



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

ANNUAL OPERATIONAL PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATE 2023/2024





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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 127 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 name, along with a new logo, represents the changes that have been happening within the organization as it focuses on supporting children and 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. In 2019, the organization approved a five-year strategic vision. The strategic vision provides a blueprint for leading HCFS through 2025. This document, "Operational Plan Review and Update: 2023-2024" highlights the strategic priorities and objectives, and the agency's progress in achieving its operational goals.

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 will be reported to the board twice a year.
- Key performance indicators will be 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 km¹. 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 the 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,² (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.

¹ [Hamilton to become 'sanctuary city' for newcomers who fear deportation \(thespec.com\)](https://thespec.com)

² [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 2020.³
- 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.⁴
- In March 2023, approximately 6% of Hamilton's population, including about 9,000 children, accessed foodbanks through Hamilton Food Share.⁵
- 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.⁶
- In July 2023, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Hamilton was \$2,298.⁷

Services at HCFS

Service volumes have remained lower than pre-COVID levels for the past four consecutive years, however they are continuing to increase back toward 2019-2020 volumes.

There have been shifts in the reasons for investigations. For example, investigations due to caregiver addiction, mental health, or developmental disability have increased as have investigations for caregiver/child conflict. By contrast, physical force/maltreatment investigations have decreased by 8% over the past four years.

HCFS continues to experience a lack of residential resources and other community supports, including a lack of residential placements with appropriate resources to support the complex needs of youth. COVID 19 also increased staffing challenges within residential programs. The sector is still recovering from this.

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.

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

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

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

⁶ [Hamilton Opioid Information System | City of Hamilton](#)

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



Strategic Vision 2019-2024

2023 -2024 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 will support us in achieving our vision for the agency and provide a map of what we aim to do and how we aim to do it.

In 2023-24, 39 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

- a) Shared understanding with others of how we can best contribute to supporting families in the community
- b) Increased capacity of families to provide for their children in their own home and reduce the risk of need for protection through early help and support by HCFS and by accessing help from others
- 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 organizations

Key Achievements

Work continues to strengthen communication between both kin and foster caregivers and parents. This work requires continued focus on the relationship between the child and family's workers to foster this communication. A genogram workshop was offered to all staff to further build on skills around engagement and building out support networks.

Many people do not know that 99 per cent of the work we do with families is done in their homes or in the community and 85 per cent of families work voluntarily with us. Together with partners in the community we strive to get families the right help at the right time. We are committed to listening and centering the voice of children, youth and families in our service planning and decision making.

To improve the quality of care and service, our frontline staff have done exceptional work to use creativity and out of the box ideas to address the challenges in placement and access community supports. The number of children in the care of HCFS has decreased and the number of youth being reunified with parents, caregivers, and extended family after being in care for some time has increased. There has also been an increase in the number of family meetings that include family and community supports, resulting in joint work and planning which continues to decrease the number of families being taken to court.



A communication protocol was collaboratively developed with the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation. A draft protocol was further developed to be a starting point of collaborative work with other First Nations. Conversations have been started with the Six Nations of the Grand River and with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. In addition, work has been proceeding with the Right to Return – Devon's Principle – implementation and promotion. A Right to Return working group has been working on meeting with each service team to share information and to encourage progress in this area. HCFS has 43 First Nations youth in care that have an identified First Nation. Out of those 43 youth, 16 already have great connections to their culture and First Nation that include visiting the First Nation lands. A conversation about Right to Return has been had with almost every youth/child and there have been two formal Right to Return visits.





Priority 2: Permanency and Potential

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

Objectives

- a) Children in care safely transition to a permanent and stable out-of-care arrangement as soon as possible following admission
- b) Children in care are most often served in family-based settings as close to their homes as possible
- c) Improved educational achievement for all children and youth in care
- d) Plans and decisions are fully informed by youth voice and their input is reflected in service
- e) All transition-aged youth receiving service get the supports they need to reach their full potential as adults

Key Achievements

A family rapid response pilot was developed and implemented with a focus on two key areas:

1. Admission prevention
2. Reduced time to permanency

There were promising practices specific to the need for intensive support processes during times of crisis and a specific focus on developing a rapid response process when children and youth enter care. The focus of this project is to develop plans to have children and youth safely returned to the community more quickly and with the supports needed for the family youth/child to be successful. We have seen an increase in the number of formal and informal supports that families are connected to, in both the pilot as well as the day-to-day work that continues to happen.

In alignment with Quality Standards Framework (QSF) requirements, there is a process for placement based on the child's strengths, interests and needs. Reunification of families has focused on connecting the family to community supports in a timely manner. There has been a slight increase in adolescents placed within the internal foster system and greater success with youth being reunified with family. Foster care recruitment remains a priority for the organization. A recruitment plan focused on reaching out to specific communities for foster caregiving options is being implemented.

There has been success with the majority of youth 16 - 17 years old remaining in their school setting when moves were required. HCFS supports education through an education liaison position. This role helps to support timely educational placements and timely planning so that young people can reach their full educational potential.

The voice of the child and youth is a value of HCFS. There has been an increase in how the voice of youth informs planning and supports through plans of care and case note documentation. In the coming year the Client Feedback working group will be working on strategies to hear from youth through surveys and direct feedback. The youth council continues to inform practice and is meeting regularly.



The Ready Set Go (RSG) working group has developed a pathway of planning, support, and connection engagement to connect youth to the supports and people they need to transition to adulthood. Youth leaving care at age 18 have transition plans that start at age 16.





