

Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies



Marian and Anita

Linda

Saving lives from abuse, neglect

When Marian's mother sent her to Canada from Ghana to live with her father, she had no idea that the "better life and education" she anticipated would become a living hell for her daughter.

By age 12, Marian had suffered such severe discipline and sexual abuse that she was removed from her father's care.

In 2009 alone, over 27,000 children in Ontario were in need of substitute care and, every year, more than 156,000 calls about possible abuse and neglect of children like Marian are received by Ontario's 51 Children's Aid Societies (CASs).

For Marian, life became dramatically different as a result of one of those calls.

When she became a crown ward at the age of 14, Marian was quiet, frightened, anxious and withdrawn. CAS child and youth worker Anita Strauss recalls, "Marian would eat her lunch in a cubicle in

the school bathroom and just isolate herself."

It was a relationship with Ms. Strauss and a committed foster family that drew Marian out of her inner nightmare into a safe and promising future.

"When she first came to live with me, Marian was like a mouse," says foster mother Linda Weseloh. "The first night I asked her what her favourite food was – she told me it was chicken wings, so I made them. She ate one chicken wing. It wasn't until years later that she told me she was afraid if she ate more than one, we would send her back."

Ms. Weseloh says her belief that everyone can excel at something led her to encourage all of her kids, biological or foster, to find out what sparked a fire in them. "Marian didn't express any interests, but she had a beautiful voice, so I signed her up with the conservatory for singing lessons," she says.

Over time, Marian became

comfortable enough to sing in her church choir and perform in school musicals.

"One day she showed me some ribbons – track and field

ribbons – from when she was in Grade 4 or 5," says Ms. Weseloh. "She had won every event she was in."

It turned out that Marian

had quit track and field because of back pain. It wasn't until Ms. Weseloh consulted a sports doctor that they found her foster daughter had a hairline fracture in her spine.

After wearing a back brace for six to eight months, the bright student and skilled athlete picked up where she left off. Eventually, Marian would receive a full track scholarship at Southern Illinois University.

Two master's degrees later – one in linguistics and one in speech and language pathology – Marian is married and hopes to start a family. "My husband, Chip, gave her away at her wedding last year," says Ms. Weseloh, who describes her three sons and her three foster kids – Marian, Anita and Kwame – as an extremely close-knit family.

Ms. Strauss, Marian's child and youth worker, attended both her graduation and wedding. "I drove 18 hours to attend her graduation. She was the valedictorian and delivered her speech in front

of several thousand people. It was incredibly moving," she says.

Thanks to concerned members of Marian's childhood community, her dedicated CAS worker and her caring and passionate foster family, a life of abuse and neglect was replaced by protection from harm and a home without fear.

"These kids carry a lot of their early experiences with them forever, but, if they're loved, nurtured and given experiences they can feel good about, they can overcome it. Not get over it, but overcome it," says Ms. Weseloh.

Societies answer call of children in need

In 2009, Ontario's Children's Aid Societies (CASs) investigated 78,516 referrals from families, teachers, doctors and neighbours concerned about the protection, safety and well-being of children and youth at risk of abuse and neglect. That same year, more than 27,000 children were in need of substitute care for protection from abuse or neglect.

CAS makes a difference in the lives of kids by providing assessments, crisis intervention, positive parenting programs, individual or group counselling, peer support groups and referrals to other community services.

And, if children can't stay at home because of serious safety concerns, CAS finds a safe living arrangement in the home of a relative or family friend, foster care, a care home or with a customary care giver. Eventually, if being reunited with family is not an option, the ultimate goal is finding a child an adoptive family and a permanent home.

Share your story, thoughts and comments online at www.useyourvoice.ca. Or, for more information about the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, visit www.oacas.org.

This supplement was produced by RandallAnthony Communications Inc. (www.randallanthony.com) in conjunction with the advertising department of The Globe and Mail. Keith Ryder, Category Manager, kryder@globeandmail.com.

GEORGE
Cook
Tow Truck Driver
Artist
Social Entrepreneur

"I came under the care of Children's Aid at fourteen. Growing up in foster homes, I learned early that part of healing would be about giving back. After graduating from art college, and earning a degree from university, I looked for a way to contribute to others. Working with a partner, we applied to the Children's Aid Foundation, wrote a business plan and won funding for a DJ company that would employ young men like ourselves."



