

CASe Notes



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



Margaret Osmond, York CAS Director of Services for Children with Robert Sears, Blue Hills Clinical Director.

Parent Therapists provide treatment and foster care

“Parents nurture, but parents can also heal.”

Margaret Osmond, York CAS Director of Services for Children, is talking about Parent Therapists who are at the core of an innovative program introduced in partnership with Blue Hills Child and Family Centre.

Known as Treatment Foster Care, the joint program provides specialized home-based treatment to children whose special needs might otherwise lead to residential care - group homes or a children's mental health residences. In treatment foster care, well-trained and carefully supervised Parent Therapists work to help and heal children in the home as part of a

multi-disciplinary team. The team includes psychologists and psychiatrists as well as child protection workers.

“Treatment Foster Care is the model of choice for children who otherwise would have been placed in a setting where they would have been cared for by staff rather than family. There are equal or better treatment outcomes and, in addition, the children grow up in the context of a loving family with all of the benefits that provides,” Margaret Osmond says.

Robert Sears, Blue Hills Clinical Director, adds that Treatment Foster Care achieves the goals of all social service programs - better service delivery while using public money as effectively as possible.

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Child poverty increases in York

Urging the federal and provincial governments to take immediate action, York Region Children's Aid Society (CAS) and other Greater Toronto Area (GTA) societies last month released a report on child poverty.

Greater Trouble in Greater Toronto, Child Poverty in the GTA, prepared and released in partnership with the Social Planning Network, reports that half of all children in Ontario who live in poverty - more than 141,000 - live in the GTA,

up from 44 per cent in 1997. In the same period, the percentage of impoverished GTA children who live in York Region increased from 10 per cent to 12 per cent.

Pat Lake, Executive Director of York CAS, says the report highlights the fact that poverty is being driven out of the downtown and inner suburbs into neighbouring regions.

“There's continued up-migration from the city as people search for opportunity and affordable housing,” he

says. Ironically, they find less affordable housing and fewer supports like food banks, educational resources and public transportation.

“What is most frightening,” he adds, “is that the growth of child poverty took place during a time of economic growth and strength. Now that we are facing much tougher economic times, how much worse will it be for those families already in poverty and for those bordering on poverty?”

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from Pat Lake, Executive Director

“Orphan of the orphan”



Children’s mental health services in York Region are starving. And York CAS is partly to blame.

Thanks to the transformation agenda which is rethinking and restructuring the work of Children’s Aid Societies in Ontario, York CAS is now required to shift its’ focus to families and children most in need of Child Protection services. Rather than this agency serving clients with more moderate needs, cases are shifted to other agencies in the region through our community link service. We are now the largest single referral point to a number of children’s mental health and family counselling services in the community.

This is not a bad thing. The only problem is that the province hasn’t put additional resources in place on the other side. Shifting the parameters of child welfare in order to control Children’s Aid Society costs is creating a crisis in other parts of the system.

In 2006, Senator Michael Kirby, then Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology said there is a stigma surrounding mental illness, particularly in children. If mental health services generally are the orphan of the health care system, then children’s services are the “orphan of the orphan,” he said. They are at the bottom of governments’ priority list.

His case is clearly illustrated by the fact that, in Ontario, children’s mental health services have in the last 15 years only twice received percentage increases in funding to cover base programs. They’re still making do with 1992 dollars.

Why is this the case when there have been huge increases in other health and education spending? I believe that an important reason is that families in crisis are reluctant to speak out about the need for children’s mental health services. They have not demanded government investment. In other words, it may be that shame stands in the way.

Now that we’re facing an unknown financial future, this blind spot in our public conscience is even more frightening. We already know that those who are in last place for resources are the first ones to lose them when times get tough. Because of a history of funding neglect and the population explosion in the 90s area, most service agencies receive a tiny portion – often one-half to one-third – of funding per child in the community, compared to what is received by similar agencies elsewhere in Ontario. In our agency’s case, for example, being funded to the Provincial average per child in the community would require a total budget of \$132 million; instead our allocation is approximately \$40 million. Similar gaps affect every type of service, including Children’s Mental Health.

