



The Children's Aid Society of Ottawa | La Société de l'aide à l'enfance d'Ottawa



ANNUAL **REPORT**
2020-2021

Table of Contents



1
Reach Goals

2
Financials

3
Management Team

4
Message from the
Board of Directors

5
Message from the ED



6
Strategic
Directions

Highlights of Progress

7 **1** Excellence &
Innovation

11 **2** Equity, Diversity
and Inclusion

13 **3** Reconciliation

15 **4** Partnerships and
Collaboration



17
Service
Details

Who We Are and
What We Do

18 Intake and
Assessment

19 Ongoing Services

21 Children and
Youth in Care

23 Resource Services

25 Kin Service

26 Permanency



27
Committees

28
Youth Focus



Reach Goals

Reaching higher



▼
No child or youth will grow up in our care

▼
No child or youth will exit our care into loneliness

▼
Families are empowered to make the best decisions for their child

Our Mission

We work to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and youth by strengthening the capacity of families and communities.





Financials

The Children's Aid Society of Ottawa

Statement of operations and changes in fund balances

Years Ended March 21, 2021	2021 Total \$	2020 Total \$
Revenue	-	-
Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services	69,460,000	70,331,229
Other revenue and expenditure recoveries	2,880,712	2,900,891
Amortization of deferred capital contributions	309,100	309,100
Restricted contributions – special projects	24,586,533	1,723,447
	97,236,345*	75,264,667
Expenses	-	-
Salaries and wages	32,080,247	32,340,302
Benefits	7,400,391	7,768,472
Travel – administration	11,683	68,715
Adoption subsidy	1,397,850	1,505,292
Legal custody subsidy	88,005	55,550
Targeted adoption and legal custody subsidy	1,792,620	1,702,575
Education and conferences	156,352	267,329
Professional services, case	639,413	1,114,405
Professional services, non-case	1,015,581	1,025,305
Clients' personal needs	1,296,952	1,636,130
Financial assistance	710,225	322,920
Health and related	395,138	367,038
Building occupancy	919,203	1,435,725
Promotion and publicity	83,314	167,527
Office administration	678,370	737,266
Other	839,840	800,827
Direct service travel	683,262	1,623,342
Boarding rate payments	21,062,511	19,253,099
Program Expenses	4,667	17,883
Customary care one-time financing	6,809	12,555
Technology	225,811	250,936
Amortization of capital assets	1,149,885	1,099,905
Special projects [note 19.2, schedule 1 and 2]	24,586,533	1,723,447
	97,224,664	75,296,545
Excess (deficiency) of revenue over expenses before the following:	11,681	(31,878)
Surplus payable to Ministry operated balanced budget fund	(23,827)	-
Excess (deficiency) of revenue over expenses for the year	(12,146)	(31,878)
Fund balances, beginning of year	9,391,573	9,423,451
Fund balances, end of year**	9,379,427	9,391,573
** Includes balance budget fund accumulation at March 31, 2021	1,053,933	1,030,106

Full audited financial statements are available upon request.

* During fiscal year 2020-2021, the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa was the successful applicant as Lead Agency to administer two ministry programs designed to support licensed congregate care living facilities retain staff during the emergency respond to Covid-19. Both programs are temporary in nature, this revenue source is not sustainable over the long term.

Management Team

Executive Director

Kelly Raymond

Associate Executive Director

Debbie Hoffman

Chief Financial Officer

Neal Reeve

Chief Counsel

Julie Daoust

Human Resource Director

Amy Bennett

Equity, Diversity and
Inclusion Manager

Wendy White

Service Managers

Stacey Fragiskos

Marc Poliquin

Melanie Fulford

Dan MacNeil

Andrée Guillemette

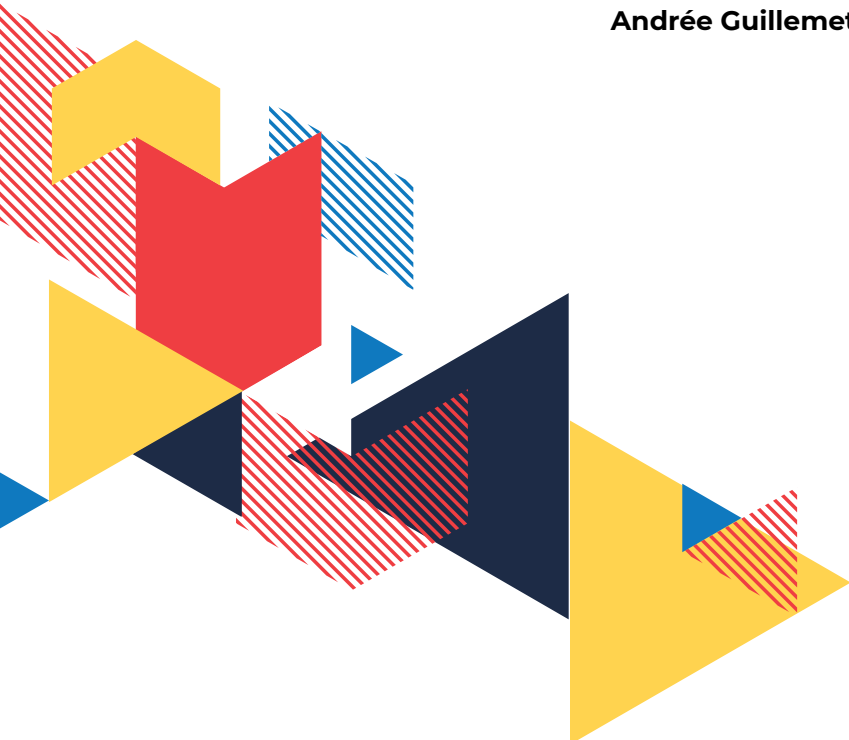
Quality Assurance
and Organizational
Development Manager

Jayna Carter

Corporate Services Manager

Cheryl Farris-Manning

*There are 321 staff in direct service and
125 staff in corporate services.*



Message from the Board of Directors

On behalf of the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa (CASO) Board of Directors, I am pleased to present CASO's 2020–21 Annual Report. The report provides a high-level description of our key services and activities over the year which fulfilled our mandate and supported strategic priorities. The report also provides a status report on key deliverables as well as a year-end view of CASO's financial performance.

CASO is committed to protecting the safety and well-being of children, youth and families in Ottawa. The importance of our work has never been more apparent given the emergence of the global COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. The work of the Board over the past year focused on maintaining the momentum of our strategic plan, while coping with the demands of the pandemic. The events of the past year reinforced the importance of our commitment to achieving equitable outcomes and service excellence. We must redouble our efforts in becoming an anti-racist organization, and one that actively progresses on our path to Reconciliation.

