



## Province hands York Children's Aid Society lifeline

By Chris Traber

Published on Feb 18, 2010

Neither the irony nor the significance was lost on York Region Children's Aid Society executive director Patrick Lake.

Monday, designated as holiday Family Day, the province announced \$26.9 million in grants to agencies most financially challenged. York Region's received \$4.1 million, or about 15 per cent of that funding.

'This is a government that sees you drowning 30 feet off shore and throws you a 20-foot rope then says, see, we met you more than half way.'

Only months earlier, the same Liberal government cut \$5.5 million from the agency's budget, requiring it to dismiss 18 staffers and mobilize major cost containment measures to ensure seamless core services to children and families.

But Mr. Lake is not questioning Ontario's budgetary ping pong-policies or timing.

"It's certainly welcome news," he said of the cash infusion arriving just as the agency was on financial fumes. "It's a lifeline for us. It doesn't solve our problems but it means we can get through this year. We were just about running out of money."

Though it remains \$2.2 million in the red, the largesse ensures that the 1,200 families, 2,400 children residing in their own homes and the 500 kids in the agency's care will continue to receive services.

While the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare is credited with the cheque writing, Mr. Lake applauds an all party consortium of York Region MPPs who rallied to make Queen's Park aware of the society's fragile state.

"The government needed the opportunity to recognize that York Region's funding wasn't keeping up with our growth," he said.

Mr. Lake credited Newmarket-Aurora MPP Frank Klees, Thornhill MPP Peter Shurman and York-Simcoe MPP Julia Munro on the Conservative side and Liberal Richmond Hill MPP Reza Moridi.

Mr. Shurman and his colleagues raised the issue in the legislature and lobbied behind the scenes.

"This is just a stop gap," he said. "That's all it is. This is a government that sees you drowning 30 feet off shore and throws you a 20-foot rope then says, see, we met you more than half way."

"It's not enough. We need a formula on a go-forward basis so that we don't see another road block 10 months down the road. We need to provide sustainable funding."

After learning in June that the agency would have to do more with less, it, along with a

record 36 of 51 societies, filed Section 14 reviews, a mechanism to appeal government cutbacks.

The York society trimmed staff, training programs and renegotiated equipment and third party service contracts related to overhead and discretionary budget items.

"We did it with no impact on the direct delivery of services to the children," Mr Lake said.

"Young people receiving the support and protection of children's aid societies are some of the most vulnerable children and youth in our province and we are committed to keeping them safe," Children and Youth Services Minister Laurel Broten said.

"This funding will ensure that CASs continue to provide critical services as they work with the Commission and my ministry to find solutions that are focused on better outcomes for kids."

York Region Children's Aid Society, with a 2009 \$38-million budget, is uncertain what level of support is available this and next year. The only known is that it will require more.

"We're not out of the woods," Mr. Lake said. "But at least we're seeing some light through the leaves."

#### Fast facts:

- Ontario is spending more than \$1.4 billion this year in child protection services.
- Over the last decade, expenditures to CASs have increased by almost \$1 billion, outpacing service volume increases.
- As a result of improvements within Ontario's child protection system, Queen's Park says children's aid societies are seeing fewer children and youth in care (foster and group homes) and more young people succeeding in permanent homes.

Source: Ministry of Children and Youth Services [www.ontario.ca/children](http://www.ontario.ca/children)

#### Fast facts:

- Ontario is spending more than \$1.4 billion this year in child protection services.
- Over the last decade, expenditures to CASs have increased by almost \$1 billion, outpacing service volume increases.
- As a result of improvements within Ontario's child protection system, Queen's Park says

children's aid societies are seeing fewer children and youth in care (foster and group homes) and more young people succeeding in permanent homes.

Source: Ministry of Children and Youth Services [www.ontario.ca/children](http://www.ontario.ca/children)