November is Adoption Awareness Month – a time to raise awareness about the urgent need for adoptive families for the vulnerable children and youth in our government care system who are at risk of growing up without a secure family connection.

This month we start the conversation that must continue throughout the year. This year, in partnership – Adoption Council of Ontario (ACO), Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS), Children’s Aid Foundation (CAF) and Adopt4Life (A4L) have created this calendar to ensure that Ontario is working on this complex issue all year long.

We know that adoption gives children and youth a ‘forever family’ when they

"Families are the cornerstone of our society. Families raise our children and build our communities. As families succeed, Canada succeeds."

His Excellency, Governor General David Johnston
Throne Speech 2013

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cannot live with the family they were born into. We also know that the journey can be fraught with hurdles, barriers and curves in the road. As a province we must all commit to working together to reduce the barriers, support families with the challenges and build partnerships for permanency that will ensure that every child and youth has a FAMILY – to grow up and grow old in.

With this calendar we are inviting our key stakeholders to join us all year long in building the bridges and creating the pathways to permanency that we need to accomplish our vision of every child in Ontario having a family because EVERY CHILD DESERVES A FAMILY is the beginning of an ongoing conversation – to understand the scope and complexity of the problem and an invitation to be part of the solution.

Thank you for joining us.

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"As a province we must all commit to working together to reduce the barriers, support families with the challenges and build partnerships for permanency that will ensure that every child has a FAMILY -- to grow up and grow old in."

Pat Convey, Executive Director Adoption Council of Ontario
According to the OACAS over the next 12 months, over 1,000 youth will “age out” of care in Ontario¹, leaving government care without a life long family. Their outcomes are poor.¹

- Fewer than 50% will complete high school.¹
- Fewer than 3% will earn a college/university degree.¹

Based on research in other jurisdictions, we can also assume that:

- Within the first two years of leaving care 25% will become homeless and 25% will become incarcerated.²
- More than 50% will have a psychiatric diagnosis.²
- 25% to 33% will suffer from PTSD.²
- 60% of the young women leaving care will have had a child within four years and that child is twice as likely to end up in care.²

¹ OACAS
² Camillia Network; Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption; Evan B. Donaldson Institute for Adoption 2012
"They leave with no roots to grow from and no one by their side."

Children’s Aid Society manager

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A family to grow up and grow old in!

Legal certainty, emotional security and a family to call their own.

Legal adoption, Kinship, Customary Care, Legal Custody, all terms to describe a family permanently caring for a child who was not born to them.

"I was adopted when I was 12 years old... I know for sure my adoptive mother, sister and extended family have my back, and no matter what happens in life, I have a safety net. I know I am one of the lucky ones and I would not have had that if I stayed in care."

Ashley, 15

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"I was adopted by my foster parents when I was four years old. Now I can always have a family. My kids will have grandparents and aunts and uncles. I will always have someone to call in the middle of the night. I can share family pictures and tell family stories but most of all, I'll always belong."

Amanda, 13
The Cost of Doing Nothing

Currently in Ontario, just under 7,000 children and youth live as permanent wards of the Ontario government – A CROWN WARD.

A Report by the Conference Board of Canada presented in April 2014 found that a child “aging out” of care today will earn about $326,000 less income over his/her lifetime compared to the average Canadian.4

- As a result of their lower income, they also require more social assistance and pay less income and consumption taxes over their lifetimes.4

- On a per-person basis this will cost all levels of Canadian government more then $126,000 per year in the form of higher social assistance payments and lower tax revenue.4


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"It costs at least $32,000 a year to keep a Crown Ward in care. It costs significantly less to provide supports and subsidies to help adoptive families parent children."

Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption, Ontario (2009)

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It’s a Moral Imperative!

The Preamble to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states:

Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

*David Morley, President and CEO, UNICEF Canada*

Permanency for Crown Wards/having a forever family is a human right to be enjoyed by every child.

"Ultimately adoption is about the rights of children -- they deserve a chance to thrive to their full capacity and as adults we are charged with ensuring that chance becomes a reality."

Adoptive parent

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"Kids down right deserve a loving and caring family."

Adoptive parent

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Who can adopt?

People wanting to adopt understand the importance of providing children and youth with a safe, loving and nurturing environment – a home where children can reach their full potential.

Adoptive parents can be individuals and couples, people unable to have children of their own, parents who already have children and want to add to their growing family, as well as adults whose first choice for building a family is through adoption.

People from diverse cultural backgrounds, single people or same-sex couples are encouraged to consider adoption. People who are open to parenting special needs children and youth, sibling groups or older children are also encouraged to consider adoption.

"I think that whether your child is biological or adopted, being a parent is a lifelong commitment of your heart and soul."

Adoptive parent
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"Children don't need perfect parents, just one or two loving individuals willing to make a lifetime commitment to their children."

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

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Mark*
was a very troubled 7 year old having been in nine different families by the time he was adopted. He had experienced significant neglect and sexual abuse. The first years with his new family were difficult with tantrums and troublesome school behaviours. Mark, now 15, has grown into a reflective, intelligent and caring young man who has been active from the start of his family’s recent adoption of two young brothers, believing that he would be “a very good role model and brother to the boys”.

* Not his real name.
"Adoptive parents are coming to us all the time and are telling us how they can't imagine their adopted child not being part of their family."

