



Hamilton Child and Family Supports  
Soutien aux enfants et aux familles de Hamilton

**2025-2026 Community Report**  
**Real Voices. Real Impact.**

## Land and Treaty Acknowledgement

Hamilton Child and Family Supports acknowledges that we live, work, play and gather on the traditional territories of the Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee Confederacy, protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Treaty. This treaty reminds us of our shared responsibility to care for the land and for one another with respect, honesty and accountability both now and for generations to come.

We recognize the deep and enduring relationship Indigenous Peoples have with this land, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Six Nations of the Grand River, and the many Indigenous Peoples from across Turtle Island who now call Hamilton home.

As an organization that walks alongside children, youth and families, we also recognize the painful legacy child welfare systems have had and continue to have on Indigenous families and communities. For generations, colonial systems disrupted family bonds, culture, language, identity and belonging. These are difficult truths but must be acknowledged openly and with humility.

Reconciliation is not a single action or statement. It is an ongoing commitment to listening, learning, building relationships and a focus on doing better. It means creating space for Indigenous voices, supporting culturally grounded approaches to the work we do, and continuing the work of rebuilding trust, connection and community.

Hamilton Child and Family Supports remains committed to this ongoing work and to supporting a future where Indigenous children, youth, families and communities are honoured, heard and empowered.

[Learn more about our commitment to Truth & Reconciliation](#)

# Message from our Executive Director and Board President

***"A mom shared that 35 years ago she was in the child welfare system as a child. She was worried about being involved with HCFS based on her experience, but it has been so different. Her worker has been supportive and listened to her. The kids know they can talk to her and have her card on the fridge in case they ever wanted to call or email her." – HCFS service recipient***

This year, hearing directly from families was an area of focus for Hamilton Child and Family Supports. Within this year's annual community report you will hear additional comments and quotes directly from families, but we wanted to start off by sharing this feedback which exemplifies HCFS commitment to listening to those we serve.

Thanks to the staff, foster caregivers, volunteers and partners who do the work and advocate for those we serve, we are changing how we are seen within the community. We are extremely grateful to our staff who challenge themselves to think differently, lead through innovation and make it a priority to achieve best outcomes for children, youth and families.

One example of innovation over the past year is HCFS's work with the City of Hamilton on two important project/initiatives – Community Safety and Well-Being and Child and Youth Network. We are excited to be a part of these partnerships that reflect systems leadership and bring together sector leaders, community organizations and networks committed to making Hamilton the best place to raise children. Together we are helping to create a Hamilton where children, youth and families can thrive.

Another area of success was increasing the number of youth remaining safe in the community and identifying placements to better meet the needs of children in care. With families being increasingly supported to remain safely together, fewer children need to come into care.



*(Left to right) Executive Director, Bryan Shone and Board President, Allan Buist*

And through reconnecting youth already in care to their families and communities, more young people are achieving permanency and a true sense of belonging.

These decisions were rooted in values, not finance. However, what evolved was the development of clearer, more responsive plans that evolved with the needs of each youth, a notable reduction in special rate agreements, less use of hotels and a balanced budget at the end of the fiscal year.

Other examples of HCFS vision in action include having staff from across the organization identify and participate in a leadership framework, an organization wide commitment to mental health and well-being, partnerships within the SOGIE community to better serve 2SLGBTQIA+ children, youth and families and beginning work on becoming a multi-service organization all of which are highlighted throughout this report.

## **HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Strong boards build strong organizations. The board of directors and board committees at HCFS provide strategic guidance, uphold accountability, and ensure our work reflects the diverse communities we serve.

Over the past year, members of our Recruitment and Nominating committee continued their work on diversity, equity and inclusion so those who are invited and welcomed to the board are representative of the community we serve. The board actively works to identify voices who may have been missing from the table, knowing the best decisions are made when we have wide-ranging discussions and lived experiences.

A new committee – Service, Excellence and Equity – was established to assist the board in fulfilling its oversight and monitoring responsibilities related to program and service excellence, service equity, and mandated performance indicators.

