

FOCUS

ANNUAL REPORT
2020/2021





C O N T E N T S

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Thank you to the children and youth of both our staff and clients who have all submitted the artwork that graces the cover and the pages throughout our annual report.



**In a year
where a global pandemic
has changed the way
everyone lives and works, it has
driven us to remain
steadfast and focused on the
children, youth and families
we serve.**



We promote trust, equality, openness, respect, honesty and diversity.

We create an environment that promotes trust, equality, respect, diversity, openness and honesty; Affirming and valuing our staff, care providers, clients and volunteers; Promoting enduring relationships for children and youth; Being accountable and transparent; Demonstrating excellence, leadership, teamwork and innovation.







We strive to be bold in our approach to the work we do.

We strive to be bold in our approach to the work we do, because we cannot afford to be anything less, just as the children, youth and families that work with us are bold in advocating for their needs. We place the needs of children and youth first. As you will see in these pages, the impact of our work is tremendous in terms of results and the number of children and youth we serve.



We care deeply about the well- being of the children.

We care deeply about the well-being of the children, youth and families. We are looking at all of our processes to ensure that the voices of children and youth are heard when decisions about their lives are being made and we are partnering with families to find solutions about how to best manage the challenges they face.



**MESSAGE
FROM OUR CEO**



At the time of this report, the world continues to work together to fight a healthcare crisis that has had an unprecedented impact on organizations, institutions, businesses and economies across the globe. It has also had a profound impact on our daily lives, our mental health, both personally and professionally. We are adapting to new ways of fostering connections with each other as we strive to support our employees and clients.

Although we could not have predicted the dramatic change in our working environment, the operational and service strategies that we have implemented in recent years have served us well through the crisis and will continue to benefit the children, youth, families and communities we serve, as well as our organization well into the future.

All of these developments come at a time when the pandemic has given rise to hate and xenophobia around the world, with rampant acts of targeted violence, and the spread of misinformation, racial stereotyping and fear. At CAS Toronto, we condemn injustice, discrimination and reaffirm our commitment to live by our values and cultivate a workplace that makes equality, diversity, inclusiveness and openness priorities. Martin Luther King Jr. said, *“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”* As individuals and as an organization, we must stand up against acts of intolerance and racism—as well as behaviours that promote divisiveness. In line with our values, we will not accept hate, racism or intolerance of any kind.

The layout of this report presented us with a powerful way of symbolizing how the agency has had to FOCUS this past year on navigating new terrain to ensure that children, youth and families in our community have the resources and supports the need to overcome challenges and thrive. We truly believe that working in partnership with families produces the best outcomes.

We have also been steadfast and focused on creating new partnerships to address equity and the overrepresentation of racialized children and youth in care. Our African, Caribbean and Black Family Group Conferencing (ACB-FGC) project is one such novel initiative that we have developed to help us reach our goals in this space. The primary goal of the ACB-FGC Project is to address the overrepresentation of African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) children in the child welfare system through a restorative justice intervention called African Caribbean Black Family Group Conferencing.

I would like to thank the entire team here at CAS Toronto for their tireless dedication and inspired work over the past year plus, and I would like to thank our Board Chair, Margot Trevelyan and our highly engaged Board of Directors for their commendable commitment to the agency and to our community.

Lastly, both Margot, and our Chief Operating Officer, Mahesh Prajapat, will be saying goodbye and retiring from their roles this year. On behalf of the children, youth, families and communities that we work with, I want to sincerely thank them both and wish them well in their next steps.

Thank you,

Paul Rosebush
Chief Executive Officer

**MESSAGE FROM OUR
BOARD CHAIR**



The past year has been one which has underlined the need for focus, not only by CAS Toronto, but for our partners and the communities we serve. Every family, every parent and every child has been hit by this pandemic.

Some have been hit harder than others. COVID-19 has shone a bright and harsh spotlight on the disparities between communities. Some families, have found it impossible to socially distance. Others have had to choose between paying the rent or getting sick and possibly dying. Schools have sporadically opened and closed, leaving some parents with the impossible choices.

Marginalized communities have been disproportionately and negatively impacted by this pandemic. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the CAS Toronto board believes it cannot fulfil its mandate to help children, youth, and families, without acknowledging and addressing systemic racism. The challenges of the pandemic, rather than distracting us, have stiffened our resolve, sharpened our tools, and helped us to identify and address the systemic issues which put children at risk.

While we have a long way to go, I am very proud of the steps we have taken. We have made a concerted effort to have racialized directors on the board so that we can ensure their voice and their perspectives inform our deliberations. We have adopted a strategic plan that has prioritized reducing the number of black children in care and set targets. This plan has been implemented by the CEO and by staff and supported by training programs, monitoring tools and research. Challenging at the best of times, we continue to move forward while ensuring the safety of staff.

Complementing this direction, the agency seeks to engage in programs that provide support to families facing challenges in a way that is sensitive to distinct cultures and ethnicities. Journey to Zero, a public-private partnership that provides customized supports to strengthen families so that children can stay at home, is one of these.

As I end my term as chair of the board, I think how fortunate I have been to have Paul Rosebush as CEO throughout my tenure. Paul has been an invaluable support to me and to the board and has provided strong leadership to the organization and collegial relationships with our partners. His focus on anti-black racism and on the development of key indicators for CAS Toronto programs ensure the agency moves in the right direction, monitoring the impact of programs and making changes where necessary. CAS Toronto is also very fortunate to have strong staff at every level of the organization, both in the delivery of programs and in administrative support.

