

Independent review says the CAS was wrong

**It took two years for a London woman to clear her name, now
she wants an apology**

MARDY BACIGALUPO, The Londoner



**Carol Richardson was accused by the
Children's Aid Society of hitting her
granddaughter.**

Carol Richardson could not have asked for a better Christmas present than the one she got. A couple of days before the big day, Mrs. Richardson received a package from her lawyer in Ottawa. After an extensive investigation, he found she is innocent of allegations made by the Children's Aid Society (CAS) of London.

For more than seven years, Mrs. Richardson has had a court order to care part-time for her

granddaughter. Two years ago, her granddaughter told a social worker her grandmother hit her with a wooden spoon and her hand. The girl claimed to have a small oval-shaped bruise to prove it.

That night, Mrs. Richardson received a devastating phone call from CAS. They told her access to her granddaughter would be denied. However, she was adamant she was innocent. Now, this report from the lawyer appointed to her case by the ministry of child and youth services substantiates her claim.

"This lawyer did not mess around," she explains. "He saw through it from the very beginning. What he's saying is (CAS) screwed up. And they did. That was the best Christmas present ever."

Paul Conlin of the Ottawa firm Conlin & Payette came to London and spent a few days interviewing Mrs. Richardson, her psychologist, her granddaughter's CAS social worker, as well as some of Mrs. Richardson's friends.

Among other things, the report states, "The flawed CAS investigation led to a flawed verification process as great reliance was placed on the social workers investigation, but

the verification committee ought to have been more vigilant.”

Mrs. Richardson couldn't agree more. She says when her granddaughter told her social worker about the alleged striking, it took three or four days for her to arrange a doctor's appointment to have the bruise examined. Also, the social worker did not make any formal recordings – on a tape recorder for example – of the girl's claim.

Mr. Conlin recommends the CAS apologize to Mrs. Richardson and remove any such allegations from their records. They are currently reviewing the report.

“I don't expect to get an apology because they told me last summer, if the procedures were all followed properly on their end, they don't apologize. These procedures weren't followed in my opinion,” Mrs. Richardson says.

Mrs. Richardson says CAS received the report on the same day she did.

She believes they are trying to find a loophole, something the lawyer must have missed. Mrs. Richardson doesn't see how that will be possible.

“I plan to take them to court for defamation of character. Whether I get the letter of apology or not, they have to be held accountable,” she says. “If their review is anything like their verification process, which is nil . . . what they put me through should not happen to anybody else and people should know. We have the right, as taxpayers, to know what is going on. I think it is no wonder that so many people are disillusioned about Children's Aid.”

Diane Cresswell, director of communications at CAS for five years, says they will be looking at what recommendations the report makes and any steps the society needs to take.

“We will be reviewing the report and as soon as we have done our review we will be further in touch with the grandmother at that time,” Ms. Cresswell says. “We need to consider the review seriously and the information in that.”

Ms. Cresswell was unable to comment on whether the society has ever been in this situation before. She was also unable to say how long the review would take.

“We are taking this report from the review very seriously and we will be taking action and looking at the recommendation as soon as we can,” she explains.

Mr. Conlin states in his report “the CAS has every right to voice their opinion as to whether Mrs. Richardson's conduct amounted to inappropriate discipline or excessive corporal punishment, but in doing so, having concluded that the conduct did not raise a protection concern, it (CAS) stepped outside its legislative mandate’.

More than a year ago, Mrs. Richardson paid to have a polygraph test done. She passed. The four-hour test is considered to be 96 per cent accurate. CAS did not even consider the results from this test in their investigation.