



FAMILY &
CHILDREN'S SERVICES
OF THE WATERLOO REGION

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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Sonia Dennis, Executive Director

Sekoh, Anii, Ullaqut, Bonjour, Hola, Nin Hao, Ola, Shikamoo, Namaste, Shalom, hello.

When preparing to write this report I repeatedly said to myself and others, “nothing noteworthy has occurred over the last year, the work just carried on.” As I quieted my mind and began to reflect, I realized that this year has been significant not only for the organization, but for me personally.

In July of 2023, after 29 years, Karen Spencer, Agency and Foundation Executive Director retired and I was elected as the Agency’s first ever, Black Executive Director. This was a significant milestone for the Agency given the overrepresentation of Black families involved with the child welfare system. In addition, The Foundation took a further step toward self governance and hired their own Executive Director, Dr. Jill Stoddart. Jill has worked in many roles within our Agency over the years most recently managing the Foundation Board of Directors alongside her role with the Agency as the Director of Research and Innovation. This was a natural transition, as if Jill was exactly where she needed to be.

The Agency has had its fair share of challenges this year. Coming out of the pandemic the complexities for children and families grew. Increased stressors,

limited resources and an opioid crisis has impacted communities like never before. This impact was not only felt by children and families but also our staff. As Ministry funding has continued to decrease, we are consistently addressing staffing pressures as staff are asked to do more, with less. Social work is already difficult and complex, and these issues are making it even more difficult.

As an Agency, we recently participated in an organizational assessment and staff census survey and results of both confirmed that morale was low; however, it also highlighted a level of hope amongst the staff. We continue to be committed to building on our strengths and moving forward to do the best we can to serve the children and families of Waterloo Region.

We believe that it takes a village to raise a child and this year we have used this concept many times to help guide our work. At Family and Children’s Services of the Waterloo Region we are part of a village and every one of us is interconnected in the work we do with the focus of supporting our community.

We remain focused on achieving the goals set out in our Strategic Plan and we are committed to our mission, **Building relationships with families**

and communities for the well-being and safety of children and youth.

We continue to grow as an organization and reimagine FACS Waterloo and our place in the community. We continue to fall forward when we make a mistake and each work to ensure our village is thriving.

I wish to thank our Agency Board of Directors for their continued support to me over this past year and I look forward to serving them well. I wish to thank the Agency staff Ubuntu “**I am because we are**”. Your dedication to each other and the children and families we serve does not go unnoticed. I appreciate all of you and I am honoured to be your colleague.

Lastly, thank you to our community partners, neighbours and friends who continue to support the Agency and as we strive to achieve our mission and vision.

With thanks

Sonia





Board of Directors

2023/2024

- Trisha Robinson (Chair)
- Kelly Laurila (Vice-Chair)
- Gary Pooley (Treasurer)
- Ann Marie Beals
- Jim Boles
- Christopher Goss
- Saliha Haidar
- Darren Kelly
- Paulette Lewis
- Joanna Nicol
- Angie Pham
- Aubrey Sherman
- Joe Stuart
- Connie Vanin
- Mona Loffelmann
- Stephanie Bryenton

Trisha Robinson, Agency Board Chair

This year has been a year of many things: challenges, opportunities, and successes.

I wish I were a gifted writer and could weave a tale of magic and positivity, one that would inspire you and give you a hopeful prediction about the future of our children. However, I am neither a good writer nor a seer and I can only base my observations and report on what I have seen over the past year.

Some of our most vulnerable families are facing impossible choices. There are simply not enough supports. Homelessness is at an all time high; community families are living in shelters, in tents, in hotels and in vehicles. The housing waiting list is years long, food bank usage is at an all-time high and mental health complexities continue to rise, impacting wait lists for support. We simply cannot keep up.

Our ministry funding continues to be reduced, and while agencies have “full budget flexibilities” when there are not enough funds to protect our children, budget flexibilities mean nothing. Our Board along with other Boards across the province struggle to balance budgets while being committed to not compromising care to children, which is our job as a child protection agency. We find, we too are also faced with impossible choices.

This systematic problem cannot be left to one agency, one community or one ministry to solve. This is going to take a collaborative approach and strong leadership from all; at the government, municipal, community and individual level.

We need change now. We need a new funding formula, a new way of doing business - one that focuses on prevention. If not, I fear the future of our most vulnerable children and families is at risk.

