



# Halton Children's Aid Society 2021-22 Annual Report

Providing the Wings  
for Our  
Youth to Soar



Photo Credit: Aidan O'Sullivan De Peza

Vision—Children, Youth and Families Thrive

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



# Land Acknowledgement

**Let us acknowledge together that Halton Region stands on the traditional territory of the Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee and the Huron-Wendat; now home to many First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.**

**As settlers, we are grateful for the opportunity to meet here and we thank all the generations of people who have taken care of the land and for those who continue today.**



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# A Poem for Truth and Reconciliation

We are the granddaughters of survivors.  
We are the nieces of people who never came home.  
This entire year has been excruciating for us.  
Not like a punch to the stomach,  
One you don't see coming,  
Taking your breath all at once.  
But like an avalanche.

The slow collection of snow on a mountaintop.  
Until, one day, a sound sets off a cascade,  
Wrecking everything in its path.

We all saw the building snow.  
Our bodies knew the horrors untold.  
You see, we live near the mountains.

Towns, however, that are crushed by snow,  
Are shielded by walls and roads.  
Existing so far away from mountaintops.

A sea of orange now floods the landscape.  
T-shirts, signs, banners, handprints  
Take up the space cleared by snow.  
Some wear the colour to commemorate  
Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, Cousins.  
Some wear the colour to honour  
The childhood that was stolen from them.  
Some wear the colour as a sign of atonement.  
Refusing to let history be buried.  
Some wear the colour to blend in.  
Using apologies, holidays, and shirts  
To cover the gap.

Meanwhile pipelines, legal action, and police raids  
Tear the rift further and further apart.

We are the granddaughters of survivors.  
We are the nieces of those who never came home.  
We are apart of the avalanche.  
We had our hearts unburied with every child found.  
Where do you fit in this story unfolding?

*Thamer Linklater is a member of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and a survivor of the child welfare system in Manitoba. She recently graduated from the University of Winnipeg with a B.A. in English and is working on her Master's in Indigenous Studies at Trent University. Thamer has recently started work on her collection of poems and hopes to publish them soon.*

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# A Message from Our Executive Director and Board Chair

This year saw the continuation of pandemic responses on multiple levels across the Halton Children's Aid Society (Halton CAS). It has been said that the pandemic is an accelerator, prompting change in service delivery with more urgency than in the previous environment. The pandemic also has been referred to as a magnifier of health, social, and economic inequities. At Halton CAS our experience mirrors each of these likenesses. Over the past year, as we learned to live within pandemic conditions, we responded to the needs of children, youth and families whose situations were intensified by the pandemic.

Implementing a newly developed hybrid work model, our service was conducted both virtually and in person, as required. Often, our front-line staff were the only social service responders out in the community seeing children, youth and families in person. We recognize and honour the dedication of child welfare workers in Halton and across Ontario. The past year saw increases in family issues such as mental health problems, substance abuse and addiction, and intimate partner violence. Our approach in the pandemic was to carefully assess the impact on families while strengthening the natural assets in families and their support systems.

The focus was on ameliorating, wherever we could, conditions of disadvantage and disparity for our children and youth in care. We increased the financial support for youth in and transitioning from care to alleviate stress and economic insecurity. The Halton Youth Collective Impact program successfully concluded its pilot and we are now seeking long-term funding to stabilize this program as a permanent community and CAS response to youth transitioning out of care to the age of 25. We embarked on a collaborative strategy with our partners at Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK) to increase local care for youth with complex needs. We worked at establishing and strengthening partnerships within the Black, Indigenous, Muslim and 2SLGBTQ+ communities to improve our ability to offer meaningful and helpful services to children, youth and families. We developed a pilot Diversity, Equity and Inclusion child welfare team to increase our capacity for culturally aligned service response. With gratitude, we engaged with the newly created Halton African Black Caribbean Committee (HABCC), whose experience and wisdom helps to shape equitable policies and services at Halton CAS.

Our staff were highly engaged in multiple training, learning, and development opportunities over the past year. Our management staff completed the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) provincial Equity in Child Welfare training. All staff were provided the opportunity to complete the 4 Seasons of Indigenous Reconciliation training. There were also numerous opportunities throughout the year for staff to commemorate days and events of significance to the Indigenous, Black, Muslim and 2SLGBTQ+ communities. These occasions enrich us all and we look forward to including more communities in the upcoming year.

