



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

SPRING 2011

A PUBLICATION OF DURHAM CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY

JESSICA AND JUSTIN'S FOREVER FAMILY

When Carol and Steve VanderVeer talk about their children it is obvious that they are passionate about their love for them, but they are equally passionate about *how* they became a family. Carol and Steve welcomed Jessica and Justin into their lives in 2004.

The VanderVeers speak about how they knew they always wanted a family, and always wanted to adopt. They were also adamant about wanting to adopt locally. They really wanted to help children here, in Canada. They felt much more comfortable dealing with 'the system' in Ontario, rather than having to navigate the intricacies of international adoption... especially in another language.

"There are so many children here who need homes. It was always my dream to adopt," says Carol.

"We also wanted to work with a local agency, where we knew we could get the support we needed."

By adopting locally, they felt comfortable with the legal issues; they could connect with local support services; and they would be working in a community that they know.

Jessica and Justin, at six and three years old respectively when they were adopted, were considered "older" children. Many people are seeking to adopt infants, and therefore so-called "older children" (older than 2) are sometimes overlooked by families.

There were challenges but throughout the entire process, the VanderVeers felt supported by the staff at Durham CAS.

As Steve says, "From day one until today -- long after the adoption was finalized -- we could call up and get help if we need it."

They also speak highly of the support they have received from other families they have met on their journey. Part of that has been the PALS (Parenting, Adoption, Learning and Support)

I am so proud to say that I am the father of these two beautiful adopted children.

*-Steve
Adoptive Dad*

The VanderVeers didn't overlook them, indeed they felt that at that point in their lives, adopting two older siblings made the most sense. As Carol says, "We blended perfectly, it was a natural fit."

They don't pretend that it has been simple, but raising kids (no matter how a family comes together) is never easy.

network -- a cooperative project, organized by adoptive parents and supported by Durham CAS. They have felt supported by and connected to many families who are facing the same challenges and triumphs.

When asked about the impact that adoption has had on their lives, their faces light up. They talk about the adventures they have had, how they have all learned from each other... how their family is complete. They also talk about skiing!



QUEEN'S PARK VISIT

On Monday, May 16, Durham CAS joined child welfare agencies from across the province at Queen's Park for the second annual

briefing day for our Members of Provincial Parliament. It is an opportunity for CASs to come together as a field and advocate for the well-being of children and families in Ontario.

The majority of Children's Aid Societies attended, and participated in approximately 60 meetings on that day. Activities included attendance at Question Period, followed by a lunch reception with remarks from Minister of Child and Youth Services, Laurel Broten and other dignitaries.

This year, Queen's Park also welcomed former youth in care from all across the province. Durham in particular was honoured to have former crown ward Wendy Hayes participate in the MPP meetings alongside board president Lisa Sarsfied, board member David Wade, and executive director Wanda Secord.

Durham CAS has always relied on the support and advocacy of our local political leaders, and we asked for their continued support on the following issues:

Provincial:

- Raising the age of protection to 18 years of age
- Extending supports to youth in care
- Support for permanent families for children
- Improve the life chances of aboriginal children

Local:

- Historical deficit funding
- Service and funding equity
- Board liability (see story page 3)

We would like to thank all of the MPPs and political staff who took the time to meet with us on that day, and for continuing to be champions for children and families in Durham Region.

We would also like to thank Wendy Hayes for participating in MPP Briefing Day and for sharing your story. You are an inspiration to us all.



Durham MPP, John O'Toole, with Wendy Hayes.



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VISION
BUILDING HOPE AND OPPORTUNITIES WITH
CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES.

MISSION
WORKING WITH FAMILIES AND THE COMMUNITY TO KEEP
CHILDREN AND YOUTH SAFE FROM HARM AND CREATE
STABILITY AND PERMANENCE IN THEIR LIVES.

EQUITABLE FUNDING FOR ALL

Due to rigorous cost-containment measures, we have been able to achieve a balanced budget for the 2010/2011 fiscal year. Savings were realized by the elimination of staff positions and an increased focus on prevention and family-based care for those children requiring in-care services. But we are still carrying a \$3.3 million historical deficit.

We will be able to maintain our current level of service, but we still face challenges in managing the effect of carrying this historical deficit, which has resulted from the underfunding of past services.

