

# 2022-23 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 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 works collaboratively with families and communities to promote the safe and healthy development of children and youth. Throughout 2022-23, the Society received 5,688 referrals from members of the community reporting child protection concerns. In response, Society workers completed 2,136 investigations and opened 411 ongoing protection files with 644 ongoing files remaining open at year-end. Although the number of referrals received increased by 8% over the previous fiscal year, as a percentage of referrals received, our investigations completed decreased by 10% which appears to be the result of a 6% increase in the number of investigations closed without client contact. This is an unusual

variation, and the Society will be monitoring these service points in the upcoming year to better understand the nature of this change. Further to this, the number of ongoing files open at year-end decreased by 14% which can be attributed in part to the Society's commitment to focused planning and engagement with families, and continued collaboration with community partners who can provide specialized support to families in their homes, within their communities.

Child in care service volumes increased slightly and the Society ended the fiscal year with 466 children and youth in care, compared to 439 at the end of the previous fiscal year. Of those, 124 (26%) were youth who have remained in care beyond their 21<sup>st</sup> 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, have instead remained in care until September 30, 2023, while continuing to receive the same services and supports. As we transition these youth out of care, we expect the number of children in care to fall well below 400. The Society expects to be 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 and to reduce the amount of time a child is placed in care.

To support our efforts to promote the healthy development of children and youth, the Society is fortunate to provide children and youth in care with timely access to medical care in the Society's medical clinic. As the clinic only serves children in care, it is better able to provide informed care and referrals to ensure children and youth receive the best level of care. Further to this, as the clinic is onsite, children and youth can access medical services in a friendly, and private location.

## **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. The Society also continues to actively monitor group placements to ensure alternative arrangements are explored with preference given to family-based care. Over the past fiscal year, 75% of days in care were placements in family-based foster homes, which is consistent with the previous fiscal year.

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. By utilizing a variety of recruitment strategies including information sessions, social media and community engagement, the Society has been successful in increasing the number of family-based care providers from the 2SLGBTQIA+, Black and Indigenous communities. The Society was also pleased to be issued its 2023 foster license with no conditions.

Although family reunification is the preferred permanency outcome, at times it may not be possible, and adoption is considered. 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 590 children who received in-care services throughout 2022-23, 193 (33%) were eligible for adoption based on their legal status and the court finalized 20 adoptions. As anticipated, this is down from the previous year when 30 adoptions were finalized which included a backlog of adoptions resulting from the partial shutdown of the Family Court system in 2020-21 due to the pandemic.

### **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.**

We acknowledge the racist and oppressive role that child welfare has played in the past and the impact that it currently has on many communities and as such when the Society receives a call that does not require intensive child protection services, the caller or the family can be referred (linked) to a community service. 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 5,688 referrals received throughout 2022-23, 180 (3%) were responded to by providing a community link which was consistent with the previous fiscal year. The Society continues to work cooperatively 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. In addition, we continue to provide service with an appreciation and respect for cultural differences through our Black African Canadian Services and Indigenous Services teams. These teams have a genuine passion to help uplift Black and Indigenous families from the community by providing investigation, ongoing and child-in-care services with attention given to ensuring equity is incorporated into all aspects of service delivery.

Ongoing case planning also 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 these First Nations communities, protocols have been established to ensure all planning for members of an Indigenous community will occur with immediate notification to the appropriate Band Representative and planning will be made with 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 as well as Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point. These reviews, in addition to family meetings, aid in the development of plans that respect Indigenous culture and traditions. Additionally, workers and supervisors work closely with and receive guidance from Band representatives to determine when to submit a request under *Jordan's Principle* to help ensure Indigenous children and youth are provided with access to essential services and supports. Community services for Indigenous families and children are also provided by Indigenous service providers including *N'Amerind (London) Friendship Centre*, *Atlohsa Family Healing Services* and the *Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Center* to assist staff with the provision of support to urban Indigenous children, youth and their families in the spirit of partnership and mutual respect.

To further support provincial and local efforts to develop strategies to address systemic barriers present in child welfare, the Society engaged with *Metrics@Work* to conduct a confidential, voluntary survey of our staff demographics. This data will inform our future recruitment and hiring strategies as we work toward building a workforce that brings a broad diversity of lived experiences and perspectives. Having a better understanding of the community's diverse needs will help us make better decisions.

## 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, permanency and well-being of children and youth. In recognition of this, the Society continues to prioritize the importance of kin searches as early as possible 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 more familiar placement option to provide increased stability as the child is not placed with someone who is unknown to them. 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. 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 continues to provide kin service providers with limited funding to cover costs not supported by other programs including start-up costs such as furniture and home modifications, as well as episodic funding for items including clothing, school supplies, and other needs related to the child's health, safety and wellbeing. Throughout the year, 138 kin searches were completed and as of March 31, 2023, the Society was serving 116 children and youth cared for by extended family members or by someone in the community with whom they have a connection.

## 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, 2023, the Society was providing voluntary services to 47 youth ages 16-17 of which 18 were in care under a *Voluntary Youth Service* agreement, as well as to an additional 230 youth ages 18-23 under a *Continued Care and Support for Youth* agreement. Combined, these demographics comprise 53% of all children and youth in care. In response to their unique needs, 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.

The Society continues to participate with area school boards in the *Joint Protocol for Student Achievement*. This framework enables the Society to create a core team of support and joint planning to address the individual child or youth's needs, allowing teachers and protection workers to be proactive and inclusive. Our efforts to best support our children and youth in care achieve academic success was evidenced in our 2022 Extended Society Care Review as 100% of 17 files reviewed indicated appropriate planning for new academic placement to ensure smooth transition. Further to this, 100% of 40 files reviewed indicated

the child/youth was provided with additional supports, services, or programming within the school setting. Together, we will continue to address inequities and bolster educational support.

Additionally, Society protection workers ensure children and youth in care are provided with a variety of educational supports including services provided by the agency's Educational Liaisons; our Tutor Mentor program; scholarships and bursaries; and transportation funding. Our Education Program also includes CASLM night school and summer school programs provided in partnership with one local school board. These classrooms provide highly individualized, alternative education for youth who are disengaged from the traditional classroom setting.

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 2022-23, 18 youth were awarded bursaries to assist with the costs associated with their post-secondary education and of those, 12 were new bursary recipients, and 6 were continuing. 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.

## 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. Our commitment for 2023-24 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 2SLGBTQIA+ children, youth, families, care providers and staff. We will remain committed to ensuring all staff 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.