HCFS also held its first board to board meeting where members from boards of partner organizations came together to build relationships and learn how governance happens within the difference contexts and histories of our organizations.

Other highlights included a focus on board evaluations and self-assessments to continue to build accountability at a board and personal level and supporting HCFS to achieve a balanced budget.

*"On behalf of the board, we would like to thank each and every staff member whose dedication contributes to the positive outcomes for children, youth and families. We are also grateful to have members of the senior leadership team regularly attend our board meetings to provide information and receive feedback, and an executive director whose skillset and vision is helping to move the HCFS strategic plan, vision and mission forward."* – Allan Buist, Board President

## Looking ahead

We recently launched our Strategic Plan which will guide us in our work over the next five years. Work on this plan began in 2021 when we first began our rebranding process. We heard directly from families, youth, staff, foster caregivers, community partners, donors, and board members and used this feedback to guide the organization's strategic planning process.

This strategic plan clearly connects vision to action. Not only is it based on feedback from the very people we serve; it also outlines tangible goals around equity, community partnerships, and innovation. This plan lays the groundwork for deepening trust and strong outcomes. It centers on the well-being of children and families while also challenging us to develop a responsive, accountable organization. Most importantly, it reminds us that every child and family deserve to feel supported and valued.

By embedding a strong quality improvement lens into the strategic plan, we're committing ourselves to being curious, reflective, and brave enough to adjust when something isn't working. That's how we ensure services are effective, inclusive, and based on best practices.

Looking ahead, we are committed to developing more amazing partnerships with community service providers, especially ethno-specific communities. We are looking at moving to be more of a multi-service agency which will provide families with the opportunity to receive a wide range of services beyond what child protection services can offer. By doing so, our hope is that we'll be able to reduce the need for child protective services and keep children, youth and families together and safely in the community.

We are hopeful and optimistic about how the community will continue to respond over the next few years. We want people to feel more connected to Hamilton Child and Family Supports as partners, advocates, and as participants in shaping the future.

## Message to families

Hearing from the families we serve is a priority for Hamilton Child and Family Supports. We would like to say thank you to all the families we have connected with over the past year for providing us with valuable feedback so we can identify what is going well and areas we need to continue to focus on. We are sharing this information throughout the organization on a quarterly basis and will be connecting with children and youth over the coming year to get their feedback as well.

We want to hear from you so please continue to chat with staff that call, [fill out an anonymous survey](#) or connect with your worker.

*Shaped by stories, strengthened by community.*

## Children, Youth, and Families

**Last year, two operational goals for HCFS centered around increasing the number of family support and community members participating in planning and decisions for the safety and well-being of children and youth. A working group of staff across the organization came together to develop guiding principles, tools and a clear process with a focus on identity and belonging and centering the voice of children and youth.**

**The following stories highlight this work in action and the impact it is having on children, youth and families that HCFS is supporting.**

### **SMALL STEPS**

Being separated from a parent can be scary, especially for a young child. HCFS staff working with Elijah\* took a different approach to help him understand what was happening and to include family in friends to plan for his safety and well-being.

Elijah's worker and supervisor helped his mom to write a story for him that explained why HCFS was involved with his family, what was being done to address the worries and ways to work together so that he could go back to living at home.

At the same time, family friends were able to care for him on a temporary basis which helped him to understand that there are many people who care for him and his family. HCFS and Elijah's mom are working on a safety plan together so that eventually he can return to living with his mom again.



While each of these may seem like small steps, together they have created a positive experience for Elijah where he understands what is happening, knows that he is loved and has lifelong connections to family and friends and knows what steps are being taken for him to return home. *\* Name has been changed.*

## **FEELING HEARD**

Having a worker and supervisor come together with their mom and members of their community to create a strong sense of belonging to their family, extended family, and community has made a huge difference for three siblings who have been living separately while involved with HCFS.

"The worker and I were worried about the siblings being disconnected from each other, their family and extended family. As they grow into young adults, they might not feel grounded or know who they could trust," says Fred, a supervisor at HCFS.

Over the past five months, we have been working with mom, the eldest youth and the family's support network to develop a plan that strengthens each young person's sense of belonging within their family, extended family, and community."

