

Brant CAS to continue at Six Nations for another six months

By Donna Duric
Writer

Six Nations clanmothers were upset to learn last week that the Brant Children's Aid (CAS)- Native Services Branch will continue to operate on the territory for another six months.

The Brant CAS was supposed to be close up shop April 1 and be replaced with a Six Nations-designed and operated child protection service but the committee tasked with the takeover is behind on implementing the plan. Band Council's decision to keep the service here for another six months upset clan-

mother Janice Henry, and helper Gwen Hill who are both involved in the takeover.

Band Council came close last Tuesday night to sticking with last year's resolution to evict the CAS by April 1 when Councillor Carl Hill abruptly tabled a motion to stick with the original plan but he could not gain a second.

Instead, council agreed to hold the resolution to remove the CAS from the territory in abeyance until Oct. 1.

Clanmothers sighed and shook their heads as they ex-

ited council chambers when the motion was passed.

Andy Koster, director of the Brant CAS, was at the council session arguing to keep the service operating for a year, instead of six months. "I worry about how this process is going," he said. "I worry that it's going to hurt the kids and the families that we serve and there wouldn't be a proper transition of all the risk factors involved with all of these families."

CASs are funded by the province on a per-capita basis. A recent story in The Toronto Star highlighted one agency's determination to keep more children on file in order to retain its government funding. The Star obtained an internal memo from the Peel Region CAS branch that asked staff not to

close any cases for the month of March as "part of a strategy to secure government funding," the article stated. According to The Star, the memo said, "when service volume is lower than projected, there is less money for the CAS."

Six Nations moved to take over child protection services in 2011 after hearing numerous complaints from community members that included allegations of parents being denied basic rights and access to their children.

"We're not your enemy," said Koster. "What we want is for Six Nations to take over the service and we'll do everything to support that but I honestly don't think it's fair to do that by the way it looks...to sort of put others

down. There are many people here on Six Nations that are pleased with our service." Koster said allegations levelled were "unfair."

"We do not agree that (surveys) were accurate. It seemed in my opinion there was a bit of a bias here; that somehow the CAS wasn't doing its job."

He said claims that there are 500 Six Nations children in CAS care are not accurate. The number is closer to 70, he said.

He admitted, "There have been some controversial cases over the last few years and we know that. Have workers on occasion not done the right thing? Like any organization, that's probably true. This agency tried to deal with those situations."

He said "Six months is very

fast. I understand that perhaps you want to leverage with the government but I'm questioning that our agency and the staff and the kids not also be put in a negative position that could be hurtful to them."

Arliiss Skye, Social Services director, said she's not sure six months will be enough time. "We're asking (for the extension) because we're not as far along in the process as we thought we would be," said Skye.

Koster said a series of community meetings last year seeking input on the takeover were poorly attended.

Henry said people were afraid to attend the meetings for fear of retribution from the CAS. "That's because the people are so scared. They're scared to go."

Koster claimed his staff is feeling "marginalized" and "oppressed" because of the allegations but, "our staff remain loyal to Six Nations. They're still committed and they still say to us, 'we're here for the kids and we're here for the community.' It's an opportunity for us to still be partners with one another."

Henry said Koster has not responded to three letters clanmothers sent him during takeover negotiations. "He says he's tried working with the community; he never worked with us. Not once."