

# Connections

Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto  
Quarterly Publication, Spring 2015



## Youth in care benefits from pay-it-forward approach to mentoring

At 12 years of age, Kyle\* – a CCAS youth in care had never held a baseball bat – that is – until he met his mentor Glen Reyes.

"I taught him how to throw a baseball and hold a bat correctly. For him to take a swing and say 'I really love this – it's my second favourite sport now' – made me realize how privileged I am to have played baseball before the age of 12. There are so many sports he has not had the opportunity to do and I hope to introduce him to new things because he's having a lot of fun," says Glen, a volunteer youth mentor with CCAS.

Glen was recruited to volunteer with CCAS in April, 2014 because of the agency's need for male role models. He was well suited for the position as he possesses a strong belief that every individual needs a mentor to bring out their own special talents and interests – a belief that blossomed from his own personal experience.

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Upon graduating from York University with an Honours Bachelor of Science Degree in 2009, Glen was unable to find employment.

"I knew I wanted to focus on education and help people find their purpose. Through networking, I was able to find the best guidance counsellor and the best teacher out there because that's who I wanted to be. One of the things that changed my life was seeking out personal mentors for myself," explains Glen.

*\*The youth's real name has been changed to protect his privacy.*

This personal insight into the role of mentorship and how valuable it is for a youth's development helped create an instant connection between Glen and his mentee, Kyle.

Through CCAS's mentorship program, Glen and Kyle meet bi-weekly after school and spend their time working on homework, playing sports outside and talking about life like old friends. Glen has become an integral part of his Kyle's life - involved in his plans of care, school visits and extra-curricular activities.

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*Glen Reyes, Volunteer Youth Mentor with CCAS*

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“Glen has built a trusting, open and honest relationship with Kyle who was struggling in school and having difficulty setting goals,” says Dylan Santos, Volunteer Coordinator at CCAS. “Through Glen’s help, Kyle has started to set goals for himself: he is playing soccer, going to the library to work on his homework and being more accountable and responsible for his behaviour,” she says.

Their relationship has had a positive impact on Kyle’s school work. His most recent report card is the best yet and this has boosted his self esteem and eagerness to do well in school.

“The greatest challenge about being a mentor is knowing when to take off your mentor hat, and put on your friendship hat or your classmate hat. Knowing when to put on the right hat is a tough skill but it comes with time and is so important in being a mentor,” explains Glen.

By changing up his “hats” Glen has shown Kyle how to balance hard work

and having fun. Glen has become more than just a mentor, he has become his friend and confidant.

Glen’s “pay-it-forward” approach to mentorship has benefited Kyle and many others. He runs an empowerment program for youth called the Universal B-boy League (UBL). This is a competitive Breakdance league, providing opportunities for street dancers to do what they love. Building on UBL, Glen branched out to create “How Hip Hop Helps.” This program has expanded into high schools across the GTA and helps youth develop their breakdancing skills, while learning life lessons through this art form.

“Everybody has greatness in them, they just need the opportunity to show it,” says Glen. “That’s what I love about mentoring – it’s discovering who they are, what their talents and strengths are and then helping to bring out that greatness in them.”

*The CCAS Youth Mentor Program is a volunteer-based program which incorporates a group session and individual sessions with one-to-one mentors. The Youth Mentor Program began in early 2014 and is dedicated to improving the lives of young people and enabling them to become productive, responsible adults. The program is available to all youth in and out of care. To date, we have matched 30 children and youth to mentors.*

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**Three Cheers for Our Volunteers!**

April 12 to 18 is National Volunteer Week and at CCAS, we will celebrate the contributions of our amazing team of 174 volunteers who donate their time and talent to support our programs and services. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of the children, youth and families we serve.

## Healing the trauma of domestic violence and sexual abuse

An innovative pilot project that brought together professionals from the Catholic Children’s Aid Society of Toronto, Toronto Police Services, Victim Services Toronto and other community partners, helped women and their children heal from the trauma of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

The Scarborough Family Justice Initiative (SFJI) paired victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse with an advocate who provided support to navigate the criminal justice system and helped make connections with resources for financial assistance, child care, housing and counselling. Located in Toronto Police Service’s 41 Division and funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General, it was launched as a pilot project in 2012.

