



DURHAM
Children's Aid Society

110th Annual Report

for the fiscal year 2015 / 2016

Message from the Board President and Executive Director

At Durham CAS, we are passionate about delivering on our vision of *building hope and opportunities with children, youth and families*, and our Mission of *working with families and the community to keep children and youth safe from harm and create stability and permanence in their lives*. Our exceptional staff, caregivers, volunteers and members of our Board of Directors are committed to making our vision and mission realities.

We take pride in our accomplishments in 2015-16 within a changing child welfare environment. In addition, we concluded our strategic plan for 2012-16 which has resulted in many service delivery and innovation advancements. We are pleased to present the Annual Report for 2015-16 and invite you to read on to learn more about the agency.

Providing high quality service responsive to the needs of children, youth and families continues to be essential in delivering on the promise of our vision and mission. Our Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) approach is foundational to this work. We continue with our key strategies of strengthening and supporting families through admission prevention activities, emphasizing family based care for children who require it, and supporting our children and youth in care to be successful.

A service initiative undertaken this year was the hiring of French speaking workers to serve our growing Francophone community. This service has been well received by the community and is aligned with the provincial direction to provide French language services.

In 2015-16, Durham CAS embarked on a significant community consultation process with Durham's African Canadian community. This consultation was born out of concerns raised about overrepresentation of African Canadian children and families in the child welfare system.

Leaders from Durham's African Canadian community have been working with Durham CAS to create a process for ongoing dialogue and engagement with a view to identifying and resolving systemic issues that impact this community. This builds upon the AOP work that we have been doing over the last few years with Durham's diverse communities to increase mutual awareness and demystify child welfare. We are appreciative of the engagement by the African Canadian community at the Building Bridges consultation held on November 23, 2015 with a follow-up session in the spring. We are currently working on the development of a Community Advisory Council to be implemented in 2016-17.

In addition, Durham CAS is excited to be working in partnership with the African Canadian Legal Clinic on the implementation of their support and intervention services to African Canadian families involved with child welfare. This program is slated for implementation as a pilot project in 2016-17.

On a financial note, we are pleased to report that the agency is in a strong financial position again this year. Our service strategies and financial stewardship have resulted in both quality services and a surplus. These funds will go to the Ministry's Balanced Budget Fund that we plan to access as we implement the provincial Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) in 2016 and 2017.



Bryan Buttigieg
Board President

Many innovative services such as Pre-Natal Support, Complex Special Needs and Indigenous Services developed over the course of the strategic plan are mainstays of our service delivery. Last year's annual report highlighted the introduction of Signs of Safety/Family Finding, an internationally recognized clinical model, into our practice. Our Connections Team works with families using this clinical model with positive results. The agency will be integrating this model across our service departments over the coming year.

Child welfare is facing and embracing significant changes. In 2015-16, there was considerable pressure on and scrutiny of the system as the result of the Auditor General of Ontario Annual Report, the Motherisk Hair Analysis Review, inquests and media coverage. Durham CAS was one of the agencies reviewed by the Auditor General. While these events present challenges to individual agencies and the system at large, it is our belief that they will result in more responsive, equitable and accountable service delivery to children, youth and families.

Working together with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, Durham CAS and all CASs across the province have committed to the following:

- Implementing quality and performance initiatives
- Improving the competence and expertise of staff
- Improving the structure of the system
- Improving governance practices
- Implementing the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN)
- Committing to common data reporting
- Moving forward with Truth and Reconciliation with Aboriginal people
- Improving service delivery

We look forward to continuing this work and have integrated it into our annual service plan and the new Strategic Plan for 2016-20. We are pleased to officially launch our new strategic plan at the 2016 Annual General Meeting. This plan is the result of the hard work and engagement of many of our stakeholders including service recipients, staff, caregivers, volunteers, board of directors and community partners.

Reflecting upon 2015-16, and as we conclude our Strategic Plan for 2012-16, we have much to celebrate. We welcome the challenges as opportunities for creativity and positive change. We don't do this work in isolation. We rely on the support of and partnership with many to achieve our vision and mission. We would like to acknowledge the Ministry, and our long-standing and new community partners in helping us to ensure the well-being of children, youth and families. A special 'thank you' for the financial support provided by the Durham Children's Aid Foundation which shares our vision for children, youth and families.

