

**Kids at risk!**

## ***A Day on Intake at CAS***

Many people wonder about the work that Children's Aid Societies do. What kind of people call the CAS? Are there really many cases of abuse and neglect in our community?

Let's sit for one day beside intake worker Bernadette MacDonald and listen to the kind of calls that come in (details have been changed to protect the identity of the children and families involved).

First call: A father calls with concerns that his ex-wife isn't getting medical attention for one of their children. Bernadette suggests that he could take the child to the doctor himself, and he agrees. No investigation needed.

#2: A woman calls about her niece who has been living with her and her husband since the little girl's father was sent to jail. Now the father will be released soon, and the little girl has confided in her aunt that he sexually abused her before he went to jail. What will happen once he's home again? This case is opened for investigation.

#3: Another CAS calls to alert Bernadette that a child from their agency has been placed in our community, and that the child's mother may come to search for her. We will alert our staff.

#4: A private counsellor calls. A mother who has come to her for counselling has described physically abusing her two-year-old daughter. While it's good that the mother has taken the positive step of going for counselling, Bernadette agrees that the actions described warrant investigating.

#5: A neighbour calls to report that a dog which was placed under quarantine order has not been quarantined, and in fact is being allowed to play with the family's two children, ages one and three. This needs to be investigated.

#6: A neighbour calls to say she can hear the mother next door constantly yelling at her children. The information is very sketchy, and there seem to be no protection concerns, so Bernadette decides we do not have enough information to investigate.

#7: A counsellor working with a teenage girl reports that the teen has told her about being sexually abused by her uncle when she was younger. Now the teen is concerned that this uncle is taking care of some of her young cousins and may also be abusing them. This will be investigated.

#8: Another CAS calls to tell us that a teenage girl from our area has moved back here. This girl became involved with our agency a year or so ago because of conflicts with her parents. She then decided to move in with her grandparents, and continued to be monitored by the CAS where her grandparents lived. That hasn't worked out either, though, and she's moving back with her parents. We will assess the need for ongoing service.

#9: A frantic mother of three children under five calls, asking if her children can be placed in foster care. She's tried to leave her abusive husband but couldn't manage and had to come back. Now she feels unable to cope, as though she's having a nervous breakdown. This will be investigated; Bernadette also refers the mother to area women's shelters and counselling.

#10: An anonymous caller asks about parents taking drugs in front of their children. What would we do? The caller will only talk hypothetically, so there isn't enough information to investigate.

#11: A 19-year-old calls. She was sexually abused by her stepfather when she was younger; now she's noticed how that stepfather behaves around her young half-sister, and she's afraid that he's also abusing her. This will be investigated.

***Wait, the day is not over. Please turn the page over for more intake calls....***

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#12: A woman comes into the office to speak to the intake worker. She's an immigrant, interested in arranging to adopt her nephew and bring him to Canada to live with her. She'd like CAS to help her arrange this. Bernadette explains that CAS only arranges adoptions for children already in CAS care, and gives her names of private adoption agencies.

#13: A woman calls. Her 15-year-old daughter has been babysitting a 2-year-old boy for over a week now, and the little boy's mother still hasn't returned to pick him up. This will be investigated.

#14: A school principal called to say that a 10-year-old boy told his teacher that his dad had hit him on the head. This will be investigated, but there is no evidence of injury at this point so it is not classified as abuse, only inappropriate discipline.

#15: A women's shelter called. One of the mothers there has described being violently raped by her husband in front of the children, who were forced to watch. This will be investigated as a sexual abuse case.

#16: A principal called for a consultation. He was concerned about a six-year-old boy who seemed to be trying to get other children to behave sexually with him. He wondered if the child might have been sexually abused himself. Bernadette made some suggestions about how the principal might clarify some of the information to enable her to decide whether an investigation is needed.

Bernadette also had about a half-dozen calls about such things as custody and access disputes, referrals from other CAS's, and other situations that did not require an investigation. This was not an unusually busy day: "Some days we'll receive ten calls in a morning," she says. Some calls may take an hour or more of Bernadette's time, as she talks to the people involved, sorts out the information she's given, and measures this against the guidelines for opening cases. Her supervisor is always available for consultation when necessary.

*"Sometimes people say to me, why do we need a Children's Aid Society," Bernadette comments.*

*"They just don't realize how many families are struggling, how many children are suffering, and for many people the Children's Aid is all they have to turn to. We're the only ones who can protect some of these children."*