



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

2022-2023 COMMUNITY REPORT

Rooted in community





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.

Message from Bryan Shone and Denise Christopherson



We are happy to present the Hamilton CAS Report to the Community for 2022-2023. The agency's work continues to be driven by our 2019-2024 Strategic Vision. We have achieved many successes and overcome a number of challenges this past year and we wish to thank our many partners including our dedicated staff, foster caregivers and kin families, local community partners and volunteers.

Hamilton CAS is in the process of implementing the 360 Family Engagement model of service by increasing the involvement of families – children, youth, family networks and community – in planning and decision making. In the coming year, we will be working to increase the number of family meetings that include family and community supports as identified by the family served and increase family and child or youth inclusion and voice in service planning. We are happy to report that as part of this work there has already been a significant decrease in the number of families being taken to court and 98% of the time children and youth are safely maintained in their homes and communities.

When children and youth require safety planning that includes coming into care, Hamilton CAS prioritizes permanency and reunification. A Family Based Care committee including front line staff, management and foster parent representatives has been working together to establish decision-making principles to support family-based care. This includes the safe return of children to their family or kin, and if this is not possible, to have children remain in foster placements within the Hamilton community whenever possible.

Hamilton CAS has also been working on an initiative to reshape and better communicate our strategic vision and strategic plan to families and stakeholders. This work will be launched this fall. Hamilton CAS took the time to engage with all stakeholders including community families, youth, foster and kin families, staff, the board of directors and community partners to identify their communication needs and expectations.



While community service supports continue to reopen following the COVID 19 pandemic, many challenges continue to exist for families, children and youth in the Hamilton community. The need for mental health and developmental community services has continued to rise over the past year and community residential programs remain at reduced capacity. As a result, some children and youth in care, as well as in the community, have experienced delays in treatment. Hamilton CAS has experienced increased costs due to these delays and challenges, resulting in an agency deficit.

A new provincial funding formula was introduced by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) in November 2022, resulting in a significant budget reduction in each of the next two years. To prepare for these reductions, the agency had to make the difficult decision to initiate layoffs to offset these costs while still ensuring that mandated services were maintained. We are confident that through these proactive steps, the organization is well positioned for the coming year, and we will continue to review our volumes and budget regularly to support services provided by Hamilton CAS.

From September 26 - October 21, 2022, the agency participated in the inquest into the death of Devon Freeman. We are thankful for the many lessons the inquest has taught us and are currently in the process of implementing the recommendations made by the jury. Hamilton CAS has updated a number of policies and has been working with the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation in developing a communications protocol which is currently being finalized. Work is also underway with Hamilton Police Service and Lynwood Charlton Centre in order to implement the inquest jury's joint recommendations.

We hope you can take a few moments to read through the stories below to gain a better understand our role as a partner in the community dedicated to children, youth and families in Hamilton. Some highlights of our strategic vision in action include:

Safety and Well-Being – Collaborating with our partners at Hamilton Regional Indian Centre to provide better service to a family involved with Hamilton CAS

Permanency and Potential – Establishment of a Youth Advisory Council to empower youth to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives and a focus on family based care



Engaged and Inspired - Continuing our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion through removing barriers in our recruitment and selection process and building a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community

Strategic partnerships - Community engagement anchored the rebranding project to ensure the agency's brand reflects our commitment to changing our approach to service and reflects the organization's strategic vision, guiding principles, commitment to equity and inclusion and commitment to collaborative community relations

Continuous improvement - Development and integration of a positive culture statement to promote a culture where everyone is welcomed, heard, respected and valued and launch of PolicyTech to update agency policies and ensure they are accessible, clear and routinely reviewed

Resources and Sustainability – expansion of the Grateful Hearts program that empowers families to make their own purchases during the holiday season to include supporting families through Ramadan

The Board of Directors continues to champion and support the work of the agency. Through a governance review, the Board is modernizing its structure and integrating equity, anti-racism, anti-oppression and Truth and Reconciliation into its work. A number of subcommittees have been established, and work is ongoing to review and update board policies and bylaws. This work will continue to strengthen our governance structure for years to come.

In closing, we would like to acknowledge, our staff, foster, kin and adoptive families, volunteers, board members, donors and partners in our community who have continued to work together to ensure we can provide essential services and support to children, youth and families in the Hamilton community. We look forward to another successful year in 2023.



