



# **ANNUAL OPERATIONAL PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATE 2024/2025**



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## INTRODUCTION

Hamilton Child and Family Supports (HCFS), in partnership with families and the community, is committed to the safety, protection and well-being of children and supporting families by building on their strengths while valuing diversity and promoting equity. The organization has operated for 128 years and continues to evolve to meet community and provincial needs with a vision that every child in the community is a gift to be valued, nurtured, and kept safe.

After extensive feedback from the community, and hearing directly from families in Hamilton, Hamilton Children's Aid Society changed its name to Hamilton Child and Family Supports (HCFS) in January 2024. This new direction has been well received by the community and better reflects the work of the organization as it focuses on supporting the safety and protection of children, with families through early help. Keeping families together and engaging with the community to provide for the safety, permanency and well-being for children, youth and families in Hamilton is a strong organizational value.

The 2024/25 Operational Plan Review reflects the final year of the organization's five-year strategic vision. The report highlights the strategic priorities and objectives, and HCFS progress in achieving its operational goals. A new strategic plan has been developed for 2025-2029 which will provide goals and objectives that will guide future operational plans.

This document is comprised of two sections

- Context
- Strategic Priorities, Objectives and Operational Goals

How do we track and report progress?

- Progress on operational goals is reported to the board twice a year.
- Key performance indicators are reported to the board in September.
- The measurement and progress on key performance indicators will aid in the evaluation of our progress towards our objectives and will be used to inform further refinement of objectives over time to respond to the changing context.



## CONTEXT

### Demographics

HCFS provides child welfare services to the amalgamated City of Hamilton which consists of both urban and rural landscapes comprised of 1,138 km<sup>1</sup>. The socio-demographic composition of the City of Hamilton provides the context within which services are provided to families and underscores the complexity of the families we serve. Hamilton has two child welfare agencies: Hamilton Child and Family Supports and the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton.

#### Population

- The 2021 Census found that 569,355 people lived in Hamilton. This represents an increase of 6% over the five-year period from 2016 to 2021.
- Approximately 28% (just under 160,000) of those living in Hamilton are aged 0–24.

#### Indigenous Identity and Racialized Population

- 3% of Hamilton's 0–24-year-old population identified as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis.
- Hamilton continues to see a rise in the diversity of its population and the younger the population, the more diverse it is.
- 34% of 0–24-year-old Hamiltonians identified as racialized. The racialized population made up 22% of Hamilton's population in 2011.
- In 2021, racialized 0–24-year-olds included those who identified as Black (9%), South Asian (8%), and Arab (5%).

#### Immigration

- Immigrants comprise about a quarter of the total population of Hamilton,<sup>2</sup> (26%), with 6% having arrived within the last 10 years.
- Hamilton has become a major Canadian destination for those moving to Canada and has been a designated Sanctuary City since 2014.

#### Language

- 83% of residents in Hamilton speak English most often at home and 71% had English identified as their first language. Arabic (2.2%) Italian (2.2%), and Spanish (1.8%) rounded out other most used languages in Hamilton.

#### Income and Education

- The median after-tax income of Hamilton households in 2020 was \$74,500.
- 37% of the population of the City of Hamilton between ages 25 and 64 have a high school (equivalent education) or less, with 12% between these ages having not graduated high school or any other post-secondary institution.

<sup>1</sup> [Hamilton to become 'sanctuary city' for newcomers who fear deportation \(thespec.com\)](https://www.thespec.com/news/local/hamilton-to-become-sanctuary-city-for-newcomers-who-fear-deportation)

<sup>2</sup> According to the 2021 Census dictionary, "Immigrant" refers to persons who are, or who have ever been, landed immigrants or permanent residents. Such persons have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization are included in this category.



## Poverty, Food and Housing Insecurity

- Using the low-income after-tax measure in the 2021 census, 13% of children under 18 in Hamilton live in low-income households. This is higher than the provincial (12%) and national (12%) averages for children under 18.
- A smaller proportion of those under 18 lived in low-income households in 2021 as compared to 2016 when 21% of those under 18 lived in low-income households. Statistics Canada says after-tax income growth was faster for households with lower incomes, reflecting greater contributions of the Canada Child Benefit and pandemic relief benefits to the incomes of lower-income families in 2020.<sup>3</sup>
- In April 2024, it was estimated that close to 1900 people were experiencing homelessness in Hamilton with an estimated 200 visibly homeless and living in encampments.<sup>4</sup>
- In March 2023, approximately 6% of Hamilton's population, including about 9,000 children, accessed foodbanks through Hamilton Food Share.<sup>5</sup>
- In April 2023, the City of Hamilton declared a state of emergency related to homelessness, opioid addiction, and mental health and this continues to be in effect. In 2023, Hamilton Paramedic Services responded to 964 incidents (approximately 80 per month) and opioid related deaths in Hamilton were 63% higher than the provincial rate.<sup>6</sup>
- In July 2023, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Hamilton was \$2,298.<sup>7</sup>

