

## **PROVINCE RECOGNIZES STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE**

Today Ontario celebrates the first official Children and Youth in Care Day, an annual day which recognizes the strength and resilience shown by young people who have faced challenges and adversity in their lives. Every child or youth deserves to be part of a loving family. The initial focus of child welfare work is on ensuring child safety while keeping kids with their families whenever possible. If a young person comes into the care of the Society it is often after experiencing the trauma of abuse or neglect, and they demonstrate remarkable resilience in light of a unique set of challenges.

In November of 2011 youth in and from care shared their experiences and stories growing up as Crown wards of the province during the Youth Leaving Care Hearings at Queen's Park. The final report of the Hearings, *'My REAL Life Book'* identified the difficulties these young people experience growing up in care, including vulnerability, isolation, unpredictability and aging out of care before they are ready. Issues with mental health, completing high school, homelessness and involvement with the justice system were also identified.

The creation of Children and Youth in Care Day was one of the key recommendations provided in *'My REAL Life Book'*. In response, a private member's bill was introduced in the legislature by Soo Wong (MPP for Scarborough- Agincourt) to designate May 14 each year as Children and Youth in Care Day. In late March of 2014, the bill was granted royal assent.

Ontarians are standing up in support of children and youth in care. The declaration of this important day is one of a number of initiatives recently announced to support these young people in reaching their full potential. These include the creation of 50 Youth-in-Transition worker positions across the province to help young people between the ages of 16 and 24 connect with key services, a new Aftercare Benefits Initiative to provide young people leaving care with access to health, dental, vision and extended health services, and increased financial supports to help young people pursue post-secondary education.

Mark Kartusch, Executive Director of Highland Shores Children's Aid emphasized, "Children and youth who come into the care of a Children's Aid Society do so through no fault of their own. While these young people have faced challenges that many of us will never have to experience, we must remember that they don't want to be treated differently and they deserve to enjoy the same benefits and opportunities afforded to any young person in our province today. On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, we will celebrate many amazing achievements of these young people at the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Reach for Success Youth Awards. We hope that on May 14<sup>th</sup>, Ontarians will take a moment to think about children and youth in care and join with us in supporting and celebrating them."