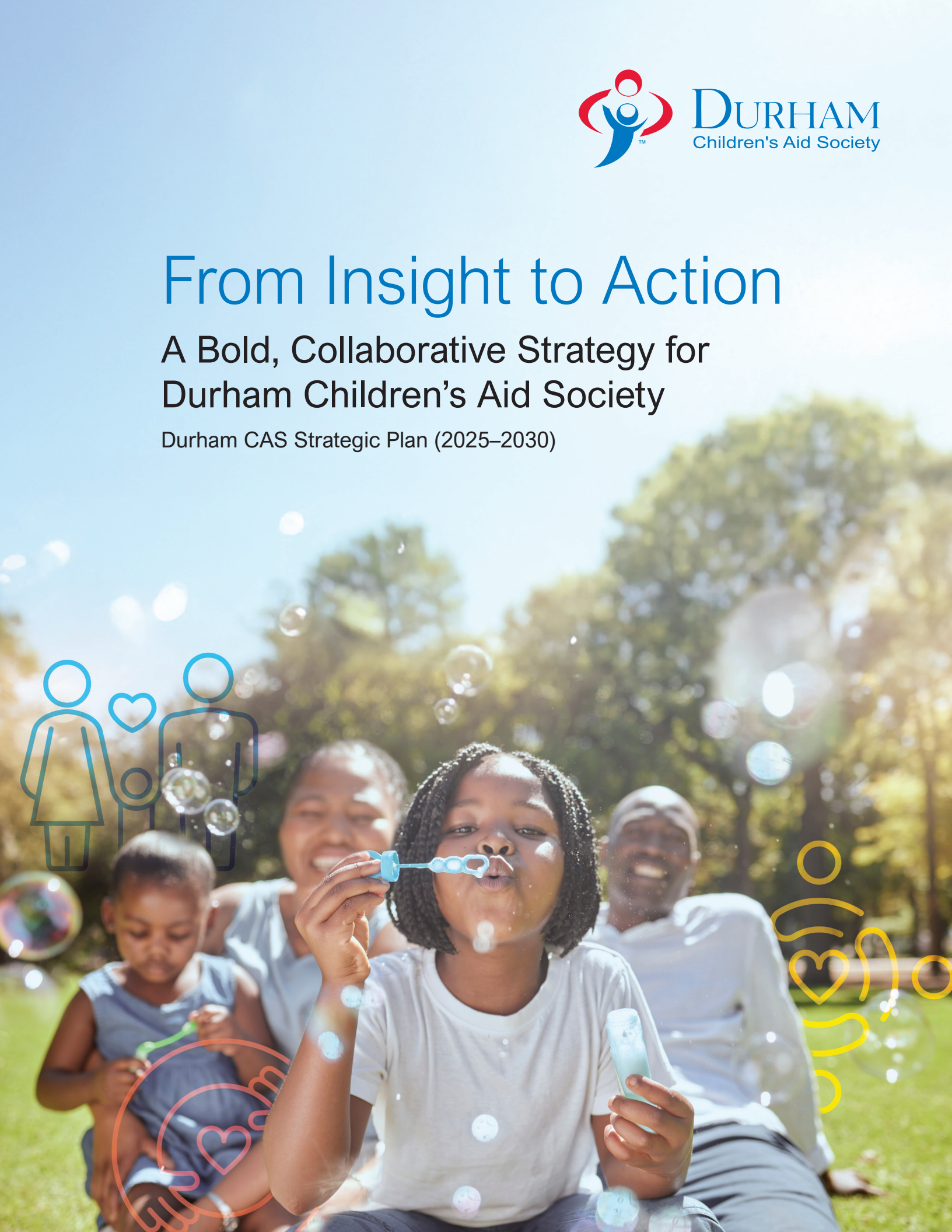


From Insight to Action

A Bold, Collaborative Strategy for Durham Children's Aid Society

Durham CAS Strategic Plan (2025–2030)







Message from the Board Chair and Executive Director

Durham CAS is at a pivotal moment of transformation. This five-year strategic plan reflects a deep commitment to equity, accountability, and collaboration. It was co-created through a broad, participatory process that engaged staff, community partners, youth, families, Indigenous and equity-seeking groups.