As quoted so eloquently from Board member Stephanie “We are an agency that provides essential service to the community, but we are also an agency that has overgone and continues to work on structural and institutional change and investment to address historic and ongoing systemic oppression. This is what we are seeing in our increased expenditure, work being done differently from a restorative child focused lens, rather than a historic punitive court system approach.” The shift in agency practice has cost the agency more “... and will continue to do so if we want to get it right.

Despite these challenges there has been opportunities. The agency commissioned an external review which let us know our areas of strengths and areas to improve becoming a stronger organization. We also completed a risk assessment for MCCSS,

this too showed us areas for improvement.

There were also successes to celebrate. We welcomed Sonia Dennis as the new Executive Director. She brilliantly navigated her first year as the newly appointed leader. We continue to be grateful for the strong leadership team, the dedication and unfailing commitment of staff and volunteers to ensure the absolute best outcomes for our community children regardless of the challenges we are facing.

We also saw the Foundation embark on becoming its own entity!

In closing I want to thank the Board members for their ongoing leadership, guidance and for selflessly sharing of your time this past year. It has been a pleasure serving along side you.

On behalf of the Board, I want to thank the amazing, dedicated staff and volunteers led by Executive Director Sonia Dennis for their devotion, passion, and excellent work in helping to make a caring community where children and their families can thrive. The Board of Directors values your efforts. We celebrate the progress you have made and the work that is being done every day for the children, youth, and families.





OUR CORE 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.

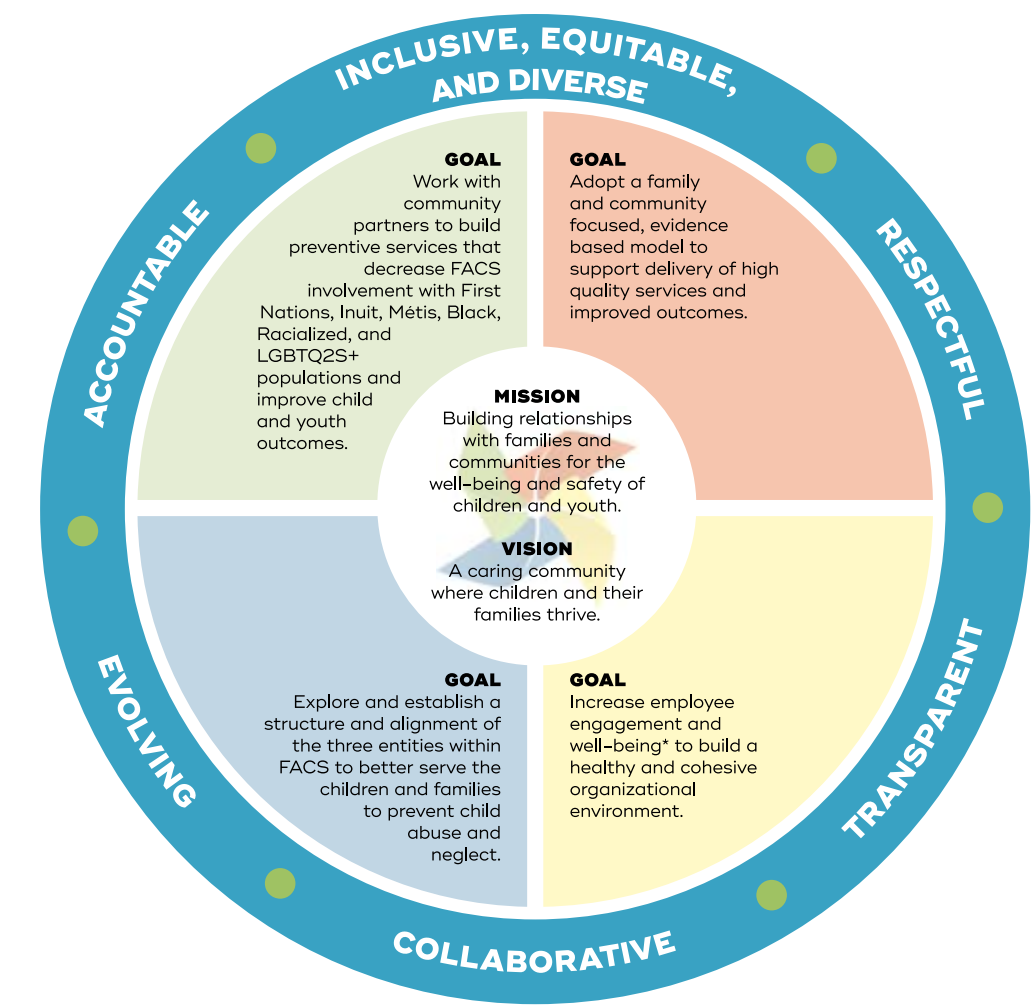
Inclusive, Equitable, and Diverse

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.