I am excited about the future of this agency as it continues to wrest itself from the grip of eurocentrism and pivot towards the support of families in crisis. It is strong, it is resolute, and it continues to learn to adapt in an ever-changing and complex environment.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margot Trevelyan". The script is fluid and cursive.

Margot Trevelyan
Chair, Board of Directors



Questions and
answers

Every day I think about how we can improve the client experience, how we can advance quality in our work, and how we can eliminate disproportionality and disparity in outcomes for families.

Q: With the pandemic being at the forefront of this past year – and CAS Toronto being deemed an essential service during the pandemic by the government, what are you proudest of the organization for?

I am really proud of everyone in the organization for continuing to put the needs of children and youth first despite having to operate in a restrictive pandemic environment with endless obstacles that made their day-to-day work very difficult.

Read more about our Response to COVID-19: <https://torontocas.ca/news/covid-19-message-our-ceo>

Q: What current issues are top of mind for you and the organization?

Our agency is focused on executing our strategic priorities in order to serve children, youth and families better. Every day I think about how we can improve the client experience, how we can advance quality in our work, and how we can eliminate disproportionality and disparity in outcomes for families.

I also think a lot about who are the other agencies or service organizations that we can partner with to ensure that families have rapid access to the best resources available to meet their needs.

Read about the CAS Toronto Mission, Vision and Values: <http://torontocas.ca/vision-mission-and-values>

Q: What do you hope to accomplish within the next year?

I would like to see us achieve excellent results on our service goals. For example, I want to see children and youth spend fewer days in care. I want admissions of Black and Black

biracial children and youth safely reduced. I want to see more family-based care options developed to support children and youth. I want to see us working more effectively with community agencies to serve children, youth and families better. I want to see our focus on prevention activities to keep increasing. I want the agency to keep building our equity program so that we become a non-profit leader in this space. I want to see the agency create new pathways for children, youth and families to provide feedback on their experiences with our agency so that we can continue to improve how we engage with and support families. Finally, I want to ensure that every staff member feels safe and supported within the agency whether we continue working remotely or eventually return to a more traditional office-based setting.

Read about CAS Toronto services to clients: <http://torontocas.ca/services-clients>

Q: Currently CAS Toronto is in the middle of holding consultations with numerous internal and external stakeholders, can you speak to what the purpose is for?

Since the day I arrived at this organization approximately three years ago, the agency has been devotedly working on advancing equity in our organization and in our work with the community and the families that we serve. Although we are proud of the many steps we are taking to address equity and to overcome Anti-Black Racism (ABR) we recognized that we needed to check in again with our internal and external stakeholders on how we are doing in this space and get their guidance on what other specific steps we can consider taking as an organization to eliminate barriers internally and serve Black and Black biracial families better.

Read about some of the equity work going on at CAS Toronto: <http://torontocas.ca/equity>



**The agency is continuing
to invest significantly in our ABR program
by allocating new resources and
staff to support this important work.**

Q: Can you speak to the current Anti-Black Racism (ABR) strategy and the steps CAS Toronto is taking on our journey to achieve our goals?

The agency is continuing to invest significantly in our ABR program by allocating new resources and staff to support this important work. Our hope is that we will create a more inclusive environment for all Black staff and that we will make meaningful progress in eliminating disparity and disproportionality in outcomes for the Black families, children and youth who intersect with our agency. From our Board to every CAS Toronto team member, and with the assistance of incredible community partners, we are all pulling in the same direction to advance change that is visible.

CAS Toronto is also using every lever available to us to advance our ABR goals including collecting race-based data, providing extensive staff training, adding diversity to the Board, creating more opportunity for community and client feedback, as well as creating a pathway for racialized staff to advance into leadership roles with the agency.

CAS Toronto is also committed to changing our service practices that contribute to disproportionate admissions into care. Furthermore we are committed to working cooperatively with community partners so that we can help build the capacity of community services to support and strengthen families before they reach a crisis point.

When we created our current 2019-2022 Strategic Plan we intentionally made “Championing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion” one of our three cornerstone pillars so that we could clearly signal our priorities in this space to the community and be held accountable for results.

Read about the CAS Toronto Community Advisory Committee:
<http://torontocas.ca/index.php/community-advisory-committee-cac-services-black-african-caribbean-canadian-families-children-youth>



We have done a lot this past year, but keeping a safe workforce which was able to pivot and adapt to the ever-changing pandemic was a huge undertaking, which has been and continues to be a great strength.



Q: How can CAS Toronto cultivate and maintain a vibrant and positive culture during this challenging time?

Anthony: It starts with being kind and understanding with each other and with ourselves. It is important to acknowledge that the past year plus has impacted everyone in ways big and small. Whether it's the pandemic, lockdowns, stay-at-home orders, virtual school, very public cases of racism, in particular anti-Black, anti-Indigenous and anti-Asian racism, and everyone's own personal matters. Being adaptable and being compassionate for our colleagues and those that we serve are important aspects of moving forward at this time.

Mahesh: We must always focus on the fact that we serve a population that has tremendous need through these challenging times. Our work has never had more purpose that it does now. We have to always show our staff that we appreciate their commitment and dedication to the people we serve. During these difficult times acknowledgement, appreciation and thank you's are significant drivers of positive culture.

