



# Annual Report 2020/21

Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region

Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region Foundation





## Karen Spencer, Executive Director



It seems like every year I write this report and talk about the changes in our work and our community. But this past year has been unique... we have spent a full year living through a pandemic. I want to acknowledge that while this has been a challenging year for all of us, the pandemic has impacted us in disproportionate ways, some families have experienced greater hardship and some families have experienced loss.

It has also been a year of challenges, and learning from those challenges, for both the Agency and Foundation.

I want to acknowledge how difficult the pandemic has been for the youth we care for, especially the youth who live independently and at times spent countless days alone during Provincial lock-downs; the children in care who had visits with their parents disrupted; the students who missed their peers and the youth who live in group care and who were subjected to wearing PPE in their own home to keep everyone safe.

The pandemic has affected parents too, both those we work with and the members of our staff who are parents. I would add that not all families are affected equally. We know that Black and Indigenous people were disproportionately impacted by COVID 19. The more marginalized families have faced loss of income, the struggle of helping their children learn while schools are closed, and the stresses of living in crowded households and without their usual supports. ,

Our own staff have had to adapt to working at home, often balancing the needs of their family members and their responsibilities to the families we serve. As an Agency, we have been responsive and have changed quickly to ensure services were maintained, and sometimes improved.

We worked well together, shared information and often resources to ensure needs were met in our community.

I think we have learned that change does not need to take a long time.

My goal is for us to use our learning and apply it to other areas. Let's use this as an opportunity to combat the big issues we have discussed for years – ending racism, discrimination and poverty, and investing in upstream solutions. Based on how we have managed to make big changes through this pandemic... it can be done!

We are taking the first steps towards making important changes with our new Strategic Plan, which was approved by both the Foundation and Agency Boards in February 2021. This is a joint Strategic Plan for the Agency and Foundation. You will find the Plan details later in this Annual Report and I hope you will share in our enthusiasm about our goals and aspirations.

I want to thank our Agency and Foundation Board of Directors for their support and the Ministry for additional resources. I also give a heart-felt thanks to our funders for their commitment to helping where help was needed.

I am tremendously proud and appreciative of our staff, volunteers and foster caregivers, who continued to provide excellent service to the children, youth and families we have the privilege of helping. Your dedication and commitment is outstanding.

And special acknowledgement to those we provide service to... you are resilient, you are strong and it is an honour to work with you.

*Karen Spencer, Executive Director*





## Chris Goss, Chair of the Agency Board of Directors



This has been a challenging year for the organization and for the Board. COVID has forced us to change practices, to grow and to adapt, but through these challenges lessons were learned: lessons about resilience, commitment and capacity.

The Agency continues to do remarkable work and the Board is very grateful to Karen, her leadership team and all the staff for supporting children and families each and every day.

Through a continued and committed focus on evidence-based best practice, programs like 360 Family Engagement and Every Family Has a Voice, the innovative work of the Resilience Project, and by maintaining many effective partnerships; children and youth are supported and kept safe. The work is guided

by the belief that families are strongest when they are together, safe and supported. Kinship Service is a strong pillar.

Your Board remains committed to addressing the over-representation of First Nations, Metis, Inuit and Black children and youth in care. Systemic racism is the undeniable cause. The Board has received and continues to receive learning to better understand and address this problem from a governance perspective. We are working to ensure our Board represents the diversity and the needs of our community. Our support to staff who work with great intention to address this situation is absolute.

Funding continues to remain a focus. The Board has advocated with the Ministry and through the OACAS for changes to the funding model that supports working proactively to keep children out of care, and allocates proper resources to address over the representation of FNMI and Black families.

This year the new strategic plan was developed, and the process drove close consultation between the Agency and the Foundation Boards. I believe these two entities will become more cohesive and efficient in their support of the organization as we move forward. Staff, the Board, and consultants MNP, have created a plan well designed for the future with over-representation and quality of service ingrained in the principles and the actions.

In closing: Karen, thank you, for your leadership in these times of great change, challenge and opportunity. Thank to all staff managing through a difficult year; the Board recognizes how very difficult it was, how amazing you are and the incredible work that you have done.

And thanks to each of you for supporting children and families in our Region.

*Chris Goss, Chair of the Board of Directors, Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region*





## Agency Service Data

<b>Intake</b>	<b>From April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021</b>
Total calls/inquiries	7,526
Calls about Children Needing Help	5,455
Families Referred to Other Community Organizations	595
<b>Investigations</b>	
Completed and Closed	1,664
Completed and Transferred to Ongoing	323
Total Investigations Completed	1,987
<b>Ongoing</b>	
Families Receiving Services at Beginning of Year	605
New Families Needing Services	350
Total Served	955
Families Receiving Services at Year-end	602
<b>Children in Care Under 18</b>	
Children under 18 at Beginning of the Year in Foster Care	247
Children under 16 Who Came into Foster Care this year	104
Children 16 & 17 Who Came into Foster Care this year	20
Children who Returned to Families	114
Children under 18 in Foster Care at the End of the Year	211
<b>Youth in Care 18+</b>	
Youth 18+ at Beginning of the Year in Foster Care	69
Youth Who Turned 18 while in Foster Care or came into Foster Care this year	27
Youth 18+ who Left Foster Care to Live Independently	10
Youth 18+ in Foster Care at the End of the Year	86
<b>Kinship Services</b>	
Children (monthly average)	183
Families (monthly average)	138



## Agency Financial Statement







<b>CHILD WELFARE</b>					
<b>Revenue By Source</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>	<b>Expenses</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>
Province of Ontario	\$52,212,706	\$52,391,185	Salaries and benefits	\$31,516,644	\$31,842,571
Grants from Foundation	163,792	544,495	Child in care and client related	16,711,014	17,169,773
Family benefit and Child Tax Benefit	1,324,620	1,450,262	Operating expenses	4,603,042	3,191,035
Other *	1,116,632	282,998			
	<b>\$54,817,750</b>	<b>\$54,668,940</b>		<b>\$53,830,700</b>	<b>\$52,203,379</b>
*Rebates, interest, miscellaneous income, administration fees					
<b>Summary of Operations</b>	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>			
Revenue	\$54,817,750	\$54,668,940			
Expenses	53,830,700	52,203,379			
Excess of revenue over expenses	<b>\$987,050</b>	<b>\$2,465,561</b>			
<b>SPECIAL PROGRAM FUNDING</b>					
	<b>2020-2021</b>	<b>2019-2020</b>			
Sexual Abuse Treatment Program	\$520,820	\$504,820			
Education Liaison Program	111,114	64,966			
All special programs are 100% expended					

