

# Many are heroes to children

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When most people think of the Children's Aid Society, it's natural they think of the situations to which child protection workers respond – the worst of what can go wrong in the life of a child.

The midnight run to remove a child from an unsafe situation.

The court case that leads to children being taken into care because their parents have failed them.

The child who comes to school hungry, dirty and tired.

All of this – and more – is the daily business of the 155 child protection workers of the York Children's Aid Society, the people whose job it is to walk into those situations on your behalf, often facing criticism, verbal abuse and, occasionally, danger, to do their jobs.

Why do they do it?

The first and most important reason is obvious: because they make a difference. They can save vulnerable children and support families so they can remain together.

But there's another reason that might be less obvious.

As child welfare workers, we are also privileged to witness to the best of human nature – the efforts of the people in this community to protect at risk children.

There's the babysitter of a five-year-old boy who was willing to take him into her own home rather than see him go to strangers when his mother, who was suffering from addiction problems, was unable to care for him any longer.

And the elementary school teacher who donates time every day to teach immigrant children to read and write English.

The family friend of a child in care who volunteered uncounted hours of her time to help a reintegrate him back to her family home by supervising visits.

The 17-year-old – himself a foster child – who walked miles in the cold after school every day to volunteer at our Christmas program depot, sorting and packing gifts.

The seven-year-old girl who donated all of her own birthday gifts to the Christmas program.

We're privileged, too, to work with colleagues whose dedication routinely drives them to go well beyond the call of duty.

At Christmas, for example, a member of our team left her own children and grandchildren Christmas Eve to spend four hours supervising the visit of a foster child with his mother – a visit that could not have taken place without her presence.

Others volunteered weekends and evenings to help deliver Christmas gifts to children and families.

And there are scores of stories about foster parents who go to great lengths to give children a warm and stable home.

Fourteen years ago, for example, five children four to 13 were taken into care after their parents had hidden them in a basement – without school or medical attention – for 18 months.

All five were welcomed by one foster family who raised them as their own.

In fact, the youngest is still with the foster parents, who are now retired.

And, of course, there are our volunteers who drive children to their doctor's appointments, hockey practice or piano lessons. In particular, we think of the volunteer driver who had made such a strong connection with a child who is in a group home that, when the child's mother refused to visit him on Family Day, visited in the parent's place.

There are the volunteers who stand in malls for up to 12 hours a day to earn the gift wrapping fees that will buy essential extras for the children in our care.

In the end, it's what gets better in the life of a child, thanks to the people of this community who make our work not just a challenge, but a joy.

Patrick Lake is the executive director of the York Region Children's Aid Society.

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