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Policy Matters: Dylan Cohen

By Dylan Cohen

Later this year, Canadians will vote in the 43rd federal election. Many non-profit organizations, networks, and coalitions see elections as a critical opportunity to raise relevant public policy issues. Recently, the rules for charities engaging in public policy have become a prominent source of debate and discussion in government and the sector. As we countdown to the next election, The Philanthropist will be asking non-profit leaders what public policy issues are top of mind for them.

Name and organization: Dylan Cohen, Fostering Change (the featured image includes the Fostering Change team)

What current election issues might impact your work?

Youth from care, systemically removed from their natural relationships and ejected from child welfare authorities at 18 or 19 years old, are disproportionately more likely to experience homelessness and housing instability. Youth often navigate independence and face precarious housing in vulnerable circumstances. New data stemming from youth-specific point-in-time homeless counts and service providers demonstrates growing knowledge about the specific needs for services targeting homeless youth. We expect a federal commitment to action that addresses youth homelessness.

What issues would you like to bring more attention to in the election?

Youth who are currently in the system are being overshadowed by conversation surrounding new federal child welfare legislation, Bill C-92. While the bill may be a significant step forward in reconciliation and improving Indigenous child welfare services, we are concerned that an emphasis on prevention brings youth who are currently in the system out of focus. Consequently, off-reserve and already apprehended youth are missed in this policy conversation, along with adequate supports for this population. Well-equipped youth could age into community successfully – rather than age out of care – when presented with an array of support services and programming complemented by government funding. Federal child welfare legislation must reflect an outcomes-driven system that is geared to youth success instead of eligibility criteria and funding.

Where can we learn more about these issues?

Indigenous Services Canada: Federal legislation as an important step toward reducing the number of Indigenous children in foster care

Cindy Blackstock, The Globe and Mail: For Indigenous kids' welfare, our government knows better: it just needs to do better

Judith Sayers, The Tyee: Good Intentions on Indigenous Child Welfare — and Many Questions