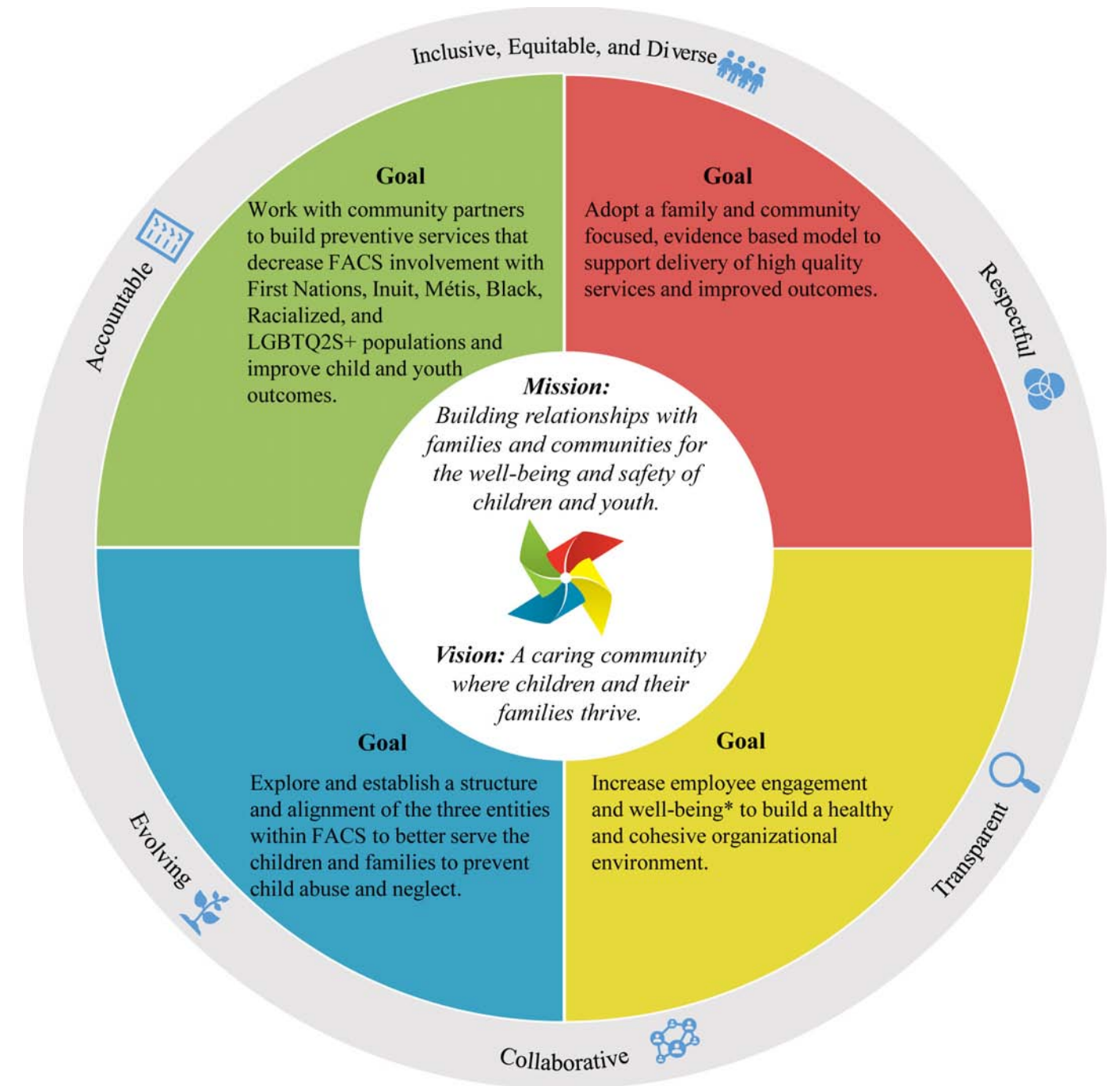


# Strategic Plan

Our new Strategic Plan is a collaborative plan developed by the Agency, Family Centre and Foundation to guide our work for the next five years.

## Our Values

- 
**Transparent**  
 Being open and honest about the activities and actions of FACS Waterloo, including performance and outcomes related to service delivery.
- 
**Collaborative**  
 Working together as a united organization, with partners, and with the community towards common goals that support the mission and vision.
- 
**Evolving**  
 Consistently learning and growing while adapting and responding to a changing environment.
- 
**Respectful**  
 Always treating others in a kind and fair manner.
- 
**Inclusive, Equitable, and Diverse**  
 Creating an environment where all individuals with different abilities, races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and gender identities and expressions are treated with the care that they require.
- 
**Accountable**  
 Accepting responsibility and ownership of actions and being a dependable resource for the community.



## Family and Children's Services Responds to the COVID-19 Pandemic



### What We Did

As reports of the COVID-19 virus causing illness and deaths in Ontario came out, we held our first meetings to discuss the virus and its impact on our organization on March 9 and 11 with a Crisis Management Team being struck on March 17. March 17 was also the day that Premier Ford declared a state of emergency in Ontario.

On March 27, we moved the majority of our employees to working remotely wherever possible. The Family Centre and Cambridge office

closed and the Ardel office was reduced to essential employees only. Our Tech team was extremely busy at the start, implementing technologies and procedures to support a new remote work approach (new policies and procedures were also drafted and adopted).

Leadership staff established regular check-ins with the Union to ensure we were apprised of the concerns coming forward from our employees and to advise the union of the approach and rationale management were taking.

Initially, we worked with families virtually, including access visits. Our first Pandemic plan emphasized health and safety protocols and adopting sanitation practices consistent with recommendations from Public Health Ontario.

We established that our primary sources of information related to COVID-19 would be World Health Organization, Health Canada, Public Health Ontario and our local Health Unit. We sourced necessary PPE based on research and,

when available, ordered supplies directly from OACAS Shared Services Project.

As new information and recommendations came forward, we revamped and adjusted our Agency pandemic plan to meet with the changing Provincial guidelines.

### How We Provided Service

After an initial period of only virtual contact, a Face-to-Face team was created and all in person contact was managed by this team. Employees on the Face-to-Face team, along with our CARE Home staff received pandemic pay from the province for a period of time.

Tech supports – primarily cell phones, but a few laptops or iPads - were provided to youth and families to facilitate access and connections with workers.

As we learned more about the virus, enhanced our PPE usage and explored the impact of virtual contact on service delivery, we were able to move back to all direct service staff providing in person contact within strict safety protocols.

