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**Submitted to  
Ministry of Children and Youth Services  
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**Children and Youth Residential Services Review  
Executive Summary**

This report was prepared over a five month period by Bay Consulting Group on the basis of available information with limitations as noted in the report. The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services or the government of Ontario.

# Ministry of Children and Youth Services Children and Youth Residential Services Review

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 2005 the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS or the Ministry) retained Bay Consulting Group to complete a review of residential services for children and youth in Ontario. The project objectives were to:

- develop a description of existing services and assessment of needs;
- analyze the strengths and weaknesses of existing residential services;
- develop an overview of stakeholder issues;
- undertake a review of literature and jurisdictional research on models of residential care; and
- provide a final report that summarizes findings and recommendations for future policy development and program design.

The review addressed the provision of residential services for child welfare, children and youth mental health, children and youth with complex/multiple special needs, children and youth developmental services and youth justice. The Ministry's lead was a project manager in the Children and Youth at Risk Branch. Throughout the project the consultants worked closely with the project lead, met periodically with a Directors' Steering Committee as well as an Internal Working Group and a Data Working Group, and obtained input from an External Review Committee. Thirteen Ministry regional contacts, one for each regional office, coordinated review activities from a field perspective. Field visits to five different communities provided an "on the ground" perspective of families, service providers, placing agencies and Ministry staff.

This Executive Summary describes Ontario's existing residential services for children and youth, and contains conclusions and recommended directions. Detailed commentary is contained in the body of the report.

## FINDINGS

### Profile of the Existing Residential Services for Children and Youth

The profile of current residential services developed during this review represents the first time MCYS has had an integrated set of quantitative data on residential services for child welfare, children and youth mental health, children with complex needs, youth justice and child and youth developmental services. This profile provides an overall, consolidated "snapshot" of the characteristics of the sector and this has been taken into consideration in the analysis and development of recommended directions in this review. The profile also provides a basis for further analysis and policy development.

The profile shows that, as of March 31, 2005, a total of 9,724 homes and 24,846 licensed beds<sup>1</sup> were devoted to providing residential services for children and youth across Ontario. In 2004/2005,

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<sup>1</sup> The term "beds" used throughout this report refers to beds licensed and funded through MCYS to provide child and youth residential services (including approved and funded beds in facilities that are directly operated by MCYS and

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a total of some 6.3 million days of residential care were provided at a cost of \$808 million for an average cost per day of about \$128. On a province-wide basis, some highlights are as follows:

- 80% of all beds, 71% of all days and 56% of all costs were for transfer payment agencies (TPAs);
- 17% of all beds, 26% of all days and 36 % of all costs were for private, not-for-profit or for-profit operators (outside paid resources or OPRs);
- 3% of all beds, 3% of all days and 8% of all costs were for MCYS directly operated facilities;
- 72% of all beds were for foster care, 16% for group care in smaller settings (of 4 to 9 beds) and 12% for group care/institutional beds in larger settings (of 10 or more beds);
- approximately 83% of all transfer payment agency beds were for child welfare, 9% for children's mental health, 7% for youth justice and 1% for child and youth developmental services;
- the average bed occupancy for all group and institutional care licensed beds during 2004/2005 was approximately 60% for transfer payment agencies, 108% for private operators and 72% for directly operated facilities for an overall average provincial-wide bed occupancy of 78%; and
- at March 31 2005, the ratio of total residential beds per 1,000 population aged 0 to 18 years of age ranged from a low of 4.5 beds per 1,000 in the Central West Region to a high of 30.8 beds per 1,000 in the Northern Region.

In assembling the profile information several major limitations in the availability, accuracy and comparability of data were identified. These limitations, together with the late timing and availability of the data, restricted its applicability to some of the findings and research produced in the review. These shortcomings need to be considered in interpreting, analyzing and comparing data between parts of the residential services sector. One of recommended directions from this review relates to development of an integrated database of up-to-date information on child and youth residential services.

### **Strengths of Residential Services for Children and Youth**

The nature of the review required that the focus be on tackling major issues associated with residential services. Our recommendations build upon current strengths, including effective practices, which could be more broadly applied. Key strengths observed over the course of the review include:

- the wide array of services offered in different ways to meet the local needs of children and youth;
- good working relationships among key stakeholders, including the Ministry's working relationship with most providers;
- local service provider initiatives with the potential to be used in other parts of the province;
- local integrative mechanisms for service planning and placement and case resolution for child and youth mental health; and

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in regional hospitals that are funded jointly with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care). Some residences have additional beds that are unlicensed or unapproved and are therefore not included in the bed figures in this report.

- dedicated staff and service providers committed to improving the well-being of children and youth and meeting their challenging needs in all parts of the province.

