



# 3-YEAR EQUITY STRATEGY

2023 - 2025



we  
acknowledge...

We acknowledge this land is situated within the traditional and treaty territory of the **Mississauga's of Scugog Island First Nation**, signatories of the **1788 Gunshot Treaty** and **1923 Williams Treaties**. This land is home to the Indigenous Peoples.

Let us acknowledge the deliberate acts and traumas of the past through authenticity, solidarity, truth, and reconciliation.

Let us celebrate Indigenous communities by being leaders of action in the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** and the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission's** recommendations.

Let us move forward together with kindness and respect.



**The Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation** moved into southern Ontario from their former homeland north of Lake Huron around the year 1700. The Mississaugas are a branch of the greater Ojibwa Nation, one of the largest native groups in Canada.



The Johnson-Butler Purchase of 1787-88 (the "**Gunshot Treaty**," referring to the distance a person could hear a gunshot from the lake's edge) is one of the earliest land agreements between representatives of the Crown and the Indigenous peoples of Upper Canada (later Ontario).



**The Williams Treaties** were signed in 1923 by the governments of Canada and Ontario and by seven First Nations: Alderville, Chippewas of Beausoleil, Chippewas of Georgina Island, Chippewas of Rama, Curve Lake, Hiawatha and **Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation**.



This **Declaration** provides a roadmap for the Government of Canada and First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to work together to implement lasting reconciliation, healing, and cooperative relations.



**The Truth and Reconciliation Commission** provided those affected by the legacy of the residential schools policy with an opportunity to share their stories and experiences. The Commission released its final report detailing **94 calls to action**.



# setting the context

There is no system in Canada so deliberately built on the ideals of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy and Eurocentrism than the child welfare system.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, child welfare services were primarily concerned with the care and protection of orphaned or abandoned White children, with little to no understanding of the needs and challenges of Indigenous and racialized children. Many children, particularly those from marginalized communities, were placed in institutional settings such as orphanages or residential schools. Indigenous children, in particular, experienced systemic removal from their families and cultural heritage at such high rates that we now recognize this period in Canadian history as a cultural genocide. During this period, Indigenous children and families were subjected to forced assimilation policies through practices like the residential "school" system. These policies aimed to erase Indigenous cultures and values, resulting in significant harm to generations of Indigenous children.

Black children and families were over-surveilled at such a high rate that overrepresentation now exists in most CAS's across Ontario.

Disproportionate rates of child apprehension, separation, and placement in foster care were observed, reflecting biases and structural inequities.

Starting in the 1970s, criticisms of the child welfare system emerged, particularly regarding its disproportionate impact on marginalized communities. Critics argued that marginalized families, such as those from racialized, Indigenous, and low-income backgrounds, were more likely to be subject to child welfare interventions due to systemic biases and discrimination. Indigenous and Black children continue to be overrepresented in the child welfare system.

This overrepresentation is rooted in historical injustices, intergenerational trauma, poverty, and systemic racism. The lack of culturally appropriate services and limited Indigenous-led and Black-focused agencies exacerbate challenges in child welfare.

In response to these critiques, child welfare agencies in Ontario began implementing culturally sensitive and anti-oppressive approaches. This involved recognizing the importance of cultural identity, respecting diverse family structures and values, and challenging discriminatory practices within the system.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition in Ontario to increasingly prioritize community-based and family-centered support.

This involves providing resources, services, and interventions that empower families, promote their well-being, and address the underlying systemic factors that contribute to child maltreatment.

For child welfare to truly pivot into a new direction, there must be an institutional imperative to look inwards and address systemic racism and inequities within the system manifested by employees prioritizing investigations and apprehensions over community empowerment.

Efforts need to ensure more equitable access to services, address racial disparities in child welfare interventions, and promote anti-racist policies and practices. Initiatives need to address the representation of racialized and Indigenous workers within the child welfare workforce and a more deliberate approach is required to reduce the number of Black children coming into care, reduce the amount of time they spend in care, and to empower Black families and communities to make decisions for their children.

Durham CAS's Three-Year Equity Strategy aims to shift the discourse of dominance from the system to the people through a psychologically safe child welfare system.



# highlights

The primary concern of this strategy is to increase psychological safety and remove or reduce psychological harm for employees, children, youth and families. Psychological harm and safety can be open to interpretation but at its core it is about creating more equitable and healthy spaces through recognized pathways. For employees, this means greater engagement in the workplace, decreased exposure to risk factors and trauma as a result of racially motivated violence, increased engagement in healthy behaviours, and increased safety to question and disrupt inequitable practices. For the community, it means greater trust and accountability and being able to engage with child welfare without the fear of apprehension and judgement.

Social, economic, and political factors shape the conditions in which individuals grow, live, work, and age, and are vitally important for health and wellbeing. When these inequalities are systematic, unfair and avoidable, they can be considered inequitable. Growing research has increasingly recognized racism as an important driver of inequitable health outcomes for racialized Canadians generally and Black Canadians, specifically.

Black Canadians continue to experience disproportionality and disparities in a variety of social areas, including, racial profiling by police; over-policing (e.g. surveillance, harassment, excessive use of force) and under-policing (e.g. under-responsiveness, abandonment); over-representation in criminal justice systems, systemic discrimination and under-treatment in hospitals and other healthcare systems, low representation or absence of Black people in leadership positions across institutions and systems and finally, overrepresentation of Black youth and children in the child welfare system.

