



2023-24 Annual Report

Vision

Children, Youth and Families Thrive

Mission

We protect children and youth, strengthen their well-being and support lifelong, enduring relationships

Organizational Values

Wellness | Empowerment | Diversity and Equity
Integrity | Accountability

Executive Message

Executive Director and Board Chair Message

Welcome to the 2023-24 Halton Children's Aid Society's (Halton CAS) Annual Report!

Our annual report is an opportunity to talk to you, our community, about the work of the Society. What do we want to say to you? **We are here to help!** This is the message. This is the commitment. This is the daily intention that each of our staff brings to their work. And this is the focus of our annual report. An examination of how we helped children, youth and families in the community last year.

The story of how this intention unfolds is in the numbers. Last year, Halton CAS received 4,514 referrals. Each one representing a call from a concerned community member about the safety and well-being of a child or youth. Of that 4,514, Halton CAS conducted 2,109 child protection investigations and assigned a further 731 cases to our community links worker for connection to community resources.

Our Service Delivery Model is predicated upon the following principles.

- ◆ **We will provide the best, most responsive service to families.**
- ◆ **We will develop staff knowledge and skills in various specializations.**
- ◆ **Early help, assessment and community linkage are preferred over traditional forensic investigations.**
- ◆ **We strive for manageable workloads for our staff to enhance their professional capacities.**
- ◆ **We will not raise children in care.**

Our top referral source is law enforcement with 27% of referrals. The second highest number of referrals comes from education personnel with 21%. The third highest number of referrals comes from families themselves at nearly 8%. This is important data for Halton CAS to understand where the needs are in the community, what types of problems families are facing, and where the numbers tell us we need to apply the lens of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion to critically examine the story inside.

There has been a discernible change in the well-being of our community, challenging our staff's ability to fully realize these principles, particularly the last two years. With the erosion of the social safety net in communities across Ontario over the past number of years, and the compounding effect of the pandemic, the vulnerable in our communities are affected – directly and devastatingly. Among this population are children, youth and their families with complex social needs and issues. Furthermore, in the post-COVID environment, our staff report that the work is more demanding and complex.

"Society and community have drastically changed in a post-COVID world in how people relate to one another or how communities interact. This impacts how we do our work and who we need to engage with, from both a client level and community partner level, for services and support."

In an environment where community social services are stretched to capacity, there has been an increase in the number of children and youth who are struggling to live with serious and complex issues. Their families struggle to cope with their needs. Some families, brought to the breaking point, arrive at the door of the child welfare agency as a last resort. This is when we bring all resources to the table creating a plan for that child/youth. We do everything we can to not bring them into care. If that is unavoidable, we look to kin or another natural setting for a temporary residential respite for the child/youth and their family. **This is how we help.** This is how we uphold our service principles. And we never do it alone. Our planning relies on community partners, clinicians, and professionals who join us at the table to create these plans alongside families.

Halton CAS is blessed to have compassionate and professional staff who understand the social influences of stress on families, dedicating their talent in response to their children and youth. They share their knowledge with other service providers and contribute to the learning culture of our organization. We gratefully acknowledge the passion and care of our foster, kin and adoptive parents. Our volunteers dedicate their time to children and youth, making lives brighter whenever they can. Our Board of Directors is a constant source of support and wise guidance as governors of the Society. The work of the Society – **how we help** – is built upon the foundation of all these contributors. We will continue to do our absolute best and most creative work, building lasting and positive change for children, youth and families in the coming year.

Janice Robinson, Executive Director
Joyce See, Board Chair

Our Team

Board of Directors

Board Executive

Joyce See, Chair

Eslyn Blair, Vice Chair

Mike Reid, Audit, Finance and Risk Management Committee Chair

Janice May, Governance Committee Chair

Brendan Neil, Director at Large

Board Members

Jason Barr | **Steve Cranna** | **Muhammad Faizan**

Karen Marshall | **Renée Mahoney** | **Terrence Rodriguez**

Leadership Team

Janice Robinson, Executive Director

Steve Levac, Director of Service, Child and Youth Services

Jennifer Binnington, Director of Service, Community Protection (retired April 30, 2024)

