



The Children's Aid Society
OF HAMILTON

La Société d'aide à l'enfance
DE HAMILTON

2020-2021 COMMUNITY REPORT

Engaging with families and community partners to reshape service



Land & Treaty Acknowledgement

The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton acknowledges our presence on ancestral Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Confederacy land as determined by the Dish with One Spoon treaty. The intent of this wampum treaty is for all nations sharing this territory to do so responsibly, respectfully and sustainably in perpetuity. We respect the long-standing relationships with the local Indigenous communities, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River. On this land we are mindful of broken covenants and the need to reconcile our history in child welfare and relations with Indigenous peoples. We are especially mindful of the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action to redress the Legacy of Child Welfare on Indigenous families and communities. We acknowledge that today Hamilton is the home to many Indigenous Peoples from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in this community, on their territory.



The Children's Aid Society
OF HAMILTON
La Société d'aide à l'enfance
DE HAMILTON

Message from Bryan Shone and Neil McMahon



When reflecting on the past year, there is an overall theme that comes to mind – resilience. Throughout the challenges of a global pandemic staff, foster and kin families and volunteers at Hamilton Children’s Aid society have remained steadfast in their commitment to children, youth and families in the Hamilton community. As an essential service, we focused on our guiding principles to navigate three lockdowns, school closures and support face to face access between children and families when many of our partners in the community were unable to do so.

Our work continues to be driven by our 2019-2024 Strategic Vision.

The agency’s guiding principles include keeping children safe with their family and in their community, providing service and centering decisions on the needs and voice of children, youth and families, achieving permanency for children and youth involved with the agency and supporting children and youth to reach their full potential, centering equity and inclusion in the agency’s guiding principles, creating a healthy workplace and enhancing relationships and partnerships with identified communities.

In each of the six key areas you will read stories that exemplify the agency’s vision in action. Stories like being able to support a newcomer family through the challenges of Covid when they didn’t have anywhere else to turn, helping a youth achieve her educational goals and incredible partnerships with community organizations to provide early help and support to families.

Our work to embed equity into the fabric of what we do each day is ongoing. We are listening, learning through training, utilizing data and investing in partnerships to improve services to racialized and marginalized children, youth and families. We expanded our holiday giving program, recognizing that Hamilton is a diverse community and we can support and empower families no matter how they celebrate.

Our commitment to equity is happening at all levels of the agency, including our board of directors. This past summer the board had the opportunity to learn from an Indigenous teacher and has just gone through a comprehensive recruitment strategy to engage leaders, young people and members from the Indigenous and equity seeking communities we serve. In 2020, the coroner called an inquest into the death of Devon Freeman, a youth our agency was involved with. Devon’s death was a heartbreaking loss that was felt by all those who knew him. We are committed to working together with Devon’s family, the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation and our partners in the community to help identify and implement recommendations that would reduce the risk of a tragedy like Devon’s death from happening again. Other key highlights we would like to share from the past year include:

- The creation of a customer service framework to guide our service to families, our partners in the community and to each other along with a process to hear complaints and concerns so we can continually improve the experience of those whose lives we touch
- Working together with our Foster Family Association to create a shared workplan that puts children, youth and families at the centre of all decisions
- Wherever possible, collaborating with families to create consensus based solutions and only go to court when absolutely necessary to ensure the safety of children
- Ending the fiscal year with a surplus which allowed us to pay off the organization’s historical debt and reinvest into service.

When you look up synonyms for resilience, you will find words such as strength, spirit and flexibility. These words describe the children, youth and families we work with. They also reflect our staff, foster and kin families, volunteers, board members, donors and partners in our community. On behalf of Hamilton Children’s Aid Society, thank you for helping us to provide service to those who need it.

Safety and Well-Being

At Hamilton CAS, 98% of the work we do with children, youth and families is in their homes or community. By working with families early, we can often provide support and connections to resources in the community to help families thrive. We are excited to share two stories of this excellent work in action.