The aim of this strategy is to ensure equity is recognized at Durham Children's Aid Society as an institutional imperative and improve agency-wide anti-racism, decolonization, anti-Black racism and equity skills and capabilities among its employees.

The strategy includes five main areas of focus: leadership, policy and governance, human resources, employee engagement and wellbeing, and community accountability. Within each area, there are specific goals and actions, including increasing the representation of racialized and historically marginalized employees, improving hiring practices, reviewing and revising policies and procedures to ensure they are equitable, and integrating anti-racism content into all aspects of the service delivery.

This strategy also highlights some of the progress made towards achieving the goals of the strategy, such as the establishment of an Equity Team, consisting of a Diversity Initiatives and Community Engagement Lead, the One Vision One Voice Lead and Equity Sponsors, and the development of the Employee Resource Groups (ERG). This strategy emphasizes that this work is ongoing and that Durham CAS is committed to continuing to address systemic racism and creating an inclusive environment for all employees while ensuring communication channels with the community and establishing clear accountability measures through third-party evaluators.



# this strategy

1

Identifies five pillars and 50 actions, with the aim of removing and/or reducing psychological harm and improving psychological safety at Durham Children's Aid Society.

2

Is agile (iterative). Its timelines and deliverables overlap, focusing on building the necessary foundational capabilities and identifying opportunities for impact in each department first, to prepare us for broader implementation.

3

Provides a framework for clear steps that each department will implement.

4

Includes actions and accountabilities that are meaningful, measurable and mindful of current agency and community commitments, challenges and opportunities.

The actions that follow build on identified needs and continue the advancement of our strategic plan and our anti-racism work. The plan recognizes that some employees and departments at the agency are at different stages of their inclusion, decolonization, equity and anti-racism journey and may or may not have the resources, capacity, and capabilities to engage in these actions. These departments and employees are encouraged to engage with the actions that align with where they are on their journey and share their successes and learnings with the broader agency.

It is also recognized that the successful implementation of this plan depends on all employees of the Durham CAS joining in solidarity and a sustained commitment to social equity to create a truly inclusive community.

Finally, these actions require continued investment, capacity, and capabilities beyond the three-year term.

## GOAL

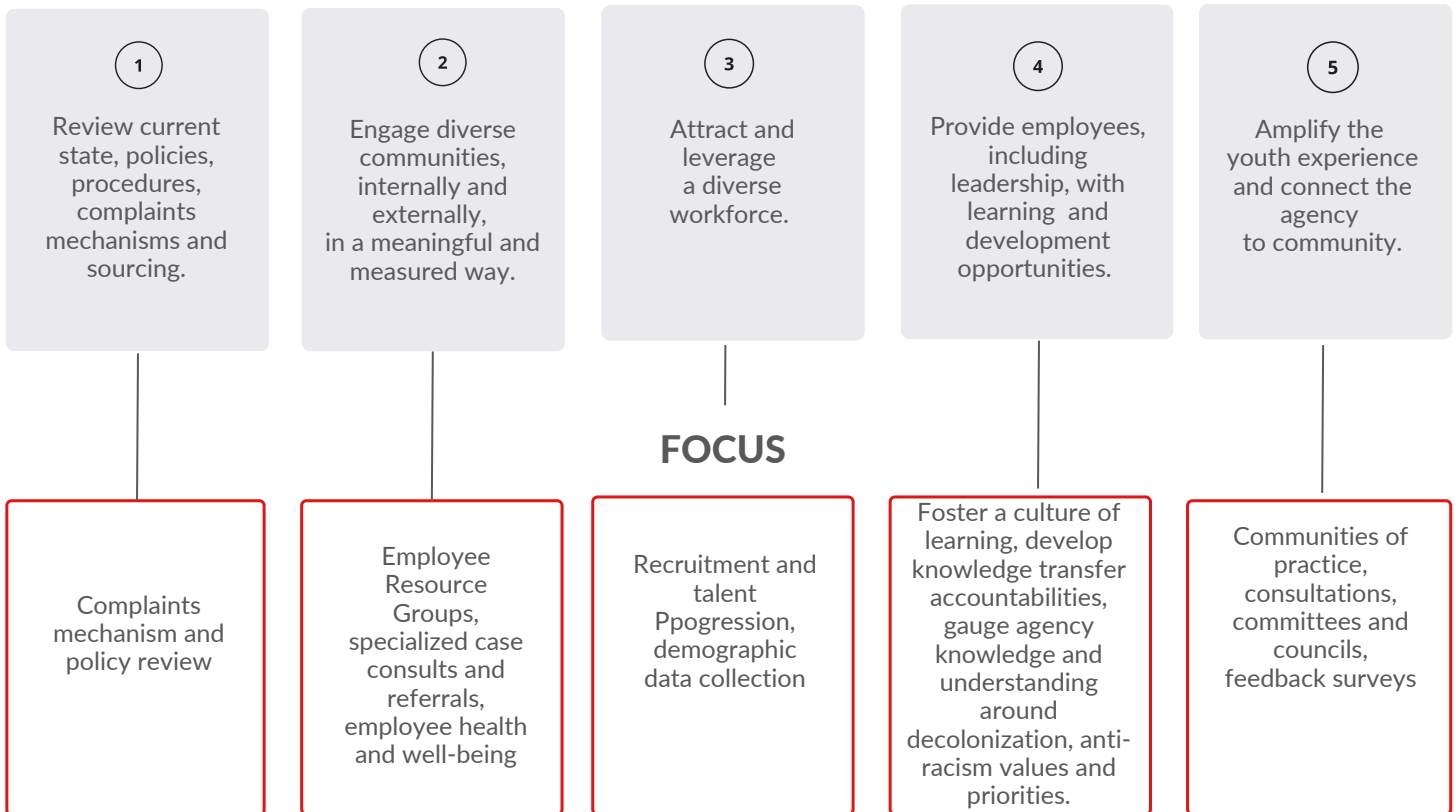
REDUCE / REMOVE PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM & IMPROVE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY FOR ALL EMPLOYEES, CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES BY ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES WITHIN DURHAM CHILDREN’S AID SOCIETY