Strategic Plan 2021-2026





'Building relationships with families and communities for the wellbeing and safety of children and youth.'

What if there isn't a protection concern? What if there is extended family available to help out? Then why would someone contact Family and Children's Services?

In this story, you will hear about an extraordinary young woman who turned to us late in her youth and how the focus on her wellbeing has given her support alongside family to chase the dreams she always had but now knowing, she didn't have to chase those dreams alone.

Makilda Addico grew up in Waterloo Region with her parents and siblings. Makilda always enjoyed school,

she loved participating in extracurricular activities and always knew she had a passion to help others. Spending time counselling at camps, tutoring after school or coaching gymnastics, the focus was always about making time to volunteer which is a selfless act that always brings her an immense amount of joy!

As a student focused on her studies, Makilda had no doubt she would attend university; however, as high school started, year after year, things at home were becoming more and more unsettling. There was a disconnect and unrest which made it tough to remain focused on her studies. Given the challenges Makilda was now facing she made the decision to commit to

creating her own destiny no matter what was going on around her. By the summer of grade 11 while away counseling at summer camp, a message was received that when camp was over Makilda and one of her siblings would be without a place to live: this was devastating. Upon her return she reached out to one of her aunts who had some space in her home to help out on a short-term basis, but Makilda and her brother knew, they would need a long-term solution and at such a young age this was a huge undertaking.

Unsure of where to turn, Makilda reached out to Waterloo Region Police Services who sent her to FACS for support and this is when Makilda met Nancy, her worker, her support, her friend.

"Nancy listened to me, and she cared, she invested in me but wasn't pushy. Nancy was always ready to make connections knowing what was important to me and she truly wanted the best for me."

Makilda talks about how her friends thought it was so cool that she lived on her own



NO ONE IS YOU: AND THAT IS YOUR POWER



and would say “you’re so lucky, you can do whatever you want, must be nice to not have parents always bothering you.” She assured them, it was not her desire to be on her own and would’ve loved for things to turn out differently and be with her parents and the rest of her family. In the face of all the challenges and barriers she did not let any of them hold her back.

Makilda went on to graduate from Wilfrid Laurier with a degree in International Education Studies and has now been accepted to complete her Master’s degree in Development Studies at University of Waterloo in the fall of 2024. Makilda received the FACS Foundation, Ross and Doris Dixon scholarship to support her first two (2) years of university and the LeClerc scholarship to support the last two (2) years. In addition, she was presented with the Sankofa Award in 2023 which celebrates and acknowledges Black youth for their resilience and youth who have made meaningful changes in their lives while overcoming challenges. We are very proud of the accomplishments of this exceptional young woman. But wait, it doesn’t stop there, I asked Makilda “what’s next?”

In addition to her current involvement in our community with programs like Level Up; a youth program for those ages 12-15 years old focusing on community development and social justice she

continues with tutoring as she prepares for another few years of schooling ahead.

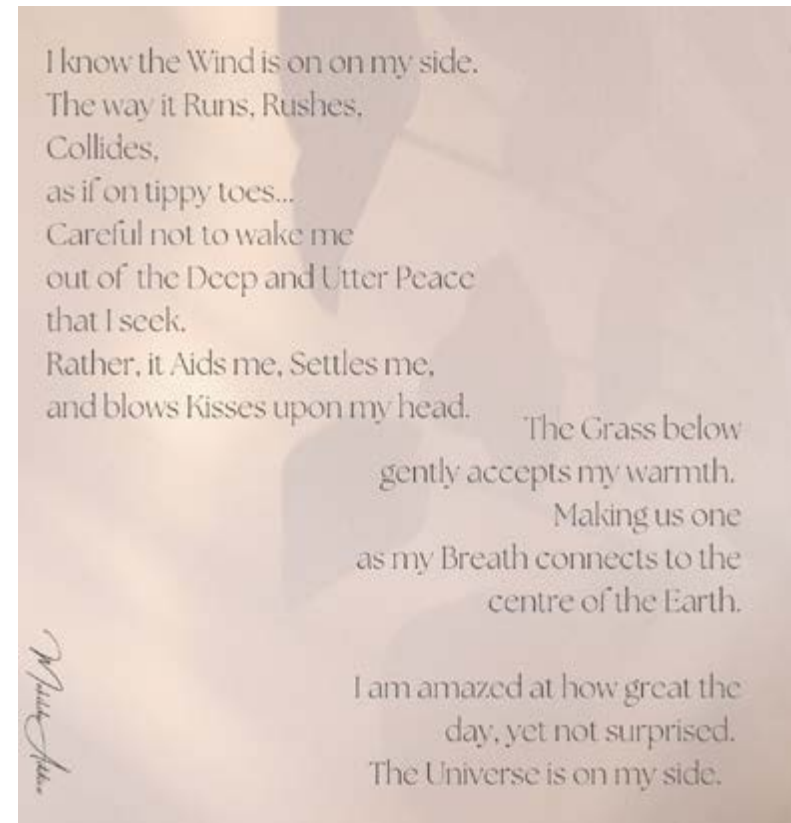
“Perhaps I will go and work with the United Nations working on developing communities who are facing water and food insecurities.”