The advocate accompanied police officers to all reports of abuse involving women where charges were laid. To provide reassurance, the advocate met with women wherever they felt safe – in their home, a coffee shop, or a meeting

room in a community partner’s office. A CCAS worker was assigned to assess any protection issues in the home, and to provide support for children involved in violent situations, while strengthening family ties where possible.

“Understanding the dynamics of domestic violence is a key component to this program as a lot of women are isolated, feel shame about their situation and worry about their children being exposed to violence,” explains Isabel Dutra, CCAS Child Protection Supervisor, and Steering Committee member for the pilot project.

“If the mother is safe, she can keep her child safe; if the emotional needs of the mom are being met, she is better prepared to meet the emotional needs of her children. With advocates being involved in the safety and wellbeing of the women, CCAS workers were able to focus on the children’s safety and

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*Isabel Dutra proudly showcases the Victim Assistance Committee Award*

# Recommendations from the Jeffrey Baldwin Inquest– one year later

## *Message from Janice Robinson, CCAS Executive Director*

It has been a little over a year since the Coroner's Jury delivered the recommendations from the Inquest into the death of Jeffrey Baldwin in 2002 as a result of his grandparents' neglect and abuse.

The jury made 103 recommendations, which included legislative and organizational changes across various sectors aimed at reducing the likelihood of a similar death.

The Inquest was a long and difficult process but it shed light on issues of practice across the child welfare sector in Ontario, regarding record checking practices and policies with respect to assessment of potential kin caregivers.

### **CCAS responds to Inquest recommendations**

CCAS has taken quick and decisive action to respond to the jury's recommendations. After Jeffrey's death, the Society moved swiftly to change its record checking policies and to develop policies for the assessment of alternate caregivers. The Society also advocated and influenced the implementation of provincial kinship standards in 2006, which ensure a thorough assessment of alternate caregivers including child welfare and police checks.

These are the steps that we have taken to implement the three recommendations directed at CCAS:

- The first recommendation called for excellent communication skills to be included in key qualifications for positions in the agency that require client contact.

Following the Inquest, CCAS completed a review and confirmed that position descriptions and job postings for such positions at the Society include requirements for strong interpersonal skills to establish supportive and ongoing client relationships, demonstrated written communication and computer

literacy, and demonstrated presentation skills to represent the Society in the community and in legal proceedings.

- The second recommendation called for the Society to revise the Kinship Service Home Study Report Comprehensive Assessment to set out and elicit maiden names, aliases, nicknames or other former names, as is done in the SAFE Home Study Report completed for potential foster homes. This recommendation has been fully completed.
- The third recommendation called for CCAS to work with the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies' (OACAS) provincial training program to develop a case study that captures the learning from the death of Jeffrey Baldwin and its aftermath.

The Society proposed and strongly endorsed this recommendation. Immediately following the Inquest, the Society and OACAS began writing a case study and identifying themes emerging from the case, including those specifically outlined in the recommendation. The case study will be utilized in the Foundations Training for new Child Protection Workers, and in Supervisory Training.

### **Additional action taken**

Over and above the Society's response to the jury's recommendations, CCAS has taken the following actions:

- A single information system for Children's Aid Societies was the subject of much testimony at the inquest, and was part of the jury's recommendations. CCAS is an early adopter of the Child Protection Information Network and is on track to implement the system at the end of March.
- CCAS has been working closely with OACAS to address jury recommendations relating to the

broader field of child welfare.

- CCAS has worked with the Toronto District School Board to revise their policies, and the Ontario College of Teachers on a professional advisory with respect to the Duty to Report.
- Following the Inquest, the Society delivered presentations to provincial Executive Directors, Directors of Service and the provincial Quality Assurance Network to share information about the case, the inquest process, recommendations and lessons learned. In April the Society will deliver a similar presentation to the Toronto Catholic District School Board, emphasizing themes relevant to educators.

### **Moving forward for the future**

We cannot change the past. However, we will honour Jeffrey's memory by ensuring that we attend to the safety and wellbeing of the children we serve through our policies and practices. We will work closely with other Children's Aid Societies and community service providers to share the lessons learned from Jeffrey's death.

Sincerely,



Janice Robinson,  
Executive Director

## Your donation to the Sleep Tight Campaign will help keep babies safe

Imagine the stress of having to choose between paying your rent and buying a crib to provide a safe sleeping environment for your tiny newborn baby. This is exactly the choice that some new mothers face on a daily basis – mothers like Ann, a single mom who reached out to CCAS for help caring for her son.