In usual times, the Board of Directors at the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa (CASO) recognizes the difficult work staff face every day and we are proud of the dedication and compassion they demonstrate when working with children, youth and families. This last year has been anything but "business as usual". In spite of the significant challenges

staff have faced, the Board recognizes the dedication with which they have continued to put the needs of children, youth and families they serve first. This has been no small feat. Distancing guidelines, evolving regulations, and substantial significant restrictions in available supports to meet children, youth and family's needs have had a significant impact on our staff's abilities to perform critical child welfare duties. The Board of Directors celebrate the strength, resilience, dedication, and hard work of the child welfare staff. Our hats off to you all.

I thank my fellow Board members for working so collaboratively and effectively despite a shift to virtual meetings for the entire year. On behalf of the Board, I also thank the leadership, supervisory and the staff of CASO for carrying on the essential operational work as well as moving forward on our strategic plan during this lengthy COVID-19 pandemic.



Ralph Heintzman



The Children's Aid Society of Ottawa 2020–2021

Board of Directors

Ralph Heintzman, Chair

Sheila Niven, Vice-Chair

Anna Tosto,

**Patricia Elliott-
Miller,**

**Abdourahman
Kahin,**

**Toonejoulee
Kootoo-Chiarelo,**

Matt Lundie,

Ann Marcotte,

Jacob McIsaac,

Debbie Miller,

Kristine Neglia,

Jessica Robson,

**Roger Scott-
Douglas,**

Deanna Tremblay,

Deborah Tunis

Message from the ED

What an extraordinary year! Our response to COVID-19's unexpected outbreak illustrated how quickly we can mobilize to help each other navigate a major crisis together. In a world struggling to figure out how to respond, our values, mission and vision guided us, and enabled our staff to focus on immediate needs and support the most vulnerable in our communities. The Board was inspired by the dedication and creativity of staff and management as they supported children, youth and families and worked with community organizations in order to cope with the impacts of the pandemic.

This last year also spotlighted the fact that racism continues to plague our society, sometimes visibly, and sometimes hidden structures of which we are all a part. The Children's Aid Society of Ottawa stands for equity, diversity, and inclusion. Last year, we recognized the need to do more and made the important decision to increase our transparency and accountability by sharing our data regarding who we serve. This work continues with a plan to ensure that our Agency is actively addressing racism and overrepresentation in our service volumes.

We continued our Reconciliation work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, families and communities and strived to create a more inclusive and self-determined experience. Through broad consultation with Indigenous stakeholders, we are also exploring how we can improve the ways in which we serve Indigenous communities to create better and more equitable outcomes.

In many ways this Annual Report is unlike previous ones. This past year has not been "business as usual". It has been a time of great stress and uncertainty for everyone, however our staff continued to help and support the most vulnerable children, youth and families in our community. You will see from this annual report that CASO is well situated to influence and contribute to the provincial redesign pillars. During this period, we have strengthened our relationships with both local partners and provincial government and have helped drive change for our children, youth and families. We were exposed to and contributed to innovative practices, where our culture was showcased in programs, practice, policy and legislation.

Resilience, dedication, conviction: to the staff, supervisors and managers you are the true unsung heroes. Thank you for being a source of strength and stability for children, youth and families that rely on you.



Kelly Raymond





COVID-19: A year of Innovation and Adaptation

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on our lives for an extended period. The effects for individual children, youth, families and the wider community are likely to be with us for some time. Like all public services, the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa had to adapt quickly to continue to meet statutory requirements, maintain support for vulnerable children, youth and families, and do so in ways that ensured COVID-safe practice. Despite the COVID-19 challenges, this annual report showcases the many promising innovations and adaptations the CASO shifted to. The speed and agility with which these innovations and adaptations were rolled out and their achievements are testimony to the pre-existing local relationships with community partners, contextual expertise, dedication and ingenuity of child protection workers and practitioners to quickly adapt to changing contexts and ensure effective programming, formalized relationships with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services contributing to shared policies and change agendas. It is through the dedicated efforts of these staff and partners that we have been able to keep children and youth safer and promote their well-being in these challenging times.



Strategic Directions

Highlights of Progress

Moving our goals and visions into practice.



1

Excellence & Innovation

◆ *Youth Initiative on Group Home Usage*

CASO is developing an initiative that will help curb our usage of group homes and ultimately result in fewer children and youth being placed in these resources. The initiative began with an information gathering phase that included a review of literature on the topic of group care diversion programs, and an environmental scan composed of consultations with Children's Aid Societies across Ontario. The focus of this research was on learning what has been successful in averting group care placements.

Key learnings from this phase of the initiative have confirmed that many agencies are attempting to slow down the group care placement process and instead, create processes that see staff doing immediate and intensive planning to explore all possible options before clients are placed in group care. If placed in group care, every effort is made to keep their stay short until a better option is found.

Following this research phase, a committee with cross-society representation was established to inform development of a group care reduction strategy based on a strong foundation of evidence.

◆ *Youth Leaving Care to Independence Initiative*

Youth who transition out of care and into adulthood often voice feeling unprepared for independent living. This initiative is focused on developing intentional and actionable approaches to help youth prepare for life after care. It kicked off with a literature review that investigated the needs of transition-aged youth in care and the best practices for supporting them. A committee was established to review the literature and to inform the development of a draft best practice “roadmap” that describes the preparatory milestones, (lifeskills training for example), that need to be met each year by clients aged 16 to 21 so they are ready to successfully transition from care.

◆ Youth-in-Transition Programming

Many of CASO's youth-in-transition programs pivoted in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic to virtual delivery in order to provide uninterrupted connections and support to transition-aged youth in care. The **CAS Teens** program focused on maintaining weekly meetings, alternating between group discussions and hands-on virtual workshops. These meetings emphasized connecting youth to a peer group with whom they can hopefully build life-long relationships and, particularly during the pandemic, not experience isolation.

The **FLIP camp**, a camp designed to help youth in care develop and practice financial literacy skills, also went virtual this year and, for the first time ever, the option for youth to take part in one-on-one sessions was offered. These sessions precipitated a key learning: that some youth who are not comfortable with group programming can be reached through one-on-one programming supported by remote communications tools.

GPS (which stands for Guide, Partner, Succeed) Connect is a transitional life-skills program that incorporates mentorship to strengthen the learning experience and the youths' social network. The pandemic struck during the first GPS Connect cohort of 2020, resulting in a pause on the program that restarted virtually in the fall. A key learning from this experience was that youth in care, who are already at risk of isolation, were even more at risk during this time of social distancing and stay-at-home orders. Consequently, they required frequent check-ins and coordinated support from their mentors.

Another key learning occurred when we observed that all youth who finished this cohort were those that came into the program with natural mentors; these were the relationships that were able to endure the challenges of a pandemic summer.

Natural mentors are those people in the youth's network of family and friends who have committed to attend the program with the youth. For this reason, even greater efforts were made to ensure that youth taking part in the Winter 2021 cohort had natural mentors identified.