When asked what the next five to ten years look like Makilda simply stated that following the path that keeps her excited is her number one focus. Perhaps eventually pursuing a PhD, traveling the world to help solve issues that present themselves, she just knows being available to use her knowledge, her lived experience, and the meaningful relationships she has created to help those in transition, those in need and those facing barriers is a must.

Lastly, Makilda lives by two very rich quotes that get her through all of life’s challenges.

“This too shall pass.” She believes everything in life good or bad, comes and goes and nothing is forever so whatever challenge one is facing, it will come to and end.

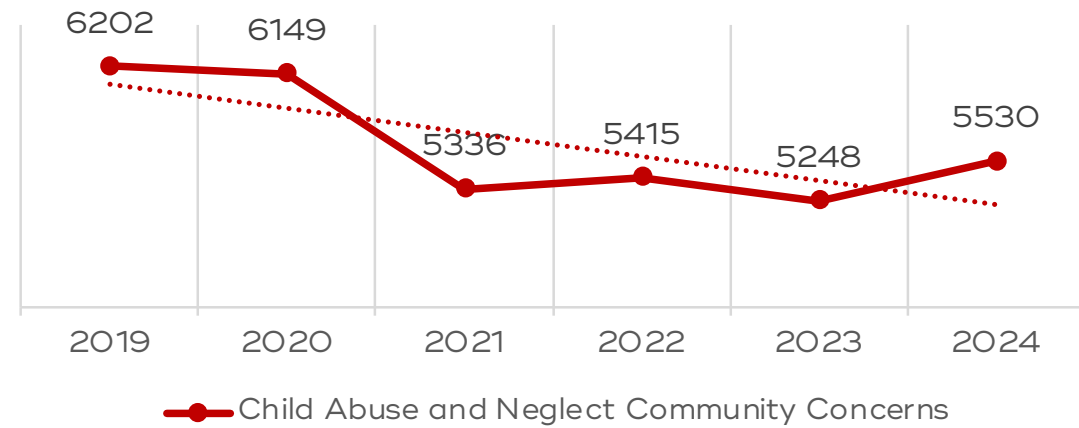
The second *“No one is you; and that is your power.”* So, she will live in her power knowing there is no other like her.



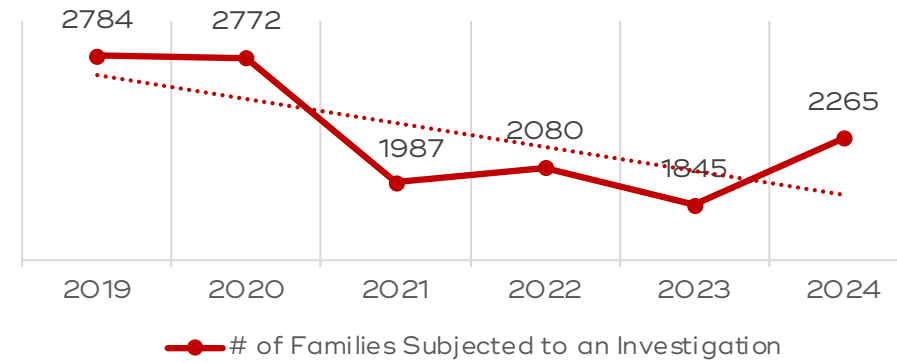
To follow along on Makilda’s journey please [follow her blog, creatingwaves.ca](https://www.creatingwaves.ca) – we have no doubt she will do amazing things in the future. Makilda, from all of us at Family and Children’s Services we are very proud of you!



