



The Children's Aid Society
OF HAMILTON
La Société d'aide à l'enfance
DE HAMILTON

Service Plan Review and Update: 2019-2020



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INTRODUCTION

The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton, in partnership with families and our community, is committed to the safety, protection and well-being of children. We aim to strengthen families, while valuing diversity and promoting equity. The agency has operated for 126 years and continues to evolve to meet community and provincial needs with a vision that every child in the community is a gift to be valued, nurtured and kept safe.

In 2019, The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton approved a five-year strategic vision. The strategic vision provides a blueprint for leading the agency through 2024. This document "Service Plan Review and Update: 2019-2020" highlights the **priorities, strategic goals and objectives** and lays out a plan of how the agency aims to achieve the goals within the current provincial landscape and agency's strategic direction. This document is comprised of two sections:

- Context
- Priorities, Strategic Goals and Objectives

Measuring progress:

- Progress on strategic goals and objectives will be reported to the board twice a year.
- Key performance indicators will be reported to the board in September.
- The measurement and progress on key performance indicators will aid in the evaluation of our progress towards our objectives and will be used to inform further refinement of objectives over time to respond to the changing context and current progress.

Context

Demographics

Hamilton CAS provides child welfare services to the amalgamated City of Hamilton which consists of both urban and rural landscapes comprised of 1138 Km². The socio-demographic composition of the City of Hamilton provides the context within which services are provided to families and underscores the complexity of families we serve. Hamilton CAS is one of two agencies in the city and primarily serves the non-Catholic population of Hamilton.

Population

- The 2016 census found that 536,917 people lived in Hamilton.
- Non-Catholics make up approximately 67% of the population in Hamilton.
- The population grew by 3.3% over a five-year period from 2011 to 2016.
- Approximately 20%, or just over 105,000 0-17 year olds, lived in the City of Hamilton and 70,041 were non-Catholic.

Aboriginal Identity and Visible Minorities

- 2.3% of Hamilton's population identifies as FNIM.
- 20% of Hamilton's population are visible minorities; 5% are South Asian, 4% are Black, and 2% are each of Chinese, Filipino Latin American and Arab.

Immigration

- Hamilton has become a major Canadian destination for immigrants and since February 2014, city council voted to declared it a sanctuary city.
- Immigrants comprise a quarter of the total population of Hamilton (25%), with 5% having arrived within the last 10 years.

Language

- 84% of residents in Hamilton speak English most often at home and 73% have English identified as their first language.

Poverty

- Using the Low-income after-tax measure, 21% of children under 18 in Hamilton live in low-income households. This is higher than the provincial (18.4%) and national (17%) averages for children under 18.

COVID-19

A state of emergency was declared by the Province of Ontario on March 17, 2020 due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). This resulted in the closure of non-essential businesses in Ontario and many of our business processes changed including the closure of our access program. The agency saw an immediate decline in service volumes following the declaration of the state of emergency. Hamilton Children's Aid Society mobilized quickly to provide additional clinical and financial supports to families and youth who faced challenges due to COVID-19.

Strategic Vision 2019-2024

Priorities, Strategic Goals, Objectives, 2019-20 Year in Review

Priorities and Strategic Goals:

The agency has identified six areas of focus to guide our journey over the next several years. Our priorities and strategic goals will support us in achieving our vision for the agency and provide a map of what we aim to do and how we aim to do it. Nineteen objectives across the six strategic goals are outlined below. Our priorities, strategic goals and objectives are:

Priority 1: Safety and Well-being

Strategic Goal 1: Children and youth safety and well-being will be increased within the family through good assessment and planning, capacity building and accessing the assets of the family itself, and their community.