Monetary support was provided for youth, kin and foster families to ensure the needs of children and youth were met during the pandemic

### How We Supported One Another

With many staff working remotely, we developed ways to hold virtual team meetings, initially through Zoom and later using Teams. We also started regular weekly Town Halls to answer questions from staff and hear feedback. By spring 2021, the Town Halls were scheduled for once every two weeks and were still very well attended by employees.

A regular staff newsletter sent to all staff by email provided more information and support.

We offered an on-site flu vaccine clinic that was well-attended.



We provided strong support for flexible hours of work to allow those with young families to manage the competing demands of on line learning for their children. As well, we offered flexible temporary accommodation plans for employees that required an extra level of support.

We did not forget the importance of evaluation. We conducted a staff survey to inform the next phase of the pandemic plan intended to take us from the fall of 2020 to the fall of 2021, and set up an electronic suggestion box for additional feedback and ideas.

We also provided financial support to offset costs for employees related to the pandemic.

## Looking Forward

As vaccines are becoming more readily available, we are reviewing our practices related to safe work strategies. It is time to start thinking about a return to office strategy and also think long-term about our physical space needs going forward.

All in all, the Agency has demonstrated great resilience in the face of tremendous uncertainty. The dedication and commitment of all employees to the Mission, Vision and Values of the organization deserves to be acknowledged and celebrated. “Stronger together” certainly fits for how we as an Agency have managed through an incredibly challenging period in our history.

*Anne-Marie Simpson, Director of Operations*

## COVID Care

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were a lot of uncertainties that led to contingency planning. One of the first priorities was to ensure that children whose parents were too ill to provide care and had no other support network available had a safe place to stay. In April 2020 the agency launched its COVID Care program, which recruited families who were willing to care for children on a short term, temporary basis while their parents recovered. Children placed in a COVID Care home would not be in the care of the agency, these arrangements would be made by agreement between the agency, caregiver and the custodial parent(s). One of the recruiters for this program, **Katrina Howie** shares some of her thoughts and experiences about this program.



### What questions did you ask folks who called in?

We would start with initial screening questions like what experience did they have with kids. A big focus was placed on recruiting teachers and early childhood educators (ECE) who have experience working with children and who were home during the first lockdown. We made sure they were isolating and not traveling, as well as discussing any health concerns for them and their family.

### How was recruiting for this program different from recruiting for foster parents?

Similar to the process for foster parents, we completed background checks (for example, police record and child welfare checks) and interviewed everyone residing in the home. Once those were completed with no concerns identified, we would also do an in person home safety check.

Because of our agency's health and safety policy at the time, only members of the face to face team were allowed in the homes and to meet with people. This required us to be creative, so I would be on FaceTime while my colleague walked around the home and confirmed safety guidelines were met. They



would also have the family sign all of the required paperwork (for example, confidentiality agreement).

#### **What questions were people asking?**

We would get asked what this care was exactly and we made it clear it was not fostering. We had to clarify that these kids were not coming into care, the parents were voluntarily consenting to others providing care for their children while retaining their parental rights, only for families whose health was impacted by COVID-19.

There was a common concern for the children getting a COVID test before coming into the home. In early 2020 it was not always easy to get a test, so often we would tell people that children who were exposed may be placed in their home before a test could be administered.

#### **What kinds of families qualified to be a part of this program?**

One of the families that was approved to provide COVID care had no underlying health concerns, both parents were able to work from home and one of the parents specialized in child development and working with children, especially children who may be going through a traumatic period in their lives. Their home was designed in a way that the child could self-isolate with an adult if needed, that way they could minimize the risk of exposure to the rest of the family. The whole family was also willing to isolate for 14 days when the child came into their home.

#### **What has the last year been like overall?**

It's been busy in recruitment as we have experienced a surge in foster inquiries. Moving to doing many virtual assessments has been an adjustment. I find families have been very overwhelmed with online schooling and I am allowing things to take longer when doing an assessment. It has been great to get more interest, however it is harder to get through assessments, especially when things like the extra risk of COVID-19 exposures come into play and virtual training.

#### **Any final thoughts to share on the COVID Care program?**

It has been refreshing to see the amount of people who called in to see if they could help! We were inundated with calls and it was very heartwarming

seeing the number of people willing to open their home. Seeing the community come together was nice to see. At the height of it, we were getting over 40 inquiries a day. It was too busy for the duty worker, so multiple folks had to step in to help. I would say that is a good problem to have.





## Donna Desgroseilliers and the Two Row Understanding Services Team



In November 2020, Donna Desgroseilliers joined the Leadership Team as the Director of Indigenous Services, supporting the work of the Two Row Understanding Services Team.

Donna has worked at Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region for over 20 years, and previously worked for a child welfare organization in Northern Ontario. Her family has been impacted by the child welfare system and systemic racism, and that experience has solidified her commitment to the development of a service model that places the rights of FNIM (First Nation, Inuit and Metis) at the forefront.

The TRUST team is dedicated to working differently with FNIM families in an efforts to provide a full range of culturally relevant services to FNIM families including prevention, family support, protection services and when absolutely necessary, temporary foster care provisions.

Donna expresses appreciation for the support she receives from the Reconciliation Lead, Danielle Glass, and the Cultural Wellness Lead, Tammy Laundrie, who are also part of the leadership team. She is also grateful for the Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Cultural Advisors who are working closely with the team. Each of them shares knowledge, wisdom, and kindness as they teach about the importance of honoring culture and heritage. Each of them reminds the team of their commitments and the importance of bringing FNIM children back home where they belong.

She thanks each of the staff on the TRUST team for standing tirelessly and with kindness, compassion and heart as they navigate through the challenges of interrupting harmful and racist practices within a child welfare system, even though for many this comes at a cost to them. As well, she thanks the colleagues and allies who prioritize addressing systemic racism within our organization and to work alongside the TRUST team to help move forward our commitments.

Work with community organizations such as The Healing of the Seven Generations, Anishnabeg Outreach, White Owl Native Ancestry Association, Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Management Board, Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre, Guelph Indigenous Services, Metis Nation of Ontario, Indigenous Child Service Management is a key part of the team's strategy. Donna has committed to creating an Elders' advisory committee to guide our work and to hold us accountable.

The team members are committed to building protocols with the FNIM communities who are connected with the children and families who come into contact with our organization, and to ongoing education for all staff, community partners and community organizations.





## Working Through the Pandemic:

Tammy Landrie, Cultural Wellness Lead, says pandemic restrictions often affected the connections they were trying to maintain and strengthen. Even visits between children in care and their families were seriously affected: in one case, a seven-month-old baby had never seen his mother without a mask or been touched by her without her wearing gloves.