## Services at HCFS

Service volumes at HCFS have decreased in a number of areas since 2019 including the number of investigations, ongoing services and children in care. Referrals have remained flat. There has been an increase in the number of youth being served voluntarily through Voluntary Youth Services Agreements and the Ready Set Go programs.

The top three reasons for child protection investigations include caregiver addictions, mental health or developmental disability, child exposure to partner violence and physical force/maltreatment.

HCFS continues to experience a lack of availability of community supports, including residential placements with appropriate resources to support the complex needs of youth, and other community programs and supports.

Beginning in April 2023, with the introduction of MCCSS's Ready Set Go Program, youth have had services of the organization maintained until the age of 23. The program aims to provide support to youth to transition successfully from care to adulthood.

<sup>3</sup> [Household after-tax income rises and income inequality declines, says new census data | CBC News](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Mortality rates among Hamilton's unhoused are not getting better: report - Hamilton | Globalnews.ca](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Nearly six per cent of Hamilton's population fed by food banks | TheSpec.com](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Hamilton Opioid Information System | City of Hamilton](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Average rent for one-bedroom apartments in Hamilton up by more than 15 per cent from last year \(thespec.com\)](#)



## 2024 -2025 Priorities & Objectives Year in Review

In 2019, the organization identified six priority areas of focus to guide our journey over a five-year period. Our priorities and strategic goals support us in achieving our vision for HCFS and provide a map of what we aim to do and how we aim to do it.

In 2024-25, 16 goals were set across the six priority areas (see Appendix). Key achievements for each priority are presented below.

### Priority 1: Safety and Well-being

Children and youth safety and well-being will be increased within the family through good assessment and planning, capacity building and accessing the assets of the family itself and their community.

#### Objectives & Goals

- a) Shared understanding with others of how we can best contribute to supporting families in the community
- b) Expanded range of strategies used with families to reduce the use of mandatory intervention whenever possible and increase the proportion of voluntary participation in service.
  - i. Increase in the number of family files that have a clearly documented plan with clearly articulated goals, who is responsible and timelines. The plan will be shared with all members of the child and families safety network. The plan will adhere to the timelines as set out in the child protection standards.
- c) Services and other interactions with ethno-specific and linguistic communities reflect well-informed and appropriate practices including with Afro-Canadian and Indigenous people and organization

#### Key Achievements

A focus on safely supporting children within their own family and community has continued to be a primary goal where we have seen much success. This work has been achieved through a balanced risk assessment approach, looking at strengths within families, their network of support both informal and formal and building capacity in areas that require attention. This approach has continued to be effective as the majority of the work we engage in is with children in their own homes and communities. Such an approach highlights the importance of engagement and collaboration with families and community while using critical engagement strategies and signs of safety approaches to build trust and access assets within the family and their community.

As of the end of March 2025, there has been a 43% decrease in children in care compared to March 2019. It speaks to the success we've seen in engaging families and supporting children within their own homes and communities—an area that has been a key priority for us in promoting safety and well-being.



Family Engagement approaches have not only supported increased safety of children at home and in community, it has also continued to support a shift in practice. The majority of the work happening is through a voluntary process with 80% of families we work with not having involvement with court.

When a safety plan cannot be developed to support a child remaining at home and there is a need for short term care by an alternate care provider, this happens primarily through a voluntary process and agreement between the primary caregiver and kin. This engaged process of building safety and supporting children in natural family settings has seen an increase in our use of kinship service placements. This is not only a more natural caregiver arrangement for the children but is often part of the safety plan that supports the return of the child back home and lifelong support and connections.

Supporting children and families requires strong staff skill with engagement practices and values that use family strengths within families to reduce protection risks. This is the premise of our work and is embedded in all aspects of the work, including safety planning and developing plans that will support the continued safety and well-being of the child and family once we are no longer involved.

