

2020-21 ENDS REPORT

The Children's Aid Society of London & Middlesex (the Society) is proud to present its annual ENDS report. As the Society continues to respond to community and regulatory demands, we remain committed to ensuring every child and youth served by the Society is protected, provided with stability and permanency, and is provided with the necessary supports and self-care skills to prepare them for life.

ENDS Statements

We believe all children and youth thrive in a safe, stable and loving family. The Society interprets its role to include, but not be limited to intentional activities in the areas of protection/prevention, permanency, and preparation for life.

1. Protection/Prevention

- 1.1 Children and youth served by the Society are safe as a primary focus of all intervention.
- 1.2 Where safe, service provision within a family-based environment is prioritized.
- 1.3 The Society, in partnership with the community, works collaboratively to address root causes of child and youth maltreatment and to promote the best interests, protection and wellbeing of children and youth.

2. Permanency

- 2.1 Children and youth develop a sense of belonging and continuity of care through the establishment of meaningful and healthy life-long connections.

3. Preparation for Life

- 3.1 Children and youth served and cared for by the Society have the appropriate knowledge, life skills (housing, vocational and/or educational opportunities) and meaningful supports to successfully transition to adult life.

ENDS #1: Protection/Prevention

1.1 Children and youth served by the Society are safe as a primary focus of all intervention.

The Society provides critical and essential services to infants, children and youth who are at risk of or are experiencing physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, neglect, or abandonment. During the 2020-21 fiscal year, the Society received 5,064 referrals from community sources including teachers, physicians, police, and other community members reporting child protection concerns. Issues related to poverty, addiction, woman abuse, mental health, overflowing emergency shelters, and the lack of affordable housing were significant needs in our community throughout 2020-21 and these areas of concern were reflected in the calls and openings processed by our Intake department.

Through the provision of assessments, crisis and intervention services, Society workers help to ensure the infant, child or youth are safe from abuse and neglect and also help to determine what is required to ensure their continued safety. Throughout the fiscal year, the Society completed 2,280 investigations.

2020-21 ENDS REPORT

While the Society has experienced a 15% reduction in the number of investigations completed over the past three years, the transfer rate to Ongoing service has remained steady at 21%. Ongoing services were provided to 1,299 families, which is down slightly from 2019-20 where 1,420 families were provided with ongoing support. As of March 31, 2021, the Society was providing ongoing services to 768 families, a decrease of 2% over the previous fiscal year.

To remove a child from the family home is the last option; however, at times it is the only safe option available. When it is determined that safety cannot be achieved in the family home under current circumstances, the Society will bring the child to a place of safety and permanency planning for the child begins immediately. The Society ended 2020-21 with 438 children and youth in care, compared to 442 at the end of the previous fiscal year. Of those, 40 were youth who have remained in care beyond their 21st birthday under the provincial *Supporting Consistency of Care for Youth whose Care Arrangements are Scheduled to Expire During the COVID-19 Pandemic* policy directive. Under this directive, youth who would have been discharged upon turning 21, will instead remain in care until September 30, 2022 and will continue to receive the same services and supports. Although this has had a significant impact on the Society's ability to reduce the number of children and youth in care, the Society was able to sustain this number through continued emphasis on the early identification of kin who could be assessed as possible care providers. Throughout 2020-21, 36 children and youth were discharged from Society care to kinship homes. To further ensure no child grows up in care, the Society continues to ensure children and youth are provided with access to community-funded placements; continues with its provision of admission prevention programs, and actively engages with families for discharge planning.

There has been a 23% reduction in the number of children in care over the past five years.

1.2 Where safe, service provision within a family-based environment is prioritized

The Society strongly believes that the best place for a child to grow up is with their family of origin and the most effective way to ensure a child's safety, permanency, and well-being is to provide services that engage, involve, strengthen, and support families. The Society is committed to strengthening local family-based care while working toward the goal of permanency. Days care by placement type is one measure of the Society's success in achieving this objective. Over the past year, the percentage of days children and youth spent in family-based care increased to 75.5%, up 1.7% from the previous fiscal year. This increase was due in part to a reduction in group days care which has decreased by 2% over the year from 15% to 13%. The Society continues to actively monitor these placements to ensure preference is always given to family-based care. The Society also continues to maintain its focus on recruitment of family-based care providers including kin, specialized foster care providers and supported transitional living programs for children and youth.

When a child or youth cannot safely remain at home, it is the Society's priority to seek an alternative placement with kin or a member of their community. Kin service placements are intended to provide the child or youth with a less intrusive placement option with increased stability as the child is not placed with a stranger. Kinship families are assessed following the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services' provincial kinship service standards and once approved, are offered the assistance of a Kinship Family Support worker to ease the transition of the child or youth into the family home. At year-end, the

2020-21 ENDS REPORT

Society was serving 157 children and youth cared for by extended family members or by someone in the community with whom they have a connection.

