

The Power of PARTNERSHIPS

partnerships

2021-2022 ANNUAL REPORT



CHILDREN'S
AID SOCIETY
of TORONTO

LA SOCIÉTÉ
DE L'AIDE à
L'ENFANCE
DE TORONTO

An abstract graphic featuring four hands in different colors (orange, blue, green, and purple) reaching towards the center, framing the text. The hands are stylized with thick outlines and are positioned around a central white area where the text is located.

The Power of Partnerships

Every day at Children's Aid Society of Toronto, we witness the power of partnerships.

We strive to build strong connections with our colleagues, community organizations and professionals, and the children, youth and caregivers who intersect with our Agency.

Partnerships inside and outside of our Agency allow us to evolve our Service offerings, mobilize our equity strategy, and connect families with resources and networks to overcome obstacles and safely care for their children.

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Letter from Paul Rosebush

The past year was challenging yet hugely rewarding. In line with many organizations, working through another year of COVID-19 brought new challenges for the Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST).

While managing the numerous complexities presented by the pandemic, our Agency's important work continued without interruption thanks to the dedication of our team members who ensured that we upheld our mandate to build a "city where children are safe, families are strong and communities are supported." With the pandemic creating compounding challenges for vulnerable communities including new financial, housing, mental health and employment stressors, we found that our Agency, more than ever, became a critical resource for supporting families in need.

The theme of our 2021-2022 Annual Report, *The Power of Partnerships*, highlights our Agency's journey over the last year to support children, youth and families. Part of that journey included our efforts to keep our staff, clients and partners safe by updating our health and safety protocols and procedures. Although we continued to work in a primarily remote model, departments across the Agency stepped up to ensure all employees were provided with the tools, resources and supports needed to stay engaged, informed and connected. We truly navigated the second year of the pandemic together, and I would like to thank all of our CAST team members who consistently rose to the occasion by demonstrating exceptional collaboration, creativity and commitment to meet the needs of our colleagues, kinship and foster caregivers, and the children, youth and families we serve.

The Power of Partnerships also mirrors our Agency's continued efforts over the past year to develop purposeful relationships with organizations and professionals who can support the unique needs and identities of families. As we work steadfastly to reduce the number of families who intersect with child welfare, and address disproportionality in our practice, our sector-leading partnerships are greatly extending our Service offerings by providing children, youth and

caregivers with culturally-appropriate programs and support networks that build their individual capacity and strengthen their family unit.

We understand the importance of connecting families with trusted services in and from their communities and are grateful for our partners in the community who hold us accountable to ensure our work is always grounded in a framework of equity, diversity and inclusion. I am proud of the connections that our Agency and employees are making across Toronto to assist children, youth and families. As we move forward, we will continue to break down silos, improve access to services, and build innovative partnerships with the voices and interests of children, youth and caregivers paving our way.

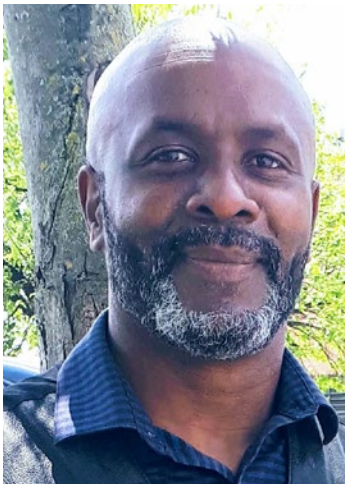
As you'll read in the following pages there are many individuals who support us in supporting families. We are extremely grateful for our extended and passionate CAST community, including our kinship and foster caregivers, as well as the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, who work alongside us with a shared goal of keeping children and youth safe, well and strongly connected to their home, communities and culture.

I would like to thank the entire team here at CAST for their tireless dedication and inspired work over the past year. I would also like to thank our Board Chair, Marlon Merraro and our highly engaged Board of Directors for their commendable commitment to the Agency and our community.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge that Mark Foerster, Uppi Doshi, Racheal Lawrence and Antonella Ceddia have recently said goodbye and stepped away from their Board member roles here at the Agency. Further, Marlon Merraro will be stepping away from his role as Board Chair. On behalf of the Agency, Board, and the children, youth, families and communities that we serve, I want to thank Marlon and our departing Directors for their service and contributions. We thank them and wish them all well in their next steps.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Rosebush". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Paul Rosebush
Chief Executive Officer
Children's Aid Society of Toronto



Letter from Marlon Merraro

While 2021-2022 provided another year of unknowns, Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST), like other child welfare agencies, continued to successfully operate as an essential service during the pandemic

thanks to the strength and commitment of staff, volunteers and community partners.