The agency's success is the result of the critical work of our staff; our foster, kin and adoptive families; and our volunteers – a sincere thank you for all you do. Finally, thank you to our volunteer Board of Directors for your expertise, leadership and commitment to the agency. As always, we look forward to the year ahead as we continue to *build hope and opportunities with children, youth and families.*



Bryan Buttigieg
Board President



Wanda Secord
Executive Director



Wanda Secord
Executive Director

Our journey begins with one step

In June 2015, we officially launched our Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) journey with our community. The public launch featured speakers and entertainment including, keynote speaker Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard, as well as youth-in-care who shared their personal experiences of oppression.

Anti-oppressive practice is a social work practice that addresses issues of power and oppression. In child welfare, integrating anti-oppressive practices means addressing institutional power and systemic oppression. This includes preventing and addressing concerns of the overrepresentation of minoritized and indigenous communities.

To guide us in this work we have declared the following AOP Directional Statement, "We are committed to anti-oppressive practice in which we challenge the impacts of power and privilege, eliminate barriers and are inclusive of the broad range of diversity in our community."

While this year saw our official public launch, our initial steps began long before the event. Over the last few years, we have been diligently working to implement this initiative internally and develop staff capacity. This included increased training, commissioning an Anti-Oppressive Practice needs assessment, and hiring an Anti-Oppressive Practice Integration Leader (AOPIL), to support the organization.

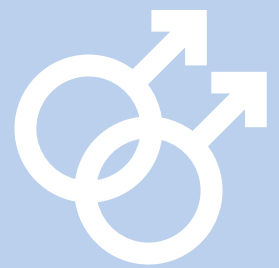
An overarching goal of the work is enhanced capacity in all aspects. To support this goal we have expanded our training for staff, foster parents and volunteers. This has included formal training, as well as sessions related to both celebrations and world events that affect the various cultures and communities we serve.

We have conducted more informal sessions where there have been difficult discussions. We have had to challenge beliefs that may have historically impacted the families we serve. We are also reviewing all parts of our work, for example: our internal structure, policies, forms, support services for youth and families, staff demographics, our publications, and all aspects of our service delivery.

Through a variety of approaches we are working to develop responsive services that are in harmony with and inclusive of the culture and individual needs of the children, youth and families we serve.



Community AOP Launch, June 2015



Message from the Anti-Oppressive Practice Integration Leader

AOP Directional Statement

Durham CAS is committed to anti-oppressive practice in which we challenge the impacts of power and privilege, eliminate barriers and are inclusive of the broad range of diversity within our community.

The Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) integration journey is unlike any other and it impacts every aspect of Durham CAS, including as a service provider and as an employer. It is a process that is not only intellectually and professionally challenging but is a process that hits you at a gut-level, a spirit-level, and changes the core of how you see yourself and the world around you.

To begin the journey to achieve our Anti-Oppressive Directional Statement, as an organization we have had to step far out of our comfort zone. As the Anti-Oppressive Practice Integration Leader, I am impressed with our Board of Directors, leadership, management and all staff, as well as our caregivers and volunteers. They have not only embraced Anti-Oppressive Practice but are on a proactive journey of getting comfortable with the uncomfortable and continuously unlearning and deconstructing.

This has resulted in the organization moving forward on the recommendations made by Dr. Leeno Karumanchery of Diversity Solutions Incorporated which formed the basis of our Anti-Oppressive Practice Road Map.

We have an AO Overarching Policy, and all of our internal policies have undergone an AO Equity Lens Review. This is now a permanent part of policy review and approval moving forward. Internally, we have created an AO structure that includes an AO Steering Committee and several AO Sub Committees which allows us to embed AO throughout the work of the agency.

