



# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

WINTER 2013 - SPRING 2014

## HOLIDAY HOPE: THE TRUE HOLIDAY SPIRIT

"We are so blessed, we have so many things, and we wanted to give back to our community," says Giselle of why she and her family decided to sponsor a family through our *Holiday Hope Program*.

Since her boys were getting older and "not asking for as much for Christmas," she suggested that they sponsor a family who may need a helping hand during the holidays. It was very important to her that they decide as a family, and do the shopping as a family.

All four boys were on board immediately. Giselle requested that they be matched with a family of boys -- just like them. It turned out to be a fabulous experience for the family. Even though her "boys aren't big shoppers," as Giselle says, they got really excited about going through the other boys' wish lists, and searching for just the right gifts.

It turned out even more rewarding than anticipated as they had a lot of fun shopping together and making sure their recipient family had a happy holiday.

"It wasn't just a really fun family day, it was also a great learning experience," says Giselle. "They got to learn a bit about giving back to the community."

Giselle's comments are very similar to those we hear from many of our dedicated supporters. But what makes Giselle's comments so remarkable is that once, she and her family were on the other side of this story.

A few years ago a teacher called Durham CAS with some concerns about the boys' father (from whom Giselle was separated). Due to a variety of concerns, we became involved, and they met Family Service Worker, Susanne Piper. Initially, Giselle was upset and resistant to any CAS involvement.

"I had my back up, but I had no idea how much CAS could help," she says. "I also had no idea how much I needed help."

At first the boys were scared, but they bonded immediately with Susanne. That comforted Giselle, helping her open up to the assistance available.



Susanne supported Giselle and the boys throughout more than two years of CAS involvement.

She even helped to improve the relationship with their father despite some significant challenges.

**"We have so much, and we wanted to give back to our community"**  
- Giselle,  
*Holiday Hope Donor*

"Susanne is an angel," says Giselle. "She is so amazing, she gave us so much."

In addition to helping the family throughout the CAS process, Susanne also connected the family with other supports through the Durham Children's Aid Foundation such as summer camp and the *Holiday Hope Program*.

The boys were able to enjoy a week at summer camp on two occasions. Giselle is so thankful that all four of her boys could go together, and that we were even able to provide transportation to camp. She says that she never would have been able to provide this incredible, once-in-a-lifetime experience.



# HOLIDAY HOPE: THE TRUE HOLIDAY SPIRIT... CONTINUED

"I never could have imagined that this would be possible," says Giselle. "I could never have provided this experience... especially for four."

At camp, the boys made some amazing life-long friends, and had experiences they would never have had otherwise. And not only was it great for the boys, it was also a nice break for mom.

In addition to camp, they also received some help during the holidays. The boys were so excited to receive gifts, and still talk about how Santa also brought mom a present.

"I had no idea CAS could do this," says Giselle. "All the support was such a wonderful gift."

It's this incredible sense of gratitude that lead Giselle to reach out and help someone else. It has been a few years since their involvement with us, and the family is doing very well. And now that the boys are older, they decided that now was a good time to help another family involved with CAS.

"I always made sure that my boys understood where the gifts and camp came from," says Giselle. "It was important that they understood that CAS was helping us."

This family personifies our *Holiday Hope Program*. While we are truly grateful for all of our supporters, Giselle and her family are especially remarkable. Giselle repeatedly expressed her thanks to us, but we really must thank her and her family. You truly do personify kindness and generosity.



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**VISION**  
BUILDING HOPE AND OPPORTUNITIES WITH  
CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES.

**MISSION**  
WORKING WITH FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY TO KEEP  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH SAFE FROM HARM AND CREATE  
STABILITY AND PERMANENCE IN THEIR LIVES.

# HOLIDAY HOPE: WORKING TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

This past holiday season the Durham Children's Aid Foundation's *Holiday Hope Program* provided gifts for 737 families. This includes 1,159 children, 202 youth and 709 caregivers. The program provides gifts to families of all faiths and cultural backgrounds. Holiday Hope would not be possible without the help of many generous supporters.

Donors help in many different ways: with financial support, or the donation of individual items or gift cards. And some donors are groups of

friends, family or colleagues who join forces to sponsor a family.

We also couldn't run the program without our amazing volunteers who devote hundreds of hours of their time. Volunteers help to coordinate donations, sort the items from community toy drives, and manage the donated hampers. It's breathtaking to see our office turn into a busy holiday factory, packed with games, teddy bears, clothes, household items, books and more.