Umoja Youth Group seeks to connect youth who identify as Afro-Caribbean and/or Black with their peers. In monthly group sessions, topics that are relevant to their individualized cultural experiences in care are discussed and activities are organized to maintain connections as well to collaborate and develop ways in which their experiences can be improved.

The **Youth Works** program launched in January of 2021 after a robust research and development phase that included a review of literature on the topic of employment support to youth in care, and an environmental scan of other programming of this type. As a result of this research, the initiative was structured to take a case management approach to supporting youth in care and formerly in care, by connecting them with paid employment and on the job experiences. Since launch, the Youth Works program has supported 18 youth in reaching their employment goals.

With the inception of the COVID-19 pandemic, the **QuaranTEEN** program was launched to ensure that youth in care were not becoming isolated. It consisted of structured virtual life skills and knowledge development training. The program ran four groups of eight to twelve weeks each, serving a total of 45 youth in care. The program was also curriculum-mapped with the local school boards so that youth who completed the program were awarded a course credit for their efforts. Youth said that connecting online was fun and helped them feel less isolated, particularly the youth living in extended society care.

Figure 10: GPS Connect Pre & Post-Program Youth Self-Reported Knowledge and Ability Rating

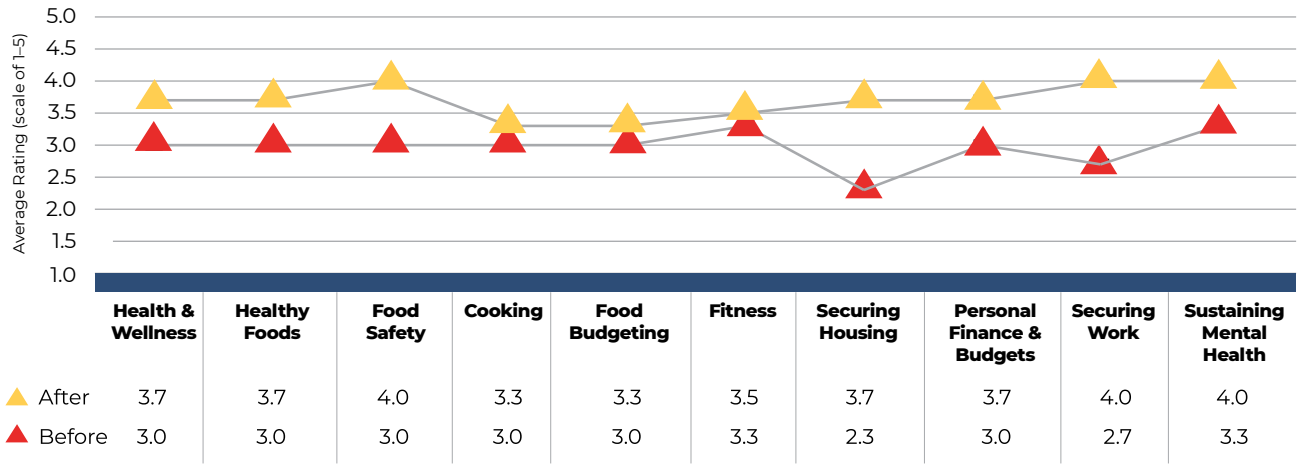
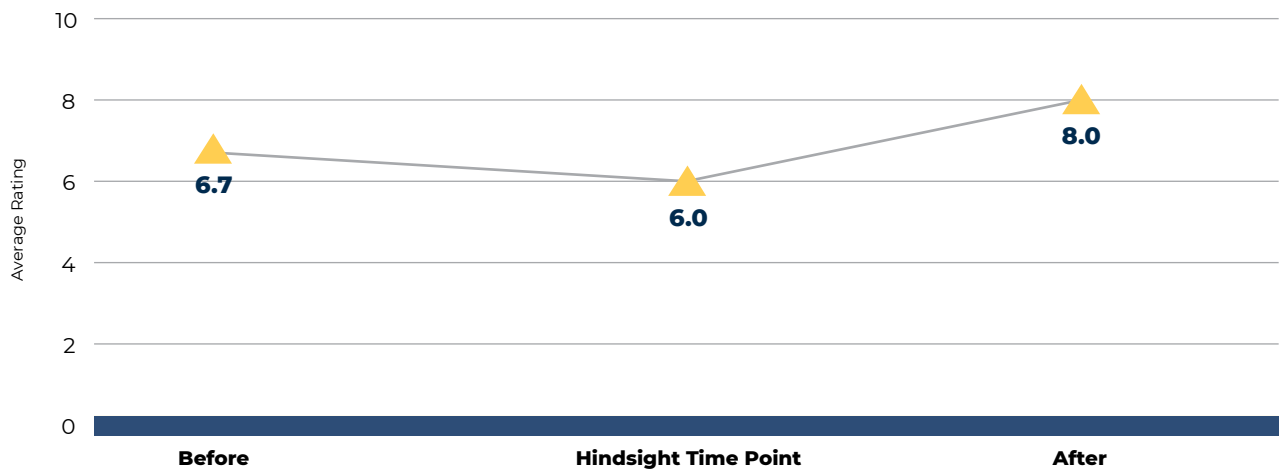


Figure 11: GPS Connect: “How comfortable do you feel in your ability to live independently, in a comfortable and successful manner, the way that you want to?” (19.4% change)



◆ **Family Engagement**

The goal of **Family Engagement** work is to achieve:

- ▶ a reduction in transfers to ongoing service,
- ▶ fewer court orders,
- ▶ fewer admissions of children and youth in care,
- ▶ a reduction in the length of time in care when it's required.

To increase consistency of practice and transfer of knowledge between Family Engagement workers and protection workers/supervisors—documentation requirements, workflows, and consultation processes have been standardized. Additionally, two targeted workshops were delivered to 21 child protection workers carrying child-in-care cases, to help them recruit naturally-occurring mentors for the GPS Connect program. As well, training entitled “**Recruiting Connections: Engaging Clients in a Conversation about their Networks**” was delivered to 37 participants.

Pod Model for Learning

When the pandemic struck, CASO was concerned about the impact of remote learning on those youth most at risk of disengaging from their studies.

The Pod Model program was developed and implemented in approximately a month and its comprehensive, culturally responsive, wrap-around support has been key to the well-being and academic success of more than 150 youth in care. It helped ensure youth were registered in appropriate educational programs, had the required technology and supplies, and received social supports and personalized academic help at a time when the school system was struggling to respond to the realities of the pandemic.

An evaluation of the program is underway but preliminary results are very promising. The average credit completion rates for all students in the program were identical before and during the pandemic. However, credit completion rates for the Pod Model for Learning students thought to be most at risk, increased by 12%.

These interim results are very encouraging given what we know anecdotally is the pandemic and remote learning have negatively impacted student engagement, learning, and achievement. If this is true of most students, one would assume that students who have increased risk factors may be even more vulnerable to these negative effects. The Pod Model has seemingly mitigated against these challenges.