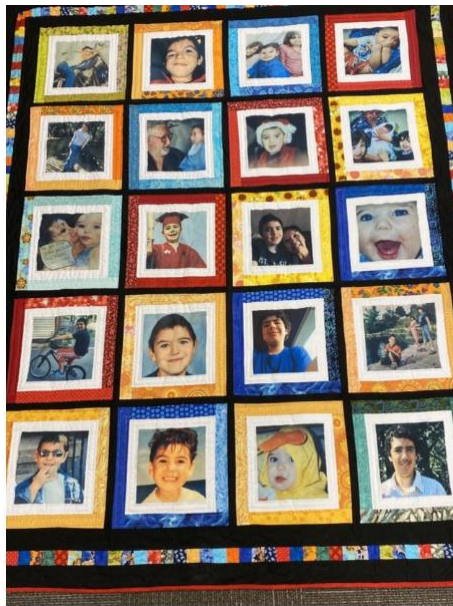
Message to families we serve

Hamilton CAS is committed to supporting you and your children safely in the community by building partnerships with you, your family members, important people in your lives, and the local community. Our priority is to advocate and access the support you need and build on the individual strengths of each family. We recognize that we have not always provided service in the way that works best for you and have been working hard to build upon and develop an approach that is focused on engagement. We recognize that this is a journey but also know that this is the right way to do this work. We appreciate that we cannot support families without engaging and listening to you, children and youth and the community. Our commitment is to work in partnership to identify what is going well, where there might be some worries and then develop plans to address the worries. We look forward to our work together as a community in the coming year.



Honoring Devon Freeman

Devon (Muska'abo – his spirit name) was a member of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation. He was smart, funny and resourceful. He was polite and kind, loved cars and working with his hands. Devon was a son, a grandson, brother and friend.



Devon and his family's involvement with the Children's Aid Society of Hamilton and numerous community mental health services is extensive and complex. Devon was raised by his grandmother Pamela Freeman. Ms. Freeman did her very best, and for years advocated for, and participated in, services to get Devon help, specifically access to mental health services. No child or youth should have to come under the care of a children's aid society to get the mental health support they need.

In October 2017, Devon, who was a crown ward (now Extended Society Care), left Lynwood Charlton Center- Flamborough Program, a non-secure youth mental health facility, where he was residing. In April of 2018 Devon's body was found on the property of the facility and an autopsy report confirmed that Devon had died by suicide.

In 2020, the coroner called an inquest into Devon's death. Hamilton CAS worked together with Devon's family, the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, and 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.



Learning from the inquest process

Devon's passing was a terrible loss and Hamilton CAS acknowledges that the system failed Devon, his grandmother Pamela Freeman and his community, the Band of Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation. We are truly sorry. As an agency we could have done better. Devon has taught us many lessons and will continue to teach us for years to come.

The role of Children's Aid Societies is to help families and children by connecting families to communities and community services at the right time. Families who need help are best supported in their own homes through early assistance and prevention programs. With the proper funding of community services and early help initiatives, families like Devon's would have been able to receive timely supports resulting in reduced need for child protection services.

We listened and learned from the inquest process. Through the inquest it was outlined that there were communication gaps, issues with the transfer of files and information between organizations and workers, and a failure to engage Devon's band. Since his death, significant changes have been made at Hamilton CAS in areas such as training, agency service and communication and partnerships to reduce the risk of a tragedy like this from happening again. Some key changes include mandatory training on Truth and Reconciliation and the harm child welfare has had on Indigenous families, the creation of an Indigenous Team, face to face transfer interviews, and file reviews for all Indigenous youth in care. Together with Indigenous service agencies in Hamilton, the development of the Indigenous Child Welfare collaboration agreement, the development of a protocol for Youth with Complex Suicide Needs, working collaboratively with Indigenous partners on programming, and funding a position at Hamilton Regional Indian Centre to support system navigation and service provision have also occurred. The agency will continue to learn, develop relationships with our first nations communities, and continue to change our work to better serve Indigenous families in our community.

There are also serious system gaps in support for Indigenous youth with mental health challenges. In fact, in the Hamilton community, there are no Indigenous specific residential mental health programs, and a very limited number of programs across the province. The residential services that are available are funded as outside paid resources rather than funded as mental health residential services. When working with Indigenous youth, residential treatment options should be Indigenous run and informed with Indigenous specific programming and staff so that youth can remain in their local community, connected to family,



culture and local supports. These programs should support the involvement of the band and provide a holistic approach to care including the family and community in providing care and support.

A holistic approach to how we support children, youth and families with complex needs is essential. Removing children from their homes to access treatment does not support best outcomes for a youth or their family. Indigenous youth placed in urban settings with no connection to culture is not the answer. We need to enhance communication with bands and support them to have the capacity to work with partners and agencies. We will work in partnership with Devon's family, his nation, the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation and partners in the community to implement recommendations that would reduce the risk of a tragedy like Devon's death from happening again and honouring the lessons that Devon continues to teach us.

The path forward

On the final day of the inquest, the jury presented [75 recommendations](#) to prevent similar tragedies like Devon's from happening again. Work is underway at Hamilton CAS on these recommendations, and we wanted to share one example of collaboration with the Band of Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation.

One recommendation (#43) was to develop a communications protocol with bands and First Nation communities. Hamilton CAS staff traveled to Georgina Island to meet with the band, review the existing protocol and customize it for Hamilton CAS to strengthen the agency's work with bands and First Nations. "It's really important to build this relationship and strengthen communication to improve how we work together in the future," says Santhosh Kuriakose, a child protection worker helping to lead this work. "As a worker, I got to experience first-hand the realities of limited access to resources that those living on Georgina Island face." "It really makes you understand what we take for granted," adds Dorraine Mitchell, a supervisor who is working with Santhosh on formalizing the communications protocol. "To honour and repair our work with Indigenous families, we need to act and not just say we will do something. This includes reaching out immediately to a band or First Nation when working with an Indigenous family. We also need to apply Devon's principle consistently so Indigenous youth working with child welfare get the chance to return to, and experience, their First Nation community."

A full report on the work the agency is doing on the recommendations has been provided to the Ministry and a group of staff who worked with Devon will be helping to guide this ongoing work.



Safety and Well-Being

Children and youth safety and well-being will be increased within the family through good assessment and planning, capacity building and accessing the assets of the family and the community.

Working Differently: The power of community and relationship

The following story, written by Sarah, one of our child protection workers on the Indigenous Service Team, highlights the importance of community connection and collaboration as it relates to best outcomes for children, youth and families and how as a child welfare system we cannot or should not do this work in isolation.

Sasha* and Nick* and their two children had been involved with child welfare in the past due to issues surrounding family violence. Nick had previous challenges with alcohol use and felt judged and unheard so did not participate in service planning. With no engagement to address concerns, the safety plan for the family included Nick being fully supervised with his children.

When the agency began working with the family again a few years later because of worries that Sasha was using drugs and not doing well, Nick was not initially included in service planning. Instead, a safety plan was made for the children to stay with their grandfather. Nick did not trust the agency to include him in a meaningful way and did not want to participate, other than to see his children at their grandfather's home. A lot of information was missing at first about Nick and his role in the family. This changed with a connection to community supports.

Nick identified as First Nations, however due to circumstances in his early life, he did not know of a connection to any specific band. He was however very connected to the urban Indigenous community in Hamilton and regularly participated in programming at the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre (HRIC). A worker from Hamilton CAS contacted HRIC and asked for support in meeting and working with both Sasha and Nick. This connection allowed for a safe space for Nick to share more about himself and it was learned that he was actively working on his mental health with the support of a psychologist, that he no longer was drinking alcohol, and he was participating in anger management and healthy relationships programming through HRIC.



Nick also had great culinary skills and training and had been employed as cook for a period of time. None of this information had been included in past assessments about Nick because of the lack of relationship between Nick and the agency.

With the support of HRIC, the agency was able to engage with Nick and Sasha and a plan was developed for the children to return to their care through an Indigenous Dispute Resolution process. Although Sasha had further struggles with substance use, Nick was able to take a lead in supporting Sasha through this and being the main caregiver for the children until things improved. With the support of the Hamilton Regional Indian Centre and the agency, the family was able to move forward together, safely caring for their children with the support of their community.

When I asked Nick how he felt the involvement with the agency went and what he thought what made a difference in the positive outcome he shared, "I think that given my involvement with the Society in the past, I was very non-compliant but later learned the benefits of community. My community made me secure in making better strides with the Society. Community supports which include family supports, helped build a foundation which inevitably produced the outcome of success in repairing family function/relationships." Nick also shared some important feedback with me directly, "I know you may have always thought I never thought much of you due to you being a CAS worker, but I really did think that you personally, were very influential and supportive. I do remember a time when I called you after business hours and we had a lengthy chat. I'll never forget that but I hope in your career with the agency that you consider other men like me and maybe allow more freedom sooner."

Nick and I ended our involvement by discussing how he had also influenced me as a worker and had taught me a lot. I thanked him for giving me that. Nick's response was, "you're welcome. It was you though, we just grew together I believe."

*names have been changed



Permanency and Potential

Enabling children and youth to find permanency and reach their full potential is vital to our daily work.

Youth Advisory Council empowering youth to have a voice

The Youth Advisory Council (YAC) officially kicked off! Having started this October 2022, the group has been meeting consistently every other week for a few hours at a time, in a Youth friendly space. Each session consists of anywhere from 4-10 youth ranging in age from 16-23 and the group size has been steadily growing since the fall with new members joining each month. The group has been working steadfast during these meetings to reach goals they have laid out for themselves to embody the change they wish to see in the system. The group wants to empower youth to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. By sharing their opinions and perspectives the youth are helping to inform how things happen in the agency and are advocating for changes that will make a positive difference for themselves and others in care of children's aid societies. In addition, the group is focused on providing mentorship and support to other youth in care. The group has also expressed interest in developing foster parent and worker training to help improve the quality of care provided to young people. By collaborating with the agency and other community partners the youth hope to have a meaningful impact on the lives of children and youth in and a part of the system.

The youth advisory council have already taken action to achieve their goals and become more involved in the agency. Youth have been emcee for events like the holiday dinner, are helping plan for Children/Youth in Care Day, and are speaking to an OACAS representative on their experiences to help impact legislature. They are also excitedly working on a guide full of feedback for workers having incorporated their lived experience with CAS which they hope to present at an upcoming staff meeting.

The staff from across the agency are committed to supporting this youth group and the work they do!



Family Based Care – keeping children and youth connected to family and community

Enabling children in Hamilton to grow up in safe, nurturing environments surrounded by family and community is a key principle of the agency’s Family-Based Care (FBC) Working Group. This group is leading the agency’s work to keep children connected to family and community and in Hamilton where they can build their sense of identity and belonging. Other priorities include ensuring decisions about a child’s life are made with them, keeping foster placements short term with safe plans to transition home within 1-2 months whenever possible, and using group care as a last resort. With a value on partnership with foster caregivers, families, and of course their communities, FBC utilizes supports needed that best serve the individuals.

The group has already made progress by connecting with youth not currently in a family-based care setting and strategizing how to put them on that path. Together with their colleagues, this group is working to ensure all staff in the agency are integrating family-based care principles into their daily work to support children, youth, and families.



Engaged and Inspired

Agency staff, foster parents and volunteers will be engaged and inspired in a healthy workplace.

Reflecting the community we serve: Equitable recruitment and selection

Hamilton CAS is committed to the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion by ensuring we remove barriers in our recruitment and selection processes. In doing so, we aspire to build a workforce of competent staff, reflective of the community we serve, with diverse lived experiences to enrich our work with children, youth and families.

To support the agency's vision of removing barriers in the recruitment process so that every candidate has equal opportunities for employment and promotion within the agency, our Human Resources Department, and an internal working group consisting of a cross section of staff, developed and finalized our agency's Equitable Recruitment and Selection Toolkit. This toolkit formalized the agency's approach to recruitment and selection and was designed to help us mitigate bias and expand our applicant pools by increasing diversity in candidates, while adhering to best practices for hiring the best candidate for every position.

A diverse workforce benefits our community both externally and internally. We now have more staff represented from diverse backgrounds and varied lived experiences to share insights and perspectives that influence positive outcomes not only for the families and children we serve, but also for our staff community. In 2019, the agency introduced staff affinity groups which enable employees to come together and build connections based on shared demographic characteristics such as ethnicity. These groups assist the agency in promoting diversity and an inclusive work environment and improve cultural awareness. We have seen membership in our *Black* and *Racialized Immigrants and Refugee* staff affinity groups more than double since their inception through the application of the principles and approaches included in the agency's Equitable Recruitment and Selection Toolkit.

As an agency, we are excited to continue this journey towards building a workforce that reflects the diversity in our community.



Strategic Partnerships

Develop and maintain strategic partnerships within the community and across the province that assist in supporting vulnerable children and families.

Hamilton CAS partners with the community to launch a new brand

In September 2021, as part of Hamilton CASs commitment to changing its approach to service, the agency initiated a rebranding process which included getting feedback from all stakeholders including staff, foster caregivers, youth in care, families working with the agency, board members/volunteers and members of the community.

Through surveys and community engagement done in partnership with Empowerment Squared and Hamilton Regional Indian Centre, the agency has received valuable feedback from those we provide service to and those we work in partnership with. Understanding how we are experienced as an organization is integral to providing equitable and inclusive service and aligning our work to meet the needs of the community and developing a new brand.

One key area of feedback we received from all stakeholders was that the current name and logo does not reflect the vision of the agency, the service it provides or the community the agency serves. After further consultation with stakeholders on possible name options, Hamilton CAS will be moving forward with a new name – Hamilton Child and Family Supports. Focusing on Child and Family is more inclusive of the range of people interacting with the organization. Using “Supports” is a more holistic, human-oriented way of saying “services” or “aid,” which may feel clinical and impersonal.


The direction for renaming the agency to build on our strategic vision, guiding principles and commitment to equity and inclusion, came directly from feedback we received while engaging with our stakeholders and partners in the community. The new name was actually suggested during one of the engagement sessions! The development of the graphic elements to accompany the new name and logo is underway and will be rolled out later this year. Thank you to those who provided valuable input on the agency’s rebranding project!

Continuous Improvement

Enhance systems to support continuous quality improvement, transparency, and accountability.

Staff create positive culture statement for Hamilton CAS

Last year, staff across the agency worked together to develop and integrate a positive culture statement for Hamilton CAS to promote a culture where everyone is welcomed, heard, respected and valued. The group developed a purpose and principles to guide their work. We are excited to share the statement all staff agreed to, and are accountable, for.



We are all responsible, committed, and accountable to each other to promote a culture where everyone is welcomed, heard, respected, and valued.

We commit to challenging and interrupting behaviours of racism, discrimination, disrespect, intolerance, harassment, and bullying as we strive toward an environment of learning, care and respect for each other; a place where the voices of equity-deserving individuals will be heard and acted upon as we continue our journey of healing, inclusivity, equity and growth.



PolicyTech creates roadmap for success

Policies and procedures provide a critical roadmap for staff and volunteers. As part of the Strategic Vision Continuous Improvement pillar and 2022-23 operational goal, we developed a set of guidelines for updating our 400+ policies and began extensive review and revision. In the past, policy writing had been mostly reactive to legislative changes, but we wanted a more inclusive, proactive approach that aligns with our mission and values. We designed and implemented a curriculum to train all supervisors and directors in policy writing with an equity lens. This approach sparked thoughtful collaboration. So far, we have been able to retire over 100 obsolete or redundant policies, and all remaining policies now have an identified owner and review schedule. Close to 50 policies are either already updated and approved, or close to it.

One of the lessons we learned from the Devon Freeman Inquest is that having policies in place does not mean everyone has read them or is following them. We have taken critical steps to provide staff with easy, organized access to our policies in a new system, PolicyTech, which is also being adopted by other children's aid societies across the province. This online system makes it easy to find the up-to-date versions of policies in one place and has a digital attestation feature so supervisors can keep track of who has read, reviewed and signed off on a policy. By ensuring our policies are accessible, updated, clear, and reviewed routinely, we help ensure every member of our staff can rely on these roadmaps for their day-to-day work.



Resources and Sustainability

Ensure that valuable resources are in place to support service outcomes and ensure financial sustainability.

We all have grateful hearts

The Grateful Hearts program is a holiday support program that reflects the diverse needs of our community and encourages the individualism of faith, traditions, and practices. The Grateful Hearts program helps empower families to make their own purchases during the holiday season, no matter how they celebrate!

With the growth of the program in early 2022, Grateful Hearts expanded to support families observing Ramadan. Widened the program to support families throughout the year, as opposed to only during December increased the reach we had to those in the Hamilton community that are being empowered. This allows more people to purchase their own gifts, groceries, supplies, toys and more based on their own needs.

Last year with the help of our community the Grateful Hearts program:

- Empowered **356 families** to make their own purchases, no matter how they celebrate
- Supported a total of **546 adults** and **885 children**
- Provided families in the Hamilton community with **\$66,375** in Wal-Mart gift cards

A heartfelt thank you goes out to our donors and businesses in the Hamilton community who continue to make the Grateful Hearts Program possible. Your generosity is felt warmly by the children, youth and families we serve.



2022-2023 Stats at a Glance

4,874

calls about the safety & well-being of a child

2,550

investigations opened

854

links to community services

Top 3 reasons for working with families:

20%

caregiver with addictions/mental health challenges

19%

child exposure to domestic violence

15%

physical force and/or maltreatment

817

families supported on an ongoing basis

89%

Families working voluntarily with us

99%

Families supported in their home or in the community



206

children in care



156

youth in Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY)



127

children/youth being cared for by kin



98

foster families



267

staff



44

volunteers



Expenses - Breakdown by Category (%)

2022-2023 Financials

Hamilton Children's Aid Society reported a deficit for the fiscal year. Costs have increased due to a number of high cost youth in care.

	2022-2023 (in '000s)	2021-2022 (in '000s)
Total Revenue	54,386	52,683
Total Expenses	55,339	50,768
(Deficit) Surplus for the year	(1,013)	1,915

This is a summary of details in the 2022-23 audited financial statements prepared under Public Sector Accounting Standards (PSAS) and audited by KPMG LLP. A full audited financial statement is available on-line.