We were able to achieve a balanced budget, even though we have maintained our commitment to implementing regulations that were introduced under the government's Transformation Agenda. Budget allocations have not reflected the cost of implementation, but we maintained our level of implementation because these approaches are based on a balance between safety of children and strengthening of families.

The current funding formula is inequitable and unfairly distributes funding based a variety of sometimes arbitrary criteria. As a result, there is inconsistent service delivery across Ontario.

We need to have consistent and equitable funding to ensure sustainable quality services for all children, youth and families in Ontario.

The current system has created a crisis that the entire sector is still struggling to resolve. The historical deficit is a direct result of years of a faulty funding framework that has been applied unevenly.

Not only has this inequity been reflected to a vastly different financial situations among Ontario's CASs, but it has also lead to a wide variety of services delivered across the province.

We support a funding formula that is related to the population that each Society serves. As cited by the *Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare*, this would:

- Allocate funds on the basis of population needs, rather than historical institutional and service patterns, thereby encouraging response to changing circumstances.
- Enable agencies to fulfill their service mandate, in response to needs and preferences of local population.
- Maintain equity of allocations, whatever the size of the funding for the sector.

Besides the impact on services, an unfortunate corollary of inequitable funding is that there is a great risk that must be assumed by members of boards of directors. Board liability needs to be addressed.

When compared to police and hospital boards of directors, it is clear that this field deserves equal consideration, for they are provided legislated protection from liability.

Without statutory protection from liability, directors may be exposed to unnecessary personal liability. Our volunteer directors need to be assured that they can perform their mandated duties without fear of unnecessary personal liability.



If funding and liability issues are not resolved, Societies will have difficulty attracting quality individuals to serve on our boards, and could hamper the ability of current board members to perform their duties to their fullest.

We need our provincial government representatives to understand that ensuring that all CASs are able to provide quality services is fundamental to the health and well-being of children, youth and families in Ontario.

THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

VOLUNTEERS: PASSION, ACTION, IMPACT

Passion, Action, Impact – three simple words that sum up our volunteers- a group of 135 people from all walks of life and all parts of our community who choose Durham CAS as the place where they offer their time, talent and skills.

We currently have more than 30 children, youth and families who have a one to one relationship with a volunteer with whom they visit each week. These volunteers are: special friends, tutors, youth mentors, parent mentors; and social group volunteers.

This year, more than 50 children have participated in volunteer-led special events and sports skills sessions such as a trip to Pingle's farm market, a holiday craft event, our recurring Saturday Bake Shop, and our first ever skating skills session.

We have ten youth who have moved into independent homes with the help of our volunteer drivers and movers: Jim Paris and Jim McTurk.

More than 12,000 passengers were transported by our drivers during our last fiscal year on drives to places such as camp, life skills groups, therapy, medical appointments and family visits.

Our volunteers also shopped for and assembled 70 independence starter kits in support of our youth who are moving out on their own. Kits include such things as dishes, kitchen utensils and cleaning supplies and toiletries.

Our *Neat Repeats* and *Youth Clothing Program* provided clothing for 400 children and youth. Four hundred is also the number of hours of service given by volunteers to our *Holiday Hope Program*, impacting more than 1,000 children in 2010. In total volunteers gave over 36,000 hours of service over the past year.

Our volunteers also support the *Phenomenal Woman's Conference*, Client Feedback Surveys, agency and Foundation events.



Ryan

Our volunteers even come to us with their unique and innovative ideas such as the 2010 *Catch a Star Fashion Show* created by volunteer Lorna Dougherty and Shrimp Cocktail Lounge, which raised over \$5,000 for our Foundation.

I want to help children experience happiness and fun in their lives. They deserve it.

*- Jessica Schmid
Volunteer*

Thank you to all of our volunteers once again for all of your passion, action and impact in support of our children, youth and families. We could not do all that we do without you.

We are always looking for volunteers. To learn more, please contact Dawn Ashford at ext. 2412 or dawn.ashford@durhamcas.ca.



Jessica



Shelly

What inspires people to volunteer? What is their passion? You might think that people take action in pursuit of external reward, and sometimes, that may be true. But often the enticement of greater external rewards does not bring greater effort. In fact, in some cases, effort decreases with greater reward.

So, why do people take action? All human beings have a desire to belong, to connect, to have freedom and opportunity to master something and to act with purpose and that purpose is to contribute. Given the opportunity, people choose to contribute. We all want to have impact.

