

Embracing Diversity & Working Together to Better Serve Families

Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society
121st Annual Report 2020-2021



MISSION // STATEMENT

The Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society is dedicated to the well-being and safety of every child by advocating for, and partnering with, our children, families and communities.

TERRITORIAL // ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society acknowledges the sacred land upon which we are located. We recognize that this land has been inhabited by Indigenous peoples from the beginning. This is the Traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, comprised of the Ojibway, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie people. We are grateful to have the opportunity to live and work on this land. We are especially mindful of our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, and acknowledge that we walk upon territories and original nations of the first peoples of this land.

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Ms. Jacqueline Bobyk-Krumins, Interim Director of Family Services
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Ms. Loran Dutka, Director of Family Services
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Mr. Lyle Ward, Director of Permanency and Children Services



A MESSAGE FROM THE // BOARD CHAIR AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Mr. Kulveer Virk,
M. Eng., PMP
Board Chair

The emphasis of this 2020-2021 Annual Report of the Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society (WECAS) is on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - Three integral words that are deeply embedded in our daily work and are at the centre of WECAS' long-term organizational goals. As we continue on our equity journey, together with community partners and other stakeholders, we strive to foster a workplace, and to be a service provider, that recognizes, affirms, validates and supports all people in a way that honours uniqueness, complexity, and fullness of their identity. We are committed to serve with cultural and historical humility to create cultural respect and safety.

It was important that we carried on with our annual Pride Flag Raising last summer. In light of the events that brought anti-black racism to the forefront of our consciousness, we raised the Philadelphia Pride Flag, which includes an added black and brown stripe to show our support for our Black staff, service users and the community. Throughout this past year, there has been open dialogue at WECAS between the leadership team and the members of the Black, African Canadian and/or Caribbean (BACC) staff, which has created an opportunity and space for our BACC staff to discuss their experiences in the workplace and to bring forward ideas about how WECAS leadership can create an organizational culture of diversity, equity and inclusion. This committee has been meeting with leadership on a monthly basis and they are working on developing specialized initiatives to support children, youth and families from the BACC community. We have also continued to partner with Black Community Organizations that directly serve the Black community to provide better outcomes for the families we work with.



Mr. Derrick Drouillard,
BSW, MSW, RSW
Executive Director

WECAS similarly continues to build and strengthen its relationship with the Indigenous Community. A significant amount of staff training was instituted in 2020, and expanded to include Board members (WECAS and Can-Am Indian Friendship Centre) and other Indigenous Service Management. Staff were invited to attend a powerful presentation by Dr. Cindy Blackstock focused on Jordan's Principle and the history of Indigenous women and their right to participate in politics. A grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) allowed us to deliver a Family Wellness Program in partnership with the Can-Am Indian Friendship Centre that offered an opportunity for Indigenous families to heal and learn in a culturally safe space through guidance of their peers who experience and understand Indigenous culture.

Throughout the course of the past year, the term "Extraordinary Times" has been frequently used to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic. This global health crisis has impacted our lives in ways that we would not have even considered several months ago. At WECAS, we have closely followed and adhered to local and provincial government health guidelines and restrictions. We implemented an electronic active on-site screening assessment for everyone entering the buildings, as well as a contact tracing system with all staff. We have closely followed government announcements pertaining to re-opening schools, taking into account the impact that such directives have on the children, youth and families we serve, as well as our own staff. The Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Foundation (WECAF), via successful grants, was instrumental in re-inventing some of the traditional resources offered to those whom we support. Summer Camp, certainly not an in-person option this past year, was delivered in a box to over 200 families. Crafts, activity and story books, kites, toys, sports equipment and gift cards for a family picnic and ice cream, helped ease the stress of many weeks of lockdown. Similar initiatives also took place for Family Day and Easter. Youth living independently were provided with baskets that included food supplies, gift cards, enhanced internet access and a special treat to help them get through a very difficult time.

During the pandemic, we have recognized the good work of our staff through discounts at local restaurants and businesses and porch drop-offs of appreciation kits. These were small ways to say 'Thank You' to a remarkable team who have continually demonstrated a tremendous amount of resilience and dedication that goes well beyond their job requirements. The same can be said of our foster parents and kinship families who have endured and carried on during a very difficult period. Volunteers have certainly gone the extra mile as they clocked 13,858 hours collectively transporting children and youth to and from appointments, school, and activities. Our Board of Directors has continued to govern, support and ensure that our agency continues to serve those who need us the most. There is no doubt that our staff, foster parents, kin families, volunteers and Board members are our own "Hometown Heroes!"