While engagement with families is critical, we have also continued to make meaningful connections with community partners so that they too might play an integral role in supporting families and more specifically community partners who represent the unique identities of those we work with. This past year we continue to see strong engagement strategies with the Indigenous community, with a focus on engagement with Bands, when families have Indigenous status, this has led to successes in planning that is culturally specific and reflective of Truth and Reconciliation Commitments and quality service. We have seen examples of collaborative service, from access occurring at Hamilton Regional Indian Center and well as Indigenous families being referred to Indigenous services within our community.

We have also continued to partner with CCAS to ensure there is a pathway to support French speaking families by providing a full range of services in French, again with a focus on connecting French speaking families with French services in the community. Beginning discussions have also happened and continue with Hamilton Jewish Family Services, specific to building connections and a pathway that would support Jewish families who become involved with Hamilton Child and Family Supports, so that the family can be appropriately connected to identify specific services and supports. Similar work has continued to further refine with Mishka in support of Muslim Families. We have also continued to partner with Empowerment Squared. These are some of the promising practices that have been central to our work over this past year and will be further built and expanded in the coming years.



## Priority 2: Permanency and Potential

Enable children and youth in care to find permanency and reach their full potential.

### Objectives & Goals

- a) Strategies are in place to increase permanency and lifelong relationships for children and youth that foster permanency and connection.
  - i. Development of Permanency Principles and plans to support early permanency and reliable, long lasting connections.
- b) Planning and strategies developed for children and youth to be connected to their community, culture, and land. Improved educational achievement for all children and youth in care
  - i. All Indigenous children and youth will be given the "Right to Return" to their First Nation and will have a clearly documented, actualized plan.
- c) All children/youth will have a voice in their planning and will receive the service and supports they need to reach their full potential as adults.
  - i. All children/youth will have a clearly documented plan for their transition from care with the supports and network needed, with clearly articulated goals, who is responsible and timelines. The plan will be developed with the important people to the child and will reflect the voice and wishes of the child. The plan will adhere to the timelines as set out in the child protection standards.

### Key Achievements

Supporting children and youth in care to build and maintain lifelong connections remains a central priority. Our goal is to achieve permanency for children and youth to reach their fullest potential by ensuring they remain connected to and at times reconnect with the people who matter most to them. Permanency is having a sense of one's past, a sense of belonging, belonging to family and community, and cultural identity.

This commitment is reflected in our approach which emphasizes early permanency and planning. To guide this work HCFS has developed Permanency Principles that serve as a foundation for best practices and work in the community.

Principle 1: Children should be cared for in their own families and communities.

Principle 2: Permanency will be at the forefront of planning for children and families from the onset of child welfare involvement and throughout.

Principle 3: Relational permanency for a child/youth will continue regardless of their legal status.

Principle 4: Children/Youth will be able to link their past, present, and future, which enables them to experience connectedness, belonging, and hope.



HCFS is committed to Devon's Principle – Right to Return. The right to Return honors and supports the right of Indigenous children and youth to reconnect with their communities, ancestral lands, and cultural heritage. To date, 40 First Nation youth have been offered a Right to Return Visit and 21 First Nations contacted about Right to Return to build relationship to facilitate this important connection. A policy embedding Right to Return in practice is currently in process of being developed and approved.

The voice of children and youth is essential in all aspects of their planning, particularly as they transition out of care. This planning is a collaborative process that actively involves the young person and their network of support. Together, they build comprehensive plans that clearly outline the steps, supports, roles, and timelines needed for a successful transition from care. These plans reflect the youth's voice, goals, and wishes, and are grounded in the meaningful relationships that matter most in their lives.

Transition plans are developed thoughtfully and reviewed regularly to remain responsive to the evolving needs and aspirations of each young person.



## Priority 3: Engaged and Inspired

HCFS staff, foster parents and volunteers will be engaged and inspired in a healthy workplace

### Objectives

- a) Adequate staffing and skill levels are available to serve the needs and volumes of families and children served
- b) Create an agency-wide learning and development strategy that supports the agency as an evidence-based place for learning.
  - i. Development and implementation of a leadership development tool for management.
  - ii. Enhance the agency succession planning tools & processes to align with concepts from the Equitable Recruitment and Selection Toolkit."
- c) Develop and implement a Healthy Workplace Strategy

### Key Achievements

HCFS is committed to supporting all employees in the development of their leadership skills and competencies. The organization has taken a modern approach to succession planning and is integrating career and leadership development through implementation and use of a Development Assessment Tool. This tool was rolled out in phases and effective January 1, 2025, has been implemented for all staff. The Development Assessment is intended to be constructive and collaborative, incorporating coaching and mentoring strategies to help align employees' goals while remaining focused on the organization's strategic vision.