Despite having to navigate COVID-19, the Agency remained steadfast in moving our work forward guided by our 2019-2022 Strategic Directions:

- Strengthening Client-Centred Services and Supports
- Working Collaboratively
- Championing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Since being introduced by our Board in 2019, these organizational priorities have served as the blueprint for how our Agency sets goals, makes decisions and works with our internal and external stakeholders. Over the past three years, these directives have led us in achieving significant results including:

- Working with children, youth and families to prevent admissions into care
- Reducing the number of days children and youth are in care
- Increasing the number of kinship placements for Black children and youth
- Developing Service partnerships with Black-centred social service agencies
- Implementing an Equity Hiring Strategy to identify employment vacancies for job candidates from equity-deserving groups

As we head into the 2022-2023 fiscal year and beyond, we have arrived at a point in time where we must pause and reflect on our progress and challenges. In doing

so, we must also ask ourselves what is next? How do we continue making strides towards better supporting children, youth and families in our communities?

To help answer these questions, over the next year our Board will prioritize working in partnership with our Executive Team and our talented employees across the entire organization to review and update our Strategic Directions which includes stewarding incredible community partnerships.

We will also continue to monitor admissions into care and champion Service strategies that will further reduce the disproportionate number of Black children and youth involved with our Agency. This includes identifying and implementing new partnerships with organizations who represent diverse identities within the Black community.

With a goal to better understand and connect with a broad range of external stakeholders, over the next twelve months we will also be establishing a "Supporters Group" to garner feedback from diverse members of our communities.

In closing, I would like to recognize that while COVID-19 continued to present us with uncertainties, 2021-2022 was a notable year for CAST in advancing our Strategic Directions. Thank you to our Board, partners, strong community networks and our resilient staff. I applaud all of you, our CAST community, for your ongoing commitment and dedication to delivering our mission and mandate, which ultimately helps to strengthen families.

Marlon Merraro
Board Chair
Children's Aid Society of Toronto



■ ■ We are working to develop a broad range of partnerships with organizations across Toronto who can meet the varying needs and challenges of the children,

youth and families that come to the attention of our Agency. These partnerships are important at all levels of Service and begin at the initial time of involvement and ideally continue beyond child welfare's involvement with a child, youth and family.

Our work with partners is not only through direct service but has allowed us to develop learning opportunities and accountability frameworks both of which impact on more effective Service delivery to families in Toronto. We look forward to the coming year and work with the community. ■ ■

Lisa Tomlinson
Chief Operating Officer
Children's Aid Society of Toronto



■ ■ The Corporate Services branch walks together with our partners and colleagues in the Service areas.

Our Agency turns to our professional governance, technical and

administrative services to support and enable our Service teams who directly engage with our clients and community partners. Our role as the Corporate Services branch is to support our staff and enable them in delivering on our collective vision of strong families and communities where children are safe. We accomplish this through strong partnerships with teams and leaders across CAST to understand their needs, provide timely guidance as subject matter experts, and implement projects that improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our Service delivery.

We are on this journey together building internal and external partnerships to expand our capabilities and our capacity, and to position our Agency for the challenges that lie ahead to serve our community. ■ ■

Keshwer Patel
Chief Financial Officer
Children's Aid Society of Toronto

Developing our **partnerships** from the inside out

With more than 750 staff members, we have internal positions, processes and programs that allow us to deliver on our mandate of supporting children, youth and families utilizing an equity lens.

It is through the strength of our internal partnerships, that we can establish, measure and evolve our impactful external partnerships.

Supporting our Service Delivery

It takes the commitment and hard work of teams across our Agency to ensure we can deliver our services to children, youth and families in our communities. With a shared goal to uphold our mandate, we have a range of roles across the following departments dedicated to supporting our Service staff and efforts:

- Communications
- Finance and Administration
- Human Resources
- Information Technology and Property
- Information Management
- Legal Services

We have unique roles across our Agency that provide further expertise and specialized supports for our staff, clients and communities.

Manager, Strategic Community Partnerships

In 2021, we introduced the position of Manager, Strategic Community Partnerships, which is

responsible for developing and stewarding varying levels of partnerships with external organizations and professionals that have expertise in supporting equity-deserving groups.

With a focus on promoting services for communities by communities, this role implements strategies to grow and evaluate our network of partners available to support the diverse needs of the children, youth and families who utilize our services.