In terms of administrative accountability, we are pleased to say that we have once again achieved financial consistency and closed the fiscal year with a budget surplus. We continue to work in concert with the Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services (MCCSS) on the Child Welfare Re-Design. This is a multi-year plan which involves other sectors and community partners to ensure that communities are not about child welfare solely, but about the “welfare of children in the community”. For WECAS, the next steps involve establishing goals and processes that will embed equity into all of the work we do; continuing to reduce the utilization of intrusive services and replacing them with a more family engagement, strength-based approach; and examining our resources to ensure they better align with our prevention/early intervention needs to keep children/youth from coming into care. Also, in keeping with our pledge to achieve complete equity, we are in the process of initiating the hiring process for a One Vision, One Voice (OVOV) Specialist and a Director of Equity, Inclusion and Diversity. These will be welcome additions to the Leadership Team in the coming year.

Recently, we have started the transformational process of developing a new strategic plan, which will set the tone for the agency’s work for the next several years. Throughout the coming months, a number of focus groups will take place with various stakeholders (Board members, all staff, community partners, foster/kin parents, youth and volunteers), with the overall objective to receive feedback on how WECAS can enhance its current goals and provide better outcomes for the children, youth and families of Windsor-Essex. The goal is to launch the new Strategic Plan this Fall. We are very excited about the direction our agency is taking in a number of service and policy areas. The new Strategic plan will solidify this and will provide a footprint for how we move forward.

In a related note, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Windsor-Essex Children’s Aid Foundation (WECAF) who adopted their own Strategic Plan this past November. We look forward to working collaboratively as we look at the most effective processes and resources to accomplish our work. Hats off as well to WECAF who completed their 5-year fundraising campaign, “You Can Write A Child’s Story.” The campaign exceeded its \$2 million goal, having raised \$4.2 million for programs that provide positive outcomes for children, youth and families.

It has been a year of transition as we continue to navigate through a global pandemic and set in place the first steps for our future direction. Much has been accomplished in terms of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, but we know we still have a long way to go. This is an ongoing process that all of us will continue to work on, each and every day. WECAS is on the right path, and, as the Japanese Buddhist philosopher, Daisaku Ikeda, said, “Everything begins with the resolve to take the first step. From that action, wisdom arises and change begins. Without action, nothing changes.”

Respectfully submitted:



Mr. Kulveer Virk,
M.Eng., PMP
Board Chair



Mr. Derrick Drouillard,
BSW, MSW, RSW
Executive Director

IN MEMORIAM

We are deeply saddened by the discoveries of unmarked graves at numerous Indigenous residential schools across the country and stand in solidarity with all Indigenous peoples. As a child welfare agency, we acknowledge the trauma and pain residential school survivors have had to endure and that continue to impact the Indigenous communities to this day. Truth and Reconciliation, our Indigenous commitments and restoring the jurisdiction of child welfare matters back to the Nations we serve, continue to be amongst our critical priorities. We acknowledge our responsibility to be and do better with collaborating and supporting First Nation, Inuit, and Métis children, youth and families, and we are committed to end the ongoing systemic racism and inequality that Indigenous peoples continue to face each and every single day.

STATISTICAL & FINANCIAL // REVIEW //



CHILD WELFARE DATA

3,431 // Total Families Served
410 // Average Children in Care
2,540 // Child Protection Investigations
899 // Average Open Ongoing Protection Cases
13,858 // Volunteer Hours



FAMILY BASED CARE

139 // Foster and Kinship in Care Homes
138 // Children in Foster and Kinship in Care Homes
118 // Kinship Service Families
166 // Children in Kinship Services



TOP 3 REFERRAL SOURCES

27.6% // Professional Community
20.6% // Relative/Friend
19.4% // Police



HOW WAS THE DOLLAR SPENT // \$56.8M

55.6% // Protection & Children's Services
12.5% // Purchased Foster & Group Care
11.0% // Infrastructure & Administrative Support Services
7.5% // Society Foster, Kinship & Other Care
4.8% // Permanency Services
4.84% // Legal Services
4.2% // Technology



ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICE REASONS

37.0% // Caregiver Capacity
24.7% // Emotional Harm
20.4% // Physical/Sexual Harm by Commission
12.7% // Harm by Omission
5.2% // Separation from Parent/Caregiver

BUILDING RESTORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS: COLLABORATION WITH CAN-AM INDIAN FRIENDSHIP CENTRE

WECAS received a \$75,000 Seed Grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), which funded a collaborative Family Wellness Program with the Can-Am Indian Friendship Centre (CAIFC). The primary goal of the program was to address the need to provide supervised court ordered visitation (or “access”) to Indigenous families without subjecting them to further trauma caused by having visitation at the Society’s building. The experience of attending visits at the Agency in a “governmental building” can further traumatize families whose ancestors, extended family members, and they themselves, may have endured harsh treatment at the hands of the Canadian Government. For those that have had their cultural history erased, a program such as this helps reconnect families to their culture.

The funds enabled Can-Am to hire an Indigenous Family Access Worker who facilitated all the visits for those enrolled in the program, weaving Indigenous teachings (such as the 7 Grandfather teachings) and storytelling throughout the program and connecting families to other valuable services that CAIFC offers. Funds were also used in other ways that benefitted families such providing transportation options to facilitate attendance, providing healthy snacks and posters detailing traditional foods based on location.

Throughout the course of the program, the overwhelming response was that parents felt culturally supported in access. As a result of this comfort factor, many sought out and participated in a variety of new programs as well as continuing with already established programs at the Centre. These programs focused on positive parenting, mental health and addiction issues and family well-being modules.

Overall, this program offers a space that can assist in reducing trauma, supporting and restoring culture, and more importantly, it provides an opportunity for families to reconnect and thrive.



“Culture is one of those things that you do not realize you are missing until you are exposed to it and it connects to something inside of you. By having access at the Friendship Centre, it is an opportunity for families to learn about and be exposed to aspects of Indigenous culture...they did not know much about.” - Marija Byrne, Indigenous Family Access Worker

ENHANCING SERVICE FOR BLACK AFRICAN CANADIAN CARIBBEAN COMMUNITIES • ONE VISION ONE VOICE & AFRICAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION OF WINDSOR ADVOCATES PROJECT

This past year, we witnessed a global reckoning around anti-Black racism, and we saw the significant disproportionate impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on many Black communities. While much attention was focused on the role of law enforcement and healthcare, the child welfare

system has been complicit in the harm and oppression of Black, Indigenous and marginalized peoples. Even before last summer’s protests, a conversation was already taking place about anti-Black racism within the Child Welfare sector and in our own agency.

WECAS has been actively participating in the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS) led, One Vision One Voice (OVVO) project, designed to address the overrepresentation of Black children in care and to improve the outcomes of African Canadians in Ontario’s child welfare system. In order to address these concerns, we continually liaise with community partners to enhance communications and working relationships, and to improve outcomes and reduce the incidences of BACC (Black African Canadian and Caribbean Communities) families and children being involved with WECAS services.

WECAS has worked in partnership with numerous BACC groups and associations, most notably, ACOW (African Community Organization of Windsor) to offer the advocate project to children, youth and families who are involved with the Society and identify as Black, African and/or Caribbean. The goal of the advocate program is to provide support services that will be helpful to and strengthen families. Families have been provided services including: emergency assistance, life skills support, budgeting, household maintenance, parenting information, translation services, referrals to community programs, cultural connections, spiritual connections, transportation and system advocacy. The services provided have aimed at prevention and keeping families together. When children are in out-of-home placements, the goal is to support the youth to maintain cultural connections and to support the family in reunification efforts. Advocates also provide culturally relevant services and education, and will work with families, children, foster parents, kin parents and WECAS staff to meet their specific needs.

While we have begun the very important work of addressing anti-Black racism in our sector, we recognize that there is still much more to be done. We are committed to listening, learning and taking action to ensure that our Black staff and service users see and feel change. WECAS acknowledges our current and historic role in systemic oppression and commits to meaningful change.



