



Halton CAS cutting staff

Child-protection agency's plan to chop 13 full-time positions still leaves a \$900-K budget shortfall

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The executive director of the Halton Children's Aid Society said the child-protection agency will have let go of about 13 full-time workers by next spring due to money problems, and will still face a \$900,000 budget deficit the provincial government won't cover.

"Halton (CAS) will run out of money in March 2010," the end of its 2009-10 fiscal year, said Nancy MacGillivray.

"Without increased funding, (volunteer) boards of directors (at other CASs) are exploring the unthinkable action of winding down operations," she said, noting that while the Halton CAS isn't anticipating folding its operations, she doesn't know where the money is going to come from to cover the anticipated shortfall.

"Halton CAS has heard the message about sustainability, underscored by the sizeable downturn in the economic climate. However, the extent and depth of this unexpected cutback leaves us no choice but to cut back on service," said MacGillivray.

She said she has already had to layoff a lawyer, a supervisor and four front-line social workers and anticipates seven more positions will be eliminated from the current budget through attrition via workers leaving for another job or going on educational or maternity leave, although the latter have the right to return to their position.

The Halton CAS had 127 paid staff, mostly full time, at the start of 2009-10, before the layoffs; about two-thirds of the staff are frontline social workers. It had 3,400 requests for service in 2008-09 with 2,000 investigations into alleged child abuse or neglect. At any time, the agency has 350 active cases and 240 children in its care.

MacGillivray said the Halton Children's Aid Society received \$17.5 million in funding for 2008-09, including coverage of a \$700,000 year-end deficit. She said the ministry has told her that the final funding allotment for 2009-10 will be \$16.3 million, a drop of \$1.2 million (6.9 per cent) from last year. However, its projected budget for 2009-10 is \$17.2 million.

"With the reduction (we) are expected to deliver the same level of mandated service," said MacGillivray.

Children's Aid Societies protect children from abuse and neglect, promote their wellbeing within their families and communities, and provide a safe, nurturing place for children and youth to grow up.

MacGillivray said no CAS wants to be in a position where it has to consider borrowing money to continue operating, and then not know how it's going to pay it back.

"That's what boards (of directors) are concerned about, who is going to be on the hook for that? We have used our line of credit this year to cover our cash flow. Is our board prepared to fund the budget on a line of

credit? There are a number of agencies that will run out of money before we do. I know our board will be (reluctant) to use a line of credit," she said.

Paris Meilleur, spokesperson for the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS), which funds CASs, told the *Post* the government covered the budget shortfalls for some CASs for the 2008-09 fiscal year, including Halton's \$700,000 deficit, but that it does not intend to do so again in 2009-10.

She said CASs can carry a deficit over to the next year. However, Meilleur wouldn't say who is ultimately responsible for covering a deficit if the government doesn't pay for it. The ministry is setting up a newly-established Public Sustainability Commission to look at cost containment strategies for all CASs.

Meilleur said funding for Ontario CASs has increased to \$1.4 billion from \$510 million over the last 10 years. "These sorts of (funding) increases aren't sustainable now," she said. "CASs are working with our regional offices to work within (their) budget without that yearend (bail out) money.

"The funding formula is sensitive to service volume increases. If it goes up this year, their funding would go up (for next year)," said Meilleur.

MacGillivray said it's all about the funding and what it can do for vulnerable kids.

"Halton acknowledges MCYS's initiatives to improve outcomes for children. Over the past 10 years, through child welfare reform and transformation, standards of service have continued to improve and, more recently, new mandated approaches have brought together safety and keeping children connected to their families. It now appears that the ministry is committed to the concepts but not the costs, just as outcomes were being met."

MacGillivray said Halton CAS employees' workload will be impacted this year as follows:

- Intake workers will carry nine new case assignments per month (an increase of one)
- Existing case workers will carry an average of 18 cases per month (an increase of one)
- Residential workers will carry an average of 19 cases per month (an increase of two)
- Resource workers will carry an average of 40 foster homes (an increase of five);
- Secretarial support reduced by one position.
- Supervisor ratios were targeted at an average of 1:7 staff from previous 1:6; the provincial average is 1:5
- The number of lawyers on staff decreased from three to two based on a downward trend in legal cases.

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