Indigenous Practice Integration Lead

In March 2022, we hired our first Indigenous Practice Integration Lead which is responsible for providing oversight to our Agency's services for Indigenous families and partnership with Native Child and Family Services of Toronto.

This position will help build our Agency's capacity to support families by better understanding Indigenous ways of being and how this can impact our approach and case decision making. Through ongoing monitoring and analysis of our services, the role also provides recommendations and insights to support our Agency in keeping accountable to our Truth and Reconciliation commitments and processes.

Child Welfare Supervisor, Children's Aid Foundation of Canada Programs

Introduced in March 2022, the Child Welfare Supervisor, Children's Aid Foundation of Canada Programs, manages our joint programs and partnerships with the CAFC, along with other resources available to children and youth in our care.

At this time, the position is focused on leading the Big Steps to Success Program by working in partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada, Big Brothers Big Sisters Local Chapter and other child welfare agencies.

**Learn more about the
Big Steps to Success
Program on page 13**

Anti-Black Racism Practice Integration Leads

Our Service staff are supported by Anti-Black Racism Practice Integration Leads who provide leadership in addressing issues of disparity and disproportionality that impact Service delivery to Black children, youth and caregivers. These leads partner with our Service staff through consultation to identify systemic barriers in our work, and facilitate interventions that lead to better outcomes for Black families.

The individuals in these positions are also responsible for leading the promotion of our ongoing commitment to anti-Black racism and anti-oppressive practices, as well as, our equity approaches to child welfare with Black communities.

Out & Proud Program Coordinator

CAST also has a dedicated Out & Proud Program Coordinator who partners with Service staff to develop strategies and highlight planning considerations for working with families who identify as 2SLGBTQ+. This includes offering consultations and resources to staff related to

protective factors, coming out, gender transition and family rejection/ambivalence to assist with supporting children, youth and caregivers.

The Out & Proud Program Coordinator is also responsible for managing and growing our Agency's relationships with community partners who focus on offering services and resources that align with the needs of the 2SLGBTQ+ children, youth and families we support.

Child Welfare Institute

In understanding the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of our Service delivery, we have an internal department at CAST, the Child Welfare Institute, which conducts ongoing assessments of our programs and partnerships.

Over the past year, this department has worked in collaboration with staff across our Agency to measure and evaluate more than 30 projects with a focus on identifying opportunities to improve Service outcomes for children, youth and families.



Paving the path to a more diverse workforce

In the last twelve months, our Human Resources Department has leaned into partnerships dedicated to addressing the underrepresentation of equity-deserving groups in our workplace.

As an organization that supports diverse communities, we're focused on ensuring our employees, across all levels and positions, reflect the unique identities of the children, youth and families we serve.

Equity Hiring Strategy

In July 2021, our Human Resources department and CUPE Local 2316 expanded our Hiring Equity Strategy to include unionized positions.

As part of this new strategy, our Agency is working in partnership with the Union to identify employment vacancies for qualified job candidates from equity-deserving groups. This includes job applicants who self-identify as racialized, 2SLGBTQ+, persons with disabilities, or as women.

■ ■ **The Racialized and Indigenous Mentorship Program offered me opportunities for personal and professional development, as well as guiding me in the proper direction to become a better leader.** ■ ■

Joji John, **Family Service Worker, Children's Aid Society of Toronto**

Racialized and Indigenous Mentorship Program Pilot

With 10 pairs of mentors and mentees, we rolled-out our Racialized and Indigenous Mentorship Program Pilot designed to support the professional

development, growth and career trajectory of Racialized and Indigenous staff seeking to attain supervisory positions.

The pilot program garnered positive feedback from all participants. Mentees shared that the experience provided them with an opportunity to practice self-reflection, build confidence, and engage in networking and job preparation.

■ ■ **As a racialized Supervisor, I chose to participate in the Program to give back in a way that would allow me to coach, encourage and nurture leadership in other racialized and Indigenous workers. More specifically, I wanted to share my own journey that has brought me to a leadership position, and the opportunities, challenges and barriers I've experienced along the way.** ■ ■

Sherlene Fernando
**Child Welfare Supervisor,
Children's Aid Society of Toronto**



Strengthening families through community connections

At CAST, we're focused on building partnerships that bridge the gap between our Agency's Service delivery and the range of supports families need to resource themselves and keep their children safe.

As advocates and voices of the diverse populations we serve, our Service partners allow us to connect families with culturally-safe support and trusted networks from and within their own respective communities.

