



## Kinship & Alternate Care Awareness Week 2023: Day 4

### Community

On Day 4, we look at how community collaboration improves well-being and placement stability through a kinship story shared by The Children's Aid Society of Algoma, and highlighting collaboration with many community organizations and programs, including the local school boards through Transportation and Stability Support, and via Ontario Works for Temporary Care Assistance.

### Community Collaboration – Story

The caregivers, 'Marie' and 'Matthew' are the maternal grandparents to their two grandchildren, 'John' (age 10) and 'Helen' (age 7). They began caring for their grandchildren via kinship service, at the beginning of March 2018, as the parents continue to struggle with ongoing substance abuse and mental health challenges. The children were 5 and 2 at the time of placement.

When the children were placed with the maternal grandparents, the grandmother had already been diagnosed, treated and was in remission for cancer, however it left her vulnerable to viruses and pneumonia which she developed later in March 2018. She became so ill that she was not expected to live and was placed in an end-of-life hospice. Thankfully, she rallied and returned home but in a much-weakened state and could not even lift the youngest child to put her in a car seat, etc. The grandfather made the decision to retire two years earlier than he had anticipated to provide for the grandmother and the children with the level of care required. The caregivers were able to access much needed full-time subsidized day care for Helen, and for John for periods of time that he was not in school, through the Temporary Care Assistance Program.

Since that time, the grandmother had another bout of pneumonia, and she is now required to use oxygen. In addition to the health crisis experienced by the grandmother, the grandfather had some concerns related to his heart health. He has addressed this by losing weight and joining the local gym and working out when the children are at activities or in school. He is also very active with the children when they are home.

During COVID there were two periods of time – one when the grandmother had pneumonia and one when the grandfather’s health was a concern – that they approached the worker to look into foster homes for the children as they were struggling with the extra demands during COVID as well as with their own personal health. Both times, homes were found but at the last minute they declined. The grandparents ultimately identified that they were determined to avoid the children coming into the care of the Society and continued to ‘make it work’. Their commitment to their grandchildren has been exemplary. The maternal grandfather is the primary caregiver to the children and remains actively involved in community and recreational activities with the children. The grandfather also takes the children for bike rides, fishing trips, and actively reads to the children.

The children share a very clear attachment with the grandparents and are both very clear that the grandparents’ house is “home”. The children are both quite active and busy. John presents some challenges in socialization and peer interactions. John did experience difficulties in the school environment as a result of his limited social skills and anxiety. This required ongoing contact between the caregivers and the school. Local children’s developmental and community mental health agencies were also involved, and the grandparents remained committed to taking John to all his counselling appointments. He is an energetic, kind, and unique pre-teen. Helen presents with age typical development and behaviors but enjoys being busy.

The grandparents have relied heavily on the limited funding available through Ontario Works Temporary Care Assistance Program. The Ontario Works Temporary Care Program also provided the subsidized day care costs when Helen was in need of full-time day care.

The Society has developed a close community partnership with the local school boards. It is through that partnership that the Society was able to access the Transportation and Stability Funding that is applied for and held by the school board. Given the demands in the home, having summer day camps and support for children outside of regular school days has been a paramount need. The Society’s Education Liaison worked in collaboration with a local school board regarding the children’s need for stability and support the caregivers require to provide that stability. The school board Transportation and Stability Funding has provided invaluable support to these children and grandparents over the past two years.

Funding has been provided for day camps over PD days and March breaks. They Transportation and Stability funding has provided a laptop during COVID online learning, tutoring support to John through a Bricks4Kids program, summer soccer program registration fees, annual YMCA passes and enrollment costs in YMCA programs including swimming lessons, gymnastics groups and discounted summer day camp rates which stretches the episodic funding a bit further to cover the cost of day summer day camps.

The children have recently secured a deemed custody with their grandparents in April 2023. It was a lengthy process due to the significant challenges the grandparents faced throughout the time the children were in the kinship care of the grandparents.