“Doing healing circles virtually is much different than doing them in person,” she adds. “It’s the spiritual connection that leads to the healing. Smudging, sweat lodges and healing lodges, pow-wows, feasts – all these important community events have been halted.” Tammy also was concerned about the difficulty in working with community Elders during the pandemic, as the Bands were generally very protective of them.

The Indigenous Pride youth group, which had been very successful and was attracting 20 or more youth to each of the land-based activities, did not readily transfer to a virtual group despite the organizers’ best efforts. This group helped youth learn traditional skills and taught them pride in being indigenous.

Donna Desgroseilliers was pleased that, through the pandemic, the team has been able to develop an Elders and Grandmothers Advisory Council to help guide their work through virtual meetings. Six Indigenous staff have also been hired to work on the team.

Despite these positive steps, the pandemic has also highlighted the need for more resources to provide culturally appropriate services to all Indigenous families. Tammy points out that the Two Row Understanding Service Team provides all services through an Indigenous worldview; when Indigenous families are not able to work with the team they miss some of the essential services they are entitled to. “And we do not have enough staff to serve all the families,” she says.

As well, Danielle Glass has been handling most of the situations where searches need to be done to locate a family’s Band, community or extended family. She and others on the team believe it is essential to have a staff person dedicated to this role who could be a liaison with the Boards. This is especially important because child welfare has played a role in disconnecting families from their communities and hidden family histories.

The team continues to work towards meeting the Agency’s responsibilities towards FNIM families, youth and children despite the challenges.





## Associate Director Sonia Dennis

In January 2021, Sonia Dennis was appointed Associate Director. Sonia is the first Black woman in this role.

Sonia, who has a BA from McMaster, BSW from Ryerson and MSW from Wilfrid Laurier, has been a valued member of Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region for 18 years. She joined us in 2002 as a Child Protection Supervisor then in 2008 became the Initial Response Supervisor. Before joining the agency, Sonia was a front line protection worker at Peel Children's Aid Society and Hamilton Children's Aid Society.

In 2014, Sonia joined the leadership team as a Senior Service Manager. In this role, Sonia lead the work of the Family Violence Project, including having a staff from Women's Crisis Services co-locate in our agency. She

was also involved as a leader in the development of the Child and Youth Advocacy Centre.

Sonia contributed significantly to the development of our agency's anti-oppressive/anti-racism practice. In 2019, Sonia was promoted to Director, and in this role she continued her equity work and was able to make real progress.

Sonia is a trusted community partner. In 2016, Sonia worked alongside a number of community agencies in 2016 when we welcomed and settled over 1300 Syrian Refugees in our community. She is an agency representative at the Child and Youth Planning Table and a member of the Well-being Waterloo Region Systems Change Champions group. She is the lead for the implementation of the One Vision One Voice Framework locally. Currently, she is working on developing co-location partnerships with Reception House and Kinbridge Community Association. She is part of the Domestic Assault Review Team and was previously Co-Chair of that group.

At the Provincial level, Sonia is an OACAS Equity trainer and has contributed to the third phase of the One Vision One Voice Framework.

Sonia lives in Waterloo Region with her partner and their two children.

As she moves into this new role, Sonia emphasizes that she is guided by her belief in prevention services, her commitment to working with the community, and her focus on keeping children in their family networks and communities.





## Service Director Clayton Greaves

Our new Service Director – Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Clayton Greaves, brings years of experience and a commitment to equity and social justice to FACS Waterloo.

Born in Jamaica, Clayton spent the first five years of his life in Kingston, Jamaica. His mother then moved to Canada, and Clayton, with his little brother, moved to rural Jamaica to live with his grandparents. Seven years later, Clayton and his brother were brought to Canada by his mother, where they were introduced to a new family: a stepfather and two older children.

Clayton describes himself as having been a “barrel kid:” one of the children

who were left behind in the Caribbean while the parent or parents emigrated to look for better work and more opportunities. Many of those children, like Clayton, found that their parents had remarried by the time they were able to join them. He says: “It can be difficult to re-connect with parents after many years apart, especially when you also have a new step-parent, plus you are trying to adjust to a new culture.”

Initially, Clayton and his family lived in the Rexdale area of Toronto, a community that was seriously under-resourced at the time. A few years later they moved to Brampton. Clayton attended Central Peel Secondary School where he participated in track and field and basketball.

His high school years were also when Clayton became more aware of his identity as a Black man, and of the ongoing and frequent conflict between the Black community and the police.

After graduation, he attended the University of Windsor.

Two things from his University years: one was that of the more than 200 students in his graduating class, only four were Black. The second was that while most students were complaining about having gained weight at school (the “Freshman 15”), Clayton missed his mother’s home-cooked (and delicious) food and ended up losing a significant amount of weight. “I couldn’t stomach that cafeteria food,” he says.

More importantly, Clayton joined the Board of the University’s Black Students’ Association, and got involved with the activist African Community Organization of Windsor. In that role, he was part of the establishment of the first summer camp for Black children in the city.

After graduation, Clayton moved to Toronto and worked in residential care, including the Yonge Street Mission. “Many of the kids living on the street that we were trying to help had child welfare backgrounds,” he points out. “Group homes in particular were pipelines to the Youth Justice system and from there youth ended up as homeless street kids. And Black youth in particular were falling through the cracks.”

That was on his mind when he was hired by Toronto CAS, where he worked for 13 years. As a Family Service worker on the adolescent team, he advocated for Black families. He saw many of the “Barrel kids” families who had been through the experience he and his brother had; often the children are disconnected from the parents by the time they arrive in Canada, and may have to deal with new step-parents as they adjust to the very different culture of their new country. Clayton worked towards building a framework to work with families in these situations.

Clayton was also part of the agency’s Black Education and Awareness Committee which created programs for Black youth in child welfare. Although Black families were over-represented, resources were not being allocated to meet their needs. Clayton joined the task force that “removed the veil” around the data about Black families in child welfare.

“As we saw this over-representation, the agency talked about wanting to change, but nothing actually happened,” Clayton says. He also saw that Black staff were generally not seen as supervisors or management.

Feeling discouraged and stifled by the Agency’s lack of vision for Black families, he looked for other opportunities, and found one when a position opened up in Nunavut in 2015. While he started as a front-line worker, his experience helped him quickly move into a supervisory and then a senior management role. “Nunavut actually has a rich Black history that nobody knows about, but that you can see in historical photos,” Clayton points out. He was on the board of Nunavut’s Black History Society and helped organize and lead the Black Lives Matter protest in Iqaluit after the murder of George Floyd.

