



THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF THE DISTRICTS OF SUDBURY AND MANITOULIN (CASDSM)

CHILD WELFARE IN ONTARIO

In Ontario, Children's Aid Societies have the exclusive legal responsibility to provide child protection services 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. The activities and purpose of a Children's Aid Society are set out in the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*.

This legislation requires Children's Aid to:

- Investigate allegations or evidence that children who are under the age of 18 years are in need of protection
- Protect children who are under the age of 18 years
- Provide guidance, counselling and other services to families for protecting children or for the prevention of circumstances requiring the protection of children
- Provide care for children assigned to its care
- Supervise children assigned to its supervision
- Place children for adoption

The legislation governing Children's Aid Societies also includes providing protection for children who have been harmed or are at risk of harm.

There are 50 Children's Aid Societies that provide services for Ontario's children, youth and families. Each Children's Aid Society is a not-for-profit corporation each with their own Board of Directors.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF THE DISTRICTS OF SUDBURY AND MANITOULIN (CASDSM)

- CASDSM is one of the 50 Children's Aid Societies in the Province;
- Prior to 2015, CASDSM served all children and their families in the Districts of Sudbury and Manitoulin including Indigenous children, youth and families.
- Beginning April 1, 2015 and completed in December 2018, CASDSM transferred jurisdiction of First Nation services to Kina Gbezhgomi Child & Family Services and Nogdawindamin Child and Family Services;
- CASDSM no longer services First Nations on or off reserve but continue to serve Metis and Inuit families and children;

TERMINOLOGY YOUTH STATUS OF SERVICE

EXTENDED CARE OF THE SOCIETY:

In child protection cases, a child who has been placed permanently in the care of a children's aid society. The state or Crown has the rights and responsibilities of a parent for the purpose of the child's care, custody and control.

CONTINUED CARE AND SUPPORT FOR YOUTH (CCSY):

Any youth who has been in the Extended Care of the Society, under a Customary Care Agreement (specific to First Nations children) or a Voluntary Youth Services Agreement (VYSA) is entitled to receive ongoing support from 18-21. This includes financial support as well as emotional support from an assigned Child Protection Worker, with a focus on physical and emotional well-being, life skills and social/community connections for support.

The goal is to assist youth in their transition to adulthood. For many youth involved the age of 18 is when they move into their own living situation, and away from a foster parent or group home placement. It is a time of vulnerability and uncertainty so the ongoing support and assistance is critical.

After the age of 18, some youth continue to reside in their alternative care providers' home moving into a Room and Board situation. Many youth who move to independence remain connected to their caregivers. Other youth do not have stable and healthy life-long connections which increases their vulnerability to housing insecurity, poverty, mental health concerns including substance misuse. These are the most vulnerable youth in our communities.

VOLUNTARY YOUTH SERVICES AGREEMENT (VYSA):

This service was legislated in the new Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 and came into effect January 2018. Prior to this new legislation Ontario Child Welfare Agencies were not mandated to provide services to youth 16 year of age or older unless they were the subject of a court order prior to their 16th birthday. Prior to this amendment, Ontario was the only child welfare service in Canada that did not provide services to the age of 18.

A VYSA is a voluntary agreement that can be entered into by a Society with a youth who is 16 or 17 years of age and where child protection concerns have been assessed and verified with their family. The youth must consent to this involvement, consult with a representative of the Office of the Children's Lawyer prior to entering into the agreement, and be engaged in the development of their youth plan. Financial support is provided (equivalent to CCSY) as well as the emotional/transitional support of an assigned Child Protection Worker.

One of the greatest risks facing these youth when they initially become involved with the Society is the lack of safe, stable housing. This is often the first point of planning and engagement. Once this basic need is met other youth transition goals are identified and links with appropriate community services are made. VYSA agreements only include a placement in a child welfare approved resource in exceptional circumstances.

A youth who is involved with the Society under a VYSA will move to CCSY services on their 18th birthday and this support will continue until they are 21 years of age.

STAY AT HOME FOR SCHOOL:

This initiative was introduced in 2016 to support the educational outcomes for youth involved with Child Welfare Services. Youth who turn 18 prior to completing their secondary level education are able to remain in their current alternative care placement with the alternate caregiver until the completion of their high school education or to the age of 21 whichever comes first. Under the Stay at Home for School, the youth's alternate caregiver will continue to receive all of the same supports and financial assistance while the youth is in secondary school. The youth must consent to this arrangement. Once the youth has attained their diploma they will then transition to CCSY for ongoing support.