

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

GTA is Child Poverty Capital of Ontario----Local CASs Urge Government to Take Action Now

GTA Children's Aid Societies and Social Planning Network release report on child poverty that shows a startling increase in the number of children living in poverty

December 2, 2008 (TORONTO, ON) – A report released today by the Children's Aid Society of Toronto entitled, "Greater Trouble in Greater Toronto, Child Poverty in the GTA" reveals that 50 per cent of Ontario's children in poverty now live in the GTA, up from 44 per cent in 1997. In the City of Toronto, all growth in the number of children living in poverty since 1997 occurred in the inner suburbs, where abysmally high rates of child poverty now surpass those of downtown.

"The time to act is now. More children and families are living in poverty in the GTA than ever before," said David Rivard, Executive Director, Children's Aid Society of Toronto. "It has been nineteen years since Campaign 2000 provided the government with realistic strategies to end child poverty. At our Agency, almost two thirds of our clients live at or below the poverty line, the children and families of Toronto cannot wait any longer. Mary McConville, the Executive Director of the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, and I are both committing our Agencies to working with the provincial government to develop initiatives that will help to reduce child poverty. We urge the government to make this a top priority in their poverty reduction strategy," added Rivard.

Lack of affordable housing is one of the most significant barriers to breaking the cycle of poverty. At the CAS of Toronto housing is a factor for one out of every five children coming into care and one out of every ten children is delayed from returning home because of housing problems. Just under one half (46%) of female lead single parent families and recent immigrant families (44%) cannot afford their housing.

"A poverty reduction strategy for Ontario needs to demonstrate a strong commitment to affordable housing. The cost of housing and rising utility costs are the single biggest expense for most low income families. Without access to safe, affordable housing families and children cannot break the cycle of poverty," said Tracey Vaughan, Executive Director, Community Development Council, Durham Region.

"Living in poverty means overwhelming stress. Everyday you worry about money for rent, food and for the basic daily necessities. This robs you of your hope and destroys your self esteem," said Shantel Smith, a former youth in the care of a GTA Children's Aid Society. "As a teenager I could not live at home, I lived with my boyfriend, we were extremely poor. When he became abusive and kicked me out, I had nowhere to go. I ended up living in the homes of several different friends and ran the streets for money. Sadly and unnecessarily, because of poverty, many children potentially face the same hardships that I once experienced," added Smith.

The face of child poverty in the Greater Toronto Area

Most single parent households are lead by mothers. Toronto has the greatest prevalence of children living in single parent households with 29 per cent. 51 per cent of these children live in poverty.

One in five food bank users in the GTA are single parents and for almost half of these parents child care is the reason they cannot work. Quality child care is unavailable throughout the GTA. There are not enough spaces and it is also extremely expensive at \$47 per day on average for a toddler.

Child poverty is racialized. Today the GTA makes up about 80 per cent of Ontario's immigrants and visible minorities. Children of non-European heritage now make up about one half of the area's children, with seven out of ten of those children living in poverty

The Children's Aid Society's in the GTA and the Social Planning Network are community partners in Campaign 2000, a non-partisan, cross-Canada network of community, provincial, and national organizations committed to working together to end child and family poverty in Canada.

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