Teresa Zonneveld, Director of Service, Community Protection (effective May 1, 2024)

Michelle McGaw, Director of Human Resources and Administration

Donna Miles, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Andrew Pike, Director of Finance and Property

Robyn Connolly, Executive Assistant to the Executive Director/Comms Specialist



Youth Awards

McPhie Award—Argentina N

Argentina is a true artist; her illustrations are amazing and have transformed and evolved over the past five years. She recently graduated from a two-year arts program at Sheridan College and has been accepted into another program where she will study special effects makeup. Argentina aspires to work on a film set one day. Argentina is an excellent student and a loyal friend and sister, evidenced by her advocacy for her sister (and herself) on an ongoing basis.

Moen Inc. Award—Amanda F

Amanda is a motivated, self-sufficient person. She continues to work hard to manage her full-time post-secondary education all while maintaining two jobs. Amanda manages to excel in everything she does.

Youth In Action Award—Elizabeth G

Just as the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Lizzy was accepted to the CYC program at George Brown College. She embraced her college experience and graduated last June. She found work in her field at the YMCA in their before-and-after-school program but did not stop there. Lizzy is currently a teacher in the kindergarten class at a day care centre and loves her job! Lizzy has full-time employment, stable housing and a partner who is very supportive of her goals and aspirations.

Youth Leadership Award—Tyler G

Tyler recently started working for an autobody shop and is starting his apprenticeship with them with the goal to receiving his Red Seal License. Tyler plans to attend Mohawk College to complete his in-class requirements. Tyler has integrity and will stand up for his beliefs in the face of adversity and is a very responsible, resourceful youth.

Joan Marshall Achievement Award—Omeema A

Omeema is an amazing advocate and leader. She helped with The Youth in Care Project by Project Outsiders and has been a leading member of the YouthSAID Advisory Group. All this while maintaining her own art shop for drawing commissions. Omeema is resilient and dedicated to her passions.

Scott Waterhouse Leadership in Equity and Inclusion Award—E.Mittens R

E.Mittens is dedicated to promoting change and taking action via an anti-oppressive lens. They exemplify a young adult who holds an intense passion of caring for others. E.Mittens is committed to change in society and how society views marginalized groups and individuals. They speak heavily about the changes that need to happen for these groups to make positive change.

Nancy MacGillivray Award—Shianne B

Shianne will be graduating Grade 8 this year and we are all very proud of her. With the assistance of family and other supports, she has gone from attending only a few hours of school a day to attending full days, every week, and completing her academics to the best of her ability. Shianne has made several positive gains this past year and has so very much to be proud of. We wish her all the success as she transitions to high school in the Fall. Way to go Shianne!!!

Honourable Mention—Desmond W

Desmond is a Grade 11 student who takes his studies very seriously. He works very hard and independently. He has signed up (again) of his own accord to take a summer school class to ensure his grades continue to remain outstanding. "He is a lovely, kind-hearted young man who it is my great pleasure to have gotten to know." (from his worker). Desmond's family continue to be very, very proud of him. Way to go Desmond!!!

Honourable Mention—Joshua A.

Joshua has consistently attended Futures programming and works hard to benefit from the program. He has made a concerted effort to learn financial literacy and cooking skills and has led by example and rejuvenated the presence of other youth to get involved.

Our Partners

Children's Aid Foundation of Halton

Thirty-five years ago, a group of staff and volunteers from the Halton Children's Aid Society (Halton CAS) convinced their Board of Directors that much more could be done for the children and youth in care if there were more funds from which to draw. They recommended specific programming for children and youth in care, help for young mothers, summer camp, mentoring, tutoring and post-secondary opportunities — all things that would enhance the work of staff and enrich the lives of children, youth and families who depended on support from Halton CAS.

In 1990, the Halton CAS Board of Directors founded the Children's Aid Foundation of Halton (CAFH) and so began the task of fundraising and creating awareness for the transformative work that transpired at the agency and the path of excellence pursued by those who benefit from the partnership. Today the legacy is thriving. In fact, it is flourishing and prosperous.