“ *I was struggling a lot, [the POD model teacher] came along, put me back on track. She saved me. She's never pushy about schoolwork. She asks me how are you feeling? She cares more about my wellbeing than a lot of teachers do.* ”



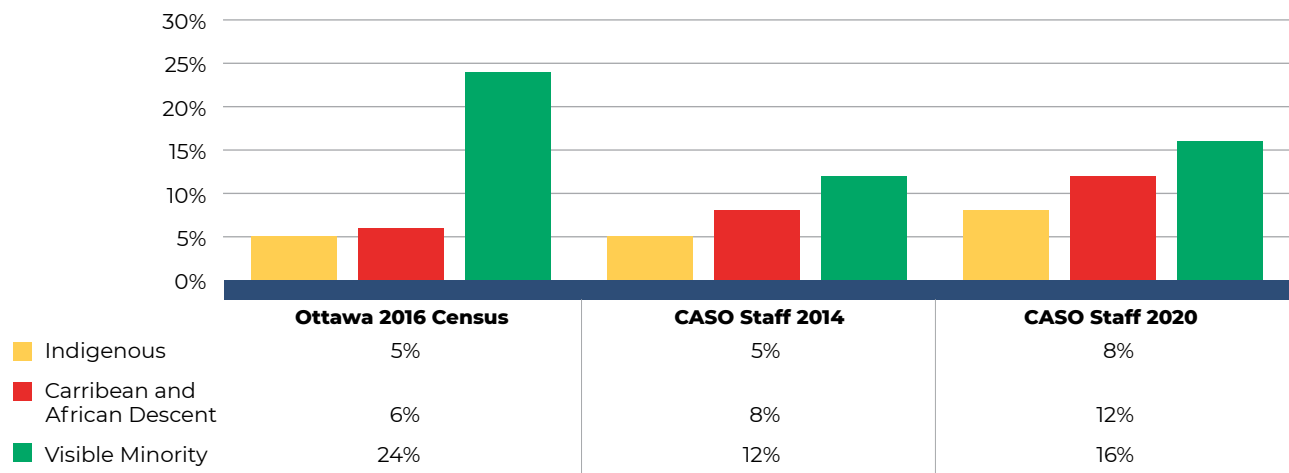
2

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

◆ CASO Staff Census

In August of 2020, CASO embarked on its second staff census. The information collected through this census is intended to help guide our efforts in creating and sustaining a workforce that embraces diversity and inclusion and supports all employees in achieving their full potential. We continuously strive for a workforce that

reflects the clients and communities we serve and promotes an environment that values respect, dignity and professional growth. Our ability to attract, develop, and retain a quality, diverse workforce is key to CASO's success. The response rate for the survey was very strong at 83%.



◆ ***Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Staffing***

Given the foundational nature of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) to the work we do at CASO, two new positions were created to move related initiatives forward. An EDI manager was hired in the fall of 2020. This manager is leading CASO in delivering on our commitment to equity-informed and anti-oppressive approaches to child welfare services. As well, a Family Engagement worker was hired in the spring of 2021 specifically to work with Black and racialized families identify social supports that create safety and reduce admissions to care.

◆ ***Cultural Safety and Security Plans***

Children and youth who are placed outside of their community of origin require supports to ensure they remain connected to all elements of their identity. To ensure this, CASO has implemented Cultural Safety and Security plans for all children and youth brought into care. This plan is developed in consultation with the child/youth, the parent(s), the care provider(s), involved community supports and the protection worker. This plan:

- ▶ informs caregivers about the child/youth's culture and ensures there are items accessible in the home that reflect this culture
- ▶ reviews the child/youth's needs such as products required for hair, skin and other essential care
- ▶ includes food considerations and religious ceremonies/traditions
- ▶ outlines culturally relevant community connections

These plans help to maintain positive connections and celebrations of all meaningful elements of the child/youth's identity.

◆ ***Pilot Service Model for Black Families***

Following the findings of a comprehensive case review of service to Black children and youth in care, a series of recommendations were developed and a work plan was implemented. The goal of this work plan was to create equitable outcomes in child welfare services for Black families. One of the initiatives flowing from this review was the pilot implementation of a new case consultation process for Black families receiving protection services. Through this new service approach, families' culture and identity are recognized as being crucial elements to the success of the collaboration. Child protection workers ensure they continue to reflect on and remain aware of their social location and privilege throughout the case work process. CASO staff engage service recipients in a manner which is collaborative, empowering and anti-racist. Since the implementation of this pilot, no Black children or youth have been admitted to care in the units involved in this pilot.



3

Reconciliation

◆ *Position at Minwaashin*

This year CASO funded a position at **Minwaashin Lodge, a local non-profit which provides a range of services to Indigenous people**, devoted to working with clients who are receiving services from both CASO and Minwaashin. The services include counselling, family visitations, court processes, and Circle of Care processes among others. Minwaashin has noted the usefulness of the position which allows for the facilitation of family visits without Society involvement, supports navigating systems, and helps triage supports that are culturally appropriate. The new staff member participates in Family Engagement meetings and helps grow the natural social networks of their clients. Families have said they find working with a Minwaashin staff member a more comfortable experience. Since February 2021, 22 families have been able to take advantage of this new resource.

◆ *COVID-19 Adaptation & Response*

The focus of the Society's work with Indigenous community partners during the pandemic has been a deepening of partnerships and collaborations to keep pace with the needs of the community. Priority was given to community consultations on program delivery and the continuity of joint supports to clients. For example, regular case conferences continued remotely between CASO and Inuit community partners Innugatigiit and Tungasuvvingat Inuit with Circle of Care conferences continuing virtually as well.

◆ ***Prenatal Support for Indigenous Families***

CASO developed a partnership with Montfort Hospital and Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health to recruit a staff person who would provide prenatal services and supports at the time of birth, for Indigenous families. The Montfort Hospital noted the experience of Indigenous women coming into the hospital can often be risky and stressful. To rectify this a staff position was designed to support these

women and their families, even when CASO isn't needed. The goal of this collaboration is to bridge a gap in culturally-appropriate service to expecting parents and new Indigenous parents at the Montfort Hospital. CASO 's role is to provide funding for the position and to clarify how and when to call CASO for support. The search is underway to staff this position.

“ *The goal of this collaboration is to bridge a gap in culturally-appropriate service to expecting parents and new Indigenous parents at the Montfort Hospital.* ”





4

Partnerships and Collaboration

◆ *Youth Stakeholder Survey*

A key stakeholder group for CASO is our youth in care. A qualitative Youth Stakeholder Feedback survey conducted last year identified themes quality of care, connection to identity and access to supports that served as the basis of an electronic survey sent to youth over the age of 13 asking them about their CASO experience. We achieved a response rate of 32% and collected important information that will help us develop initiatives to improve the service experiences of youth in care.