To achieve this goal, the strategy will aim to answer the following questions:

- How can the agency ensure its staff feel psychologically safe to disrupt and challenge current inequitable practices?
- What steps does the agency need to take to ensure it is mitigating psychological harm for employees, children, youth and families?
- How can the agency ensure the community feels psychologically safe to connect with the agency on child welfare concerns, family empowerment and community referrals?

To address these questions, this strategy is focused on five pillars over the next three years.

## PILLARS

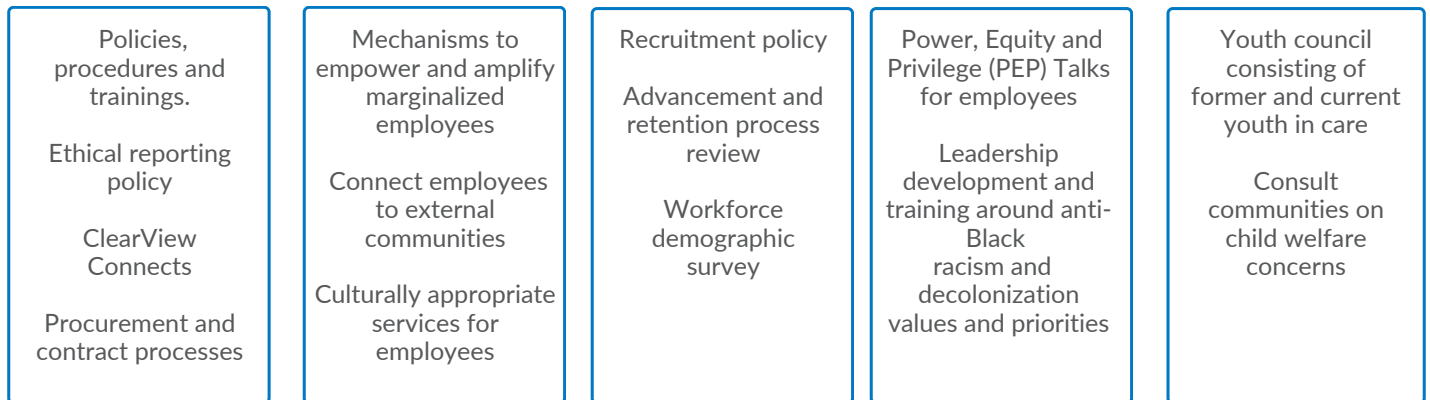




## GOAL

REDUCE / REMOVE PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM AND IMPROVE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY FOR ALL EMPLOYEES, CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES BY ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES WITHIN DURHAM CHILDREN’S AID SOCIETY

### IMPLEMENT



The first year focuses on current state review, including policies and procedures, building internal capacity through knowledge sharing and skill development. This includes laying the foundation for the employee resources groups and establishing robust complaints mechanisms, including external anonymous reporting mechanisms from the community. Year one will see the launch of the family feedback surveys, allowing the agency to better understand and measure disparities in service. The first year will also focus on connecting the agency to the community through a youth council led by a former youth in care, a Black-led service provider committee of grassroots organizations in Durham Region, and the Public Accountability Town Hall (PATH) series which will be attended by a third-party evaluator and organized across Durham Region.

The second year will focus on engaging in actions that support greater alignment of current behaviour and practices to Durham CAS's anti-racism and equity values and principles. The actions identified in year two will foster a culture of learning to improve knowledge transfer and promote the ongoing learning and development of employees through the Power, Equity and Privilege (PEP) Talks. Year two will also focus on equity-based data collection, for potential candidates and current employees, and a clearly articulated recruitment process.

The Workforce Equity Survey, which will be launched in year one, will begin to inform the agency in year two, along with the employee resource groups, of representational gaps at the agency. Year two will also see the reemergence of Soul Journey, with an aim to provide educational and cultural awareness opportunities for African and Caribbean Canadian youth in care.

By year three, the agency will begin to engage in a cycle of systemic inquiry, including addressing disproportional representation and inequities in our service delivery, programs, services, human resources outcomes and broader policy processes. The process of review will provide an opportunity to assess Durham CAS's institutional readiness to implement purposeful changes in practices, services, programs, and policies. It will also provide the necessary groundwork to develop future action plans, targets, and accountabilities to address racial inequities.

