



Connections

The Quarterly Newsletter of The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Winter 2014

Soul Journey – CCAS Youth Take Part in Journey with a Purpose

Six youth from CCAS participated in Soul Journey, a week-long tour which provides youth in care a chance to visit historical sites that bear witness to the unique history of North Americans of African descent. The tour was held in the Windsor/ Detroit area, an important crossing point for slaves seeking freedom via the Underground Railroad in the 1700s to 1800s. In previous years, youth have travelled to New York, Washington DC and Africville, Nova Scotia.

This year, youth visited many prominent historical sites, such as the Historic First Congregational Church in Detroit, Uncle Tom's Cabin in Dresden, Ontario, the Buxton National Historic Site and

Museum in North Buxton, Ontario, the University of Windsor and the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

Vanessa, a 16-year-old CCAS youth in care participated in this year's trip. "I wanted to take part in Soul Journey so I could know more about my culture and where I come from," she says. "It was interesting to learn about the living conditions the slaves experienced and how they were treated, and the steps they had to take for freedom."

This marked the third year that youth from both CCAS and the Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) have participated in Soul Journey, an initiative of the Black Education Awareness Committee. The Committee is composed of staff, volunteers and foster parents from both agencies and aims to provide educational and cultural awareness opportunities for African-Canadian youth in care.

Grace Moturi, a senior Child Protection Worker, accompanied the youth on Soul Journey. "We wanted to provide [the youth] with an opportunity to learn about their unique heritage and the difficult circumstances descendants from Africa faced throughout history in the West," she states. "Through the trip we were able to provide the participants with a chance to see and touch a part of their history."

Grace recalls how some of the sites and exhibits were difficult for the youth to visit and, in some cases, brought some of the group members to tears. Yet, she



Youth in care visit the Historic First Congregational Church in Detroit.

also points out how much of what they saw was characterized by an underlying theme of endurance and forgiveness. She adds that many of the sites and monuments aimed to remind visitors of the freedom and opportunity that exists today.

"A big theme of these trips is the notion of courage and perseverance," notes Grace. "A focus of Soul Journey is to help the youth look beyond being in care and show them that there is a lot you can do despite your circumstances."

Estimates vary greatly, however between 30,000 and 100,000 slaves escaped to Canada using the Underground Railroad. Most settled in Southern Ontario and, even though slavery was not permitted, many of the descendants faced discrimination and racism after arriving in Canada.

The CAST Black Education Awareness Committee was created 25 years ago and has organized eight trips for youth in care to date. For more information contact CCAS's It Takes a Village committee co-chairs Esther Addo or Lucy Mariera.

Inside this newsletter...

p2 Journey Towards Independence 
Stand Up for Kids Awards

p3 Leading Expert in Child Welfare Announces Retirement

p4 Sustainability a Priority for CCAS

 Students Learn Sweet Lesson in Giving

p5 Hope for Children Recipients Express their Gratitude

p6 Meet our Board Chair
Christmas Message 

The Journey Towards Independence: Vivian's Story

by Anne Rappé,
Communications Manager

For youth living in foster care, turning 18 years-of-age is a major milestone. It's the time in their lives when most leave their foster home and move out on their own.

Vivian, a CCAS crown ward who will transition to independence later this year, admits to having some mixed emotions about leaving behind the comforts and supports of her foster family. "Living at Sandra's house is literally like a home. I do want to get my own place, but I'm so unsure of myself," she admits.

Helping youth to succeed on their own was the idea behind CCAS's pilot Summer Program: an eight-week intensive course designed specifically for youth transitioning to independence.

"The program drew me in because the only thing I knew to make was toast," says Vivian. "I learned about cooking on a budget as well as nutrition and what's in our food."

Leana Clarke, Child and Youth Worker and Dean Hughes, Program Coordinator, designed the curriculum to address a

combination of tangible skills such as cooking, financial literacy, and securing employment and intangibles such as problem-solving, emotional IQ and decision-making.