◆ *CASO Retention and Recruitment Plan Consultations*

Being representative of the community we serve is fundamentally important to creating equitable outcomes for all of our clients. To inform CASO's Recruitment and Retention Plan, our Human Resources Division conducted a broad consultation with internal stakeholder groups including the Equity and

First Nations, Inuit and Metis Forums, the Francophone team and the Umoja committee (a committee for Black CASO staff). This consultation will help ensure plans capture the needs and challenges of our diverse staff compliment in order to create a welcoming and inclusive employment environment.

◆ *Working Minds*

Our staff are our greatest resource and promoting their well-being is a CASO priority. Working Minds is an evidence-based training program designed to promote mental health and reduce the stigma around mental illness in the workplace. In the last fiscal year, CASO has provided 16 Working Minds sessions to 269 staff members. Through this training, we hope to create a culture that fosters greater awareness and support for mental health among our employees.

◆ **Muslim Family Services
Ottawa Partnership**

CASO has many valuable partnerships with community agencies. This year we engaged with Muslim Family Services of Ottawa (MFSO) and Ottawa Muslim Community Service (OMCS) to support the Muslim families we serve through culturally and spiritually affirming activities.

Community members raised money for families to receive food hampers to support them in their celebration of Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha. The goal of this work was to reduce family isolation through the creation of meaningful connections with the service organization.

“Community members raised money for families to receive food hampers to support them in their celebration of Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha.”





Service Details

Who We Are and What We Do

Child, Youth and Family Services

Child, youth and family services are guided by a set of standards and tools that define practice in three key areas of CASO work:

▼
Intake and Assessment
(includes after hours)

▼
Ongoing Services

▼
Child and youth in care

CASO complements this work with several support services.

Intake and Assessment

Intake and assessment is a specialized function of child, youth and family services. Reports of children or youth in need of protection are received 24/7. During evenings, weekends and holidays, a team of child, youth and family services workers and supervisors are available to respond to concerns regarding child maltreatment and neglect through the **After Hours Services** (AHS) team. This work involves receipt of information from persons in the community who suspect the actions or lack of actions of a parent or caregiver have caused harm or create a risk of harm to a child or youth. Concerns are reported via telephone calls, letters, emails, face-to-face contact, and police reports.

In the past five years, CASO's AHS has averaged approximately 6000 calls per year. The volume of calls in 2020/21 was slightly above this average, but the change was not significant.

The volume of face-to-face worker activity (that is, Child Protection Workers going into homes in the community to assess child protection concerns) was 12% lower this year than the previous year due to the pandemic and resulting public health restrictions regarding in-person contact. However, there was a 33% increase in place-of-safety assessments compared

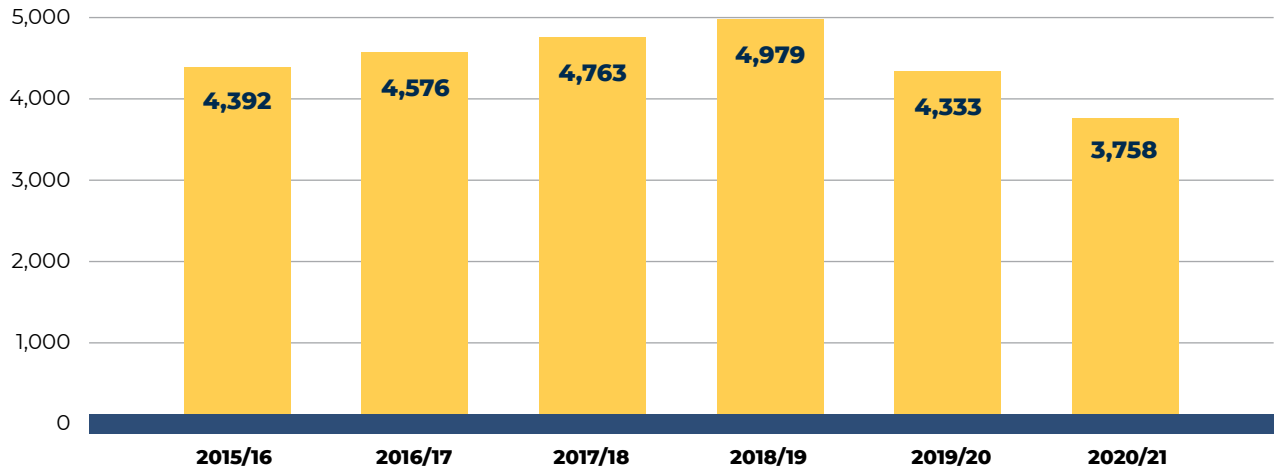
to the previous year, (a 12% increase over the five-year average).

A team of child protection workers screen all referrals CASO receives to determine eligibility for child welfare service. The team uses a standard tool called the **Ontario Child Welfare Eligibility Spectrum** (2019) that assists them in making accurate and consistent decisions. If the information in the report received suggests the risk of harm or danger to a child or youth is immediate, or when there is a suspicious injury, a child protection worker responds immediately. For other reports of eligible child protection matters, the response occurs within seven days.

When a family first becomes involved with child, youth and family services, the role of child protection worker is to assess the concerns that have been raised and determine whether there is a risk of child maltreatment that will require ongoing involvement with CASO. Time-limited service at the assessment stage is often sufficient to strengthen a family's capacity to care for their children and avoid admission to care.



Figure 1: **Cases opened for Child Protection Assessments**



The above graph shows a decrease in the number of cases opened for assessments for the second year in a row. While it was thought the 2019/20 decrease was attributable to more community link openings¹ as well as more rigorous screening for protection service eligibility, this year's decrease was a direct result of the pandemic. Schools typically provide more than one-third of child protection referrals to CASO. With schools closed to in-person learning for many months of the year, education personnel made far fewer referrals than usual.

Ongoing Services

In situations where the child protection concerns are not resolved during the assessment phase, the family is connected with an ongoing child protection worker who helps the family to ensure the plan of service initiated during the assessment phase, is implemented.