Crossing the River Together Program

In November 2021, we launched the Crossing the River Together (CRT) Program in partnership with Caribbean, African Canadian Social Services (CAFCAN).

Through CTR, Black families in need are connected to CAFCAN for identity and culturally-safe services where they are better supported in their communities. These services build upon their strengths including: individual, family or group counselling, as well as, connections to employment services, emergency shelter/housing services, youth mentorship, child care, parenting support, emergency food supports and more.


Already in the first five months of the CRT Program, more than 55 families have benefited from this partnership. Many families have expressed their gratitude for being connected with a Black-focused social service agency that understands their specific needs.

**In less than six months,
more than 55 families
have benefited from the
CRT Program**

The Cornerstone Partnership

Introduced in 2019, the Cornerstone Partnership is a joint initiative between CAST and Yonge Street Mission (YSM) funded by the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, the Keenan Foundation and other private YSM donors.

The program focuses specifically on supporting families who identify as Black where there is a risk of a child or youth coming into our Agency's care. YSM provides extensive wrap-around services including a dedicated YSM intake worker who connects families with community supports and resources related to mental health, housing, child care, food access and case management. In the last year, 53 families were able to receive service through this partnership.



 **With the partnership between YSM and CAST we have seen firsthand families who may have lacked the knowledge around resources find their way to us through referrals. As well, the partnership is building trust whereby both CAST workers and YSM staff can each advocate for the children while being allies in restoring families and preventing admission into care.** 

Dale Thompson
Supervisor,
Care Management in Family Services,
Yonge Street Mission

African, Caribbean and Black Family Group Conferencing

Beginning in 2020, the African, Caribbean and Black Family Group Conferencing (ACB-FGC) Project is a partnership between CAST, Women's Health and Women's Hands, and Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at OISE. The program is facilitated by ACB-FGC Project Coordinators who hold restorative conference circles with Black caregivers, their support networks and social service agencies to establish long-term plans for the safety and well-being of their children. In 2021, 20 families took part in virtual conferences.

Over the past year, we expanded the ACB-FGC project with a new youth-led model that places the voice and needs of a young person transitioning out of care at the centre of the conference circle. Through this model, we have brought together 23 youth and their families with a focus on establishing the youth's goals, connecting them with community resources and building their networks of support.

 **Families who have completed their family group conferences (FGCs) expressed positive feedback about the process and their coordinators. ACB families appreciate having the time and space to share their feelings and communicate with family members and are very satisfied with the work of their coordinator. They felt that the FGC process helped them navigate challenges within their families, and would recommend the service to other community members, family members and friends.** 

Zina Mustafa
ACB-FGC Project Coordinator

Journey to Zero

Launched in 2019, Journey to Zero is a joint initiative between CAST, Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, the Government of Ontario and several Canadian philanthropic foundations and donors.

With a primary goal of reducing the number of children and youth who enter and remain in care, Journey to Zero connects children, youth and caregivers with customized supports and wrap-around resources through a series of early interventions. Facilitated through four unique partnerships with YouthLink Youth Services, George Hull Centre for Children and Families, Delta Family Resource Centre and Strides Toronto, Journey to Zero works to strengthen families by building their support networks and creating individualized safety plans that meet their unique needs.

In 2021–2022, 323 families received services through Journey to Zero. Over the past two years, we have witnessed the benefits of the program that has prevented more than 90% of children and youth from entering into care.

Over the past two years, Journey to Zero has prevented more than 90% of children and youth from entering care

Children at Risk of Exploitation Pilot Program

In August of 2021, we launched the Children at Risk of Exploitation (CARE) Pilot Program with Toronto Police Services, which is a program dedicated to supporting youth who are at risk of, or involved in, human trafficking.

CAST and Durham Children's Aid Society were selected to participate in the program that pairs

child welfare workers with police officers who provide youth and families with psychoeducation, risk assessments, safety planning and connections to community supports. As this partnership evolves, we are working with other child welfare agencies, including Indigenous organizations, to help broaden the program and make it available to more communities.

Since its launch, CAST has supported more than 150 youth and their families with many expressing their gratitude for the supportive partnership and how we're helping address concerns around human trafficking risks.

Through the CARE Pilot Program, our Agency has supported more than 150 youth and their families

Building a network of social workers and therapists

In 2021, we focused on developing partnerships with Black-identifying social workers and therapists with expertise in supporting and improving outcomes for children, youth and families who identify as Black.

