

Connections

The Quarterly Newsletter of The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Winter 2013

Ministry of the Attorney General Enforcement Officers Receive Stand Up for Kids Award

By Krista Lamb

Every October, Children's Aid Societies across Ontario mark Child Abuse Prevention Month with awareness campaigns. In Toronto, the four agencies (CCAS, Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Jewish Family & Child and Native Child & Family Services) present the Stand Up for Kids Awards, which recognize those who have made a special contribution to protecting children.

This year, Dora Charalambous and Lyndon Chandler, Enforcement Officers with the Ministry of the Attorney General, were recognized in a ceremony held at Queen's Park on October 21st. As Enforcement Officers, Dora and Lyndon's work brought them into



Representatives from Toronto Children's Aid Societies stand with award recipients, Dora Charalambous (third from left), and Lyndon Chandler, (fourth from left).

contact with a young child in an apartment where a family was being evicted. The child was unsafe, hungry, had no clean clothes, and was not attending school. Dora and Lyndon chose to get involved immediately by offering support to the child and his mother, who was living with untreated mental health issues. Supported by colleagues, friends and family they collected material and financial donations, as well as arranging for a children's aid society representative to conduct an information session for their colleagues about how to spot the signs of child abuse and neglect.

"It is our responsibility as a community, to raise each and every child with love, compassion and understanding. We are too afraid of getting involved and helping one another because we're not sure of the outcome. That's not right. You will never see this world change if you yourself don't make a difference in someone else's life," said Dora Charalambous when she learned they had won the award.

Dora's young nephew accepted the award alongside her and Lyndon, something she felt was important as he had been a huge part of the fundraising efforts. She thought it was an important lesson for him and for other children about helping others whose circumstances are less fortunate.

The awards ceremony was attended by Theresa Piruzza, Minister of Children and Youth Services, who spoke about the importance of awards like these, which recognize that protecting children is a community responsibility.

"Protecting children in the community is a tremendous responsibility and we cannot do it alone. Children's Aid Societies need individuals like this year's Stand Up for Kids Award winners who demonstrate the caring and compassion for children, youth and families that make our city a safer place for everyone," said Mary A. McConville, Executive Director, CCAS.

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Opening Hearts and Homes

A foster family steps up when another foster parent dies unexpectedly

By Krista Lamb

The unexpected passing of Carmel, one of our foster parents was a tragedy for everyone at CCAS. Moreover, the children in her care were particularly devastated, as they saw her as a parent whose home they could stay in as long as they needed. The thought that they might need to be split up was equally distressing. The children see each other as siblings, though they weren't all related, and they wanted to stay together.

For Joan and Edmund, CCAS foster parents who lived in the same city, Carmel's passing was a shock, but their first thought was, 'don't split her boys up.' They knew Carmel through fostering and understood how important family was to her – they offered to take the children. CCAS staff thought this would be a wonderful option. The older children (all over 17) were able to move in with friends (they now all live together as roommates supported by the Society), which meant that Joan and Edmund had the space for the three youngest boys.

The couple had to scramble to get enough

beds and linens – they even decided to move out of their master bedroom into a finished suite in the basement to better accommodate the needs of the boys. So far it has proven to be a successful transition, bringing much laughter and life into their home. "It's a little nutty," Joan says with a chuckle. "I think we were getting older and when that happens you tend to watch a lot of TV and read. But this really shook things up." She notes that with all the going out and arranging of the boys schedules the couple has not even have time to think about being retired.

The children are adapting well to their new family. They started calling Joan and Edmund Nana and Papa about a week after moving in and they like that the older children live very close by and are always welcome to visit. For CCAS, it has proven to be a successful match because all of the children are safe, happy and together. Not to mention being able to stay in the same school. Everyone acknowledges that it will be a long, difficult process to help the children grieve the sudden loss of someone they loved so much,

but this is the best case scenario under the circumstances.

The family and CCAS held a small memorial service for Carmel shortly after she passed. It gave everyone a chance to say good-bye and to celebrate the incredible impact Carmel had on their lives. Joan played a recording of the Lee Ann Womack song, "I Hope You Dance" as a tribute from Carmel to her boys because she knew it was a message that she would want them to hear.

