

In 2023 the Child, Youth, and Family Wellbeing department focused on continually improving service and care experiences and outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities in York Region and beyond. Through the dedication of staff, resource parents, and volunteers, the department developed several initiatives outlined below. Services were realigned to centre child, youth, and family wellbeing through prevention, early support, protection, and care services.

## Specialized Teams

**Intimate Partner Violence (IPV):** Created to work alongside children, youth, and families experiencing IPV and risk of sex trafficking. In collaboration with community partners, support and services are trauma-informed, anti-oppressive, and culturally specific.

### Prevention Early Intervention Wellbeing Screening Team:

Focused on early engagement through linking families with accessible services to meet their unique needs. The team is focused on addressing overrepresentation of marginalized communities through detailed interviews, and communication with referral sources.

### Education Liaisons:

Supporting and empowering children and youth to attain their educational goals through youth-centered, strength-based advocacy, programming and collaboration.

## Implementation of Innovative Service Models

### Signs of Safety (SOS) Model:

Centres children, youth, and families in service delivery, emphasizing strengths and support networks. This model encourages practitioners to reflect on biases and barriers, adapting practices to the unique experiences and voice of those they serve.

### Quality Standards Framework (QSF):

Regulations and practices to improve the quality of out-of-home care.

### Ready Set Go (RSG) Program:

Supporting and empowering youth readiness for independence.

## Youth Focused Programming

Delivered to youth in care, by our Youth Support Worker



**Life Skills** (Financial Literacy, RentSmart Housing, Estate Planning, Cooking Programs)



**Mental Health Education** (Opioids Workshop, Gambling Addiction)



**Identification Clinics**



**Social Outings** (Musical Theatre, Escape Rooms, Wonderland, Overnight trips).

## Foster Care Recruitment

A new strategy was developed to recruit new foster parents and families to provide care for diverse children and youth. The recruitment strategy included targeted social media campaigns and media interviews to increase public awareness of the need for more diverse foster parents. Learn more at [www.yorkcas.org/foster-caregivers/](http://www.yorkcas.org/foster-caregivers/)

## Community Partnerships

Supporting complex mental health, behavioural and developmental needs



York Hills Centre for Children, Youth and Families



Mackenzie Health Centre for Behavioural Health Sciences



Your Support Services Network



**York Region CAS continues to prioritize Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) to ensure equitable service and outcomes, embedding DEI within human resources and leadership, fostering an inclusive workplace culture, and prioritizing community engagement.**

The department has an expanded focus on issues related to trauma, mental health, accessibility, disabilities, diverse abilities, and intersecting issues of poverty, immigration, and social determinants of health.

**Prioritizing Equitable Service Delivery and Outcomes**

York Region CAS continues to actively create strategies and policies and conduct service file reviews and DEI consultations to address disproportionality and disparity for overrepresented and marginalized communities within the child welfare system. The following York Region CAS initiatives have been established/maintained:

- Over 102 Formal DEI Tools, Consultations and Conferences to integrate equity in admission, prevention, risk and Safety assessments, discharges, and adoption
- Participation in 55+ Situation Tables, see page 12
- Participation and recommendations in Internal Complaints Review Plan Client Complaints Panel for Discrimination and Harassment

**Policies and Tool Guides Developed for Service Delivery**

- Developed New Allyship in Action tool guide for all York Region CAS staff
- New Trite Reporting Policy
- First Nations Inuit and Métis Band Directory

**Inclusive and Equitable Direct Service Delivery**

- Ongoing child and youth in care file reviews for Black and Indigenous Children to address disproportionality and reduce the number of children and youth in care at York Region CAS
- Ongoing implementation of the 11 Race Equity Practices for One Vision One Voice
- Ongoing implementation of the York Region CAS Truth and Reconciliation: Calls to Action Workplan
- Targeted recruitment of the 2SLGBTQ+ community-affirming resource caregivers

- Prioritization of First Nations Data requests utilizing York Region CAS formalized process
- Supported youth to attend 2SLGBTQ+ identity-specific programming such as Camp Lifting Leaves

**Prioritizing Community Engagement**

- YRAACC Bi-Monthly joint meetings
- Created a York Region CAS Pride in Community youth group initiative and logo
- Agency member of Pride at Work Canada to support talent recruitment from the 2SLGBTQ+ community
  - Staff attendance at the Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Conference in Ottawa
- Ongoing outreach and service consultation with Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child & Family Services

**York Region CAS Community Partnerships and Representation**

- York Region District School Board, Equity, and Inclusivity Advisory Steering Committee
- York Region Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group
- York Region 2SLGBTQ+ Rainbows Network
- OACAS Provincial Anti-Colonial & Equity Roundtable
- OACAS Provincial 2SLGBTQ+ Committee
- York Region Situational Tables, see page 12
- York Region Welcome Centre Meeting Participation
- Supporting a McMaster University research study for developing a user-centred policy design in child welfare. The research involves resource caregivers and service providers who have cared for Black Children
- 360 Kids Black Youth Housing Project
- YRAACC Bi-Monthly joint community meetings
- Collaboration with Milliken Church, York Region Alliance of African Canadian Communities, ANCHOR Canada and Miracle Arena to develop a community closet for marginalized families and asylum seekers

## WITH HUMAN RESOURCES & LEADERSHIP



### **New Service/HR Frameworks or Programs**

Developed and launched a New DEI and Signs of Safety Group Supervision Framework and model for leadership to support the integration of equity and reconciliation in clinical supervision.

