



# Connections

The Quarterly Newsletter of The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Fall 2013

## A Day in the Life of Charmaine King, Child Protection Supervisor - Ongoing, at CCAS's North West Location

By Krista Lamb

**C**harmaine King, Child Protection Supervisor – Ongoing, is seated at a table with a group of staff and community partners, listening as the details of a high risk CCAS case are discussed. She takes it all in and then, when the moment is right, quietly and firmly adds her context and opinion. It's a complicated case and her voice is an important one – she is explaining her understanding of the feelings of the parent being discussed. It is a perfect example of her role as a Supervisor – asking questions and providing objectivity to ensure the case is looked at from all sides.

High Risk Conferences are held if a case is deemed to have a higher level of risk than the average. In each case, the goal is to find a way to work with a family successfully while ensuring the safety of children. The child protection staff meet with the branch manager and a member of one or more community programs to discuss the case and decide

the best steps to take. Charmaine likes that someone from a community agency is in attendance to bring a fresh perspective from outside the sphere of child welfare.

Charmaine is an advocate for incorporating outside opinions into our work. Part of her role as a supervisor is to manage CCAS's involvement in the Keeping Families Together (KFT) programs with the Griffin Child & Youth Centre and with the Jamaican Canadian Association and Millan & Associates. When I arrive to shadow her for the day, she is already meeting with a worker from the Griffin program to go over cases we have referred to them – something she does about once a month.

KFT programs are short-term service options for families where the protection concerns may be resolved with the support of community services. The program serving African-Caribbean families started last year and has been a huge success – providing service support in the home on evenings and weekends to make them more accessible, while also ensuring cultural sensitivity. Charmaine spends a portion of each day working on referrals to the program and meeting with the staff as needed.

Like most supervisors, Charmaine's job is technically 9 to 5, but in reality she is available whenever her staff needs her. "I say to my team, if you're working, I'm working." That means she is on call if a staff member is out in the community early in the morning or late in the evening. Her job is to be there when they need support.

I sit with her while she goes through a case with one of her staff. It's a common story –



Child Protection Supervisor - Ongoing,  
Charmaine King

the parent came to Canada to work and then sponsored the children a few years later. The children arrive and have difficulty adjusting – the relationship is strained after so much time apart and issues arise that result in CCAS being called. In this case, the outcome is a positive one – the Child Protection Worker is able to work positively with the family, they are guided to community supports and the case will likely be closed soon. Both the children and the parents are in a better place.

Charmaine talks the worker through the case – asks questions, takes notes, follows-up on points from their last discussion. She asks for the workers thoughts and probes for more information. "It's important to always have objectivity in every situation," she says. "My staff know the details and character of the families and their story. My job is to provide that objectivity, to ask questions and work with them to find solutions."

For Charmaine and her team, collaboration, community support and teamwork are integral components of a successful day.

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# Talking About Resource Services: A Q&A with Domenic Gratta

In honour of Foster Family Week in October and Adoption Month in November, this issue of Connections features Questions and Answers with Domenic Gratta, Manager, Resource Services. Resource Services consists of CCAS's adoption, foster care and kinship services department.

## 1. How long have you been at CCAS and what other roles have you held?

I joined CCAS in 1997 as an Intake Supervisor. In 2006, I became the Associate Manager for the City of Toronto Branch. Later in 2006, I moved to the Scarborough Branch in the Manager's role responsible for Intake, family service, children in care and protection support services. I moved to my current role as Manager for Resource Services in 2011 and am now responsible for 14 programs, including Foster Care, Kinship Care, Adoption and Placement Services.

Prior to CCAS I worked for four other CASs, beginning my career in 1980 with the Sudbury and District CAS, followed by Porcupine CAS in Timmins, Windsor CAS and Peel CAS in Brampton.

## 2. What other committees do you sit on?

Currently, I am involved with the GTA Resource Managers committee and the Ministry of Child and Youth Services Bed Management and Quicker Access committees. I have been of member of numerous internal and community committees along the way.

## 3. Resource Services encompasses Foster Care, Adoption and Kinship. How do you support the needs of all three areas? It must be very challenging.

I have been leading the department through a substantial change management process over the past two years. I support the department by providing leadership throughout the change process, managing resources, advocating for the numerous programs, negotiating roles and functions, bringing clarity of vision and purpose, and ensuring that we have a collaborative working relationship with others.