Early help and support changes family's opinion of CAS

After previous involvement with the child welfare system, a couple who were pregnant with their second child were fearful of working with Hamilton Children's Aid Society. They were very open and honest about their past experiences, including that they had been unable to care for their first child who ended up being adopted by another family.

They worried that they would be automatically judged because of their history, and assumptions would be made about their ability to parent. After meeting with their worker at Hamilton CAS, the couple identified supports in the community including Public Health and their church. The worker remained involved with the family to provide ongoing support for over a year after the baby was born. At no time, were there any concerns identified regarding the safety of the child and the parents are still actively engaged with their community and their church.

The parents were willing to share their story because their feelings about the child welfare system and children's aid have totally changed. "We want others to know that you can work together with the society. Our goals and the goals of the agency were the same – to ensure our daughter was well taken care of and was a happy, healthy child. We are no longer fearful of CAS and are grateful for the support we received. Our workers listened to us, spoke to us with dignity and respect and gave us hope. We did not feel judged based our past. We would willingly call Hamilton CAS if we needed help, knowing our concerns would be listened to. We appreciate that we were given a voice about our own lives and an opportunity to show we could be good parents."

Helping a family through the challenges of COVID

Recently, the agency received a call from Hamilton Public Health about a family with two children who tested positive for COVID. Their illness made it difficult for them to care for their children and they contacted public health directly as they didn't have any other supports to turn to in the community.

Staff from CAS and public health worked together to ensure the children were checked at a hospital. Public Health provided the family with groceries from the foodbank and the society provided formula, groceries, and medication. Given these exceptional circumstances, the society planned to pay for a community professional (PSW or nurse) to go to the home and assist with caregiving. Fortunately, the parents soon felt better and were able to care for their children. The family shared, "we are very thankful for the help provided, and we really appreciate it." While working with this family, CAS staff outreached to multiple community resources for support and many challenges were identified including a high demand for nurses, the need for isolation of staff following services to the family, and lack of staff fully vaccinated. While the family got the support they needed, the agency and public health continue to work together on solutions to address some of the challenges families are facing in extraordinary times.

The family continues to stay in touch with the worker through texting, sending videos and pictures of their family, their daughter, and their recent marriage. They have shared pictures of their daughter's first day of school, riding her new bike, and even a video of her in a play at church!



Permanency and Potential

Helping youth involved with Hamilton CAS to reach their full potential is a priority for the agency. Some key elements of youth success include health, education, transition to independent living and a strong sense of self and belonging. Two positions at Hamilton CAS – a youth success coordinator and an educational liaison – help guide this work.

Meet Aliyah

Aliyah has always dreamt of a career in policing. At the age of 17 – inspired by her dreams and interest in criminology – she applied to the Community Justice program at Niagara College.

Already living on her own, Aliyah had concerns about how she would pay for her schooling. “I had many bills to pay for, and although I was working while attending school, I still struggled to pay for everything.”

In April 2020, Aliyah applied for a post-secondary bursary through the Hamilton CAS Bursary Program. This program allows the agency to provide Extended Society Care (ESC) youth with financial support during their schooling.

“The bursary gave me a chance to focus on my studies and achieve my goal of graduating with honours. It also helped me pay for the required textbooks as they can get quite pricey!”

The bursary helped Aliyah in a big way – she is set to graduate this month and has already applied to the Ministry to become a Correctional Officer.

“I am grateful for the support I have received through CAS, I can’t wait to get started on my career!”



*“You can help **resilient and determined** youth just like Aliyah! By donating to the [Bursary Program](#), you are providing youth in care with financial assistance in their educational expenses, allowing them to focus on school.*”



Permanency and Potential Continued

Siblings find forever home through adoption

One of the guiding principles of the agency's strategic vision is enabling children and youth in care to find permanency and reach their full potential. Having children stay with their birth parents or kin is always the goal, but sometimes this is not possible, and adoption is the best option. The following story highlights a collaboration with another children's aid society that resulted in a forever family for three brothers.