This year's Annual Report theme is **Providing the Wings for Our Youth to Soar**. It is with great appreciation that we thank the dedicated staff of the Halton Children's Aid Society. Without these compassionate people, our children, youth and families would not be able to soar to new heights. Our gratitude also goes to our foster, kin and adoptive caregivers for their steadfast commitment and caring for the children and youth with whom they share their homes. Thank you to our volunteers who spend countless hours and selfless dedication in many ways that enrich the lives of our children, youth and families. Our gratitude is further extended to our community partners and service professionals who bring their own expertise and compassion to the work we all do in Halton Region. Thank you as well to the donors to the Children's Aid Foundation of Halton for adding hope to our children, youth and families. Lastly, we recognize the guidance and wisdom of our Board of Directors who assist us to keep Halton CAS on track to deliver on the vision, mission, values and service excellence that distinguishes us in the Halton community.

Emad Elsayed, Board Chair

Janice Robinson, Executive Director

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# Our Team

## Board of Directors

### Board Executive

**Emad Elsayed**, Chair

**Joyce See**, Vice Chair

**Terry Kelly**, Finance and Risk Management Committee Chair

**Terry Spearin**, Governance Committee Chair

**Brendan Neil**, Director at Large

### Board Members

**Eslyn Blair \* Jacqueline Dinsmore \* Muhammad Faizan \* Hazel Lambert \* Joan Lewis  
Marcus Logan \* Karen Marshall \* Janice May \* Kamran Niazi \* Reena Vanza**

## Leadership Team

**Janice Robinson**, Executive Director

**Lynn Barker**, Director of Children and Youth Services

**Jennifer Binnington**, Director of Protection Services

**Michelle McGaw**, Director of Human Resources and Organizational Excellence

**Donna Miles**, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

**Heema Dhup**, Director of Finance and Property Management

**Robyn Connolly**, Executive Assistant to the Executive Director/Communications Specialist

**\$22,470,995**  
(revenue)

**\$22,623,571**  
(expenses)

**2021-22 deficit = \$152,576**

The above is a summary of details from the Halton CAS 2021-22 audited financial statements prepared and audited by SB Partners.

Access our full audited financial statements at [www.HaltonCAS.ca](http://www.HaltonCAS.ca)

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# Resources for Youth

Early into the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (Ministry) issued a policy directive to all children's aid societies (CAS) to ensure youth turning 18—and those whose care arrangements were scheduled to expire—would continue to receive a consistent level of care.

Prior to this directive, the Halton Children's Aid Society made a commitment to continue to provide financial support and rent relief to all youth in our care based on the values and ethics we uphold as an agency. This commitment included those on Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY), Voluntary Youth Service Agreements (VYSA) and youth in the Bridging the Gap (BTG) program. Our agency strongly believes this funding underscores the need to continue to support our children and youth through the pandemic in providing much needed resources.

While the Ministry directive originally had an expiration of September 30, 2022, we are pleased to note it has recently been extended until March 31, 2023. As part of this extension, the Ministry has confirmed its intention to engage with youth advocates and the sector to develop a readiness assessment, co-developed by youth themselves, which will guide decision-making and set our youth up for success as they make the immensely significant transition to young adulthood. This funding extension and development of a readiness assessment is welcomed by youth advocates and the child welfare sector, both of whom have advocated strongly for a replacement to the current policy in which youth are discharged from the child welfare system based on reaching the chronological age of 18 or 21 years.

Our children's services staff were able to communicate this good news to our youth to let them know they would continue to be fully supported. Read what some of them had to say.

"I am a full-time student and have just completed my first year in college. My first year in college was a different experience than most to say the least, simply because I attended school at the height of a pandemic. Starting college is scary enough, you have to learn how to live by yourself for the first time and budget accordingly, and then on top of all that you have all these additional costs, textbooks, course fees, residence fees, etc., all while ensuring you are working hard enough to pass all your classes. The additional \$390 has helped me pay for some of those additional costs that come with moving out on my own. Having that additional financial support helps me to focus more on my studies instead of worrying about how I can spread out my last bit of money on groceries for the week."

"During the pandemic, there has been so much uncertainty. Whether it be losing my job, or getting my hours cut back where it scares me that I won't have enough to pay my bills. The one thing that made life a little bit easier during this time has been that extra little bit of money just in case things take a turn for the worst. When the money was not available, it was a choice between paying for bills or buying groceries and, most of the time, my bills came first and food came last. Though I am thankful for those grocery gift cards, it usually isn't enough to ensure I have food to last me a month, let alone two weeks. That extra bit of money makes it so I am not overly stressed about everything going on and am able to focus on the things that I need to, without the worry of 'am I going to have enough money to pay my bills' or 'am I going to starve this month because my bills need to be paid?' I hope this \$390 will be here for a little bit longer, because the pandemic isn't going away any time soon and it would be really nice to have that extra bit of financial support during these tough times."