Along with basic survival skills, many of the youth need emotional support as well. "There's fear there," says Leana. "Even though they age out, sometimes they're not ready emotionally." For this reason, the workers created a module to build emotional preparedness and personal expression through visual arts.

And while each youth came with their own strengths and abilities, the workers saw them progress over time. "With Vivian, she came here and was very quiet and reserved," says Dean. "When we went to the employment centre, she blossomed. She followed up. She got a job. We're thinking of putting her in a role as a mentor," he adds.

Vivian's eyes light up when she recalls landing that summer job. "We went to the Youth Employment Centre. That was amazing because I found a summer job at the CNE," she says, and is now working with the Employment Centre to find another part-time job.

Taking youth out of the classroom and into the community to access resources was one of the program's strong points: "It was hands on so they could apply all the skills that we taught them and see that come through," says Leana. "That's what this program's about. Creating building blocks for future success so that they can do things independently and don't need us all the time."

Vivian agrees: "I think without this program I would have been a little more lost. I saw the way that Leana and Dean dealt with things and I tried to do the exact same thing. They're just amazing people. You can tell they really care about us," Vivian beams.

**Based on the successful Pilot Summer Program, the CCAS recently launched its new Foundations Program for youth ages 16 to 20 to support their journey towards independence.*



Local Child Advocates Honoured at Annual Stand Up for Kids Awards

by Alison McLennan, Communications Specialist

What do a primary school teacher and a police chief have in common? Both were honoured for their commitment to keeping children safe at the 14th annual Stand Up for Kids Awards held October 30th at Queen's Park.

Tracy MacCharles, Minister of Children and Youth Services, presented the awards to Lisa Felton, a teacher at Dixon Grove Junior Middle School and William (Bill) Blair, Chief of Police, Toronto Police Service.

Presented by Toronto's four Children's Aid Societies to mark the end of Child Abuse Prevention Month, the awards

recognized local heroes who have stood up against child abuse.

Ms. Felton went above and beyond the call of duty to build a caring and supportive relationship with a Grade 8 student who was a victim of extensive sexual abuse. When the situation failed to improve, she was approached by child welfare workers about becoming a caregiver for the girl. Ms. Felton is now her primary caregiver.

Chief Blair has been a loyal advocate for the rights of children for many years. He has served on the Board of Directors for the Children's Aid Society of Toronto and Covenant House, and most recently was one of the founding supporters of



Toronto's first Child and Youth Advocacy Centre.

"Protecting children and youth from abuse and harm is the responsibility of the entire community," says Mary McConville, CCAS Executive Director.

"Both of these individuals are outstanding examples of leaders in the community who have gone above and beyond their regular call of duty to guarantee that our children and youth are safe and free from abuse and emotional harm."

Leading Expert in Child Welfare Announces Retirement by Anne Rappé

After 15 years as Executive Director, Mary McConville has announced she will be retiring from CCAS on December 23, 2014. A highly respected leader and authority in the field of child welfare, Mary has contributed to the welfare of children for more than 36 years.

“As I move towards my retirement, it’s clear to me that the past 15 years with CCAS have been the most memorable and fulfilling of all,” says Mary. “We do this work for the love of children and I want to sincerely thank everyone at CCAS for their dedication and hard work and for what we’ve been able to accomplish together for our children, youth and families and how we’ve been able to build this great organization together,” she adds.

Mary began her career at CCAS as a Children’s Services Worker, leaving a year later to obtain her Master’s Degree in Social Work from the University of Toronto.

Over the years, Mary was a manager at a number of different organizations including Catholic Family Services in Toronto and the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto.

Mary then served as Executive Director of Covenant House, the largest crisis care facility for street youth in Canada, before being appointed Executive Director of the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS), where she remained for 10 years before joining CCAS in 1999 as Executive Director.