While family reunification is the preferred permanency outcome, this is not possible for some children and youth. For some, adoption may be an option but there are many variables to consider when assessing whether adoption is the best plan for a child or youth. Some children and youth in care are adopted by their current foster parents while others require a more extensive search to identify prospective families. To assist in this search, profiles of children and youth are shared at the Adoption Resource Exchange (ARE) in Toronto. The Society also continues to receive funding from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption to fund one full-time Permanency worker position. Working under the principle that no child is “unadoptable,” a *Wendy’s Wonderful Kids* position provides a focused approach with the intent to find the best home for every child in need of a forever family. Of the 543 children who received in-care services throughout 2020-21, 149 (27%) were eligible for adoption based on their legal status and the Court finalized 17 adoptions. This was a dramatic change over the previous fiscal year where 232 of 679 children and youth (34%) were eligible for adoption and 37 adoptions were finalized. This decrease is attributed in part to the partial shutdown of the Family Court system due to the pandemic which resulted in a delay of the execution of Extended Society Care orders and adoption finalizations.

1.3 The Society, in partnership with the community, works collaboratively to address root causes (poverty, marginalized families, migration experience of new Canadians) of child and youth maltreatment and to promote the best interests, protection and wellbeing of children and youth.

When the Society receives a call that does not require intensive child protection services, the caller or the family can be referred (linked) to community service partners. This “link” is the least intrusive alternative service delivery method as it does not involve initiating a child protection investigation but still ensures that families and children have the appropriate resources and supports available to them. The Society received 5,064 referrals throughout 2020-21, down 21% from the previous fiscal year and of those, 218 (4%) were responded to by providing a community link.

The Society continues in its partnerships with community service providers including Merrymount Family Support & Crisis Centre, Vanier Children’s Services, the Black African Caribbean Canadian Local Advisory Council, Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU), and Western Area Youth Service. The Society is also an active member of the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse, as well as the London Situation Table which is a collaboration of community organizations representing mental health, addictions, justice, housing, and sex trafficking. Additionally, the Society continues to participate in a protocol developed with the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration (MRCSSI) to guide service delivery between the Society and local Muslim and Arabic-speaking populations.

Ongoing case planning continues to occur in conjunction with local First Nations communities including Oneida Nation of the Thames, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, and the Munsee-Delaware Nation. In cooperation with the local First Nations communities, protocols have been established to ensure no planning for any member of the Indigenous community will occur without immediate notification of the appropriate Band representative and no plan will be made without the involvement and support of the Band. The Society also conducts scheduled formal case reviews with Band representatives from Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames and Kettle and Stony Point First Nation. These reviews, in addition to family meetings, aid in the development of plans that respect Indigenous culture and traditions. Where available, services for Indigenous families and children are

2020-21 ENDS REPORT

provided by Indigenous service providers including N’Amerind (London) Friendship Centre and Atlohssa Family Healing Services to assist staff with the provision of support to urban Indigenous children, youth and their families in a culturally informed manner.

ENDS #2: Permanency

2.1 Children and youth develop a sense of belonging and continuity of care through the establishment of meaningful and healthy life-long connections.

The inclusion of families in a child or youth’s care helps to empower families to share in the responsibility for safety, permanence and well-being of children and youth. In recognition of this, the agency continues to prioritize the importance of kin searches to provide an alternative placement option, should it be needed, as well as to provide added support and connections for children, youth, and families. The Society currently has four full-time kinship search workers who completed 126 extensive kin searches throughout 2020-21. These connections are not limited to biological connections and can include a person who is close to the child/youth or their family such as a friend, teacher or neighbour. The establishment of these connections provides a family with the opportunity to build supports and resilience within the family network. As of March 31, 2021, the Society was providing support to 157 children and youth out of care, residing in kinship homes. Research informs us that searching for extended family or community will result in the increased likelihood of:

The number of children and youth residing out of care in a kinship home has increased by 33% over the past two years.

- the child or youth being able to live within their extended family or community, and not be admitted to Society care;
- the family actively participating in the development and support of an alternative care plan for their child;
- the achievement of an early permanency plan that provides stability for the child or youth;
- access to family information that is helpful in the development of a child’s social history which can help a child to better understand their personal story at a later date if required; and,
- the identification of Formal Customary Care homes to ensure cultural continuity, safety and wellbeing for Indigenous children and youth.

Through its *One Vision One Voice* programming, the Society launched the *Aunties & Uncles* program which was developed for African Canadian children and youth involved with the child welfare system. Children and youth referred to the program are matched with volunteers from their communities known as “Aunties and Uncles” so they can benefit from the transmission of knowledge, wisdom, connection, and validation to grow their cultural attachment and positive identity as African Canadians. Once matched, Aunties and Uncles are encouraged to bring the young person into their lives to share time with them in activities that are beneficial and based on the needs of the child. Activities can include attending community events, supportive listening, economic literacy and advocacy for the child or youth. The intended outcomes are improved interpersonal skills; improved critical thinking skills; increased knowledge of ethnic/racial culture and traditions; racial and cultural survival skills and, improved academic success.

