



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SOUNDING THE ALARM: Child and youth mental health sector needs to be shored up

Ottawa – January 27, 2010 – Facing ever-increasing demand but frozen funding, supporters of Ottawa’s child and youth mental health agencies have issued a public letter to Premier Dalton McGuinty asking the province to stabilize crisis, counseling other mental health services for kids and families.

“We know that times are financially difficult; our agencies don’t need a huge infusion of cash. But children’s mental health needs to be stabilized before more agencies move to insolvency,” said the letter, which was signed by nine prominent Ottawans who volunteer as community Board members at Crossroads Children’s Centre, the Roberts Smart Centre and the Youth Services Bureau – the three major local community mental health agencies for children.

Mental health services for children and youth in our community, and across the province, are in real trouble. Referrals to Ontario’s children’s mental health centres have risen 35% since the economic downturn in September 2008. Meanwhile, across the province, children’s mental health providers have seen their resources for core services erode by 28% since 1992. That’s because, most years since then, core operating funds were either frozen or reduced.

Locally over the past year, this almost resulted in the closure of the Roberts Smart Centre. Waiting lists at the Crossroads Children’s Centre have grown to eight months for some programs and are climbing. At the Youth Services Bureau, lack of funding resulted in the closure of a highly-valued group program targeting parents of adolescents. Parents had been waiting up to 18 months to join this support group, the only one of its kind locally.

According to Ontario’s Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 15 to 21% of children suffer from mental health issues. The Ministry also reports that about three-quarters of those kids never receive specialized treatment. In fact, 15- to 24-year-olds have the highest level of unmet mental health needs of any age group, Statistics Canada has reported.

Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa Bureau des services à la jeunesse d’Ottawa

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Accredited by Children’s Mental Health Ontario Accréditée par Santé mentale pour enfants Ontario

Today's letter to the Premier is part of a province-wide campaign by Children's Mental Health Ontario.

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**LETTER TO PREMIER MCGUINTY FROM PROMINENT COMMUNITY
MEMBERS CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH**

January 27,

2010

Dear Premier:

We are community members whose concern for the success of children and youth has led us to become volunteer Board members of community children's mental health agencies in Ottawa. We are writing to seek your urgent support for increased investment in the vital services that help the one in five young people in this city who are struggling with mental health issues.

Mental health services for children and youth in our community, and across the province, are in real trouble. Referrals to Ontario's children's mental health centres have risen 35% since the economic downturn in September 2008. Meanwhile, across the province, children's mental health providers have seen their resources for core services erode by 28% since 1992. Attached please see a fact sheet prepared by our association, Children's Mental Health Ontario, which outlines both the gravity of the situation and the needs of young people.

Locally over the past year, this almost resulted in the closure of the Roberts Smart Centre. Waiting lists at the Crossroads Children's Centre have grown to a full year. At the Youth Services Bureau, lack of funding resulted in the closure of a highly-valued group program targeting parents of adolescents. Parents had been waiting up to 18 months to join this support group, the only one of its kind locally.

We know you care about kids. We also know this isn't a partisan issue. That governments of all stripes have not put enough priority on child and youth mental health is because, for far too long, shame and stigma kept this issue in the shadows. It just wasn't a priority for citizens and communities. But that's changing – and your constituents, our neighbours, are talking about how important it is to intervene and help young people so their entire lives don't become defined by a struggle with mental illness.

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We know that times are financially difficult; our agencies don't need a huge infusion of cash. But children's mental health needs to be stabilized before more agencies move to insolvency. This requires a compensating inflationary adjustment in the next service year, which starts April 1. Secondly, a firm commitment to rebuild the system over the next 5 to 10 years is required. The Ontario Government has published and is working toward the implementation of a strategic framework for children's services. We applaud this effort but we also need to shore up the system so that it will be here in a decade.

Sincerely,

Chris Warburton
Chair, Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa
Vice President (retired) Human Resources, Algonquin College

Lynn Graham
Board Member, Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa
Former Chair, Ottawa Carleton District School Board

Louise Tardif
Board Member, Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa
Vice President (retired), National Bank Financial

Patricia Day
Past President, Roberts Smart
Vice President, Children's Mental Health Ontario

Janet Olds, PhD
President, Roberts Smart
Neuropsychologist at CHEO

Kathie Lynas
Roberts Smart
Communications Consultant

Brenda Beauchamp
President, Crossroads

Jim Chiarelli
Board Member, Crossroads

Neil Wyatt
Principal (retired) Ottawa District School Board

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Children's Mental Health Funding Crisis

Children's Mental Health services receive funding from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services rather than the Ministry of Health.

The Minister of Children and Youth Services is Laurel Broten

Rate of inflation 1992 – 2009 35.94% Source: Bank of Canada

Increases in core funding:

1992 – 1995 (NDP)	-1%
1995 – 2003 (PC)	0%
2003 – 2009 (Lib)	8%

15 to 21% of children in Ontario suffer from mental health issues*

14% have a diagnosable mental health illness*

75% of children with mental health disorders do not receive specialized treatment*

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among 15 – 18 year olds. *

15 to 24 year olds have the highest level of unmet mental health needs of any age group (ages 15 and above). Source: Statistics Canada 2003

*Source, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, October 5, 2009

The onset of most mental illnesses occurs in adolescence or early adulthood.
Source: Public Health Agency of Canada

Children's mental health needs are the "most neglected piece" of the Canadian health care system. Source: Senator Michael Kirby, CMA Journal Aug 30, 2005