"I Am Your Children's Aid."

GET INVOLVED WITH YOUR CHILDREN'S AID. GO TO USEYOURVOICE.CA

Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies



Finding kids safe, nurturing homes

Connie Blair is determined to provide children with something she was denied: a happy childhood.

Ms. Blair's early years were spent in and out of foster care, creating a heart-wrenching cycle of acceptance and rejection until adoption at the age of nine finally settled her into a safe, happy home.

Today, she's the birth mother of three, adoptive mother of four, foster parent of four and legal custodian of one. Her childhood experiences have left her committed to providing unconditional love and acceptance to her family of 12.

To the Blairs, every child is welcome.

"When my husband and I got into fostering, we didn't want children that were easy to place. We wanted children that other people had pretty much given up on," she says.

One of their sons had been headed to a group home, while another was on his way to treatment; two of their kids have fetal alcohol syndrome;

one son has spina bifida; one teenage daughter has severe developmental delays; and their two youngest daughters have physical and developmental challenges.

"I had been placed in a few foster homes and, until I was adopted by my parents, was always returned back to the orphanage," says Ms. Blair. "I didn't want other children to go through that. Every child deserves a happy childhood ... and the knowledge that when they come in my door, they are in a safe place."

While Ontario's Children's Aid Societies aim to do all they can to return children to rehabilitated and supported birth families, some become Crown wards. From there, they are placed in foster care, with the ultimate goal of finding permanent, adoptive families.

As of March 2009, 9,215 children and youth were under the permanent care of 51 of Ontario's Children's Aid Societies. Of these, over 2,600, or almost 30 per cent, had no access to their biological fami-

lies and need permanent homes. An additional 6,600, or 70 per cent, had some contact with their biological families, but adoption was still an option.

That same year 1,461

homes were approved for adoption, 819 adoptions were finalized and 865 children were in the process of being adopted.

Child welfare worker Nandita Junnarkar notes that,

Societies answer call of children in need

In 2009, Ontario's Children's Aid Societies (CASs) investigated 78,516 referrals from families, teachers, doctors and neighbours concerned about the protection, safety and well-being of children and youth at risk of abuse and neglect. That same year, more than 27,000 children needed of substitute care for protection from abuse or neglect.

CAS makes a difference in the lives of kids by providing assessments, crisis intervention, positive parenting programs, individual or group counselling, peer support groups and referrals to other community services.

If children can't stay at home because of serious safety concerns, CAS finds a safe living arrangement in the home of a relative or family friend, foster care, a group care home or with a customary care giver. If being reunited with family is not an option, the ultimate goal is finding an adoptive family and permanent home for every child.

before children are placed in adoptive homes, the Children's Aid Society works very hard with biological parents and families to create safe, nurturing living conditions. Many times that works out, but sometimes it doesn't.

"My first case where children became Crown wards involved two children who were living in severe neglect," says Ms. Junnarkar. "They were living in their grandparent's basement with their mom, and there were beer bottles and dirty diapers everywhere, feces, urine and everything. We tried very hard to work with the family, but nobody was willing to make a plan for the children."

"The mom didn't come to any of the visits with her children, and the dad started just not showing up at all. That was a good story in the end, because the foster mother for those children was a good fit, and ended up adopting them."

Candy Boucher grew up in a situation of abuse and neglect. When she was just 14, she did everything she could to