Through these partnerships, we are able to provide families who identify as Black African, Caribbean, Canadian with individual and group counselling and therapeutic services, including caregivers, high risk adolescents and fathers.

CAST Speakers Bureau

Over the past year, members of our staff were invited to speak to more than 50 community organizations including educational institutions, hospitals, social service agencies and child care providers about Duty to Report, what happens when our Agency is engaged, the services we provide and our community partnerships.

With audiences including students, professionals and caregivers, we understand the value in creating safe spaces for members of our community network to meet, learn more and ask questions about our child welfare model.

Kinship Caregivers

In line with our priority of keeping children and youth connected to their communities, in 2021-2022 we facilitated more than 475 kinship placements for children or youth who could no longer safely stay at home. Kinship care allows children and youth to better maintain relationships, strengthen their sense of identity and maintain their racial, religious and cultural practices.

Foster Parents

While our primary goal is to always keep children and youth with their primary caregivers and in their communities, when this cannot occur we turn to foster parents who provide them with a temporary home. Over the past year we strengthened our partnerships with foster parents to ensure the needs of children and youth in their care were met throughout the pandemic. We're thankful for the commitment made by the foster parent community.



■ ■ **As foster caregivers, we keep connected to a child's primary family through communications books, occasional meet-ups during Access visits and plans of care. We recognize that reunification between a child and their primary family is always the desired outcome. In the last two years, we have twice supported with the reunification of children with their primary families. In both instances, we have stayed in contact with members of these families who are well-adjusted and thriving.** ■ ■

Pat May
Foster Parent



Setting young people up for success

Our Child and Youth Services Department is dedicated to providing youth aging out of care with the support and empowerment they need to pursue their life goals with self-determination.

Through external partnerships, our focus is on ensuring that youth have the tools, resources and networks in place to achieve positive outcomes now and into their adulthood.

Pape Adolescent Resource Centre

The Pape Adolescent Resource Centre (PARC) is a voluntary program that provides 16 – 29 year-old youth leaving the child welfare system with access to resources, programming and services designed to support their transition to adulthood. PARC is operated by CAST in partnership with Catholic Children's Aid Society and Jewish Family and Child Service, with funding support from the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada.

In 2021, PARC delivered its services and programs to 630 youth

I have been attending programs at the Pape Adolescents Resource Centre for a few years now. Every time I've reached out for support from my case worker and staff, they have been nothing but respectful, supportive and encouraging, and provide a safe space where I can relax and be myself. It's for reasons like these why I would like to take on this career path and hopefully be able to make an impact on somebody's life as they have mine.

PARC Service Recipient

In 2021, PARC delivered its services and programs to 630 youth through a primarily remote model, and as restrictions began to lift youth started to access in-person assistance. Resulting from the impact COVID-19 has had on young people, particularly those from marginalized communities, PARC has supported the increased demand for services related to food insecurity, finding housing options, re-entering the workforce, mental health and wellness, child care needs, technology and financial aid.

Big Steps to Success

In February 2022, Big Steps to Success was launched as a five-year mentorship program funded by the Bank of Montreal and the Government of Ontario. The program is co-designed by Children's Aid Foundation of Canada and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada (BBBS) and is being implemented at our Agency through a dedicated Navigator who works in partnership with BBBS.

The goal of Big Steps to Success is to improve the educational outcomes of seven to 14 year-old children in care by connecting them with a mentor to improve their school engagement and bonding, and provide academic motivation.

Cross-Branch Education Committee

High school graduation rates for youth in, or from, care are significantly lower than their peers. In response to these statistics, in November 2021 we launched our Agency's first Cross-Branch Education Committee.

This Committee is part of our Three-Year Education Plan to improve graduation rates, and brings together Service staff from across our Agency to provide children and youth in care with tools that increase their access to employment opportunities, higher education or a vocation.

Take a Youth to Work Day

Since 2018, CAST has worked in partnership with TELUS to ensure youth in care are provided with

opportunities to participate in Take a Youth to Work Day. Last year, 17 youth involved with our Agency took part in a virtual experience where they discussed their career goals, heard from a range of professionals, and explored the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace.

In understanding the positive impact of providing young people in care with barrier-free access to guidance and employment experience, TELUS has expanded Take a Youth to Work Day by developing a broader program, Ladder 2 Rise. Launched in 2021, Ladder 2 Rise will include mentorship for students in Grade 10 - 12, and co-op placements for young people aging out of care.