Supporting the Development Assessment process, last year, a working group of a cross section of staff endorsed and recommended the implementation of a leadership framework for the organization based on the book "The Leadership Challenge" by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner.

From this framework, we know that leadership is not about the positions we hold, it is a skill that can be developed through a lifetime of practice. A leader can be anyone who champions the work and who can inspire others to take action through a shared vision. There are leaders throughout our organization, in all roles, at every level.

All employees now have the opportunity to engage in small discussion groups to learn more about the leadership practices within the framework, exchange ideas, and contribute to their own leadership development, both personally and professionally.

As an organization we are excited to continue building a foundation of leadership and development that will contribute to our shared success as an organization.



## Priority 4: Strategic Partnerships

Develop and maintain strategic partnerships within the community and across the province that assist in supporting vulnerable children and families.

### Objectives

- a) Strategic partnerships with local communities including a focus on communities who are over-represented in the child welfare system to support them in keeping their children safe at home and connected to their community.
  - i. Implementation of partnership with MISHKA to increase supports to Muslim Families.
  - ii. Creation of workplan & implementation of recommendations from the Staff Census Survey.
  - iii. Develop a partnership to increase LGBTQ2S+ supports in the Hamilton Community.
- b) A multi-level strategy (provincial, local, and case level) that supports advocacy, with specific roles defined for each level of HCFS including staff and the Board

### Key Achievements

HCFS has built a partnership with MISHKA to achieve better outcomes for Muslim, Black, and Newcomer children, youth and families. MISHKA and HCFS have worked together to develop a Cultural Brokage Program to connect families and children to culturally appropriate support and advocacy, as well as to assist HCFS to provide services with a lens of cultural humility. The joint initiative is to build a sustainable partnership and collaboration based on transparency and mutual trust with the Muslim, Black, and Newcomer community. A pilot of this program commenced in April 2024 and 22 families were successfully supported. Families and children who accessed the program are reporting positive experiences with HCFS and MISHKA. While the pilot has ended, HSFS and MISHKA are committed to continuing to provide support to families while pursuing funding opportunities.

#### Testimonial:

"[The Cultural Broker] was so supportive. She listened to my concerns and helped my family get a food bank card. [The Cultural Broker] also helped solve the problem with our immigration lawyer and spoke with them professionally. My needs were understood, and they gave me the right support. She went above and beyond, and I felt heard and supported."

- i. HCFS is committed to our shared responsibility to creating a healthy and safe workplace. The voice of the staff was captured in the Staff Census Survey and is guiding this work. The recommendations that came from the survey were shared and discussed across HCFS. Along with all supervisors, an in-depth review of the recommendations has taken place and a workplan developed. Supervisors have committed to collaborating with their team to creating an implementation plan to begin the work.



- ii. HCFS remains committed to engagement and partnership with 2SLGBTQIA+ community and partners. Within HCFS, we have developed Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Expression (SOGIE) committee. The group has been instrumental in supporting the internal work and engagement with the community. We had a very successful Pride celebration, with panel discussions from former youth in care, foster caregivers, community leaders and the feedback is valuable. With the support of the HCFS SOGIE committee we are reaching out to youth, caregivers and community partners and 2SLGBTQIA+ community leaders for a meeting this fall to further explore gaps and challenges and help create solutions to address the service gaps/ streamline services to ensure accessibility.

The Executive Director, the Child Welfare Sector and the Board continue to advocate to government related to supporting the work of child protection and the needs of the Hamilton Community. The Board Chair and the Executive Director have met with a number of MPPs and the Hamilton Mayor to discuss the work of the organization, current challenges, and some of the positive outcomes we are seeing at HCFS.

The Board Chair and the Executive Director also met with partners at the Ministry on a number of occasions to discuss current placement capacity challenges and the resulting financial challenges including recommendations and possible solutions.



## Priority 5: Continuous Improvement

Enhance systems to support continuous quality improvement, transparency, and accountability.

