



Spring 2004

### Our Vision:

A community where all children can grow up being safe, healthy, and loved.

### Our Mission:

Finding the way forward with our community to protect children, to support all children and strengthen families, and to develop a caring environment for children.

### Our Agency:

Family and Children's Services is the Children's Aid Society for the Waterloo Region. We are incorporated as a charitable, non-profit social service agency working under the authority of Ontario child welfare legislation.

### Our Community:

The Waterloo Region is a municipality of 450,000 people and is situated 100 km west of Toronto, Ontario. It is one of the most prosperous areas of Canada offering many exciting opportunities in the fields of education, culture and recreation.

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# DIVERSITY

FAMILY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES OF THE WATERLOO REGION

## Responding to Diversity

### The Issue

Waterloo Region is becoming an increasingly diverse community. In recent years, the diversity of the Region has become much more apparent with the arrival of large numbers of people of many different nationalities, cultures, languages, and religions from all parts of the world.

But diversity is not new to the community, nor is diversity just about the mix of peoples immigrating and integrating into our society. Diversity has always been present in many forms, and many groups of people who perceive themselves as different from the mainstream community have struggled and continue to struggle for acceptance and an equal place and voice, for example: – people with physical and mental disabilities, people unable to maintain gainful employment, the elderly, children and youth, people who have broken the law, people of sexual orientation other than heterosexual.

Addressing the diversity of our community is about the mainstream taking positive action to end the experience of many different groups and individuals of being on the outside of society looking in. It is about overcoming ignorance and fear by increasing our learning about and understanding of people we

see as “different”. It is about appreciating, valuing, reaching out, welcoming and including everyone regardless of “difference”. It is about seeking to hear, recognize, and do our best to respond to the needs of everyone equally.

As the diversity of our community has become much more evident, organizations of every type have faced the challenge that they need to make changes – changes in their policies, services, presentation, skills and training of staff in order to be able to meet the needs of the many different groups, communities, and individuals who need their services, and to do so in a spirit that is welcoming, inclusive, respectful and competent. Family and Children's Services faces this challenge as well.



### What we are doing to respond

#### The Strategic Plan points the way...



Stakeholder input to the Strategic Plan, gathered through the Future Search Conference in 2001, stressed the need for the agency to take action to become more responsive to the increasing diversity of the communities of Waterloo Region.



In direct response to this advice, one of the four major directions in the Strategic Plan, adopted to guide the work of the agency over the next few years, commits us to: “Strengthening the Agency's Response to an Increasingly Diverse Community”.



Translation of this Strategic Direction into action has become the focus of two complementary taskforces within the agency: The Sexual Orientation Taskforce and The Taskforce on Cultural Competence. The taskforces have worked closely together and have shared their work. (This brochure describes the work and output of both).



## What we are doing to respond

### The Agency's Values give us a firm foundation...



Making a commitment to strengthen our response to an increasingly diverse community reflects a reinforcement in our beliefs, as an organization, that we are fundamentally opposed to any form of discrimination, that we want to become as inclusive and welcoming of all people as possible, and that we are committed to serving everyone who needs our services equally well regardless of difference.



The clarification and reinforcement of our beliefs have been captured in a new and expanded Values Statement which forms one of the key underpinnings of the Strategic Plan. The Values Statement has also been profiled and published in a new document entitled "The Values That Guide Our Work". This document has been produced in two formats, one for the information of the general public, and the other (clarifying the meaning of the Values in the context of our day to day work) for all parties who work or volunteer for the agency in one capacity or another. Both formats are available in hard copy. Additionally, the public version is available on the agency's website, and the version for internal stakeholders is available on the agency's Intranet site.

### Some examples of how our Values have been strengthened to support our Response to Diversity...



"every individual is a person to be valued"



"all people, regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, same-sex partnership status, family status, disability, or record of offences should receive a respectful and inclusive response from everyone"



"the promotion of inclusiveness and equality in the agency is a duty of all employees, board members, foster parents, placement students, and volunteers"



"loving and nurturing caregivers include opposite and same sex couples, extended family members, and single adults"

### Board of Directors makes a Policy commitment to support Diversity...



On December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2003, the Board of Directors established a policy statement committing the agency to promote an environment supportive of diversity. The policy statement contains the following Declaration:

### The Board of Directors declares that Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region is committed to:



Serving people in a manner which is knowledgeable, inclusive, and respectful of their diversity, and competent in its ability to respond appropriately to their needs



Creating a working environment which welcomes and encourages the open appreciation of the diversity of all who work for us and with us

## The Sexual Orientation Task Force



An earlier phase of the taskforce produced a report in 2001 which provided comprehensive recommendations to the agency on strategies for creating an inclusive and accepting service and working environment for gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual clients, employees, foster and adoptive parents, and volunteers (all stakeholders). The implementation of the recommendations was assigned to a sec-

ond phase of the taskforce, which began its work in the fall of 2002.

