

Study reveals state of crisis in Canadian foster care system

October 24 2014, by Jeff Renaud

A new study of foster care in Canada led by a researcher at Western University reveals a shrinking number of foster care providers are available across the country to care for a growing number of children with increasingly complex disorders.

The study, led by Alan Leschied from Western's Faculty of Education, is the single largest review of foster care ever conducted in Canada. With a purpose to better understand the challenges facing the recruitment and retention of foster parents, the two-year study involved input from 941 foster parents representing every province and territory in the country.

The findings showed an overall shortage of available care providers in Canada, as well as a lack of adequate training and support for providers who must often care for foster [children](#) with serious [mental health issues](#) as a result of trauma, neglect or abuse.

"This report sheds light on the challenges to organizations and [foster parents](#) that are charged with caring for an ever-increasing number of children and youth, who are arguably the most vulnerable members of society," explains Leschied, considered one of Canada's leading experts on the subject of foster care. "Recruitment and retention of care providers has become more challenging. Our society asks these people to take on herculean responsibilities, but without adequate support and training to properly support the children for whom they are providing care. This so often becomes overwhelming and is simply not sustainable."

The study, *Rescuing a Critical Resource: A Review of the Foster Care Retention and Recruitment Literature and its Relevance in the Canadian Child Welfare Context*, was funded by the Child Welfare League of Canada (CWLC) as part of its Every Child Matters initiative. The study was released in Ottawa today at 11 a.m. as part of Foster Family Week, which runs from Oct 19-25.

Results of the study will be made available online at www.cwlc.ca/en/projects both as a national report, as well as by individual province and territory.

Leschied anticipates the study will be a catalyst for discussion at the local, provincial and federal level on how to better equip existing foster care providers with knowledge and resources to support children and youth, as well as to develop new strategies for recruitment and retention of [foster care](#) givers.

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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