Q: What do you think was the most important step CAS Toronto did this past year?

Mahesh: We made a commitment, that despite the pandemic, we would not move to a virtual service model. We clearly understood that the safety and well-being of vulnerable children and families is not a service that can be provided virtually. Our staff understood and agreed with this principle and showed tremendous commitment and caring for the children and families we serve.

Anthony: We cannot look back at the past year without acknowledging how everyone across our organization showed incredible resiliency and adaptability in order to effectively and safely deliver services to the children, youth and families of the Greater Toronto Area through a pan-

demic. We had to embrace technology this past year in a way we never imagined was possible. Additionally, as an organization we were able to pivot to provide additional supports to those that we served, many of whom were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including financial supports and cell phones for those isolated by the pandemic.

Marnie: We have done a lot this past year, but keeping a safe workforce which was able to pivot and adapt to the ever-changing pandemic was a huge undertaking, which has been and continues to be a great strength. We have embraced innovation in terms of getting the work done during these challenging times.

Q: What's next?

Marnie: Certainly we are focusing on continuing to develop our HR Equity Strategy, which includes the development of special programs for Union staff as well as growing our leadership with respect to not only equity seeking staff but leadership across the organization.

We have recently rolled-out our first racialized mentorship program with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion department. We are moving along with our non-Union equity hiring strategy, which at this point is well established and fueling our organization with more diverse, broader thinking and different lenses so we can provide better services to the clients we serve.

Anthony: Looking forward, we continue to identify ways we can use technology to work better and build organizational capacity. Whether that comes from how we can make our own internal processes more efficient to improving how those that we serve can access our services to how we can better leverage data to into our everyday decision-making.

**By centering Equity in our work we
want to show the community that we are invested
in keeping our families together by
addressing the inequities that exist in the child
welfare system.**

Mahesh: We want to continue to challenge the foundational principles that child welfare has been built on and move away from a model of investigation. By centering Equity in our work we want to show our community that we are invested in keeping families together by addressing the inequities that exist in the child welfare system. Mostly we want to build a service model that has us partnering with families so they receive real help for the issues that cause children to be unsafe.

Q: What would you like to say to the CAS Toronto team about their resiliency over this past year?

Anthony: Thank you!! Our organization could not have successfully navigated the past year without the dedication of our people across the organization. Their commitment to supporting the children, youth and families of the Greater Toronto Area is incredible to see every day.

Q: After 31 years working in this sector and 5 years working with CAS Toronto, Mahesh you are retiring. When you look back, how has child welfare changed over the years and what part has Toronto CAS played in that change?

Mahesh: It has been an absolute privilege for me to serve the children and families of the Greater Toronto Area as staff member of Toronto Children's Aid. I truly consider myself lucky to be a part of a staff group that cares so much for the children, youth and families we serve. I want to thank all the staff and our community partners for all you have taught me, it has been a tremendous journey.

Child welfare has made significant changes and it has been humbling to be a part of those changes. We know that the field has caused unintentional harm to many marginalized communities and we must hold ourselves accountable to a higher standard of service.

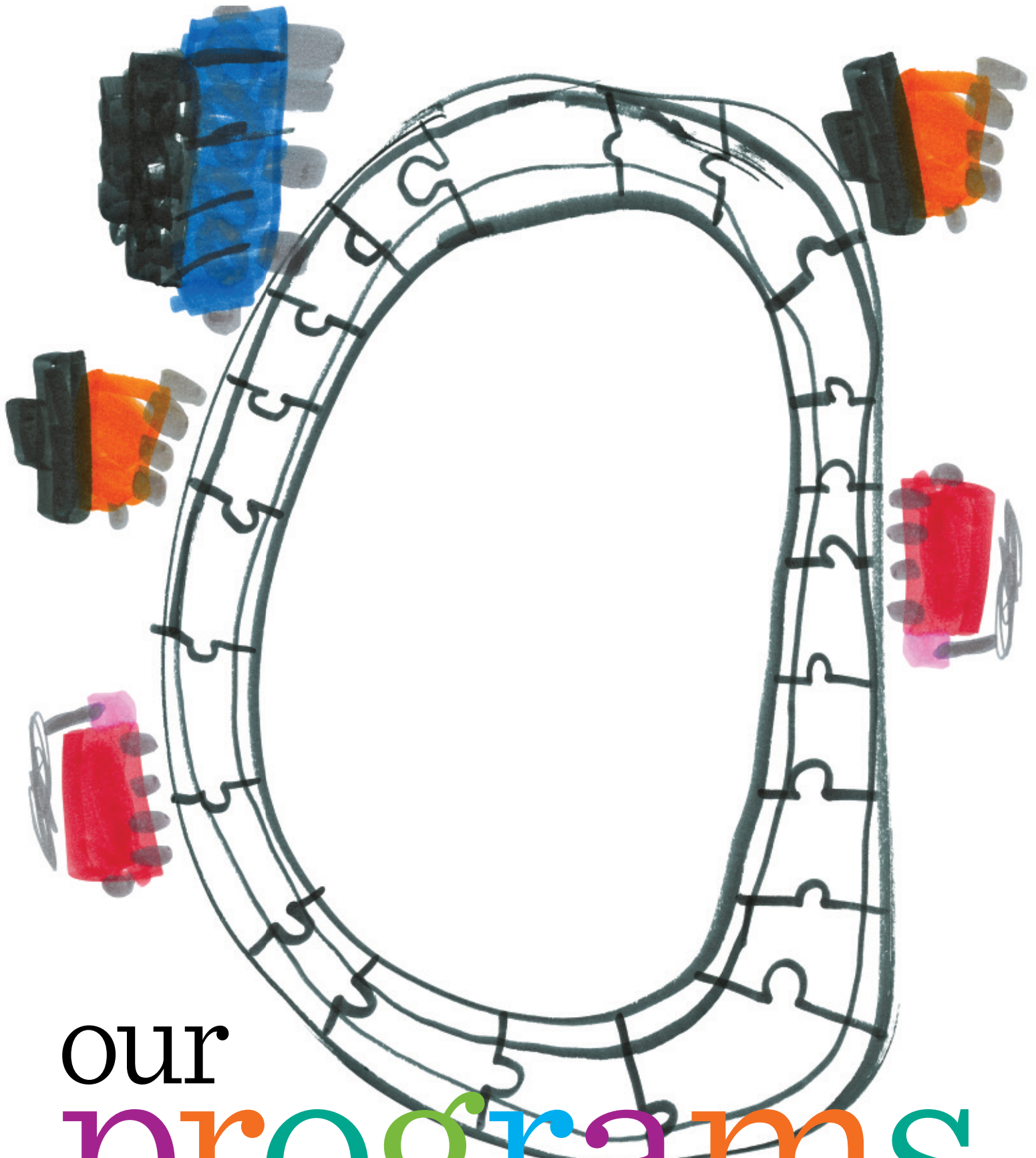
Our innovative partnerships and practice has played a significant role in improving our service and we know we have a long way to going on our journey to accountability. However, we know we are headed in the right direction and we commit to staying that course.



