

# Oops!

## Family finds confidential CAS files

By Krissie Rutherford

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Sensitive and confidential information about 22 families who have cases with the Halton Children's Aid Society was left on the kitchen table of an Oakville home Monday afternoon.

The residents of the home, who cannot be identified because they are clients of the CAS, said they found the stack of papers clipped together on the table after an hour-long visit with a case worker.

"We were shocked," said the 33-year-old man, who lives at the home with his wife and her children.

"We started reading it, and it's not just our stuff she left behind. It starts into the details of everything else about other families -- their deepest and darkest secrets."

The files viewed by this reporter included relocation of women and children to foster homes, details of sexual abuse, drinking and drug habits. Names, addresses, phone numbers - the information is all there.

"All of these cases have been jeopardized," said the woman.

The mother of four initially thought the papers were all related to her family, which she said has had an open case with the CAS for four years since she split with her previous husband.

"I'm looking through and I'm thinking, I don't know this person," she said. "This is too many people's lives in jeopardy. The CAS is supposed to be protecting these children."

Executive Director of Halton CAS Nancy MacGillivry said the case worker in question told her she doesn't think she left anything behind.

"It's a very concerning situation. I don't know the circumstances of how this happened. If it was a mistake, or however it happened, I feel very badly about that," said MacGillivry. "We try to protect people's privacy, that's very, very important."

MacGillivry learned of the missing files after receiving a call from the press on Tuesday.

"After we heard they were in receipt of confidential information, we called the family on Tuesday and Wednesday, but didn't get ahold of anyone," she said.

Halton CAS sent an employee to the home on Wednesday to retrieve the papers, but the couple refused to give them back.

Instead, the man said he planned to hand the papers to a judge during a hearing in a Milton family court yesterday afternoon.

"If the CAS worker is going to leave this here, if we give it right back, who's to know this won't happen again?" he said.

The couple said that's the reason they didn't call the CAS to give back the papers in the first place.

"Why would other people's files be in our house? That's the question," the woman said. "This is private information. This is about the safety of children."

MacGillivry does not yet know the nature of the papers, but said it sounds like they were notes a case worker would carry on their person from appointment to appointment if they had several in one day.

"Workers would have case notes with them because they often would go out and visit more than one family at a time, so they'd carry those notes," she said. "We're required by law to take case notes, so that's a requirement. It's standard practice."

MacGillivry said workers are taught to keep those notes in "a secure place" like a binder or briefcase, and to never leave them in the car, in case it's stolen.

Halton CAS left a letter with the family in possession of the notes on Wednesday, after asking for the papers back. The letter stated the organization had heard from "a variety of reliable sources" that they had papers containing "the names and addresses of at least 15 clients of the society."

The letter requests the documents be handed back "immediately."

"I am sure you can appreciate privacy and confidentiality of all our clients are of the utmost importance to us," it continued.

MacGillivry said she will determine what action to take with the CAS case worker and organization once they have all the information regarding the nature of the files and how they were left behind.