

For Immediate Release
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More Families Need Supports During Economic Crisis

TORONTO – As Ontario celebrates the second annual Family Day, everyone is reminded that vulnerable families and children affected by the current economic crisis, high levels of unemployment and increased welfare rates will need community services and supports.

Children's Aid Societies (CASs) are one of the first front-line service providers to see the impact of a downturn in the economy since unemployment, social assistance and poverty are linked to increased rates of family stress, mental health issues, child abuse and neglect.

Some areas of the province experienced economic distress five years ago with the permanent closure of mills and mines in single industry towns. In these communities, CASs reported that child protection caseloads increased up to 45% within six to 12 months after the massive job losses. In Windsor where there have recently been significant job losses, the local CAS has reported a 13% increase since last year. Child welfare experts anticipate that as major employers across Ontario announce layoffs and closures, child protection caseloads will grow.

"Despite the challenges of our current economic environment, we must remain committed to securing prosperous futures for our children," said Jeanette Lewis, Executive Director of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. "Even with the increased pressures families face in the economic crisis, Ontario's children still need strong, healthy and safe families in order to grow and develop and that's why strong families are more important now than ever."

Even before the current economic situation affected Ontario, many children lacked the nurturing family and community supports they need to succeed and thrive. Statistics from 2007/08 showed:

- 40% of food bank clients in Ontario were children.
- One in six children in Ontario lived in poverty.
- Almost 40% of women assaulted by spouses said their children witnessed the violence; in many cases the violence was severe.
- One-third of children seeking mental health services were still waiting at the end of the year.
- More than 77,000 allegations of abuse and neglect were investigated by Ontario's CASs.
- More than 27,000 children were in CAS care at some time during the year.

As the economic crisis continues to escalate so will the number of children and families who desperately need services to maintain safe, stable homes.

Last year, 42,811 families received ongoing support from Children's Aid Societies. When parents cannot provide proper care, housing and food for their children, CASs must step in to provide supports. These supports include assessments, crisis intervention, counselling and services to families. CASs also work with community partners to ensure children are protected and families are supported. Many programs are offered in partnership with other community agencies.

Ontarians are asked to make vulnerable children and families a priority in their thoughts and actions by speaking up and volunteering at their local Children's Aid Society.

For more information, visit www.oacas.org

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