Recently the mom has shared that she is very happy for the chance to make changes for her children and family and that she feels very heard throughout this process. The eldest son became emotional and shared that it really feels like others care about his siblings and his family.

"My past experience with CAS has not always been the best. I have a long history and it hasn't always gone positive," says mom. "This past year working with HCFS has been completely different. I've never met a group of more supportive workers in my life. They have my back, they have my family's back, and they have our best interests at

heart. Thanks to them I've been able to succeed and accomplish something that I thought wasn't coming for a long time. The support, the caring, the understanding and the time they've taken to spend with my family and get to know us and help us, it means more than they'll ever know."

## **LISTENING, LEARNING, AND STRENGTHENING OUR SUPPORT**

Between December 2025 and February 2026, HCFS launched a direct client feedback initiative to better understand the families we serve. Reaching out to 40 service recipients across both assessment and ongoing service stages, we achieved a strong 63% response rate.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Caregivers consistently described our workers as kind, respectful, and professional, noting that HCFS has had a meaningful impact on their family's well-being. Key strengths identified include:

- Collaborative Planning: Families felt heard, included, and informed regarding goals and next steps.
- Inclusive Care: Families from diverse backgrounds – including FNIM and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities – reported that their identities were deeply respected and affirmed.

Moving forward, HCFS is committed to keeping lived experiences at the heart of our service. By Fall 2026, we will launch a pilot initiative to gather direct feedback from children and youth in care, ensuring continuous organization-wide practice improvement.

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"You are the most helpful people I've ever met"

" My worker believed in me when others did not and encouraged me to focus on the positive things that I was doing and not be influenced by [negative peers]. My worker gave me positive feedback, and this meant a lot to me."

"The mother shared she was in the system as a child, 35 years ago. She was worried about being involved with the organization based on her experience, but it has been so different and supportive."

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# Our Community

**Community collaboration is essential to building a system of well-being for children, youth and families. As part of our operational plan, we set goals to further develop relationships with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and seek partnerships outside of child welfare that help support families. The following two stories are examples of this work in action and the difference it is making.**

## **COLLABORATING WITH THE 2SLGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY IN HAMILTON**

*One of our ongoing operational goals at Hamilton Child and Family Supports is a commitment to supporting children, youth and families who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. Over the past year, more than 100 staff across the organization completed SOGIE training offered by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.*

*This training was designed to provide a foundation for child welfare professionals to better understand and respond to the experiences, challenges, and needs of 2SLGBTQIA+ children, youth, and families involved with child welfare. Training to support caregivers in creating affirming environments for 2SLGBTQIA+ children and youth is also being offered to caregivers at HCFS.*

"We know that there is a need to build greater support for children, youth and families who are a part of the SOGIE community and better understand how HCFS can help provide these services," says Dee Lewis, Community Relations Specialist, HCFS.



"We invited community members who identify, along with representatives from community organizations serving the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, together to discuss ways we can work together to support children, youth and families."

In the initial meeting participants shared available resources and services, identified gaps and safety concerns, and discussed how to improve

support. It was a good first step to determine how we can all work together to support families in our community and HCFS is committed to continuing this collaboration through supporting ongoing meetings and addressing gaps and challenges.

One partner who attended the meeting shared valuable feedback with HCFS following the meeting. "Earlier this year, we were invited to take part in a community roundtable discussion regarding inclusion and support of 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and families in the community," says Emily Kulpaka from Determination Martial Arts, an adaptive and inclusive martial arts facility in East Hamilton.

"This discussion really helped reaffirm our position and reinvigorate our mandate to provide more vocal support. It can be exhausting and complicated being a stand-alone organization in a sport that isn't typically inclusive, and know that there is even more of a need than we experience, reminds us that it's worth it, and we have other resources we can turn to if we are unsure.

It also showed us how there can be large gaps in understanding of need, or different impressions of need, not because of malice, but because of misinformation, historical bias, and places of privilege. This is vitally important, as small businesses and not for profits often have to work in a vacuum of their small community and miss aspects of what is needed (or wanted) by the community outside their confirmation bias. We are grateful for this opportunity and hope there are more chances for service providers to sit together and discuss, with no agenda other than improving the lives of those we serve."