Mahesh Prajapat
Chief Operating Officer

Marnie Lynn
Chief Human Resource
Officer

Anthony Battista
Chief Financial Officer



our
programs





8,902

Screening Cases Opened (Total number of calls reporting abuse, neglect, seeking information and community links)

365,996

Social media impressions

ACB-FGC
DORIAN KING

The African, Caribbean and Black Family Group Conferencing (ACB-FGC) project is partnership between the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto, Black Creek Community Health Center and The University of Toronto. The goal of the ACB-FGC Project to address the problem of the overrepresentation of African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) children in the child welfare system through a restorative justice intervention called African Caribbean Black Family Group Conferencing.

The ACB-FGC Project Coordinators identify as ACB, have been trained to identify and speak to anti-Black racism, and have an understanding of the child welfare system. The ACB-FGC model is based on the traditional FGC model, however it has been adapted for the ACB population. The idea is to hold restorative conference circles involving families, their supports and partner agencies to address the identified child welfare concerns and put together long term plans for the safety and wellbeing of children.

In January 2020, service delivery commenced in the form of conferences.

Prior to the pandemic, the plan was to hold conferences at locations chosen by the family such as community centres, churches and family homes,

The staff drawings throughout this section have been illustrated by the youth and adolescents in our staff’s life.

however conferences are now being held virtually. The agency has provided a number of tablets to assist families to partake in virtual conferences.

During the fall of 2020, The University to Toronto conducted an evaluation of the ACB-FGC Project and provided feedback from both service recipients and CAS Toronto staff involved with the project. 83% of family members who took part in conferences endorsed feeling like the ACB-FGC process gave them a voice. Clients reported that they felt supported throughout the process and rated the work that was done with the ACB-FGC staff positively. They also reported great levels of communication which helped them to feel important to the process and found facilitators to be very patient with them.

CAS Toronto staff reported that they felt as though the ACB-FGC process gave clients a voice when creating plans for children, allowed for the opinions and concerns of clients to be heard, not just CAS Toronto’s bottom lines and was a means for clients to empower themselves. Workers were very pleased with the outcomes and reported that the conferences have helped to move families to reunification, reduce CAS involvement because clients were not calling workers as often; and increase family supports to step in and provide help.

The ACB-FGC Project has mainly been providing services to North West Branch, however in 2021, the project will be expanding to all of the Community Based Branches and Child and Youth Services.

Canadian Heritage Mentorship Program
DEBORAH GOODMAN

In June 2019, the Child Welfare Institute (CWI) at CAS Toronto was awarded a \$175,900 grant to implement a culturally specific mentorship program for Black youth in care. Titled *Improving High School Graduation Rates & Long-Term Outcomes for Black Youth in Care Via Culturally Specific Mentorship* this was a leading partnership between Delta Family Resources (Delta) and the CAS Toronto areas of RCY, PARC and CWI. Cascading program objectives included: creating positive relationships with youth/mentors, to help youth improve their academics, to help them feel more connected to their community/culture.

All CAS Toronto youth in care, ages 12-17 that identify as Black or Black-Bi Racial were invited to participate in this study via their child welfare worker. The intervention group included 26 youth vs. 14 youth in the comparison group who either already had a mentor or did not want or need one.

Mentors were recruited from approved CAS Toronto volunteers and partner agencies, like Delta. Although the study formally ended March 31, 2021, Delta successfully applied for funding from the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services, which will support an additional year of program coordination and mentor-mentee match support. Also being explored is



As we navigate this global pandemic there has been an increase in domestic violence worldwide. Dads Connect is grounded in the framework of father-centeredness and inter-partner violence.

a partnership with CHEERS, an existing Afro-centric tri-mentorship program for youth leaving care.