Our volunteers and 12 million like them across Canada, have an inspired belief in the value of community and contribution. With this belief they take action and impact the lives of hundreds of children, youth and families every day.

FINDING FOREVER FAMILIES FOR MORE KIDS IN CARE

In April of this year, the Ontario government announced a series of amendments to the *Child and Family Services Act* to help more children and youth find permanent homes. The changes are intended to make the adoption process easier and more efficient.

Changes include:

- removing "access orders" for biological families, which create a barrier to adoption of Crown Wards
- reducing wait times for home studies
- doubling the number of provincial Adoption Resource Exchange events, from two to four per year
- examining ways to implement subsidies to help children find permanent legal families

We look forward to working with government to implement these and any other changes that will make it easier to find children permanent homes more quickly.

Removing Access Orders

Most of the Crown Wards in our care have access orders, and adoption has not been an option for them. Historically, if a Crown Ward has court-ordered access to their biological family (immediate or extended), then they were not legally free for adoption.

The proposed changes will not eliminate access, but it will not preclude adoption as an option. This will allow us to consider all permanency options for them. It will also allow us to act more quickly, with more flexibility when seeking a family for these children. Many may maintain relationships with their biological families, but they will also be able to have their own, legal, forever family.

Expediting Home Studies

While it is still unclear how all the changes will be implemented, we welcome all opportunities to

expedite home studies for families who are willing and able to adopt children in care.

At Durham CAS we have many families waiting to be approved, so this is very welcome news. Families are eagerly waiting to begin their journey to adoption, so we look forward to having more resources to speed their journey along. Combined with the removal of access orders, this will have a huge impact for many families and children.

Adoption Resource Exchange

The Adoption Resource Exchange is a conference that helps CASs meet hundreds of possible adoptive parents who may be the family for children with very special challenges. It also provides adoption applicants the opportunity to learn more about the adoption process, learn more about the children who are awaiting homes, and meet with the staff of CASs from across the province. The proposed changes will see the number of events doubled (to four per year), in different locations across the province.

This will give families and CASs more opportunities to learn more about each other. We welcome any opportunity that enables prospective parents to know more about the children awaiting permanent families.

Post-adoption subsidies

The government is considering ways to implement cost-neutral targeted subsidies to help children find permanent legal families.

Currently, the average cost of a child in care is over \$42,000 per year and the outcomes for children in temporary family arrangements are not ideal.

Subsidies will open the door to increased opportunities for permanent families for many children in care.

The current system allows agencies to do this within existing resources on a year-by-year basis, and at Durham we have done what we can with limited resources because we know that financial help is critical to the success of some adoption placements.

Many of the children we are trying to place have complex needs. They may need health care, specialized services and in some cases additional help for the new parents. Many are sibling groups where all the children have very special needs.

Unfortunately, without subsidies, we are unable to find permanent homes for many children due to the cost of their care. That care is paid for while in foster care, but not if they are adopted.

Post-adoption financial assistance is crucial in finding forever families for children in our care.

Implementing these changes will secure more permanent homes for children and youth. Collectively the changes will make "family" a reality for many children and youth in CAS care across Ontario.



CROWN WARD SUCCESS

Education is fundamental to success, yet the children and youth served by a Children's Aid Society achieve academic success at rate much lower than the general youth population. They face many challenges in their lives that can make academic success seem insurmountable.

Of children in the care of Durham CAS 62 percent required modification of their programs and 85 percent were identified as special needs.

Provincially, graduation rates for Crown Wards are the lowest in Ontario next to Aboriginal youth; 42 percent of youth in care graduate high school as compared to the provincial rate of 75 percent; and 21 percent of youth in care ages 18 and 19 were in post-secondary institutions as compared to 40 percent in the population at large.

The Ontario government has made a commitment to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities to pursue a post-secondary education. Part of this effort includes financial assistance for Crown Wards who are attending a post-secondary institution as well as resources to assist youth in navigating the system.

They are also establishing *Crown Ward Education Championship Teams* across Ontario. These teams will help youth succeed in completing high school and pursue a post-secondary education. The teams are developing a variety of initiatives, such as peer mentoring, engaging the youth in activities at school, and developing a resource guide for Crown Wards moving towards postsecondary education.