When Ann first called CCAS, she was in the depths of a severe postpartum depression. The stress and worry of caring for her son alone with very little money had left her feeling hopeless and desperate.

When the CCAS worker met with Ann in her apartment, she discovered that Ann was co-sleeping with her son because she couldn't afford to buy a crib. Knowing that this was a serious safety

issue, the worker immediately referred her to the Hope for Children Fund Crib Program, which provides new cribs to families in need.



Thanks to CCAS's Hope for Children Crib Program, Ann received a brand new crib; she also received information on safe sleeping from her worker. Knowing that her son could sleep safely and securely gave her peace of mind and Ann is

forever grateful to the generous donors who supported the Crib Program.

Your donation to our 2015 Sleep Tight Campaign, which runs in April and May, will help enable the purchase of new cribs for vulnerable babies in our community. "Our goal is to raise \$50,000 to purchase enough cribs for one year," says Kara Spedding, Manager of the Hope for Children Fund. "Your donation will help ensure that moms like Ann aren't forced to choose between their baby's safety and providing the basic necessities of life."

**For more information or to donate, please visit [www.hopeforchildren.ca](http://www.hopeforchildren.ca) or call 416-395-1634.**

## Mary A. McConville Scholarship Fund honours a legacy of leadership

A special scholarship fund has been established to honour the legacy of Mary A. McConville who retired as Executive Director of the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto in December, 2014 after 15 years of visionary leadership and dedicated service.

A highly respected leader and authority in the field of child welfare for more than 36 years, Mary held senior leadership positions in several organizations including CCAS, Covenant House and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

"The Mary A. McConville Scholarship Fund will provide much needed financial assistance to the Society's crown wards as they pursue their post-secondary education," explains Kara Spedding, Manager of the CCAS's Hope for Children Fund. "It is a fitting tribute to an amazing woman whose unwavering commitment and dedication to CCAS and to the child welfare system has improved the lives of thousands of children and families in the province of Ontario."



If you would like to make a donation to support the Mary A. McConville Scholarship Fund, please visit the Hope for Children website at [www.hopeforchildren.ca](http://www.hopeforchildren.ca).



*Mary Juric, Director of Service for CCAS presents Mary A. McConville with a certificate of the Scholarship Fund created in her honour.*



# Sleep Tight

Give the gift of safety and security to a baby.

**This Mother's Day...**

You can give a baby a safe place to sleep and a mother peace of mind knowing that her child is sleeping in a safe crib.

Make a donation in honour of your mother towards the purchase of a crib for a family in need.

**Your donation goes a long way:**

-  \$400 buys a crib, mattress and sleep sac
-  \$275 buys a crib
-  \$100 buys a crib mattress
-  \$25 buys a sleep sac

Donate now at [www.hopeforchildren.ca](http://www.hopeforchildren.ca)



***I want to make a donation to support  
the Sleep Tight Campaign:***

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ Province \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Donation Amount (please circle):      \$30              \$50              \$100              Other \_\_\_\_\_

I have enclosed a cheque       Please charge my credit card (please circle): Visa      Mastercard      Amex

Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Expiry Date \_\_\_\_\_

CSC# (3 digit code on back of credit card) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Please mail this coupon to:**  
**Hope for Children Fund**  
**26 Maitland Street**  
**Toronto, Ontario**  
**M4Y1C6**

Charitable Registration Number 1298 63577 RR0001

Yes, I wish to receive this newsletter electronically



*The Hope for Children Fund provides needed supports for vulnerable children, youth and families served by the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto.*



## Bookworm Club inspires a love of reading

Ten-year-old Suzy\* is eagerly waiting at the door for the arrival of a special package that will unlock a gateway to a magical world of imagination. She is one of 225 children living in the care of CCAS whose lives are being transformed by an innovative program called the Bookworm Club.

Launched in 2012, the Bookworm Club is a partnership of 23 Children's Aid Societies in Ontario and is administered by Highland Shores Children's Aid Society and The Quinte Children's Foundation. Child and Youth Supervisor Peter Clarke leads the Bookworm Club at CCAS.

"The goal of the Bookworm Club is to improve literacy and educational outcomes for children living in out-of-home care, in grades one through 12, by inspiring a love of reading," explains Ruth Tansony, CCAS Manager of Child and Youth Services.

"Every month, from June to December, children receive a personally addressed package in the mail containing books, games and other resources. They also receive a letter from 'the Bookworm' and a set of labels for their books."