2020-21 ENDS REPORT

The Society also continues in its partnership with The Centre for School of Mental Health at Western University to deliver the *Rise UP!* program to at-risk youth involved with the Society. Originally known as the Healthy Relationships program, it has been enhanced for child welfare to include a strengthened focus on mental health, suicide prevention, and drug and alcohol use. Programming is delivered in small group settings and also targets the prevention of violence through the promotion of positive, healthy relationships and provides a specific curriculum geared toward youth who identify as LGBTQ2S+.

ENDS #3: Preparation for Life

3.1 Children and youth served and cared for by the Society have the appropriate knowledge, life skills (housing, vocational and/or educational opportunities) and meaningful supports to successfully transition to adult life.

As of March 31, 2021, the Society was providing voluntary services to 16 youth ages 16-17, and 181 youth ages 18-22. Combined, these demographics comprise 45% of all children and youth in care. In response to the unique needs of this demographic, the Society has maintained increased services to youth both in and out of care through a designated Youth Response Unit which strengthens youth-centred services for youth and their families in times of crisis. This unit also supports permanency for youth by preserving family systems and promoting permanent meaningful connections for youth with their families, kin and in their communities. Other services provided by the Society include financial assistance; assistance in securing housing; education planning; and, preparation for life through the development of healthy life strategies. In addition, over the past year, the Society has also increased its collaboration with YOU to provide immediate and transitional housing and supports to youth. This has included an exclusive partnership to provide housing and the support of a housing stability worker to 16- and 17-year-old youth. Access to the YOU Emergency Youth Shelter is also available if required.

Provincial data shows the educational attainment of youth in care is lower than the provincial average. In response, the Society provides a wide range of educational supports including services provided by education liaisons and volunteer tutors and mentors as well as maintaining active engagement with school professionals. The Society's night school also continues to provide highly individualized, alternative education for disengaged youth. To encourage youth to complete their high school education, MCCSS provides *Stay Home for School* funding to allow students who are turning 18 to remain in their current foster or group placement while they finish high school.

The Society also continues to assist youth with post-secondary planning by opening a Registered Education Savings Plan for all eligible children in care. In addition, through endowments, donations, and the Youth in Care network, funds have been established by both the Society and OACAS for children in care and former wards of the Society. These funds are for special purposes and have specific requirements and/or conditions for eligibility and include bursaries provided by the Society in the amount of \$1500 per semester up to a maximum of \$3,000 per school year. In 2020-21, 19 youth were awarded bursaries to assist with the costs associated with their post-secondary education. Of those youth, 7 were new bursary recipients, 12 were continuing and one of those students will be graduating in the spring of this year. To further assist youth in Extended Society Care in their pursuit of post-secondary education, the provincial government provides a *Living and Learning Grant* in addition to the regular financial aid available through the Ontario Student Assistance Program. Locally, Western University, King's, Brescia, and Huron University Colleges have committed to eventually support up to 35 youth previously in Extended Society Care. Their commitment to work with youth in care and to develop individualized plans that remove

2020-21 ENDS REPORT

barriers to post-secondary education will encourage youth to apply, knowing that there will be wrap-around support to help them succeed. Fanshawe College also supports 10 of our youth in care in various programs to assist in achieving their academic and employment goals.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The Society has strived to meet its ENDS initiatives as set out by the Board. The evidence as presented in this report would indicate that we have been on a journey to achieve successful outcomes for children, youth, and families. The past year has brought many unanticipated challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted children, youth, and families in our community along with our staff, care providers and volunteers. Everyone has been affected in one way or another, and this global crisis has united us all in our efforts to remain healthy and safe.

Our commitment for 2021-22 will be to ensure children and youth are cared for by their family, and in their communities, where their culture and heritage are at the forefront of their care. The Society will continue to strive to deliver equitable services for marginalized and racialized communities. We will actively work with our FNIM and Black communities to prevent disproportionality and racial discrimination. Our agency has developed an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Plan, implemented mandatory Equity and Anti-Racism training for all staff, and established an action committee comprised of staff across the organization to focus on our Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion practices within our service delivery framework. Our Gay Straight Alliance committee is committed to creating an inclusive, accepting environment that supports 2SLGBTQIA+ children, youth, families, care providers and staff.

In the last year our agency has continued to engage in pandemic planning in response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, while continuing to provide services to children and families in our community. We have maintained communication channels with the Province of Ontario, the Ministry, OACAS, community partners and local emergency response services including area police forces, the Public Health Unit and the City of London to work together to support our community through these difficult times.

The Society will continue to deliver specialized services that are trauma and evidence informed in partnership with our community to prevent the conditions that contribute to child maltreatment and the need for protection services. Through our youth services we will continue to develop service responses that respect the voice of youth and their unique needs. Through strengthening of families and communities, the Children's Aid Society will collectively lead to what we want for all children and youth in London & Middlesex: ***Safe Children, Bright Futures.***