Domenic Gratta - Manager, Resource Services taking notes at a meeting.

## 4. There have been many changes to how the Kinship Department works, including a great emphasis on finding family members and lifelong connections for children and youth in care – how will those changes affect kinship families?

Our goal is to ensure permanency for all children, specifically those in the Society's care. We have 20 staff with our Kinship Program and two staff as Family Finders. Our goal is to ensure that wherever possible, children requiring substitute care are with kin. We assess kinship families and if approved we provide ongoing support to the kinship family and child. Further, our two family finders seek out family who can offer permanency for our children through kinship, custody, adoption or lifelong connections. These programs support children and their families being together in lifelong relationships.

## 5. How do changes to rules around openness and birth families continuing to have contact or access with children who are adopted change your approach within the department?

CCAS has a long history of supporting openness in adoption. The changes in the legislation eliminate the barriers to adoption and free more children for adoption. This provides permanency for more children through adoption and increases the need for

appropriate openness agreements and orders. These changes create new challenges, however, they also provide more opportunities for permanency for children and youth.

## 6. There are sometimes misconceptions about what it means to be a foster parent – that it is a paid position or that foster parents just provide room and board, not love and affection. How does your team work to overcome these misconceptions?

Our foster parents are committed to the children in their care. They provide warm, loving homes because they are committed to the children and youth. We overcome these misconceptions through discussion, and by having others engage with our foster parents. Foster parents are not paid to care for children, there is no income; they are provided funds to cover the day to day costs of caring for a child.

## 7. Is there a message that you would like the public to know about the work your department does?

The Resource Services department at CCAS strives to provide permanency options for children who cannot be home with their families. In collaboration with our colleagues throughout the Society, we support the needs of children and families. It is only through teamwork and collaboration, that children can meet their potential in caring, loving homes.



**Get involved:** find out how your participation benefits our children and youth

**Stay informed:** sign-up for our E-newsletter

**Donate on-line:** get your tax receipt instantly through our quick, secure and easy tools

[www.hopeforchildren.ca](http://www.hopeforchildren.ca)

## Former Youth in Care Finds Focus and Passion for Giving Back

By Donna Harris

**R**achelle is an inspiration - by the time she was 18, she had lived in 10 different foster homes, had encounters with the juvenile justice system, gave birth to a lovely baby girl and was unsure of her future. Today, she is in her final year of her undergraduate degree at the University of Toronto, pursuing History and African Studies and has plans to pursue her Masters.

On August 21, 2013 Rachelle was among the more than 100 current and former youth in care who received scholarships at the annual Hope for Children Fund Scholarship Event. She is grateful for the additional support that came in the form of a grant from the Nelson Mandela Scholarship Fund, a CCAS staff sponsored fund. "As a student and single parent I need help," says Rachelle.

Since 1994, the Nelson Mandela Scholarship Fund has been providing youth of African heritage with financial assistance to pursue post-secondary education or training through the Hope for Children Scholarship Program.

CCAS employees have organized events to raise money for the Nelson Mandela Scholarship Fund since its inception and this year three students received awards.

"We really wanted to do something positive for the community. We believe that education is a way out of poverty and can provide hope for the future," says Elaine Forrester, Child Protection Supervisor and Nelson Mandela Scholarship Fund donor.

Starting in September, the Ontario Government will provide additional support to Crown wards through tuition breaks. Rachelle believes that while the additional help is a great step in the right direction, there is a gap between the funding students will receive and the expenses they have. Faced with having to leave care at the age of 18, youth living on their own struggle to balance school, paying tuition, rent and other living expenses while holding a job. "Youth in care still need additional support. If my tuition is paid and I still have no money for rent, then I am in serious trouble," says Rachelle.



Rachelle, sits in a Inkajjik (Maasai home) in Maasai Land, Kenya with a Maasai woman holding her baby. Rachelle travelled to Kenya as an exchange student while pursuing her degree.

Excited about her future, Rachelle is still deciding which career path will be best for her. However one thing is certain – she wants a career that will allow her to give back to her community. "My community has invested in me in so many ways, even when I rejected their investments. So I am focused on giving back."

