

# CASe Notes



the quarterly newsletter of the York Region Children's Aid Society



Bonita Majonis, Director, Research and Outcome Measurement

## Practicing Wisdom

It's called "practice wisdom" – an approach to frontline social work that represents a blend of your experience, your peers' experience and what you learned in school.

Children's Aid Societies have long relied on practice wisdom as the foundation of what they do. Now it is being enhanced by "evidence-informed practice", an approach that interprets and distills research findings, folding them into the way services are provided.

"We all tend to keep doing things that we think are working for us but evidence-

informed practice brings in a new element – academic research," says Bonita Majonis, Director, Research and Outcome Measurement. "This approach combines what we know from the academic literature and adds it to practice wisdom."

Evidence-informed practice is being facilitated in Ontario by Practice and Research Together (PART), an organization created by provincial Children's Aid Society Directors who believed the daily work of protecting children and strengthening families would be enhanced by the integration of research findings.

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## How do you recognize Holiday Heroes?

They might be Newmarket Royal Bank employees who pay \$2 for the privilege of wearing jeans every Friday. Or an entire homeroom class at Dennison High School. Or the family next door.

Every year, hundreds of York Region Holiday Heroes quietly make the season special for more than 350 York Region families and more than 100 young adults who otherwise might be without gifts and food.

Holiday Heroes is a program of the York Region CAS for the children, families and young adults the agency serves.

"It says a lot about a community when individual kids and moms and dads recognize that they are fortunate in comparison to others and reach out to those in need," says York CAS Executive Director Pat Lake. "Holiday Heroes is a concrete example of the spirit of giving that is alive in this community."

Every CAS family is asked to provide a holiday "wish list"

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## Use Your Voice

October is child abuse prevention month. Across Ontario, Children's Aid Societies work to focus public attention on our shared responsibility to speak up for children who may be suffering from abuse or neglect. York Region CAS is launching its Use Your Voice campaign with Home & Family, an exhibit of paintings made by the children the agency serves. The exhibit, at the Varley Art Gallery in Unionville, continues until October 3.

For more information on reporting abuse, visit [UseYourVoice.ca](http://UseYourVoice.ca).

from Pat Lake, Executive Director

# Everything old is new again



It's ironic that, in a time when we're reaching out to our communities to talk about how York Region CAS is transforming the future in order to better serve children and families, we are, in fact, going forward by going back.

If we glance over our shoulders at the early days of social work – the original work being done in the 1930s and 1940s – we'll find that one of the key principles was that the work had to begin where we find the client.

That thinking, dormant for some while, has been revitalized with a new, sophisticated-sounding name – differential response.

Here at York CAS, it means that, as we strive to become a value-based organization, we embrace diversity. We recognize communities for what they are. We recognize that every individual within each community is, in his or her

own way, unique. We acknowledge that, to work with families for the well-being of children, we must honour all forms of diversity – culture, gender identity, faith and, not least, individual capacities.

After all, you can't help people strengthen their families unless you truly understand the values and realities by which they live.

As we integrate differential response internally, we equally recognize that to serve the community we must be of the community.

In the past, child welfare was too often seen as the bogeyman. We intend to step outside that role and become part of the community – going out to the community rather than waiting for the community to come to us.

This fall, for example, we're reaching out to every school in the region to tell educators about our transformation and

about the ways we can work together for the well-being of children. We hope to take the same message out to communities of diversity, children's mental health services and others whose activities touch the lives of children.

It's important to add that we are keenly aware that it's not enough for us to reach out in order to engage others to help us do our job. We're also here to help them do theirs. We want to work within a framework that includes seeing the needs of children through the eyes of other organizations, parents and, indeed, the children themselves.

No longer content to be the long arm of the law, we are committed to being part of the spectrum of people and organizations who take seriously our shared obligation to ensure the well-being of our children and, by extension, our community. ●

## *Practicing Wisdom – continued from page 1*

They collaborated with Britain's **research in practice** team and created PART with project funding from the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

Established in 1996, **research in practice** is a collaboration of the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the University of Sheffield with more than 100 members. Its mission is to promote positive outcomes for children and families through the use of research evidence.

Twenty-seven of Ontario's Children's Aid Societies, including York Region CAS, are members of PART.

"I believe this is the first time that there's been an organized application of research in our work in Ontario," says Bonita Majonis, York's Link PARTner.

While she says PART will not conduct research, it will provide member agencies with information and knowledge translation to help them use evidence-informed practice to improve client outcomes.

User-friendly resources – including training opportunities, organizational practice toolkits and occasions for networking with colleagues and researchers from across the country and around the world – will help frontline workers integrate research knowledge in everyday practice.

One example is a best-practice document on resilience in children.

"We used to believe that resilience is a psychological characteristic – a reflection of the nature of the child. Now, research

evidence tells us that we can create environments that helps kids become more resilient," Bonita Majonis says.

Another example is kinship services. "As a result of research findings, we know that there's evidence that the success of placement of a child in a kin-family – as opposed to a foster home – will rely on the closeness of the kin relationship and the age of the child."

Now in its second year, Bonita Majonis says PART and evidence-informed practice is beginning to attract the notice of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

"It is a culture change," she acknowledges, "but the hope is that each one of Ontario's 53 CASs will become part of PART." ●

## Karen Hastings, intake screener



Her voice may be a family's first contact with York Region Children's Aid Society.

"They may have telephoned us for assistance," Karen Hastings says. "They may have a parent/teen conflict or need help with shelter or counseling." After discussing the concerns, part of Karen's assessment is to determine whether the Society or another community organization provides the right service to meet the family's needs.

If, on the other hand, she is telephoning a family to discuss

a reported concern, it can be difficult for the family when she initiates the first contact.

