

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 and Children's Aid Societies will raise awareness about the importance of calling Children's Aid with concerns about the safety or well-being of a child or youth. This year's campaign will specifically highlight the devastating impact neglect—which is classified as a type of abuse—can have on a child.

“A child who is neglected is consistently not having their vital needs met. That could mean poor nutrition, lack of attention to hygiene, or unattended physical and medical needs,” says Mary Ballantyne, CEO of OACAS. “From a child welfare perspective, neglect is a concern because it ultimately affects a child's ability to thrive.”

Child neglect can be difficult to assess, as harm caused by the absence of something is not always readily apparent. Child neglect can be caused by the inability of parents or caregivers to meet a child's basic needs, including food, shelter, clothing, education, supervision, medical care, and safe surroundings.

Provincial research shows that approximately 90 percent of the children that receive protection services from Children's Aid live in families that are struggling with chronic needs such as poverty, mental health, and addiction. It's important to understand that although poverty can be a risk factor for both neglect and abuse, children are also abused or neglected in families with higher socio-economic status. So every community has an important role to play in helping to prevent incidences of neglect and abuse.

“Unfortunately, many people worry that their call to Children's Aid will lead to splitting up a family, however, most of the time that is not what happens,” says Mary Ballantyne, CEO of OACAS.

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.

“No one should hesitate to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect to a Children's Aid Society. Making that call can support a child and their family in getting the help they need. This can mean services and supports, and making the right connections in their community,” says Michael Coteau, Minister of Children and Youth Services and Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism.

Quick Facts

- This year marks the 25th anniversary of Child Abuse Prevention Month in Ontario.
- Dress Purple Day will take place on October 24, 2017. To launch this provincial day of action, the CN Tower will be lit purple on October 23 from sunset to sunrise. (A standard set light show will run for eight minutes at the top of every hour.)

For more information about Child Abuse Prevention Month or to arrange interviews, please contact: Sean McGrady, Media Relations and External Communications Specialist at (416) 644-2497 or smcgrady@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>.