The plan begins with listening and continues with action. It charts a clear path forward — one where Durham CAS is seen as a trusted partner, and where children and youth are safe and thriving, families are supported, and our workforce is valued and empowered.

With a reimagined Vision and Mission, renewed organizational values, and a firm grounding in Indigenous and equity affirming engagement, and community partnership, this plan lays the foundation for bold, measurable change. Through this strategy, we are redefining how we work alongside the community, embracing innovation and setting the stage for new pathways to healing and growth by focusing on culturally responsive practices and meaningful engagement. We aim to build faith in our systems and foster environments where collaboration thrives, ensuring that every child and family feels seen, heard, and supported.

We are deeply thankful to everyone who shared their insights and experiences. This plan is stronger because of you—and we move forward together, with purpose and resolve.

Vera Mercier,
Board Chair

Ramona Chereches,
Executive Director

About Durham Children's Aid Society

Durham Children's Aid Society (DCAS) is the legislated child welfare agency serving Durham Region. Our work is guided by the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017* and rooted in the best interests, protection, and wellbeing of children and youth, centred in their families and the communities they are a part of. We support children, youth, and families through trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and equity-centred services. We recognize the historical and current harms caused by the child welfare system and are committed to change that is meaningful, sustainable, and grounded in partnership.

Strategic Planning Approach

This strategic plan is grounded in feedback from more than 150 individuals across multiple engagement points, including staff town halls, consultations with Indigenous and equity-seeking groups, youth and caregiver voices, community agencies, and over a dozen key informant interviews. The board of directors engaged in its own strategic retreat and consultations.

The plan was facilitated by an external strategic advisor who helped guide the consultation and planning process.

What we heard was clear: rebuilding trust, transparency, and accountability must be central. This plan reflects those realities and lays the foundation for DCAS's continued evolution as a collaborative, responsive, and affirming organization, working with, and alongside, Indigenous, and equity-seeking communities.



Our Vision

All children and youth in Durham Region are safe and thriving in their families, identities, culture, and communities.



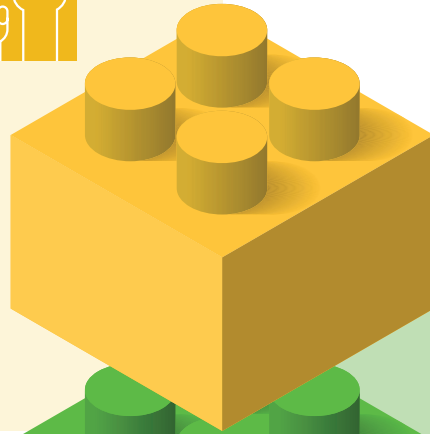
Our Mission

DCAS protects and supports children and youth by engaging families and partnering with communities to deliver trauma-informed, responsive services. We are guided by Indigenous and equity affirming outcomes, transparency, accountability, and compassion, with a commitment to transformative change.

Our Values

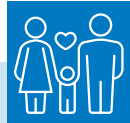
Commitment to Indigenous & Equity-Affirming Engagement

We dismantle systemic barriers through anti-racist, anti-oppressive, intersectional practices. We honour Indigenous rights and embed equity in all that we do.



Courageous & Ethical Leadership

We lead with humility and are willing to own our history, challenge the status quo, and grow through accountability and reflection.



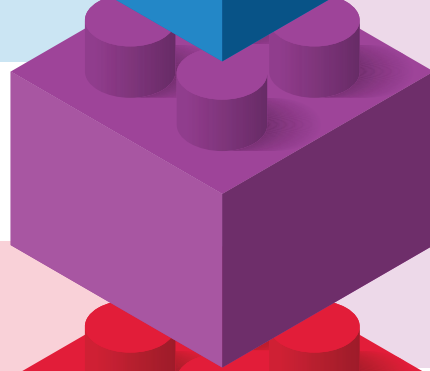
Empowerment through Partnership

We work alongside families and communities, sharing power and creating lasting change through mutual respect.



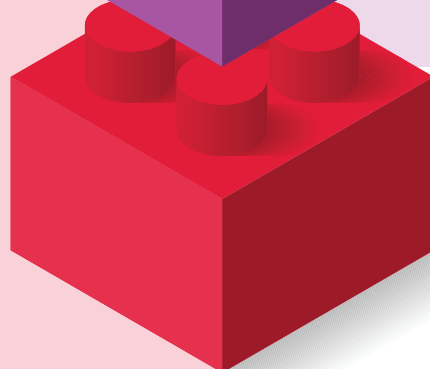
Transparency & Accountability

We act with openness and integrity, taking responsibility for our actions and decisions.