In the fall of 2020, the agency was working with a sibling group of three brothers ages 13, 11, and 8 where reunification with family or being cared for by kin were not options. The children were quite clear they wanted to have a family and be adopted.

Collaborating with another child welfare agency, family was identified as a potential match for the siblings. After learning about the brothers, it was evident the family wanted to be the ones to provide them with their forever home. Their boys' excitement was palpable when they learned about this family.

Together the foster parents, the worker from the other agency, the adoption worker at Hamilton CAS and the adoptive parents collaborated to set up regular virtual visits. Everyone got creative when coming up with ways to make the visits engaging as possible and to facilitate the building of a relationship. The adoptive parents went above and beyond with the virtual visits; cooking together, playing games together and just "spending time" online with one another.

On the Family Day weekend, the agency arranged for the family to come to Hamilton to visit the boys and meet them in person, creating a weekend full of excitement with plenty of smiles, laughter and firsts for the boys. Arrangements were then made for the boys to travel and see their future family again and get a sense of their new home, creating more wonderful memories. In March 2021, the boys left Hamilton for the last time and were placed with their adoptive family.

This whirlwind process came together with incredible speed and grace because of a lot of hard work by many individuals who were motivated and committed to seeing the process through and getting these boys moved on to permanency. The collaboration with a partner agency and open communication with the adoptive family created a successful process and ensures ongoing support can be provided to these boys as they transition and adjust to their new family and new home.

"The journey that these children have been on, and continue to be on, is inspiring and heart-warming. I feel truly honoured and blessed to have been a small part of their story and proud to have been a part of the team of people that made it happen." – Cynthia White, Wendy's Wonderful Kids Recruiter at Hamilton Children's Aid Society

"The words that come to mind about this collaboration are seamless, supportive, engaging, child focused and hard work. The dedication to ensure a positive match, positive transition and ensure that the family has support during the transition phase as been exceptional." – worker, partner CAS



Engaged and Inspired

Sometimes, initiatives happening within the agency fall under more than one area of the agency's strategic vision. The agency's guiding principles of engaged and inspired as well as strategic partnerships are both reflected in the following article on student placements which are overseen by the agency's Human Resources Department.

Future leaders in child welfare

While the pandemic has created some unique challenges with student placements, Hamilton Children's Aid Society has maintained its commitment to continuing to provide a learning environment. Within the last five years, a total of 80 placements have been offered and 15 graduates were hired.

A variety of student placements are offered in accredited programs including Bachelor of Social Work, Master of Social Work, Social Service Work, Child and Youth Work, Legal Office Administration, Office Administration and the Law Practice Program. The majority of placements facilitated at Hamilton CAS are within the BSW and MSW programs. A total of 63 placements were completed in the last five years. Students are provided with direct supervision by a Child Protection Worker, an orientation to the agency and the various service units.

The program enables front-line staff to enhance their own professional skills as leaders sharing their knowledge, skills and experiences. "I never really had an interest in being a field placement supervisor, but the opportunity arose, and I decided to do it," says Sanila Habib, Child Protection Worker, Flex Team, Placement Supervisor. "My experience was positive as I was lucky to have very good students that were extremely patient and willing to learn and be outside their comfort zone. Being a student during the pandemic is hard, and I give these students a lot of credit for getting through it."

Most recently Hamilton CAS has worked towards strengthening its collaborative relationship with the Internationally Educated Social Work Professionals (IESW) Bridging Program at Ryerson University. Providing these positive placement experiences and outcomes have contributed to career success in the social service sector where internationally trained individuals are able to obtain positions that are reflective of their education and experience.