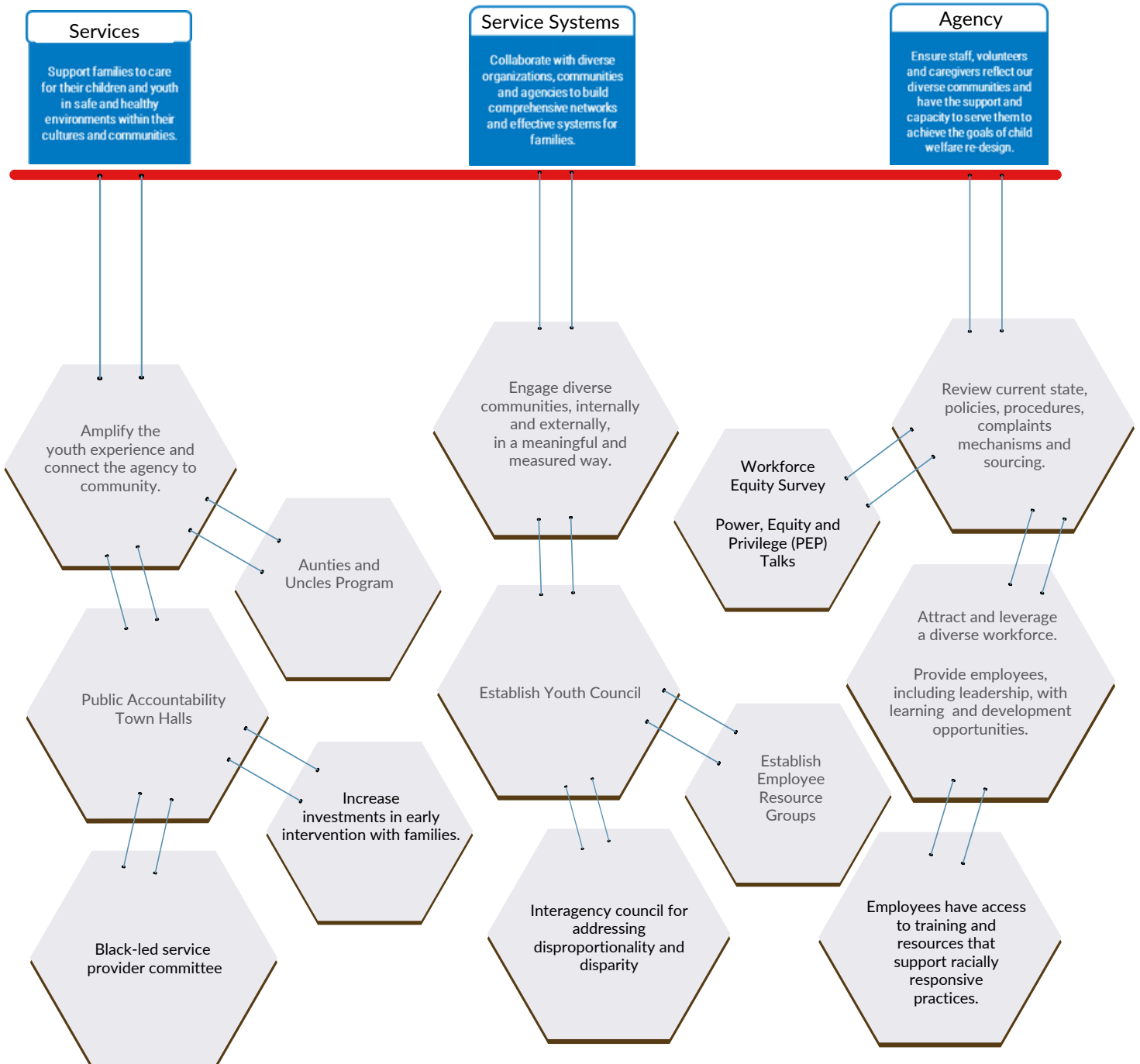
## ALIGN INTERNALLY

### Our Vision:

Families receive the support and resources needed to thrive in their cultures and communities.

### Our Mission:

Durham Children's Aid Society works collaboratively with families, community members and service providers to overcome barriers to safe and healthy development of children and youth.





## ALIGN EXTERNALLY

This strategy is directly aligned with provincial efforts, including the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies' One Vision One Voice 11 Equity Practices and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services' child welfare redesign pillars.

**ONE VISION ONE VOICE**

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies

- COMMIT TO COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP
- COLLECT AND ANALYZE DATA TO MEASURE RACIAL DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITIES
- EVALUATE PROGRAMS AND MONITOR PERFORMANCE
- ALLOCATE APPROPRIATE AND DEDICATED RESOURCES
- ENGAGE AFRICAN CANADIAN PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES
- ENGAGE AND EDUCATE MANDATED REFERRERS
- ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE INTERNAL COMPLAINT MECHANISMS
- ENHANCE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
- PROVIDE DAILY SUPPORTS AND ONGOING TRAINING FOR STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND CAREGIVERS
- ESTABLISH COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS
- STRENGTHEN ABILITY OF CAREGIVERS TO SUPPORT AFRICAN CANADIAN CHILDREN

The Ministry's pillars focus on transforming child and family services to strengthen families and communities through prevention, early intervention and seeking more permanent homes for children and youth in care when they cannot stay in their own homes or communities.

There is also an intentional focus on community-based prevention services to enhance family wellbeing and increasing youth supports and improving accountability and sustainability.

These culturally-specific responses to child welfare services are long overdue, in particular for African Canadian children, youth and families.

Because while other marginalized groups have seen specific programming and initiatives tailored to their communities, particularly Indigenous and Jewish communities, Ontario currently lacks a comprehensive institutional response to anti-Black racism and the cultural needs of African Canadians.