For Joan, taking in the boys has been especially meaningful because Carmel was someone who always gave so much and never asked for anything – now she sees a way to give back to her friend. "I told the boys at her memorial service, 'today I'm here to help not only Carmel, but also you. My home, my heart will be open to you for the rest of my life.'"

Interested in becoming a CCAS foster parent. Please call: 416-395-0558. For more information on fostering you can visit our website at www.torontoccas.org/fostering.

Volunteer Turned Donor Gives Much Needed Items to Kids

By Krista Lamb

When Lisa Landriault saw that there were extra Christmas toys at a community organization where she was volunteering a few years ago, she asked about the possibility of donating those toys to another charity that was dear to her heart – CCAS. She got the OK, not realizing that that decision would change the course of her work as a volunteer.

Lisa's generosity helped many of the families we support at our Scarborough offices and she began looking for other ways to assist families throughout the year. She talked to friends, family and neighbours about CCAS and the families we serve and they helped her collect gently used toys, clothing, baby equipment and other items that were greatly

needed by the families and children in our community.

"I consider myself a giver," explains Lisa of her motivation. "I get a lot of joy out of this." Lisa also has another inspiration when it comes to helping out our agency – she and her husband adopted their two children, now 3 and 5, through CCAS. "I'm grateful that you brought my family together," she says.

For Julia Matthews, the Supervisor of Administrative Services at Child Protection Services East in Scarborough, people like Lisa play an important role. "Lisa's work has a positive effect on staff. Workers have been able to bring new clothing and toys to their families, as well as gently used baby items –

which we can always use. Lisa always makes sure everything is fresh and clean before she brings them. Her energy and generosity positively impacts the morale of our staff and the families we serve."

Lisa is a great example of someone taking a skill that they have and turning it into a volunteer role. As Julia explains, "Christmas is only once a year, but family's needs stretch over the entire year." Volunteers and donors like Lisa help by providing things that are needed all year round.

Interested in volunteering? We are now accepting new volunteers. Please call 416-395-1891 or email volunteering@torontoccas.org for more information.

Get involved: find out how your participation benefits our children and youth

Stay informed: sign-up for our E-newsletter

Donate on-line: get your tax receipt instantly through our quick, secure and easy tools

www.hopeforchildren.ca

Adopt-a-Family Gives Youth a Brighter Christmas

By Donna Harris

Brian vividly remembers what Christmas was like when he lived with his family. At home in the Philippines, Christmas was spent unwrapping presents, caroling, eating sumptuous meals, watching fireworks displays and going to church. That was more than 10 years ago. Today in Toronto, life is very different for Brian. Without the companionship of his mother, who he does not have a relationship with, or his older sister, who still lives in the Philippines, Christmas isn't quite what it used to be.

Recognizing that Christmas can be a bitter-sweet time for many youth, children, and families in Toronto, Hope for Children Fund's Adopt-a-Family program aims to make the Holiday Season sweeter. Especially for those who have struggled with poverty, abuse, and neglect.

For youth like Brian, this program provides some of the necessities that others take for granted and some fun gifts as well. As a university student and a former Crown ward, Brian juggles school and the burdens of independent living, such as rent, groceries and household expenses. The help he receives from Adopt-a-Family eases some of the financial stress he experiences. "Life's easier when you don't have to worry as much about your own survival," says Brian candidly.

The program's primary focus is to thoughtfully match youth or families with donors. Each donor receives a profile and a special gift list from the youth or family and this helps the donor personalize their giving. Donors can decide how much they would like to contribute or how many items on the wish list they would like to purchase. Donors drop off their donations at one of the Adopt-a-Family locations across Toronto and volunteers and staff ensure that the gifts are delivered to families and youth.



Adopt-a-Family participant, and former Crown ward, Brian speaking to an audience at Hope for Children Fund's Scholarship Event. Brian is a second-year student at Ryerson University and a Hope for Children Fund scholarship recipient.

Brian explains that being a part of the Adopt-a-Family program isn't just about receiving gifts. He feels the most touching component of the program is knowing how much donors actually care. "I have the best donors ever. They provide genuine help. They've sent letters expressing their concern for me and they have gone above and beyond," says Brian.