Here at Durham CAS, we are building on the work of the Ontario government, and are strengthening our commitment helping children and youth in our care succeed.

We have two educational consultants who work with our staff to help ensure that the children in our care succeed at school. We have also joined with York CAS to establish the *York/Durham Crown Ward Education Championship Team*. Recently the team hosted a symposium designed to enhance awareness and to explore the challenges and successes that young people experience. The event also examined how we can work together to help reduce the barriers that youth experience in the pursuit of a post-secondary education.

The event was a huge success, attended by representatives of local school boards, Children's Aid Societies, post-secondary institutions and many youth. A dynamic youth panel was a highlight of the day. Youth had an opportunity to discuss their experiences, and offer their insight into solutions. Our staff and youth had the opportunity to both learn about services offered by post-secondary institutions, and inform others about the work we are doing with children and youth in our care.

We look forward to continuing our work with the Championship Teams as they develop more exciting initiatives and events to ensure the success of our youth.



HELPING KIDS SUCCEED

We are pleased to introduce our second Educational Consultant, Norma Yeomanson. Norma joined us in February of this year, and along with Ron Tansley, is helping to ensure the educational success of children and youth in care.

Ron and Norma (*in photo at right*) each have many years of experience, and a wealth of knowledge in all aspects of education. Their skills and experience with others in the education field are of tremendous assistance to staff in maximizing the educational opportunities for all of the children we serve.

Our commitment to advocating for the children and youth in our care includes working closely with the staff of the schools they attend. Another important part of the program is performing educational assessments to ensure that we have a comprehensive view of the child's needs.

Tutors are also provided for those who would benefit from that extra, personal assistance.

Norma has a great deal of experience with younger children, and in the field of special education. Norma is concentrating on the early years, making sure that those children up to grade 3 get a strong foundation to ensure ongoing success in their education.

One particular focus for our educational consultants is times of transition for children and youth. The children we serve face many disruptions in their lives. When children change schools, grades or classes it is difficult for anyone -- for the children we serve it can be even more challenging. Our consultants serve as advocates for children in care to ensure that these transitions go smoothly and that they don't get lost in bureaucracy.



Together Ron and Norma are an essential component to helping our children and youth succeed.

If we're proactive and deal with issues early, we can make sure that kids get all the help they need. We're focused on their success.

*-Norma Yeomanson
Educational Consultant*

VOLUNTEER SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Another integral part of the education picture is the invaluable role that our volunteers play. Teaching and tutoring is a fundamental, and growing, initiative of our volunteer services department that enhances the protection work of the agency.

Each week, more than 15 children and youth receive academic support through tutors and homework groups that are led and evaluated by Ontario Certified Teachers, Mary Ann Bain, Chidinma Igboanugo, Kathryn Randle, Judith Randle and Carol Neuman.

Teachers provide one-to-one teaching, academic support and assessment as well as mentorship to a child or youth ages six to sixteen. Teachers are volunteers who are professionals, retired teachers or new graduates matched with children based on academic need, current academic

assessments and educational plans. Each match has individual academic goals and most include some goals related to positive role modeling and self-esteem building.

Homework groups take place once per week and provide help with homework and age appropriate practice exercises to support ongoing academic development. Groups are available for primary as well as secondary students.

We are seeking more teacher volunteers, especially for the 2011-2012 school year. To get involved, please contact Dawn Ashford, ext. 2412 or dawn.ashford@durhamcas.ca



Chidinma



Carol

The kids I've been working with think they can't do it. But they can. I help them find that knowledge and skill within themselves.

*- Carol Neuman
Volunteer*

FIRST NATIONS CHILD WELFARE ...CONTINUED

A Customary Care home must meet all the requirements of a foster home, but the child does not come into the care of the CAS.

Customary care providers are vitally important in promoting a positive cultural identity and maintaining spiritual teachings, language and guidance.

As Rice says, "We need to remember that we aren't working with just a family -- we are working with a community, and it is imperative that we respect their history, culture and customs."

The children in this case maintained their connection with their family and friends, they attended the same school, and they continued participating in all the recreational, cultural and spiritual activities as they always had.

Maintaining those connections are fundamental in ensuring their well-being.

"I always keep in mind that the relationship between child welfare and First Nations has historically been extremely oppressive, and it is imperative that they are involved in every aspect of the process," says Rice. "This is the spirit of customary care even if a customary care arrangement cannot be reached due to extenuating circumstances."