"Hamilton Children's Aid Society's contribution and commitment to the field, to the students learning, and to the IESW Bridging Program, is exceptional and immeasurably appreciated," says Ellen Bercovitz, Coordinator, Field Program for the IESW Bridging Program. "Our work together has been a valuable contribution to the field of child welfare and to our agency. Maintaining our commitment to promoting equitable workplaces has helped to bring equity and inclusion goals to life as we reduce the individual and system barriers faced by IESW's in employment."

Smitha Thomas, graduate of the IESW Bridging Program and now an agency Child Protection Worker shares; "I graduated with an MSW from Maharaja Sayajirao University, India. I came to Canada in 2018 and completed the Ryerson University's Bridging Program for Internationally Educated Social Work Professionals to acquire the Canadian perspective of social work practice. After completing the program, Hamilton Children's Aid Society offered me the position of Family Services Worker, a role which enables me to work with my clients based on the principles of Anti-Oppressive Practice and Anti-Black Racism. Hamilton CAS is an inclusive and equal opportunity employer that recognized my talent and experiences regardless of where I received my initial training."

Over many years, long standing partnerships have been cultivated with provincial, national and international universities and colleges such as McMaster University, Mohawk College, Wilfred Laurier University, Ryerson University, University of Windsor and the University of Buffalo. Some of our partners graciously shared their experiences while working with the agency.



Engaged and Inspired Continued

Janice Chaplin, Field Education Co-ordinator and Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Work

Student placement opportunities help to shape and assist in producing graduates with the potential of future leadership within child welfare, successfully working in the system while also having the ability to think outside them. The Field Education Program at McMaster University School of Social Work greatly values the longstanding, strong partnership we have with Hamilton Children's Aid Society. Staff have always been very supportive of our students. The collaborative and reciprocal relationship we have enables students to benefit from the experience of a field placement hosted by the agency. At the same time, students bring their classroom learning into the agency. This reciprocity leads to strong student experiences and helps establish the organizational leaders of tomorrow who will transform child welfare for the future! Hamilton CAS has been one of several local CAS's that have partnered with us to create a Child Welfare Pathway for BSW students at McMaster. It is these kinds of relationships that leads to creative responses in delivering service through education. We look forward to our ongoing work together!"

Vicky Webb, Field Placement Specialist, Social Service Worker Program, Mohawk College

"For many years, The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton has partnered with Mohawk's Social Service Worker program by hosting our students in their Family Visit and Parent Support Programs. Consistently our students have expressed appreciation for the vocational learning opportunities offered, such as developing an analytical approach to documentation, working within a strengths-based model to recognize barriers and diversity, along with employing the critical thinking and active listening skills essential to a successful client interaction. Students have also honed their employability skills through active participation during team environments, along with displaying accountability and self-initiative by completing their workload. It has often been said that field placement is at the heart of a Social Service Worker program. We recognize how closely your experiential opportunities align with the professional and ethical standards of our program and are grateful for our partnership, as the CAS co-educates our future professionals."

Strategic Partnerships

With Strategic Partnerships an identified area of focus for Hamilton Children's Aid Society, we continue to cultivate relationships with partners in the community to support ongoing work at the agency and improve services to children, youth and families we work with. In 2021, we welcomed Donika Jones to the agency as Director of Equity, Inclusion and Community Development to provide strategic leadership to ensure that the principles of anti-oppression and anti-racism are integrated into all aspects of the agency's activities. She shares some of her thoughts on how can continue moving the agency's equity journey forward.



Building partnerships and finding ways to work alongside community organizations that support Indigenous, Black, racialized, and LGBT2SQ+ children, youth and families as well all equity deserving individuals who are at the intersections of gender, ethnicity, age, religion, ability, class, race, sex, etc. is integral to informing and improving the way we work with children, youth and families. Through these partnerships we will be able to shift our approaches, so we are more attuned and responsive. We will also be better positioned to connect community members to existing organizations in Hamilton (and vice versa) through our work thereby continuing to strengthen and support children, youth and families.