Anti-Black racism needs to be at the centre of child welfare redesign through comprehensive, community-led initiatives.

In 2022, Durham Children's Aid Society launched the Durham Model, the first of its kind in child welfare. This three-year, community based initiative is designed to provide culturally appropriate supports and early intervention services to African-Canadian families and children who are at-risk or have become involved with the society.




# **3-YEAR EQUITY STRATEGY**

2023 - 2025

5 pillars  
&  
50 actions

# our agency

An inclusive, affirming, celebratory working and learning ecosystem and healthy and safe environments for all employees with the aim of improving employee engagement and promoting and protecting disrupters and collaborators. An agency that is representative, inclusive, empowered and where engagement is meaningfully measured.

- 
- Review all current agency diversity, equity and anti-racism offerings including initiatives, employee committees and sector commitments, determine level of activity, ROI and sponsorship.
  - Conduct a gap analysis to determine other offerings and partnerships with internal and external community stakeholders and develop practical, scalable and sustainable initiatives.
  - Identify and implement specific supports and development initiatives for Black, Indigenous and racialized employees based on needs identified through engagement within these communities.
  - Explore opportunities for Black, Indigenous and racialized employees, youth, volunteers and students, to gather, host events, celebrate and share traditions and achievements to foster belonging.
  - Review opportunities to establish awards and incentives that recognize outstanding anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives and contributions in learning and community engagement, including employee-led initiatives.
  - Develop internal communication plan to promote key messages in support of education and to build awareness of Durham CAS's anti-racism and equity efforts.
  - Reassess existing agency security and safety infrastructure and protocols with a view to protecting the safety of all employees.

## **Agency Feedback and Complaints Mechanisms:**

Establish and launch an employee culture survey to collecting equity disaggregated data for effective monitoring of employee engagement and examine and develop other feedback channels at the agency for employees to express their experiences.

Revise and update the agency Harassment and Discrimination Policy and ensure employees receive training on their rights and responsibilities as outlined in the policy.

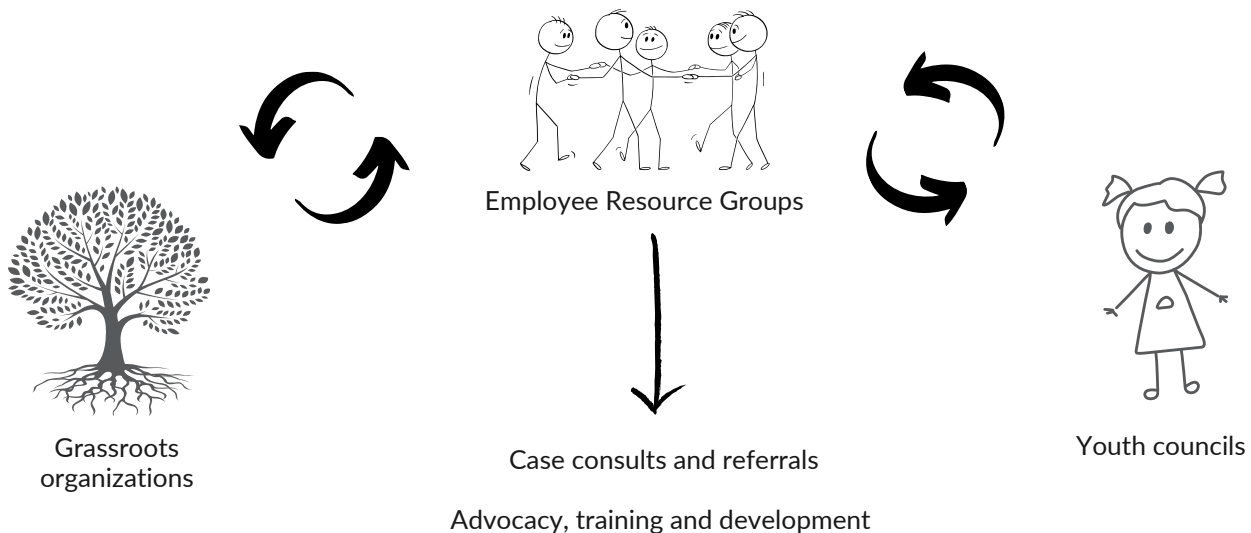
# our people and culture

## Establish Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are voluntary, employee-led collectives within Durham CAS that bring together individuals with similar backgrounds, experiences, identities, or interests. ERGs are designed to create a supportive and inclusive environment for employees, promote diversity and inclusion, and provide opportunities for networking, professional development, and community engagement.

The ERGs at Durham CAS will have an internal and external focus and will be formed based on various dimensions of diversity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, abilities, and more. They can also be focused on specific interests or common goals, such as gender equity, 2SLGBTQIA+ advocacy, mental health and well-being, or cultural heritage.

Internally, specific ERG members will have an opportunity to educate, raise awareness, consult on cases and support employees. Staff will be able to leverage the expertise and lived experiences of ERG members to better support children, youth and families working with historically marginalized communities.




In addition to mobilizing internally, the various ERGs at Durham CAS will be connected to community via youth councils and grassroots organizations. The Indigenous, Black, Asian and Pride ERGs will engage in community outreach activities, partnering with local organizations and initiatives.