Objectives:

- a. Shared understanding with others of how we can best contribute to supporting families in the community.
- b. Increased capacity of families to provide for their children in their own home and reduce the risk of need for protection through early help and support by CAS and by accessing help from others.
- c. Expanded range of strategies used with families to reduce the use of mandatory intervention wherever possible and increase the proportion of voluntary participation in service.
- d. Services and other interactions with ethno-specific and linguistic communities reflect well-informed and appropriate practices including with Afro-Canadian and Indigenous people and organizations.

Assessment

In March 2020, a new service structure was introduced to support the established strategic priorities and to facilitate ongoing improvement in supporting the needs of children and families in the community. The Service Structure is positioned with the work centered in two areas: Assessment and Support, and Permanency and Resource Services.

The service structure is founded upon an integrated service approach with teams responsible for the agency's mandated protection services role with families involved with the agency. Several specialized teams were developed to reflect the unique service needs of the families and children in the Hamilton community.

These teams include:

- An Indigenous Team
- A Racialized, Newcomer Team
- An Addictions and Mental Health Team

Staff on these teams continue to develop expertise that is exchanged among other teams aimed at the overall goal of improving outcomes for all children and families. Furthermore, the specialized teams will continue to enhance relationships and formal and informal partnerships with identified communities and service providers to better support children and families, with a particular focus on those who suffer disparity and disproportionality within the child welfare system.

Continued efforts to structure our work through a Signs of Safety (SOS) framework supports increased engagement with families and their support networks, resulting in an increase in the number of families who are engaging through voluntary service.

The Kin Connect Program was established with two Kin Connect staff hired to act as mentors, coaches and facilitators for other staff at the Agency to build additional capacity in early engagement of support networks. The kin connect program, though in its early stages, has already contributed to maintaining family connections, supporting the development of safety plans as well as securing placement with kin. With ongoing efforts and commitment to engage with families through the SOS framework as well with the support of the Kin Connect Program, we continue to see more children safely supported with their families and in the community.

The speaker's bureau met with various community partners around duty to report in 2019-20. A group of individuals including front line staff, supervisor and communications are in the process of updating the duty to report community presentation so that it aligns with our strategic vision and captures a community approach to safety and well-being. The duty to report presentation will be updated for community roll out in next year's plan.

To support early resolution of complaints, a complaints resolution lead position was created but due to COVID was not filled during the review period. This position will be filled as part of next year's plan.

Priority 2: Permanency and Potential

Strategic Goal 2: Enable children and youth in care to find permanency and reach their full potential.

Objectives:

- a. Children in care safely transition to a permanent and stable out-of-care arrangement as soon as possible following admission.
- b. Children in care are most often served in family-based settings as close to their homes as possible.
- c. Improved educational achievement for all children and youth in care.
- d. Plans and decisions are fully informed by youth voice and their input is reflected in service.
- e. All transition-aged youth receiving service get the supports they need to reach their full potential as adults.

Assessment

The development of the new service structure included the development and implementation of a number of programs and processes aimed at creating timely permanency plans for children including reunification with family, placement with kin, customary care arrangements in partnership with Indigenous communities, and adoption or legal custody orders.

The Kin Connect Program is also helping children in care maintain connections with extended family and those close to them and to help re-establish family connections to support the child or youth's family supports.

A systematic process named Pathways to Permanency was established to support the timely development of permanency plans for children temporarily admitted into the care. An ethno-specific process was developed to support the unique needs of Indigenous children and youth in care. As a result of these ongoing efforts, the agency was able to increase permanency and reduce the number of children in care by 70 children.

To support educational outcomes for children and youth in care, a Youth Success Coordinator position was created and a specific workplan developed. The Youth Success Coordinator position is critical to developing a strong youth voice at the agency to guide us in providing the skills, supports and resources to ensure youth success.

The educational needs of children in care and those placed with kin continue to be supported through the work of the agency's Educational Liaison. The Educational Liaison works in partnership with staff to advocate and support children in care receiving the services required to facilitate success within the academic environment. Furthermore, through the support of generous donors, the agency supported 39 bursaries for youth pursuing post-secondary education.