As we recognize and acknowledge the history and the harms we have caused as a sector, address the overrepresentation of Black, Indigenous and LGBT2SQ+ children and youth in care, and honor our promise to Truth and reconciliation, we reaffirm our commitment as an agency to do the work, to embed equity in our work, and work in equitable ways. To do this, we will look internally, identify our oppressive practices and come to terms with areas and practices that need to shift to improve as an agency and create an environment that supports staff and moves us along our own equity journey.

There is much work to be done, but we anticipate and hope that we will continue to strengthen and enhance the community partnerships we have built and create new partnerships that will enable us to support the community and the children, youth and families in Hamilton.

Recently, I had the opportunity to meet with a colleague from Hamilton Pride. We identified opportunities to support Pride events, but also support ongoing work at the agency. We both saw value in working together and discussed the possibility of collaborating moving forward as partners. Although we haven't clearly defined what this will look like, we are open to co-developing something that will move the work forward. As an agency, we welcome the opportunity to work alongside any other community organizations that are interested.

Last year in our Community Report we shared a story on the agency's partnership with Empowerment Squared. In November 2020, the organizations [jointly announced](#) further steps in the partnership including co-locating and a pilot program to provide early help and intervention services to meet the needs of racialized families working with Hamilton CAS. We are excited to share additional information on this pilot – The Family Support Program.



Strategic Partnerships Continued

Family Support Pilot Program

When the partnership between Hamilton Children's Aid Society and Empowerment Squared was initially developed, members of the Black community identified the need for a network system which would enhance their parenting and provide ongoing support. They asked for child welfare to acknowledge and value their cultural approach to parenting and to educate them on parenting in Canada.

That is where The Family Support Pilot Program comes in. This program has been created so that CAS and Empowerment Squared will work collaboratively to meet the needs of families. "By working together, we can expand the programs offered through Empowerment Squared to families working with CAS, and to the broader community," says Leo Nupolu Johnson, Executive Director, Empowerment Squared.

The program will provide culturally aligned services with a goal of supporting newcomer children in their own homes and communities or assisting with reintegration of children back into their home or in their community when children need to come into care.

After working together with CAS and Empowerment Squared, families will know what community-based supports are available, how to access services in their community and feel more supported and more confident in navigating these systems. "Our hope is that after working with our organizations children and youth will thrive as parents feel validated and empowered in their parenting role," says Veronica Bennett Shaw, Supervisor of Hamilton Children's Aid Society's Racialized and Newcomer Team. "The Black and racialized community will build confidence and create their own network of support for their families."

Family Support Program Guiding Principles

Acknowledgement

- To recognize that each family is unique and possess diverse and valuable knowledge
- To respect where the families come from and their process of settling to a new country

Support

- To provide an environment where parents feel supported and connected to other individuals with similar experiences

Prevention

- To provide families with educational content that enhances their knowledge of the child welfare system
- To provide families with the necessary community supports to help prevent future CAS involvement

Trust

- To promote a professional relationship built on trust, respect, and transparency
- To provide an environment where families feel welcomed, engaged and comfortable to share

Educate

- To facilitate learning opportunities that are family oriented and culturally appropriate

Navigate

- For families to gain actual knowledge that increases their confidence in navigating new systems



Continuous Improvement

Part of the society's strategic vision is to provide quality service, a key element of continuous improvement. Through this vision, we saw an opportunity to redefine how our clients, staff, the community and other professionals experience us. We are making a commitment to developing a customer service model which aspires to raise the bar of how we deliver service.

Committed to customer service

At Hamilton Children's Aid Society, we are using our vision and strategic goals to help us develop a customer service model with principles and core competencies that will illustrate our passion and commitment to the safety and well-being of children.

This is an opportunity to redefine how clients and external parties experience the society whether it is through child protection services, collaborative services, community programs or simply through their interactions with us. It is important for us to have measurable goals for customer service to be accountable to those we work with.

