

The
Adoption
Council of
Ontario's
Annual
Report

2011



Since 1987, the Adoption Council of Ontario has been working towards a provincial community where all children have families forever.

The Adoption Council of Ontario is a non-profit charitable organization providing outreach, support and education to all adoptees, adoptive parents, potential adoptive parents, birth families, and adoption professionals in Ontario.

The Adoption Council of Ontario 2011 Annual Report

I. The ACO's Vision:

We will work towards a community where all children have a family forever.

II. The ACO's Mission:

The ACO

- Educates the community about adoption,
- Connects families and children,
- Advocates for all those touched by adoption, and
- Supports them on their lifelong journey.

Creating a family through adoption is a great journey and a special challenge. A child's family created through adoption must have the information, education and support they need to be a forever family. Since 1987, ACO has existed to provide the education, connection, support and advocacy needed by all those touched by adoption – families who want to adopt, adoptive families, birth families, adoptees and adoption professionals.

III. The ACO's Stakeholders:

The ACO has approximately 7,000 members, former members and other interested parties who are currently on the organization's distribution list. Our stakeholders include them and others, as follows:

- Prospective parents
- Adoptive parents
- Donors/potential donors – individuals and corporations
- Funding agencies (e.g. Ministry of Child and Youth Services, Ontario Trillium Foundation, Provincial Youth Advocate, Circle for Children Foundation), and others - United Way, Children's Aid Foundation
- Users/ beneficiaries of services – adoptees, youth and adult, adoptive families, birth families
- Professionals – CAS social workers and private adoption workers, therapists, psychologists
- Volunteers
- Partners – ACC (Adoption Council of Canada), NACAC (North American Council of Adoptable Children), OACAS (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies), other provincial associations
- Corporate Sponsors – Solar Power Network

- Media
- Community & the General Public

IV. Current Environment

Statistics:

As of 2011 there were over 30,000 children in care across Canada. In Ontario there are approximately 17,000 children and youth in foster care. 8,400 of these children are Crown Wards. More than 5,000 Crown Wards are over the age of 12 and at high risk of leaving care at the age of 18 without the support of a family. Approximately 80% of the children and youth in care have been diagnosed with special needs, and over 45% of the children and youth in care rely on psychotropic medications. The average annual cost of keeping a child in care is approximately \$45,000.

Additionally, Ontario has adoption programs with 28 countries, the three largest of which are China, Russia and Korea. Approximately 500 Ontario families apply to an international country to adopt each year. And finally, approximately 100 children are adopted privately each year in Ontario.

Legislation:

New legislation was passed in 2011, Bill 179, *Building Families and Supporting Youth to be Successful Act*. This legislation breaks down barriers to youth in foster care being considered for adoption by allowing youth with access orders to be adopted. It also provides additional support to youth that were in care after they reach the age of 18. This legislation follows recommendations of the 2009 Expert Panel of Infertility and Adoption, a blue ribbon panel of experts appointed by the government of Ontario to make recommendations to improve our adoption system for families and youth in foster care.

Study after study shows the importance of creating permanence for children. On May 14, 2012 the Provincial Youth Advocate issued a report on children aging out of foster care. This report provides us with clear messages of the needs of vulnerable youth, and organizations like the ACO will be challenged to consider how they can support permanency programs that bring children and families together.

Partnerships:

There is increased interest amongst groups that we partner with to try to bring Adoption issues to more attention. The ACO is leading this initiative from a provincial perspective.

V. Strategic Priorities for 2012 to 2015

Taking into account our vision, mission and stakeholder groups as well as the environment in which we operate, the following are the ACO's Strategic Priorities over the next three years:

- **Delivering Responsive Programs and Services to our Stakeholders:** The ACO needs to respond in a timely fashion to the needs of its stakeholders to continue to be relevant. The ACO will continue to play its key role in executing the AdoptOntario program. In line with our mission, the programming areas we will focus on are Education and Supporting and Connecting families and youth. The ACO will continue to be the leader in providing adoption related education in Ontario. We will further expand our reach by rolling out webinars so that people all across the province can be the beneficiaries of our educational programming at little or no cost to them. Going forward, the ACO needs to dedicate more resources to Post-Adoption support services and programs. With older child adoption being the focus of the Ontario government since new legislation was passed in the fall of 2011, there will be a greater need in the province for post-adoption support services. The ACO needs to be in a position to respond to the potentially complex needs of these children and the families who adopt them. The ACO aims to be the gateway to supports and services available in the communities that surround them.
- **Sustainability:** It is critical for the ACO to become sustainable so that we can continue to deliver on our mandate whether sufficient government funding is available or not. To deliver on this priority, the ACO will develop a meaningful annual report that can be used to enhance our funding abilities through individual donors and corporate sponsors. The report needs to contain facts, statistics and tell the story of what we are all about and what its stakeholders need it to accomplish. The ACO will also examine the needs of our stakeholders through surveys and find out to what extent the stakeholders are willing to fund their needs. Where there are gaps other sources of funding will need to be found whether that be through greater government funding or through corporate sponsorship. To further establish our long-term sustainability we will work with ACC, NACAC and other interested organizations in developing a framework to turn the spotlight on adoption across Canada and see if we can obtain corporate sponsorship at a meaningful level.
- **Communication:** To support its strategic initiative of becoming sustainable, the ACO needs to improve its communication to its members and other stakeholders and provide a means through which feedback from them is captured. We need to have a better understanding of the needs of our stakeholders, the ability of stakeholders to fund their needs, what the