Analyses of the youth and mentor data are currently underway; findings are anticipated to be released in mid-May of 2021. The comprehensive evaluation plan involved: referral data, feedback from workers post-program, treatment and comparison data from pre/post-test, mentor pre/post-tests coupled with more in-depth telephone interviews or focus groups with mentees and mentors. Findings are key as they will inform CAS Toronto and other agencies serving Black youth on the value and impact of such mentor-mentee programs aimed at improving the outcomes of specific youth cohorts.

Dads Connect

DAWN MOHAMED AND JOHN TELFER

As we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic there has been an increase in domestic violence worldwide. Dads Connect is grounded in the framework of father-centeredness and inter-partner violence. This group decreases isolation of fathers while offering the necessary supports.

CAS Toronto staffer Nick Green who is a facilitator of the Caring Dads program, recognized the gap in service to fathers who are involved with child welfare due to conflict with, and/or perpetrated violence against the mother of their child(ren). For example, fathers who

missed the deadline for the Caring Dads group have to wait months to register for the next session. In addition, fathers are unable to participate in Caring Dads if they do not have access with their child(ren) at the time of referral.

Recognizing this gap and need created the idea of providing a drop in group for fathers facilitated by dedicated and committed child welfare staff was supported by the agency. Dads Connect drop-in group aims to help support the safety of women and children by engaging men. This group supports fathers in understanding and acknowledging the impact of domestic violence on children, it unpack beliefs and help fathers build support networks.

This drop-in group is voluntary and is aligned with the agency’s strategic plan, of strengthening client centred services and supports, working collaboratively by engaging community agencies to support fathers and championing diversity and equity by understanding the various intersecting identities fathers have in parenting yet holding them responsible for their actions.

Dads Connect takes place on Tuesday nights from 6 to 7:00 p.m. via virtual platform with two facilitators where fathers can drop-in for support, connect and have a space to unpack their challenges.

Facilitators: Nick Green; Roxanne Mathalon; Chan Nankosingh; Beverly Yap; Majuri Sabaratnam

Journey to Zero

SHARON CABRERA

Journey to Zero is a joint initiative between the CAS Toronto, the Children’s Aid Foundation of Canada, the Government of Ontario, and several Canadian philanthropic foundations and donors. It was publically launched on November 20, 2019. The first two demonstration projects: Early Response Family Partnership Meetings and Intensive In-Home Supports for Adolescents were implemented.

On February 1st, 2021 two more interventions were launched: Intensive Family Network Builders and Mpatapo (Supporting Black Families in the Journey to Reconciliation). Each intervention reflects a formal partnership between CAS Toronto and a community partner. The George Hull Centre is partnering with CAS Toronto to provide Early Response Family Partnership Meetings and YouthLink is providing Youth Outreach Workers intensive in home support for adolescents and their families. Strides Toronto provides Intensive Family Network Builder services and Delta Family Resource Centre provides intensive family network builder services specifically for Black and Black Biracial children, youth and families.



The Kuponya Project was named after the Swahili word for “healing.” Working from an Afro-centric framework and trauma-informed framework, services are offered to Black families who are involved with CAS Toronto.



CAS Toronto’s Child Welfare Institute (CWI) and community partners designed the evaluation plans for all of the demonstration projects focusing on Clinical/Service Goals and the Impact on Operational/Overall Program Goals.

The primary aim of Journey to Zero continues to be to reduce the number of children and youth from coming into care and the amount of time children and youth stay in care. Journey to Zero focuses on prevention as its primary service.

Kuponya Project ODELIA FRANCIS

The Kuponya Project was named after the Swahili word for “healing.” Working from an Afro-centric framework and trauma-informed framework, services are offered to Black families who are involved with CAS Toronto. A main focus of the program is to provide services that are designed to meet the unique needs of Black families through a culturally specific and safe lens that recognizes the systemic oppression and barriers that Black families experience. The overall aim of the program is to address these issues in a culturally safe manner and empower and support families to develop positive parenting skills. The Kuponya Project focuses on admission prevention, early intervention, and overrepresentation and disparities in services.

The Kuponya Project is a collaboration between CAS Toronto’s North West Branch, Caribbean African Canadian Social Services (CAFSCAN) and the Jean Tweed Centre to offer a two-fold approach to working with Black families from a trauma informed perspective. The project entails:

- The delivery of two groups for parents entitled, *Trauma 101 and Parenting Through Trauma*. These sessions are designed to support parents to better understand how trauma and trauma reactions can impact parenting with a view to developing effective coping strategies. These groups are co-led by child welfare staff and CAFSCAN staff and are delivered in the community.
- A Community Resource Liaison position to assist in connecting families with culturally appropriate and relevant clinical and support services in a timely and practical way. This is a co-located model which enhances capacity building opportunities between CAS Toronto and CAFSCAN, as well as with the larger Black community.

During this year, CAS Toronto has continued to foster and strengthen our partnership with CAFSCAN and Jean Tweed with services being delivered through an ABR lens and promoting diversity, equity and inclusive services.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the start date of the Kuponya Trauma Groups were delayed, with the first one commencing on August 12, 2020. We

offered two sessions of Parenting Through Trauma and one session of Trauma 101 through a virtual platform. In addition, consultation, education, support and referrals to other relevant services were provided to families by the Community Resource Liaison Worker.