Milson is pleased that child welfare practices have evolved and are much more cooperative and culturally-sensitive, but she still sees room for improvement. "I really wish we could provide more training about the history of our First Nations and its impact on families," says Milson.



"It is imperative that we respect the family's history, culture and customs."

*- Mary Ann Rice
Kinship Care Worker*

JESSICA AND JUSTIN'S FOREVER FAMILY

...CONTINUED

Jessica is very protective of her little brother, and is also extremely eloquent when speaking about adoption. She remembers when they were adopted; she remembers the upheaval, and how she didn't understand what 'adoption' meant. But she has a huge smile when she talks about her family now, and how much fun they have together.

She also helps her mother advocate regarding adoption issues, in raising awareness about the need for support for adoptive families.

As for Justin... when asked what it's like to have a forever family, he says simply, "It's totally cool."

WHAT IS PALS?

PALS (Parenting, Adoption, Learning and Support) is a cooperative project, organized by adoptive parents and supported by Durham Children's Aid Society. The group provides support, education and advocacy for families involved in adoption.

PALS provides parents with an opportunity to share their experiences and insight with other families and to learn from one another. PALS facilitates learning opportunities on a various topics related to adoption.

Who can participate?

PALS is open to Durham families that:

- have an approved homestudy
- have children on adoption probation or
- have finalized an adoption



CAMPS FOR KIDS

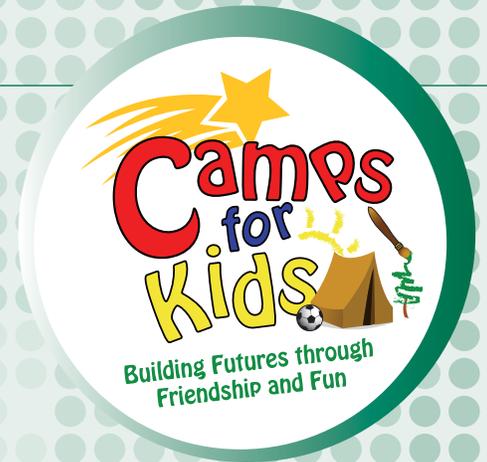
Beginning on May 16, the third annual Durham Children's Aid Foundation's *Camps for Kids* Campaign will launch once again in the Durham region. Launched with the generous support of RBC Royal Bank and headed by Foundation Trustee Travis Capes, the seven week campaign was initiated to ensure that no child with the CAS who wishes to experience summer camp would be turned away.

Royal Bank customers and staff can donate in a variety of ways, and the twelve retail and commercial branches stepped up in a big way.

Participating branches host book and bake sales, and dress-down days to send kids to camp. Last year's initiative was so successful that they were able to exceed their goal of \$40,000. Amazing!

This year's the push is on to match, if not exceed, those funds. RBC will be joined by RBC Dominion Securities, *Sharon's Kids* and Mary Roy & Team Re/Max in their campaign. They are hoping that you will join us, too.

So, head over to your local RBC branch and give generously. Help us in making sure that no child gets left behind this summer.



FRONTLINE CHARITY CLASSIC

The *Front Line Fall Classic Charity Golf Event* is gearing up again. Taking place on September 9, the event will be at the Kedron Dells Golf Club in Oshawa (Ritson and Conlin) with a tee off time of 1 p.m. The cost is \$100 per player with proceeds going towards the *Camps for Kids* Campaign.

This year's tournament is dedicated to the memory of Joanne Francis. Joanne passed this year after a courageous 13-year battle with breast cancer, an illness she refused to allow to define or impede her. She lived virtually her entire life in Oshawa and Port Perry, and devoted her life to bettering the lives of children and the underprivileged in the Durham area.

Joanne practiced law for more than 25 years in Oshawa with her husband, Ken, providing legal services as a mediator and private counsel, as well as an agent for the Office of the Children's Lawyer and the Family Responsibility Office.

She was also a founding member of the Collaborative Law Association of Durham. Joanne's passing left a void that was keenly felt and she would be more than honoured to know that children would be heading to camp in her name.

This tournament is organized by employees of the Durham Children's Aid Society. Over the last two years the event has raised approximately \$11,000 for the Foundation.