While this is one of our more enjoyable initiatives, the most rewarding part is imagining all the little faces lighting up when they open their gifts. Thank you to everyone who helped to make Holiday Hope a huge success.

In addition to the donations and hampers for Holiday Hope, there are many other activities happening during the holidays.

## Teddy Bear Toss

This year we were again honoured to be the beneficiary of the Oshawa Generals' Teddy Bear Toss. When the Generals score their first goal of the game, fans throw donated plush toys on to the ice. It's always a thrill to see thousands of stuffed animals soaring through the arena in celebration of both the first goal and supporting our community's children.

This year's event was generously sponsored by Meineke Car Care Centre, and transportation for all those stuffed animals was provided by Two Men and a Truck. Seeing our building invaded by over 5,500 stuffed toy bears, dogs, cats, dragons, penguins and bunnies is quite spectacular. The toys are then distributed through our *Holiday Hope Program*.

***Knowing that someone cares enough to give us such amazing gifts makes me feel not quite as alone in this world as I sometimes do. So thank you from the very bottom of my heart.***

*- Kaitlyn*

## Festive luncheon

Another heartwarming event is our festive luncheon for the youth we serve, many of

whom live on their own and may not have anywhere to go for the holidays. The event has grown from a small dinner for just a few youth to this year serving over 115 youth.

While we are able to offer a great meal, it's so much more. It's a chance for the youth to unwind and have fun with each other and staff. Many youth feel isolated and lonely during the holidays, but here everyone can feel connected and loved. They can relax with other youth who know what they are going through.

Everyone agrees it's important to give what so many of us take for granted: that we have someone to share the holidays with.

This event would not have happened without the generous support of many businesses and individuals. Financial support was provided by CUPE Local 3223 and CIBC. The Durham Children's Aid Foundation provided gift bags for the youth. And most of the food was donated by Metro with additional food provided by Cam-Scott Transport.

In addition to donated food and other items, we must also recognize the incredible contribution of everyone's time. The Charcoal Gourmet Catering Company invested many hours preparing mountains of turkey and vegetables.

Thank you to everyone who supported all of our initiatives which help make the holidays special for the children, youth and families we serve.



# WORKING WITH OUR GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

Last year, the *Ministry of Children and Youth Services* announced significant changes regarding funding and accountability for Children's Aid Societies across Ontario. These changes will have a significant impact on our service delivery.

For Durham CAS, this new model has resulted in a reduction in funding that will compound over the coming years. In 2009/2010, the cost of service delivery based on need was approximately \$74 million. The new funding model represents a total reduction of over \$10 million in a very short time span.

We have maintained a long and successful history of recognized prudent fiscal management. We have had to make some very difficult decisions in order to meet the demands of our continually reduced funding allocations so that we are able to deliver a balanced budget year after year.

These difficult decisions have included the elimination of staff positions, and the discontinuation of innovative programs. We have continued our commitment of admitting fewer children to care through strengthened admission-prevention strategies and a greater focus on family-based care for children and youth.

The complex needs of the children, youth and families we serve are increasing, yet the resources available are decreasing.

In order to maintain quality services, we rely on the commitment and support of our partners at all levels of government. We have made a commitment to build and maintain strong relationships with them.

In November we attended Queen's Park for an information day and series of meetings with our Members of Provincial Parliament. Over the past few years, we have hosted these events with our children's aid partners from across Ontario to ensure that our representatives are well informed of our successes, as well as the challenges facing our ongoing delivery of quality services.

We believe that representatives at all levels of government should be informed partners in ensuring quality services for our community. As such we presented to the Durham Region Health and Social Services Committee in October, and then full Regional Council in November.

We are pleased that Regional Council passed a resolution in support of our requests to the Ministry to ease the burden by allowing any surplus achieved through cost containment to be applied against future deficit projections; continuing to provide transitional funding to address the gap between last year's spending and future needs; and ensuring adequate resources for children with complex special needs who do not require protection services.

We will also be participating in the upcoming provincial pre-budget consultations with the Ministry of Finance to ensure that services for children, youth and families receive the attention they deserve in the provincial budget.

We are proud of the ongoing and open dialogue we have with all of our government representatives. These relationships are an integral part of the collaboration necessary to ensure that quality, comprehensive and effective services are available to the children, youth and families in Durham Region.