Youth in care who are transitioning to adulthood experience unique challenges and require specific supports to be successful. A team of specialized workers has been developed and their work will focus on supporting youth who will enter into Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY) agreements or transition to services within the Adult Development Services system.

Focused efforts to recruit foster families continue to be undertaken in conjunction with the Foster Family Association. Recruitment of foster care providers who can be champions of inclusive care was a focus. Inclusive care homes provide an environment where the birth family can feel comfortable being part of the care team with a goal of mentoring birth parents and ultimately reunifying children to their families sooner. From the beginning of the foster family's journey and continuing through training, messages of inclusive care are embedded. In addition, focused efforts to identify and develop specialized homes for higher needs children was undertaken. The agency supports these foster homes with specialized training and targeted support. This has enabled children placed in outside paid resource foster homes and group homes to be cared for within our local foster home network.

Priority 3: Engaged and Inspired

Strategic Goal 3: Agency staff, foster parents and volunteers will be engaged and inspired in a healthy workplace.

Objectives:

- a. Adequate staffing and skill levels are available to serve the needs and volumes of families and children served.
- b. An agency-wide learning and development strategy that supports the agency as an evidenced-based place of learning.
- c. Develop and implement a Healthy Workplace Strategy

Assessment

Throughout the last fiscal year, the Human Resources Department completed a team re-alignment to better support the work of Hamilton CAS staff. To do this, the Human Resources Team developed a philosophy statement that outlined a commitment to provide strategic Human Resource Services through engagement and collaboration with staff, volunteers and foster parents to support them in their delivery of Child Welfare Services.

The Human Resources Department has developed a workplan that includes several projects including an Employment Equity Plan and Healthy Workplace Initiatives.

To support the work of the organization and manage the volume of work, an absence management report and staff vacancy report are being developed. The agency will review these reports regularly to enhance planning for staff and to help address workload pressures within the context of our current staffing compliment.

The agency remains committed to providing opportunities for staff, foster parents and volunteers to participate in training and professional development opportunities. The Human Resources Department develops an annual training calendar for staff which is based upon training priorities established annually.

The foster care modernization strategy implemented in 2019-20 now incentivizes ongoing training for foster parents to enhance their skills in supporting children and youth.

Priority 4: Strategic Partnerships

Strategic Goal 4: Develop and maintain strategic partnerships within the community and across the province that assist in supporting vulnerable children and families.

Objectives:

- a. Strategic partnerships with Indigenous and Black communities to support them in keeping their children safe at home.
- b. A multi-level strategy (provincial, local and case level) that supports advocacy, with specific roles defined for each level of the agency including staff and the Board.

Assessment

The Children's Aid Society of Hamilton has established partnerships with community service agencies from across several sectors including education, violence against women, children's mental health, Indigenous, legal, and health. Over the past year, work has focused upon building upon those relationships through the establishment of an Indigenous Liaison and a formalized partnership with Empowerment Squared to support racialized and newcomer families.

With the support of Black and Indigenous community partners, we are in the beginning stages of developing culturally aligned programs/supports that will focus our efforts to address the disproportionality and disparity of Black and Indigenous individuals who are involved with our agency. We are also continuing to collect and review race-based data to support continued program and service model development.

Hamilton CAS is continuing to develop a plan to support relationship building with local government officials. The goal of this strategy is to keep local authorities advised of opportunities and challenges that our community may be experiencing. This year, the agency was happy to host Jill Dunlop, Associate Minister of Children and Women's Issues to provide feedback regarding our local experience and suggestions about child welfare modernization. This goal will be further developed in the coming year.

Priority 5: Continuous Improvement

Strategic Goal 5: Enhance systems to support continuous quality improvement, transparency and accountability.

Objectives:

- a. High levels of compliance are achieved on service standards and strategic outcomes are measured.
- b. New provincial requirements are implemented.
- c. Support is maintained for CPIN¹ integration.

