

2021-22 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 requirements, 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 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 essential services to families in which children and youth are at risk of or are experiencing physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, neglect, or separation. Throughout 2021-22, the Society received 5,253 referrals, completed 2,487 investigations, and opened 485 ongoing protection files with 751 ongoing files remaining open at year-end. These numbers are consistent with the previous fiscal year service volumes and community sources including police, teachers, physicians, and other community members have continued to report child welfare concerns related to poverty, addiction, domestic violence, mental health, overflowing emergency shelters, and the lack of affordable housing. In response, the Society is committed to taking an equity-based approach to help ensure the social conditions impacting families and children are accurately identified and addressed to help achieve positive outcomes.

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Child in care service volumes have also remained consistent and the Society ended the fiscal year with 439 children and youth in care, compared to 438 at the end of the previous fiscal year. Of those, 73 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, while continuing to receive the same services and supports. The Society was able to sustain this number through a continued emphasis on admission prevention initiatives including emergency funding, early identification of kin and active engagement with families to help increase the likelihood of early and positive outcomes^[wv2].

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. 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. If it is determined that a kinship home is not available, the Society will first consider family-based foster placements.^[wv3] The Society also continues to actively monitor group placements to ensure alternative arrangements are explored with preference given to family-based care. In addition, the Society has maintained its focus on the recruitment of family-based care providers including kin, specialized foster care providers and supported transitional living programs for children and youth.

Family-based days care has increased by 5.3% over the past two fiscal years to 76%.

Family reunification is the preferred permanency outcome, and when this is not possible adoption may be an option. While some children and youth are adopted by their current foster parents, others require a more extensive search to identify prospective families. To assist in this search, profiles of children and youth are shared with *AdoptOntario* and are also shared at Adoption Resource Exchange events. Of the 575 children who received in-care services throughout 2021-22, 203 (35%) were eligible for adoption based on their legal status and the court finalized 30 adoptions. This was a significant increase over the previous year when the courts finalized just 17 adoptions; however, this disruption was attributed to the partial shutdown of the Family Court system due to the pandemic and as such the Society anticipates there will be less fluctuation in the number of finalized adoptions over the next twelve months.

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 support available to them. Of the received 5,253 referrals received throughout 2021-22, 215 (4%) were responded to by providing a community link which was consistent with the percentage of community links made during the previous fiscal year. The Society continues in its partnerships with approximately fifty community service providers to help provide informed services related to concerns including domestic violence, mental health, and addiction. Additionally, the Society continues to work closely with the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration as well as the Black African Caribbean Canadian Local Advisory Council to help guide services provided to the Black, Muslim and Arabic-speaking communities.

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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, and Oneida Nation of the Thames. 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 provided by Indigenous service providers including N’Amerind (London) Friendship Centre and Atlohsa 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 and community members in a child or youth’s care helps to empower them to share in the responsibility for the safety, permanence and well-being of children and youth. In recognition of this, the Society 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 establishment of these connections provides a family with the opportunity to build support and resilience within the family network. 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 Society was serving 134 children and youth cared for by extended family members or by someone in the community with whom they have a connection.

In 2021-22, 106 kin searches were completed to help locate out-of-care placements for 306 youth.

Unlike licensed foster parents, kin providers do not receive a per diem and the cost of supporting a child or youth in their home can be a financial barrier for some. To help address these barriers, the Society is pleased to now be able to provide kin service providers with limited funding to cover costs not supported by other programs including start-up costs such as cribs and mattresses, therapy for a child or youth, professional services including legal fees, assessments, interpreters, client personal needs including clothing, school supplies, as well as health and dental expenses.

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, 2022, the Society was providing voluntary services to 48 youth ages 16-17, and 206 youth ages 18-22. Combined, these demographics comprise 57% of all children and youth in care which represents

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a 12% increase over the previous fiscal year. In response to the unique needs of this growing 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. 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, the Society has continued with its collaboration with Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) to provide immediate and transitional housing with the support of a housing stability worker for 16- and 17-year-old youth. Access to the YOU Emergency Youth Shelter is also available if required.

Through the provision of a Registered Education Savings Plan for all eligible children in care, endowments, donations, and the Youth in Care network, funds have been established by both the Society and OACAS for eligible children in care. 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 \$3000 per school year. In 2021-22, 13 youth were awarded bursaries to assist with the costs associated with their post-secondary education and of those, 6 were new bursary recipients, and 7 were continuing. Currently, 7 of our youth in care are enrolled at Fanshawe College. Western University, King's, Brescia, and Huron University Colleges have also committed to eventually supporting up to 35 youth previously in Extended Society Care. Together, the commitment of the Society and the academic community to develop individualized plans that remove barriers to post-secondary education will encourage youth to apply, knowing that there will be wrap-around support to help them succeed [wv5][wv6].

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The Society has strived to meet its ENDS initiatives as set out by the Board. The evidence 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 continued to bring 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. Throughout, the Society has continued to engage in pandemic planning 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 Middlesex-London Health Unit, and the City of London to work together to support our community through these difficult times. 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 2022-23 will be to ensure children and youth are cared for by their families, and in their communities, where their unique identities are at the forefront of their care. We will actively work with our diverse communities to achieve positive outcomes while working to address concerns related to disproportionality and racial discrimination. Further to this, we will work to create an environment that is affirming of 2SLGBTQ+ children, youth, families, care providers and staff. We will remain committed to ensuring all staff to participate in both Equity and Anti-Racism training, as well as Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression training. In addition, 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 the strengthening of families and communities, the Society will collectively lead to help ensure all children and youth grow and thrive in their families, cultures, and communities.