*Learn more about our community partnerships, story p. 8*



# PARENTS HELPING PARENTS

Durham CAS has maintained a volunteer based mentor program for children and youth for many years. We have seen great success with that program, so we have now launched a similar program for parents.

By supporting parents and caregivers mentors help prevent the admission of children to care. The volunteer may assist parents or parents-to-be with a range of issues, such as securing and maintaining a safe, clean home; family scheduling; budgeting and shopping; meal planning; or planning for a new baby; and providing overall social support to parents.

Janet DeFaria was our first parent mentor; she has been matched with a mom of two young children for the last year. She is helping the mother access community support services, such as food banks, and she has helped her move and set up her new apartment. Ultimately Janet is helping to empower her to establish a stable, healthy home for her children.

“While the work with kids is important, it’s also important to work with the parents,” says Janet. “Helping the parents may be the key to breaking the cycle.”

Janet is a retired registered nurse, and she came to us with a wealth of knowledge and skill in helping people. She had also successfully raised three sons, so she certainly has had a lot of hands on experience with all the ups and downs of raising a family and juggling the demands of a busy household.

Not only does Janet have the ideal qualifications, she is patient, empathetic and flexible. She is also very open to working with our staff to understand the needs of the family, and compassionate when considering the challenges the family may be facing. These are all qualities that are essential when working with families who may be struggling and working within the parameters of the child welfare system.

After several months, and despite some challenges, Janet is very positive when reflecting on her experience.

“Even when I’m just driving her to an appointment, it’s still important. We are spending time together, and talking,” says Janet. “It may not have an immediate impact, but small steps lead to change.”

A mentor can introduce new ideas, and help influence others to change themselves. Mentors also provide a different viewpoint which may help a parent introduce changes that can have a huge impact on that family’s home life.

While Janet has provided support and guidance, she’s the first to admit that she has also benefitted greatly from the experience. She feels even more empowered now to help others with what she has learned, whether it’s discovering new resources or having a greater appreciation for the challenges that some families face.

As Janet says, “We can’t force change, but we can offer help and hope for the best.”



***It may not have an immediate impact, but small steps lead to change.***

*- Janet,  
Volunteer Mentor*

# HELPING MOMS BECOME BETTER MOMS

Recently Durham CAS made the Prenatal Support Program permanent, and now has two dedicated family service workers, Jennifer Beattie and Laura Bortoluss. The program, launched in November 2011, provides comprehensive service to pregnant women who may need help to ensure the safety and well-being of both themselves and their babies.

Durham CAS receives approximately 135 reports annually of concerns about pregnant women. Reports include a range of concerns, such as substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health and parenting capacity. We have always tried to ensure that the baby, once delivered, is safe.



However, this program allows us to work more effectively with the women and their families before the birth to ensure the best plans possible are put into place.

A primary goal is to work with the women earlier and more consistently, to ensure the best chance possible to parent successfully. Essentially, we are trying to help expectant mothers become better mothers. If successful, there is reduced need for CAS involvement.

The program is voluntary and allows us to work with mothers and their families throughout the pregnancy.

We can help connect families to appropriate services, ensuring proper pre and post-natal care. With regular contact, the workers also have a greater opportunity to get to know the woman's extended family. Family members and close friends play a crucial role in ensuring the mother's success, or if necessary, may be able to provide alternate care if the mother is unable to care for the child.

By being involved with families early in the pregnancy, we can also help to connect families to the appropriate services. We are able to reduce risk in cases where mothers abuse drugs and/or alcohol or if there are mental health concerns, optimizing the likelihood of a healthy baby.

This program has demonstrated an improvement in the general health of the babies born, a reduction in the number of children coming into care, and a decrease in the level of CAS involvement for many children and families.

The program has also been very successful in establishing a more effective and coordinated service with other community service providers. We have established clearer guidelines regarding how our services can be more effectively integrated. Having a designated contact person also ensures more consistency thus a more comprehensive understanding of the woman's health, family and home life.

One community partner we work with frequently is Amber Ballam, a social worker from the Maternal Child Program at Lakeridge Health. Ballam speaks very highly of our pre-natal program, and confirms that our goals are being realized with this program.

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## HELPING MOMS BECOME BETTER MOMS ...CONTINUED

Ballam explains that working with Beattie and Bortoluss has made the process not only more efficient, but also more effective. She states that by having two specific workers means that everyone is able to share information much more quickly, and that it is easier to keep everyone informed of the plans that are in place for each case.

