



REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Alan Markwart
Lifetime Achievement Award of Excellence

Alan Markwart's entire public service career of more than 30 years has been dedicated to improving outcomes for vulnerable children and youth.

Throughout B.C. he is known as a compassionate and knowledgeable expert in the youth justice field.

As assistant deputy minister, Provincial Services, at the Ministry of Children and Family Development he oversees services to children and youth with special needs, early childhood development and child care, youth justice, and child and youth mental health. He is also responsible for the administration of youth custody centres, youth forensic psychiatric services, the Maples Adolescent Treatment Centre, provincial services for the deaf and hard of hearing and child care operations.

During his career Alan has overseen the development and introduction of the Child and Youth Mental Health Plan. He has made significant contributions to a broad range of policies and practices and is renowned for his sage advice, his support for his colleagues and for his deep understanding of operations. The result of all his expertise in so many areas is that he has the respect of regional staff at all levels. Even when tough decisions have had to be made, Alan's compassion and respect for staff has made challenging times that much easier.

Perhaps most importantly and most telling of all – Alan has never lost sight of the importance of keeping the needs of children and youth central to all he does.



Adoptive Families Association of B.C. Advocacy Award of Excellence

Whatever their age, children need the stability of a family and a home that is distinctly theirs, yet most youth in care in British Columbia age out of care without having a permanent family to call their own. According to the Association, only 28 of the 560 teens eligible for adoption in 2007 were adopted.

With the slogan *'Too old for adoption? Never.'* the Adoptive Families Association of B.C. engaged the experts –teens themselves – in a compelling campaign to raise awareness of the hundreds of teens in B.C. who hope to be adopted.

An advisory group of young people helped the Association produce promotional material including a video in which youth in care and adopted youth speak of the benefits of adoption. The advisory group became a speak-out group in which the teens told their personal stories.

The youth involved in the campaign gained valuable life skills and the confidence to have their voices heard. The campaign itself raised awareness among prospective parents of the many older children in need of a family of their own.

The Association keeps the spotlight on teen adoptions with a program for parents considering adopting an older child and its Focus on Adoption magazine regularly profiles teens waiting for adoption as well as stories about teen adoptions.

Teen adoption is woven through all the Association's service areas and brings the faces and voices of youth to professionals and to the public.

Quotes from Nomination Letters

"The Youth Engagement project exceeded expectations and I have no doubt that AFABC will find a way to keep the opinions and voices of the youth front and centre."

"The AFABC's work in youth advocacy is creating opportunity to build community, team work and camaraderie amongst the teens involved as well as teaching valuable skills."

"AFABC is a pioneer in the field of adoption. The organization's steadfast commitment to raising awareness of youth who need family permanency is a testament to that. It's innovative, important and long overdue."



**antidote: Multiracial and Indigenous Girls and Women's Network
Cultural Heritage and Diversity Award of Excellence**

For 150 Victoria girls and women of diverse cultures and backgrounds, antidote is a bridge that strengthens understanding and respect, and provides a welcoming place of connection between cultural communities.

Established in 2002 antidote is a volunteer organization with members of all ages and many racial, linguistic and religious backgrounds. They work with youth, families, schools community groups, service providers and policy makers to promote the needs of visible minority and Indigenous girls and women.

At antidote, younger girls are mentored on projects by slightly older peers who in turn are mentored by older women. This circle of supporting role models among women and girls of different cultures builds confidence, connection and awareness.

Based at the University of the Victoria, antidote gives academics insight into the unique experiences of minority immigrants and Indigenous girls and women.

antidote has three program levels:

- social network and outreach that reduces isolation and connects girls and women to health, education and social services
- training and research initiatives that build leadership and participation
- public education

The organization uses documentaries, theatre, photography, poetry and art to build public awareness while building confidence and skills among members.

Quotes from Nomination Letters

"Their impact on our community and on the lives of the girls and women who participate in their programs is and will be significant."

"The caring and affection that the intergenerational group has for each other is genuine and tangible. This is not just an activist or educational group; they fill the void of a longing so many of us have for kinship and deep connection."

"Support of this sort can change lives. Based on what I have observed over the last four years, I'm confident that it has."