While undertaking certain tasks as a whole, the (implementation) taskforce has also divided itself into three committees, each addressing different subject areas of the recommendations: **Services and Information, Training, and Communication and Advocacy.**

### The taskforce as a whole has:

Drafted the public and internal versions of the document "*the Values that Guide our Work*", reflecting input from a series of consultations with staff, foster parents and the Board.

Drafted the *Policy on Response to Clients who Identify Themselves as Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual or Transgendered*.

Drafted the *Policy on Confronting Prejudice re Diversity Exhibited by the Community Towards Clients or Stakeholders*.

### The Services and Information Committee has:

Created the *Information and Resource Manual* regarding services for clients who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgendered, and including a listing of literature resources. This manual is now available to all staff units (see your admin assistant).

Created posters and other materials announcing that the agency is a place where all persons including gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and transgendered people are welcome and supported.

Created a website on sexual orientation on both the agency's Intranet and Internet Websites. Policies, manuals training program details, posters and other information are accessible on the website. [Visit the Intranet](#)

site at [www2.facswaterloo.org](http://www2.facswaterloo.org) and the Internet site at [www.facswaterloo.org](http://www.facswaterloo.org).

### The Training Committee has:

Developed a training program on Sexual Orientation for staff and foster parents. (This training is a counterpart to the Cultural Competency Training program). The first sessions of the training will be offered during the winter of 2004, starting in March.

Over the next couple of years, all staff and foster parents will receive both programs of training. The Sexual Orientation and Cultural Competency training programs will become part of orientation training for new staff joining the agency in the future.

### The Communications and Advocacy Committee has:

Managed the publication and distribution promotion of materials produced by the taskforce.

Commissioned additional artwork from Sue Wicks reflecting the diversity of the population the agency is serving.

Obtained literature on same-sex families, suitable for a variety of ages, for the library and waiting rooms.

Revised the *Rights and Responsibilities Handbook* for children and youth entering care to communicate the agency's policies on Diversity.

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## Developing Cultural Competence at F&CS Waterloo

### What is Cultural Competence?

Cultural Competence can be described as "the ability of individuals and systems to respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and faiths or religion, in a manner that organizes, affirms, and values the work of the individuals, families, tribes and communities, and protects the dignity of each" (from the Child Welfare League of America, 2001).

Cultural competence embraces the following principles:

**Inclusiveness:** Refers to an organizational system

where decision-making includes perspectives from diverse points of view, within and without the organization, where appropriate.

**Reflecting:** Reflecting cultural differences refers to the process of identifying or recognizing cultural diversity.

**Valuing:** Valuing cultural differences refers to the process of regarding highly cultural differences. Valuation is demonstrated through the organization's actions, practices and implementation policies.

**Employment Equity:** Describes approaches to achieving equal access to employment for all.



**Service Equity:** Ability to provide accessible and relevant services to the targeted groups.

### How Does Cultural Competence Link with the Overall Goals of the Agency?

**Future Search**, a consultation and planning process in which the agency engaged during 2001, identified the need for the organization to strengthen its capacity to respond to an increasingly diverse community.

F&CS serves a community that is growing in diversity. Understanding and accepting the diversity of religions, abilities and family constellations enables the agency to respond with empathy, compassion and wisdom. Cultural competence, sensitivity and openness of staff to all people creates a welcoming and supportive environment. Training, role modeling and sensitive case practice policy build the capacity of the agency to respond to this diversity. (Strategic Plan 2002)

As part of an organizational focus on diversity a working group has been struck to further develop the cultural competence of the agency.

#### Initiatives undertaken by the working group:

- Community consultation
- Development of a work plan
- Focus on the following broad areas of competence:



Increase the knowledge and awareness of agency staff concerning cultural diversity in client services through the provision of compulsory training.



Develop electronic linkages with resource materials in conjunction with local agencies.



Build/maintain relationships with key contacts within the multicultural community.



Review HR policies with respect to recruitment and hiring to ensure that they are open and non-discriminatory.



Develop more targeted recruitment strategies.



Develop better linkages to the multicultural community through voluntarily gathering information regarding staff skills, relationships, faith affiliation, languages and dialects. Utilize this information as a resource to better serve children and families.

#### Achievements to date:



The recruitment of over 20 staff who will be trained to deliver cultural competency training across the agency.



The development of a research partnership through which we will evaluate the extent to which training is advancing our goal of greater cultural competence.



The development of liaison with the multicultural programs at the YWCA through which we will provide training for host families regarding the role of CAS; provide information to newcomers regarding parenting practices in Canada; providing training for counselors regarding parenting practices and how to identify child abuse and neglect.



The development of a link with the African Women's Alliance to discuss parenting practices and the role of child welfare.

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## Members of the Sexual Orientation & The Cultural Diversity Implementation Committees

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