



Declaration of Equitable Service Delivery

Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region is committed to equity practice in child welfare and to the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. It is our collective goal to ensure the achievement of equitable service across our Region, and to ensure that all, especially those who are vulnerable and reside in under-resourced communities, will receive supports and services that are fair, equitable, culturally relevant, culturally safe, and practiced through cultural humility to preserve their basic human rights and dignity.

In adopting this Declaration, when we speak of all citizens in Waterloo Region we keep in mind that:

"It is important to note that Indigenous peoples understand themselves as peoples or nations, not as racial or ethnic groups. There are many consequences that flow from this distinction, including Indigenous peoples' rights to land and rights to self-determination, which includes rights to self-government. These rights have been recognized at the international level through the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. To respect these distinct entitlements, Indigenous peoples must be distinguished from other communities and recognized as unique. We encourage CASs, government and others to clearly recognize Indigenous peoples as distinct peoples and nations when considering data collection and other aspects of service delivery." ^{*1}

Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region sits, and we work, on the lands of the Attawandaron (Neutral), Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples: land that was stolen. We are committed to truly understanding Indigenous peoples, as peoples or nations, not as racial or ethnic groups. We listen and are committed to taking action to honour Indigenous peoples' distinction and rights to land and self-determination, which includes self-government.

The National Collaborating Center for the Determinants of Health suggests that the '*Social Determinants of Health*' (SDH) include many social conditions that interact to influence health and well-being. They include the circumstances, in which people are born, grow up, live, work and age. These social determinants are critically important to the health, well-being and safety of all families. In times of hardship and strife, as are currently being experienced, individuals and communities, are experiencing negative impacts to their health, livelihood and ultimately, their survival, due to their social identity and socio-economic status, all linked to SDH. The devastating impacts of colonialism that exist in current public policy and practices have continued to affect the Social Determinants of Health for many First Nation, Inuit, and Metis Communities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) Commission has proposed three recommendations for actions to assist in improving the Social Determinants:

1. Tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money, and resources;
2. Measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action
3. Improve daily living conditions

All service delivery decisions and practice should be centered on the principles of truth and reconciliation and equity and focused on the social determinants of health to ensure that no child, youth, or family is left behind.

Child welfare services have caused harm to First Nations, Inuit, and Metis communities. The legacy of Residential schools and forced family breakdown still affects FNIM families today. In the present day, we continue to have an overrepresentation of FNIM Children in care. We have to do better.

Child Welfare Services have also caused continued harm to African-descent families as evidenced in the overrepresentation of Black families within our service system, including Black children in care. We have to do better.

¹ *Interrupted childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario child welfare (2018).*

Our Declaration compels us to ‘walk the talk’ – to bear witness to our guiding principles of Truth and Reconciliation, equity, inclusion, Anti-Black Racism, Anti-Indigenous Racism, diversity, human rights and dignity, anti-oppressive practice, and fairness for all children, youth, and families we work with. All of these principles lead us to be more vulnerable, mindful, and accepting of the transformation that is required to re-imagine Ontario’s child welfare sector to realize its strategic vision for *Equity and Belonging*.

We believe that the development of effective services and programs is hinged upon anti-oppressive collaboration and sharing of resources with communities, particularly those that are under-resourced, to increase capacity and opportunities for culturally specific support and services for vulnerable families, and to support economic and social service systems that are sustainable within all communities. We strive for workforces that reflect the communities that we work with, that will ensure that the voices and needs of children, youth and families living within those communities are heard and respected, and that their experiences are validated. This forms the core of our reimagined child welfare system.

As leaders, we are committed to making change and modelling the practices and behaviours that are reflected in this declaration and promise to create an environment of urgency, truth, trust, safety and belonging for both employees and service users engaged in the child welfare system.

Far too often, the bulk of Anti-Racist and equity work falls on the shoulders of racialized and marginalized individuals across organizations to create systemic solutions to legacy issues engrained in mainstream structures like child welfare.

We recognize our position in child welfare: we are leaders who are largely from dominant social groups, who contribute to overrepresentation and disparities within child welfare for both service users and staff members who belong to racialized and marginalized groups.

Leaders with privilege understand their role in equity work as allies with a stake and integral involvement in the issues, while constantly identifying and questioning how their individual privilege acts to maintain White privilege, colonialism, systemic racism, heteronormativity, and other forms of oppression.

This declaration by the leadership of Family and Children’s Services of the Waterloo Region is adapted from the Provincial Directors of Service, in cooperation with the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies Declaration of Equitable Service Delivery: Covid-19 Pandemic and Moving Forward

A collection of handwritten signatures in blue and black ink, arranged in two rows. The first row contains eight signatures, and the second row contains seven. Some signatures are partially obscured by a grey rectangular box.