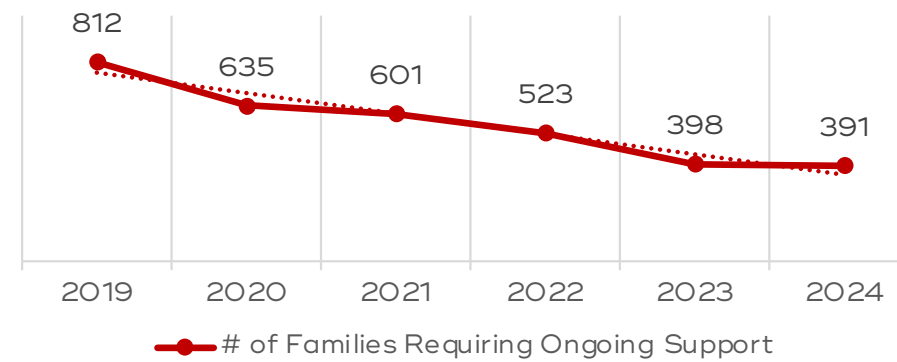
We have seen a 10% decrease in community concerns from 2019 to 2024



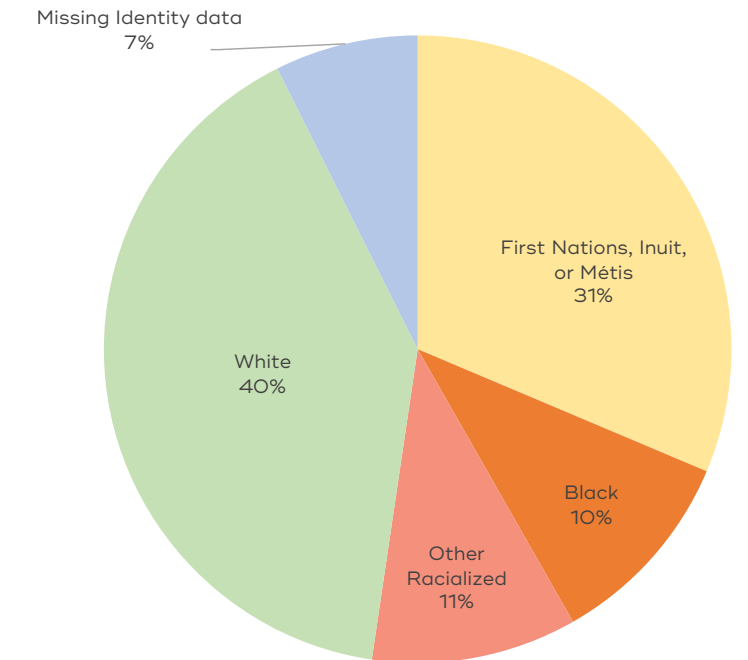
We have seen a 18% decrease in families subjected to an investigation from 2019 to 2024



We have seen a 51% decrease in families requiring ongoing support



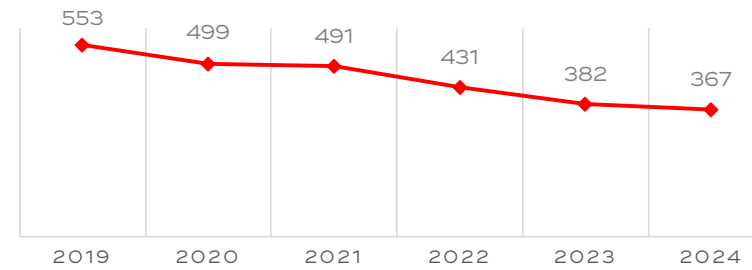
What are the Ethnoracial identities of Families requiring ongoing support?



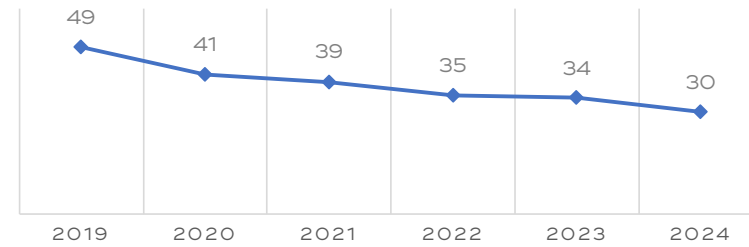
DATA



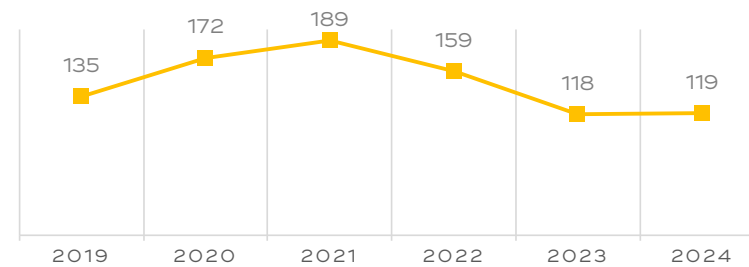
We have seen a 33% decrease in children/youth requiring to be placed in foster care or with extended family from 2019 to 2024