For children like Suzy, who may come into care with few possessions, receiving a personally addressed package has special meaning. Suzy's foster mom, Marcia says that her books are her most treasured possessions. "She even keeps the boxes

they arrived in at the foot of her bed," she says.

Participating in the Bookworm Club has been a transformative experience for both Marcia and Suzy. "As a young girl, I was passionate about reading. I always wanted that for Suzy and now we share that passion," says Marcia. "We spend time discussing the books she has read and take trips to the library to look for new books."

Since joining the Bookworm Club, Suzy has become a stronger, more confident reader and her grades have improved significantly. In a letter to the Bookworm, Suzy explained how the program has helped her: "The books that you give me are so fun to read. Now I can read in front of my class."

Marcia has noticed other encouraging changes in Suzy as well. "Reading has become a positive coping strategy when she is dealing with difficult emotions," says Marcia. "She told me herself that she feels calmer and more self-confident."

These days, Suzy is seldom seen without a book in her hand. "She is always reading—at breakfast, on the bus downtown, before bed," says Marcia. "She doesn't read because I tell her to, she reads because she loves it."

The Bookworm Club has been so successful that plans are in place to expand the program to include all children in care from Kindergarten to grade 12, and to provide KOBO readers to 17-year-old participants.

*\*The child's real name has been changed to protect her privacy.*

## CPIN update: we've crossed the finish line

CCAS will mark a major milestone on March 30 with the launch of the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN)—a province-wide, computer information system that will eventually link all of Ontario's Children's Aid Societies.

"The launch of CPIN has been a three-year marathon involving thousands of hours of careful planning and preparation spanning all levels of the organization," says Renée Walsh, Manager of Centralized Services and Co-Chair of the CPIN Project Team. "We are thrilled to be crossing the finish line and proud to be among the first CASs in the province to go live with CPIN."

CPIN will enhance child safety by improving the capacity to consistently track children and seamlessly transfer

critical case information to other agencies; improve management oversight by enabling accurate, comparable data on expenditures and services; and reduce the administrative burden by increasing efficiencies and simplifying administrative flows.

The CPIN project team reached critical milestones throughout this process, including 340 days of training resulting in 100 per cent of employees being successfully trained on the new platform; and the successful completion of a smooth "dry run."

The "dry run" was a critical milestone that was accomplished with exceptional success. Tasks were completed within the timelines and validation of data in CPIN was reported to be free of concerns.

The government's CPIN Team was extremely complimentary of our team who facilitated the "dry run."

In support of the launch, CCAS implemented a number of supports to assist with workload and the transition to CPIN:

- Hiring Child Protection Workers and Administrative Staff for all service areas.
- Additional staff where an increase in workload is anticipated.
- Training labs to assist employees for the first three weeks after Go-Live.
- Seven CCAS trainers

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## Up close with Janice Robinson

*Janice Robinson is a visionary, strategic leader with more than 27 years experience in child welfare as an executive,*

*senior manager, supervisor and child protection worker. In her first week at the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto she tells Connections' Editor Anne Rappé about her vision for CCAS.*

**Q:** What drew you to CCAS?

**A:** In some ways I feel that every decision and turning point in my career has led me here. During my career in child welfare, I have held this agency in high regard and provincially, it is seen as an agency with grace, reliability and integrity. My hope was that sometime in my career I would be able to contribute to that legacy. And most of all, it was the agency's mission that drew me here. Every part of this complex organization works to support that single moment when a CCAS worker meets a family for the first time, the essence of which is for the love of children.

**Q:** Coming from an agency that served more of an urban/rural mix of clients, what do you see as some of the differences in serving our children and families here in Toronto?

**A:** I think a very big difference is the diversity of the families we work with and the unique set of circumstances that our staff need to be aware of as they engage people from very diverse backgrounds, countries and experiences, many of whom have not been here very long. Another difference is the variety of resources here and the richness of the caring services, particularly in the Catholic community, where there is a network of resources and a social safety net that our families can hopefully access that helps ameliorate problems faster.

**Q:** What does it mean for you to work for a child welfare agency with a Catholic identity?

**A:** I find that Catholic values live here. I think there's a lot of congruency between Catholic values and social work values: social justice, the obligation to care for one another and human kindness. There's also commonality or a common ground when you're assisting a family that has asked for service that has a Catholic perspective to it and believing that there is some other aspect of the relationship that transcends the practical. I think

and I love working here." As an Executive Director that is what I hope for – that everyone I speak to can, in their conversation, demonstrate the alignment with that core service principle in a word or deed. What I thought I would find here, I have found.