The Kuponya Project fosters collaboration with families and community partners to deliver services with the aim of promoting positive and equitable outcomes for families who interface with the agency. The evaluation data reports participants having a rewarding experience, seeing CAS Toronto in a more positive light, having learned strategies to cope with their trauma and having a space to interact with other mothers with similar lived experiences and trauma history. In addition, the data and findings are promising and suggest that the majority of program intended outcomes were met.

Pandemic Health and Safety

LEIGH LEPAGE &
JULIANA DE MARCO

Throughout the pandemic, Toronto CAS has taken proactive precautions to protect the health and safety of its staff, clients and partners to mitigate the risk and spread of COVID-19. Spearheaded by CAS Toronto’s Health and Safety Lead, dedicated teams across



644

Children and Youth in Care Served

75,964,098

media impressions



the agency, including the Leadership Team and the Joint Health and Safety Committee, meet regularly to ensure the organization is both following and going above and beyond Public Health direction.

As a pandemic essential service, the agency's staff must continue to meet with clients and are provided with mandatory Personal Protective Equipment, hand sanitizer and wipes for in-home and Access visits. For their further protection, the agency has also implemented Screening Questions to identify if a client has travelled outside of Canada, has potential symptoms and/or has had COVID-19 exposure prior to meeting with staff.

By shifting to a primarily remote working model, CAS Toronto has dramatically reduced the number of staff in office. For staff and visitors required to enter its premises, the agency mandates that every person complete Screening Questions, wear a mask or face covering, practice hand hygiene and maintain social distancing wherever possible. In addition to frequent sanitization of high-touch surfaces, the agency has implemented safety measures including: plexi-glass barriers, enhanced cleaning, air purifiers and touchless initiatives such as automatic doors and faucets.

To manage potential cases and suspected COVID-19 exposure, CAS Toronto has developed protocols to track the symptoms, self-isolation and test results of staff and their households. the agency has also introduced contract tracing procedures for any workplace exposure between clients, staff, visitors and the general public.

As staff play an active role in protecting themselves and others, CAS Toronto provides real-time resources, information and training related to risks, Public Health protocols and Agency procedures. All Staff Meetings and regular Supervisor check-ins provide opportunities for staff to receive updates, provide feedback and share concerns or questions.

PARC CHERYL MANGAR

The Pape Adolescent Resource Centre (PARC) offers a variety of supports, skills development programs and financial aid to youth leaving care. During the pandemic young people were dealing with housing, mental and physical health issues, food insecurity, education barriers and unemployment.

PARC received a grant through the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada to support youth during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The PARC COVID-19 Support program has helped in the following ways:

- 251 Youth have received funding through a \$300 one-time only fund.
- 125 youth have received an honorarium for attending PARC Virtual programming.
- 48 Black youth have received additional ABR support through the Ahead of the Game, Black Hair Care Workshop, Black History Workshop in partnership with CHEERS and Out and Proud and the PARC Black History Event.
- 196 youth have received \$50 Emergency gift cards and/or Emergency funding.

Young people have reported that the funding has reduced financial stress, food insecurity, provided support to maintain their housing, support child care needs, travel to get to appointments, secure technology, and access mental health supports and purchase supplies and personal needs. Young people also reported that the PARC Virtual Workshops was additionally helpful in reducing feelings of isolation, reduce food insecurity and provided education and support to develop life skills and access supports in the community.

Resources for Children and Youth and Partnership with The 519

In 2019, a partnership with The 519 and CAS Toronto began to find resource parents to reflect the identities and needs of all of our children and youth.





522,065

Over the pandemic, we have 31 drivers and they still completed approximately 522,065km from Jan.1 to Dec. 31, 2020.

292

Black/Biracial Children in Care Served

Through this partnership we have been able to obtain customized training for our staff and foster parents.

This training was specifically geared toward the 2SLGBTQ+ and the intersectional identities that make up the community, aligns with our strategic directives as well as the sector's directives.

The training was also aligned to our CAS Toronto employee engagement strategy and staffing requests for learning that would enhance their work with children and families.

Employees who have taken the training have said that it has amplified critical thinking, self-reflection and un-learning oppressive beliefs.

Shared Services

DEBBIE SMITH, PHD
AND KAREN LEITH-WENTGES

Shared Services began as an innovative way for child welfare agencies to pool their resources and work collaboratively in an effort to find efficiencies in a common program that was previously housed independently by each agency: After Hours. Shared Services is a ground breaking program in which CAS Toronto After Hours responds to both urgent and non urgent calls for a variety of Participating Agencies (PA's) including BGCFS, Halton and DCAS. CAS Toronto has always, even pre shared services, covered for NCFCS and continues to cover for this agency.

Originally, when the project started in 2019, there were 8 other CAS' involved, however, four remain. Ultimately this program benefits the clients and families that we serve as they receive a seamless service where all calls are triaged through Shared Services. The PA's would have their own afterhours worker on call to attend out on any assessments as required.

Our team of 35 EAHS workers had to learn all of the policies and procedures for each of the agencies in order to be able to respond to calls appropriately and to ensure they were informed when explaining to callers what the next steps would be. Benefits for the PA's include direct call answering, providing a consistent service, combining of agency resources, establishing consistent business standards, providing a seamless service for families when they call in and use of ABR, Equity and SOS frameworks which is embedded in all the intakes completed by EAHS staff.