We have seen a 38% decrease in Black families requiring their children/youth to be placed in foster care or with extended family from 2019 to 2024



We have seen a 11% decrease in First Nations, Inuit or Metis families requiring their children/youth to be placed in foster care or with extended family from 2019 to 2024



DATA

Where are children and youth placed when they are removed from their homes?



75% are placed in foster care (In Care)

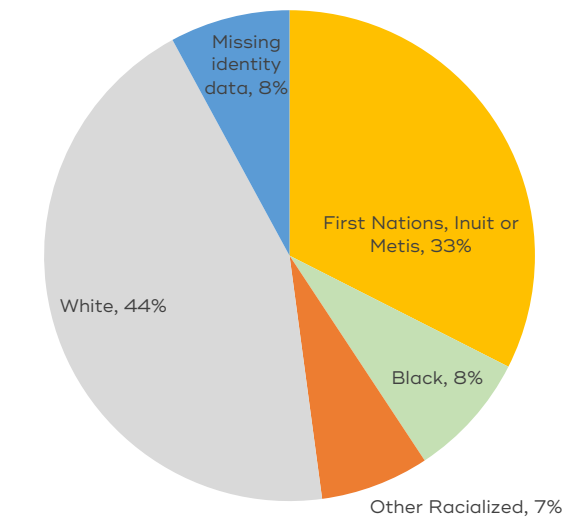


25% are placed with their extended family (Kinship Service)



49% of children in care were Ready Set Go youths

What are the Ethnoracial identities of children and youth staying in foster care or with extended family?





DATA

Family & Children's Services of Waterloo Region Agency

2023-24 Condensed Financial Report

CHILD WELFARE					
REVENUE BY SOURCE	2023-2024	2022-2023	EXPENSES	2023-2024	2022-2023
Province of Ontario	\$ 50,677,085	\$ 50,566,542	Salaries and benefits	\$ 32,008,759	\$ 34,358,071
Grants from Foundation	463,407	439,933	Child in care and client related	17,984,988	14,819,224
Family benefit and Child Tax Benefit	1,187,020	1,349,423	Operating expenses	5,151,295	5,743,138
Other *	2,248,379	1,738,695			
	<u>\$ 54,575,891</u>	<u>\$ 54,094,593</u>		<u>\$ 55,145,042</u>	<u>\$ 54,920,433</u>

* Rebates, interest, miscellaneous income, administration fees

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS	2023-2024	2022-2023
Revenue	\$ 54,575,891	\$ 54,094,593
Expenses	55,145,042	54,920,433
Excess of revenue over expenses before the undernoted	<u>\$ (569,151)</u>	<u>\$ (825,840)</u>
Non-vested sick leave benefits	(39,420)	14,447
Other expenditures	-	-
Gain on sale of capital assets	-	-
Other funding (recovery)		
Province of Ontario - deficit funding	1,226,890	951,811
Province of Ontario - prior years' recoveries	(2,268)	(1,300,156)
	<u>616,051</u>	<u>(1,159,738)</u>

SPECIAL PROGRAM FUNDING	2023-2024	2022-2023
Sexual Abuse Treatment Program	\$ 564,588	\$ 530,020
Education Liaison Program	113,115	113,114

All special programs are 100% expended

(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.



As we continue to re-imagine how we deliver programs and services that support our community and promote positive outcomes; Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region remains committed to the development of partnerships that are welcoming and inclusive for children and families within FACS, co-locations for community-based child welfare, and the Family Center.

Under the new leadership of Dr. Oluwakemi Aderibigbe, Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships, our hope is to foster community relationships by building on the prevention services. It is our hope to enhance our commitment to an equity approach to address the disproportionalities of children, youth, and families from equity-deserving communities in the child welfare system and across all policies, programs, and initiatives.

I am pleased to report that over the past few months, we have made significant strides in

building the foundation for a holistic approach to the well-being of children, youth, and their families, rooted in wrap-around services and a decentralized child welfare system. We are also enhancing the dynamic network of partnerships focused on prevention, support, and early intervention within our Family Center.