Please consider making a donation to the Hope for Children Scholarship Fund. Visit [www.hopeforchildren.ca/donate](http://www.hopeforchildren.ca/donate).

## Monica Mullen – A Legacy of Giving

By Krista Lamb

**W**hen Monica Mullen passed away in April, the entire agency felt the loss. For more than 40 years, Monica was a beloved foster parent and resource. She had provided a loving and caring home for more than 700 young women over those years.

Monica's daughter, Adrienne Conroy and her family have continued Monica's legacy by opening their home to our children as a long-time foster family. Adrienne is currently the President of the Foster Family Association.

While many of us at CCAS have wonderful

memories of Monica, we were all especially touched by the words shared with us by one of our Child Protection Workers, Cynthia Power. Cynthia was one of the many young women who stayed with Monica and her family during their years as a foster family.

"Monica Mullen was my beloved foster mother for 35 years. Monica's devotion to her foster children remained constant – long past your discharge dates. I recall that she had a framed quote in her kitchen that stated: 'You are a stranger here but once'. This truly captures the Mullen/Conroy's belief in caring for children and warmly welcoming their foster children's

families as well as workers, who were always welcome for tea," says Cynthia.

"Monica, her husband Patrick, her daughter Adrienne Conroy and their entire extended family have given unconditional love, endless support and wise guidance to approximately 700 girls like me – helping us, 'become the women you were meant to be,' as Adrienne says. We were truly blessed to have her in our lives," she continues.

Everyone at CCAS has been deeply touched by the work of the Mullen/Conroy family and we extend our sincere condolences to the family for their loss.

# News At a Glance

## Educating Caregivers About Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

In September we recognize FASD Month. FASD is the range of disabilities caused by the use of alcohol during pregnancy. This year the focus has shifted from providing education aimed at preventing FASD to providing information to help support caregivers who are raising children and youth with FASD.

As part of CCAS's internal educational campaign, staff participated in a fun and educational 'Game of Life' to help visually illustrate some of the important issues caregivers face when raising a child with FASD.

## Never too Late to Help: Lace up With the Hope for Children Fund

Join the Hope for Children Team at the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon on October 20, 2013! You can choose to either run or walk 5K, a half-marathon or a full marathon. The many families we help need support year-round and through the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon we are able to raise additional funds to better meet their needs. You can join the Hope for Children team today! Learn more at: [www.hopeforchildren.ca/marathon](http://www.hopeforchildren.ca/marathon).

## October 20-26 is Foster Family Week

Foster Family Week is an important opportunity to celebrate the integral role foster families play in our work at CCAS. So much of what we do would not be possible without their support, hard work and commitment. This year's theme, "Our Hearts, Our Home," is reflective of how our foster families truly open up their hearts and their own families to the children and youth in their care. On October 26th CCAS will hold its annual Foster Family Appreciation Luncheon and pay tribute to the wonderful and essential role foster families play. To learn more about fostering, visit [www.torontoccas.org/fostering](http://www.torontoccas.org/fostering).

## November Brings Adoption Month Awareness

Last year CCAS completed 38 adoptions. Among those adoptions were many amazing stories about children and youth of all ages who found permanence with loving families. The Society continues to have a number of children available for adoption who have yet to be placed. As with all CASs, it is more of a challenge and often takes more time to find permanent families for older children, children with special needs and sibling groups. We continue to make great progress, but our belief and hope is that we will find more families stepping forward to adopt our children. This November, we shall continue to highlight the importance of adoption within our community. To learn more about adoption, visit [www.torontoccas.org/adoption](http://www.torontoccas.org/adoption).



## October is Child Abuse Prevention Month!

Throughout the month, Children's Aid Societies in Ontario promote child abuse awareness, reminding the public that reporting child abuse is everyone's responsibility.

This year, we partnered with the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Jewish Family & Child Services and Native Child and Family Services to create a video to help the public better understand the duty to report child abuse and neglect. This video will be featured on all four agencies websites to make this valuable information available to as many people as possible.

To learn more about you can help prevent child abuse and neglect please visit our website: [www.torontoccas.org/protect](http://www.torontoccas.org/protect).

## Connections

This newsletter is published by the CCAS Communications Department. We welcome your story ideas!

**Email:** [communications@torontoccas.org](mailto:communications@torontoccas.org)

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