areas of greatest need are, and to what extent other organizations or groups can meet their needs. We also need better vehicles to demonstrate how we are meeting their needs on an on-going basis. We will also need to understand the priorities of our funders, both government and corporate.

- **Expand the ACO's Reach Ontario-wide:** Currently the ACO is present in a limited number of communities across the province of Ontario. With its new and improved website better communication is available and will be further enhanced so that the ACO can truly deliver on its mission throughout the province of Ontario.
- **Partnering:** To be as effective as possible within Ontario, the ACO will continue to build strong partnerships with our colleagues in the overall adoption space. These include ACC, NACAC, OACAS, CAF, etc. We can learn from these other organizations and work with them to achieve our complementary goals.
- **Advocacy:** Part of the ACO's mission is to advocate for all those touched by adoption. The ACO will closely examine this role in the coming years and establish a framework for when and how we can best fulfill the role of advocate, keeping in mind tax and other restrictions on our advocating ability as a charitable organization.

VI. Report on the Year Ended December 31, 2011: Activities & Outcomes

(a) The ACO Educates the Community about Adoption

The ACO's '**How to Adopt**' seminars have been providing people with the facts about adoption for almost 25 years. These seminars provide a full overview of adoption. Sessions are run in several locations in Ontario. Topics covered include Private, International and Public adoption, becoming AdoptReady and how to navigate and make decisions for the adoption journey. In 2011:

- **320** people attended one of the ACO's **34** How to Adopt seminars
- **18** speakers supplemented learning with their personal experiences
- **10** volunteers, including social work students assisted with the operation of the sessions.

Overall feedback of sessions can be summed up in this quote:

"How to Adopt sessions are the only place where people can go to get unbiased, accurate and up-to-date information on all types of adoption for people who are starting the journey towards building their family. It takes away all the myths and you're left with the facts." Carol Deighton, Adoptive Parent/Speaker

The ACO hosts semi-annual **Education Days** each year. The goal is to provide quality workshops in a central location at a reasonable price. The focus is on supporting families who are interested in adopting as well as families who have adopted in learning more about the myriad of adoption related parenting issues and building networks with other families. In 2011:

- **230** people attended one of the **two** of the ACO Education days
- **24** speakers volunteered their time to bring their expertise and information on key subject areas related to adoption parenting
- **24** volunteers supported the operations of the day

Feedback from families noted overall satisfaction with the high quality of the presentations and their relevance to participants learning goals as well as praise for providing a session that was affordable and in a comfortable environment.

The **ACO website and information line** provide ongoing support and information to families. In 2011,

- an average of **15** people a day called the ACO for information about adoption or assistance along their adoption journey
- an average of **70** people a day visited the ACO website for information about events, information and education about adoption

(b) The ACO Connects Families and Children

Pursuant to our agreement with the Ministry of Child and Youth Services, the ACO operates the AdoptOntario program. AdoptOntario is an award winning, internet-based program that maximizes opportunities for families in Ontario to connect with waiting children in Children's Aid Society foster care who need the permanency of a family through adoption. The website aims to recruit families interested in adopting children and features a photolisting of waiting children.

In 2011, AdoptOntario registered 3,750 new families to bring its total of Resource families to 21,913 families. There were approximately 400 daily visitors to the AdoptOntario photolisting of waiting children. Adoption professionals added 145 new AdoptReady Families in 2011 and 95 new children were added to the databank. 101 children were closed on the databank; 82 of whom were adopted. Eight of those children were adopted by families identified by AdoptOntario.

