

## BLOG

# The Business of Care: How Privatizing Child Welfare Services is Failing Ontario's Youth

In recent years, there has been a growing body of news articles reporting the maltreatment and deaths of children and youth in private group homes. Many of our current and past grantees who work in the Child Welfare sector, are former survivors themselves. Frustrated with the system and aware of critical service gaps, they have taken action to ensure that children and youth in care and those transitioning out, are able to access the support they need to thrive. This includes equipping them with basic life skills, and teaching them to advocate for themselves in securing housing, medical treatment, and other necessities. The combination of news reports and testimonies from our grantees led us on our own journey of exploration to not only understand the issues but also to advocate for the communities we support.

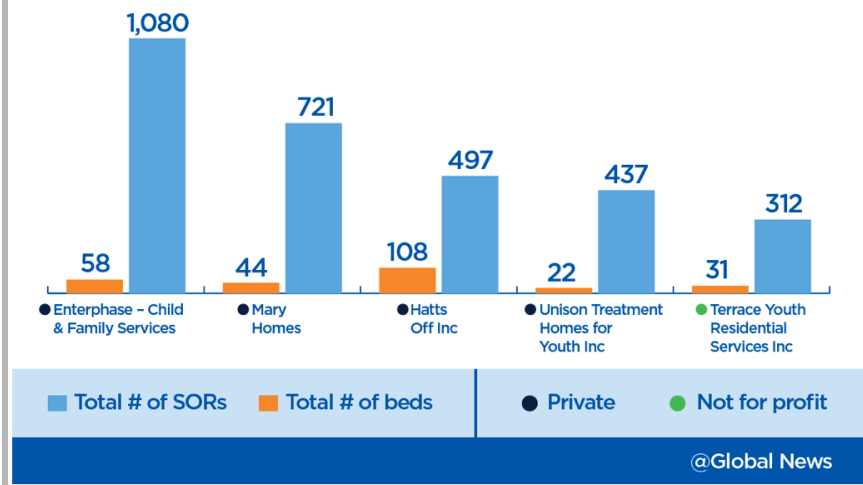
Our inquiry started with fundamental questions: How do children and youth enter care? What services do they receive while in care? How are they prepared to exit the system at the age of 18 to live independently? What is happening in group homes that would result in the harm or death of children? This exploration led us to examine service delivery models, particularly private for-profit models. We have come to learn that over time, privatization has quietly reshaped Ontario's Child Welfare system, exacerbating existing issues and causing children more harm than help. Recognizing that the issue's complexity required specialized expertise, we are partnering with the Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN), whose advocacy includes opposing the privatization of publicly funded services, highlighting how such practices prioritize financial gain over the well-being of those receiving care. In conducting our research so far, it has become increasingly apparent that when care is driven by profit margins instead of children's well-being, the results are devastating.

Private operators currently provide a significant portion of residential placements for children in care, but the absence of public data on these facilities makes it nearly impossible to track performance, and ensure children are receiving the support they need. From the little information that is publicly available however, the findings are troubling:

- Ontario has licensed and unlicensed group homes but no comprehensive list of the unlicensed facilities are available. A [Global News article](#) however, reported the existence of approximately 300 licensed group homes, half of which are run by private “for-profit” companies.
- Private group homes account for a disproportionately high number of [serious incidents \(55%\)](#), including the use of physical restraints, medication errors, and even deaths.
  - [The Ministry of the Solicitor General](#) reported a total of 28 deaths of children and youth in care between 2019 and 2021.
  - A [Global News article](#) reported 83 percent of the Serious Occurrence Reports (SOR) involved using physical restraints on children, 66 percent were of missing youth, 62 percent related to medication errors, and 31 percent were of serious injuries.

## Service providers with the most serious occurrence reports

Private operators make up only 25% of child welfare beds. Yet, they filed 55% of all serious occurrences.



These incidents are the result of cost-cutting measures aimed at improving efficiency; a common strategy among for-profit entities. This often results in group homes operating with underqualified staff, inadequate resources, and substandard living conditions. Meanwhile, children in care, many of whom already face complex challenges, are left vulnerable to neglect and further trauma. The system is failing the very individuals it was designed to protect.

Beyond the immediate dangers, privatization has exacerbated systemic inequities. Black and Indigenous children are already overrepresented in Ontario's Child Welfare system due to historical and ongoing discrimination. Private care providers, with little accountability, are ill-equipped to provide the culturally responsive support these children and youth need. Without proper oversight, these disparities continue unchecked, further entrenching cycles of harm.

As we continue to investigate and engage with our grantees to learn more about the subject, one thing has become apparent, that ending the reliance on for-profit models in caring for the children and youth in Ontario's Child Welfare system is not just a policy recommendation, it's a moral imperative. We need a system that prioritizes care over profit, transparency over secrecy, and children's futures over financial gain. With the federal and provincial elections underway, now may be the opportune time to reimagine how we support and provide for children in need. This should include a system that prioritizes care over profit, transparency over secrecy, and children's futures over financial gain. We need a commitment to reinvesting in public, community-led solutions that center the well-being of every child in care. Children in Ontario deserve better!