Part of developing this model includes providing others with an equitable opportunity to share feedback. This will be done through listening tours, surveys and consultation with key stakeholders. It is important for us to understand how we can serve our customers better and to ensure the voices of those we work with, foster and kin families, volunteers, our community and our staff are heard.

The model will extend to the atmosphere within our building to create a welcoming environment. Our customer service principles and competencies will incorporate our key values such as equity, collaboration, and professional excellence. Part of this framework also includes a formalized process to hear complaints and concerns from families we work with. This holistic approach to customer service will touch each aspect of the work we do and help us to continually improve the experience of those whose lives we touch.

Resources and Sustainability

This guiding principle ensures that valuable resources are in place to support service outcomes and ensure financial sustainability

Grateful Hearts

In 2020, we revised the agency’s holiday program and launched Grateful Hearts – a program that reflects the diversity of our community, and has been made available to support all families, no matter how they celebrate. At Hamilton CAS, we are committed to equitable outcomes for the children, youth, and families we serve and serve families of diverse faiths and traditions. Funds raised were used to provide cards to families to empower them to make their own purchases based on their own needs.



The Grateful Hearts program:

- Empowered 293 families to make their own purchases for the holidays
- Provided families with \$35,750 in PC and Giant Tiger gift cards
- Supported 450 adults and 724 children, supporting a total of 1,174 individuals

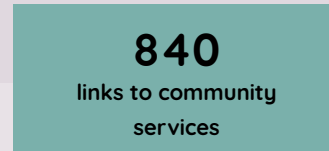
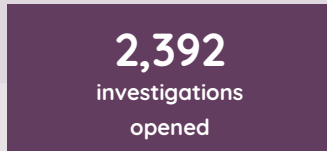
There is no better measure than direct feedback from the families we support. Families supported through Hamilton Children’s Aid Society’s Grateful Hearts program shared the following;

“The Grateful Hearts program helped out a lot. It helped us get groceries. During the holiday season, money is always tight, and this helped me and my family. Receiving gift cards made me feel better than someone else buying stuff for me. It allowed me to buy gifts for my own family.”

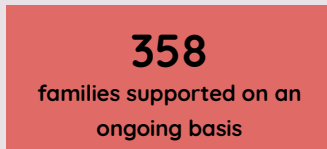
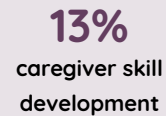
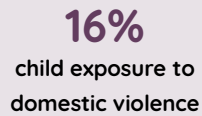
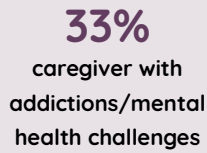
“The Grateful Hearts program helped with getting a few things that I wouldn’t normally be able to buy. We were able to buy a good quality ham for our Christmas dinner, one with a bone, which is something we cannot usually buy. I enjoyed the gift cards because I could purchase what my family needed, and I was able to buy what I knew my kids would use and enjoy.”

A heartfelt thank you to all our donors who made this program possible! Your generosity is appreciated by the children, youth and families that we serve. We look forward to continuing to expand this program to support families celebrating various holidays throughout the year.

2020-2021 Stats at a Glance



Top 3 reasons for working with families:



2020-2021 Financials

Hamilton Children's Aid Society has reported a surplus for the fiscal year. The surplus will be used to pay off the accumulated historical deficit from child welfare operations. We are in a strong financial position to ensure financial sustainability and to promote the agency's strategic vision.

	2020-2021 (in '000s)	2019-2020 (in '000s)
Total Revenue	50,832	48,652
Total Expenses	47,175	48,744
Surplus (Deficit) for the year	3,657	(92)

This is a summary of details in the 2020-21 audited financial statements prepared under Public Sector Accounting Standards (PSAS) and audited by MNP LLP. [Contact us for a full audited financial statement.](#)

Expenses - Breakdown by Category (%)