That means that children are going untreated. And that’s a shame because early intervention, support and treatment work. Primary prevention programs pay huge dividends and these children would go on to have healthy, normal lives.

If these purely humanitarian grounds are not reason enough to invest in children’s mental health, let me give you a reason that impacts every one

of us. The recent Ontario Roots of Youth Violence report by the Hon. Roy McMurtry and Dr. Alvin Curling says that health issues, such as mental health and substance abuse, can be viewed as direct roots of the immediate risk factors for violence involving youth. Children with untreated mental health issues often meet society not in the arenas of health or social services but

in the justice system. Community safety is at stake here.

Finally, not least, with appropriate mental health services, it’s not a stretch to imagine that children at risk have more

chance of staying in the family home than being taken into care.

In York Region we have kids on waiting lists for mental health services and, more important, children who are not being identified because they tend to be invisible until it’s too late.

Lest you think this worry is disproportionate to the problem, remember that one in five children experiences a mental health disorder that is diagnosable and treatable. Right now, only one in five of those one in five is actually getting help.

If only a percentage of children with any other health need were receiving treatment to address their problems, we as a society would be outraged. We should be outraged about this.

Shouldn’t our children have the same access to service as children elsewhere in Ontario? Shouldn’t they matter as much? ●

**“Children
are
going
untreated”**

Cathy Harrison, Director, Residential Services



“We can’t do it alone.”

Cathy Harrison believes that success in her new role as Director of Residential Services for York Children’s Aid Society relies on working closely with the society’s foster parents and other community partners to serve the needs of children in care.

Responsible for the placement of children, she’ll focus on ensuring resources are in place, both in terms of York’s own foster care system and in terms of working with community partners to develop other placement opportunities.

A York CAS alumna – she worked at the agency for a short time about a decade ago – Cathy Harrison says that one of her greatest challenges will be learning about the community to ensure the right programs and services address both the needs of the children of the region and the needs of the agency.

“The big change since I worked here in 1997 has been the growth of cultural diversity. As a result, we must ensure our programs and services recognize and reflect these individual needs in our planning and care for children. Of course, I’m lucky to be working with a highly-skilled and highly-experienced team who understand the needs of the children and the region.”

A manager in the child welfare transformation branch of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services before coming to York CAS, Cathy Harrison is already creating linkages with children’s mental health and other organizations concerned with child welfare.

“There’s a constant need to recruit new foster parents and continue to support those foster families already working with our society,” she says. Her portfolio includes adoption, foster care training and retention, residential recruitment and placement and kinship services and care. ●

Michael Bove, Outreach and Diversity



York CAS intends to reflect its community as the region changes and diversifies. That’s why Michael Bove, a former family service worker at Toronto

CAS, has taken on the task of supervisor of diversity and outreach.

“I’m here to provide leadership and program development so that the agency becomes more diverse in all its practices, both within the agency and in the community.”

It’s a brand new role at the agency.

“We’re looking at the agency overall in terms of its practices – including child

welfare practices – so that there are no barriers to inclusivity.”

Michael Bove says that, with the new Diversity Committee, policies, protocols and guidelines are being examined to ensure they encourage full participation by the diverse communities of York Region.

Practices with respect to employees, volunteers and foster parents are being reviewed as well as practices with respect to volunteers at all levels. “That way we’ll ensure our child welfare practices are delivered in ways that are sensitive and responsive to everyone.”

Michael Bove says it’s early days. “Right now the Diversity Committee is still in the formative stages of developing and administering an agency-wide needs assessment survey which will help to

frame the work that it does.”

He acknowledges that internal needs assessment presents challenges. “Some of the concepts are difficult,” Michael Bove admits, adding that, what’s more important is that “people are eager and highly motivated to ensure that our practices are diverse and inclusive.”

Next steps include a community needs assessment through grass roots and mainstream agencies along with current and former clients.

“Then we’ll be in a position to fashion an initiative which develops programs and mandates participation in community groups so that we can support existing community priorities in our collective efforts to reach out to all communities in York Region.” ●

Child Poverty continued from page 1

Greater Trouble in Greater Toronto also highlights the fact that a disproportionate number of children of colour – whether Canadian-born or newcomers – live in poverty. For example, in 2000, in the Metropolitan Toronto census area (CMA), which includes York Region,

the number of low income children was one child in 10 among global European groups but one child in two for children of African groups.