Through the generosity of their donors, Adopt-a-Family supports more than 1,200 youth and families annually. Many donors also support youth and families by providing gift certificates or cash. When youth and families receive gift certificates and food vouchers they feel empowered to make their own purchasing decisions. Parents have the joy of shopping for their children with the gift certificates that are provided. With the food vouchers they receive, parents are able to provide a nutritious Christmas meal for their family.

The donors generosity never goes unnoticed. "I would give my donors a hug and thank them a lot if I ever met them," said Brian. "I'd thank them for not just thinking about themselves at this time of year, but for thinking of others as well."

This year Brian will be spending Christmas with his former foster parents. Although he moved out of his foster home a few years ago, he still has a very strong relationship with his foster parents.

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Adopt-a-Family is still in need of gift certificates and cash donations. To make this holiday season brighter for children, families and youth, please visit www.hopeforchildren.ca.

Quality Corner: Improving our Work with Evidence-Informed Practice

By Tanya Morton, Quality Assurance and Research Analyst

Promoting a sound base of knowledge to guide workers decisions is important: Child welfare work is fast paced and complex, and child protection workers are often faced with limited information while trying to meet their clients' needs. The CCAS Service Principles include evidence-informed practice, an approach that guides the decisions workers make by combining the use of research evidence, professional judgment, and the preferences of clients. One way the agency promotes evidence-informed practice is through the work of the Quality Assurance (QA) department. The members of the QA department are Lori Bennett, Transformation Policy Writer, Bruce Leslie, Manager of Quality Assurance and Outcomes Measurement, Tanya Morton, Quality Assurance and Research Analyst, and Peggy Tsukamoto, Quality Assurance

Administrative Assistant. The QA department helps to evaluate programs in the agency, distributes research results, writes policies, conducts audits, measures outcomes, and does other activities that support the use of research evidence.

An additional strategy involves the QA department building and maintaining the agency's e-library so that workers may access information related to questions about practice. The QA department also liaises with Practice and Research Together (PART), the national membership-based knowledge exchange organization for child welfare agencies. PART provides workers with resources such as webinars, interactive case studies, brief literature reviews, and guidebooks to help them make decisions that are informed by research. Members of the QA department help support the transfer

of learning from PART events and forums to the agency.

Practitioners may find research papers cumbersome to read; however, integrating research evidence into practice is a way for workers to make research applicable to themselves and their clients. In a field where workers are constantly making decisions, the QA department is always looking for ways to disseminate useful information that workers can easily access and apply. Keeping abreast on the latest child welfare research may be seen as a process of learning that allows us to think critically about the research that exists, and factor it into clinical judgment and clients' circumstances and needs. If you have any questions for the QA department, feel free to contact Bruce Leslie at 416 395-1618 or Tanya Morton at 416 395-1919 for more information.

Christmas Message



By Ann Keating, Pastoral Consultant

At the birth of their first-born child, the Royals said, "We couldn't be happier." However, I'm sure they'd agree that this birth changes everything. Like every parent, their hopes, their concerns, their thoughts and their lives now focus on the care and welfare of this little one. This Christmas we celebrate the birth and blessing we are given in this child and every child. We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell: You have come to dwell with us, Our Lord Emmanuel. Merry Christmas!

News At a Glance

Child Youth Advocacy Centre Opened

On September 30th, Toronto's first Child Youth Advocacy Centre at Boost opened. CCAS collaborated with seven other community partner agencies to create this new centre for abuse victims.

"The goal of the CYAC at Boost is to ensure that children, youth and families who have experienced abuse receive the very best child-focused investigation, treatment, support services, and advocacy under one roof," says Karyn Kennedy, the Executive Director for Boost Child Abuse Prevention & Intervention (Boost).

Recognizing Our Long Serving Staff

On November 20th, CCAS held its annual Long Service Recognition Event to celebrate our long-standing employees and say goodbye to our retirees. More than 100 members of staff were recognized for their service.

To see photos and read the retiree biographies, please visit:
www.torontoccas.org/connections/winter2013

Connections

This newsletter is published by the CCAS Communications Department. We welcome your story ideas!

Email: communications@torontoccas.org

Read more of this issue's articles online at: www.torontoccas.org/connections



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