### **Stakeholder Issues Regarding Ontario's Residential Services for Children and Youth**

A significant amount of information on existing children and youth residential services was obtained from stakeholders. The main themes that emerged from stakeholders are:

- the major issues of the children and youth consulted, i.e. related to staff, physical plant and safety/privacy;
- the inconsistency in mechanisms and processes for holding service providers accountable for the residential care and treatment provided to Ontario's children and youth. The single, most important inconsistency observed is that OPRs and TPAs do not have the same reporting relationship and accountability to the Ministry;
- many communities across the province have multiple points of access and, consequently, families must navigate their way through a confusing and complex series of services. There is also a belief among parents that it is easier to gain access to residential services through mandated services such as child welfare or youth justice;
- the quality of services in parts of the residential services sector is affected by a lack of staff training and underpaid front-line staff and also by a licensing mechanism that needs to focus more on quality and care standards;
- the inconsistent funding levels between TPAs, OPRs and directly operated facilities that may contribute to variations in care and quality of service. These funding methods generally do not link specific funding levels with a consistent, objective assessment of the particular needs of children and youth;
- the variations in the availability of residential services and beds across the province that contribute to difficulties in access, waiting lists and a high number of children and youth who are being served far away from their homes. There appears to be an oversupply of services and beds in some areas and an undersupply in others. Such service gaps impact out-of-region placements, waiting lists for non-mandatory services, mental health services, respite services and crisis intervention;
- gaps and limitations in information that need to be considered when either interpreting existing data on children and youth residential services or applying it for future planning, policy development and management purposes; and
- limited integration between programs aimed at the same population. This particularly affects children and youth who are having difficulty in school as well as those who are transitioning out of school into an adult environment.

### **Review of Literature and Other Jurisdictions**

The academic literature has conceptual and methodological limitations and poses key questions that need to be answered through additional empirical, scientific research. While descriptions of residential care projects and programs are common in the academic and gray literatures, they rarely include data on, or analysis of, the overall populations served, challenges and successes of the project, or outcomes from a systems perspective.

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The review confirmed that other jurisdictions are facing issues similar to Ontario's as follows:

- planning for transition to the adult system;
- finding community-based care alternatives for residences for children/youth;
- overcoming funding and capacity constraints;
- implementing adequate quality assurance mechanisms;
- administering the out of home case coordination/case management function;
- managing the over-representation of aboriginal children in residential services;
- sustaining foster care kinship care as major element of residential services;
- integrating and sharing profile data;
- dealing with a high proportion of children with complex needs; and
- bringing staff to the required levels of training and competency.

### **Effective Practices**

While this review identified many issues in Ontario and elsewhere, it also identified many opportunities in the form of effective practices. Some of these effective practices are operational in nature and some are strategic, as follows:

- at the operational level effective practices in other jurisdictions include intake and assessment practices, placement decisions, quality assurance, continuum of service, permanency planning, fostering, prevention programs, regulation of service providing practitioners, research, residential service programs, and service management;
- at a more strategic level, effective practices in other jurisdictions included regional authorities, "system of care" approaches and the "looking after children" approach; and
- effective practices in Ontario span intensive home-based services, mixing children and youth from different sectors, integrated service provider agencies, regional office databases, integrated access, regional operating frameworks, increased collaboration, culturally-specific services and short-term crisis intervention.

### **RECOMMENDED DIRECTIONS**

The overall direction for residential services should be to ensure that the right types of residential service are available at the right place at the right time and that each type of service has consistent expectations for quality, accountability and funding. Based on the feedback from stakeholders, the report contains a series of recommendations with this end in mind - the topic and objective of each recommendation is set out below:

- **Governance and Accountability:** To define an approach to governance and accountability that sets common expectations, outcomes and reporting requirements for any residential service provider serving children and youth that receives government funding either directly or indirectly.
- **Access:** To move toward a clearer integrated access mechanism for all services and supports for children in Ontario, rather than segregating access by the child or youth's presenting problem.

- **Service Quality:** To identify and develop comparable strategies that promote quality in service across all residential providers.
- **Funding:** To move to a fair, equitable and transparent basis for funding across residential services that is reflective of the level of need of the child, the level and intensity of the service provided and the expected outcomes.
- **System and Service Management:** To implement an integrated and comprehensive approach to planning and managing the availability of residential services to meet the needs of all children and youth within major geographic areas or communities across the province.
- **Information Management:** To create a single, integrated database of information that supports the effective and efficient planning and management of all residential services for children and youth.
- **Evaluation and Research:** To establish a coordinated approach to applied research, evaluation and outcome measurement efforts among all key stakeholders (e.g. MCYS, provincial associations, universities) to support transformation of, and continuous improvement to, residential services.
- **Service Management Coordination:** To establish appropriate integrating mechanisms within the Ministry, between ministries and with external stakeholders to make programs as seamless as possible for parents, children, youth, and service providers.

## CONCLUSION

This review represents a first step in documenting existing residential services for children and youth across all sectors and in identifying needs, issues and priorities related to their future delivery. For the first time, albeit with limitations, the Ministry has a detailed profile of existing services, as well as a series of recommended directions that have been informed by input from all major stakeholder groups – these can now be further analyzed to help shape future policy development and program design. The implications for future possible directions now need to be assessed and a plan developed for moving ahead to meet future needs.

As a point of departure, a framework for children and youth residential services is needed – one that confirms priorities and responsibilities with respect to oversight and roles within and between ministries and with service providers. This framework, in combination with related Ministry initiatives, can set the stage for high quality, safe residential environments that contribute to the best possible outcomes for children and youth.