At OACAS, Mary established the Ontario Child Mortality Task Force and joined forces with the Coroner’s Office of Ontario to collect and analyze data on the deaths of children being served by the Child Welfare System. She co-chaired the Task Force with Dr. James Cairns, then Deputy Chief Coroner and was subsequently appointed to the Paediatric Death Review Committee of the Provincial Coroner’s Office.

Over the years, Mary has been widely recognized for her achievements and leadership in the field of child welfare. In 1999, she was honoured by the Office of the Chief Coroner and Minister Janet

Ecker in appreciation of her service to the Coroner’s Office and the passage of Bill 6, which amended the Child and Family Services Act of Ontario, and ushered in the first round of Child Welfare Reform in the province. These reforms included new comprehensive child welfare standards, a strengthened training system, the first provincial funding formula for CASs and new risk assessment tools among others. In 2002, Mary received the Outstanding Achievement Award for Staff Leadership from OACAS.

Under Mary’s leadership, CCAS developed a reputation not only as a leading advocate for Child Welfare, but as an organization with integrity and courage.

During one of the most challenging periods for the agency – the tragic death of Jeffrey Baldwin in 2001 – Mary led the agency in quickly changing its own practices, facilitating an independent review of the case and sharing the lessons learned with others, including the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, the Office of the Chief Coroner and other Children’s Aid Societies.

“Mary demonstrated exceptional strength and courage under the most difficult circumstances, providing leadership that helped the agency come out stronger,” says Richard Piatti, CCAS Board President.

Much has been learned from Jeffrey’s death, and this tragedy was directly responsible for new Ministry Kinship Service Standards, which will significantly reduce the likelihood that a death in similar circumstances will occur again in Ontario.

CCAS has championed the development of strong community partnerships with agencies that provide vital supports to our clients. She has promoted the value of a caring family for every child and strong relationship with the Foster Parent Association.

Over the past 10 years, CCAS has been recognized as one of Canada’s Top 100 Employers, one of Greater Toronto’s Top Employers, one of Canada’s Top Family Friendly Employers, one of Canada’s Best Diversity Employers and has received the Best Employers Award for 50 Plus Canadians.



Mary McConville, Executive Director
retires December 23, 2014

Mary is well liked and respected by staff throughout the agency. One child Protection Worker wrote the following upon hearing of Mary’s planned retirement:

“I have looked up to you as the anchor and pillar of this organization. I have seen your clear sense of purpose to ensure that children are protected and families are strengthened. Your exemplary leadership skills have steered this Society to greater heights and particularly enabled it to remain stable and to withstand all the financial turmoil facing other Agencies. You are why I have stayed on for 12 years at the Society with confidence.”

Mary also values the unique contribution that community Boards make to foster community involvement in child welfare. Richard says Mary was admired by the Board for her strong leadership and direction. “Mary has always had a wonderful relationship with the Board of Directors. She supported the Board so that it could discharge its responsibilities properly and she could always be counted on to anticipate challenges and provide solutions. She was a great leader and always handled feedback respectfully,” he adds.

A Search Committee of the Board is now working to identify a new Executive Director. Meanwhile, Richard views the next chapter of CCAS’s future as an exciting opportunity. “I try not to view change in a negative way. We need to embrace change and view it positively. I’m pleased for Mary because she is now able to transition into a wonderful stage of her life, though I will certainly miss her insight!”

Sustainability a Priority at CCAS

*Interview with Mary Juric, Director of Service
by Anne Rappé*



Q What is the goal of the Sustainability Plan?

Last spring, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services announced a new funding model for CASs. Under the new funding model, CCAS's allocation has been reduced by two per cent every year for the next three fiscal years. As a result of this significant decrease in our allocation, the Society developed the "Sustainability Plan" to reduce our expenditures and achieve a balanced budget. The Sustainability Plan was developed in July of 2013 and approved by the Society's Board in August of 2013.

