



AGENCY STORY

Children's Aid Foundation of Halton Bridges The Gap

Giving abused and neglected kids support, skills and a way out

Imagine being 16 years old and living alone – not by choice – but out of circumstances outside of your control.

“Kids who have never previously been involved with the Children's Aid Society (CAS) who are 16 or older, even if they're homeless or being abused, are too old. They are not covered by the *Family Services Act* and cannot be helped by their local CAS,” explains Tina Blatchford, Executive Director of the Children's Aid Foundation of Halton (CAFH). “Providing support to help bridge that age gap between 16 and adulthood is just one example of where the CAFH directs funds.”

Going beyond basic necessities for children and youth

The Children's Aid Foundation of Halton raises money in order to do more than provide basic needs, such as room and board provided by the Children's Aid Society (CAS) – and to support young people who wouldn't ordinarily qualify for CAS support. Funds from the CAFH allow the Halton CAS to provide programs designed to help children and youth build confidence and succeed; with an emphasis on education and life skills.

For example, the CAFH funds after-school tutoring to help children and youth achieve appropriate grade levels in reading and math and to keep them from dropping out before finishing high school. Stronger academic achievement instills positive growth and encourages children to feel self-confident.

The CAFH also provides bursaries; encouraging youth in care who have succeeded in completing high school to pursue post-secondary education. Other programs funded by CAFH include summer camps, recreational programming and life skills programs to better prepare teens for adult life.

Blatchford explains: “We are supporting kids who are in need because of abuse or neglect. Their circumstances are often related to issues of poverty and mental health – for example, depression and addiction. Parents and families are trying their best, but mental health, housing and the equity gap, are serious issues in Halton region.”

Local support can lift local kids out of the cycle

The CAFH receives no funding from the government and is supported solely by donations from the community. To strengthen its financial base, the organization has established an Agency Fund at The Oakville Community Foundation.

With an Agency Fund, the capital is held and invested by The Foundation and the income generated is used by the CAFH to deliver programs and services; a partnership that goes beyond the scope of annual granting. CAFH values the role The Foundation plays, in the support of financial management of their Agency Fund, but also in linking partners and funders to issues that matter.

According to Blatchford, a relatively small donation will change a life – but without funding, the cycle of unemployment and of reliance upon social services will continue for these kids.

“A relatively modest donation can mean so much. For example, take those teens as young as 16 having to start up new lives independently. Just \$1,000 provides two young people with the basic necessities for getting set up in an apartment, including dishes, linens, cleaning supplies and ingredients for their first meal on their own.”

“The difference local dollars can make right here on your doorstep is incredible,” says Blatchford. “Our youth are the future of our community. Local youth who have experienced abuse and neglect need hope. And they need our support.”

The Halton Children's Aid Society received funding in 2016 for their “Bridging the Gap program” – a program to support youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Bridging the Gap serves an average of 250-300 youth per year in Halton.

“The donation means more youth will be able to have a roof over their head as the fund will pay for allowances for host homes and give individuals the opportunity to learn supportive, life-building skills and receive basic life necessities.” Youth Supervisor Steve Levac