The relationship between Halton CAS and CAFH is symbiotic. The impact of each organization's respective work relies on each other. The partnership continues to strengthen and becomes more motivated when one witnesses the accomplishments of young people, the strengthening of a family and dreams being fulfilled.

CAFH is dedicated to helping children, youth and families who are receiving services from Halton CAS and works to provide support, resources and advocacy for those who have experienced abuse, neglect, loss, unstable housing or other difficult circumstances. #DYK? Over 5,000 children and youth are supported annually by Halton CAS and CAFH. Of that number, only 3% are placed in care, which means the majority of work and support is provided in the family home — keeping families together.

CAFH Vision – A community where all children, youth and families can reach their full potential.

CAFH Mission – Providing life-changing opportunities for children, youth and families supported by the Halton Children's Aid Society.

CAFH Values – We value a society where every child is cherished and respected. We are committed to the HEART principles – **H**onesty, **E**ducation, **A**ccountability, **R**espect, **T**ransparency

Programs funded and supported by CAFH enrich the lives of children, youth and families and enhance the work of Halton CAS by providing activities, opportunities and resources beyond the basic operations funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. Those programs include Bridging the Gap, Bursaries, Family Preservation/Reunification, Futures, Pathways, Seasonal Support, Halton Youth Collective Impact Program and YouthSAID Advisory Group.

For more information on the Children's Aid Foundation of Halton or to make a donation, please visit our [website](#), engage with us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#) or [LinkedIn](#) or contact us at either 905.333.4441, x2 or Foundation@HaltonCAS.ca

Thank you for helping children, youth and families in Halton!



Our Partners

Our Kids Network

Our Kids Network (OKN) is a Halton-wide partnership of agencies and organizations who work together to make sure all children and youth thrive. As a collective impact network, our mission is to build the capacity of community organizations that support children, youth and families. We build community capacity by mobilizing knowledge and maximizing resources to support the work of Halton professionals.

Together with our partners, OKN promotes and advances positive child and youth well-being. We do that through conducting and sharing research and bringing organizations, agencies and professionals together and developing and sharing resources, building the community's capacity to support children, youth and families. Through collaborative action, we strive to achieve a more diverse, inclusive and equitable community that empowers young people and creates opportunities for all.

OKN and our partners conduct and share research and data at the neighbourhood level to track our progress on the [Halton 7](#) — the seven evidence-based conditions of well-being needed for children, youth and families to thrive.

Fun Fact! Over 128,000 children, youth and adults have participated in seven OKN data cycles since 2003!! [Learn more about the work we do.](#)

Key Highlights of 2023-24

- ◆ Launched revamped website featuring over 450 resources at your fingertips
- ◆ Updated neighbourhood boundaries
- ◆ Enhanced [Data Portal](#)
- ◆ Conducted 7th Kindergarten Parent Survey
- ◆ Created series of five bulletins on child and youth well-being
- ◆ Organized Annual Knowledge Translation Conference
- ◆ Implemented the Indigenous Reconciliation Strategy
- ◆ Strengthened ties with community partners
- ◆ Welcomed 900 participants to our educational events
- ◆ Received 30,000 visits to our website and a social media reach of 30,000 views
- ◆ Generated 1,400 downloads of our materials
- ◆ Received coverage in 12 news articles

The Halton Children's Aid Society (Halton CAS), OKNs Secretariat, plays a vital role in the support of OKN. In addition to offering office space, Halton CAS is responsible for providing critical financial, human resources and IT support. With this support, the backbone OKN team can focus on implementing OKNs strategic initiatives and improving outcomes for children, youth and families in Halton. The continued dedication of Halton CAS is instrumental in the effective functioning and growth of OKN. We thank them for their continued support.

For more information on Our Kids Network, please visit our [website](#) or engage with us on [X](#) and [LinkedIn](#).



Our Programs

Bridging the Gap

Bridging The Gap (BTG) works with youth experiencing homelessness or those at risk of experiencing homelessness who are between the ages of 16 and 24. As part of this program we have four residences where youth can reside and be connected to a transitional youth worker to help them achieve their goals. We also have a Host Home Program where youth can stay short-term while they look for stability. We have an outreach component as well where we support youth in the community to look for housing options.