This involvement will allow the ERGs to make a positive impact beyond the workplace, raising awareness and supporting relevant causes and advocacy in the broader community with the expectation that these learnings will be brought back to the agency as learning and development opportunities from the frontlines.



# our recruitment and retention



Develop equitable human resources capabilities and policies to support the development of agency-wide inclusive practices to attract and hire talent that is reflective of the diversity within Durham Region, within all departments and at all levels.

Provide anti-bias training, tools and resources to the recruitment team and hiring managers to guard against bias in hiring process and to support more equitable hiring practices.

Ensure all new employees complete onboarding training on Introduction to Anti-Racism, AODA and human rights.

In all job postings, include language that is reflective of the diversity in our community, and integrates anti-racism, equity and decolonizing principles and values.

Require that a member of Employee Resource Groups or Department Equity Sponsor (once established) be part of the director recruitment processes.

Develop and implement an “exit survey” process to enable identification of barriers to retention for racialized employees.

Ensure Indigenous representation and intentional, meaningful involvement for the Board of Directors.



# demographic data collection

Using data accelerates anti-racism and equity efforts. Durham CAS will implement data collection processes to enable the collection and analysis of data on current employees as well as all potential candidates, this includes disaggregated data related to intersecting identities such as race, religion, ethnicity, and gender identity.

This information will advance the agency's ability to measure, map, maintain and share data about the pervasiveness of systemic inequities/discrimination within the agency to support evidence-based decision making.

Demographic data collection will provide the agency with crucial information for policy and procedure development in various areas including AODA, human rights and culturally appropriate employee supports. Population specific data will assist the agency understand the characteristics and needs of different groups, allowing us to address specific challenges and allocate resources effectively.

By understanding the demographic characteristics, we can determine where resources are most needed, ensuring resources are distributed equitably and based on actual demographic needs. Demographic data is invaluable for research and analysis allowing us to identify patterns, trends, and disparities across different demographic groups. Internal demographic data also allows us to compare changes to external population growth and migration patterns within the Region of Durham. This information contributes to a better understanding of social dynamics and helps inform policies and strategies for social and community engagement development.

It helps the agency identify and address disparities and inequalities that may exist among different demographic groups, such as racialized employees, women, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ population and employees with differing abilities. By collecting data on these groups, the agency can advocate towards creating policies and initiatives that reduce inequalities, promote inclusivity, and ensure equal opportunities for all.

Finally, population specific data serves as a benchmark for monitoring progress and evaluating the impact of interventions and policies. By collecting data over time, it becomes possible to assess whether specific initiatives are achieving their intended goals and whether disparities are being reduced. This feedback loop enables the agency to adjust, refine, and improve strategies and outcomes.


- Develop and deploy the workforce equity survey to support ongoing collection of demographic data and enhance the collection of disaggregated equity-based data.
- Develop demographic data collection for all potential employees, students and volunteers.





# training and development


Resource the development and implementation of robust anti-racism and equity training and development opportunities to enhance Durham CAS's understanding of and alignment to equity as an institutional imperative. Improve agency-wide anti-racism, decolonization, anti-Black racism and equity skills and capabilities to establish a highly knowledgeable and skilled community with expanded abilities and expertise to address racial inequities and promote racial equity.



Revise all current equity training offerings, require all employees to take part in the training and develop a self-directed mandatory learning module for employee onboarding on equitable language, power and privilege, and racial trauma.


Ensure all employees have access to training and resources that support racially responsive and culturally sensitive practices and are inclusive and accessible.

Implement mandatory, regular Indigenous training for staff.



Implement mandatory anti-racism and equity training for all employees to complete at orientation for new employees and throughout the year for current employees. (Trainings include "Introduction to Anti-Racism", "Manifestation of Anti-Black Racism", "History of Child Welfare", micro-aggressions, unconscious bias, trite reporting, immigration, intimate partner violence, human rights, and consent).

Establish and support the OVOV Resource Library for all employees as a resource focused on equity, anti-Black racism and decolonization values and practices.