## PREVENTING CRISIS, BUILDING CONFIDENCE

This year, the Mental Health and Addictions team focused on building earlier connections with expectant mothers, so that plans are in place before a baby is born. By working pre-natally, we help reduce crisis and create a more supportive, less overwhelming experience.

This work began at a Community Partner Table at the Hamilton Public Library, where we connected with organizations such as the Hamilton Alliance for Tiny Shelters and the YWCA. To support these partnerships, the team developed a clear pamphlet explaining our approach, including the option for anonymous, low barrier conversations so mothers can ask questions without fear.



Through relationship building, referrals began to grow. Staff at Tiny Shelters developed trust with a dedicated child protection worker and reached out directly when support was needed. In one case, a client who had a positive experience encouraged staff to contact that same worker again for another mother. These connections also extended to Barton Jail, where a social worker reached out to support a pregnant mother and later made additional referrals.

Community partners consistently share that having one trusted contact person makes a significant difference. This approach helps create continuity and builds confidence in reaching out for support. As one partner described it, "I know who to call."

At the core of this work is a focus on respect and empowerment. Mothers are supported in their parenting without judgment and are actively involved in decision making. Barrier free visits and early connections help build trust and allow for smoother transitions to ongoing support, reducing fear and uncertainty.

As these partnerships continue to grow, we are strengthening a network that supports better outcomes for mothers and their babies.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGY FOR HCFS TO BECOME A MULTI-SERVICE AGENCY**

To best meet the needs of children, youth and families, HCFS is taking steps to become a multi-service agency. "A multi service approach allows for a range of services that build on family strengths and reduce the possibility of a family being in crisis," says Bryan Shone, Executive Director, HCFS. "This approach can also help us respond more effectively to community needs and provide continuous effective care."

To move this approach forward, HCFS has developed a full workplan which will start with an environmental scan of the community and similar sized communities across the province. A consultant will assist with identifying priority needs and what services or support would be most helpful for the community.

## **Our Organization**

**One of our operational goals for our organization was to implement and sustain a comprehensive organizational excellence program which includes quality and a healthy workplace, with key accountabilities and a focus on mental health and well-being. The following story is an example of this work-in-action to support staff and the impact that it has had on those who have participated.**

### **SUPPORTING STAFF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING**

Supporting staff mental health and well-being remained a key priority for HCFS over the past year. Staff were introduced to a comprehensive wellness toolkit designed to provide practical resources and confidential access to support services through the organization's EFAP provider, Homewood Health. The toolkit included stress management strategies, guided exercises to help reduce anxiety, and resources to support overall mental well-being. Leaders were also provided with guidance and tools to help foster supportive teams.

Staff also had the opportunity to attend a training session on *Secondary Traumatic Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Resilience*. This session supported staff in recognizing, understanding, and reframing workplace stressors, while building practical skills to enhance personal resilience. HCFS, along with other agencies in the Grand River Zone, are collaborating to develop implementation plans for a “train-the-trainer” model for this training, which is anticipated to roll out later this year. This approach expands internal capacity to deliver consistent, peer-led learning, supports staff growth and leadership development, and provides the ability to share knowledge and resources within respective organizations.

Staff who participated in the training shared how it strengthened their understanding of secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and resilience, while providing practical strategies they continue to apply in their daily work.

These efforts reflect HCFS’ ongoing commitment to fostering a workplace culture grounded in care, resilience, and support for all employees.

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“Building internal capacity around understanding secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue and resilience is vital in child welfare to protect staff mental health, reduce turnover, and to prevent deterioration of the quality work that all workers at HCFS provide.”

- Child Protection Worker

“The training reinforced that resilience isn’t just about finding ways to do more – it’s also about recognizing when to step back. Since then, I’ve been more mindful about checking in with myself, taking breaks when needed and maintaining boundaries between work and my personal life to support my well-being over the long term.”

