AdoptOntario Factsheet 2010 (April – October 2010)

Many children in foster care are awaiting adoption

AdoptOntario is a program that is a support to all Children's Aid Societies (CAS) in planning for children in foster care who are not able to be reunited with birth family.

The AdoptOntario program supports CASs in making the important first connections with families in Ontario who are prepared to adopt and provide children in foster care with the forever family they deserve.

Our Program

- Promotes more timely adoption placements for Ontario's children where adoption is in their best interest, by pooling resource families from CASs and private adoption practitioners across Ontario

- Hosts the Adoption Resource Databank which offers a number of strategies to *match waiting children to families* who can be at various stages in the adoption process

- Provides prospective adoptive families a chance to view and enquire after "waiting children" published on the public (video/photolisting) website

> *"... moving toward a province-wide matching system could result in an overall match increase of at least 25% - or 200 adoptions – for all current Crown wards without court-ordered access."*
>
> **Raising Expectations**, *page. 53.*

- Provides a place for all Ontario adoption professionals to exchange information and resources to assist them in their work

- Provides a forum to increase public awareness and understanding about all aspects of adoption to adoption professionals and members of the public

Our Usage

The AdoptOntario program has demonstrated a significant increase in use since 2007 when the Adoption Resource Databank was launched.

- *471 "waiting children" have been posted on the Adoption Resource Databank.*
- *487 AdoptReady™ families have been posted on the Adoption Resource Databank.*

- *302 CAS workers, adoption professionals and private practitioners have professional accounts with AdoptOntario.*
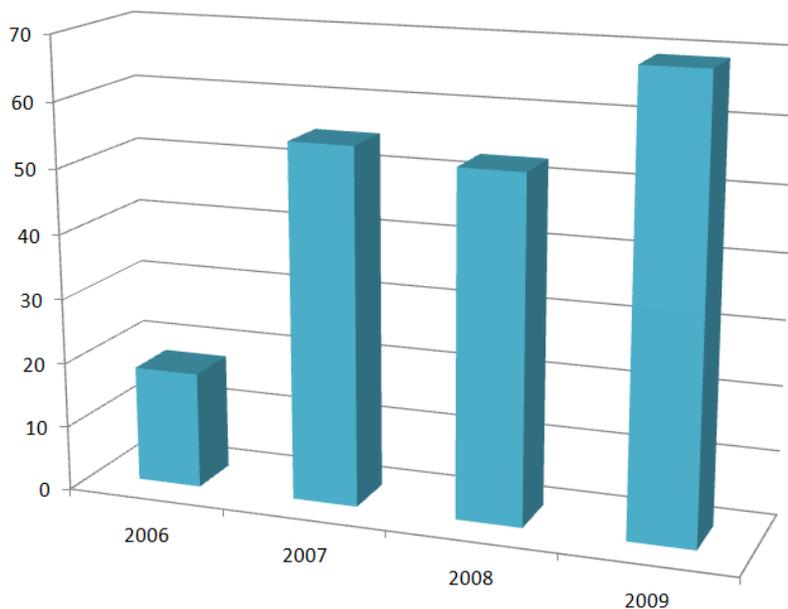- *63 provincial and private agencies are registered.*

Furthermore, technical enhancements to the public website in 2008 have shown unprecedented activity since its inception in 2006.

- *Over **17,863** Ontario residents are members of the public website.*
- *Over **45,000** responses to children have been made.*
- *On average, **400** people in Ontario visit the website daily.*

Our Findings

Between April and October 2010, ***79 children have been added*** to the databank. Nearly sixty percent of these children have 'medical needs' – a growing trend that lends focus to finding families that are specially equipped to care for high special needs children.

Children on Databank with Medical Needs

Of the 79 children added, in 2010, the percentage of children with:

Medical Needs	*59%*
Genetic Risks	*47%*
Developmental Issues	*47%*
Siblings	*46%*
Racial Minority	*23%*

One of the most alarming invisible trends is the growing number of teens leaving foster or group home care without a permanency plan. Fewer and fewer youth, ages 12 – 18, have adoption

plans. CASs ought to be utilizing innovative targeted recruitment strategies like our public website, Youth Awaiting You program and the Today's Child feature in the Toronto Star, as well as, other initiatives like Heart Gallery or Pat O'Brien's "You Gotta Believe" program.