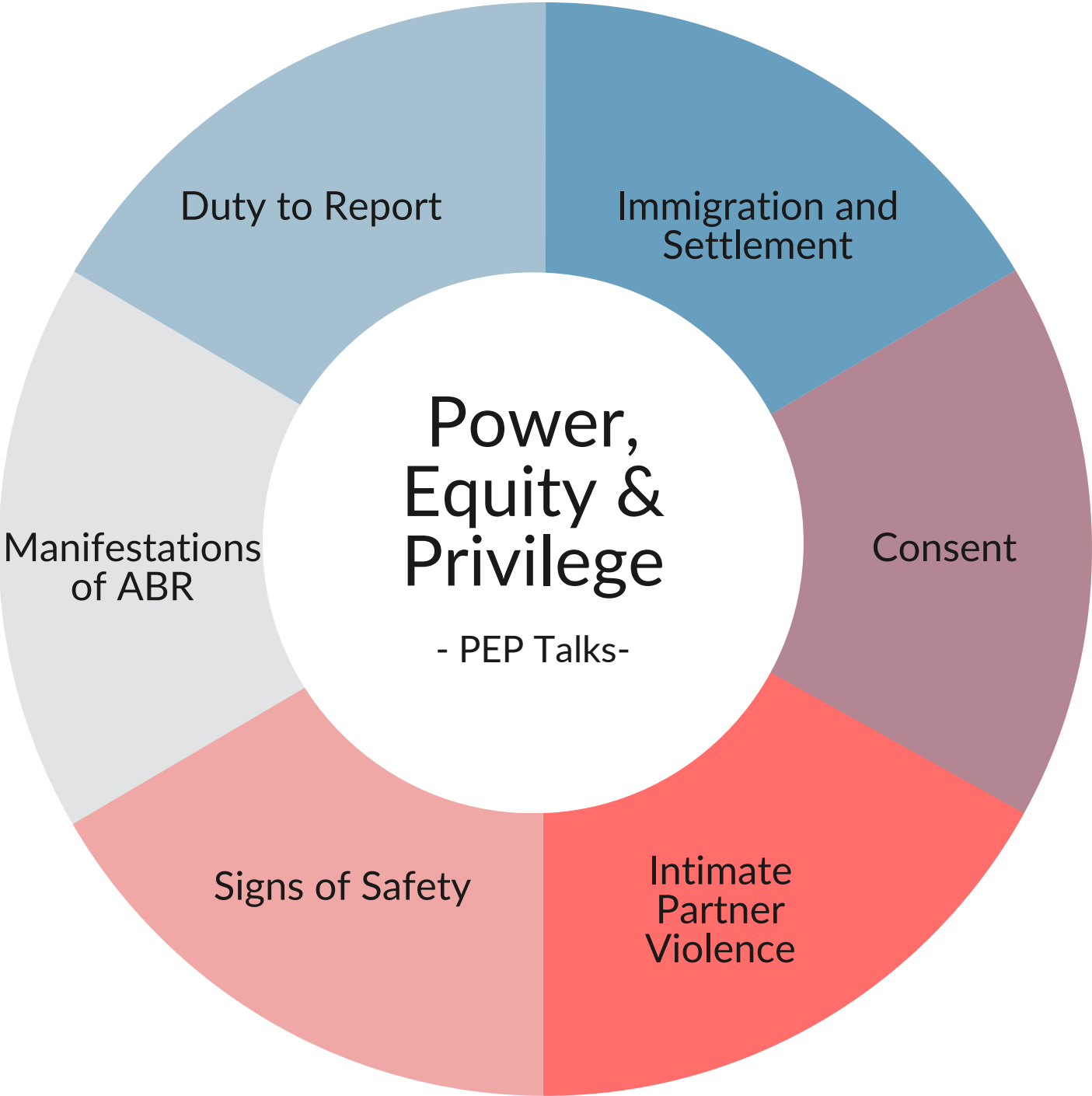
Ensure supervisors are present on rotating basis at Public Accountability Town Halls as a development and engagement opportunity.

Engage consultants and leverage the expertise of the DEC Team to develop a learning plan focused on all employees, leadership and Board of Directors, to enhance learning, engagement, and accountability and ensure agency-wide participation in anti-racism and equity efforts.

Develop a plan to consistently communicate and champion Durham CAS' commitment to inclusion, decolonization, equity and anti-racism in visible platforms (e.g., town halls, meeting agendas and social events).


Create an internal online portal to facilitate access to tools and resources that encourage and support employees in developing inclusive, decolonization, equity and anti-racist principles and practices. Develop and deploy training for foster parents to improve awareness and diversify recruitment.

Redesign the current speakers bureau to Power, Equity and Privilege (PEP) Talks and offer employees and system partners learning opportunities on workshops and facilitated sessions on relevant topics including power, privilege and bias, anti-Black racism, decolonization practices, engaging in difficult conversations and becoming a racially responsible and equity-minded employee.






# our commitment to equity



Allocate financial resources that are specifically intended to support anti-racism and equity initiatives and can be accessed by teams and departments and/or allocate funds to incentivize departments to engage in anti-racism, decolonization, and equity work.

Increase investments in early intervention with families.


Investments for preventive services and supports can lead to a decreased reliance on more costly interventions required when families become more deeply involved in the child welfare system.



Support cross-system collaboration that prioritizes diverse partnerships in child welfare and across public systems - This includes schools, legal clinics, mental health and housing supports.

Embed Jordan's Principle in service practice and the interagency protocol.

Support all policy efforts to keep families together in immigration-related matters.



The overlap of immigration enforcement and child welfare has devastating repercussions on families. Durham CAS should support policies that slow down the child welfare and immigration enforcement processes long enough to ensure that families can stay together or at a minimum allow parents to make informed decisions for the care and custody of their children.

In addition, when parents are detained or deported, efforts should be made to facilitate contact and exceptions made to the timeline for the termination of parental rights. Clear policies stating that undocumented parents and families will have equal treatment in the child welfare system would not only increase equity but ensure that the best interests of the child are paramount.

Develop and implement department and team goals identifying anti-racism and equity-related training and learning targets, as well as anti-racism and equity actions (inclusive of related actions in this plan) as part of 2025 priority setting.

Recruit an employee within each department as an Equity Sponsor. The Equity Sponsor will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of anti-racism and equity commitments made in departmental work plans.

Continue to advocate for a more equitable child welfare agency through systems reviews and communities of practice.



# our accountability to community

A community that is engaged, informed and empowered to question and hold the agency accountable.

With the implementation of the new Strategic Plan, it became evident that broader community engagement and deeper collaboration with the partners and organizations serving Black children, youth, and their families, is necessary to address and dismantle anti-Black racism within the child welfare system. In addition, the narratives and lived experiences of the children and youth interacting with Durham CAS were necessary to ensure the programs and services available reflect their needs.