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# Youth Testimonials

“I want to start by thanking you for the additional \$390 for all these months. Unfortunately I have been laid off twice since the pandemic started. I have been able to make very little money through Instacart. The \$925 CCSY funding has been going to the rent I pay my grandma and paying for food and bills. The additional \$390 has been helping me with my future. I have been trying to save as much as possible for when I'm in school and am paying way more in rent. The pandemic has been so hard on me. I'm married to my amazing husband who lives in America and, due to the pandemic, we have barely seen each other. I've been trying to get all the immigration paperwork together to get my husband here to Canada with me. My mental health has been deteriorating and I can't function due to it. I am going to college for a full-time course to become a PSW. As a young adult, I am stressed with what seems to be the weight of the whole world on my shoulders. This additional \$390 per month has been helping me feel a bit better about my future.”

“I am so incredibly grateful for everything the agency has done for me over the last few years. Even after all these years, I am still shocked by the generosity you guys continue to offer. It is not entirely dramatic to say the monthly \$390 saved me during this pandemic. I wasn't expecting it at all, so I had fully accepted I was going to burn through all my savings until I could find work again. But, I never had to. The \$390 alleviated so much stress and fear. I also support my brothers so I was worried about all the sacrifices I was going to have to make when the severity of the pandemic finally hit. When I say the \$390 saved me, I am being completely honest. Saved me from countless sleepless nights, hungry mornings and many panic attacks. I am so thankful for the agency and everything you guys continue to do for me!!!”

“Since the beginning of the pandemic, I personally felt a lot of stress figuring out how I would be able to get money since I didn't qualify for CERB and wasn't able to find a job. When I learned I would be getting an extra \$390 per month, it alleviated a lot of that stress and I was able to use the money towards transportation since public transportation had a lot of obstacles. I've been eating healthier because I can afford organic options and it's been helping my mental health. I have a sense of a hope that I can still save while being able to get my essentials and not falling short.”

“The \$390 during the pandemic helped me to not starve every month. Usually, I run out of food with my Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY) funds so it was nice to have extra. My hours at Mark's Work Wearhouse got cut back to one shift a week and the \$390 helped to make up for lost wages. I was also able to save a little bit of money every month, which I have never been able to do before. To be honest, I am really worried about what is going to happen when the \$390 stops. I have come to rely on it especially since the pandemic is not over. I was supposed to be aging out last July and I am really glad that didn't happen because I don't know how I would make ends meet. I think CCSY should continue until age 25 because I know I am not ready.”

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# The Impact of Mentors

“The Halton Youth Collective Impact program has been such a rewarding experience for me as a mentor. Through this important program, I have developed a mentoring relationship with two individuals, formerly youth in care. At the beginning, I took cues from each individual as to what kind of mentoring relationship they wanted. Slowly and thoughtfully, we chatted and texted with each other, and got to know each other. My role now with each of them is quite diverse, which makes my experience even more enjoyable! We text about how their week has been, and we meet for lunch and talk about their jobs and busy schedules. I have given advice on college assignments, discussed cooking and groceries, explained how to iron clothes and have asked one of my mentees for some advice while shopping together for make-up at the mall. These two mentees have demonstrated so much positive strength and work ethic, and it is always my pleasure to talk and meet with them.” ~JH, *Halton Youth Collective Impact Program Mentor*

“Hey there. I wanted to thank both of you for helping me pursue my educational goals. I have been using the collective impact money to help pay for the certificate I earned. This will be the fourth one now and I am hoping I could still apply for a college/university course even once I ‘age out’ in September. Just wanted to share the news I’m still working on getting more to improve my chances of getting accepted in a writing/art school. I recently completed Creative Writing: The Craft of Character from Wesleyan University on Coursera.” ~Halton Youth Collective Impact Program Participant

“I am a former youth in care that was lucky enough to be a part of the collective impact. The collective has really helped me with my education. With this program I was able to get a nice rose gold Macbook Air laptop and the software I need for my program. Without the collective impact, I would not have been able to afford a laptop or the software to get through this year online.” ~Halton Youth Collective Impact Program Participant