Our Success

50 children have already been adopted between April and October 2010. 84 children were adopted in 2009. 3 of 50 children found their forever families as a direct result of the public website. This affirms that with education and programs easily accessible, like AdoptOntario, families can and do step up.

> *"The AdoptOntario website and databank ... has good success matching children with adoptive families."*
>
> **Raising Expectations**, *page. 35.*

In addition to finding that special family, AdoptOntario has seen success with timely adoptive placements. 22 of the 50 children had families identified within 3-6 months. On average, children had spent about 10 months on our site before being matched to a family.

Our Benefits

Prospective adoptive families can create **online profiles** with photos, child sought details, parenting skills, etc. Adoption workers can access these online profiles, and invite the families to information sessions.

18,000 members can view child biographies and photos, and formally **express interest** in a child anytime – 365 days a year.

Only registered AdoptReady families can view **waiting child videos** on the public site at anytime.

The databank caches a wealth of information about waiting children and families – a repository for **research and reporting** in the future.

The Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare has defined a Sustainable Child Welfare system as one that:

- *Constantly adapts to evolving challenges, needs and knowledge*
- *Leverages available resources to maximize positive outcomes for children and youth*
- *Balances current needs and demands while building a strong system for children and families*

Matching tools are available to workers anytime, anywhere with internet access. Match Emails are automatically sent to workers monthly.

Detailed Match Reports can be printed – no identifying information will show except worker contact information.

Child videos, photos and profiles can be uploaded to the databank. Workers can than **host a mini-ARE** for the families unable to attend the conference in Toronto.

Family **homestudies** and profiles can be uploaded to the databank making them unnecessary to bring to ARE or mail to agencies.

Adoptability affidavits can be supplemented with use of the **Hypothetical Match Tool**, which can quickly show if a family is on the databank that meets the needs of the child.

Crown wards with access can be posted on the databank, and matched. A shortlist of potential families can be on hand if this child becomes available for adoption.

Our Future

The potential of and the need for the AdoptOntario program is far greater than its current use. The program has the ability to:

- Track a child's or family's progress through the adoption process
- Recruit an array of AdoptReady families and prospective adoptive families
- Provide system-generated reports to the province to identify ability to meet objectives

"... make it easier for potential adoptive parents to learn about children who might be good matches. All levels of government should contribute to programs (e.g., national and regional photolisting services) that support this goal."

CMAJ Editorial "Every Child Deserves a Home", *December 2009*

Our FAQs

Is the site user friendly?

Yes. A complete renovation of site to a more user friendly format was executed in 2008 with input from workers and advisory group.

AdoptOntario staff readily and continuously offers to upload material, to coach workers through procedures, and webinar trainings.

AdoptOntario launched the public site with a 'fresh look' in 2010. With the facelift came new features and functions for families and adoption professionals.

The Agency doesn't want families from out of region. Is there a solution?

Yes. Match criteria can be adjusted to look for families within an agency, a region or across Ontario.

We need to focus on finding the best family for a child and, as a system, address the barriers posed by placement out of region.

Are the AdoptOntario sites – public and professional – secure?

Yes. The Privacy Impact Assessment and Threat Risk Assessments were completed in 2008 with positive reports on security of site. For more information, please contact us.

Information posted on the site can be viewed online – no need to download sensitive material to computers or risk loss in mail or by fax.

Revisions to professional site access were completed in September 2009 by the Advisory group – access to children and families is only available to adoption professionals with family and child placement responsibilities.

Are the matches accurate?

Yes. The matching tool is a sophisticated algorithm, already in use by MCFD in BC adoptions. Workers may need to learn how better to input data to get the information they need in the Detailed Match Report.

How much time and effort will it take?

AdoptOntario staff is willing to directly help agencies to get caught up on backlogs and have a number of options for helping.

Some of the work of uploading families and child can be done by admin staff in agencies.

Families can register for the databank and follow-up with worker for review.

Databank input is becoming more integrated into practice – some agencies do it as part of the adoption homestudy.

Greater use of this technology will result in greater ease in using the site.

How "good" are the families on the databank?

It is true that some CASs discourage families from placement on the databank for periods of time while encouraging families who might be harder to place with to be on databank.

Some CASs consider placing families after 3 months with no referral.

Private practitioners are also encouraging their families to sign up. CASs are becoming more agreeable to doing homestudy updates for families with a private homestudy.