



## **BACKGROUND**

### **Children and Youth give a high rating to the care provided**

Children and Youth gave a high rating to the care provided to them in their current placements” concluded the *Quality of Care Review: Children’s Aid Society of Toronto* by Ontario’s Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy (OCFSA). OCFSA conducted 185 interviews with youth and children in the care of the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto (CAS of Toronto). The OCFSA was “extremely impressed with the quality of care described by many of the young people interviewed.” OCFSA will release its recommendations tomorrow. “The review of our Agency emphasizes the crucial difference foster parents can make for children whose lives have been impacted by child abuse,” said Carolyn Buck, Executive Director.

#### **Our children and youth**

CAS of Toronto has approximately 3,000 children in its care throughout the year. Children who have to come into our care have had so many losses in their lives- loss of safety, loss of trust and loss of innocence. On those shaky beginnings our foster parents and staff try to develop a relationship and try to get them to trust again. First we provide a permanent foundation built on structure, routine, boundaries, and nurturing--all the things kids need to feel safe. In the end, like any parent, our wish is that our young people will be happy and optimistic about their future despite their turbulent beginnings.

#### **Care we provide**

On average 53 per cent live in foster homes, 17 per cent live in group homes, and 20 per cent live independently in the community. The rest of our youth live in other situations, i.e. in hospitals. Each child or youth comes to us with individual needs. It is our responsibility to plan for these children and youth so that they have what they need in the short term to prepare them for the long term. Our workers visit them on average 10 times per year (two and half times more than the provincial requirement). In these visits we try to ensure that all of their needs--education, health, identity, family and relationships, social presentation, emotional and behavioral development and self-care are being addressed. This is no small undertaking. It is done with great care as we know that what we do and what we leave undone has the potential to change the course of a human life.

#### **Where our children and youth live**

Children and youth come into our care because they cannot remain safely at home or with extended family members. We match them with caregivers who can meet their needs and provide them with nurturing and stability. Our first choice is a family setting. This works for most children, but some, through no fault of their own, have developed behaviour that is too challenging for families to help. Group homes provide a valuable service for these young people. Structure, routine and boundaries, along with the stability of consistent relationships with staff members and their worker can help move children forward beyond the behaviour and into hope for the future.

CAS of Toronto does not license group homes, shut them down or impose disciplinary action. That is the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. We try to ensure that they are meeting the needs of our young people. If they are not, our only choice is to stop using their service. Sometimes, this is a very difficult decision because children and youth have bonded to the staff members and other young people.

### **Quality control**

The Advocate also points out that there are no provincially mandated residential standards to ensure quality. This has been a longstanding concern. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services is responsible for licensing group homes but there is no regulatory body to monitor the overall quality provided to the residents. CAS's, financed by special funding from the Ministry of Finance, collaborated on a provincial approach to create a system with accountability and quality assurance features. The plan would save money through supply chain management which would offset the cost of quality assurance. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services, who received this report in March, were required to endorse this proposal before the Ministry of Finance was able to fund it. This was not done and the funding deadline has passed. "It is a lost opportunity to redirect resources which could have had a direct impact on quality of care for our youth", said Carolyn Buck, Co-Chair of the Provincial Committee.

### **Youth transitioning out of care**

Supporting youth as they transition out of our care is about preparing them for independence. Youth need help with housing, education, finding a job, and relationships. We believe that our youth should receive the same level of care that their peers do, which means the age of eligibility for service needs to be extended. CAS of Toronto must stop providing support to youth at 21 because the Child and Family Services Act says so. Youth often tell us how important their worker and foster parents is to them. Our workers and foster families recognize this and many continue the relationship long after youth leave, not because they are obliged to, but because they care.

The greatest test of our work, is what our young people say. We are encouraged by their reports to the Advocate. We know there is some distance to go and we are committed to the journey because we know what is at stake.