What makes BTG so unique? Our extensive community connections all over Halton Region. BTG works alongside emergency shelter providers, healthcare providers, education systems and food banks. These connections are vitally important because youth need a wraparound approach to be successful. To sustain housing, we have to look at mental health supports, education and employment to have continued success.

Importance of Housing. When we think about success in housing, for many of our youth it means building the skills to live independently while working with us. Little things like cooking, doing laundry and budgeting go a long way toward independence. We also look at how do we put a team of supports in place for young people so that once they leave our program, they have ongoing supports should they experience challenges. Creating community connections is a proven way to ensure stability. Over the past year, we had the opportunity to have the flooring redone in one of our homes — a big project that goes a long way to making youth feel comfortable. By investing in this space, it shows our commitment to providing a safe and comfortable environment, which then empowers youth to want to keep that space clean and organized.

Communication. As a team, BTG works very closely together because we know that open communication lines help improve support for youth. Youth will often work with multiple team members as they move their way through different parts of our program. We work very closely with the protection workers at Halton Children's Aid Society (Halton CAS) should they come across youth needing support with housing. These connections and integration are what makes the Bridging the Gap program so unique.

Partnership. BTG and its partnership with Halton CAS is one that allows for additional support for youth exiting care to have ongoing housing supports. Recognizing that many youth cannot live independently at the age of 18, BTG is able to ensure a continuum of support and care. The BTG team work very closely with Voluntary Youth Service Agreement (VYSA) and Ready, Set Go (RSG) workers at Halton CAS as many of these youth face challenges entering the housing market. This partnership is very strong and one that continues to grow and adapt to support the needs of youth.



Our Programs

Halton Youth Collective Impact Program

The Halton Youth Collective Impact Program (HYCIP) is a well-rounded, youth-focused community partnership. Halton-based agencies support youth with their goals for employment, education and training, which has been a vital part of the program. It breaks down barriers for youth to be connected to these agencies in a more streamlined way. One of those partners is the Halton Children's Aid Society.

An important aspect of the program is the mentorship relationship offered to youth. These relationships provide youth with a person who is invested in showing what a positive and supporting relationship can look like. Mentors are people that also bring a unique support outside the traditional worker/youth relationship. HYCIP works with 30 youth aged 18 to 24 to support them with their goals of employment, education and training including these mentorship opportunities.

HYCIP has been fortunate to be able to provide youth with financial support to break down barriers including funding for transportation (i.e., paying for driving school), food insecurity and technology (i.e., laptops for school and/or employment). HYCIP has also supported youth with school supplies for a specific area of study as well as covering the cost of University and College applications and tuition deposits.

"I want to share how the Halton Youth Collective Impact program has helped me out during my time in the program. Honestly, it's been a game-changer for me. First off, the financial support has been huge. The bursary I received from the Halton Children's Aid Society allowed me to pursue my flight training, which was a big deal for me since I want to become a commercial pilot. This funding has covered a significant portion of my training costs and also helped relieve the financial stress of acquiring textbooks and equipment. It took a load off my shoulders and let me focus on learning to fly. But it's not just about the money. The mentorship and guidance I've received have been incredible. My worker and the team have always been there for me, giving advice, cheering me on, and just being available to talk to when things get tough. That support has been crucial. The Halton Youth Collective Impact program has played a big role in my journey. The support, resources, and community have helped me chase my dreams and build a better future. I'm extremely grateful for everything the program has done for me. Thanks for all the support and for making a real difference in my life." ~E.I., HYCIP Participant, University of Waterloo