Surrey Place

NANCY ANDREWS

Just before COVID began, CAS Toronto was planning to have a Coordinated Service Planning (CSP) staff sit in our Intake Branch to offer consultations, service and support.

Given this could not occur due to the pandemic, we have moved to virtual service and support.

Surrey Place will be collaborating with CAS Toronto, allowing one of their Coordinated Service Planning staff to work with the staff at CAS Toronto for an hour each day.

The CSP staffer will be available virtually to provide counsel on how to support complex children and youth. Through this consultation the CSP staffer will determine if the case warrants a full intake and or if the concerns can be worked out in one meeting. The CSP staffer will work with CAS Toronto staff to determine which level of service is required.

The Goals of the project are for Surrey Place and CAS Toronto to both increase their understanding of the respective agencies and how they support children and youth; for CAS Toronto staff to increase their capacity to support children and youth that have complex needs; and that support for families will be seamless with the child welfare sector and the developmental disability sector.

Young and Potential Fathers (YPF)

BIANCA STEWART

Young and Potential Fathers (YPF) provides therapeutic supervised and non-supervised access at Ujima House for Black and Black Bi-Racial families of CAS Toronto. The Therapeutic Access Program (TAP) Pilot project explored serving African Canadian fathers with culturally relevant access



Young people have reported that the funding has reduced their financial stress, food insecurity, provided support to maintain their housing, support child care needs, and access mental health supports and other personal needs.

services starting in 2012. Mothers of Black or Black biracial children can also have their access visits supervised at Ujima House as well. Ujima House is located at the corner of Weston Road and Lawrence Avenue. The goals of the program are:

- Observe and teach parenting skills to parents;
- Improve parent-child relationship during supervised visits;
- Increased fathers' engagement, interactions through reading stories, books and play with child/ren;
- Help fathers to understand their own experiences of being parented;
- Implement discipline methods without resulting to physical abuse and emotional harm;
- Encourage fathers to be role models, considerate parent partners and good leaders to their children;
- Encourage fathers to change old ways and build positive behavioural skills;
- Reinforce the importance of paying attention to safety, risk and permanency within an AOP framework; and
- Encourage the child/ren to recognize father's importance and effectiveness in his/her life.

The Young and Potential Fathers Therapeutic Access Program at Ujima House has been successful through fathers reporting they appreciate

the quality time they spent with their children; feeling more comfortable in the cultural setting which allows their visit to go smoothly; families have the opportunity to use the kitchen space to cook for their family members if they choose; and fathers working with a male that understands their cultural backgrounds, nuances and behaviours.

YSM-CAS Toronto Partnership
VIOLETA DUBOV

In June 2019, CAS Toronto and Yonge Street Mission (YSM) entered into a collaborative service partnership. Teddy Bear Grant funding through the Children Aid Foundation of Canada, enabled the YSM-CAS Toronto partnership to hire a YSM Intake Coordinator and work alongside CAS Toronto workers. This multi-disciplinary model of service allows YSM to provide prompt services to children, youth, and families referred by CAS Toronto.

The aim of the partnership is to address the disparities in service to Black and Biracial families by offering more culturally reflective, effective services. The overall goal is to reduce the number of Black and Biracial families served by CAS Toronto and reduce the numbers of Black and Bi-racial children and youth entering CAS Toronto's care. If children and youth have been admitted into care, YSM and CAS Toronto work with families towards the earliest reunification of children or youth home. In the recent year, 19 families received Care Management services from YSM.

The CWI has joined the partnership and helped adopting common outcome measures to capture the impact and evaluate this partnership with the longer-term goal of advancing an evidence-informed program design.

In the next program year, YSM is looking to continue to meet the needs of Black and Biracial families referred by CAS Toronto, as well as developing and implementing ways to raise awareness of YSM's services to families. This includes participating in learning events, such as the live webinar that took place in July 2020, where CAS Toronto and YSM jointly discussed "The Cornerstone Partnership" and the holistic support it provides that aims to address issues of poverty and strengthen the capacity of Black families to care for their children at their home. The webinar is available on CAS Toronto's YouTube channel.

Suicide Prevention work at CAS Toronto

PATSY HAMILTON

A recent report, *Raising Canada 2020*, published by the University Calgary, indicates that suicide is now the leading cause of death for children aged 10-14 years. With the continuing impacts of



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the COVID-19 pandemic, concern for the mental health of children/youth in our communities is growing. As an agency that provides services to children, youth and their caregivers, CAS Toronto is aware of the impact this has on our clients and it drives us to sharpen our focus this issue.

We are aware that many children/youth receiving our services have life experiences and characteristics that are associated with higher suicide risk. These include, but are not limited to, a history of/abuse, family history of mental illness, separation, isolation, and substance abuse. Some of those factors may be exacerbated by, and admission to Society care.

In providing services to children/youth, and as the “guardian” to some, CAS Toronto needs to be aware that young people often rate their own mental health less positively than their parents do. So, as caregivers, we need to be even more aware of a child/youth’s mental well-being. It is imperative that the agency focus attention on the mental health of the children/youth served and, specifically, be equipped to consider suicide risk when there is chance that a young person is struggling in this area.

