



The 2011 Representative's Award of Excellence: Advocacy
Dawn Johnson, Youth Engagement Coordinator
Ministry of Children and Family Development

As a tireless supporter of children's rights, Dawn Johnson continually advocates on behalf of the young people that she works with to ensure their rights are upheld and respected.

Dawn has worked as the Youth Engagement Coordinator for the Ministry of Children and Family Development for just over three years and in that time she has led numerous influential projects and initiatives that have significantly improved services through out the Coast Fraser region. Most notably, she has led the creation of fully-functioning, sustainable youth advisory councils in both Vancouver and Squamish.

Through these councils she has given young people in and from government care an opportunity to voice their opinions in a safe, respectful and meaningful way. Dawn works in partnership with council members and other young people to identify youth priorities and make recommendations on how services could better meet the needs of young people.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development is a large, complex organization that can make people sometimes feel powerless. Dawn has strategically navigated the system to find appropriate opportunities to give children, youth and staff new advocacy skills. In addition, the courage and passion that she regularly demonstrates has inspired people to advocate for change even in the face of resistance.

Dawn has helped to change the attitudes to young people who past experiences with the ministry left them angry, disempowered and silent. Young people involved through her work are now finding opportunities for positive interactions with the ministry and are able to use their own experiences to change the system for the better.

Dawn is an exceptional leader with a grace and generosity rarely seen amongst someone so early in their career. There is no doubt that the voices of children and youth are heard, listened to and acted upon because of Dawn Johnson's inherent belief that positive change is possible.

For anyone who has seen Dawn work with high-risk youth, it is easy to see that it is a labour of love. Her dedication is infectious and she exemplifies the quality of an outstanding, dedicated leader who possess personal integrity and a natural gift in connected with youth.

Due to her unique life experiences, Dawn understands and can relate to numerous perspectives, including challenges, struggles and opportunities that can face vulnerable populations. I believe this gives Dawn a quiet determination, knowledge and courage and makes her an excellent advocate for children, youth and families.