Our Initiatives

The Family and Children's Services community engagement and strategic partnerships for prevention initiatives have been categorized into two broad categories: Building a compassionate community through community engagement for prevention and creating thriving families through the family center's collaborative partnerships.

Community Engagement for Prevention: Building a Compassionate Community

The vision of community engagement for prevention is to cultivate a holistic approach

to the well-being of children, youth, and their families, rooted in wrap-around services and a decentralized child welfare system. We are committed to preventing child maltreatment and neglect by fostering a community-wide culture of support, empowerment, and collaboration.

The mission is to empower communities and their members to create nurturing environments that prioritize prevention, support, and early intervention for the safety of our children and youth. Through active engagement and collaboration, we strive to foster a network dedicated to safeguarding the wellbeing of future generations.

Through collaboration, capacity building, and advocacy, we aim to create a community where every child grows up in safety, surrounded by caring and supportive networks, ensuring a future free from harm/maltreatment. By decentralizing child welfare services, we hope to engage with the community early for prevention and create

THE FAMILY CENTRE



localized, responsive support systems that adapts to each family/community's unique needs.

The FACS programs and collaborations through SOGIE, Equity, Community-based, and other community development programs are some of the strategic approaches designed to decentralize child welfare services, build capacities, foster collaborations, and actively engage the community.

The Family Centre: Creating Thriving Families Through Collaborative Partnerships

The vision for the Family Centre is to establish a dynamic network of partnerships focused on prevention, support, and early intervention. The Family Centre will be a nurturing environment where families receive comprehensive services and support, enabling them to overcome challenges and thrive. Through collaborative efforts, we envision a community where every family is empowered to create a safe and loving home environment for their children, fostering their

growth and well-being and preventing/reducing their involvement with the child welfare sector.

The collaborative efforts of the Community Incubator Hub and the Family Centre Partners with FACS will leverage the respective strengths and resources of these partnerships to create a more holistic and integrated approach to addressing the needs of families and empowering them to overcome challenges and thrive.

Challenges and Opportunities:

While we have made noteworthy progress, we recognize that there are still challenges ahead. We are challenged to re-introduce the Family Centre to our neighbours, community and Waterloo region as a community hub, meeting, work, and recreational space. There is opportunity to grow the Family Centre into a community space that supports the work at FACS and nurtures the children, youth, and families in our community. Moving forward, we will continue to adapt our strategies to meet the evolving needs of our

community and seize opportunities for positive change.

As we have come out of COVID and the 2023-24 year our focus was to bring life back to the Family Centre. In a process of re-engaging FC In house partners and "Oluwakemi" completing a community needs assessment to understand what the community needs from child welfare in addition to assessing what programs and services are needed from our community

Through the community needs assessment, we are hearing from our community there is a need for a multitude of services for youth which is why we are creating a dedicated youth space.

There is also a need for medical services as many of the families we serve do not have access to primary care services. To move towards this, we have welcomed the Community Nursing Team once a month

to our space as we continue to seek out additional supports.

As we remain committed to focusing on wrap around supports, we want to remind our broader community the Family Center also boasts space for recreational activities, arts and music and gathering spaces.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to my team, colleagues, our partners, stakeholders, and community members for their unwavering support and commitment to our shared vision. Together, we have made significant strides in laying a solid foundation for preventing child maltreatment and neglect and creating a community where all families can thrive. I look forward to our continued collaboration as we re-imagine our Family Centre and the positive impact, we will make in the years to come.

Oluwakemi
Dr. Oluwakemi Aderibigbe





“Great things in business are never done by one person. They’re done by a team of people.”

Steve Jobs

Change is inevitable and leadership is no exception. FACS Waterloo has seen it’s share of change over the past several years as we have had to pivot and be open to finding new ways of doing our work, reimagining our bricks and mortar office space, and finding new and creative ways to collaborate with our community to serve and support the children, youth, and families of Waterloo Region.

At the helm of every great organization is a group of ordinary people with a vision, a commitment to empowering others to do their very best, humility to know they do not know all things and the drive to create system change to fill gaps and service needs.

In 2018 FACS committed to equity, diversity and Truth and Reconciliation in a different way. It was time to truly walk the talk and pick up the pace. With the inception of our Two Row Understanding Services Team developed to support our Indigenous families, our first Director of Equity Diversity and Inclusion and soon to follow, our Harambee Team a team dedicated to our Black families, we were well underway of what would turn out to be new leadership.