To this end, the agency provided Suicide Prevention training to staff. Additionally, a group of staff, foster parents, a youth representative, and a consultant have been meeting in

order to develop best practices related to suicide prevention. While this Suicide Prevention Workgroup continues those efforts, the urgency of the matter has led to the implementation of their first recommendation—the development of an internal Suicide Prevention Consultation Panel

The Panel, developed in partnership with The Child Welfare Institute, is available to consult on any case where a staff member is worried that a child/youth is/might be at risk of suicide. Consultations are scheduled promptly in recognition of the risk potentially present for the children/youth as well as the worry of the staff.

In consultations, panelists use their knowledge to elicit information from the Worker and Supervisor that can be used to enter into conversations about suicide, assess risk and enhance safety plans.

Panel members join Brahm Goldenberg, Patsy Hamilton-Diabo, Darcy Koreen, and Robert Davidson who have been involved in the operationalization of the model. The members of the pilot panel are:

Michael Wilson, Tanja Corovic, Anusha Jaura, Kevin Yarde, Chrissy Adamopoulos, Mohsin Attique, Melissa Jewel, Stephanie Briskin, Maria Beck, Ann Morris

The work of the Suicide Prevention Workgroup will continue and additional best practice recommendations will be presented in the coming months. It is the goal of the Workgroup and the Panel

to increase support to Workers and Supervisors, improve service delivery for children/youth and caregivers, increase comfort in discussing issues of suicide, and decrease suicide risk to the children and youth served by the agency.

New programs aim to keep Toronto children safe with their families and communities

JOY JIN

It may be no surprise that separating children from their families can be a traumatic experience, even if they’re leaving unsafe home environments. Children and youth can go into foster households confused, perhaps fearful of their new surroundings and unsure about their new caregivers. In some situations, children are raised in foster families with different racial and cultural backgrounds, making them feel further alienated.

For a long time, foster care was frequently used as a primary method of keeping children and youth safe from crisis situations. Through philanthropic and community partnerships, Children’s Aid Society of Toronto created an alternative program, Journey to Zero, which aims to keep children safe and not place them in foster care.

Journey to Zero was launched in 2019 and is a partnership between the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto, the Children’s Aid Foundation of Canada

185

185 total active volunteers at this time.

308

Every year roughly 308 comfort kits are distributed to children and youth who have been placed in kinship or foster care.

and several philanthropic organizations. This prevention-focused program helps support and engage families in protecting their own children so they can remain in safe environments and with people they're familiar with. The program provides intensive at-home support to families and explores their circle of relatives and community for assistance, among other interventions.

Ontario's Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services also supports the program and will be reviewing its outcomes to assess whether this kind of work should be replicated across the province.

"[The Journey to Zero] interventions are designed to strengthen family systems and strengthen family capacity as a way of dealing with safety so that children can stay at home," says Mahesh Prajapat, chief operating officer at the Children's Aid Society of Toronto. "We want to be partnering with families, we want to be looking at the resources that families have and we want to really believe that families do have the capacity to look after their own kids and to keep their kids safe."

The Journey to Zero program has served more than 200 families in need to date, and because of the interventions, fewer than 10 per cent of the children involved have needed to be placed into the care of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto.

"Foster care and group care placements should be last-resort options, because we have significant data that tells us that children who grow up in care have poor outcomes," says Prajapat, who lists education, employment, mental health, addictions and human trafficking as some variables that can affect the outcomes. "Children do best when they're with their families and their communities — but the notion of family and community needs to be broadened," he says.

In January 2020, the Children's Aid Society of Toronto launched a second family-centred intervention program. The goal of the African, Caribbean, Black-Family Group Conferencing (ACB-FGC) project, a partnership between the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, Black Creek Community Health Centre and the University of Toronto, is to continue to address the overrepresentation of African, Caribbean and Black children in the child welfare system.

ACB-FGC project coordinators identify as African, Caribbean and Black and have been trained to identify and speak to anti-Black racism as well as offer an understanding of the child welfare system.

"[The project] provides a specific service to the African, Caribbean, Black population to meet the needs of the population," says Dorian King, an ACB-FGC project lead. "It's really important to keep [children] in their community of origin, to keep their culture strong,

to maintain their identity. Children don't do well when they lose touch with their culture, their identity and their family," she says.

Since the project's inception, ACB-FGC interventions have been well received by families, who have reported feeling supported and that the process gave them a voice in working toward family reunification.

"I think that we know in our hearts that systems can't raise children well," Prajapat says, adding that programs like Journey to Zero and ACB-FGC, which invest in struggling families, provide children with a better chance at success and well-being over the long term.

To learn more about Journey to Zero, ACB-FGC and other partnerships and programs that aim to keep children and youth in safe family and community environments, visit the Children's Aid Society of Toronto.

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Salim Zulfikar Somani

(In thousands of dollars)

2020–2021

2019–2020

\$

\$

Revenue By Source

Government of Ontario	160,022	161,241
Government of Canada	3,212	3,744
Children's Aid Foundation	3,776	3,145
Other	1,872	2,873
Total Revenue	168,882	171,003

Government of Ontario

Revenue By Program

Child Welfare Program	157,621	157,999
Other	2,401	3,242
Total	160,022	161,241

Expenses

Salaries & Benefits	88,313	88,281
Boarding	47,067	43,590
Other	29,756	35,181
Total Expense	165,136	167,052

Summary of Operations

Revenue	168,882	171,003
Expenses	165,136	167,052
Excess of revenue over expenses	3,746	3,951

Audited financial statements are available upon request



Instagram: @cas_toronto

Twitter: CAS_Toronto

TorontoCAS.ca

OUR BRANCHES



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