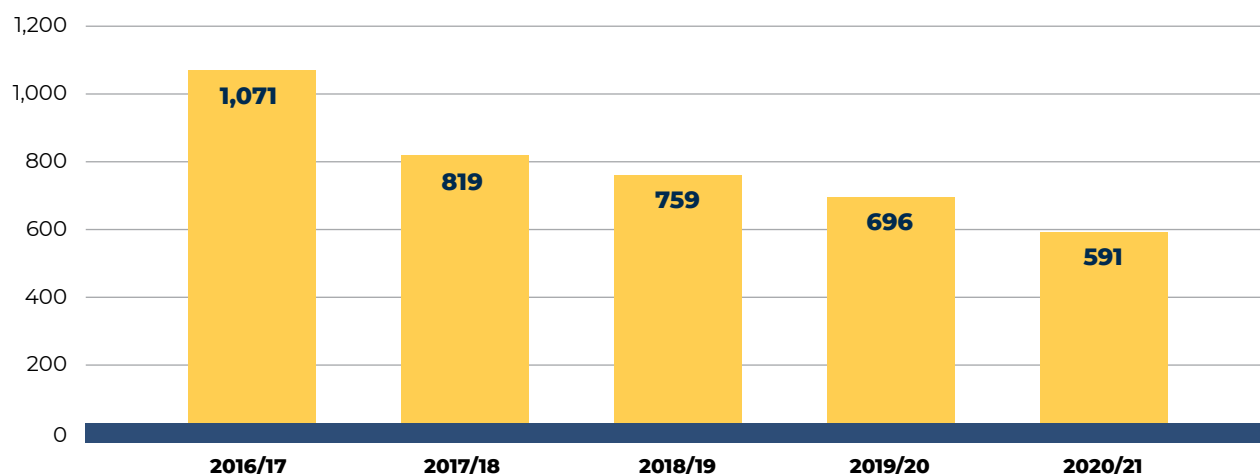
The casework relationship that develops is the foundation of the helping process, even in those cases where the relationship is non-voluntary. Families are encouraged to engage in the ongoing assessment process,

¹ A Community Link is a referral disposition that a CAS can choose for families who do not require child protection services but who may benefit from other services available in their community.

including the development of a safety network, the identification of signs of safety, risks, complicating factors, strengths and resources. The case worker assesses the ongoing strengths and risk factors and works with the family and their network to establish a safety plan that will mitigate those risks.

The figure below denotes a year over year decrease in the number of ongoing child protection cases managed by CASO. There was a decrease of 15.1% between 2019/20 and 2020/21 which was commensurate with the pandemic-related decrease in investigation cases opened over the same period.

Figure 2: **Average ongoing protection case volumes over 5 years**



On January 1, 2018 the Ministry of Child and Youth Services (MCYS) implemented a policy that increased the age limit for receiving child protection services to 18. This policy requires all children’s aid societies to provide the full range of child protection services to youth until their 18th birthday.

Voluntary Youth Services Agreements (VYSAs) are available for youth who:

- ▶ are aged 16 or 17;
- ▶ cannot be adequately protected at home or in their current living situation;
- ▶ have no other safe options with family or friends; and
- ▶ need an out-of-home placement.

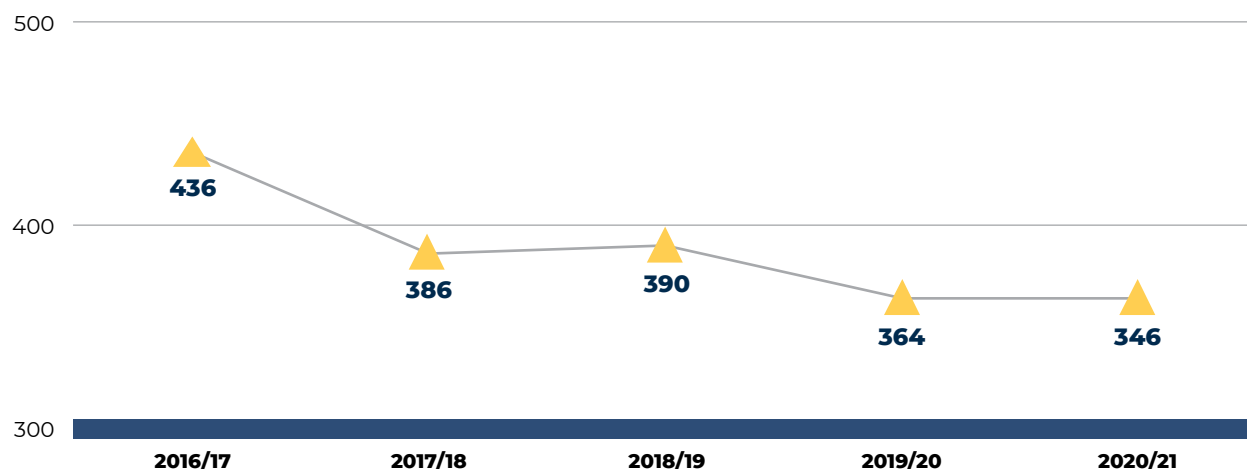
As of March 31, 2021, there were 22 Voluntary Youth Service Agreements active at the agency.

Children and Youth in Care

The provincial direction towards increased engagement of kin, and our clinical approach of *Signs of Safety*² and *Family Finding*³ / *Family Engagement*, has reduced the

number of children and youth under the age of 18 admitted into care—a number that has been trending downward by 20.6% over the past five years, and decreased five percent over the previous fiscal year.

Figure 3: Average Number of Children in Care



While there has been a decrease in admissions, children and youth who do enter care generally present with a higher-risk profile. It was noted in the *2020 Extended Society Care Review* (formerly Crown Ward Review) report that 83.8% of children and youth with Extended Society Care status have been diagnosed with a special need (medical, developmental or psychiatric) and often have significant behavioural difficulties (57.4%) which impacts their success in school and life.

- 2 Signs of Safety is a framework for child protection practice. It is underpinned by a series of principles; tools for assessment, planning and decision making; skills for workers to use in applying the framework; and processes applied in the engagement of children, youth and families (Turnell, 2017).
- 3 The Family Finding Model of practice guides workers to explore family and community connections to help establish the safety network, as well as to secure kinship arrangements for children and youth who have been or are at risk of being placed outside of their homes (Campbell, 2017).

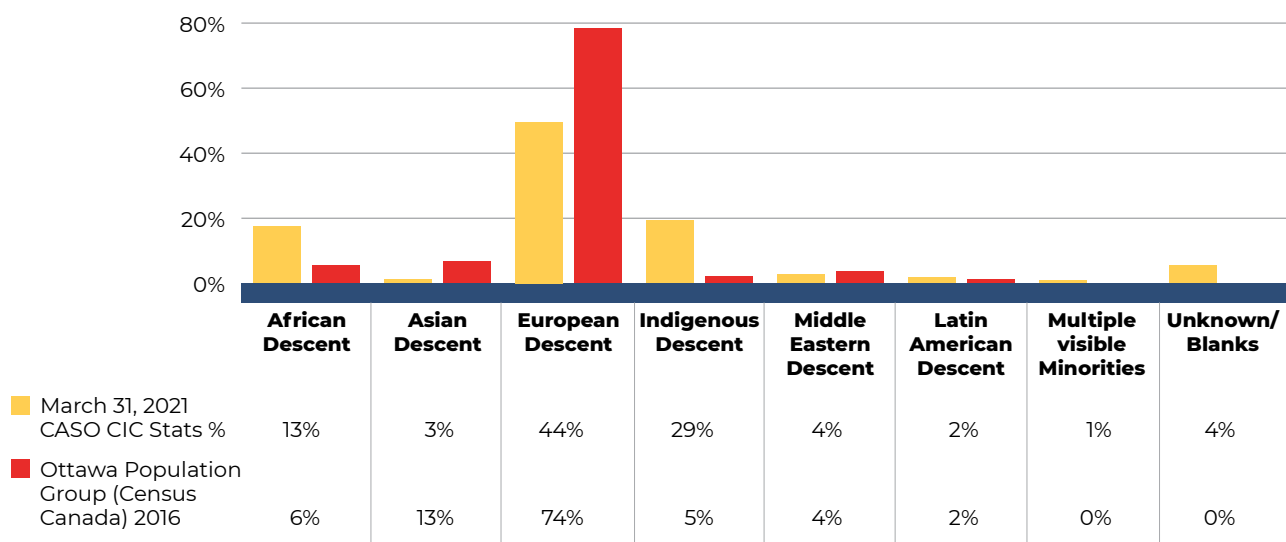
Cultural Identity of Children and Youth in Care