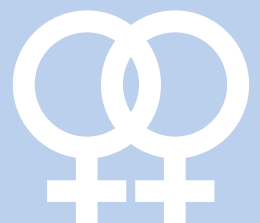
One of the products of this internal structure has been programming specifically for youth-in-care; one for youth who identify as LGBTQ, one for Black youth, and one for boys who have witnessed violence against women in the home.

To help build the capacity of our staff, we have monthly learning sessions that are safe spaces to have courageous conversations about difficult and controversial matters such as anti-black racism, colonialism, homophobia, Islamophobia, and the various intersections of oppressions. These manifest in the everyday lives of the children, youth and families that we service as well as our diverse staff, caregivers and volunteers.

Since launching our AO journey with our community and unveiling our Living Wall (an artistic expression of our AO vision), Durham CAS has begun engaging and collaborating with our local diverse communities. Through the work of Building Bridges, we will be moving forward on creating a Community Advisory Council, a permanent structure to ensure that the voices of our diverse communities are heard and where we can work together to realize our vision and mission for all children, youth and families. In the coming years, I am confident that Durham CAS will continue to be a leader and champion for anti-oppression in the child welfare sector of Ontario.



Tahmena Bokhari
Anti-Oppressive Practice
Integration Leader



Durham Children's Aid Society

Services 2015-2016

4,361
child protection
investigations

864
On-site health
clinic visits

15
adoptions
finalized

592
children in care
at year end

People We Served

Services to families	2015 / 2016	2014 / 2015
New child protection investigations	4,361	4,476
Open child protection cases at year end	852	887
Families served by Prenatal Support	92	114
Services to children		
Children admitted to care	176	168
Children discharged	192	243
Children in care served during the year	784	838
Children in care at year end	592	608
Adoptions finalized	15	29
On-site health clinic visits	864	823
Days care provided		
Total child days care	212,396	231,071
Total foster and kinship days care	72,979	80,158
Purchased foster days care	35,107	38,298
Total group days care	23,767	22,926
Continued Care and Support for Youth	58,859	66,626
Independent living days care	7,055	8,015
Total adoption days care	7,396	8,224
Other days care	7,233	6,824
Volunteer services		
Total number of volunteers (at year end)	134	143
Total kilometers driven	1,380,348	1,458,594
Volunteer drives completed	19,803	19,712
One-to-one volunteer mentorships	33	40
Total volunteer hours of service	27,855	25,357



Statement of Child Welfare Fund Operations 2015-2016

Operating revenue	2015 / 2016	2014 / 2015
Province of Ontario	65,712,937	65,200,849
Balanced Budget Fund	1,522,795	1,337,309
Other	5,759,844	4,965,622
Total	70,995,576	71,503,780
Operating expenses		
Salaries and benefits	33,907,752	35,350,312
Boarding and client services	28,524,107	28,326,153
Administration	6,764,787	6,170,521
Total	69,196,647	69,846,986
Fund balances, beginning of year	7,507,102	5,897,510
(Deficit) / Surplus for the year	1,798,929	1,609,592
Fund balances, end of year	9,306,030	7,507,102

A summary from 'Statement of Revenue and Expenses' audited by Roberts, Marlowe, Jackson, Jackson & Associates, Chartered Accountants.

92

families served
by Prenatal
Support

784

children in
care total
(throughout year)

19,803

volunteer drives

27,855

total volunteer hours



Working together to build bridges



This year, Durham CAS began a process in partnership with leaders from our local Black community to examine concerns about the impact of the child welfare system on Black children, youth and families. This is a continuation of years of work with the Black community that focused on demystifying CAS. One of the first initiatives was a series of public consultations. One of the first initiatives was a series of consultations under the banner 'Building Bridges for the Success of our Children and Youth.'

The consultations are just the beginning, as we continue the work together to address a wide variety of issues. We would like to recognize Akilah Haneef-Jabari, Dr. Leroy Clarke, Sandra Forsythe and Leyland Gudge for their leadership in helping to plan and present these historic sessions.

At the consultations we heard a range of feedback including concerns that an oppressive system has led to an over-representation of Black children in care and that Black families may be treated unfairly during their involvement with CAS.