Aunt Leah's Independent Lifeskills Society Service Provider Award of Excellence

When youth in care are about to make the transition to independence or when young moms need skills to cope, Aunt Leah's Independent Lifeskills Society has been a safe harbour and a loving 'aunt' for the past 21 years.

Gail Stewart, Aunt Leah's executive director, founded the society in 1988 when, as a foster parent, she recognized that youth in care needed extra support as they approached their 19th birthday. As they aged out of care they required life skills to make sudden independence more manageable. She also established a program to assist pregnant and parenting teens.

Over the years Aunt Leah's has added programs to fill gaps for vulnerable young people so that they can gain marketable skills like retail and restaurant training. The society has 15 homes for teens, two for youth over 19 and five homes for women with babies. It also provides one-on-one support, life skills workshops and training.

Aunt Leah's programs are innovative and supportive. They help young people to weave their own safety nets of skill and coping.

Quotes from Nomination Letters:

"This is a group of committed individuals with an established track record of providing support and housing for at risk individuals and families in Vancouver."

"Aunt Leah's is developing a model that will be a precedent for both the government and the community to emulate."

"They are proactive and innovative in their approach to adjusting programs as needs demand. Their returning members speak to the key influence that Aunt Leah's had in helping direct and prepare them for a more positive life. Aunt Leah's positively transforms lives and therefore contributes to the health and well being of our society."



MoYO: Mobile Youth Outreach Committee Innovative Services Award of Excellence

In most respects, the MoYO bus -- with its video games, flat screen TV and easy conversation -- is like any other youth centre. The difference is youth don't have to go to MoYO. This youth centre comes to them.

The MoYO bus got rolling in 2006 when Surrey Parks Recreation and Culture staff was looking at ways to address activity by unsupervised youth in city parks. A summer pilot project connected with 625 youth and confirmed that mobile outreach was an effective means of connecting with young people.

Now, with a donated TransLink bus, MoYO rolls through the city setting up in places where youth are, inviting them aboard. MoYO looks for youth hanging out in parks, playgrounds or on the street and gives them a safe place to be with activities that interest them.

Once on the bus, youth can connect with trained outreach workers who provide information about youth services or offer guidance if needed. Good behaviour is rewarded with free passes to city recreation centres and young people learn of the city's land-based youth centres.

Over the past four spring and summer seasons, MoYO has connected with thousands of Surrey young people and is recognized city-wide.

Quotes from Nomination Letters

"The program has experienced tremendous growth over the last four years and has proven to be a proactive outreach program that supports connection with youth in a positive and meaningful manner."

"MoYO has become a very visible and recognizable entity for youth in Surrey. With all community partners working together to ensure its success, the MoYO outreach workers are able to connect with more Surrey youth each year."



Chris Tait
Youth Leadership Award of Excellence

At just 17, Chris Tait is already considered to be a natural leader.

Using rap music as his medium and humour in his presentation, Chris advocates for children and youth in care and inspires young people to have their voices heard.

Chris is involved in several youth initiatives and projects in the Vancouver area. He has been a keynote speaker on teen adoption, made a video about the rights of children and youth in care, spoken to social workers about child and youth rights and planned and emceed a youth symposium. He is a representative at the Ministry of Children and Family Development advisory table and participates in an Aboriginal child and youth mental health advisory group.

Chris finds some of his greatest self expression through rap music and has been laying down rap tracks since he was a little boy in Gibsons. Involved and active, his nominators and his peers describe him as warm and funny.

Chris grew up in Gibsons and is registered with the Moricetown Band in Smithers. He is enrolled in grades 11/12 at Templeton High School in Vancouver.

His nominators say his future potential is without limit.

Quotes from Nomination Letters:

“A true youth activist, Christ Tait should be recognized for his tireless dedication to helping improve the world one hip hop verse at a time.”

“Chris has consistently been a positive, funny, energetic and compassionate peer to other young people. He makes really healthy choices and freely shares the ‘how’ and ‘why’ about those choices with others.”

“Chris is a young man who has taken a set of life experiences and turned them into powerful teaching tools and motivation for MCFD staff, service providers and youth around the region and around the province. Chris has been an amazing contributor to change for youth in and from care.”