



Ontario's Children in Care

Facts from Children's Aid Societies

October 1, 2008

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Introduction

Child abuse remains a serious concern as many children and youth are at risk of abuse or are suffering from lack of proper care.

Children's Aid Societies protect children from abuse and neglect, help parents and caregivers build healthy families and provide a safe, nurturing place for children and youth to grow up and realize their full potential. Children's Aid Societies can only act to protect children from harm when a concerned citizen or professional calls to report their suspicions or a parent calls for assistance. More education is needed to remind the public that everyone has an ongoing responsibility to protect children by reporting suspected child abuse.

According to the Child and Family Services Act, Section 72.1, everyone, including professionals who work with children, has an ongoing obligation to report promptly to a Children's Aid Society if they suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection. A child is in need of protection where there is a risk of sexual, physical or emotional abuse from an adult, caregiver, family friend or stranger or when a caregiver fails to provide proper care or deprives a child of support and affection.

There are 53 Children's Aid Societies in Ontario. They are incorporated not-for-profit agencies governed by volunteer boards of directors elected from the local community and funded by the Province of Ontario.

Child welfare agencies are exclusively mandated by the Child and Family Services Act to protect children from abuse and neglect employing clinically trained child protection workers who are guided by the provincial regulations and standards, Child Protection Standards and Tools in Ontario and the Ontario Child Welfare Eligibility Spectrum, to determine the kind of support and service needed to keep children safe and families stable in situations involving child abuse and neglect.

Ontario's Children in Care

Over the 12 month period from April 1, 2007 to March 31, 2008, Ontario's Children's Aid Societies provided child welfare services to communities across Ontario. The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) collected information from 51 of 53 mandated child welfare agencies in Ontario to prepare this report on services provided during the fiscal year. OACAS also collected information on the number of children in the care of Children's Aid Societies as of March 31, 2008.

Under the Child and Family Services Act, Children's Aid Societies are required to:

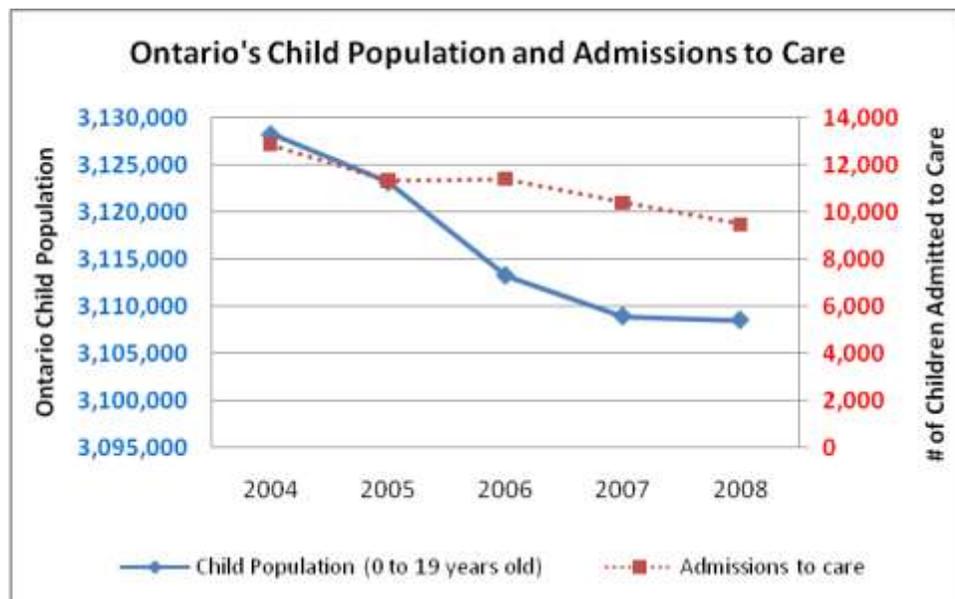
- investigate allegations of abuse and neglect;
- protect children and provide guidance, counseling and other services to support families to help them care for their children;
- provide care or supervision for children assigned to their care;
- place children for adoption.

Investigation and child protection

Children's Aid Societies investigate allegations of abuse and neglect from concerned citizens, neighbours, health care professionals, educators and police. Whenever possible, Children's Aid Societies work to keep children at home with their biological families, but when children cannot remain at home or live with relatives safely, societies offer a variety of substitute care programs and also facilitate the adoption of Crown wards (permanent wards of the province).

In 2007/08:

- **77,089** allegations of abuse and neglect were investigated by Children's Aid Societies
- **27,816** children were in the care of a Children's Aid Society for protection from child abuse and neglect
- Of the children who were cared for by a society during the year, **9,468** children came into care upon completion of abuse investigations:
 - **6,565** children had not previously been in care
 - **2,903** children were returned to care due to new child protection concerns
- Less than **1%** of Ontario's **3 million** children were in the care of Children's Aid Societies last year.
- Of the **3 million** children in Ontario, **3 in 1,000** came into the care of Children's Aid Societies last year.



The number of children coming into care each year has continued to decline, in line with the general downward trend in Ontario's child population. In 2007/08 9,468 children came into care, a 26% decline compared to 2003/04. The rate of admissions into care was 3 children per 1000 of Ontario's children population.

Supporting families

Children's Aid Societies also provide assessments, crisis intervention, counseling and services to prevent child abuse and neglect. In addition, Children's Aid Societies help vulnerable families protect and support their children. Many prevention programs are offered in partnership with other community agencies. Child protection workers also work to support families in crisis where their children are not in need of protection. A child protection worker remains involved with the family to ensure the appropriate supports and community services are in place.