### **Embedding Equity within Human Resources Practices**

- Integration of an Equity Hiring Program into the OPSEU and York Region CAS Collective Agreement to promote a diverse and equitable workforce
- Equity Practice Integration Specialist participation in talent recruitment and selection process
- Joint investigations between People and Culture and DEI to address workplace discrimination and harassment complaints, DEI consults for employee conflict resolution
- Joint department training on unconscious bias in recruitment

### **Fostering an Inclusive Workplace Culture**

York Region CAS is committed to providing ongoing opportunities for staff to build and strengthen their competencies, skills, awareness, learning, and education, as we engage and work with diverse communities, children, youth, and families.

### **Expanded Creation and Establishment of Staff-led Employee Resource Groups**

Since 2021, approximately ten York Region CAS Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), both formal and informal, have been created with diverse identities and experiences. This year five new formal ERGs were created and formalized.

### **Diverse Heritage Month Recognitions and Celebrations for Staff**

- Quarterly Days of Significance Calendar
- Diverse Heritage Month Celebrations
- Truth and Reconciliation Day and Week
- Participation in 100th Anniversary of Chinese Exclusion Act Event
- First In-Person Black History Month Event
- In-Person Asian Heritage Month Event
- Pride Month Recognition and Celebration: Flag Raising Event, York Region Pride Parade, etc.

### **Ongoing DEI Training and Professional Development Opportunities**

- Employee Training Provided: Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence 101, Anti-Semitism, Anti-Asian Racism, Truth and Reconciliation, Ageism, 2SLGBTQ+, South Asian, Mental Health, Disabilities and Diverse Abilities, Cultural Sensitivity with Tungasuvvingat Inuit
- The Black Staff Advisory Council provides ongoing leadership training and healing and restoration programs for Black Staff

### **Chai and Chats (26+ Sessions)**

Bi-weekly virtual learning forums that involve DEI-related topics and training, joint training series with community organizations, information sharing, resources, and services, highlighting community partnerships and needs, which guides the work and service delivery. The forums average 50 to 125 participants bi-weekly.



Since 2021, approximately ten ERGs have been created. ”



## NEW DEPARTMENT

### Department of Equity, Innovation and Community Engagement

The York Region CAS is on a journey of child welfare redesign with a focus on child, youth, and family wellbeing.

The organization's strategic plan is guiding the transformation. A critical factor in achieving the strategic plan was the establishment of the Department of Equity, Innovation, and Community Engagement (EICE), which represents a strengthened direction for York Region CAS towards increased engagement, partnership, and accountability to the community.

#### Inclusive Creation of the New Department

To establish the EICE department, a Core Department Re-Design Team was established with the support of our external consulting partners at Sidekick.

The Core Department Re-Design Team worked collaboratively with various stakeholders (children, youth and families,

community partners, employees, and Youth Advisory Council Members) to create the new department name, purpose, and functions.

This process to create the department's purpose and functions involved surveying all stakeholders, hosting focus groups, and running two half-day workshops. Each initiative facilitated critical discussions and ideas to determine how the needs of various stakeholders could be addressed by the new department.

#### Department Purpose

The department connects the diverse community we serve, the external partners we work with and our staff, resource caregivers, volunteers and vendors, promotes equity, inclusivity, and innovation in services, practices, and programs that create and cultivate family wellbeing and the protection of children and youth.

## NEW SPACES

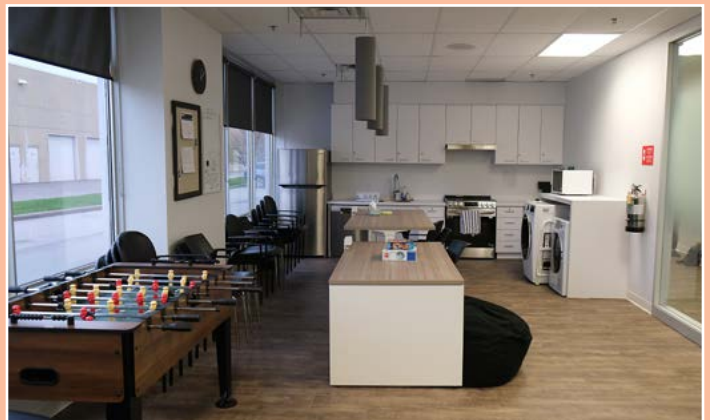
### New Office Spaces

In 2023, York Region CAS created a Workspace Project Team to Re-Design the first floor of the Leslie Street Office, as part of a larger strategy to modernize the space while more effectively aligning it to support the wellbeing of children, youth, and families. The Workspace Project Team included internal staff who consulted with community partners, and youth advisors, to ensure designs were informed by diverse perspectives and experiences.