He was also seeing the effects of colonialism and racism on the Indigenous people living in the community and spoke up for them as well. “Systemic racism is not about the individual,” he says.

While Clayton learned a great deal while working in Nunavut, he was also hearing about the One Vision One Voice project and changes that were beginning to happen back in Ontario. “I could see child welfare beginning to understand the trauma that Black families – and Black staff – were experiencing.”

That was part of his motivation to take the position at FACS Waterloo. “I also wanted to be part of building the framework to work towards equity.”

One significant step forward has been the creation of the Harambe Team to serve African-Canadian, racialized and immigrant families. The name “Harambe” is a Swahili word meaning “all pull together” and reflects the team’s emphasis on community. Included in the team are two supervisors, two CSRWs, two Equity Leads, two FCWs, four Investigation/Assessment workers and five Ongoing workers. The focus of the Harambe team’s work will be engagement, empowerment and support, and the principles that guide them are based on culture and community connections.

As well as dealing with the over-representation of racialized families and children, one of Clayton’s current priorities as Service Director – Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is to develop programs for the Rainbow (LGBT2SQ+) community. Working with staff who are part of this community, he hopes to highlight the issues facing Rainbow youth, parents and foster parents and amplify their voices, because these voices are often not at the table, even though we know they are also over-represented in child welfare.

Clayton adds: “I am passionate about child welfare work, and about delivering high quality service, not just for Black families and Indigenous families but for all the families we work with. The approaches we are taking will benefit all families, because our workers will have more competencies and more skills to help them in their work.”





## Update on Staff Professional Development

During the first few weeks of the pandemic the agency made a difficult but necessary decision to pause all classroom-based training programs at the agency. The health and safety needs of employees and Resource Parents along with provincial directives simply did not allow for in-person gatherings of this magnitude. This meant that key strategic training directions on such matters as Indigenous history, equity and family engagement needed to be put on hold.

What this did present was an opportunity; an occasion to forge ahead with training technologies and platforms that had been spoken about for years, but always planned for another day. Within approximately 10 weeks agency trainers were piloting online sessions via Zoom and Virtual Classroom. Curriculums were being adapted for virtual delivery and new training schedules were being planned to re-launch almost all key training initiatives starting in the fall of 2020.

The adaptability of trainers, the focused work of the Human Resource staff and supports through our tech staff and provincial partner, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies has meant the agency is now delivering all previously planned training on a virtual basis. The agency continues to use online platforms for e-learning and also implemented new professional learning software in 2020 that will create efficiencies in training planning, registrations and fulfillment.

There are some benefits of in-person learning, such as deep reflective discussion and emotional attunement, that are difficult to replicate in virtual delivery. So, it is our hope to resume in-person, classroom-based learning when it is safe to do so. In the meantime, we now have the adaptability, skills and technologies needed to deliver training in new and exciting ways that brings its own benefits, such as accessibility, portability and reduced costs due to decreased travel. All thanks to the dedication and creativity of our employees.



## Update on Staff Wellness Initiatives

Since 2013 a key strategic direction of Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region has been to value and support all members of the agency team through the implementation of active strategies that promote staff well-being. Around the same time, a provincial Worker Safety Report was evolving through the work of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies and two provincial unions: CUPE and OPSEU. The final recommendations of this report encouraged agencies to pay attention to the emotional toll that complex child welfare work can exact on those in the field. Specifically, the report recommended the implementation of:

- Peer Support Teams that provide critical incident debriefing services
- Implementation of the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

In June 2020, the agency successfully launched a 14 member Peer Support Team providing critical incident debriefing services to agency staff. Led by three Peer Support Coordinators, representing both staff and management, along with a Peer Support Steering Committee, the team has offered services to 30 staff experiencing critical incidents in 2020/21. Initial feedback has been positive and referrals have highlighted the need for supports around experiences of grief and loss across the agency. As the team builds expertise they are looking to provide psycho-educational sessions on secondary traumatic stress in the workplace.

The agency began implementation of the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace in 2018. Based on a two year cycle, the "Standard" provides a framework to understand, assess and mitigate risks to psychological health and safety in the workplace. A "first of its kind in the world" document, the Standard focuses on 13 psychosocial factors known to promote psychological health such as:

- Respect in the Workplace
- Clear Leadership and Expectations
- Psychological Supports



- Recognition and Reward
- Involvement and Influence...and more

In 2018/19 the agency used the tools and survey available through Guarding Minds at Work to assess the state of psychological health and safety and set an action plan in motion to mitigate risks and promote health. Based on the areas identified as most concerning, efforts focused on:

- Increased communication between leadership and staff
- Investment in our people leaders
- Increased psychological supports
- Efforts to address respect in the workplace
- Efforts to increase organizational citizenship.

In 2020 the agency continued implementation of action plan items while actively planning a new cycle of assessment through the Guarding Minds and Work survey. Early year over year comparisons show improvement in almost every psychosocial factor assessed through the framework. While the agency continues to implement and strategize action plan items, the new survey shows all areas rate as a minimal concern or relative strength for staff. A highlight is that each survey has shown the engagement and commitment of our staff to be a relative strength. We commend our staff for their ongoing efforts, especially during a worldwide pandemic.

*Angela Perkins, Supervisor of Staff Wellness and Training*





## Foster Family Recruitment

Recruitment has gone through many changes over the past few years, but this year has really been one for the books. Our agency, like most agencies across Ontario, has steadily been losing foster parents year after year without being able to bring in enough new families to replace them. 2019 was a particularly bad year, where we lost 25% of our foster homes.

Senior leadership moved to make recruitment a priority within the agency. Additional recruitment workers were hired and everyone whose key role is recruitment was placed under one supervisor and one director, with the exception being workers on the Two Row Understanding Services Team.

This newly amalgamated team faced many challenges that went beyond just bringing in new families. The pandemic forced everything from home

studies to PRIDE training to be adapted for health and safety.

Community events and speaking engagements, a pillar in recruitment were no longer possible, so the team enhanced digital campaigns with paid social media promotions, media relations, analytics, and virtual foster information nights. Inquiries for fostering not only kept up but eclipsed the previous year's numbers.

The team was also tasked to find homes for children whose parents were too ill to care for them due to COVID-19 with the COVID Care program. While this program was thankfully never needed, Waterloo Region answered the call and stepped up in a big way to ensure that homes were available in case we needed them.