The Sustainability Plan confirms the Society's purpose; a Catholic Children's Aid Society serving Catholic children and families in the City of Toronto. The plan also recognizes the Society's Mission and Planning Priorities, the legislative mandate, our service principles and will support the best possible service to children and families within our available service funding allocation. The plan builds on our Transformation Directions by deepening and accelerating our established priorities: investing in permanency, investing in family-based care, early intervention and reducing costs for Outside Paid Resources or group care costs.

Throughout the three-year Sustainability Plan, CCAS will enhance existing formal community service partnerships and secure new partnerships. We will continue to provide child protection services that keep children safe and strengthen family life where possible in collaboration with these essential community partners. All of these strategies will be supported through the existing priority planning process.

Q How does this affect service to children and families?

We have introduced a number of new programs and service enhancements to support the safety of children in the community and to increase permanency planning for children/youth in our care. We are looking to provide earlier help through our Parent Support services with families at Intake and we are part of a new collaboration through the Child and Youth Advocacy Centre at BOOST, supporting children and families involved in a child abuse investigation. We have also developed a Facilitated Conference model to support earlier conferences with families when a child is admitted to care and we are looking at how Facilitated Conferences can support bringing families and their support systems together where admission of a child is being considered or we are considering court intervention.

Q How is the move to more Facilitated Conferences being supported?

We implemented Conference Facilitators last fall and we recognize that this has been a positive enhancement to our service delivery. We also designated four Child Protection Supervisors to support conferences in our child protection sites.

The first phase of the Facilitated Conference Model is to support conferences with families and the service team quickly after a child is admitted to care and to support a permanency decision within 180 days.

The Society's current goal is to conference all admissions within 10 to 30 days of admission. The conferences support family participation in decisions to achieve quicker permanency solutions. We have also enhanced our adoption and kinship services to support legal permanency. Earlier this year, we introduced a Family Finder Program where dedicated staff are able to search for a child in care's family members with the hope that they can be engaged to support permanency and/or life-long connections for children and youth in care.

Both staff and families and their supports and our caregivers are all adjusting to the admission conferences. The model is in its early stages and we are already seeing positive outcomes including better planning, communication and coordination.

Q How is the Society's permanency strategy impacted by the sustainability plan?

Permanency can take the form of adoption, kinship care or legal custody. Through its Family Finders Program, the Society has increased its capacity to engage the network of family members of children in care, and enhanced the size of its adoption team to better enable it to create forever families for children who are waiting in care. The Society is also facilitating children's connections with their families or significant community members as a means of providing stability and permanence through legal guardianship.

There will be more to discuss as we move into year two and three of the Sustainability Plan. Thank you Mary.

Students Learn Sweet Lesson in Giving

by Alison McLennan

Cathy Mulvihill believes that children are never too young to make a difference in their community. Just over ten years ago, this energetic Grade One teacher launched the Sweet Read Program at St. Gregory Catholic School in Etobicoke. This innovative program engages students to donate new books and nut-free chocolate treats to children served by CCAS during the Christmas season.

When Cathy first joined the staff of St. Gregory, the junior and intermediate grade students collected Christmas gift baskets for underprivileged families in the community. She thought it was important to give kindergarten and primary grade students an opportunity to get involved in a Christmas program and approached the principal, who suggested that she contact the Hope for Children Fund at CCAS.

For the first two years, Cathy and the students collected new hats and mittens for CCAS children. In the third year, Cathy developed the "Sweet Read" concept. "I was thinking, as a child reads a new book - hopefully with an adult snuggled by their side - a little chocolate Christmas treat would be nice," remembers Cathy. "I had worked in advertising at one time and came up with the concept of 'Sweet Read.'"

To encourage a personal connection to the program, students are encouraged to select a book and a chocolate treat for a child at CCAS. Parents are asked to wrap the items in clear cellophane and send them with their child for placement on tables beside the Christmas tree in the school's lobby.

