

October is Child Abuse Prevention Month: Your call to Children's Aid could be the most important in a child's life

Toronto — October is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and this year the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) and Children's Aid Societies (CAS) will raise awareness about the importance of calling Children's Aid with concerns about the safety or well-being of a child or youth. Ontario's Children's Aid Societies are an essential part of the provincial safety net for children, but they rely heavily on professional and public referrals to do their work.

"The community plays a huge role in keeping children safe," says Mary Ballantyne, CEO of OACAS. "Unfortunately many people worry that their call to Children's Aid will lead to splitting up a family. During October we will be raising awareness about how a call to Children's Aid leads to an offer of help that can make all the difference to children, youth, and families."

Ontario's leading research study on child abuse and neglect shows children remained with their families in 97% of CAS investigations, a statistic that comes as a surprise to many people. Ontario's child welfare system focuses the majority of its work on in-home, early intervention services, based on the recognition that early intervention can reduce the need for more intrusive services later. Children's Aid supports include in-home visits from child welfare workers, and access to helpful services such as counselling, parenting workshops, and substance use programs.

Last year, over 165,000 Ontarians reached out to Children's Aid with a child protection concern, with teachers and police making the most referrals. But the inquests into the tragic deaths of Jeffrey Baldwin and Katelynn Sampson revealed that there is still a lack of awareness among professionals and in the community about their "duty to report" safety concerns to Children's Aid, as described by Section 72 of the Child and Family Services Act. The Child Abuse Prevention Month campaign addresses jury recommendations from both inquests for continued education about this legal and ethical obligation.

"Reporting child abuse and neglect is a collective responsibility. It's important for everyone to learn the signs of child abuse and neglect and report known or suspected cases to your local children's aid society. This one act could save a child's life," said Michael Coteau, Minister of Children and Youth Services and Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism.

For more information about Child Abuse Prevention Month or to arrange interviews, please contact: Brynn Clarke, Media Relations and Issues Management Specialist at (416) 987-3691 or bclarke@oacas.org.

About the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies: Since 1912, OACAS has represented Ontario's Children's Aid Societies in Ontario and provided service in the areas of government relations, communications, information management, education and training to advocate for the protection and well-being of children. <http://www.oacas.org>.