Over the past four years, youth involved with CAST have had unique and protected seats with major corporate organizations for the annual Take a Youth to Work Day. With the introduction of Ladder 2 Rise, youth are able to build on their curiosity with subject matter expertise mentorship that matches them with a mentor in the field they aspire to be in. Building on this momentum, we've seen the immediate impact with placement of youth for experiential and paid opportunities with corporate organizations under our Access pillar of programming. We look forward to further strengthening our partnership with CAST.

Ruth Nyaamine
CEO and Founder, Ladder 2 Rise

BY THE N

CAST calls
for service
received
21,000



Referrals
Received
15,026



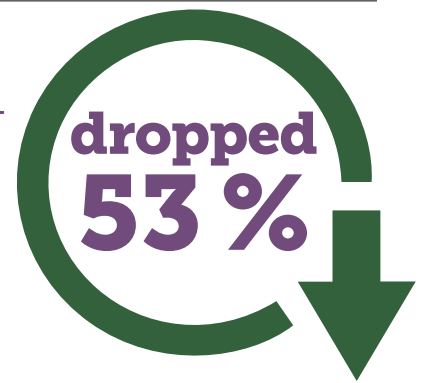
Investigations
Completed
5,447



Children and youth
discharged from
care to family
or kin **231**



In the past four years, the total
number of CAST children and
youth admitted into care has



**9 out of
10 times**

the work we do is with
children, youth and families
in their homes

NUMBERS

**From April 1, 2021
to March 31, 2022**

Total number

of kinship
placements

477



Total

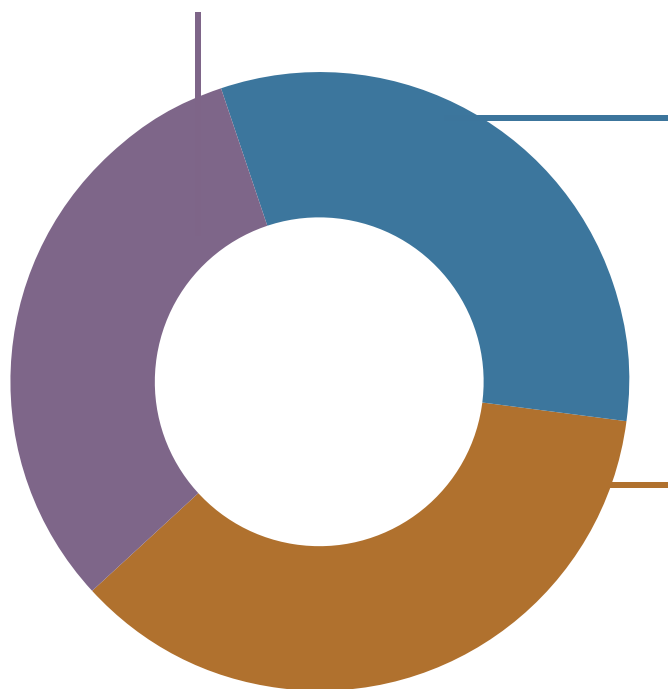
number of
adoptions

50



Client Feedback Survey Results

80% Overall Client Satisfaction



81% of clients
felt part of the decision
making process

90% of clients felt
they were treated
with respect

Board of directors

Executive Members

Marlon Merraro
Chair

Mark Foerster
First Vice-Chair

Cheyenne Ratnam
Second Vice-Chair (EDI)

Gerald Mak
Secretary

Yeugenia Kazantseva
Treasurer

Board Members

Antonella Ceddia

Randolph Carter

Silvie Crawford

Uppi Doshi

Catharine Dutt

Racheal Lawrence

Dr. Evelyn Kissi

Irene Mukasa

Jennifer Eng-Yeboah

Marshall Schnapp

Greg McGovern

Salim Zulfikar Somani

Bruce Sinclair

Gave Lindo

Financial summary

(In thousands of dollars)	2021-2022	2020-2021
	\$	\$
Revenue By Source		
Government of Ontario	163,341	160,022
Government of Canada	2,533	3,212
Children's Aid Foundation	3,950	3,776
Other	1,621	1,872
Total Revenue	171,445	168,882
Government of Ontario Revenue By Program		
Child Welfare Program	158,238	157,621
Other	5,103	2,401
Total	163,341	160,022
Expenses		
Salaries & Benefits	87,598	88,313
Boarding	44,097	47,067
Other	35,805	29,756
Total Expense	167,500	165,136
Summary of Operations		
Revenue	171,445	168,882
Expenses	167,500	165,136
Excess of revenue over expenses	3,945	3,746

Audited financial statements are available upon request.