Assessment

Continuous quality improvement is an ongoing focus at the agency. For fiscal 2019-20, the agency saw the development and implementation of several self-service operational and compliance reports to increase transparency and accountability. Our CPIN support team was instrumental in providing training on utilization of reports and critical knowledge translation and exchanges to enhance staff experience with self-serve reports. The self-service report library will be expanded further in 2020-21. The CPIN support team mobilized quickly to provide training and support staff and supervisors in their new roles during changes to the service structure. For 2020-21, the CPIN support team will be important agents in supporting regular and ongoing changes in CPIN.

The agency has also continued strong compliance with child in care standards and licensing standards evaluated with the annual Extended Society Care and Licensing Reviews.

Part X is a new section of the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, that sets out the legislative privacy framework for the child welfare sector. It came into effect on January 1, 2020. Part X of the *CYFSA* sets out rules for service providers regarding privacy, access to personal information including the collection, use and disclosure of personal information. In preparation for Part X implementation, staff engaged in training to enhance their knowledge of Part X, policies and procedures were reviewed and revised and processes were modified to ensure a culture of privacy. Looking forward, further knowledge translation to enhance a culture of privacy is an essential priority.

¹ CPIN (Child Protection Information Network) is the province-wide, computer information system launched at the agency in May 2018.

Priority 6: Resource and Sustainability

Strategic Goal 6: Ensure that valuable resources are in place to support service outcomes and ensure financial sustainability.

Objectives:

- a. Maximize revenue available including securing and allocating resources for the best possible organizational design, staffing and mix of placement resources.
- b. An IT Implementation Plan has been developed and reviewed.

Assessment

Due to ongoing efforts, fiscal 2019-20 closed with a surplus financial position following two years of deficits. The reduction in children in care resulted in more children achieving permanency earlier, and resulted in a significant decrease in costs. Overall, expenditures were reduced by 7% from the prior year. The surplus generated will be used to: protect against future uncertainties, fund projects to support the strategic vision, and pay off a portion of the agency's historical debt. The Agency continues to utilize multi-year forecasting to ensure financial sustainability.

A private fund report was prepared for the Board which highlighted the sources of funding (donations, rental income and bequests) as well as the various programs supported by private funds (for example the holiday sponsorship and bursary program that are not funded by child welfare funding).

In fiscal 2019-20, several changes were made to allow the back office to support service more effectively. Finance, IT, HR and QA have worked together to increase capacity or restructured to focus on supporting service in achieving the service plan. Another improvement was the development of automated reports to enhance analysis and access to current data. This includes a boarding analysis report and a staffing report. Efforts will continue in the coming year to utilize these reports to increase accuracy in forecasting and budgeting and optimizing the use of resources.

The IT implementation plan has also generated savings as investment in new, cost-effective solutions continues. New cost-effective solutions included replacing legacy equipment and security solutions with modern systems and cloud-based tools that provide enhanced performance and security at a significantly lower cost. Reclassification of a position resulted in hiring a network security analyst. This role has provided an opportunity for the Agency to use more sophisticated security monitoring and response systems to mitigate cyber threats. The Agency response to COVID ensured staff had secure and stable connectivity to allow for seamless service provision while working remotely.

Conclusion

Hamilton CAS successfully launched a new strategic vision in November 2019. This five-year plan realigned service delivery to support the agency goals and service staff were re-allocated to several new programs and positions. To better support the unique needs of families in the Hamilton community and the unique needs to youth aging out of care, several specialized teams were developed as well. The re-alignment supports service delivery focused on keeping children safe with their families and in their communities, centering decisions based on the voice of children and youth, helping children and youth achieve their full potential and finding permanency for children and youth as soon as possible. Hamilton CAS is pleased to provide this report which documents the success of the organization in achieving its strategic vision in order to better support vulnerable children, youth and families in the Hamilton community.