Despite many workers being on a team with new people and new management, they not only managed to meet the challenges placed before them, but they exceeded expectations to the point new hires had to be brought in to keep up with demand. This team has really been a success story over the past year for the agency. Every local foster home that we brought in, meant that children and youth in our region had a safe place to go in their community. It meant children and youth had easier access to their families, friends, and supports. Thank you to everyone in recruitment for a terrific year!



### New Homes Brought in Over the Past Year

- **Kin In Care** – 8 (including 3 Indigenous Homes)
- **Foster Homes** – 9 (including 2 Black Homes, 1 Indigenous Home)
- **Adoptive Homes** – 6 (4 of these for Kin Adoptions)



## Our Volunteers

Volunteering at Family and Children Services has changed significantly over this past year. Our roles seem to have been fewer, but have required far more commitment and dedication from our volunteers. Despite all this change, our volunteer drivers have continued to volunteer in person. Our drivers have been trained on effective personal protective procedures and they have been extremely diligent keeping up with new protocols and policies, as well as check ins with our Transportation Officers daily.

Our mentor and tutor volunteers have all successfully transitioned to online settings. Our mentors and tutors have adapted graciously, learning how to use new software and how to establish new, engaging relationships with youth virtually. We have worked together in teams to support online groups, which is new to our volunteer community.

For the first time in our history, we have had no special events, activities, or celebrations.

Despite all the challenges we have encountered this year, the support, contributions and willingness to help children, youth and families has remained strong. We would like to add that while it seems our world has been placed on hold, our volunteer community has been finding new ways to give back to our community. We are proud to recognize that despite all these challenges this year, we have filled over 90 volunteer placements not to mention the hundreds of drives, thousands of kilometres driven and countless hours trying to learn new technology.

This is what volunteering at Family and Children's Services looks like today, it may not be as direct, and it may not seem as "big" but our roles have doubled if not tripled in significance of meaningful effort and commitment. By continuously adapting to our new world, we are proud to know that we have stayed true to our vision of a community where children and their families thrive.

*John Maier, Supervisor of Volunteer Services*







# Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region Foundation

## **Peter Izzio, Chair of the Board of the Foundation**



I have been on the Foundation board for nine years. Looking back over the last two years as chair of the Board of Directors, this has been a time of tremendous change, in society and in the Foundation.

Over the past 15 months, the pandemic has had a tremendous impact on our community, but I believe that the push to address social inequities has been even more important. Individuals and groups have been raising awareness about being underserved, overrepresented, and mistreated for many years. And it seems those of us who needed to hear this are finally listening. Child welfare has mirrored many of these inequities, which has resulted in the disproportionate number of Indigenous and Black children, youth,

and families in the system. As a foundation, we want to ensure that our fundraising and funding reflects our commitment to addressing systemic racism and to creating a just community.

I hope I will be the only Board Chair to preside over two virtual Annual

General Meetings but I also hope to be remembered as a person who helped the Foundation move forward with renewed direction as a result of the change we have seen in society.

The Foundation's ability to re-direct focus, and ultimately our activities, is something I am honoured to have been a part of. None of this would have been possible without Dr. Jill Stoddart, Director of Research, Development, and Outcomes. Jill has provided excellent guidance through these change-filled times and I am grateful for her leadership in the Foundation.

So, where are we headed? I am an optimist by nature and I have always felt that the issues of the day are opportunities to make positive change. The lessons from COVID and our improved understanding of how we can better support the children, youth, and families we serve, will allow us to be successful in our continued efforts to support the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

While I would have liked to be standing in front of you, our community, in the Family Centre to deliver this message, I am proud to have helped navigate the "cyber-experience" we have seen become our norm of today.

Thank you for making great things happen in Waterloo Region!

*Peter Izzio, Chair of the Board of the Foundation*



## Foundation Financial Statement

<b>STATEMENT OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES FOR THE YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 2021</b>	
<b>Revenue</b>	
Donations	\$1,635,499
Investment Income	7,404
Miscellaneous Income	65,661
Change in fair value of investment	268,562
	<b>\$1,977,126</b>
<b>Expenditures</b>	
Grants to Agency	\$163,792
Scholarships	69,819
Other Grants	822,766
Other and administrative expenses	110,817
Professional and investment fees	18,854
	<b>\$1,186,048</b>
Net Surplus (Deficit)	<b>\$791,078</b>

*(Extracted from Audited Statements audited by KPMG LLP Chartered Professional Accountants, Licensed Public Accountants.)*

*Details for other programs are contained in the audited financial statements.*

## The Resilience Project: Building Resilience with Children, Youth, Families and Community

Since 2014, the Family and Children’s Services Foundation and partner organizations have developed and implemented the Resilience Project with a generous donation from the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation. The Resilience Project is a collective effort by over 15 partner organizations to offer resilience programs for children, youth, and families. All of our programs aim to build our participants’ resilience. Our collective resilience-led approach helps to nurture the capacity to adapt in the face of adversities, and, ultimately, to engage in initiatives that address the root cause of these adversities.

Over years, the Resilience Project has continued to develop and refine resilience-promoting programs and activities for the children, youth, and families who face various forms of adversities and marginalization. The phases have been funded as follows:

- 2014-2016** The Child & Youth Resilience Project – Funded by Lyle S Hallman Foundation
- 2016-2020** The Resilience Project: Building Resilience for Children, Families and Community – Funded by Lyle S Hallman Foundation and FACS Foundation
- 2018-present** Youth Resilience Project – Funded by Fairmont Foundation
- 2019-2020** KWCF Resilience Project Expansion – Funded by KWCF.

The Resilience Project continues to grow through shared learning and connection building across global communities. In this way, the Resilience Project emphasizes the deep and inseparable connection between the local and global realities.

One of the partners is AFRO.



## Resilience Project Partner Profile: African Family Revival Organization (AFRO)



The African Family Revival Organization (AFRO) is a grassroots, Mutual Aid Organization serving the Black and African communities within the Waterloo Region. AFRO aims to help enable marginalized community members when participating in Canadian society as active citizens.

### What services do you provide to people in the Waterloo Region? Who would be a typical person who comes to you for help/support?

AFRO provides various services to its community members, including but not limited to the following;

1. Support for single mothers living in the Waterloo Region
2. Provision of COVID Care Packages containing PPEs, Vitamin D, hand sanitizer, gift cards, etc., to the vulnerable black seniors in the Waterloo Region
3. Assistance in finding housing and health care for individuals who might be interested
4. English translation for immigrants and other community members who have ESL (English as a Second Language)
5. Support for COVID-19 testing centres with Black and African nurses

AFRO's main demographic is with Black and African community members, many of which have recently immigrated to the country.