"Quite naturally, a call from the Children's Aid results in anxiety."

When Karen makes the assessment that community support is more appropriate, she connects the family with community resources. If CAS support is needed for further assessment, an Intake Worker meets the family.

"There's often misunderstanding of what the CAS does and there's some fear because of stereotypes,"

she says. "In this culturally diverse community, there are many people who have no previous awareness these services exist."

Educating callers and being a resource is one of the things Karen finds rewarding about her role as an Intake Screener.

"When families understand our approach of customizing our response to each family, taking into account their culture, religion and family dynamics, in order to create a plan with them, they're much more willing to engage with us." ●

## Ryan Blackwell, intake worker



When CAS intake screeners open an assessment because of a child protection concern, Ryan Blackwell or another intake worker connects with the family.

"We do an assessment and, sometimes, we may close the case, after putting a plan in place with the family. But about 40 per cent of families we assess are eligible for some kind of ongoing service," Ryan Blackwell says. "In some cases, a child welfare response is too intrusive but other agencies may be able to help."

When the CAS decides to intervene, the work, he acknowledges, can be challenging.

"We want to connect and engage so that we can work with families in a meaningful way but they

may not want to work with us – they want to avoid the stigma and embarrassment. But their negative images are often based on stereotypes or misunderstanding of what the CAS role is."

He says the agency is trying to change the way it's perceived within the framework of its new differential response approach.

"We try to help families understand that we're there to look at their strengths to solve problems and help the family. We work in positive collaborative ways."

When there are ongoing concerns, intake workers open a case for the Family Services Department. If there are child safety concerns and a child must be brought into care, a Children's Services file is opened, providing the child with his or her own worker. ●

## Tinisha Eligon, family services worker



Tinisha Eligon helps parents deal with everyday issues so they can safely and effectively care for their children.

When a child protection concern has been reported to the CAS, an Intake Worker conducts the investigation, and if the concern is verified, an intake worker will transfer the file to the Family Services Department, assigning it to a Family Services worker. Her job is to develop and maintain therapeutic casework relationships with her clients to reduce

the risk of harm to children.

"We meet with the family and identify a plan of service and an intervention that will reduce risks." Goals might include participating in counseling, addiction treatment or refraining from domestic disputes in front of children.

"One of the challenges is the non-co-operative, non-compliant parents. We have to find creative ways to make them feel included in the plan."

Tinisha Eligon emphasizes that the process is collaborative. "We

work with the family. It's never a case of 'you need to work on a issue'."

More, she's able to consult peers and supervisors, putting the experience of the whole team to work on a case.

The rewards of the work, she says, include watching families who were in crisis overcome their problems and be able to function on their own.

"I learn from the families as well. Even families in crisis have strengths." ●

## Holiday heroes – continued from page 1

Families in the community, individuals and organizations are matched with a family whose specific wishes they can fulfill. Schools are invited to run food and toiletry drives or collect “Toonies for Turkeys”. Church groups drop off games and puzzles and knitted slippers, regional police run a toy drive and collect donations. Superstores in Aurora and Newmarket collect non-perishable food items from their customers.

Last year, an 11-year-old girl and her friends, who had crafted fleece blankets at her birthday party, donated them to Holiday Heroes. CGI, Newmarket, was matched with 30 families. The Newmarket Royal Bank donated its “jeans” title and every homeroom at Dennison High School was assigned a family whose wishes they could make come true. There are other donors, including those who make major gifts, who wish to remain anonymous.

What do families want and need?  
According to Leslie Humphrey,



Nicole Hook, Jennifer Glave, Leslie Humphrey and (seated) Kimberly Janse getting ready for Holiday Heroes, a gift program for the children and families York CAS serves. Through the program, individuals, corporations and foundations fulfill families' wishes with gifts and cash donations.

who co-ordinates the program, most families ask for warm winter coats and boots and food vouchers that will allow them to put a nice dinner on the table for their children. Children ask for toys and hockey sticks.

Family Services Worker Kim Janse says “our families are relieved that they can give their kids a good holiday. Even if the family doesn’t celebrate Christmas, it’s an opportunity to give the children things they wouldn’t otherwise have.” She says parents are always surprised when they receive gifts. “They’re always touched that someone remembered them.”

In fact, Leslie Humphrey says mothers seldom put down anything for themselves. They say ‘give more to my children’.

By the end of the first week of December, York CAS’s warehouse is filling with gifts. Volunteers sort donations and wrap gifts destined for the young adults who have “aged out of foster care”.

“They’re probably on their own and don’t have much,” Leslie Humphrey says. “We take special care of them. Their gifts are wrapped and, if they celebrate Christmas, we make sure they have a tree and decorations.”

If you want to sponsor a family or make a donation of dollars or gifts, contact [HolidayHeroes@YorkCAS.org](mailto:HolidayHeroes@YorkCAS.org). ●

## Friends of York CAS

**This year, these people and organizations have made contributions to York Region Children’s Aid Society in support of the vulnerable children of our community.**

Beauty Supply Outlet  
Black Creek Pioneer Village  
Canadian National Exhibition  
Cardinal Golf & Country Club  
CeDe Candy Company  
Clipindales  
CN Tower  
Epic 3 Entertainment  
Faye’s Hairstyling  
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Tim Hortons (Sutton)  
Toronto Blue Jays  
Town of East Gwillimbury  
Tupperware Canada  
Upper Canada Mall  
Wal-Mart  
Wild Water Kingdom  
Wild Wing Restaurants

Many of the people and organizations who make substantial donations to the York Region CAS wish to remain anonymous. We thank them for their support.



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*Our masthead painting was made by former foster child Jerome who is seven years old. He calls it “a sunny day”.*