“I was first introduced to the Halton Children’s Aid Society through participation in the Children’s Aid Foundation of Halton’s online auction in April 2021. The encouraging words spoken by the youth—whom I refer to as success stories—was absolutely moving. As a hyper-organized retired accountant, I knew an online event this organized must have an incredible team. That has proven true through my experience with the Futures Education and Halton Youth Collective Impact programs. Through my own eyes, I have seen remarkable progress with youth experiencing many lessons for growth and maturity to which most children and young adults do not have access. The support from the workers and incredible administrative team is continuously there to help both the youth and the volunteers move forward in their goals. Volunteering fills me with a sense of pride. When I see my adult son using his vacation days for his own form of volunteering, I am reminded of watching my mother volunteer when I was a child and feel great pride in seeing this pattern repeated! ~SP, *Halton CAS Volunteer*

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# Stories of Resilience and Hope

**Meet Isabell**, a 13-year-old member of the Inuvialuit community of the Northwest Territories. Isabell and her ten-year-old brother, Isaac, have received services from the Halton Children's Aid Society for the past three years. Their mother was a victim of the 'sixties scoop' and has had difficulty addressing her addictions, resulting in an unstable lifestyle for Isabell and her brother. Like many children involved in child welfare, Isabell and her brother were exposed to domestic violence, frequent moves and unhealthy family dynamics, leading them to be placed with their maternal aunt in Burlington. Isabell struggled and it has been a long journey for her to accept her mother's limitations. However, Isabell has shown incredible strength and resilience by diving into extracurricular activities, including the swim team and the school play, which have become a safety net.

This past summer, Isabell was registered to attend camp with the Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton. After only one week in, thanks to the keen eye of the camp manager, Isabell was transitioned from a participant to a volunteer camp counselor where she assisted with tutoring programs and various camp activities in a mentorship role. The camp manager noted that Isabell took on the role with enthusiasm, grace and a willingness to learn. Isabell made quite the impression and will be invited back next year as a camp counselor.

Despite her early childhood experience, Isabell has shown strong resilience and accomplished so much in her young life. She is self-motivated, persevering and desires to change the path of intergenerational trauma that has impacted her community. Isabell still experiences everyday struggles, but she makes an effort to rise above. To me, Isabell is a reminder of the successes we celebrate in this job. With the right support, nurturing environment and recreational activities to boost their confidence, children and youth are provided with the wings to soar to the heights of their success. *~LP, Community Child Protection Worker*

**Meet Andy**, a ten-year-old boy searching for his forever family who could honour and support his birth family. The Halton CAS Adoption Team located a maternal uncle, his wife and their two children who were a potential match for Andy. However, the family lived in the USA in California. Thanks to the hard work of Andy's adoption worker, LB, who took a crash course in the process of, and endless paperwork for, an intercountry adoption. As a result, Halton CAS was able to develop and secure an adoption transition plan with Andy and his family proving that no matter what barriers we may face, we can move mountains to achieve permanency. In July 2022, Andy's permanency became a reality. Andy and his forever family traveled to the US embassy in Montreal to secure his visa and he moved to California where he was placed on adoption with his maternal family. Being placed with family means Andy will continue to have openness with his birth mother and grandmother. In addition, Andy's culture, identity and family will be supported and will very much be a part of his everyday life. This is the first intercountry adoption for Halton CAS in many, many years. This process is a clear indication of the support, passion and commitment to find the resources to help our children and youth soar. We are very excited to share that Andy is thriving in his new location and very happy with his forever family! *~HS, Adoption Supervisor and LB, Adoption Worker*

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# Our Work By the Numbers

**97%**

of cases enable children and youth to remain with their families

**72%**

of children and youth are discharged within one year of coming into care

**74%**

of children and youth return to family or kin

**9**

adoptions finalized (or in process)

**223**

active volunteers, mentors and drivers

**2,314**

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

**137**

number of children and youth in our Society's care

**78%**

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

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# Our Work By the Numbers

580

cases linked to community services

91%

of our work  
is completed at investigation

44

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

**\$125,000**  
cash donations

**\$102,792**  
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**, which provides 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** programming including Children and Youth in Care Day, YouthCAN conference and Grand River Zone events
- ◆ **Halton Youth Collective Impact Program** to support employment for youth transitioning out of care
- ◆ **Assistance to Kin Service** children, youth and families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic
- ◆ **DREAMS Program** to provide basic household necessities, gift cards, holiday celebrations and gifts

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