Throughout the design and refurbishment process, York Region CAS staff participated in



open forums to discuss the needs across the agency for each space including reception, family meeting rooms, restrooms, and youth spaces. By early 2024, the first floor was transformed with new local and indigenous-created artwork, a multi-lingual welcome sign, and child, youth, and family-centered spaces.



### Youth Advisory Council (YAC)

York Region CAS is privileged to work with our Youth Advisory Council (YAC) comprised of 12+ years old youth in care and youth previously in care. York Region CAS's Youth Support Worker supports the council which provides consultation with children and youth in the child welfare system, internal staff, board members, and community partners. Through attending youth events and providing diverse consultation, the council helps ensure the voices of youth are included in all aspects of decision-making at the agency and beyond.

The YAC accomplished several important initiatives in the 2023-2024 year including, the development of the following items:

**Glossary of Terms:** includes abbreviations commonly encountered by youth in care.

**Know Your Rights:** A 20-page resource document outlining youth rights when navigating the child welfare system.

**How To Advocate:** Introducing Youth to advocacy. This document summarizes key ideas and steps youth can take to advocate for themselves.

The first-floor re-design includes a new space to host activities, spend time together, and support ongoing learning for all staff. It was designed especially for the YAC and youth in care, or youth previously in care to use. The new space includes a kitchen, lounge area, games, and open-concept seating.

**Community engagement and partnerships are key to removing barriers and helping to ensure that appropriate services are provided to children, youth and families needing these supports. York Region CAS's participation in York Region Situation Tables, and our partnership with Cedar Centre are examples of our commitment to collaboration.**

### **Cedar Centre - Project Hope**

With a shared responsibility for our communities, York Region CAS and the Cedar Centre embarked on a collaborative initiative, called Project Hope. A York Region CAS Project lead accepted a secondment position in 2023, to support the development of York Region's first Child & Youth Advocacy Centre (CYAC).

The CYAC is grounded in centering children and youth who have experienced abuse by improving the way our services and systems work together so every child, youth and their families receive child-focused investigation, treatment, support services, and advocacy under one roof.

This is a leadership role in an important regional initiative that will create common vision and strong collaborations across our community and improved experience for children, youth, and families.

Since the Projects' inception, 5+ new collaborative initiatives and connections have been created in the areas of the regions CAS agencies, York Regional Police, Healthcare, Victim Witness, the Crowns Office, and more! Our teams are also connected to other CYAC's across Ontario and Canada to integrate best practices.



**Recovering from  
childhood trauma begins here**

### **Situation Tables**

Situation Tables are multi-agency meetings, co-hosted by the Region of York and York Regional Police. Launched in January 2023, these meetings service four areas of York Region: Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Markham, and Georgina.

The purpose of the meetings is to bring community agencies together to provide immediate coordinated responses to children, youth, and/or families who are at a high risk of experiencing a crisis from a culturally mindful lens, while reducing overall harm and victimization.

Situation tables contribute to increased community wellbeing and safety by establishing and maintaining supportive and collaborative community partnerships.

Ten representatives from York Region CAS, (from Protection, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Resources) participate in each of the four tables, contributing to a more seamless process in connecting families to community resources they need. York Region CAS representatives also provide supports and information to partners who are navigating child protection concerns by connecting them directly to our screening teams.

We are pleased to continue engaging in this community centered approach and thank our partners, The Region of York and York Regional Police for establishing this important collaborative!

**5,209**

calls received about child safety



**2,379**

families connected with to assess child safety



**284**

families that we began providing ongoing services for, to build safety for children & youth



**188**

children in care/youth receiving ongoing voluntary support



**55**

children or youth supported with required alternate care by extended family or within their circle of support



**33**

children requiring care by York Region CAS Foster Parents, honouring identity, and maintaining a connection to their families and communities

**6**

adoptions completed 2023/24

**Agency Resource Families in York Region (Year End):**



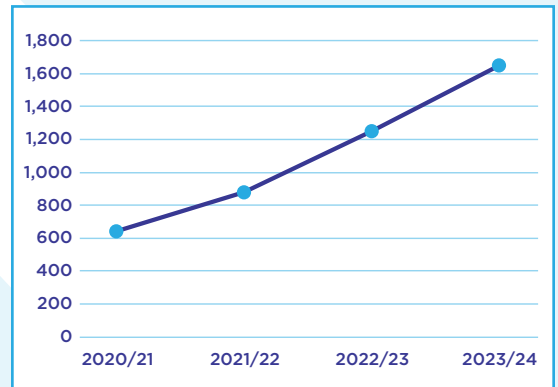
**36**  
Kinship Service Families



**34**  
Foster Families



**4**  
Kinship in Care Families



**Community Link Services**

In the last two years, the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Department has prioritized increased relationship building with diverse service partners in our communities to make services for our communities more widely accessible. New partnerships include intimate partner violence support, mental health, conflict resolution, education, culturally aligned services.