In 2007/08:

- **24,955** families received ongoing support from Children's Aid Societies where a child was in need of protection

Caring for children and youth

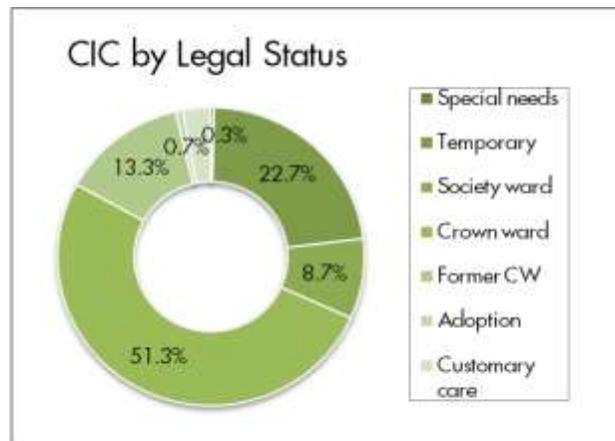
Ontario's Children's Aid Societies provided substitute care for children in need of protection from physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect. OACAS also collected information from fifty-one Children's Aid Societies on the number of children in their as of March 31, 2008.

Legal status:

Children come under the care, supervision and protection of an agency through a court order or an agreement with their parent or caregiver. Children who are Crown wards or society wards are cared for by an agency which becomes their legal guardian.

On March 31, 2008, **17,945** children were in the care of agencies as:

- **9,199** Crown wards* (51.3%)
- **2,383** former Crown wards age 18 to under 21* (13.3%)
- **1,563** society wards* (8.7%)
- **4,079** children in the temporary care of a society (22.7%)
- **536** children in customary care* (6.2%)
- **125** children placed for adoption (0.7%)
- **60** children with special needs in care under a special needs agreement (0.3%)



**Definitions*

Society wardship: Child is in care of a Children's Aid Society, which is the temporary guardian on a time-limited basis.

Crown wardship: Child is in the permanent care of a Children's Aid Society, which is the legal guardian.

Former Crown wards: youth, 18 to 21, who Children's Aid Societies provide services to through voluntary agreements.

Customary care: Indian or native children cared for in an agreement according to the custom of the child's band or native community. **Temporary Care Agreement:** Child is in care at the request or with the co-operation of their parents, by statutory agreement. Guardianship remains with the parents; agreement may be terminated at parent's request or at the determination of the Children's Aid.

Aboriginal:

- **2,512** children in care are of First Nations or Aboriginal ancestry (13% of all children in care)
 - **1,960** are Aboriginal as defined by the Indian Act
 - **552** children in care are of First Nation or Aboriginal ancestry

Francophone:

- **446** Francophone children in care
 - **384** Francophone children were placed in French-speaking foster homes
 - **426** foster homes were able to provide care and service in French

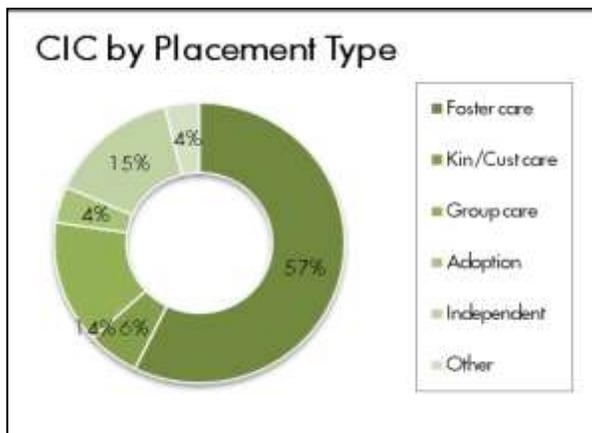
Permanent family homes

The goal for every child in care is a long-term home in a family environment. Children's Aid Societies provide opportunities for a child to belong to a committed, safe, nurturing family through long-term foster care, kinship care or adoption.

In some cases, placement with family or kin is the best option to ensure a child is in a safe and nurturing home. If a child cannot remain with their family or kin, foster care is the preferred alternative to residential care because most children's needs are best met in a family setting.

When children cannot remain at home, Children's Aid Societies offer a variety of substitute care programs, including foster care, group care, kinship care and adoption placement.

On March 31, 2008, **17,945** children were in care in these placements:



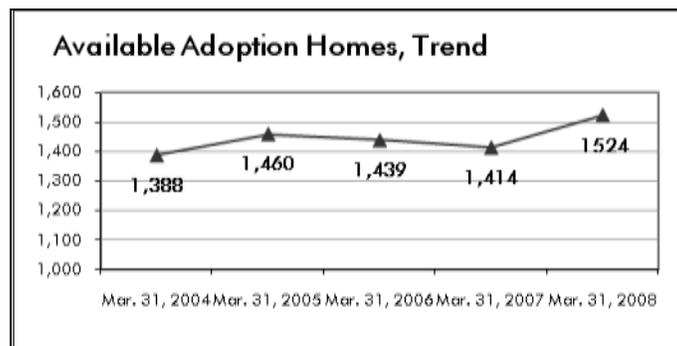
- **10,292** children and youth in foster care (57%)
- **1,042** children in kinship and customary care (6%)
- **2,545** children living in residential care, group care settings (14%)
- **2,627** youth living independently in the community (15%)
- **748** children placed with their adoptive parents (4%)
- **691** children and youth living in other placements* (4%)

Family Care:

- **7,017** foster and kinship homes available to care for children

Adoption:

- **1,524** adoptive homes available for Crown wards
- The number of available adoption homes has continued to increase, with the number of homes available or in use on March 31, 2008 9.8% higher than on March 31, 2004.



*Other includes institutions and group homes not included in other categories and youth living in arrangements other than those listed.