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# More funding needed for child welfare

Sabrina Bedford

Published May 07, 2024 • 3 minute read

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Erin Lee Marcotte, director of service at Family and Children's Services of Lanark, Leeds and Grenville, is shown in this Recorder and Times file photo. PHOTO BY RONALD ZAJAC /Ronald Zajac/The Recorder and Ti

Protecting the region's most vulnerable children has become increasingly more difficult in recent years due to inadequate funding to the child welfare sector, the local children's aid society says.

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Family and Children's Services of Lanark, Leeds and Grenville says they are facing a series of challenges due to a lack of provincial funding in recent years, which has led to staffing cuts and higher workloads for remaining workers, and risks an overall negative impact on the quality of service it provides.

Management at the agency will ask the United Counties of Leeds and Grenville this week to advocate on its behalf to convince the province to increase funding for the child welfare sector, and implement a funding formula that "truly reflects the need for service in our community."

"We would like the counties to advocate along with us, on behalf of all community members, that child welfare services need to be funded more adequately, particularly in more rural communities with lower population densities, like Lanark, Leeds and Grenville," Erin Lee Marcotte, the agency's executive director, said on Monday.



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“We understand that municipalities do not fund child welfare services, however, they have a vested interest in the wellbeing of their citizens, and this includes some of the most vulnerable children, youth and families.”

Between 2023 and 2024, the local agency opened 1,382 investigations – 54 per cent of which were in Leeds and Grenville. As of now, there are 183 local children and youth in care of the agency.

Marcotte said they want to draw attention to the ongoing problems with the current funding formula that the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services “still has not addressed.”

The current funding model has led to inadequate resources and increasing demands locally, Marcotte said.

She and Mike Andrews, president of the agency’s board of directors, are scheduled to make a delegation to the counties’ joint services committee on Tuesday, where they will ask local mayors to stand behind them and demand change to the funding formula.

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“More than half of all societies, including ours, are in deficit,” a presentation from the agency reads.

Child welfare funding has been declining for years, they said, and has reduced every year for at least the last eight years, with cuts projected to continue.

According to its presentation, the agency received nearly \$21 million in funding in 2016-2017. It has dropped every year since then, and this year they received just shy of \$18 million. This represents a 14 per cent funding drop, which the agency says has led to a series of challenges.

They’ve had to cut costs because of this, including to staffing levels, but most “large line items” are service related, they said.

In 2016, they had around 150 full-time staff. In the years that followed, they’ve had to reduce their headcount to account for lower funding.

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Now, despite a high workload, they have just under 110 full time staff – about 27 per cent fewer than when funding cuts began. There has been a higher workload for remaining staff, a decrease in staff

morale and labour relations, and the risk of a reduction to the overall quality of service the agency provides.

“(The agency) is committed to quality service and our staff demonstrate commitment and perseverance every day to support children (and) youth and families, in spite of the inadequate resources and the increasing demands of administrative burden and additional regulations,” Marcotte said.

“Burnout, staff retention, and staff morale are always at risk when employees are under this kind of ongoing pressure.”

The agency hopes the county government will pass a motion to send an advocacy letter to Michael Parsa, the provincial minister of children, community and social services, to rethink the funding model.

*sbedford@postmedia.com*

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