Sandra Forsythe was one of the initial proponents of the current initiatives, and as she says "For some, this work is uncomfortable. And if we are honest, it will continue to be hard work." Forsythe is pleased with the initial steps, but hopes for concrete results and would like to see the process move more quickly.

"It does takes time, but we have publicly committed to ongoing engagement with the Black community, and using what we learn to inform our services going forward," says AOPIL, Tahmena Bokhari. Durham CAS has pledged to undertake the following three priority initiatives, which were developed from issues that were identified during the consultations:

Enhanced demographic data

In order to better address issues, we need a comprehensive picture of the children, youth and families we serve. We know that we serve a diverse population, but we need more data to present a complete demographic picture. This involves both staff training and changing systems. Comparing our data to the federal census will help us to address concerns about over-representation.

**BLACK
LIVES
MATTER**



Community members with Durham CAS staff at first consultation; (l-r) Dr. Leroy Clarke, Tahmena Bokhari, Akilah Haneef-Jabari, Wanda Secord, Sandra Forsythe, Dawn Walcott-Parris and Leyland Gudge

Staff Census

Similarly, we want to ensure that we have a truly complete picture of our own staff demographics. Ensuring our agency is representative of the community we serve is crucial to ensuring that we work with families in an anti-oppressive and culturally appropriate manner.

Community Advisory Council

In collaboration with our partners we have been developing a formal process for ongoing dialogue in the form of a Community Advisory Council. The council will meet regularly and will have an advisory role in supporting the integration of AO into our services.

Initial steps for each of these goals were undertaken this year, and achieving them is a priority. In order for us to address concerns, we must have accurate information.

A significant part of our work is the recognition of anti-black racism and the acknowledgement that we are part of an oppressive system. We are helping staff and caregivers understand how oppression and power imbalances may impact the families we serve. We have just begun to process deeper understandings such as anti-black racism and anti-colonialism.

Akilah Haneef-Jabari has been an important partner in this work, and she is ensuring that concerns of the community do not get overlooked. She is "cautiously optimistic" but emphasizes that "anti-black racism is

Working together to build bridges ... *continued*

pervasive and we all need to work assiduously to correct it. We need to do something, not just say it." With her passionate dedication, Haneef-Jabari is helping to ensure that we achieve real and substantive changes.

Another essential partner is Dr. Leroy Clarke who emphasizes the need for mutual respect and also diligence in developing concrete, long-term changes. "This is not an easy journey, but I feel confident there is a real commitment (from the Society) to do the hard work so that we can be assured that Black children will be cared for in a just way."

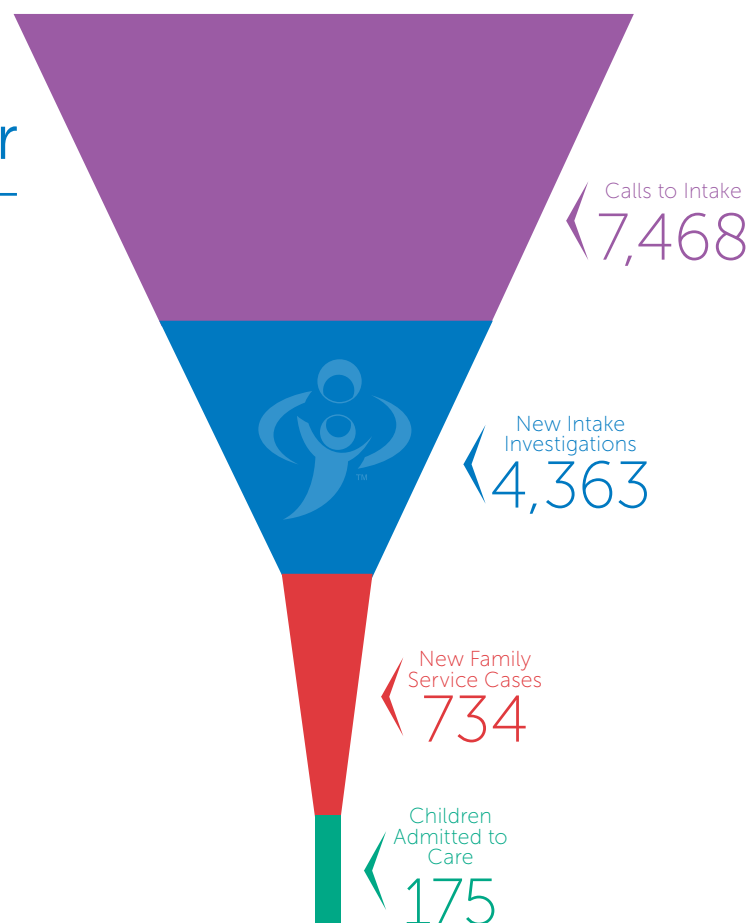
Durham Region's cultural landscape is constantly changing and there is still a lot of work we need to do. Continued meaningful engagement with the community is critical for us to increase our awareness of cultural practices, challenges and opportunities, while at the same time providing accurate information about the role of CAS. It is about mutual education, respect and understanding. This will continue to be a priority for Durham CAS.