“At York CAS, we recognize and are addressing the challenges of the increasing diversity of our region, not

just on our own but with our partners. It’s the only way this issue can be meaningfully addressed,” Pat Lake says.

Greater Trouble in Greater Toronto, Child Poverty in the GTA is available on the York CAS Web site, www.yorkcas.org ●

Parent Therapist continued from page 1

“The Ministry (of Child and Youth Services) funds the Children’s Aid Society, Mental Health and Youth Justice. Encouraging partnerships is good economics while delivering improved service.”

Celebrating its 40th year, Blue Hills Child and Family Centre works with children and their families to age 18, offering counseling, play therapy, residential treatment and specialized school programs.

York CAS is recruiting Parent Therapists.

“There are lots of challenges in delivering treatment in the context of a family but there are also incredible

rewards,” Margaret Osmond says, adding that an effective Parent Therapist has a unique set of skills.

“They place a high value on parenting and the care of children, they are thirsty and active learners and enjoy being exposed to and using up-to-date information; they flourish as part of a team and they are able and prepared to work collaboratively with that team about the strategies and techniques they’ll be using in their own home and they tend to respond to challenges with their heads followed by their hearts, rather than by their hearts alone.

“And of course they have a phenomenal sense of humour.”

The founding manager of Tri-CAS Treatment Foster Care in Cobourg, Ontario, a centre of excellence research site, Margaret Osmond says that “in the 15 years I’ve been involved with treatment foster care programs, people often ask how we find Parent Therapists. I tell them that we find them the same place we find all foster parents. It’s how we train and support and partner with them that allows them to make the transition to Parent Therapists.”

Parent Therapists are among the most valued members of the child welfare team, she says, because the children they nurture and heal are the most vulnerable in the child-in-care system.●

2008 Holiday Heroes

These organizations made donations to our 2008 Holiday Heroes campaign to provide gifts to children, youth and families served by York CAS. On their behalf, we thank you.

404 Dental Office	Dr. Dennison	Pheasant Run Golf & Country Club
Aiim Group	Secondary School	Pride in Preston Lake
Apple One Employment	Duca Credit Union	Queensville Montessori School
Aurora Montessori School	Halsal Industries	Service Ontario
Avaya	Johnson & Johnson	St. Andrews College
Ballantrae Child Care Centre	Lake Simcoe	Stephen Lewis Secondary School
Bernardi Building Supply	Conservation Authority	The Dance Zone
C.G.I. International	Laura Secord	Timberlane Athletic Club
Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness	Lego Canada	Timex Canada
Canadian Tire (Markham)	Lighthouse Chiropractic Centre	Tiny Tykes Christian Co-Op
Cannon Hygiene	Lyreco Business Products	Town of Aurora
Cardinal Containers	Magna Golf & Country Club	Town of Richmond Hill
Children’s House Daycare	Markham Suites Hotel	Toys R Us
Cold Creek Diving	McDonald’s Restaurants of Canada	Uniglobe Travel
Denne Public School	National Event Marketing	Unity Telecom
Di & I Hair Design Studio	National Money Mart	Util-Assist
Direct Link Insurance Services	Newmarket Hydro	YMCA – Hartlan Location
Dovetail Communications	Omnivex Systems	York Region Care & Education
	Pearson International	
	Peek-A-Boo Daycare	



Sixth Grade Secret Santas at Ballantrae Public School in Stouffville, Ontario decided that, rather than exchange gifts the traditional way, they’d send all of their gifts to York Region CAS for distribution to children in care. According to teacher Alison Williams, the students discussed where to donate their toys. When one student who is involved in foster care talked about the Children’s Aid Society, the class voted to send their donations to York. Thanks to these very young Holiday Heroes.

Safe seating for babies

Thanks to Peg Perego, Pickering, Ontario, which has provided six infant car seats to York Region CAS.



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CASe Notes is published quarterly by the York Region Children’s Aid Society. For more information contact Jennifer Grant at jennifer.grant@yorkcas.org

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