**Q:** What do you see as your main challenges in the first year as Executive Director?

**A:** My first task is to get to know the agency and the people in it. I also want to get to know the community and the people we serve, our partners and foster parents. I won't be able to get to know everyone quickly, but I want people to get to know me and the kinds of things I want to do here.

CPIN is a huge project for us and a major change management initiative affecting all facets of the organization. I want to hear from staff about how they're adapting to the new system. I think it's an exciting time and that once again, CCAS will emerge as one of the leaders influencing how this rolls out across the province.

Most importantly though, I feel the responsibility for the Catholic children in this community. It's a profound experience to know that this is my watch. It's much more than running the agency—it's the enormity of the responsibility for these kids.

**Q:** What is our responsibility as a leader in the field of child welfare?

**A:** The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto really did astound all the sister agencies in the province with its sustainability plan and how it grappled with the reality of the new provincial funding formula at the same time it was implementing best practice models like facilitated conferences, Early Help with Parent Support Services and Infant Mental Health, Family Finders and the 3-5-7 model. It's cutting edge here. All of that work is going on at the same time as the Sustainability Plan. It's that grit that is the leadership potential of this agency and its shining glory.



there's a fundamental respect for human dignity, compassion and caring and that our workers communicate that to our families.

**Q:** What are your initial impressions of the agency?

**A:** I think this organization has a lot of courage and has always strived for excellence. Here we are incredibly busy launching a complex enterprise information system and only the fifth CAS to do so. During a recent tour of our South office, I met Intake and family service workers who all said to me, "... yes, I'm busy because of CPIN but I'm getting out to see families

## Spring Reflection

I heard a dad describe how he had fallen in love with his newborn daughter the moment he saw her. His face radiated with love, joy and peace at the sight of her.

God has fallen in love with us in just the same way. Just as parents give their children what they need even if it means they have to make sacrifices, Easter shows us a God who gave his life for us.

With a love like this, death has no power over it. Jesus is Risen. Alleluia!

## CCAS celebrates Black History Month

Children and youth, foster parents, kin caregivers and staff gathered together on February 27 for CCAS's second annual Black History Month Celebration. The evening, which was emceed by A.K.A. Subliminal, featured traditional African head wrapping and dress, music and dance, cultural poetry and spoken word.



CCAS staff member Jacqueline Stone (left) gets a lesson in traditional African dress from colleague, Esther Addo.

### A Note from our Editor

Welcome to our new look! We decided to spruce up Connections with a fresh new look just in time for spring.

We are also pleased to announce a new section called Connections Café which will feature stories, interviews and anecdotes from our CCAS staff members in every issue.

We hope you like it!

Anne Rappé

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needs, while alleviating the mother's stress and fears about our involvement," she says.

An evaluation of the pilot project, which ended in the fall of 2014, found enormous benefits for women and their children:

- Women and their children were safer as a result of co-ordination by agencies that strengthened the safety net.
- Children's behaviour was more positive when they saw their mother getting support.
- Children gained access to more support services.
- Women accessed counselling services more quickly and learned about the impact of violence on themselves and their children.
- A guilty plea was entered in 95 per cent of cases in which the victim participated in the program.

The Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police was so impressed that it recognized the program with the Victim Assistance Committee Award.

Funding has been secured to move the pilot project to 23 Division, which serves the high-needs community of Rexdale. Hopes are high that it will eventually be extended throughout the Greater Toronto region. For more information about The Scarborough Justice Family Initiative, please contact Isabel Dutra, CCAS Child Protection Supervisor at 416-395-1483.

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- 39 on-site support in each CCAS location.
- 10 provincial trainers to assist our staff until May.

"Our staff has truly gone the distance to ensure that we met our targeted go-live date within the projected timelines," says Janice Robinson, Executive Director, CCAS. "They have worked tirelessly to ensure a smooth transition of our current systems to the new model. From the project team to IT to front-line workers, everyone has participated in CPIN training, preparations, communications or in technical capacities – it has been a collaborative approach throughout the organization."

## Connections

The CCAS Communications Department is responsible for the writing, editing and layout of the newsletter and welcomes your story ideas.

For more information please contact a member of the department at 416-395-1500. Anne Rappé, Communications Manager  
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