Algoma Children's Aid Society wishes to thank the grandparents for agreeing to share their story, but most importantly we remain indebted to these kin caregivers for their fierce commitment to their grandchildren. The Society's partnership with our local school boards, and access to the Transportation and Stability funds have contributed to the successful outcomes for these two children.

### **Collaboration Spotlight – School Boards & Transportation and Stability Support**

The Ministry of Education's Priorities and Partnerships Funding (PPF) provides school boards with Transportation and Stability Funding for Children and Youth involved with the Child Welfare System. All students attending publicly funded schools who are in the care of, or receiving services from a Society, are eligible for transportation and/or stability supports.

This funding is intended to improve the educational experience and outcomes of children and youth receiving services from a society, by ensuring positive and stable connections to school, and school supports and learning opportunities during times of instability and transition. The program promotes mental health, well-being, and positive educational experiences by providing these supports.

The total provincial Transportation and stability Support Allocations are \$6,600,000 annually.

This partnership has provided invaluable support to children who are involved with Child Welfare.

Transportation Supports Include:

- Transportation to home schools if an out of home move has occurred. Students can temporarily remain in their home school when they experience a residence change that typically would require them to switch schools during the school year.
- Transportation to the home school is provided when it is in the student's best interest until a more natural transition time (e.g., end of the semester or school year). School boards and societies should consider the unique needs of each student when considering the appropriate time for a transition.
- Transportation can also be provided to foster the participation of students in care in learning activities, which may include extracurricular, alternative learning environments and educational programs.

Stability Supports Include:

- Stability supports enable all children and youth receiving services, whether or not they have experienced a residence change, to receive supports that will provide additional stability for their educational experience and support a positive connection to education and learning.
- Stability supports may include, for example:
  - Tutoring services for students, where required for maintaining or improving academic outcomes;
  - Technology hardware and software for continuity of online learning, if determined to require more than what is provided by the school and/or other funding is not available;
  - Cultural supports with specific focus for First Nations, Inuit and Métis, and Black and racialized youth. Cultural supports typically mean connection to a representative from the community, so the unique identities of children and youth are supported by community and cultural connections;
  - Professional assessments for special education needs are eligible through stability supports in situations where student needs are unable to be met through existing board and society funding, and in situations where enrollment delays or student transitions between boards create challenges in providing timely student assessments during the pandemic.



## Collaboration Spotlight – Temporary Care Assistance

A child is in the temporary care of an adult when:

- the child is to reside for a short period with the adult;
- the child is expected to return to their parent(s) at the earliest opportunity; and
- no parent or other person with a legal obligation to support the child is able to care for them.

Temporary care Rates are \$274 for the first child and \$224 for each subsequent child.

Additional benefits which may also be included:

- Prescription drugs
- Vision care
- Crib/bed and bedding
- Special diet
- Incontinent, surgical, and diabetic supplies
- Help to pay for the cost of travel for medical reasons.
- Eye Examinations – OHIP pays for eye exams for those under age 20 and those 65 years and over every two years.
- Housing/Discretionary Benefits – Crib/bed, bedding, highchair, stroller, car seat
- Child Care Benefit: An applicant with temporary care of a child, and who is not the parent of the child, is exempt from paying a parental contribution for that child for up to 12 months in the child’s lifetime.
- Upon application, the Child Care Case Worker (CCCW) must verify the temporary care arrangement including the date that the child came into their care, through a court order or other formal documentation such as:
  - A letter from a Children’s Aid Society protection worker or
  - A letter from a health care professional or social worker
  - An applicant with a child in their care for more than twelve months must establish financial need through an income test and provide their most recent Notice(s) of assessment and/or most recent Canada Child Benefit Notice



- These two community resources are invaluable support to kin service caregivers and the children they are caring for. The collaboration between Societies, their local school boards, and Ontario Works offices enhances the seamless access to support for kin caregivers who have opened their hearts and home to care for children.