Foster and adoption recruiter, Waterloo Children’s Aid Society

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Kids need families and families need support!

Adoptive families bring to their children and youth an open heart and a willingness to do a lot of hard work, but they cannot (nor should they) do it alone. They are trying to heal hurts that occurred before they were in their care and need to know that they can count on services and support as they provide a life long family for their children.

Currently some families get some support, sometimes. We need to review subsidy programs to ensure they are meeting stated needs of enabling families to adopt and remove disincentives to the adoption of older youth/former Crown Wards.

"Many people may have the heart to adopt these children but feel they have no resources. It is important to provide for their specialized needs."

Adoptive parent

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"These children have spent so much of their early lives focused on ensuring they are safe and having basic needs met that they have not allowed themselves to learn. Learn academics and social skills, learn how to trust, learn how to be a kid, and learn to love their new family."

Adoptive parent
Dispelling a Myth

A 2013 Harris Interactive survey done by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption found that over 51% of Canadians believe children in foster care were juvenile delinquents.⁶

In reality, children and youth enter the child welfare system through no fault of their own, as victims of neglect, abandonment or abuse.

⁶ Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption Canada and Harris Interactive Canadian Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, 2013.

"There's a stereotype that adopted kids are trouble, but we aren't. Why do people think that? We just need some love from our forever families; some people we know won't abandon us. We're not items, we can't be returned at the scan of a barcode"

Jessica, 12
"You know, children in foster care have wings, but they need someone to teach them to fly, someone to lead them in the right direction, someone to be there when they fall. I am here today because of those people who taught me to fly."

Quote from The Future of Children in a submission, reprinted in My Real Life Book
The Clock is Ticking!

60% of the children and youth available for adoption are age 13+.⁷

These are the young people most at risk of aging out without a forever family.

Only 5% of children and youth adopted were ages 13-18.⁷

⁷ OACAS 2013-2014 Child Welfare Service Survey which represents 40 of the 44 member agencies
"I remember the moment I met my daughter -- looking into her eyes and knowing we were meant to be family. She was 16."

Adoptive parent

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Unadoptable is Unacceptable

We need to believe that ALL children and youth can be adopted. No child is too sick, too damaged or too old to deserve permanency and someone committed to his or her well being.

We are starting to use some innovative programs to recruit families for waiting children such as Family Finding programs, Wendy’s Wonderful Kids Recruiters, and Adopt Ontario. We’ve experienced some success. We need to do more.

"Our greatest obstacles with respect to adoption are indifference, lack of understanding and lack of education."

Governor General
David Johnston

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"Every child deserves a champion: an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists they can become the best they can possibly be."

Rita Pierson, Educator
We Asked the Experts

In 2008, the Government of Ontario established the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption to provide advice on how to improve Ontario’s adoption system.

Their vision: Ontario should aim to be the best jurisdiction in the world to build a family.

The report they issued *Raising Expectations* included a large number of recommendations with the overall goal of helping more children find permanent homes and more Ontarians build families through adoption.

Although some of their recommendations have been implemented, many more need to be acted upon.

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"...the Province must act now. It must create an integrated, responsive adoption system that works for children and families."

*Raising Expectations, Recommendations of the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption, Ontario 2009*

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"We see a province where all children have the chance to have a safe, loving and permanent family."

Raising Expectations, Recommendations of the Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption, Ontario 2009

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The Real Experts: THE YOUTH VOICE

In July 2012 the Minister of Children and Youth Services established the Youth Leaving Care Working Group in conjunction with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Working Group members (the majority of whom were youth in care) were given the responsibility of building a plan for fundamental change to the Child Welfare system on behalf of children and youth across Ontario. Members worked with passion and dedication to do justice to this task. Their number one short-term recommendation was: It is essential and urgent that every child and youth in and from care has permanent lifelong relationships that meet their personal and cultural needs.

Final Report of the Youth Leaving Care Working Group January 2013

"Kids need a sense of belonging, they need a sense of hope, they need a sense of family. No matter what that family looks like, it needs to be a permanent family."

Lisa, former youth in care
"I am not a case number in black ink on white paper. I am filled with purpose, and that purpose is what has allowed me to find meaning in every struggle I have endured. Every child put on this earth has a purpose, but it doesn’t begin to manifest without direction. Every child in the system needs a proper, permanent direction, and together we can ensure that they have it."

Current youth in care

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Time to check in. How have we done?

12 months later we ask:

- Have we decreased the number of youth aging out of care by finding them a forever family?
- Have we increased the number of Crown Wards adopted?
- How many youth aged 13 plus found a life long family?
- Have we strengthened the systems for supporting families who provide permanency?

"Every child and youth needs a forever family that provides support, unconditional love and a safe, loving home."

Mary Ballantyne, Executive Director OACAS

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"Families are the cornerstone of our society. Families raise our children and build our communities. As families succeed, Canada succeeds."

His Excellency, Governor General David Johnston
Throne Speech 2013
Government, Child Welfare Agencies, adoption professionals and adoptive families are now ready to join together to bring about change from within our system. **Co-operation is vital** if we are really going to make a difference in the outcomes for vulnerable children and youth waiting for a family.

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"Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success."

Henry Ford

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