CASO increasingly engages with community partners who serve people with diverse ethno-cultural and social identities in order to ensure families and children receive services that are meaningful, helpful, and honour their diverse needs.

CASO seeks to identify the ethno-cultural, social and language identities of all clients as an essential way of meeting their needs and determining the efficacy of initiatives addressing disproportionality and overrepresentation of racialized children, youth and families using CASO services.

Figure 4 outlines the data regarding the ethnicity of children and youth in care in fiscal 2020/21. Of concern is the higher percentage of children of African descent and First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth in care, relative to other ethnicities. As noted in the Strategic Directions section, there are several initiatives underway to ensure we better serve children from diverse communities and to partner with those communities to enhance our knowledge and understanding of their challenges and needs.

Figure 4: **Ethnicity of Children in Care as of March 31, 2021.**



Resource Services

At CASO, specialized workers focus on service delivery in the areas of:

- ▶ Family Finding/ Family Engagement
- ▶ Foster care
- ▶ Kinship
- ▶ Adoption
- ▶ Legal custody
- ▶ Placement Office
- ▶ Outside Placement Resources

In 2020, CASO began work on a strategic initiative focused on reducing the use of group care. Last year, there was a decrease in group care usage from 12% to 11%.

Due to a positive Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) policy which supports youth in transition from care up to the age of 21, there continues to be a high number of youth over the age of 18 supported by CASO. The Children's Aid Foundation offers additional financial support to assist these young adults in meeting their personal, vocational and educational goals.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, on June 24, 2020, MCCSS placed a moratorium on discharging youth from care at their 18th birthday. Societies are now required

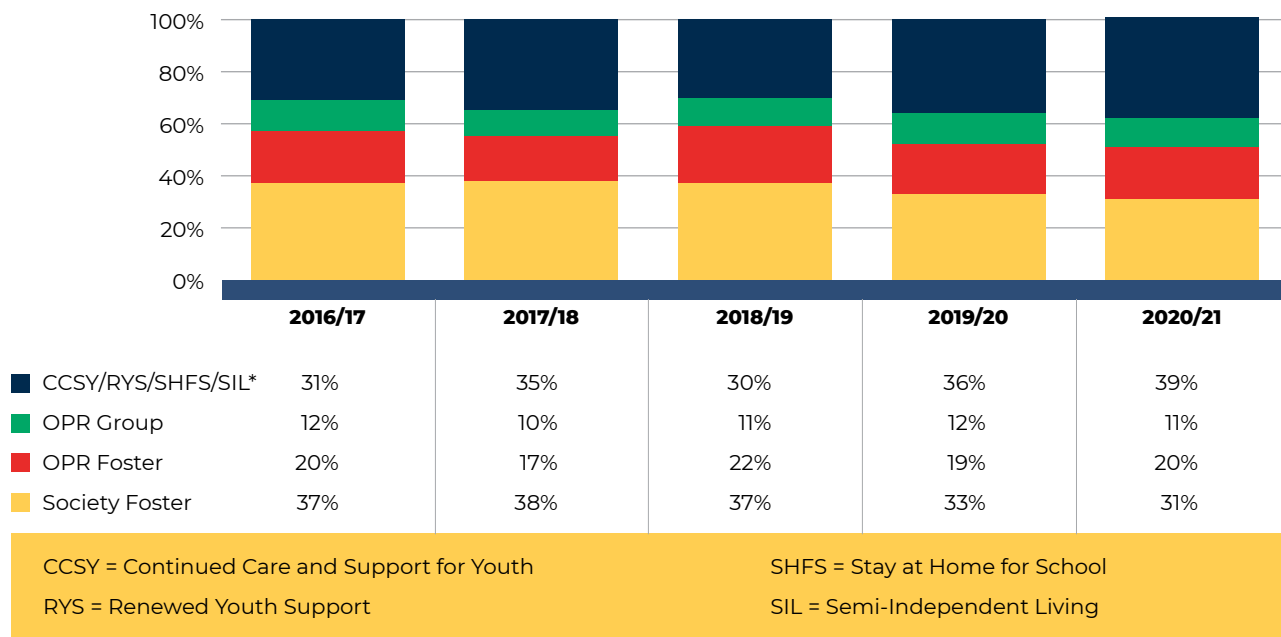
to continue to provide the same supports and services youth received prior to their 18th birthday, in order to promote consistency of care and continuity of service during this public health crisis. Societies must:

- ▶ Continue providing the same supports and services to youth turning 18 as they received prior to their 18th birthday, unless otherwise refused by the youth
- ▶ Make every effort to facilitate a seamless transition to Continued Care and Support to Youth (CCSY) with all eligible youth
- ▶ Delay transitions to adult residential developmental services through the course of the pandemic by continuing to provide supports during the pandemic
- ▶ Continue to pursue plans to reunify the youth with their family in the event it has been determined safe to do so and is in the best interest of the youth.

As a result of this directive, CASO has experienced a 3% increase over the previous fiscal year in service to youth with CCSY status—and this is expected to grow.

Please see Figure 5 to review the trends in what type of home children and youth in care are placed.

