



Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies

The voice of child welfare in Ontario

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Dear

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) and its member agencies are concerned about the Annual Report of the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, *90 Deaths Ninety Voices Silenced*, and would like to set the record straight.

OACAS strongly supported the creation of the independent Office of the Provincial Advocate and publicly demonstrated this support during the development of the legislation. Children's Aid Societies, their Boards, staff, children and youth agree that it is essential to have an Advocate to facilitate an independent voice for children and youth, encourage communication, and inform them of their rights. The role of the Advocate is critical in helping to advance systemic changes in the broader system of services to children and youth. OACAS and its members continue to support this role and commit to working collaboratively with the Advocate.

Despite this commitment, OACAS is concerned that the 2007/08 Annual Report of the Provincial Advocate, *90 Deaths Ninety Voices Silenced*, is misleading, creates confusion and potentially undermines the statutory roles that Children's Aid Societies play in protecting children and supporting families. In particular, we are concerned about the use and misrepresentation of the data in the 2008 report of the Office of the Chief Coroner and the Pediatric Death Review Committee (PDRC). The misuse of information from the PDRC Report not only harms the credibility of child protection experts, foster parents and volunteers, but it may also lead to lack of confidence by the public in the very system mandated to protect children. Creating fear among community members may prevent calls to Children's Aid Societies with reports of abuse or neglect and thus put children at risk.

It is important to clarify the facts regarding two major areas. The Advocate's report indicates that 90 children died while in the care of Children's Aid Societies; this is not true. The report also indicates that most of the deaths were preventable; this is also not true.

Here are some of the key facts as contained in the report of the PDRC:

In 2007, 90 deaths of children were reported by Children's Aid Societies to the PRDC. Of these:

- **14** were not recommended for review because the cause of death was due to natural causes (e.g. cancer, stillborn).
- A further **36** cases did not receive detailed reviews because the CAS first became involved at the time of the child's death (e.g. the CAS was called to the hospital at the

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time of a critical injury) and the Society's intervention could not have prevented the deaths.

- **40** deaths have been sent to the PDRC for future full reviews.

In 2007, the PDRC completed reviews of the deaths of 37 children.

Of the 37 deaths, **4 were children in care** and **none were deemed to be preventable**. The causes of death for these children include:

- 12 undetermined
- 9 accidents
- 7 homicides
- 6 suicides
- 3 natural causes

According to the 2008 report of the Pediatric Death Review Committee, "involvement of CAS is not a factor in the vast majority of child deaths in Ontario; for those children who died while receiving CAS services, most deaths could not have been foreseen or prevented by a CAS".

There are some very critical findings in the PDRC report:

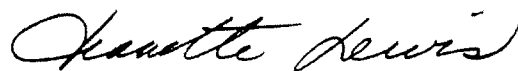
- "natural causes are the most common reason that children die"
- The most vulnerable ages are under 12 months and between 12-18 years
- A safe sleeping environment is a critical issue and needs broad education
- Accidental drowning, accidents, and suicides are the leading causes of death and professional and public education is needed to prevent further tragedies.

The death of even one child is devastating. All professionals, agencies and policy makers must work together to prevent children from dying and, in tragic cases where death occurs, to change practices so that other deaths can be prevented. Strong voices to advocate for the well-being of all Ontario's children are needed and we must work collaboratively to achieve the common goals for children and families and the future of this province. Undermining the vital role of Children's Aid Societies and child protection workers in protecting our most vulnerable children will not help achieve these goals. We must find ways to collaborate and help each other by using the right information for the right purposes to ensure children and youth are safe, healthy and thriving.

Sincerely,



Donna Denny
President



Jeanette Lewis
Executive Director