Trust & Integrity

We build safe, respectful relationships through consistency, honesty, and ethical practice.



Strategic Directions



Anti-Oppressive & Intersectional Responsiveness

Goal: Build an Indigenous and equity affirming environment that values identity, fosters belonging, and addresses systemic inequities.

Key strategies:

- Employ an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, intersectional approach to all that we do.
- Expand Indigenous-affirming practices and partnerships.
- Use disaggregated and anonymized data to identify and address disparities in service access and outcomes.
- Create safer spaces for all children, youth, families and staff, that are inclusive of Indigenous and equity-seeking communities.



Courageous, Ethical, & Innovative Sector Leadership

Goal: Embrace bold leadership and challenge norms through collaboration, advocacy, and truth-telling.

Key strategies:

- Lead public education and awareness efforts.
- Build sector-wide capacity for fulfilling our Indigenous commitments, equity-based outcomes, and innovation.
- Acknowledge and learn from past harms; foster a culture of continuous reflection and consultation.
- Be a visible advocate for policy change that strengthens family connections.



Community-Centred Engagement & Partnerships

Goal: Foster deep, trust-based partnerships with families, community organizations, and Indigenous and equity-seeking leaders.

Key strategies:

- Co-create services and solutions with marginalized communities.
- Establish formal cross-sector partnerships and wraparound models.
- Reinvest in local hubs and service integration within the DCAS building.
- Clarify DCAS's role and mandate with external partners and the public.



Organizational Culture & Workforce Wellbeing

Goal: Cultivate a healthy, inclusive workplace that supports staff wellbeing, accountability, and growth.

Key strategies:

- Address workload, trauma, and role clarity issues across the organization.
- Invest in leadership development and coaching at all levels.
- Expand support for Employee Resource Groups and feedback loops.
- Foster trust by embedding transparency and trauma-informed practice into all operations.



Financial Sustainability & Innovation

Goal: Build long-term financial health to support prevention, innovation, and equitable service delivery.

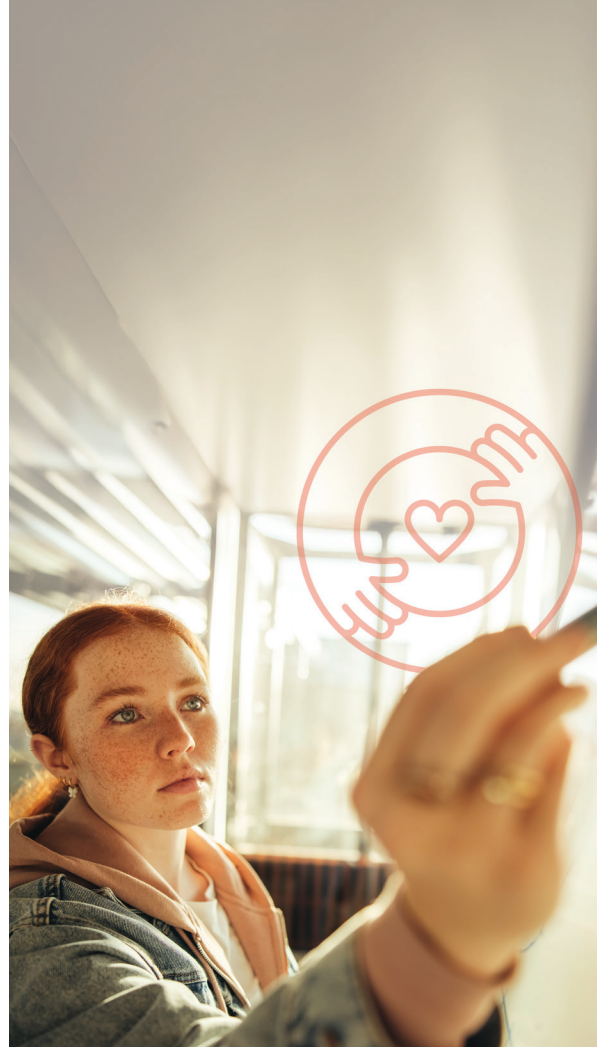
Key strategies:

- Align budget with Indigenous and equity-based goals, prevention, and staff wellbeing.
- Diversify funding (e.g. through grants, partnerships, and fee-for-service).
- Invest in data systems and digital transformation.
- Evaluate new service models based on outcomes, efficiency, and community impact.

