

Halton CAS get much-needed funding boost

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Province grants Halton Children's Aid Society an extra \$548,000 toward operating budget

By ANGELA BLACKBURN
Special to The Champion

The Halton Children's Aid Society (CAS) will receive an extra \$548,000 in funding from the Province this year.

The money is part of the Province's recent announcement of \$123 million in extra funding for 53 Ontario children's aid

societies. The extra \$548,000 will be applied to the \$9.7 million operating budget of the Halton CAS.

"That amount of public dollars is significant," said Roy Walsh, executive director of the Halton CAS.

About \$180,000 will go toward operating costs.

Mr. Walsh said this would reduce the

percentage of the budget (from 6.7 per cent to 4.9 per cent) that the agency must raise itself.

The remaining \$368,000 will go into group home care.

Mr. Walsh said the extra money is good news.

Children's aid societies aren't tied to a strict operating budget, but are funded according to provincial "benchmarks" or rules which govern how much they receive per child.

For example, Mr. Walsh said this year's budget was estimated at \$9.4 million.

Instead, it now sits at \$9.7 million

because the number of clients has increased.

The budget is revised four times annually.

The Halton CAS cares for 210 children and last year it launched 2,000 investigations—30 per cent more than the previous year, said Mr. Walsh, who attributed the hike to increased awareness.

Meanwhile, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies has asked the Province to review funding benchmarks, five of which it said are critical.

The recent funding announcement was based on a provincial review of two of the benchmarks, said Mr. Walsh.

"Obviously the Province did recognize that these needed adjustment. They've also committed to a comprehensive review of all benchmarks within the next 18 months," he said.

Among the most important to the CAS is "the staffing required to do the job as to the standards, which are good standards, set out by the ministry," said Mr. Walsh.

Caseload has increased

The local CAS added eight staff members when the ministry increased annual funding by \$114 million for children's aid societies across the province last May.

However, the caseload has increased. "We're still running three to four staff members in excess of the provincial funding formula," said Mr. Walsh.

Other benchmarks considered critical by the CAS are program support (administration) and legal services.

John Baird, the minister responsible for children, said the Province has improved standards and accountability, increased funding to hire more front-line workers, boosted foster parent rates and better trained staff.

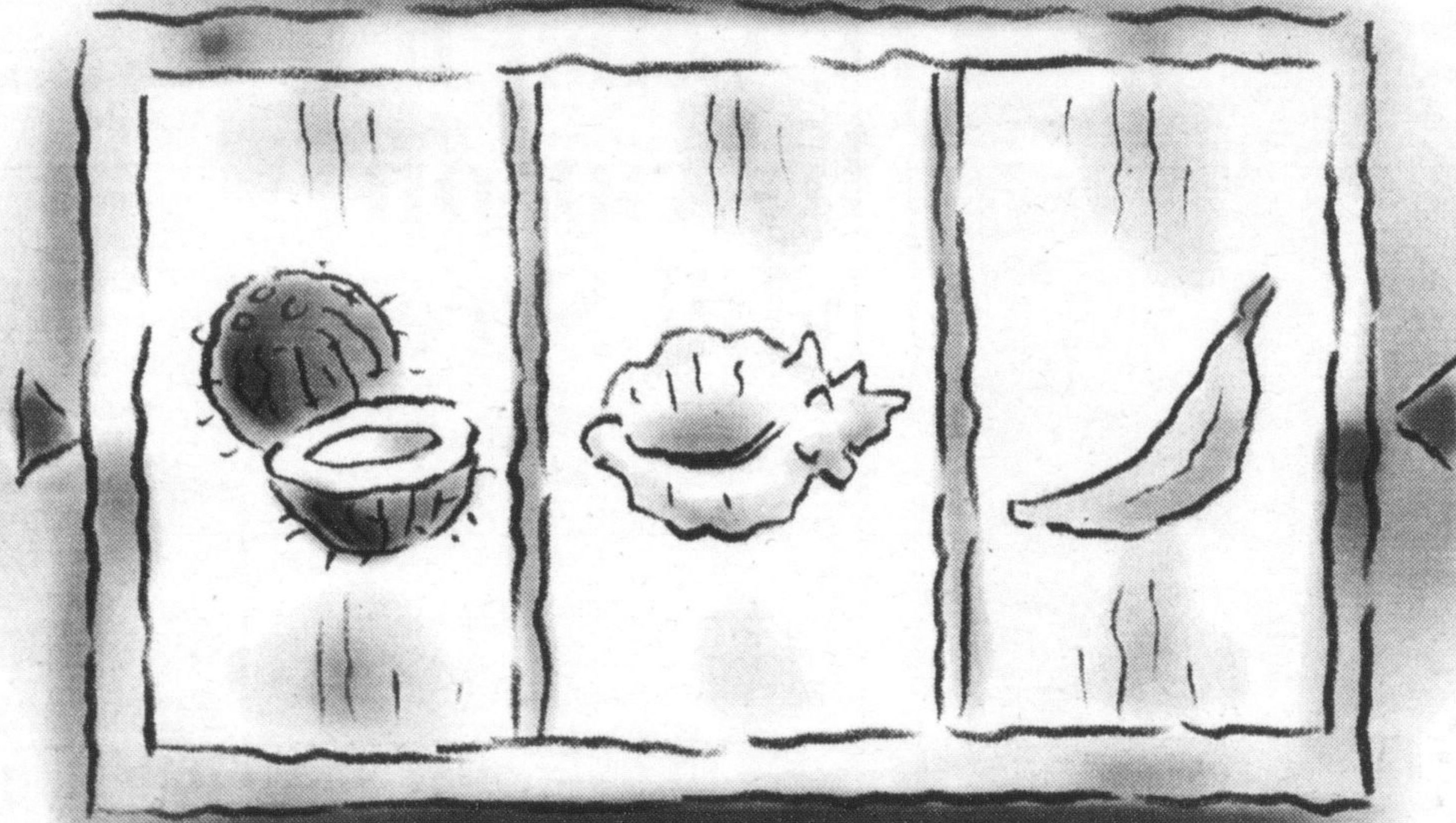
In 1998, the Province announced \$170 million over three years for children's aid societies to hire more staff, and improve training and foster care.

Minimum basic daily rates for foster parents were bumped from \$14 to \$25.71 and foster parent training is being standardized.

Front-line workers also use a common "risk assessment" system and a province-wide database helps them track high-risk families.



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