



**Ontario Association of  
Residences Treating Youth**

*Centre of Excellence for Residential Care in Ontario*

## **Service providers must work together to address systemic issues and ensure positive outcomes for children and youth**

The Toronto Star's [recent](#) articles about the experiences of children and youth in Ontario group and foster homes illustrate some of the systemic issues in the child welfare sector. We believe it was important that the articles gave a voice to the staff who work in Ontario's group and foster care homes, as their experiences are not often heard.

We want to communicate our commitment to the wellbeing of all children that come into the care system, and remind ourselves to mourn the loss, and honour the memory of any, and all the children and youth, as well as staff, that have died or experienced further harm while in care. Each and every time we seek to solve the challenges that brought us to this juncture, we must keep these children and youth in our hearts and minds.

It is imperative that all levels of service providers work together to address these systemic issues and ensure positive outcomes for the children and youth entrusted to our care.

The Ontario Association of Residences Treating Youth (OARTY) is a voluntary provincial association of private residential services, including residential treatment centres, group homes, foster and treatment foster homes. These private organizations can be either for-profit or not-for-profit. They are often referred to by others in the sector as "outside paid resources" or "OPRs", which comes from how they are paid (i.e. they do not receive direct "block" funding from the government, but rather are paid a per diem by a placing agency such as a Children's Aid Society for services provided). The per diems paid to these private organizations are set and controlled by the government through a rate setting and review process.

Everyone involved in the care and treatment of children wants the best possible outcomes, no matter who runs or is responsible for the governance of the agency into which the children are placed.

The [recent articles](#) from the Toronto Star highlight the imperative need to fix the funding issues that plague the system. The article notes that staff wages are kept low due to the fact that there are no requirements for minimum qualifications. The issue that the article does not address is that there is no mechanism for a private operator to increase their per diem rate to pay their staff higher wages (currently rate reviews cannot be accessed for either staff wages or cost of living increases). The article also does not mention that the placing agencies, such as a CAS, will often negotiate that a lower paid staff be

assigned to a youth. All of these issues are symptomatic of the funding issues plaguing the system.

The number of placements that children and youth experience while in care has been of great concern to OARTY for numerous years. The Toronto Star article notes that in recent years, provincial policy has favoured family-based care and makes reference to the number of foster care breakdowns that some children are experiencing before getting the care they need. OARTY has made several recommendations to government to address the issue of multiple placements, including:

- Adopting a robust “triage” system at intake into the system to facilitate an accessible, responsive system, grounded in respect and dignity.
- Adopting a new funding relationship model which would separate assessment, funding allotment, and service provision. Currently all three of these responsibilities are held by the CAS, with the ability to contract out service provision. In a redeveloped model, assessments would be done by an independent third party who does not offer service provision and funding allotment would be managed by the Ministry with direct funding to service providers.

Some of OARTY's past recommendations are reflected in the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' blueprint for residential services. However, as noted in the Star's articles these changes will not be fully implemented until 2025. Although we are pleased with many of the recommendations from the Ministry, we are concerned with these timelines. There is a need to make fundamental change at the system level in the short term to ensure that all placements and services are high-quality and accountable at all levels.

OARTY is committed to continuing to work with our partners to improve the sector and to improve outcomes for children and youth. We, as a sector, must ensure that all children and youth have access to the high-quality supports and services that they need when they need them.

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