- Records Clerk

“The training really solidified things I was already doing and gave names to things. It laid out a framework for strategies that help organize thoughts into action.”

- Child Protection Worker

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## **EMPOWERING FAMILIES THROUGH CELEBRATION AND CHOICE**

At HCFS, we believe that every family deserves to celebrate their traditions with dignity, joy, and autonomy. That's why we created the Grateful Hearts program—an initiative rooted in gratitude and designed to honor the diverse cultures and traditions of the children, youth, and families we serve. In the 2025/2026 season, Grateful Hearts touched the lives of 473 families, distributing over \$80,000 in Walmart gift cards thanks to the generosity of our donors. These gift cards were more than just financial support, they were a symbol of trust and empowerment, allowing families to choose what mattered most to them during their special celebrations.



Whether it was groceries for Iftar during Ramadan, gifts for children during Christmas or Diwali, or new clothes for Eid, families used their cards in ways that reflected their unique needs and traditions. This flexibility fosters not only autonomy but also a deep sense of inclusion and respect.

Your support makes this possible. Every donation to Grateful Hearts helps ensure that no family feels left out during moments of joy and reflection. Together, we can continue to build a community where every celebration is honored, and every heart is full.

## **CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES NEED OPPORTUNITIES TO THRIVE**



HCFS is a non-profit organization committed to the protection and well-being of children, youth, and families. While government funding supports our mandated services, it's your generosity that fuels the programs that go beyond the basics – programs that open doors, remove barriers, and create real opportunities for growth and success.

Your donation helps break down the educational, financial, and physical obstacles that too many families face. With your support, we can continue to offer initiatives like the Bursary Program, Back-to-School Program, Summer Camp Program, and Grateful Hearts Program – each one designed to uplift, empower, and inspire.

Together, we can build a future where every child and youth have the chance to reach their full potential.

# 2025-2026 Stats at a Glance

## TOP 3 REASONS FOR WORKING WITH FAMILIES

**21%**

caregiver experiencing  
addictions/mental health  
challenges

**21%**

child exposure to Intimate  
Partner Violence

**14%**

physical force or maltreatment



Calls about the safety  
& well-being of a child

**5,276**



Investigations  
opened

**2,525**



Links to community  
services

**961**

**372**

families supported on an  
ongoing basis

**81%**

of families are working  
voluntarily with us

**98.8%**

of families supported are  
in their own homes or in the  
community

**148**

children in care

**154**

youth in Ready, Set,  
Go (RSG)

**26**

volunteers

**99**

children/youth being  
cared for by kin

**58**

foster caregivers

**235**

staff



Youth enrolled in a post-  
secondary or training program

**26**



Youth graduated from  
high school

**17**



Youth graduated from a post-  
secondary or training program

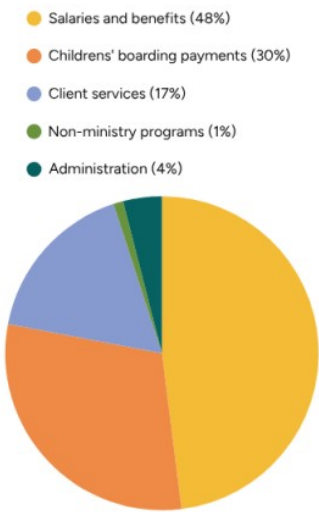
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**HCFS  
SEFH**

# Financials

## Expenses - Breakdown by Category



|                      | 2025-2026  | 2024-2025  |
|----------------------|------------|------------|
|                      | (in '000s) | (in '000s) |
| Total Revenue        | 55,105     | 53,376     |
| Total Expenses       | 54,103     | 54,451     |
| Deficit for the year | 1,002      | (1,075)    |

Hamilton Child and Family Supports had a surplus for the fiscal year. The surplus was used to pay down the accumulated deficit.

This is a summary of details in the 2025-2026 audited financial statements prepared under Public Sector Accounting Standards (PSAS) and audited by KPMG LLP. A full audited financial statement is available on [our website here.](#)

**Registered Charitable Number: 118852136 RR 0001**