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) An organization-wide learning and development strategy that supports HCFS as an evidenced-based place of learning
- c) Develop and implement a Healthy Workplace Strategy

Key Achievements

Leadership Framework: A staff working group has been established to recommend a leadership framework for the organization. Once the framework has been implemented this philosophy will be rolled out across the organization.

OACAS Leadership Competencies: These competencies have been incorporated into the annual leadership development tool. This tool has now been rolled out to all management staff and is being piloted with a few frontline staff. Staff will identify their own need for competency development through completion of this tool. Once the leadership development tool has been implemented at all levels of the organization (by the end of 2025), feedback/survey will be incorporated in phase 2 (2026).

Wellness Committee: A staff committee was established in 2023/2024 fiscal year, and they completed several of the initiatives identified on their workplan. The committee has decided to evolve to gain greater participation from staff and have developed a wellness hub.

Staff Census: The staff census survey has been completed and the survey results overview will be shared with all staff in April 2024.



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 Indigenous and Black communities to support them in keeping their children safe at home
- 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

We have experienced increased engagement with mental health services and complex needs service with planning centered around community engagement, identification of unmet needs in the community and partnerships around engagement. A collaboration plan was developed between McMaster Hospital, Ron Joyce, CCAS and HCFS and this was shared with service supervisors and front line staff.

Work with Empowerment Squared continues to ensure service needs for racialized and newcomer families are met. Providing culturally aligned services to support racialized and newcomer children in their own homes and communities or assisting with reintegration back home or in their community is the shared goal of The Student and Family Advocate Support program. This initiative aims to support and empower Black and newcomer students ages 5–21 and their families by addressing systemic barriers to their achievement, equity, and well-being.

Work continues to build partnerships including with the Hamilton Muslim community and Jewish community to provide integrated support for children, youth and families. One example is a collaboration between HCFS and Mishka Social Services to assess the experiences of Muslim families with child protective services. The formation of a Muslim Advisory Council involving eight community organizations marked a crucial step in understanding the unique challenges faced by these families.



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
- b) New provincial requirements are implemented
- c) Support is maintained for CPIN integration

Key Achievements

Work to review and update the organization's policies and procedures continued in 2023-24. We have made significant progress in continuing to review and update HCFS policies. The next step will be to utilize all the features of PolicyTech with a full roll that out to staff in the fall of 2024. Moving forward, staff will receive a notification when a policy is due to be reviewed. The work to update the policies will now happen within PolicyTech, from writing to final approval by the Senior Leadership Team. These features will allow staff to ensure policies are always up to date.

In 2022, the decision was made to pause the organization's previous client feedback survey for redesign. Steps taken in the redevelopment of the survey included a literature review, environmental scan of other agencies across Ontario, and the intentional design of the survey to align with the Collaborative Family Engagement Priority Groups. The new survey was endorsed by the Senior Leadership Team in March 2024 following significant consultation with key stakeholders. The survey aims to provide service users with easily accessible, equitable ways of providing their voice and inform service delivery in the future. The survey launched in Spring 2024 and will begin phase one of implementation through 2024-2025.

Effective July 1, 2023, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services introduced new regulatory amendments to support the implementation of the Quality Standards Framework (QSF). The intent of this framework is to improve the quality-of-care children and youth receive. HCFS brought together a multi-function group of staff from across the organization. This team met regularly to review requirements, feedback from the extended society care review, licensing audit and other inputs to inform the development of tip sheets, tools and checklists to support staff in the implementation of the QSF standards. Other implementation team activities included development and organizing of materials in a centralized location on the intranet, open houses and drop-in sessions for staff.

The Ready Set Go (RSG) program launched in April 2023, replacing the Continuing Care and Support for Youth (CCSY) Program. RSG aims to provide youth transition out of care with supports needed to transition successfully from care to adulthood. HCFS brought together a multi-function group of staff from across the organization to form an RSG implementation team. The primary focus included implementation of the requirements for 18–23year olds for fiscal 2023-24 and to operationalize planning for 13–17year-olds. Some highlights of the group's work include piloting an electronic signature process for youth plans to form the basis for other electronic signature requirements under QSF and RSG and shifting to full integration of completion of youth plans in CPIN. The team also established a partnership with the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton and the YWCA in providing life skills programming to youth.



Priority 6: Resources and Sustainability

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

Objectives:

- a) Maximize revenue available including securing and allocating resources for the best possible organizational design, staffing and mix of placement resources
- b) An Information Technology Implementation Plan has been developed and reviewed

Key Achievements:

We continue to look for cost reductions and value for money wherever possible. Throughout the year, there were continued pressures in boarding costs related to youth in high-cost placements and families, children and youth were sometimes not able to access community mental health and developmental services. Some youth did not have child welfare concerns but remained in care as we were often unable to access residential mental health or developmental services programs to support them. We are continuing to work with our community partners to find services and placements that will meet the needs of these youth.

HCFS has utilized several tools to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of service this past year. A tool to track OPR agreements was put in place to help with tracking and value for money. Service is reviewing this tool regularly as part of their work. This has resulted in agreements being completed sooner, searched more effectively and has reduced some administrative burden on front line staff. Further work will be done with IT and finance in the coming year to help support financial forecasting and accountability.



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. The 2023-24 fiscal year is the final year of the current strategic vision. Using valuable feedback from the rebranding community engagement report, HCFS will develop the 2025-2029 Strategic Vision to guide the organization's work over the next five years.