"As a participant in the Halton Youth Collective Impact program, I have been fortunate to receive an array of support that has significantly contributed to my personal and educational growth. The program's commitment to nurturing young minds and fostering opportunities for success is evident in the benefits I've experienced firsthand. One of the most tangible forms of support has been the financial aid provided for my schooling. This funding has alleviated the burden of educational expenses, allowing me to focus on my studies without the stress of financial constraints. It's a relief to know that the program stands behind its participants, investing in our futures through such generous scholarships. In addition to financial support, the Halton Youth Collective Impact program has enriched my educational experience through various seminars and workshops. These events have been instrumental in broadening my knowledge base, enhancing my skill set, and preparing me for the challenges of the academic world. The insights gained from industry professionals and educators have been invaluable, shaping my perspective and approach to learning. Beyond the direct benefits, the program has fostered a sense of community among participants. As I reflect on the impact of the Halton Youth Collective Impact program, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunities it has provided. The program's support has been a catalyst for my achievements and a constant source of motivation." ~HYCIP Participant

Our Programs

Road Home Program

The Halton Children's Aid Society (Halton CAS) prides itself on supporting children and youth in their home community and within their own families. The internal Road Home Program team helps create plans for children and youth needing reunification with their family or plans for children and youth needing intensive community supports to prevent them needing to come into care. Staff from across Halton CAS come together to innovatively solve challenges and focus on putting children and youth first in our planning.

What does it mean for us to put children and youth first?

It means bringing the views and wishes of the children and youth and putting that at the center of the Road Home meeting. The focus is to connect and ensure we understand the children and youth's views and wants as we carefully consider planning and next steps. The staff team will often start the meeting with a picture of the child or youth we are speaking about so as to not lose sight of the focus of each individual child/youth and who they are. The child/youth's identity is always a critical part of what is considered with an intensive focus on children and youth who are Indigenous, Black or 2SLGBTQI+. Our planning needs to consider the teaching and recommendations of Truth and Reconciliation, One Vision One Voice and SOGIE (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Gender Expression) to ensure we are not further contributing to the over-representation of these marginal identities in our care system.

Reduce the number of children and youth in care

The Road Home Program works to: reduce the number of children and youth needing to come into care, reduce the need for children and youth to be placed in residential group care settings for long term and ensure a faster plan on permanency for children and youth. The work within the team with our Family Connections staff explores all possibilities for children and youth to remain within their direct or extended families as well as exploring community connections. When a child or youth does have to come into care, the Road Home Program team works diligently to consider all options on a permanency plan for them.



By the Numbers

4,514

referrals (including record checks and disclosure requests)

2,019

referrals investigated

139

cases transferred to ongoing

731

cases linked to community services

Top Referral Sources

Law Enforcement
Educational Personnel
Parent/Self

55%

of children/youth discharged within one year of coming into care

61%

of children/youth return to family or kin

47

children/youth placed with kinship families when they could not remain in their own homes

9

adoptions finalized

97%

of cases enable children/youth to remain with their families

93%

of our work is completed at investigation

133

number of children and youth in our Society's care

84%

of our children and youth in care are over the age of 12

By the Numbers

\$24,728,709
(revenue)

\$24,637,397
(expenses)

2023-24 surplus = \$91,312

The above is a summary of details from the Halton CAS 2023-24 audited financial statements prepared and audited by SB Partners. Access to our full audited financial statements is available on our website.

\$405,000
cash donations

\$122,000
in-kind donations

received from the Children's Aid Foundation of Halton to support additional programming to enhance the lives of children and youth in Halton

- ◆ **Bursary Program**—financial support for youth to attend post-secondary education
- ◆ **FUTURES Educational Program**—life skills initiatives and recreational programs
- ◆ **Outreach Services**—from Bridging the Gap's homeless program for youth aged 16-24
- ◆ **YouthSAID Advisory Group Program**—including Children and Youth in Care Day, YouthCAN conference and Grand River Zone events
- ◆ **Halton Youth Collective Impact Program**—supporting youth in education, training and employment while they transition from care
- ◆ **Holiday DREAMS Program**—providing support throughout the year with seasonal support, gift cards, holiday celebrations and gifts
- ◆ **Dreams Begin at Home Program**—providing beds and other emergency supplies during times of crisis and transition
- ◆ **Bikes for Kids Program**—community partnership providing new bikes for those in need of transportation or just for fun!

138

active volunteers, mentors and drivers

1,490

volunteer driver and 'other' volunteer hours (mentors, tutors, special events, seasonal)