Through the generosity of golfers and sponsors, 34 children and youth have been able to attend camp. With your continued help and support our committee's goal is to exceed that total for the summer of 2012.

Contact Clem Nabigon to register, 905-433-1551, ext. 2445.





WELCOME STEPHENIE

The Durham Children's Aid Foundation is pleased to welcome Stephenie Bowie as the new Fund Development Coordinator.

Stephenie began her position on May 9, taking over for Joan Montgomery.

Reporting to the Foundation Board of Trustees, Stephanie's responsibilities include the development and execution of the Foundation's annual fund development plan, coordinating campaign and event logistics, and coordinating the day-to-day operations of the Foundation.

Stephenie's past experience includes work with Big Brothers and Sisters of Ajax-Pickering, and the Scarborough Hospital Foundation.

We look forward to working with Stephenie as the Foundation continues to build upon its success.

A very special thank you to Joan Montgomery, who played a critical role in the Foundation's development for the past three and a half years. Your leadership, professionalism and passion were appreciated by everyone who worked with you.

You have helped thousands of children and youth during your time with the Foundation and for that you have our heartfelt admiration. All the best Joan in your future endeavours.



CATCH A STAR FASHION SHOW



We'd like to thank Durham CAS volunteer, Lorna Dougherty for proposing a joint initiative with her friends from Shrimp Cocktail Resto-Lounge in Oshawa. Together they hosted the inaugural 'Catch a Star Fashion Show' last December.

Joan Montgomery, from the Foundation and Dawn Ashford, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, Durham Children's Aid Society were thrilled to receive the \$5,000 that the event raised for the Foundation (in photo).

They continue to host events such as golf tournaments and other events in support of the 'Catch a Star Fund.' Plans are also well underway for the Second Annual Fashion Show, to be held on Sunday, December 5, at Shrimp Cocktail.

Check our website for updates.



DREAMS TAKE FLIGHT

Inspiration can strike in the unlikelyst of places. Foundation Trustee Laura Francis knows this knows only too well because hers struck while she walked down an aisle at Canadian Tire.

"I had just joined the board of the Foundation," she explained, "and I had been struggling to find a way to merge a creative event with fundraising for the Foundation. But I was coming up empty." Enter inspiration.

"I had this birdhouse in my hand and it struck me that while it was incredibly plain it did provide a rich canvas for a creative idea. I thought to myself, wouldn't it be great if I could find a way to jazz a few of these up somehow and sell them, with the proceeds going towards the Foundation." There was one major kink in this plan, however. "Unfortunately, I can't paint to save my life."

She did, however, know a friend who owns Meta4 Gallery in her home town of Port Perry and together the two of them formed a plan. "We would provide local artists with a simple birdhouse and then carte blanche to transform them into something spectacular.

Within a few weeks," says Francis, "and with the help of a painter's tools and some creative imaginations, we were getting back birdhouses that had gone from plain to fabulous." And the Durham Children's Aid Foundation One-of-a-Kind Birdhouse Event was born.

With only 20 houses in the events inaugural year, the event has grown in profile to the point where both patrons and artists alike look forward to lending their skills. Now in its third year, the event has become a success in its hometown of Port Perry where it has grown in both scope with more than 40 artists participating. This year the auction raised \$3,065.

"People look forward to the event. Artists cherish the opportunity to lend their skills to helping children in the Durham area who are in need. In the end, everybody wins!"

And the idea of transforming something from nothing isn't lost on the event's creator.

"This is what the Foundation strives to do for the children it's serves, after all," says Francis. "We want to make every child's life into something worth cherishing. Now who doesn't want to get behind that?"



OUR VISION

WE WILL ENSURE THAT NONE OF OUR CHILDREN ARE LEFT BEHIND ON THE ROAD OF LIFE BY HARNESSING THE RESOURCES OF THE DURHAM REGION; PROVIDING HOPE THROUGH NEEDED PROGRAMS AND OPPORTUNITY THROUGH EDUCATION, WHEN OTHERS CANNOT.

Thank you for your support!

Mr. Mrs. Ms. Dr. Other: _____

First name: _____ Last name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Please accept my donation of \$ _____

Cheque or money order payable to Durham Children's Aid Foundation

Please charge the above amount to my credit card. (please complete credit card information below)

Credit Card information: Visa  MasterCard 

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