### How has the pandemic affected the people you typically serve? Have their needs changed? What new stresses are they facing?

This pandemic has affected the Black and African communities within our region immensely. With a growing concern for mental health within these communities, many of their needs have changed. Increases in depression are becoming more prevalent and psychological problems because of job loss, the loss of loved ones, social isolation and domestic violence are steadily growing too.

### How has the pandemic affected how you provide services or work with people? How has it changed how you work?

The pandemic has made it challenging to communicate effectively with the members of the communities we serve. A main component of AFRO's work consists of one-on-one interactions with people. With this form of support becoming impossible during the pandemic for many community members, it has minimized AFRO's ability to connect, socially and emotionally bond with its members. On the other hand, it has provided AFRO and our community members the opportunity to work and provide outreach online, to a broader audience.

While we try our best to stay connected and offer support to AFRO's community members, the pandemic has been challenging for the organization and the members. With many of those who need help the most being the elderly, social isolation and a lack of experience with technology has led to many obstacles for these members and when providing service to them.

### How have your connections with others in the Family Centre helped your organization working through the pandemic?

Many organizations within the Family Centre have grown closer and stronger through all the collaboration and support we offer to one another.



## Family & Children's Services Foundation 2020-21

### The Foundation's Response to COVID-19

The pandemic touched every aspect of our lives last year. The impacts of the restrictions compounded existing issues for the families we serve and raised several new ones as well. Like other organizations, we found ourselves coping with new ways of working (virtual and from home) in addition to meeting the increased demands for support.

**At every point through this past year, the community was right beside us, stepping up with kindness and generosity to support children, youth, and families.**

We spent hours on the phone talking to donors who cared and wanted to know what they could do to help.

We listened to the concerns of workers, who were seeing firsthand the results of increased social isolation and financial hardship on families.

Those conversations told us it was important to do three things:

1. Ensure youth and families knew that there was a community that cared for them
2. Meet the emergency financial needs that many experienced over the past year
3. Maintain connection to supports and services in the community in a virtual world

Here are some of the ways our donors made something great happen during a year of change, uncertainty, and challenges.

### Care and Belonging

People in two of our priority areas – Youth 18+ and Kin Families – received care packages, lovingly assembled and distributed by Agency staff.

Kelly Farrell, a Kinship Services Worker, said that the packages were a huge hit with families. Parents stuck at home found it hard to keep kids engaged and active. “Thanks to the support of the community, we were able to put together activity kits together for 90 kinship families. These 90 kinship families have approximately 180 children, all of whom were offered some new activities to provide some fun during a challenging summer of COVID-19 restrictions. In total, we made 135 kits - 48 indoor kits, 42 outdoor kits, 12 jam kits, and 28 baking kits.”

#### What is... Kinship Services?

When parents cannot care safely for their children, we look to the children's relationships to provide a safe, nurturing environment, which often includes relatives such as grandparents, aunts or uncles. The person who cares for a child could also be someone who has a relationship with them, such as a coach or teacher. The Kinship Services team works with caregivers and children to provide a safe place to call home until they can return to their parents.

Youth living independently were a group disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Support from the community meant that youth workers were able to distribute care packages to almost 300 youth aged 16 to 21+, some of whom were unhoused. In addition, several special birthday and graduation care packages were distributed. As Youth Services Worker Denny Aschnaki told us, **“the isolation these youth were experiencing was intense. As we delivered the packages, the joy and heartfelt appreciation from the youth was unbelievable. They didn't expect this. Some even called to say thank you again, to tell us what it meant to them. They felt like someone truly cared. We told them ‘yes we care and so do people in this community!’**





For families with children at home, the last year has been challenging, largely due to the school closures and juggling caring for children with other responsibilities, such as work. Parents and caregivers also faced a significant reduction in activities for children from organized sports to summer camp. These activities gave parents a break, and provided children the opportunity to be out of the house, to connect with other adults, to try new things, and to developing confidence and resilience, even be a place of safety for some children.

Community support made online and virtual programs available that provide similar benefits while respecting public health guidelines. This included supporting the expansion of existing art and music classes and the development of new ways to deliver programs usually offered in person. For example, the S.M.I.L.E.S. program, which supports children whose parents affected by mental illness, is going online. Virtual group discussions replaced in-person groups like Trusting Loving Connections (TLC) and the youth group Resilient Rebels.

### Henry's Kindness

Henry lives with his grandma in an apartment building. He received one of the baking kits. Here's what his worker shared with us: "He looked at all the items inside and told his Grandma that he wanted to bake some brownies and cookies and share them with his neighbours, who are almost all senior citizens. I could only imagine the delight that Henry's neighbours would get from the shared baked goods and a visit from such a sweet and generous boy! I guess it's true what they say "kindness begets kindness."

### Direct Financial Support

Many of the youth and families who use our services were hit hard with job losses in March and April due to pandemic shutdowns and restrictions. Gifts from the community helped meet their urgent needs including rent support, groceries, or personal items, especially hand sanitizer, facemasks, and other necessary protection.

The support of the community over the past year made it possible for us to increase this direct support to children, youth, and families in Waterloo Region by a remarkable 35%!

Thanks to a committed group of donors, 26 students received scholarships to assist with post-secondary education. The number of youth seeking support was less than years prior, as many could not continue with their studies due to loss of jobs, lack of housing, or the shift to online learning. The Ontario University Application Centre is reporting an increase in applications for the 2021-2022 academic year and we hope to see many youth begin or return to their studies.

### Technology Support

The world went online almost overnight and as a result, many youth and families were suddenly cut off from their support networks, programs and services. Many families lacked the technology needed to access the Internet and many lacked Internet access or data plans.

Thanks to grants from the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation and the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, we were able to provide the needed equipment and access so that children could continue with school online, keeping youth connected to friends and supports, and allowing families to find the help they needed in the community.



