



CAS in need of a play area

Agency turns to community for financial assistance

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Something is missing at Halton's Children's Aid Society (CAS).

With a quick visit to the Norjohn Court facility it's easy to see — an outdoor play area devoid of any play equipment.

With its largely commercial surroundings, the 25 foot by 40 foot area is the only outdoor space where children and parents can have supervised visits. Parents often having to bring a blanket to sit on and a ball for entertainment.

"Luckily kids can use their imagination," said Tina Blatchford, executive director of Halton's Children Aid Society Foundation.

More often than not, Blatchford is asked: when can we get something to play on?

But with Halton's CAS's growing deficit of approximately \$1 million, the organization simply cannot muster the funds to provide a decent play area for the hundreds of children who visit the facility yearly.

"We have a big challenge in terms of funding," explained Blatchford during a recent visit to the facility. "A lot of organizations we approach for help say, 'This should be government funded'. I agree with them, but the fact is, it isn't."

Funding from the province covers the cost of the facility, salaries and benefits, CAS services and boarding and administration costs. However, extras including furnishings, decor and play equipment are not supported.

An estimated \$50,000-\$60,000 is needed to equip the play area with a play centre and if possible, a small swing set, a picnic table and bench. The majority of the cost would go toward a soft, rubbery surface for under the play centre.

"The truth is, we're in dire straights right now, all CASs are," said Blatchford, noting cutbacks in government funding this past year has left CAS Halton working with a huge deficit.

"But the need is not diminishing," she added, pointing out from March 2008 to March 2009, Halton's CAS received 3,467 requests for service and carried out 2,049 family investigations, of which 20 per cent of families required ongoing services.

Deficit balloons

By the end of the year, Halton CAS is anticipating a deficit of \$1 million.



HELP FILL THE SPACE: The Halton Children's Aid Society is appealing to local businesses to help fund a new playground for its bleak outdoor space. The CAS is already suffering a funding crisis and says it has no money for a play area.

"We're dealing with daily issues and difficulties in families. We're not dealing with bad parents, but parents who turn to us for help. And we don't turn people away, we can't," said Blatchford.

To help elicit much-needed funds for the play area, Halton's CAS held an open house Tuesday where local businesses had the opportunity to hear about the challenges the organization faces.

Blatchford hoped the open house would serve as a meet and greet. "A lot of our neighbours probably don't know we're here," she said.

The event also will raise awareness on Child Abuse Prevention Month, which is recognized provincially each October.

The campaign encourages residents to learn about and recognize the signs of child abuse.

"We want to make our facility as family friendly as possible," said Blatchford.

"Families are separated for so many reasons. Most are trying to work towards their kids coming home. There are a lot of tears, so a little fun and laughter helps."

For more information on CAS and the play area, e-mail Tina Blatchford at tblatchford@haltoncas.ca .

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