(c) The ACO Supports adoptive families on their lifelong journey

The ACO has a vision of building an AdoptSupports program available in every region of Ontario. Current features of our program include:

- Adoption Resource Map of events and resources for adoptive families throughout Ontario accessible through our website
- Adoption Resource Library and article database is also searchable through our website. Articles can be viewed online. Our library is housed in our office and available during business hours
- Information Helpline is available 1-877-ADOPT20
- E-newsletters are sent bi-monthly to more than 11,000 people in Ontario including prospective families, adoptive families and adoption professionals
- Youth Supports is a network of youth who help to educate adults about how to help youth as well as advocate for and provide peer to peer support. This group was formed in 2011 with 18 members and 2 get-togethers. Our initial session was supported with generous funding from Circle for Children foundation.

(d) The ACO Advocates for all those touched by adoption

The ACO families and youth were instrumental in supporting our government in passing the Building Families and Supporting Youth to be Successful Act, 2011. The ACO members spent countless hours contacting their MPPs and helping them to understand the challenges adoptive families face and how the government could help them along the way. In November 2011, several members of the ACO Youth network spoke at Queen's Park and produced video and audio materials to raise awareness about the benefits of adoption for youth in foster care. As families and youth tell the story of their adoption journey through our ACO programs, we are better able to understand the challenges but also the rewards of the hard work, patience, perseverance and commitment that is part of the journey to becoming a family through adoption.

(e) FunWalk

FunWalk, formerly AdoptWalk, is a family fundraising event that connects people touched by adoption and raises funds and awareness. Our 2011 walk was held on September 24, 2011, raised nearly \$30,000 and brought more than 300 walkers together for a day of fun and games at Riverdale West Park in Toronto. Solar Power Network generously provided major sponsorship for the day and C-Seven Media sponsored the walk event.

(f) Website and social media

In 2011, the ACO joined the social media revolution with establishment of facebook and twitter. With more than 800 followers on our facebook page, we are able to quickly share information with people throughout the province. Our facebook and twitter accounts support education, information and provide a forum for adoptive families to connect with each other in a friendly and supportive way. <http://www.facebook.com/adoptioncouncilontario> ; Twitter- @ontarioadopt

VII. Financial Highlights

The following is a brief summary of the financial highlights of the ACO's 2011 year. The information is derived from the audited financial statements of the ACO for the year ended December 31, 2011, which are available upon request.

Total revenues for 2011 were \$579,000 compared with \$450,000 last year. Total expenses were \$562,000 compared with \$466,000 last year. Net revenues in excess of expenses improved greatly from a deficit of \$17,000 last year to a positive net revenue of \$17,000 this year.

Revenues increased by 29% this year due to a 13% increase in AdoptOntario funding to \$448,000 and a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation of \$109,000, of which \$62,000 was earned and spent this year. Annual fundraising improved by 18% from last year due to the continued success of the annual adoption walk and family event held in the fall. In addition, the ACO created a formal fund development committee late in 2011.

Total expenses increased 21% this year, which directly related to the additional funds received for AdoptOntario and from Trillium. During 2011 the ACO website was upgraded and a new lease arrangement was entered into for office space. Reduced spending occurred with respect to promotional materials and travel and meeting costs.

Looking ahead, there continue to be challenges for the ACO in securing sustainable funding for operations and growth of existing programs. We must support the programs and strategic growth of the ACO through volunteer support and membership engagement. We continue to work on the development of an active fund development committee and identification of recurring donors and sponsors.

VIII. Outlook

A Changing Dynamic:

Partly because of the newly passed legislation, and the increased usage and success of AdoptOntario, there is a changing dynamic occurring in Ontario that the ACO recognizes. The number of public adoptions is increasing at the same time that international adoptions are decreasing. Ontario families are stepping up to the plate at an increasing rate. Many of the children that are being adopted from the public system are older and have complex needs. These families will need substantial support from a variety of sources including the ACO to meet the needs of their adopted children and the new families that are created. A sustainable funding model to support this change is being developed by our ministry with a view to a directive in 2012

IX. Organizational Structure and Leadership of the ACO:

Governance:

The ACO Board of Directors is made up of adoption professionals, adoptive parents, birth parents, adoptees, and community members.

The Board of Directors is as follows:

Christina M. Fox, **Chair**
Danny Zita, **Vice Chair**
Tracy Hodder, **Secretary**
Monish Gandhi, Member
Debbie Jamieson, Member
Frank Liu, Member
Lisa Marcuzzi, Member
Denney Morrison, Member
Mark Waters, Member

The ACO Board has the following committees:

Fund Development Committee
Finance Committee
Governance Committee

The ACO Staff

Pat Convery is the Executive Director of the ACO. Three full-time staff supports the AdoptOntario program. The ACO has a part-time on-line editor and a part-time program and event administrator to complete the staffing. The ACO relies on a large complement of volunteers to make our programs possible – including adoption professionals, adoptive parents, adoptees and students from a number of post secondary university programs.

(X) Head Office & Contact Information:

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