Sonia Dennis, our Executive Director, was our inaugural Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, followed in 2021 by Clayton Greaves who is now, our Associate Director. Both of these two exceptional leaders have held many roles

over the years in the child welfare sector and bring with them a breadth of knowledge and a commitment to making bold moves to ensure our leadership team is well supported and equipped to service the families in our community. While our Foundation continues to focus on the early intervention prevention work and fundraising to help support programming and service delivery the Agency is well aligned as their mandate remains committed to the protection and wellbeing of children and youth.

FACS is committed to creating collaborative partnerships to provide wrap around supports and services for the families in our community. Our Family Centre located at 65 Hanson, boasts

a large amount space home to some of our grassroots organizations, partners, and some of our staff. As we anticipate the needs of our community that continue to grow the decision was made earlier this year, to hire a Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships to bring the vision of the Family Centre to life. Oluwakemi Aderibigbe stepped into this inaugural role with the vision of a central community hub providing a consortium of services from health & dental, to programs and activities all in support of our early intervention and prevention work.

Oluwakemi is community builder, strategic planner, researcher, and public health expert and is committed to this vision and our Agency.

LEADERSHIP

AT FAMILY & CHILDREN’S SERVICES OF WATERLOO REGION



As we look around the leadership table in the year 2024, we see for the first time in the Agency's history a well diversified group of people including our first ever Black Executive Director, the only Black male Associate Director provincially and ten of our fourteen leadership members are racialized or marginalized. Along with our allies around the table, the lived experience and years of agency experience and history has a direct positive impact on the success of our organization.

As we reimagine how we do our work, we remain committed to addressing historic and

ongoing systemic oppression as we work with communities to ensure they receive the supports they need to provide for the children and youth in their care. Our mandate will always be the protection of children and youth first, but our vision "A caring community where children and their families thrive" truly speaks to our commitment to collaboration and partnerships to provide best possible outcomes for all those we serve.





What is the Resilience Project? Well, simply put, it is a multi-organizational collective impact initiative to provide early intervention and prevention work for the children, youth and families in Waterloo Region.

The purpose of this collaborative is to work together using a collective impact approach to reduce barriers in receiving services and support to promote resilience in the Waterloo Region.

There are currently four (4) Action Groups each with their own objectives.

Group One: Addressing broken systems

Objective: To facilitate regular community-based meetings between stakeholders, system leaders, and grassroots organizations to identify systemic barriers and implement strategies for improvement.

Group Two: Isolation

Objective: To establish regular community programs gatherings and events facilitated by partner organizations in community centers and local meeting places to foster social connections among seniors, youth, and newcomers. coordinating, planning, developing programs and resources offered by partners.

Group Three: Sustainability

Objective: To conduct workshops and training sessions in partnership with larger organizations and financial advisors aimed at building the capacity of community organizations in grant writing, financial management, and diversifying funding sources. Act as a link between stakeholders with a focus on sustainability, coordinating grants and corporate sponsorship as a collective.

RESILIENCE PROJECT ACTION GROUPS



Resilience Summit Retreat - Jan 26, 2023

Live Graphic Recording by Brittany Datchko
fuselight creative



Group Four: Access to Resources

Objective: To facilitate access to appropriate resources that are culturally, identity and ability affirming including centers and online platforms in collaboration with counseling services, legal aid organizations, and community leaders to ensure individuals seeking resources can easily access

relevant support and information. Informing and connecting on programs and resources offered by partners.

Over the past few years, the Resilience Project has supported many projects, initiatives, programs and helped build relationships between partner organizations and families we serve knowing that the



gateway to an individual's ability to thrive is based on their connection to community.

In this collaborative, FACS Waterloo acts as the lead agency with the largest pot of available funding. Collective impact projects must have a backbone to sustain it and with multiple organisations with different mandates working towards the common goal of child protection, one organization must provide backbone resources. We believe that each one of us plays an integral role in this work and we want community partners to have more of the decision making and direction setting

abilities. Our final goal would be a shared governance model.

System navigators play a very important role within the Resilience Project. They are liaisons in the community ready to assist those facing barriers navigate complex systems.

Many of the Action Group partners are dealing with the same issues in different ways and so this collaborative was started to leverage each others work without duplication of efforts. This Action Group is a form of resistance against oppression and allows for a focused approach.

The Resilience Project has done a great job with our grassroots organizations, but we are now looking to include our larger system

partners. We need to move into the systemic oppression space from a large systemic perspective. It's time to move this work forward. It's time to come together with passion and purpose to create wrap around supports for families in our community facing barriers and inequities.

Let's take some risks and look outside the box to help build a resilient community.