The program started small, but has grown to involve not only the primary grades but some intermediate students as well. "The first few years, I ran the program on my own," says Cathy. "Now a couple of primary grade teachers and students have volunteered, which is a big help. It's a daily job once the campaign starts."

The Sweet Read Program has inspired students at St. Gregory to look beyond their own wants and needs and experience the joy of giving to others. "It's a wonderful sight to see such generous giving on display. The students have such pride on their faces when they go to put their gift on the table," says Cathy.

The experience with Sweet Read has been so positive that Cathy encourages teachers to develop similar programs in their schools. "It's a nice way for us to remind the students and their families that Christmas is a time of giving from the heart," she says. "As



Catholic educators it is our duty to remind students of the true meaning of Christmas and that giving is something that all ages can and should do."

"We are very grateful to Cathy, the staff, students and parents at St. Gregory for their amazing generosity," says Kara Spedding, Manager of Fund Development for the Hope for Children Fund. "Their kindness will help brighten the Christmas season for the children and families we serve."

If you or someone at your school are interested in launching a program to support the Hope for Children Fund, please contact: info@hopeforchildren.ca.



Hope for Children Recipients Express their Gratitude



Children and families receiving donations through the Hope for Children Fund at Christmas express their gratitude by writing "thank you" letters:

To Our Special Angels:

We would like to thank you so much for everything. In our time of need, with all the changes in our lives I can't express how I feel. My kids and I really appreciate what you all have done for us. We would like to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Wonderful New Year.

*God Bless,
Love, the family*

You Made it Special...

...On behalf of this family we would like to thank all donors and sponsors for the presents... if it wasn't for you we would not have had a wonderful Christmas. We would just like to say thank you very much and Happy New Year."

Sincerely, Family

"Thank you for the gifts and have a Merry Christmas. I love all of the gifts; they are perfect."
Quinn :)

"Thank you for your generosity."
Patricia

Meet Our Board Chair *by Anne Rappé*

Richard Piatti has never looked back since being elected to CCAS's Board of Directors in June 2010.

A professional engineer and President of Federal Elevator Systems Inc., Richard says he was delighted with the opportunity to head up the Board. "I feel a tremendous pride that I can assist in some small way. CCAS is brimming with talent, caring, professionalism and responsibility. Anyone who's involved in this organization can only get better as a person!"

Richard has an undergraduate degree from the University of Mar del Plata, Argentina, a Master of Engineering from the University of Toronto and has extensive business experience at a number of international companies. He has also served on several boards of directors.

"It brings me an incredible amount of joy and happiness to spend time doing something so extraordinarily meaningful," says Richard. "I have a couple of friends whom I respect deeply who are front-line workers at CCAS. How could anyone who knows anything about a CAS not want to play a small part in the delivery of these services?" he asks.

With the imminent retirement of CCAS's Executive Director, shrinking budgets and system changes, Richard acknowledges there are plenty of challenges ahead but remains optimistic about the agency's future. "My experience of the people in this agency is that we have a slate of top notch professionals. We are the best we can possibly be and that we will continue to be successful in embracing change and challenges in the environment openly and with knowledge."



Richard Piatti
Our New Board Chair

Since 2010, Richard has served as Treasurer and Chair of the Finance and Administration Committee, Chair of the Property Committee and is currently chairing the Board's Executive Committee.

Christmas Message

By Ann Keating, Pastoral Consultant

An old man in a shabby coat, carrying a couple of plastic bags had approached me on the street. "Where's the lake?" he asked.

I was confused by his question and asked "Are you going to the Lakeshore?" "Yes," he said.

As I gave him the directions to Lakeshore Blvd, I saw the worry on his face turn into a smile and his eyes sparkled.

For the briefest moment, he had opened himself up to peace and reassurance and passed his appreciation onto me.

May God's peace be ever present with us this holiday season and may we continue to share this peace, joy and love with others.

Merry Christmas!



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