### Objectives

- a) High levels of compliance are achieved on service standards and strategic outcomes are measured
  - i. Supervisors will develop a process to review and increase QIP compliance with their team.
- b) New provincial requirements are implemented
  - i. Implementation of QSF requirements and templates to assist staff in the transition.
  - ii. Implementation of RSG requirements.
- c) Support is maintained for CPIN integration and other IT projects that support data collection and efficiencies.
  - i. Work with Internal Stakeholders to develop a Records Management Strategy for non-case related documents.
- d) Foster a culture focused on data-driven outcomes to support continuous improvement in our work
- e) Embedding Equity outcomes into service excellence.
  - i. Development of a supervision framework including components of critical reflective practice and appreciative inquiry.
- f) Client Feedback informs practice.
  - i. A process for client feedback will be developed so that we can hear from those with lived experience to continue to deliver service in a way that is meaningful to families, children and youth and leads to better outcomes.

### Key Achievements

High quality service continues to be a priority and quality service is linked to Child Protection Standards, Quality Standards Framework and the requirements of Ready Set Go. Over a six-month period from September to February 2025 14 of the 19 QIP standards were above 85%. To align practice with new legislative requirements a workgroup was established to develop clear processes and expectations aligned with the new legislative requirements of the Quality Standards Framework (QSF), Ready Set Go (RSG) and Bill 188. The group developed a range of practical resources such as tip sheets, workflows, and implementation tools, and training, to help staff incorporate these changes into their daily practice. Organizational policies have also been updated to reflect and support the new legislative standards, supporting consistent and informed service delivery.

Work on the records management systems also saw success over this past year with a specific focus on scanning and uploading of documents into CPIN, this created efficiencies and prioritized CPIN as the primary client record repository. There has also been initial work started on a new batch scanning process that will continue into the coming year.



A supervision framework provides a structured framework for supervision, ensuring consistency and clarity in the supervisory relationship and process. This helps supervisors and supervisees anchor the work in best practice and equity work. A Supervision model establishes clear expectations and challenges and works through individual and systems bias. Supervision models also facilitate professional development, identify strengths and areas for improvement, and build a trusting relationship between the supervisor and supervisee.

Over the last year there has been focused work to identify a Supervision model that meets the needs of the organization. This work included review of current practices and structures, focus groups to learn what is working and what is needed, and a review of clinical supervision models.

The next step in this process is to connect with all areas of service within the organization to learn of what is working and what is needed. This information will help inform the recommendation of a model that can be adapted and used across the organization.



## Priority 6: Resources and Sustainability

Ensure that valuable resources are in place to support service outcomes and ensure financial sustainability.

### Objectives & Goals:

- a) Strategies are in place to maximize revenue available including securing and allocating resources for the best possible organizational design, staffing and mix of placement resources.
  - ii. Continue to transfer ownership and accountability for financial results to directors and supervisors

### Key Achievements:

We continue to look for cost reductions and ensure that we are receiving value for money. Throughout the year, there were continued pressures in boarding costs related to youth in high-cost placements, and families, and children and youth were sometimes not able to access community mental health and developmental services. We are continuing to work with our community partners to find services and placements that will meet the needs of these youth. Budget discussions regarding boarding costs were held monthly and forecasting templates were developed to allow for more accurate forecasting.

Work was done with service supervisors and a group of staff to determine principles of financial assistance, monitor spending, and ensure costs for financial assistance are in line with budget.

A more detailed process was put in place for events budgets where all budget requests were initiated by supervisors accountable for the events.



## Conclusion

HCFS is pleased to provide this report which documents the organization's progress towards achieving the strategic vision to better support vulnerable children, youth, and families in the Hamilton community. This is the final report on objectives from the 2019-2024 strategic vision.

HCFS has launched a new strategic plan for 2025-2029. This plan was developed using the organization's rebranding community engagement report which included valuable feedback from families, youth, staff, foster caregivers, community partners, donors and board members.

Working together, key areas of focus were identified to reflect what we learned and outline the path forward over the next five years. The board also played a key role, providing valuable input and approval.

Hamilton Child and Family Supports current Strategic Plan and a video – **The power of engagement and partnerships** – which captures the voices youth, families, foster caregivers, board volunteers, community partners, and staff about the impact of the new name and transformative journey underway at HCFS can be found on our website at [2025-2029 Strategic Plan: The power of engagement and partnerships - Hamilton Child and Family Supports](#).