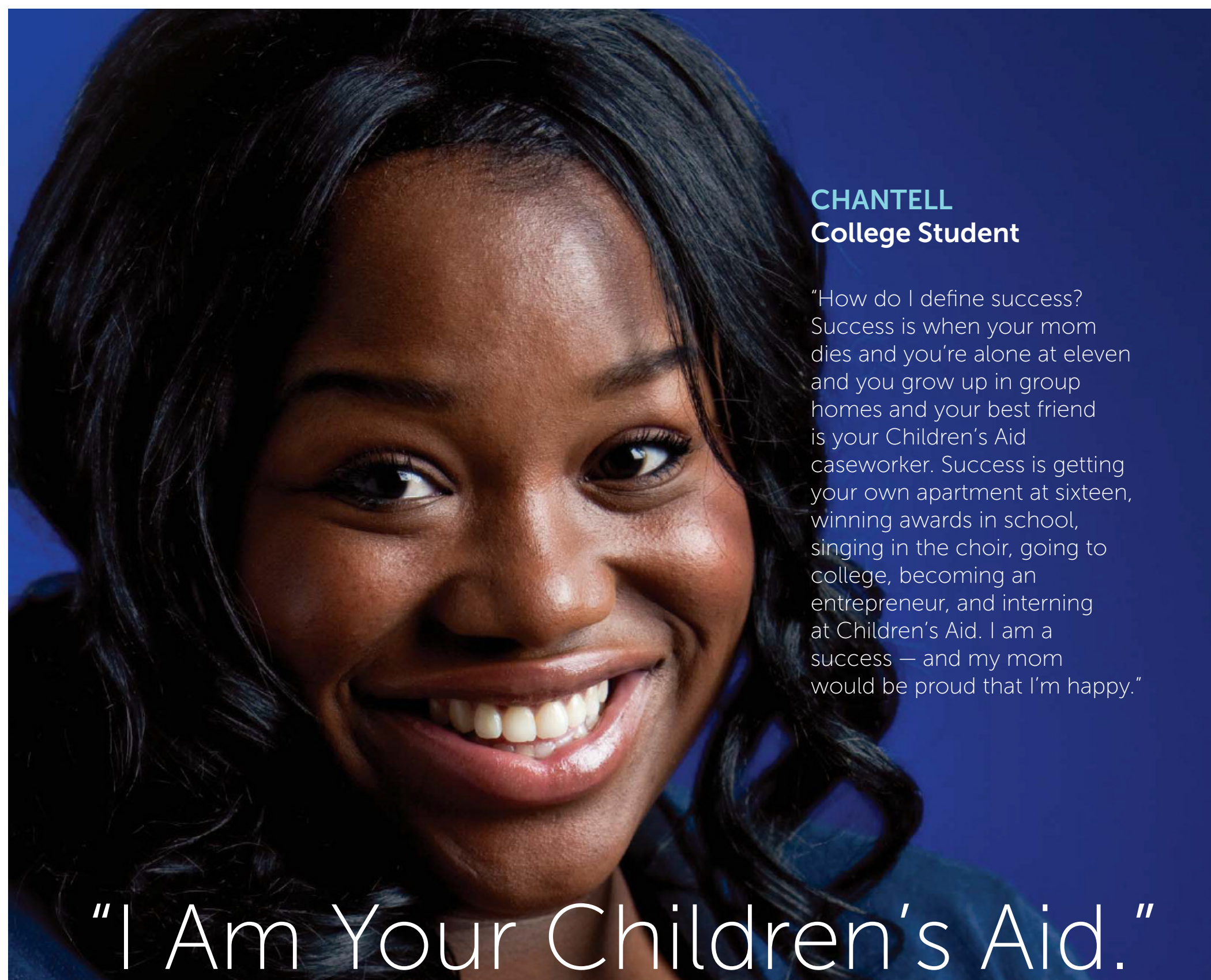
have her infant sister removed from the care of her alcoholic and physically abusive parents. "I knew my parents were going to beat me up when I got home, but, after my sister was born and my parents were still abusive, I got myself out and I took my sister out," says Ms. Boucher, a former foster child whose sister was placed in an adoptive home.

Entering into the care of a Children's Aid Society turned Ms. Boucher's life around.

Now an event planner, she chose to spend her internship at the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. "I would not be the person that I am today if it wasn't for Children's Aid. I have such love for them, such respect," she says. ■

Share your story, thoughts and comments online at www.useyourvoice.ca. Or for more information about the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, visit www.oacas.org.

This supplement was produced by RandallAnthony Communications Inc. (www.randallanthony.com) in conjunction with the advertising department of The Globe and Mail. Keith Ryder, Category Manager, kryder@globeandmail.com.



CHANTELL College Student

"How do I define success? Success is when your mom dies and you're alone at eleven and you grow up in group homes and your best friend is your Children's Aid caseworker. Success is getting your own apartment at sixteen, winning awards in school, singing in the choir, going to college, becoming an entrepreneur, and interning at Children's Aid. I am a success — and my mom would be proud that I'm happy."

"I Am Your Children's Aid."

GET INVOLVED WITH YOUR CHILDREN'S AID. GO TO USEYOURVOICE.CA

Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies