



# *Listening to the voice of the child*

*Family & Children's Services  
of the Waterloo Region  
Agency & Foundation*



**Annual Report  
2019-2020**

# Land Acknowledgment

As part of our continued commitment to learning our truth and reconciling our history and relations with Indigenous people. We need to acknowledge the sacred land that has been a site of human activity for at least 15,000 years.

It is the territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. They were caring for this land long before settlers arrived.

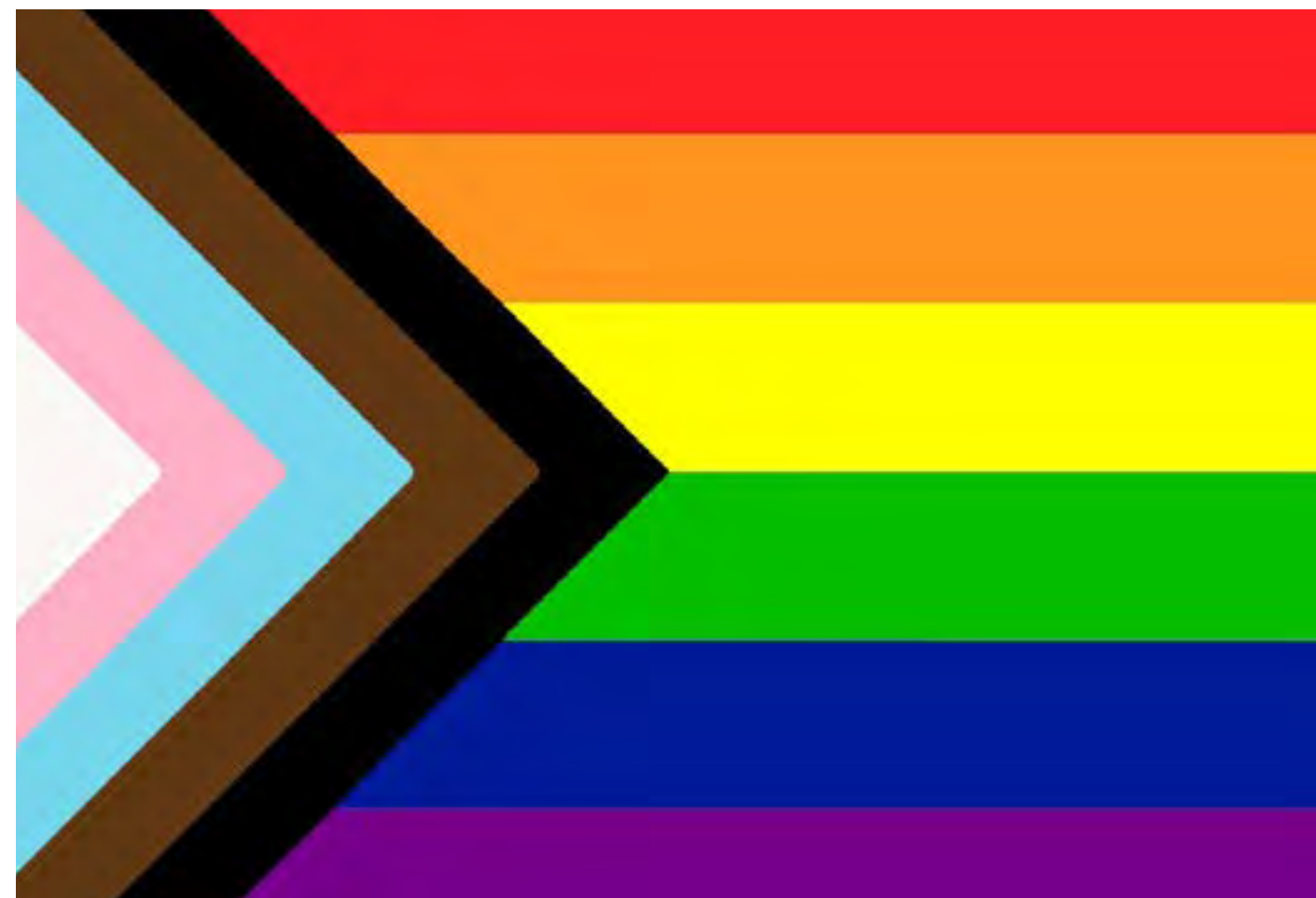
The territory we are now on is the subject of the Haldimand Tract or Halimand Proclamation, a decree that was signed in 1784. The Proclamation promised the Six Nations unending sole ownership of the land for 6 miles/10 km on either side of the Grand River.

We have a history of trauma and cultural genocide towards Indigenous people that we all play a role in reconciling. We all need to live our historical commitment to the Two Row wampum belt, “each row representing a parallel river, down which the respective vessels of each people travel, independently but in mutual support of each other”.

This is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful for the opportunity to meet, work and respect a path of mutual support on this land that rightfully belongs to the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples.



The Haldimand Tract Treaty Covers 10 km on both sides of the Grand River  
(Above)



## Our Commitment to Equity and Inclusion

Given what is happening in the world today, we would be remiss to not acknowledge that we are all learning... or better stated, that we are all unlearning.

We all play a role in affirming our collective commitment to change and to address racism and oppression, specifically anti-Indigenous and anti-Black racism due to the overrepresentation of these groups within our system. Let's also make time to recognize June is National Indigenous History Month, June is also Pride Month and there is so much information being shared externally to expand our empathy and understanding. To be an ally in addressing racism, we need to ensure we are not taking over, talking over; but walking alongside and doing everything in our privilege to amplify the voices of the unheard or muted in our systems. We need to listen and learn and then act.

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-Tara Henderson, adapted from work by Dr. Kathy Hogarth

# Message from the Executive Director of the Agency & Foundation



Karen Spencer

Executive  
Director

Agency &  
Foundation

Recently, I was able to meet with a group of young people who had been involved with our agency. Some had been or were in care, others were receiving services and support from our staff. They shared their experiences with us and provided some guidance on what they would do if they were running the agency. I valued their input so much.

Because that meeting had such an impact on me, I chose “The Voice of the Child” as the theme for both this Annual Report and our Annual Meeting. This reflects our growing understanding of the importance of listening to children and youth and creating an environment where they feel they can safely and honestly share their feelings, concerns and hopes.

I learned what most children and youth have to tell us is how important their families are to them. Even when there are problems and challenges at home, they still want those family connections. I heard some of their successes and about the loving foster parents in their lives. I also heard the pain of being removed from a parent and the feeling that the agency was keeping them apart unnecessarily. I heard the pain of youth who were harmed in our system. The experiences of our children and youth are not always easy to hear... but, we need to listen and learn and to challenge ourselves to ensure that children involved with our agency are receiving the help they need from us.

We are learning the importance of adapting our service response to meet the unique needs of children and families. I am grateful for the work of our cultural navigators for both the Black and First Nations, Inuit & Métis communities, who teach us so much about the importance of honouring culture and heritage and the important work of addressing systemic racism within our organization. This year Sonia Dennis joined the Executive Team as our Director of Equity and Community Based Child Welfare Services. Sonia has developed an excellent equity training plan for our staff and management.

We know that we cannot do this work alone and relationships in the community are vital to helping children and families. Our staff are co-located across many sites in Waterloo Region and we collaborate and co-deliver a number of services for children, youth and families.

Looking beyond Waterloo Region, we've strengthened our relationships with the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) and with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Minister Dunlop toured our agency and spoke with some of our staff and a kin parent, gaining, we hope, more insight into our work. I have also been a participant on the Ministry's Modernization working group, exploring ways to recreate child welfare services to better meet today's needs.

Nicole Bonnie, the CEO of OACAS, also visited our agency and spoke with staff and a youth in care. Nicole has been an advocate for anti-racism and equity practices in child welfare for many years. We strongly support this work, and join child welfare agencies across the province in imbedding anti-oppressive/anti-racism practices into our work.

The Foundation was one of the successful applicants for Social Venture Partner's “Perfect Pitch” program. The knowledge we gained in this program helped the Foundation to be clear about its role in preventing child abuse and neglect and in helping parents and children heal from the impact of inter-generational trauma. I am proud to say that our Foundation has experienced one of its most successful years and I want to thank the many donors in this community who support our children, youth and families.

As we neared the end of our fiscal year, we were hit by an unexpected challenge: the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that went along with it. As an agency, we are part of the Region of Waterloo pandemic planning. Seeing first-hand how we have all come together makes me proud to be part of this caring community.

I want to thank our staff, volunteers, Board members, foster and kin parents, donors, colleagues in the community and especially the children, youth and families we work with. I've seen many creative approaches, much compassion and thoughtfulness, and patience and understanding from all sides, even when we can't help feeling a bit frustrated.

I hope that when the pandemic ends, we remember what we've learned about working together in new and creative ways. Those lessons include understanding the value of listening to the voices of the families we serve, and in particular, listening to and taking action based on what our children and youth tell us.

Karen Spencer  
Executive Director

## Message from the President of the Agency Board of Directors

Thank you for taking the time to review our 2019 Annual Report. Based on the positive response that we received on the design and content in 2018 we have returned with a similar look and feel for 2019. Thank you to our Marketing team who make the magic happen!

It is difficult to begin without first acknowledging the incredible impact that COVID-19 is having on our nation, our country and in our own community. This pandemic has impacted all aspects of our daily lives, and as caring adults, it is important for us to understand how the pandemic has, and will continue to, affect our children and youth – our most vulnerable.

Our Agency's response to COVID-19 has been tirelessly lead by our fearless senior management team who quickly mobilized as a Crisis Management Team. Their focus has been to ensure that our agency was in the best position possible to provide supports to our children, youth and families and to ensure that our staff and volunteers were supported and safe. On behalf of the board of directors, I want to acknowledge and thank these leaders for navigating through the uncertainty to ensure the wellbeing of our children and youth. Our sincere appreciation goes to all of our staff who played their very important part in our agency's response to COVID-19. Additionally, thank you to all of our community partners who have collaborated to wrap around all of our kids during these times of severe need.

If ever there was a time to support the voices of children and youth, it is now. It is likely that during the pandemic, young people are feeling a loss of control, a loss of relationships and a loss of social activities. We are trying to help by finding creative ways to ensure that they have a voice in what is happening around them. Having a voice allows young people to feel valued and important and maintain a positive image as it relates to self-esteem and self-worth. I encourage all of us to find creative ways to allow children and youth to have their voice as we begin to support our community during the pandemic recovery process.

It is hard to imagine that there was life before COVID-19, but there was! There were many milestones in 2019 that I will fondly share including the 125th Anniversary of Family and Children Services of Waterloo. Staff implemented an equity based training program that included participation from our entire staff team. We have come to understand that training is only one piece of equity work and have therefore hired additional staff resources on our Two Row Team and an additional African Canadian Culture Navigator. Equity, diversity and inclusion will be the guiding principles when work on our updated Strategic Plan begins.

With that, may you find joy every day. Take care of yourself and yours.

Thank you!



Lori Palubeski

## Message from the President of the Foundation Board of Directors

To our generous and caring community,

This past year has been one of change. Dr. Jill Stoddart returned to the role of Foundation Manager. Jill was previously with the Foundation in 2014 and has been with the Agency for 23 years. We are thrilled to have Jill back! She brings her vast child welfare knowledge, research and a commitment to innovation to our work. As a result, we have made some significant improvements in our operations and fundraising so we can focus on important initiatives to prevent child abuse and neglect. Jill's ability to understand of the work the Agency has allowed us to refine and focus the work of the Foundation to meet the needs of the children and families we serve. This has also allowed us to streamline processes between the Agency and the Foundation.

We've also added Sydney Tricand as Events and Community Awareness Coordinator; Sydney brings a wealth of expertise including experience at the Sick Kids Foundation. Jacqueline Morris has brought her excellent skills to her new role as the Foundation's Finance Specialist. We are also pleased to welcome Carol Kumalo as our Executive Assistant.

In the fall of 2019, Foundation staff and Board members participated in a two month program called [Perfect Pitch](#), sponsored by SVP Waterloo. The volunteers at SVP Waterloo know that "every charity has a story to tell. Perfect Pitch helps them tell it." The way an organization shares its story is critical. Charities do so much good work, yet it can often be difficult to tell the story well. We embarked on a two month journey to refine the Foundation's message, ending in a very different place than when we started. While challenging, the two months of dialogue made us really think about our "why", something we hadn't had the chance to do recently. The end result? You can watch the video [here](#).

Lastly, I want to talk about COVID-19 and the road ahead. The Foundation entered the pandemic on a strong financial footing. With Jill's guidance and action plans in place, we continue to support the children, youth, and families we serve. Obviously, we have been forced to pivot in many directions, but we remain committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and to providing support when and where needed for families. Our goal is to make sure we are well-positioned for many years to come and we won't let this period of disruption with COVID derail our plans.

Thank you to all of our amazing Foundation staff and our volunteers who have worked tirelessly to further our mission and goals. Without you, none of this would be possible. A big thank you to the Agency staff as well. Your support has been incredible and your dedication to this often difficult field is inspiring.

On behalf of the Foundation's board of directors, I wish you all a safe and happy summer.

Sincerely,



Peter Izzio



Lori Palubeski

President

Agency Board of Directors



Peter Izzio

President

Foundation Board of Directors



# TREE OF HOPE

*make something good happen*

facsfoundation.org

Every year, the Waterloo Region community generously supports the Tree of Hope Campaign. This campaign includes the much-loved CHYM Tree of Hope Radiothon, which for 27 years has been a major part of our fundraising success.

In November and December, donations from the community fund year-round programs and services that can prevent child abuse and neglect. But while the generosity of the community didn't change, this year's campaign did!

We held our launch for the Tree of Hope campaign at CF Fairview Park in conjunction with their annual tree lighting event. The launch kicked off not only the campaign but also an online auction of festive trees. Individuals, groups, and businesses decorated small evergreen trees using the theme "Hope." In total there were 17 trees and the online auction raised \$2015.

We also had the experience of being one of the charities that participated in Bingemans Gift of Lights Walk nights. Over 900 people came out on Sunday December 1 to see the gorgeous light display!

And the biggest change of all was that the CHYM Tree of Hope Radiothon moved to The Family Centre for a live broadcast and a day of activities for the whole family! Employee volunteers from Family & Children's Services welcomed members of the community to events and activities throughout the day including Coffee and Donuts with First Responder Chiefs; story time with Kitchener Public Library; meet and greets with CFL player Chris Ackie and KW Titans Coach Cavell Johnson; creating art with Pamela Rojas; and a great chili lunch thanks to Ray of Hope Inc. Morning Glory Café & Catering. We can't thank the amazing team at CHYM enough for their ongoing support and for the exceptional way they care about children, families, and this community.

Santiago Grande, The Family Centre Manager, shared his thoughts on hosting the event – you can read all about it on the next page.

**Overall, the Tree of Hope Campaign, through the generous support of the community, raised a total of \$315,370!!!**

## Radiothon @ The Family Centre



The Family Centre is a beautiful, vibrant space designed for learning, belonging, reconnecting and sharing. It is a space for nurturing hopes and dreams which transform into innovative and collective grassroots-level initiatives, activities and programs aimed at sustaining the wellbeing of children, youth and families. With our focus on community and people, we were delighted to host the 2019 CHYM Tree of Hope Radiothon.

Hosting the day-long event offered Resilience Project and Family Centre partners, volunteers, and community the opportunity to work together around a common purpose – to create a space for participation, belonging, and a sense of hope. And of course, to raise funds to support children, youth, and families!

It was delightful to see many days of hard work and planning lead to the meticulous implementation of activities on the day of Radiothon. The pride of Family Centre partners as they worked together was clearly visible. The partners had an opportunity to share their work with the community and interact with each other and visitors.

Throughout the day we welcomed more than 500 people to the Family Centre, many of them visiting for the first time. The celebratory spirit was visible in the hallways and gym where families participated in various activities. The different activities and encounters linked individuals to the larger goal of the wellbeing of the whole community. The event really opened the door to future visits and engagement in community programs.

It was heartwarming to notice friends and families greet and reconnect with one another. Many community members enjoyed seeing the CHYM team in action, broadcasting live from the atrium. The presence and support of the leadership, staff and partners showed how important this day was to the whole community.

The Radiothon made me believe in the spirit of mutually supportive collective events and activities to support our growing community of children, youth and families.

Santiago Grande  
Family Centre Manager



96.7 CHYM FM Team



Kids at the Family Centre Fun Fair



Trees of Hope Auction



Shaka Zulu and the AFRO Drumming Group



Close up of a Tree of Hope up for Auction



Group waiting for the results at the end of the Radiothon

# Welcome to the Family Centre

Opened in 2011, The Family Centre is a place for learning, recreation, sharing, and connecting with others. It's a place to work together to support and strengthen children, families and communities.

Our partners include:

[African Family Revival Organization](#)

[Bereaved Families of Ontario](#)

[Canadian Aweil Youth Association](#)

[Coalition of Muslim Women of KW](#)

[Eritrean Islamic Community of KW Region](#)

[Grand River Métis of Ontario](#)

[Hummingbird Centre for Hope Inc.](#)

[KidsAbility](#)

[Kidsport Kitchener Waterloo](#)

[Levant](#)

[Muslim Social Services](#)

[Our Place EarlyON](#)

[Somali Canadian Association of Waterloo Region](#)

[The Arab Women of Waterloo Region](#)

[White Owl Native Ancestry Association](#)



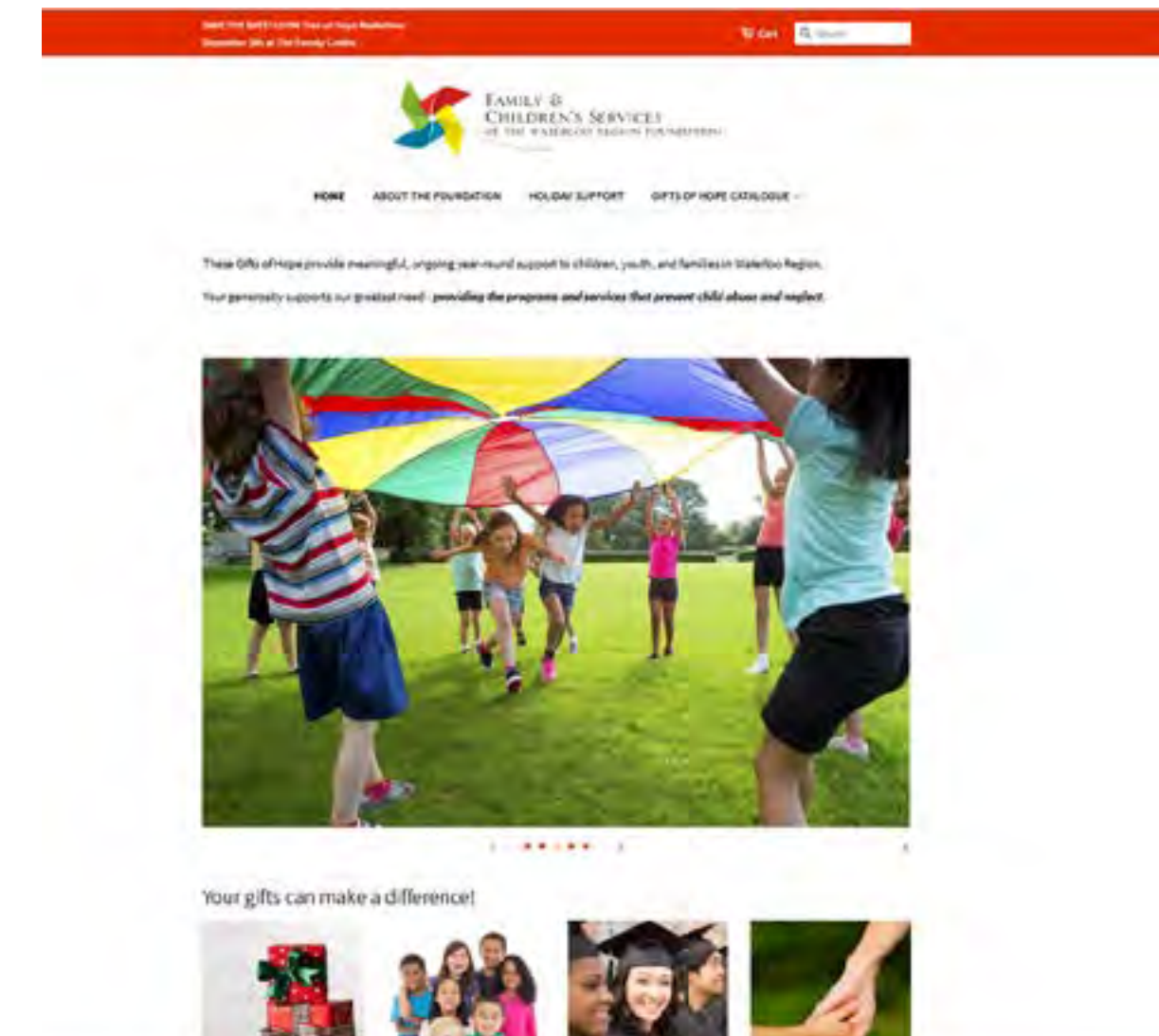
Main Lobby



Eid al Adha Celebration  
August 2019

The Family Centre offers rental space for meetings, trainings, conferences and events. For more information, click [here](#).

# Online Gift Catalogue Launched



The Foundation entered the world of e-commerce last fall with the opening of our [online gift catalogue](#) on Shopify.

The shop offers the community a showcase of all the different ways to support children, youth, and families through a gift to the Foundation. For individuals who had traditionally given in-kind items, it was a way to replicate the shopping experience while directing gifts to the areas of greatest need. "Shoppers" could make a donation to support a wide variety of programs and services such as giving kids the chance to be kids through art, music, theatre and camp experiences; providing scholarships for youth; and meeting emergency needs of children, youth and families facing hardship and adversity.

Throughout the Tree of Hope Campaign, the online gift catalogue raised \$25,000 to help children, youth, and families in our community.



# The Resilience Project

Since 2018, the Foundation, along with a generous grant from the [Lyle S. Hallman Foundation](#), has supported [The Resilience Project](#). Over the last year, the project has continued to develop and refine resilience-promoting programs and activities for the children, youth, and families we serve.

## Programming highlights include:

- Art Fusion Friday, during which youth created a large outdoor mural in Cambridge, and a travelling mural of self-portraits.
- Youth team raised \$1182 for Habitat for Humanity and participated in the Youth Build for Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region
- Youth Night

In early 2019, we held a series of meetings with youth programming staff to discuss previous initiatives. We discovered that:

- Youth need a safe and youth-friendly space;
- Youth in care require distinct programming, including programs specifically for Indigenous and Black youth in care; and,
- That youth engagement in the planning of programs is essential.

Thanks to funding from Lyle S. Hallman Foundation, the current Resilience Art space will be renovated to make it a larger, multipurpose room for Art, Music and Theatre programs. This will enable us to turn the previous music room into a dedicated space for youth.

To address the needs of youth in care, and specifically Indigenous youth, a partnership between the Two Row Team and [White Owl Native Ancestry](#) has been initiated. Funded by the [Trillium Foundation](#), this initiative is helping to preserve and keep alive Indigenous cultural heritage and will impact the lives of 250 people in the community (Full Story Further in the Report).

And lastly, as we are committed to listening to youth voices, we surveyed youth to gather their input on future resilience programming. At the Youth Night held in February, 50 youth came together to enjoy a taco dinner and had the opportunity to try out six different programs. They then shared their feedback with us via the survey. We look forward to continuing to implement their suggestions in the upcoming year!

[Contact us](#) if you would like the mural to travel to you!



## YOUR GIFT MADE GREAT THINGS HAPPEN

for children, youth, & families

Your support provides programs and services that prevent child abuse and neglect and keep families together.

Together we are breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma and giving hope today for a better tomorrow.

191  
KIDS TO CAMP



39  
SCHOLARSHIPS



300  
FAMILIES  
ACCESSED  
ITEMS FROM THE  
DONATION ROOM



200  
RECEIVED  
HOLIDAY  
SUPPORT

102 YOUTH IN CARE, 98 ADULTS, YOUTH, & CHILDREN

# 1511

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES  
HAD OPPORTUNITIES TO  
STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE THANKS  
TO PROGRAMS OFFERED BY THE  
NINE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS OF  
THE RESILIENCE PROJECT



[www.facsfoundation.org](http://www.facsfoundation.org)



# 360 Family Engagement

360 Family Engagement is a new model we have developed to bring together a number of important frameworks that have been guiding our practice. It takes the concepts from theory into action, and helps us actively listen to the voices of children, youth and families, guided by these principles:

## Model Practice Principles

### 1. All families will receive an equitable service.

We recognize that our involvement has impact. We need to address systemic oppression and the barriers it creates for families.

### 2. We engage families and their networks in collaborative planning and decision-making.

Collaborative work with families, bands, and communities builds sustainable safety and better outcomes. Relationships can create change and heal trauma.

### 3. The voices of children and youth matter.

We assess risk with a focus on the voice of children and youth, their safety and cultural safety, well-being, and permanence.

### 4. We aim to work collaboratively and transparently with families.

We are clear with families about our worries and set goals together to ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth.

### 5. We respect families as the experts in their own lives.

We seek to understand their experience, build on their strengths, and customize our approach to meet their unique needs.

### 6. Standards guide our work with families.

## The Agency by the Numbers

FACS Waterloo Service Volume (*)				
		2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
intake	Total number of calls received by the agency	9,714	8,705	8,645
intake	The number of child protection calls to the agency	6,060	6,296	6,306
investigation	Number of Investigations completed	3,922	2,784	2,772
ongoing	Total number of ongoing families served	1,640	1,468	1,117
cic	The average number of children in care	433	355	346
	Children placed in care	303	223	170
cic	Children Leaving Care	323	285	225
kinship service	The average number of children placed in kin service	148	163	168
adoption	The number of adoptions completed	49	45	30

\* including AOP

## Foster Families

For our 2019 Foster Parent Celebration event, our Children's Services staff asked children and youth living with foster families to share why they think their foster parents are stars. Here are some examples of what they said – some very heartfelt, some very specific and some that made everyone smile!



*"I like going places with him and he's really nice."*

*"My foster parents are awesome. They will always be there for me and love me."*

*"They support everything that I do."*

*"They love me, they take care of me, and they are very awesome."*

*"They are thoughtful and respectful and make very yummy food."*



*"They are always there when I really need them."*

*"It's how she makes tacos."*

*"They are very understanding and encouraging, and very funny, and I love them."*



## Fostering is challenging in the best of times

During the pandemic, foster parents are facing extra challenges – caring for the children while working at home, helping them with their schoolwork and finding ways to help them keep in touch with their parents. We appreciate the efforts made by the foster parents and the workers supporting them during these tough times.

Being a foster parent can be challenging, but also rewarding. We continue to look for people interested in providing temporary care for children who can't stay safely with their families. Training is provided as well as funding to cover the children's costs.

If you are interested in fostering you can:

**Call 519-576-0540**

Visit [www.fosteringkids.ca](http://www.fosteringkids.ca)

Email [foster.adoption@facswaterloo.org](mailto:foster.adoption@facswaterloo.org)

# African Canadian Cultural Navigators

In 2019, the agency hired a second African Canadian Cultural Navigator (ACCN) and now both Michele Ho Sue and Ajirioghene Evi work with their colleagues through training and case consults to help them understand how Anti-Black racism affects children and families in our community. They do community engagement with agencies and associations who service Black families and are developing programs for Black youth in care. All of these areas are to achieve better outcomes for Black children, youth and families.



Ajirioghene Evi (Left) Michele Ho Sue (Right)

## What is OMOP?

OMOP is an Affinity group for Black staff of African descent working at the Agency. Affinity groups provide participants the opportunity to discuss emotional topics related to sharing identity characteristics such as race, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs. The name OMOP means Out of Many One People.



The goals of OMOP are:

- \*Create a space for African Canadian staff to discuss and share their Black lived experiences within and outside the organization;
- \*Deepen member's relationships with one another; Connect with the Black Community around services and programs for children, youth and families;
- \*Assess programming needs and develop culturally appropriate programs for Black families;
- \*Develop and facilitate trainings for staff, volunteers, and caregivers around anti-Black racism by supporting the application of such knowledge to support better outcomes for Black children, youth and families.

## First Black History Event

OMOP hosted its first Black History event at the Family Centre on February 03, 2020 featuring Dr. Kathy Hogarth as the keynote speaker. Dr. Hogarth also facilitated a discussion among all those present. This very successful event was well-attended, and video recordings of the speakers and the group discussion were made so that staff unable to attend could watch them later.

Part 1 – [The Launch & Keynote Presentation](#)

Part 2 - [Discussion](#) requires a password 'facs01'

# Providing Community-Based Services

As we move through another year Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region continues to work with our community partner organizations. As the African Proverb states "it takes a village to raise a child". At Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region we believe that this village of Waterloo Region is best to care for their own children. Family and Children's Services of Waterloo is working alongside organizations sharing resources and knowledge to strengthen child safety. Over the last year Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region has continued our partnerships with Women's Crisis Services, the Child and Youth Advocacy Centre, The Family Violence Project, Reception House and Woolwich Counselling Services. We are excited that we are working with Carizon Family and Community Services, Community Development Program and Kinbridge Community Association on how we can develop further community partnerships.

Sonia Dennis - Director of Equity and Community Based Child Welfare



# New Privacy Legislation Changes How We Seek Consent, Manage Information and Give People Access to Their Records

As of January 1, 2020, all Children's Aid Societies in Ontario, including Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region, became subject to the newly-proclaimed privacy legislation which is Part X of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017. All Children's Aid Societies are also now responsible to the Privacy Commissioner of Ontario for how they manage the personal information (PI) they collect about families, youth and children.

One key point is that personal information belongs to the individual, not the agency. This new legislation gives the individuals and families we serve more control over their information and what we collect, how we use it and who we disclose it to.

Some of the areas of change under Part X include:

**Giving Notice:** When we collect personal information about someone, we must give them notice that we may use or disclose this information in accordance with Part X. This notice can be provided verbally or in writing.

**Consent:** There is no longer an age for consent. This means we will at times be seeking consent from children, and listening to their wishes about how we collect, use and disclose their information. People can withdraw their consent, and can put restrictions on their consent. Consent must be informed, so we must ensure people understand the purpose that it is being collected, used and disclosed for, that they can give, withhold or withdraw consent and the consequences of doing so.

**Capacity to Consent:** With no age limits, we need to determine if someone has the capacity to consent. Any capable person can consent (even children) which lines up with the Child, Youth and Family Services Act's emphasis on children's rights and the voice of the child.

**Collection, Use and Disclosure of information:** There are some pieces of personal information we can collect without consent, and some we need consent for. We should only collect as much personal information as is needed to do our work. We should collect information from the individual directly, with their consent, unless this is a situation where the Child, Youth and Family Services Act authorizes indirect collection or collection without consent. People must know how and for what purpose we will use or disclose their information. This will give the families we serve more ability to decide for themselves what information we can collect, use and disclose when we are not mandated to do so.

**Access to Records:** Since personal information belongs to the individual, NOT THE AGENCY, and people have a right to request a copy of their record.

**Correction to Records:** Part X gives individuals the right to not only request access to their records but to make a request for a correction to their records if something is inaccurate.

**Storage and Retention:** Part X also governs how we keep records, where we keep them and how we can retrieve information to build a file for access and disclosure requests in a timely fashion. This provides additional protection to an individual's personal information from being seen by those who do not have a right or purpose to view the information.

**Breach Management:** The agency is required to follow guidelines on what constitutes a breach. If a breach does happen, we must address the breach, put in safeguards to prevent future issues, and notify the individuals involved.

# What Does a Volunteer Driver do During a Pandemic?

Seventeen years ago, newly-retired Rob came across an ad looking for volunteer drivers. He thought to himself "They want drivers? I love to drive! I really love to drive!" and decided to apply.

Seventeen years later, Rob, who is married to Carolyn and is the father of two adult children, has covered about 650,000 miles taking children to schools or for access visits – and he loves it. He's enjoyed getting to know the children and being able to see some of them grow up over time.

Then the COVID-19 virus came to Ontario. Schools were closed and in-person access visits cancelled. What was a volunteer who loves driving to do?

Rob was asked if he'd help the Salvation Army get food hampers to families in need. He instantly said yes, and has been delivering them ever since – up to six deliveries per day. He has high praise for the efficiency of the Salvation Army staff and volunteers. "They are very well organized," he says. "They will work it out so all the deliveries I get are in Cambridge, or all in one part of Kitchener."

Care is also taken to meet the needs of each family. For example, Halal meats are provided for Muslim families, and families with pets can receive food for their animals too.

The delivery process respects the current requirements for social distancing. Rob will call the family to let them know he's on his way, and then call them again when he places the food at their door. Then he waits, at a distance, until they come out to retrieve the food (usually one box and two bags). Everyone smiles and waves and Rob heads on to the next family.

Drivers have also been delivering hampers from the Family & Children's Services of Waterloo Region Foundation to youth supported by the agency, as well as art kits to children enrolled in Resilience art programs taught by Pamela Rojas.

Once the pandemic is over, Rob will be back transporting children for Family and Children's Services. "In a perfect world, the agency would call and say 'we don't need you any more, all the kids are safe at home,'" he says. "But until then, I will keep on driving."

## What drivers mean to the children:

The first little girl Rob drove was five years old. She always called him "Mr. Rob."

After he'd been driving her to and from school each day for about five months, she got in the car one day and said "Mr. Rob, I'm going to be adopted!" He told her he thought that was wonderful.

Then she asked: "Will you still be my driver?" No, he told her, her new parents would be driving her after the adoption. She was quiet for several minutes. Then she said "If I happen to see you on the street one day, could I give you a hug?"

Rob said his eyes were inexplicably damp. He replied: "I'd be disappointed if you didn't."





**Natalie Persad**

**Child Protection Worker**

**Face-to-Face Team Member**

## Meet Natalie: A Member of the Pandemic Response Face-to-Face Team

Natalie Persad admits she tends to see the positive side of life. For example, she loves the challenge of doing investigation work for the Agency. “I love it,” she says. “I love not knowing what the day is going to bring, and meeting different people all the time.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Ontario, and the need for a team to handle face-to-face meetings was announced, Natalie stepped up quickly. “It seemed natural to me to volunteer for this,” she explains. “I’m in a very privileged minority when it comes to COVID-19 – I live alone, have no children or elderly parents to be concerned about. And I am healthy. So I was eager to take this on.”

Natalie has worked at Family and Children’s Services of Waterloo Region for just over three years, but she brought plenty of experience and expertise with her when she joined the agency. She worked at Toronto CAS for 10 years and Native Family and Children’s Services of Toronto for two, as well as nearly a decade of work with Violence Against Women services in Peel Region.

In April 2020, Natalie joined one of the two Face-to-Face teams. Each team, in turn, takes on all the cases requiring home visits for two weeks, then sticks to at-home work for the next two weeks while the other team manages the face-to-face meetings. The need for a face-to-face meeting is determined in consultation with supervisors and the service director.

For a scheduled meeting, Natalie will call the family in advance and ask screening questions about symptoms, recent travel, etc. If the meeting is unscheduled, those questions are asked when she arrives at the front door.

“When we go out, we have goggles, masks and gloves,” Natalie says. “We knock on the door, stand back, and ask the family if they are comfortable having us come in. We are there to serve them, to help them, so it’s important to ask and be respectful.” How has that worked out? “For me, the families have been nothing but welcoming,” Natalie says. “Often I am not their usual worker, but they’ve been fine about having me there. That humbles me – in a time where so many are worried or scared or struggling, they have welcomed me.”

The team has weekly meetings to provide feedback and discuss any issues they’ve encountered. Natalie says these have been helpful and positive.

She also has high praise for the Agency’s management team. “I have been impressed by how quickly management pivoted and made these changes in how we work. They’re very focused on keeping us safe, and keeping the families we serve safe. It was all implemented so quickly, and with great attention to detail. We even had videos on how to wash our hands.”

Natalie adds that, despite her positive nature, she’s not oblivious to the stress and suffering that many are experiencing during this time. “It is a hard time for many,” she acknowledges. “But for me, I feel very supported by the Agency and grateful to be in this position to keep doing the work I love.”

## Two Row Understanding Service Team



### Indigenous Youth Group

In September 2019 through funding received through a Trillium grant, we were able to start our first Indigenous youth group for children and young people ages 12 to 30. This group has provided young people connected with the agency an opportunity to meet and learn from our Indigenous community healers and knowledge keepers. The group met every 2 weeks for dinner and then hands on teachings. We have had a great response from the youth and have over 20 youth registered for the program.

Some of the highlights of our program have included a medicine walk in the fall, a winter Owl walk that included calling owls and having them respond, learning the traditional ways of making maple syrup taught to our youth by Knowledge Keepers associated with White Owl in Kitchener. We have also had teachings about traditional medicines and crystals from an Indigenous community member from Six Nations. The group has made traditional medicine pouches, dream catchers and traditional cookies.

The group members have become very close and supportive of each other. The young people speak proudly in-group of their Indigenous roots and are keen to learn each new teaching. The youth group has provided youth involved with our agency a new opportunity to learn and connect with the greater indigenous community. Together as a group, we have attended community events such as Feasts, and Powwow.

The Federal Act respecting First Nation, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families came into force on January 1, 2020.

What this means is that as of January 1, 2020, every service provider providing child and family services in relation to Indigenous children will need to follow the minimum standards found in the Act.

This new legislation impacts services being delivered to families by FACS Waterloo by ensuring an enhancement of service delivery to Indigenous children, youth and families.

This includes:

- Respecting the laws, rights, treaties, histories, cultures, languages, customs and traditions of the FNIM people receiving services.
- Taking into account the unique circumstances and needs of FNIM elders, youth, children, persons with disabilities, women, men and gender-diverse persons and two-spirit persons.
- Ensuring that there are no gaps in services for FNIM children, whether or not they live on a reserve.
- Eliminating the over-representation of FNIM children involved with Child Welfare.
- Recognizing how residential schools and other government policies have caused harm and trauma that is still affecting people over many generations today.
- Recognizing how FNIM women and girls have been treated unfairly by child welfare and other government agencies. Because of this they deserve additional supports.
- FNIM children need to be reunited with their families and communities.
- FNIM peoples have the right to self-determination. This means they have the right to govern themselves, including having their own child and family services.
- Following through with the enhanced best interest test for Indigenous children; this includes taking culture and connection to family into consideration when applying the best interest test.

# Our 125th Anniversary

2019 was the 125th anniversary of the founding of Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region. It is a milestone we approach with mixed feelings. We want to acknowledge the mistakes that were made, in particular the decisions made that led to ongoing over-representation of Black and Indigenous children in care. We also wish to honour the many dedicated staff and community members over the years who have responded with compassion and care for children who were in need of support and protection. Today, our goal is to move forward prepared to recognize and learn from past inequities, and doing the difficult work that is needed to make positive change happen.

It's hard for most of us to even imagine life in the 1800s. No cell phones, no cars, no internet. (Also, no indoor plumbing or electricity.) Almost all of Upper Canada (which would become Ontario when Canada was legally made a country) was rural and agricultural, with small towns dotting the major roadways.

The towns in what is now Waterloo Region were still small, but growing: Waterloo had just 2200 residents in 1891; Kitchener (called Berlin at that time) had just over 3,000; and Preston, the largest of the towns that became Cambridge, had under 11,000. And these communities had growing concerns about children in need. On December 11, 1894, J.J. Kelso, a Toronto reporter, gave a public talk. Kelso was passionate about Children's Aid work. He encouraged the citizens of Berlin and Waterloo to form a local branch. Five days later, the Children's Aid Society of North Waterloo was founded as the first Children's Aid Society in the region. Interest grew quickly. By 1908, Societies had been organized in Berlin, Galt, New Hamburg, Hespeler, Preston and Wellesley as well. Each had a roster of local members and a Board of Directors, and was funded almost entirely by donations from the community.

In 1933, the Government of Ontario required all Children's Aid Societies to be incorporated as not-for-profit corporations. Because of this requirement, in 1937 the three Societies in Waterloo County merged into one newly incorporated organization known as "The Children's Aid Society of the County of Waterloo and the Cities of Kitchener and Galt," although sub-committees continued to exist representing the interests of the different constituent communities. This was the organization that eventually became Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region.

This fall, we'll publish a longer and much more detailed history that we hope will increase understanding of the past and the current need for change.



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