Keeping families together

Much of our work focussed on preventing the admission of children to care, including helping families build solid foundations to keep children and youth safe and healthy. We also strive to work with families in a manner that is respectful of and informed by their culture and heritage.

We are continually seeking new community partners that can provide additional support to families. Some may be culturally specific and can help provide support that is more appropriate and customized for each family. Occasionally, we may need to bring a child into care, but with more responsive and innovative services those numbers are declining. When we do, our goal is always to place the child in culturally appropriate, family based care, whether with kin or in a foster home.

All families face challenges, and sometimes they may need a helping hand. We are continually enhancing our services so that we can help families and prevent the need to bring children into our care.



Road to Reconciliation

In recent years, the child welfare sector has been actively working to build relationships with indigenous communities and address the historical impact of the system on generations of indigenous families. This includes acknowledging and addressing the legacy of residential schools, the 'Sixties Scoop' and colonialism.

Historically, parenting in indigenous communities was a shared responsibility; this was destroyed with the establishment of residential schools. Thousands of children were removed from their communities and lost all connection to their family, language and culture. Then with the 'Sixties Scoop', the child welfare system contributed to the isolation of indigenous children. From the 1960s to the 1980s thousands more children were removed from their homes and placed in non-indigenous foster and adoptive homes.

This past year saw the release of the final report of the historic Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The Commission cites the child welfare system for its contribution to the decimation of indigenous communities and culture across Canada. The report includes several recommendations directly related to child welfare, which has bolstered our resolve to continue our work and make reconciliation a priority.

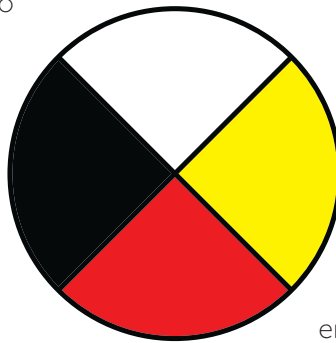
There are many aspects to the work of reconciliation, such as welcoming indigenous culture, establishing relationships with indigenous communities, staff training, new guidelines and a shift in service delivery to ensure the provision of culturally appropriate services.

Along with our colleagues across Ontario, we have started on the road to reconciliation as a part of our AO journey. We acknowledge the devastating impact that child welfare has played on generations of indigenous families, and we have made an ongoing commitment to improve relationships with indigenous communities and to enhance our services accordingly.

During 2015-2016 we expanded our Indigenous team due to an increased demand for the service as well as a growing understanding of the need to provide customized and dedicated services for the indigenous families we serve. The team is critical in our commitment to the principles of reconciliation with our indigenous communities.

The team members are of indigenous heritage, helping to ensure an essential cultural connection and deep understanding of the traumatic historical burdens carried by families served. We are building stronger relationships with our local indigenous community and band members, which ultimately helps our work with families. The team also helps families connect to their indigenous community supports, including participating in healing circles, drumming, working with elders and medicine healers, and family counselling.

