



Family and Children's Services of
St Thomas and Elgin

MEDIA RELEASE
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Funding Shortfalls Threaten Child Protection Services in Elgin County

“Children in Elgin cannot be protected beyond March 11, 2010 unless the Ministry of Children and Youth Services provides additional funding to the Family and Children’s Services of St. Thomas and Elgin. As a result, allegations of child abuse and neglect may not be responded to in the regulated timelines and children living in high risk situations may not be seen,” states Rod Potgieter, Executive Director of the local Children’s Aid Society.

St. Thomas and Elgin has been seriously affected by the economic recession—with a 10.9% rate of Unemployment and Social Assistance caseloads increasing by 28%--now is the worst time to have reductions in funding for child welfare. Losing a job and having to seek social assistance takes a toll on people. Senator Kirby who chairs the Canadian Mental Health Commission has called this the “Social Recession” and states that this will continue for 10 to 14 years after the economic recession is resolved.

Families in St. Thomas and Elgin are struggling. We are seeing increases in depression, addictions, domestic violence and child abuse. Research, conducted by Dr. Alan Leshied, from the University of Western Ontario during the last economic recession in the 1990s shows that there is a direct correlation between increases in families seeking social assistance and increases in child abuse reports.

The Society has received a 15% increase in the number of calls for help and investigations of child abuse and neglect over the past 3 months. We attribute this to the economic downturn which has hit hard in this community. The number of cases open at Family Services which provides ongoing assistance to families has increased by 18%. This agency in the last 6 months has placed 31% more teens into care than was the norm previously.

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F&CS of St. Thomas and Elgin has implemented new programs that have been recommended and legislated by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. These programs are aimed at positive outcomes for children and families. The Society does everything that we can to keep children safe and protected, while at the same time keep families together. The Society has reduced the number of children in group care and placed them in family settings in Elgin where they can be close to their family, their friends and attend their home school. The Society has made a conscious effort to reduce the number of children in care from 188 to 147 children. More children are being supported in their family of origin or with a grandparent or member of their extended family.

The Funding approach used by the Ministry of Children and Youth Services has not kept pace with the new programs and initiatives aimed at moving children to kin or home. While we do the right things for families, these programs still cost money. When a child is moved from Society care, the Agency ends up with less money than if the child were in care. The Funding approach does not fund the mandatory new directions introduced by the Ministry itself in its Transformation Agenda.

This year, F&CS of St Thomas and Elgin will receive \$307,491 less funds than last year.

The Ministry Allocation is \$1.3 million less than the budget approved by the Board of Directors. The last two months have been spent reviewing expenditures for cost savings. Only \$125,000 in savings can be found. If costs are reduced further, the Society will not be able carry out the mandate required by legislation and standards set by the Ministry. **The Society will have exhausted all of its funding by the end of the second week of March 2010.**

“It does not seem right to fund a child protection service less money than last year during an economic and social recession. We know that the recession will put our most vulnerable children at increased risk for neglect and abuse,” states Don Lawrence, President of the Board of Directors of Family and Children’s Services of St. Thomas and Elgin.

**For further information contact
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