Figure 5: Percentage of children and youth in care by type of placement



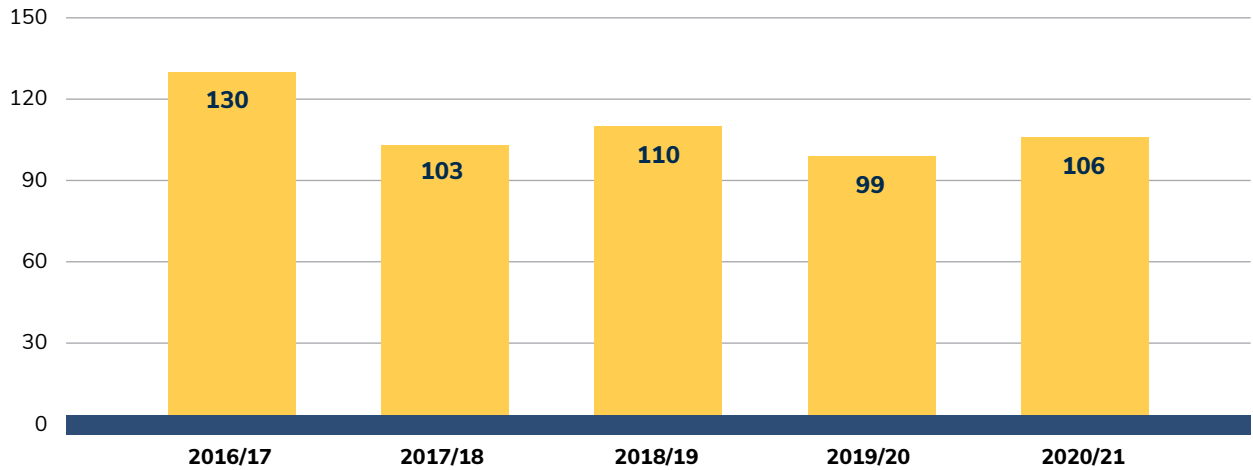
“ Societies are now required to continue to provide the same supports and services youth received prior to their 18th birthday, in order to promote consistency of care and continuity of service during this public health crisis. ”

Kin Service

The purpose of kin service is to facilitate provision of care and support in a manner that is consistent with family and community traditions for children unable to remain with their family due to protection concerns. A kinship service family participates in a screening assessment that assesses the family's ability to meet the safety and well-being needs of the child or youth.

A kin service provider could have a biological relationship to the child or youth, but this is not a requirement. Examples of kin service providers include grandparents, family friends, coaches, or teachers. Kin service is preferred over in-care arrangements such as foster care or group care whenever safely possible. At the end of 2020 there was a 7% increase in the number of kin service placements over the previous year.

Figure 6: **Number of children receiving kin service as of March 31 of each fiscal year.**



Permanency

CASO has focused on increasing **permanency** for children and youth since before the implementation of the **Transformation Agenda**. What we have learned is this involves a significant shift in beliefs and practices that put the emphasis on concurrent planning, from first involvement at the investigation phase. This entails equal attention be given to a child or youth's immediate safety needs as well as long-term care arrangements.⁴ Everyone involved in the planning process must:

- ▶ believe that families can develop and maintain the capacity to care for their children given the appropriate supports
- ▶ move quickly when a child requires out-of-home care to identify and engage interim care providers within families and their communities (kin)
- ▶ search for potential kin who may commit to providing permanency through adoption or legal custody early in the case planning, and continue searching on an ongoing basis for as long as the child or youth is in care
- ▶ realize that age or special needs should not be a barrier to permanency for any child or youth
- ▶ make use of tools such as genograms, mobility and connectedness mapping with children, youth and families to assist in developing their support networks to:
 - ▶ support them in times of crisis in order to keep the child safe while remaining at home

- ▶ help the child feel connected to a strong identity rooted in their own history
- ▶ offer practical supports to the child such as tutoring and mentoring
- ▶ provide interim or permanent care to the child/youth
- ▶ be creative in accessing financial subsidies and community-based resources to address specific needs of children/youth, thus removing barriers to establishing permanency.

CASO continues to pursue adoption and legal custody orders as permanency options. Figure 7 illustrates the permanency options achieved by type: adoptions, legal custody that was granted under CYFSA Section 106 (an order where the child or youth does not have Extended Society Care status⁵ and legal custody granted under CYFSA Section 116 (the child must have Extended Society Care status).

As placement of children and youth in kin homes for interim care occasionally leads to permanency in that family, the work of assessing and supporting kin families is closely aligned with that of adoption. The number of children and youth finding permanency through legal custody and adoption has decreased as fewer children and youth come into CASO care.

4 Frame et al (2006)

5 Extended society care is a legal status under the CYFSA in which a child or youth remains in the care and custody of a Children's Aid Society until there is a new court order; the youth turns 18; the youth gets married or the child or youth is adopted.



Committees

The work at the Children's Aid Society is guided by our commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and reconciliation. The committees listed below are staff led whose purpose is to share updates from the Society and bring forward information, issues and trends from the community to all staff.

Umoja

Umoja is a change management group composed of Black staff that focuses on equity, diversity and inclusion. The purpose of the group is to inform, educate and advise the Society on how to address disproportionality and overrepresentation of Black children, youth, and families by the

extraction and analysis of data. The group engages with staff at all levels and establishes community relationships with key partners.

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis

The purpose of this forum is to ensure that First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families engaged with CASO are provided with equitable opportunities to grow up safely at home, achieve their dreams, celebrate their language and culture and be proud of who they are. This forum considers best practices and ensures the sharing of critical information across all teams at the Society. This group leads educational initiatives and celebration events.

Queer

This group works to ensure that child welfare approaches consider issues of sexual orientation and or gender identity and expression. These efforts aim to improve the quality of work done by those who work with children, youth, and families whose lives are affected by sexual orientation and or gender identity and expression. Specifically, this group aims to:

1. Design a conceptual framework that provides a sound foundation for understanding the importance of 2SLGBTQIA+ concerns;
2. Incorporate knowledge about 2SLGBTQIA+ persons including values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours into sound practice;
3. Design appropriate and affirming service-delivery systems based on this knowledge that are free from bias.

Francophone

This group advocates “active offer” to our Francophone families. This forum creates best practices and works to build relationships with Francophone community organizations and services.

Equity

This forum is a hub for all the work within our diverse communities, i.e. the First Nations, Inuit and Métis community, the African/Black Canadian, Muslim, racialized communities, queer and trans community, and other intersectional groups/communities. The forum assists in building and supporting community relationships; establishing best practises in working with racialized and marginalized families; monitoring the 11 recommendations of One Vision One Voice; and ensuring information is funneled back to all CASO staff.

Youth Focus

Black Youth Symposium

In February 2020, Black youth in care participated in a local youth symposium which was led by the Umoja group. This event provided Black youth in care an opportunity to come together, to discuss critical issues and to advocate for change on both a local and provincial level. Events of this nature are designed to ensure that youth in care have positive experiences related to their Black identity.

Rainbow Youth in Care (RYIC)

This advocacy group, comprised of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in care, come together to participate in fun queer-positive activities all while working on advocacy and awareness projects. These events are intended to ensure that youth in care have positive experiences related to their 2SLGBTQIA+ identity.







The Children's Aid Society of Ottawa | La Société de l'aide à l'enfance d'Ottawa

613-747-7800

yourcasquestion@casott.on.ca

1602 Telesat Court, Ottawa ON K1B 1B1

www.casott.on.ca

