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Use Your Voice Campaign Launches for Child Abuse Prevention Month

NEWMARKET — A 2006 survey found that close to one-third of York Region residents would not report suspected child abuse. *Use Your Voice* is a public awareness campaign to inform the public of their obligation to report both suspected and known signs of child abuse. The campaign marks the start of October's Child Abuse Prevention month.

"Each of us has a responsibility to ensure that children and youth are safe," says Martin McNamara, Executive Director of the York Region Children's Aid Society. "Abused children are often silent, powerless victims. We hope that the information provided through Use Your Voice campaign will help break down the barriers that are preventing people from coming forward while children needlessly suffer."

The survey identified barriers to reporting child abuse, which included being afraid of being wrong, not knowing where to call, fear of retribution and fear that the situation will get worse.

The duty to report child abuse is outlined in Ontario's Child and Family Services Act: "If a person has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child may be in need of protection, the person must report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to a Children's Aid Society."

The Use Your Voice awareness campaign is in its first year in York Region, after being piloted in other Ontario CASs the previous year. The campaign web site provides information about the signs and indicators of neglect, physical, sexual and emotional abuse and how to contact a local Children's Aid Society. Visit www.useyourvoice.ca or www.yorkcas.org. Local CASs will be distributing purple wristbands and they can be purchased at participating RONA stores to help support children in care.

Since 1992, Ontario Children's Aid Societies have been involved in a public education program to inform the community about how to help prevent child abuse, including neglect. Children's Aid Societies work with children and their families when children have been or are at risk of being emotionally, physically or sexually abused or neglected.

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