Our journey is ongoing, and we will work with our indigenous and non-indigenous colleagues to invest in the principles of reconciliation. We are committed to providing holistic and culturally based services that recognize multi-generational trauma and incorporate the healing power of a family's community and heritage.



Supporting our youth

In support of our AOP work, we have several AO sub-committees that serve as resources for staff and caregivers, and help us to examine our services through an AO lens. The committees provide various avenues to discuss issues, present information, and enhance our services. This year, two groups have launched initiatives specifically for youth.

One of the AO sub-committees, Collective Hands, is focused on issues impacting Black families and children. This year the committee started a program for Black children and youth in care to support identity development, stronger cultural connections and a deeper understanding of Black heritage. Their first event was a trip to Buxton Museum to learn about the Underground Railroad. They also meet monthly for events featuring cooking culturally traditional foods, guests from the Black community, and discussions about topics like culturally significant days and Black hair.

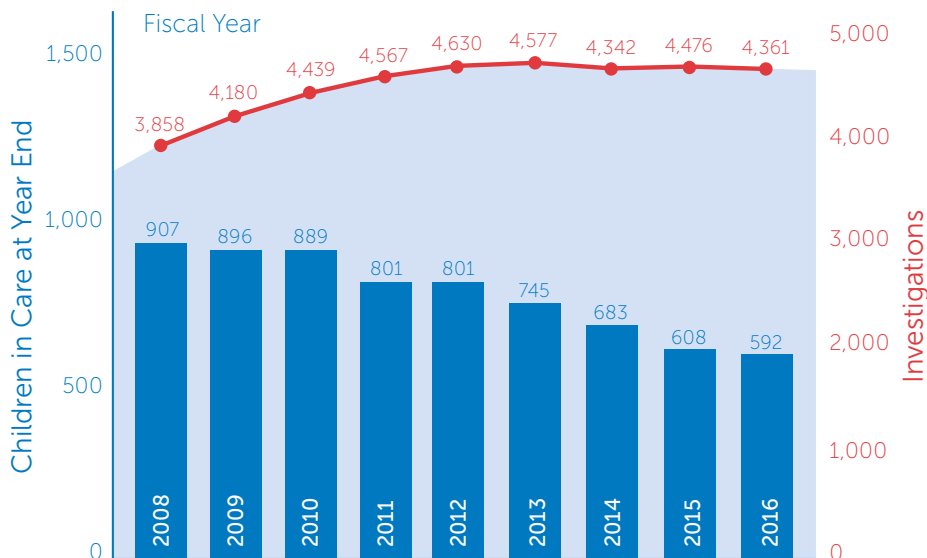
Although cautious at first, most of the youth have come to embrace the events and eagerly anticipate the next one. Not only are they learning about their history and culture, they are building connections and healthy relationships with other youth who share many of the same life experiences. Previously some may have felt isolated, but now have an opportunity to connect with both Black youth and Black staff, and discuss concerns and ask questions in a safe, supportive place.

Having a safe space for youth is also one of the goals of our Live Proud sub-committee. This committee has been working for many years providing information to staff and caregivers, and helping to inform all aspects of our service delivery to ensure we are inclusive and respectful of all individuals and families within the LGBTQ community. The committee strives to make Durham CAS a safe space for everyone regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

In addition to hosting guest speakers and distributing educational information, the committee is also focused on supporting youth in care who identify as LGBTQ and their allies. One initiative has been providing a safe space in our youth resource centre. The committee hosts an informal 'drop-in' where youth can meet with friends, hang out or talk with staff. The program has just begun and will evolve as the youth offer their input into how they would like to be supported. The most important goals for the committee are that we can continue to provide a safe space and that the youth are respected and welcomed by all.

These programs are proving to be very educational and helpful in supporting our youth as they grow into strong, healthy young adults. All of our AO sub-committees continue to develop new programming as a way to ensure that we help all children, youth and families in a culturally appropriate manner which will help us realize our AO Directional Statement.

Children in care compared to investigations, 2008 to 2016



Over the years, the number of investigations has increased, however the number of children and youth in care has decreased because of our admission prevention strategies and focus on family-based care.

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