## Foundation Support

In addition to the incredible support we received from individuals and businesses, we were also very fortunate to receive grants from the following organizations:

### CHILDREN'S AID FOUNDATION

- Child and Family Support focused on addressing some financial inequities related to Kin Families
- Emergency Support Youth 18+

### KW COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

- Covid-19 Support for Youth 18+
- Emergency Community Support focused on technology needs of families
- Elders Circle in support of the Two Row Understanding Services Team for Indigenous Children, Youth, & Families

### HALWELL MUTUAL PHILANTHROPY FUND

- Waterloo Region Equity Leaders Initiative – Equity Training for community leaders from small/grassroots organizations

### LYLE S. HALLMAN FOUNDATION

- Hallman Foundation General Operating Support (GOS) for The Resilience Project, a 15 partner project dedicated to building collective, community resilience
- Greatest Need - Covid 19

### ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION

- Resilient Community Fund in support of our engagement and development of our service to Black and Racialized families, the Harambee Model

### UNITED WAY WATERLOO REGION COMMUNITIES

- Adventure 4 Change a program working with Black Identifying youth in North Waterloo

In addition, we acted as financial partner for multiple grants, which enabled funds to be granted to partner led collaborative programs, including:

Healing of the Seven Generations, Coalition of Muslim Women, Arts4AllUnlimited, and Ethiopian Association/Kind Minds. Supporting emerging and midsized organizations in this way is part of our strategic priority to create collective impact and build community resilience. **The Foundation is doing this to address inequities in resource allocation for racialized organizations.** To learn more about why this is so important read this report about support for Black focused charities in Canada.

### Walking the walk

“These funds offer the opportunity to have conversations with the community about how they can support the current needs of the Black and Indigenous families we serve. This is a small step to decolonize child welfare and charitable work and move towards reconciliation.”

**Dr. Jill Stoddart**





## New Initiatives

On Giving Tuesday, we launched two funds that will provide support to Black-identifying and Indigenous children, youth, and families.

Why focus on these two groups?

“There is a dramatic over-representation of Black-identifying and Indigenous children, youth, and families involved in the child welfare system. As we work to address the causes for that and to make changes, we also are identifying the specific needs of these groups, especially in terms of connection to culture and community,” explains Karen Spencer, Executive Director of FACS Foundation.

The two funds were the Truth and Reconciliation Fund and the Out of Many One People Fund.

The Truth and Reconciliation Fund was established at the Foundation upon the retirement of Executive Director Alison Scott, and supports the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations.

This fund provides opportunities for Indigenous children, youth, and families to reconnect to their culture, language, and community, opportunities that are not currently supported through child welfare funding.

Much like the Smile Maker Fund, established by staff who saw gaps in child welfare funding and wanted to help the children they worked with, the Out of Many One People Fund is also driven by FACS employees.

Black staff of African descent/African diaspora and their peers wanted to be able to provide access to programs, services, training and resources that promote personal growth for the children, youth, and families they serve as well as encouraging active participation in their communities. By offering these opportunities, Black-identifying children, youth, and families will be able to connect with their culture, embrace their racial identity, and be proud of what they can accomplish.

## Tree of Hope

This year we kicked off the annual Tree of Hope campaign on October 27, Dress Purple Day, a day dedicated to raising awareness of the community's role in child abuse prevention. We launched the campaign with “Karen & Jill Go Purple” with the goal of raising \$5000. And when we did?

Karen Spencer, Executive Director, and Jill Stoddart, Director of Research, Development, and Outcomes, would dye their hair purple! Special thanks to all who took selfies and videos, sharing #IDressPurpleBecause and to everyone who gave, raising \$8390!!! And Karen and Jill, with the help of Good Hair Company, did indeed Go Purple!

Throughout the campaign, we had incredible support from across the community. Despite not being able to gather in person, there were 21 third party events led by individuals and businesses across the region. There was also a Photo Day at Benjamin Tree Farm with Perfect Schott Photography and a ‘walk-night-turned-drive-night’ at Bingemans’ Gift of Lights event.

The campaign ended with the 28th Annual CHYM Tree of Hope Radiothon on Thursday December 3. While we were unable to have an in-person event at The Family Centre as in 2019, the day was still a huge success. Led by





the team at CHYM 96.7 – Christa, Brady, Tara, and Adele – there was a great energy on the air and on the phones. It was one of our most successful Radiothon days to date!

Our gratitude is also extended to The Seltner Family, our Radiothon Matching Donor, and to our campaign sponsor, Strassburger Windows and Doors. Thank you also to other sponsors including Equitable Life, Majorel, Joseph and Company, Enbridge, Larrek Investigations, Jacqueline Morris, Budget Blinds of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo, Black Bear Auto, and Welker & Associates.

From October 27 to December 2, the Tree of Hope Campaign raised an incredible \$243,022 to support year-round programs and services to prevent child abuse and neglect. By December 31st the total amount raised was a phenomenal \$391,522.

## Other News

- The Foundation was selected to participate in the Partners in Reciprocity Fellowship offered by The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples (The Circle). The goal of the program is to reorient settler philanthropy toward equity and justice. Our team, alongside a diverse group of foundations and philanthropic organizations from across Canada, will be taking the next year to reflect and learn so that we can continue on our journey towards equity and justice in our actions and practices. We look forward to sharing more as we move through this opportunity.
- Launched a unique giving group called Circle of Caring for former staff and board members that will keep them up to date on the latest in child welfare as well as engagement opportunities that reflect their deep connection to this important work.
- We welcomed Crystal Raymond to the team in the Event and Community Awareness Coordinator to replace Sydney Tricand, who is currently on parental leave taking care of new arrival Miles and big brother Sebastien.





## Where do we go from here?

We have learned so much this past year.

We have learned to be flexible and the importance of constant reflection and intentional innovation.

We have learned to listen deeply to ensure that our good intentions do not cause harm.

We have learned that our desire to help must be rooted in equity and justice, particularly in our relationships with Black and Indigenous communities.

We have learned we are stronger, together.

In the not too distant future, our new strategic plan will be shared in detail. In the meantime, we would like to highlight the four funding priorities for 2021-2022 that reflect the values we hold as an organization:

- Ongoing support for Youth 18+ and Kinship Families – includes programs, scholarships, and emergency support
- Truth and Reconciliation Fund for Indigenous families
- Out of Many One People Fund for Black families
- The Resilience Project – building collective community resilience

These areas of need will support our mission of building relationships with families and communities for the well-being and safety of children and youth to that we can achieve our vision of a caring community where children and their families can thrive.

We are able to do this because of our donors. Whether you follow us on social media, share our content, or donate your time, talent or money, we are grateful for your care and kindness.

Together we make great things happen.







FAMILY &  
CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
OF THE WATERLOO REGION

200 Ardel Ave., Kitchener, ON, N2C 2L9  
168 Hespeler Rd., Cambridge, ON, N1R 6V7  
[facswaterloo.org](http://facswaterloo.org)



FAMILY &  
CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
OF THE WATERLOO REGION FOUNDATION

65 Hanson Avenue, Kitchener, N2C 2H6  
[facsfoundation.org](http://facsfoundation.org)