

Letter 2: YRT1_Y5.F.16

To whom it may concern,

My name is [name]. I am [age] and I am from [name of city, Ontario]. I am a youth who has been through the mental health system and [name of child protection agency] in the [name of the region] since I was 15 years old. Today I am writing to you to address my concerns with the way children and youth are supported from my own experience. I urge you to take action in making positive changes to how you support and work with us as soon as possible.

To begin, I would like to propose restructuring the Ontario school curriculum on mental and sexual health. Most of my mental health issues occurred and began just in 6th grade, before any information or awareness on mental health was taught in our classrooms. Due to this, I was constantly confused about my emotions and was too scared to ask for help or talk about what I was dealing with to my parents. We say that mental health is often a taboo topic in immigrant families, which is why we need to start encouraging children from a young age to be more intuitive with their thoughts and emotions at school. Sexual health is another subtopic that I feel schools need to be more informative about. Although sexual education is integrated into our curriculum, it's not helpful enough to prepare children with what they may go through. From speaking with friends and reflecting on my own experiences, I recognize that a lot of mental health issues stem from not being as educated about the protection of your body, sexuality and identity.

Moreover, after many experiences with [name of child and youth community-based mental health agency] and now having worked with two counselors I believe the system for waiting to get help and the type of counselling given should be changed. When I was first diagnosed with persistent depression and generalized anxiety disorder I was almost at my final session with my counsellor. The recommendations given to me by my psychiatrist were to continue with counselling and take antidepressants. This is where a lot of my frustration began. When I reapplied to get a counsellor through [name of child and youth community-based mental health agency], which was the only free service in Ontario I was told the wait time would be 10 months, unless it was an emergency. My situation may have not been as urgent as others, but I was struggling a lot on my own and dealing with things not myself or my closest friends could help me with. Even though I asked for more support on what to do after having no more sessions, [name of child and youth community-based mental health agency] hardly gave me any guidance. I had to attend a new counselling centre that was also free by myself, as well as getting my medication which took over 8 months due to my doctor who didn't support me in taking a prescription.

That being said, I stress that the waiting time to get a counselor should be minimized. There is no way to tell what could happen to a patient within the number of months they have to wait to receive help. More support and viable resources should also be after the end of counseling like helping us find a new family doctor. There should also be more options on how to get a counsellor to make the assigning system much more efficient.

People should be given a counsellor that is most experienced with what area in their life they need help with, as well as the gender and ethnicity. This can make it a lot easier for the person to open up to their counsellor and feel heard.

As a citizen of Ontario, I believe every Ontarian should be eligible for easy access to mental health care and a mental health program should be integrated into the Ontario elementary curriculum for children's understanding of issues they or their peers may face as they grow older. Many health issues follow upon this, and due to the current circumstances because of COVID-19, steps should be taken immediately. I look forward to your action to appeal this and I can be contacted by the address above or by email at [email address]. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours Sincerely, [name]