In 2022, Durham CAS made a promise to work with partners throughout Durham Region to empower Black children, youth, and families by providing support and helping them understand and navigate the child welfare system including its barriers and biases which lead many Black families into the care of the system. The agency pledged to carry out five actions:

- Targeted neighbourhood consultations within Durham Region
- Establishment of a youth council within Durham Region
- Support for the creation of a Black-led service provider committee
- Thought leadership and awareness building
- Ongoing response development and evaluation


To support these five actions, Durham CAS created a new role within the agency to support the internal diversity initiatives as well as external community engagement projects. The Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement (DICE) Lead has since:

- Established the Public Accountability Town Halls to consult with targeted neighbourhoods
- Established a youth council with a youth ambassador within Durham Region
- Supported the Creation of a Black-led Service Provider Committee consisting of over 12 Black-led agencies
- Established partnerships with Durham Community Legal Clinic to support families, youth and children with legal support
- A third-party evaluator will ensure accountability measures for the Public Accountability Town Halls and OVOV deliverables

Moving forward, this strategy will ensure clear accountability measures to ensure the work the agency is developing and deploying reflects the needs and concerns of the community.

Establish a Quality Assurance Committee to support the development of a data strategy for systemic data collection with the aim to find racial equity gaps, determine the magnitude of these gaps, track training and development and understand baseline data compilation and analysis.

Maintain the Public Accountability Town Hall (PATH) Series: Ground ongoing and future services, processes and offerings in the feedback, experiences, and realities of communities with the intention to remain transparent, accessible, and accountable to our commitments.



Develop a comprehensive annual report including actions undertaken by each department and publish it on the agency web page so that it is available to employees and community members.

Report directly to the Board of Directors on the progression of this strategic plan on a quarterly basis.

Develop and deploy a family feedback survey to ensure crucial timely and reliable data on the experiences of children, youth and families served by Durham CAS. Data will be used to facilitate an examination of the level of racial equity in service provision and suggest areas for targeted action to resolve any identified disparities.

Develop and implement a policy and external mechanism for anonymous reporting from employees and service recipients.

Develop and sustain Voices of the Youth Council. Centre youth voices and recommendations in every aspect of child welfare reform in an effort to improve the system, experiences, pathways and outcomes.

To ensure positive well-being outcomes for youth in foster care, it is important to focus on the needs of young people who may need additional support. Two such subgroups, expectant and parenting youth in foster care and youth in care who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) often face stigma. For young people of color, these intersections can cause compounding disadvantage. Focusing on improving outcomes for these youth by addressing the overlapping challenges they face should be an important consideration when crafting child welfare policies.

Offer culturally relevant programming: Intentionally build sustainable programs and partnerships to address systemic inequities and culturally specific needs in our service and program offerings.

Partner on Youth Wellness Hubs: Invest in culturally relevant, accessible, and barrier-free spaces and services for youth and families that are sustainably funded, culturally relevant, and rooted in holistic community care models.

Establish an interagency council for addressing disproportionality and disparity to examine the level of disproportionate involvement and the disparity in service experience of Indigenous, Black and racialized children in child welfare, juvenile justice and mental health systems.

The council is to make recommendations to reduce the involvement of such children in these systems and improve the children's success in the educational system. The council is to include representatives from agencies including Durham District School Board; Community Development Council Durham; Ontario Shores; Durham Regional Police Service; Durham Children's Aid Society's Youth Council, and Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services.

The council is to review delivery of child welfare, juvenile justice and mental health services to evaluate the disproportionate rates of use of the services by Indigenous, Black and racialized children. The council is to prepare a report consisting of its findings and recommendations and an implementation plan that is to be submitted to a Public Accountability Town Hall in September 2025.

Foster community partnerships: Develop and grow local relationships and complimentary pathways to service delivery with community agencies, including grassroots organizations, service providers, and advocacy circles to foster reciprocal knowledge transfers in youth and community care.

Continue to track trite reports and develop strategies around adequate engagement and education for referral sources.



# conclusion

Through this strategy, Durham Children's Aid Society's primary concern is to increase psychological safety and remove or reduce psychological harm for employees, children, youth and families. There is an institutional imperative to create a more equitable child welfare system.

By creating a safer, healthier and more accountable agency, the results will impact inequities within child welfare and improve outcomes for racialized and historically marginalized children, youth and families. But a three-year strategy alone will not solve decades of mistrust and harm, the agency must ensure it does not lose steam in tackling institutional and systemic factors that are leading to high levels of inequity – including, and specifically, manifestation of anti-Black racism. It must also advocate beyond child welfare and into systems which overlap with equity-deserving communities, including access to education for all, policing, health care – including mental health support, and stable, affordable housing.

These social determinants of health, including discrimination and racism, shape the conditions in which individuals grow, live, work, and age, and are vitally important for psychological safety. Efforts need to ensure more equitable access to services, address racial disparities in child welfare interventions, and promote anti-racist policies and practices at a provincial level.

As an agency, Durham Children's Aid Society's has pledged to actively work to recognize, challenge and dismantle systemic oppression and inequity against racialized and historically marginalized populations, including the unique circumstances and needs of Black, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, individuals with varying visible and invisible abilities, and those facing the hardships of poverty. This three-year equity strategy aims to shift the discourse of dominance from the system to the people through a psychologically safe child welfare system.