“We want to take this time to thank WECAS for their willingness to learn and grow with us. For the past couple years, BACC and WECAS partnership has proven to be instrumental in bridging the gap between the support services given to Black families in and out of care. BACC continues to be an advocate and mentor for Black, African, Caribbean and Canadians involved in the Ontario child welfare system. Together we are stronger, and we look forward to many more years of work to support Black families in our communities.”
- Joan Simpson and Michael Brown, Co-Chairs, BACC Community Advisory Committee

THE SPIRIT OF RAMADAN• THE SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP AND GIVING BACK

WECAS has been fortunate to have a longstanding partnership with the Islamic community. The Windsor Islamic Association's Islamic Social Welfare Assistance program (known lovingly to our staff as "ISWA") has been assisting families who are receiving services from WECAS with case consultations, system navigation and family supports for years. While the pandemic made it much more challenging for the Muslim community to gather during Ramadan, it did not lessen their generosity towards our children and families. ISWA once again provided beautiful Eid gifts for our Islamic children in care and youth living independently. The individual gift bags containing hand written notes, gift cards and sweet treats are always delivered with the reminder that the children are loved and remembered by their community.

WECAS is also honoured to be one of the chosen charities to receive food donations through the Share the Spirit of Ramadan Food Drive. April 2020 marked the 15th year of this wonderful program, which our families continue to benefit from. We received \$1,500 in food gift cards to be shared with families who are receiving kin and ongoing services. We are so thankful to the Islamic community for their ongoing generosity and friendship.



"Over the years, ISWA and WECAS have developed strong partnerships and collaboration helping to provide safe and loving homes for our children in care while preserving their culture and religion. The image and perception of The Children's Aid Society has improved considerably within our community to the delight of all." - Dawud Aderinto, Deputy Chair ISWA committee

BUILDING INCLUSION FOR LGBT2SQ+ COMMUNITIES• PRIDE FLAG RAISING

The Pride movement is about celebrating diversity across the breadth of all gender identities and sexual orientations. This diversity transcends race, ethnicity, faith, language, nationality and ability.

In light of events in 2020 following the death of George Floyd and anti-Black racism being brought to the forefront, our theme for our Pride Flag Raising was 'Building Inclusion'. WECAS raised the Philadelphia Pride Flag, which includes an added black and brown stripe, to symbolize the need for inclusion and visibility to ensure that the voices, concerns and contributions of Black and racialized communities are equally represented within Pride movements. The Trans Flag was also flown separately as the Trans community continues to seek visibility and inclusion within the larger Pride community.

This event was a testament to our ongoing commitment to create safe and affirming spaces for children, youth and families of all stripes. The outdoor ceremony included a diverse panel of guest speakers from across the LGBT2SQ+ community.

"[The Pride Flag] is an important symbol for all to see in a time that is desperate and isolating to many. Thank you for raising the rainbow and all that it means." - Nancy Campana, Run For Rocky



CONNECTING COMMUNITIES THROUGH LANGUAGE• FRANCOPHONE CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

The Connecting Community Through Language project was launched to enhance our capacity to provide child welfare services and supports to diverse Francophone families. French Language Service (FLS) intersects with WECAS' broader goals of equitable service delivery, as the largest growing Francophone population in our region are people emigrating from the African Continent, Caribbean and Middle Eastern nations. The importance of being able to communicate in first language cannot be overstated.

With financial assistance from the Ontario Francophone Community Grants Program, a partnership between WECAS, the Centre communautaire francophone Windsor Essex Kent (CCFWK) and Francophone service providers was developed to build relationships, engage in reciprocal learning, and foster a shared understanding that would enable us to better support Francophone families residing in Windsor-Essex. Numerous project deliverables were achieved, such as bilingual presentations about WECAS being delivered to Francophone partners; a consultation session to establish priorities and next steps towards the development of a Francophone protocol; a youth engagement session with diverse Francophone teens; a 'Community Conversation' with over 30 system partners; the launch of WECAS' translated bilingual website, as well as translated forms for workers to use with families.



"We look forward to continuing our discussions and improving upon our relations towards common goals to better serve our Francophone community. We stand at the ready to pursue our objectives and look forward to moving further ahead on these important goals." - Didier Marotte, Directeur general, Centre communautaire francophone Windsor Essex Kent (CCFWK)



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To find out how you can join us in supporting
and strengthening children, youth and families
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