



Letters to the Editor  
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**Re: 46 CAS agencies - 46 standards of care for vulnerable children, April 24**

We read with great interest, the Star's recent analysis that highlighted that youth in care in Ontario are treated differently depending on where they happen to live and which Children's Aid Society (CAS) is responsible for them. Our members share your concerns about the inconsistencies between the data collection and outcomes of the Children's Aid Societies and applaud your efforts to bring this data to the public's attention.

We would point out that although the analysis of the data reveals inconsistencies in the use of group care, it does not get to the cause of that inconsistency. Our members provide both group and foster care services to all of the CASs in Ontario and as such are in a unique position to be able to clearly observe the vast differences in how the CASs provide services for their children and youth, in particular when providing them with an out of home placement.

What the data clearly illustrates is that significant inconsistencies appear in services throughout the province - this is because there is no provincial standard or objective assessment tool consistently in use by the CASs to determine where children should be placed when they need out of home placements. Youth that are placed in foster care when they really require the support of group care end up with repeated placement breakdowns which puts undue stress on these children as they are moved from foster home to foster home; on the other hand youth placed unnecessarily in group care result in the over usage of precious resources; and youth that are removed from out of home placements and reunited with their family before the necessary supports and services are in place result in cases being reopened and more undue stress placed upon the children and their families.

Some CASs on the other hand make conscientious placement decisions and as such have higher rates of group home placements with corresponding lower rates of placement breakdowns and reopened cases. This should not be interpreted as an over usage of group care, the important data here is the lower rates of placement breakdowns and cases having to be reopened. In effect, these CASs have made appropriate placement decisions and as such are not seeing children being forced through multiple moves.

What may not be evident in the data provided by the Ministry through your FOI request is the inconsistency in the financial support that CASs provide to their youth in out of home care. Some CASs provide funding for birthday and Christmas gifts, some CASs provide nothing. Some CASs will pay for counselling for youth with mental health issues, some will not. The level of financial support a youth receives from a CAS does indeed vary depending on where the youth happens to live.

Referral to treatment foster care or group care if necessary should arise from an informed diagnosis and result in moving children with diagnosable and manifest special needs into the appropriate level of care. OARTY believes that children with special needs should get to the right place and program that matches their needs and level of care as soon as possible. Every child should get the service and treatment they need; their placement type, funding level, and services should not be dependent on the region in which they reside – services and supports should be consistent across the province.

We would be pleased to provide further information or assist with any future analysis of data.

Regards,

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