For example, Ballam explains that prior to this program, nurses were occasionally faced with a woman in labour who may have a history of substance abuse; they would be faced with figuring out what to do rather than focussing on the woman in labour. But now, because we are involved and have helped the woman and her family develop a plan to care for the baby, the nurses can focus on the labour and birth, rather than worrying that they have to call CAS.

The hospital social workers are notified if a doctor has concerns about a pregnant woman who may be struggling due to various circumstances. Now with this program, they know that there is one more resource available to help coordinate services increasing the chances of a successful birth and parenting experience.

Ballam also appreciates the fact that with two workers focussed on prenatal cases, they are very informed of all the community resources as well as all nuances of prenatal cases. She knows that she can speak to our workers and know that they really are doing everything they can to help the woman and her baby.

Ballam agrees that the program is having a positive impact and is helping all of us do our jobs better, helping women become better moms, and ultimately helping to keep children safe.

Since the program began in 2011, over 230 families have been referred to the program. In the vast majority of cases, families have been very successful in implementing a plan for a safe, prepared and loving home for the child, preventing the need for more CAS involvement.

The program has been successful in reducing the number of children in care. Indeed, among the families served so far, only five children have been brought into our care.

This is just one of our programs that helps us to build hope and opportunities with children, youth and families.



***I am so incredibly thankful to have these two workers (with the prenatal program) to contact. It makes it so much easier to coordinate our efforts. Knowing that CAS has been working with mom to develop a plan means that the nurses can focus on their job to ensure a safe delivery.***

***- Amber Ballam  
Social Worker,  
Maternal Child Program, Lakeridge Health***

# COLLABORATING FOR FAMILIES

At Durham CAS, our work wouldn't be possible without collaborating with many community partners. We couldn't fully support children, youth and families without the service and advocacy of these partners.

Recently, we were proud to participate in announcements regarding some new initiatives from two of our community partners. Each of these groups is a network of organizations that work cooperatively to support children, youth and families. We would like to thank the Ontario Trillium Foundation which provided crucial funding to each of these initiatives.

## **Durham's Children and Youth Planning Network**

*Durham's Children and Youth Planning Network* is a coalition of service providers working to deliver innovative and seamless support services. The network is an integrated and collaborative system of organizations that provides services to enhance and support the well-being of children, youth and families. Member organizations include many service providers across sectors including education, mental health, public health and municipal services.

The Trillium grant will enable the network to hire a project coordinator and fund programs that will support an inclusive community-planning structure. This will include an enhanced network promoting the well-being of children, youth and families by increased service integration, improved information sharing, enhanced evidenced-based planning and increased capacity to collect and analyze community data.



*Representatives of the Durham's Children and Youth Planning Network partners*

This work will mean enhanced services, knowledge, engagement and capacity, which will ultimately mean better services for families in Durham Region.

## **DRIVEN**

The second partnership is DRIVEN, which provides women experiencing intimate-relationship violence a wide range of services that can be accessed at one location. This program has been housed at Durham CAS since 2009.

DRIVEN's services are provided by co-located partner agencies and off-site collaborating agencies. Services provided include danger assessment, safety planning, counselling for women and children, documentation of injuries, settlement services and admission to a shelter. Services are also available for women who may be facing financial difficulties, housing issues, substance abuse, family law support concerns, or are working with the Victim Witness Assistance Program.

With the new Trillium funding, DRIVEN has hired a new coordinator and is welcoming new partners, thus enhancing services for even more women and children. DRIVEN is now partnering with the Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre to provide culturally sensitive counselling, and the Community Development Council Durham to provide settlement programs.

DRIVEN is open Mondays 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Durham CAS Clinic (east side, beside the playground).

**905-432-SAFE**  
[durhamdriven.com](http://durhamdriven.com)



*Members of the DRIVEN staff and steering committee*

## **DRIVEN Partners**

### **ON-SITE**

- Bethesda House Shelter and Outreach Services
- Catholic Family Services of Durham
- Domestic Violence / Sexual Assault Care Centre (Lakeridge Health)
- Durham Children's Aid Society
- Family Services Durham

### **OFF-SITE**

- Community Development Council Durham
- Durham Regional Police Service
- Luke's Place
- Ontario Works
- Pinewood Centre of Lakeridge Health
- Region of Durham Housing Services Division
- Victim Services of Durham Region
- Victim Witness Assistance Program
- Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre



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