Our Commitment to Action and Accountability

This strategic plan sets a bold direction for Durham CAS. Each priority outlined here will be supported by internal planning, clear accountabilities, and regular reflection. We are committed to ensuring that our actions match our values through transparent reporting, partnership-driven implementation, and continuous learning and consultation.

This plan is intended to guide the agency's decisions and direction over the next five years. We will use this plan to stay focused, responsive, and accountable. We will honour the voices that shaped it, and we will ground our commitments in meaningful action.



Acknowledgements

This plan would not have been possible without the courage, honesty, and wisdom of youth with lived experience, families, caregivers, Indigenous and equity-deserving groups, DCAS employees, community agencies, and partners. Your voices are reflected throughout these pages and will guide us in the work ahead.

This strategic plan has been developed collaboratively with DCAS and Bhavana Varma with design from BmDodo Strategic Design.

Definitions

2SLGBTQIA+

An acronym that stands for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual and other gender- and sexually-diverse identities sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions as represented by the plus sign.

Accountabilities

Responsibilities that individuals, teams, or the organization hold—internally (to each other) and externally (to the public, community, and Board).

Anti-oppression

Practices that recognize and challenge systems of power that disadvantage certain groups based on race, gender, ability, and other identities to the advantage of groups that such systems were designed by and for.

Anti-racism

Active systemic efforts to identify, prevent, and dismantle racism in systems, structures, policies, and practices.

Community-centred engagement

A way of working that puts community voices, leadership, and experiences at the centre of planning and decision-making.

Cultural responsiveness

An approach to services and relationships that respects, values, and adapts to the cultural identities and experiences of individuals and communities.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

Staff-led groups organized around shared identities or interests (e.g., Black employees, 2SLGBTQIA+ employees) to provide a sense of community and support, creating a more inclusive and productive work environment. These groups can help staff from marginalized social identities support each other in their employment experience and help the service better meet their needs.

Equity affirming engagement & outcomes

To actively work towards being an equitable, diverse and inclusive organization through the use of an anti-racist, anti-oppressive, intersectional framework that is trauma-informed, healing-centred, safe, responsive and affirming.

Equity

Equity is defined as the quality of being fair, unbiased, and just. Equity ensures a commitment to equal access to resources, opportunities, power and responsibility to all groups/communities. An equitable workplace environment enables an organization to be supportive of service recipients, staff along with internal and community partners towards meeting their full potential.

Equity-seeking groups

Communities that experience systemic barriers and discrimination (e.g., racialized, 2SLGBTQIA+, people with disabilities), and require equitable support.

Identities

The unique combination of characteristics and experiences—such as race, culture, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and language—that shape how individuals see themselves and how they experience the world. Recognizing identities means respecting these differences and ensuring services are affirming and inclusive.

Indigenous affirming engagement & outcomes

Working with, and alongside Indigenous communities in a manner that affirms their inherent rights, while actively meeting and going beyond our legislative requirements and sector commitments as per the direction of, and in collaboration with First Nations, Métis, Inuit communities, community partners, advisors and staff through a process of continual consultation as per our “duty to consult.”

Intersectionality

The way different aspects of a person's or group's identity (e.g. race, gender, disability, class, etc.) intersect to create unique overlapping systemic experiences of discrimination or privilege disadvantage.

Lived experience

Firsthand knowledge gained from directly experiencing a system, such as child welfare, mental health, or poverty.

Sector leadership

Leadership that extends beyond one organization to influence broader systems, practices, or policy change across a field (e.g., child welfare sector).

Trauma-informed

Recognizing the widespread impact of trauma and creating environments that prioritize emotional safety, choice, and empowerment.

Truth and reconciliation

A commitment to acknowledging Canada's colonial history and harms to Indigenous peoples, and taking action to repair relationships and restore Indigenous inherent rights.

Wraparound models

Holistic, team-based approaches that bring multiple services and supports together to meet the full range of a child or family's needs.



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