



Survey reveals why Ontarians don't report child abuse

Fear, lack of knowledge, uncertainty all cited as reasons

October 4, 2006 (TORONTO, ON) – There are still significant barriers that prevent Ontarians from reporting child abuse, notwithstanding widespread public awareness about the duty to do so, according to a new study released today to launch the *Use Your Voice* campaign to prevent child abuse in Ontario.

More than 87 per cent of Ontarians know they have a duty to report actual or suspected cases of child abuse, and over 66 per cent of respondents were very or somewhat familiar with the work of Children's Aid Societies. However, respondents still identify major barriers to reporting child abuse.

According to the survey, the leading reason for not reporting abuse is fear of retribution. Other primary reasons for not reporting include not knowing where to call, a lack of understanding of what constitutes abuse, and the belief that it is 'not my business.'

"The survey makes it clear that there is still a stigma associated with reporting the suspected maltreatment of a child," said Jeanette Lewis, Executive Director of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. "Our fear is that the understandable discomfort involved in reporting possible mistreatment will result in a child being overlooked. This must change, because every child has the right to a healthy and happy childhood."

The survey identifies another major barrier: more than 55 per cent said it would be difficult to report actual or suspected cases of child abuse by someone they know well. And while 48 per cent of respondents said it would be easier to report a casual acquaintance, more than 44 per cent felt they would still be hesitant to make a report.

"Each of us has a legal responsibility — and a moral one — to use our voice and speak out for children who can't speak out for themselves," added Lewis. "As the voice of child welfare in Ontario, we're urging citizens to overcome the discomfort of reporting abuse. The *Use Your Voice* campaign will inform, educate and remind people of their obligation to protect the innocence and safety of Ontario's children."

Ontarians indicate a high level of support for the work of Children's Aid Societies. More than 71 percent support the societies, with almost half indicating they strongly support the work of the Children's Aid Societies.

The duty to report child abuse is defined in Ontario's *Child and Family Services Act*. "If a person has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child may be in need of protection, the person must report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to a Children's Aid Society."

The survey was commissioned by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) and funded by the Trillium Foundation. It involved 3,448 Ontarians between May 2, 2006 and June 13, 2006. The results are considered accurate within a margin of +/- 2, 19 times out of 20.

The *Use Your Voice* campaign web site, www.useyourvoice.ca, provides information about the signs and indicators of physical, sexual and emotional abuse including neglect, and how to contact a local Children's Aid Society. This year marks the second anniversary of the *Use Your Voice* campaign.

About the OACAS

OACAS is a membership organization representing 52 of the 53 Children's Aid Societies in Ontario. The Association has served its members, the community, the public and the government in a variety of ways since 1912. These services have included the promotion of child welfare issues, member services, government liaison and policy development, research and special projects, quality assurance in child welfare practice and training for all protection workers throughout the province.

The Association is funded through membership fees, government grants and other revenue producing activities. OACAS provides system support to its member societies to assist and enhance their role in the community.

-30-

For more information, please contact:

Karen Passmore or Kyla Thoms

Argyle Rowland Communications

416-968-7311, X228/238

kpassmore@argylerowland.com

kthoms@argylerowland.com