



## A Year In Review

## FACS Waterloo's Values



### Transparent

Being open and honest about the activities and actions of FACS Waterloo, including performance and outcomes related to service delivery.



### Collaborative

Working together as a united organization, with partners, and with the community towards common goals that support the mission and vision.



### Evolving

Consistently learning and growing while adapting and responding to a changing environment.



### Respectful

Always treating others in a kind and fair manner.



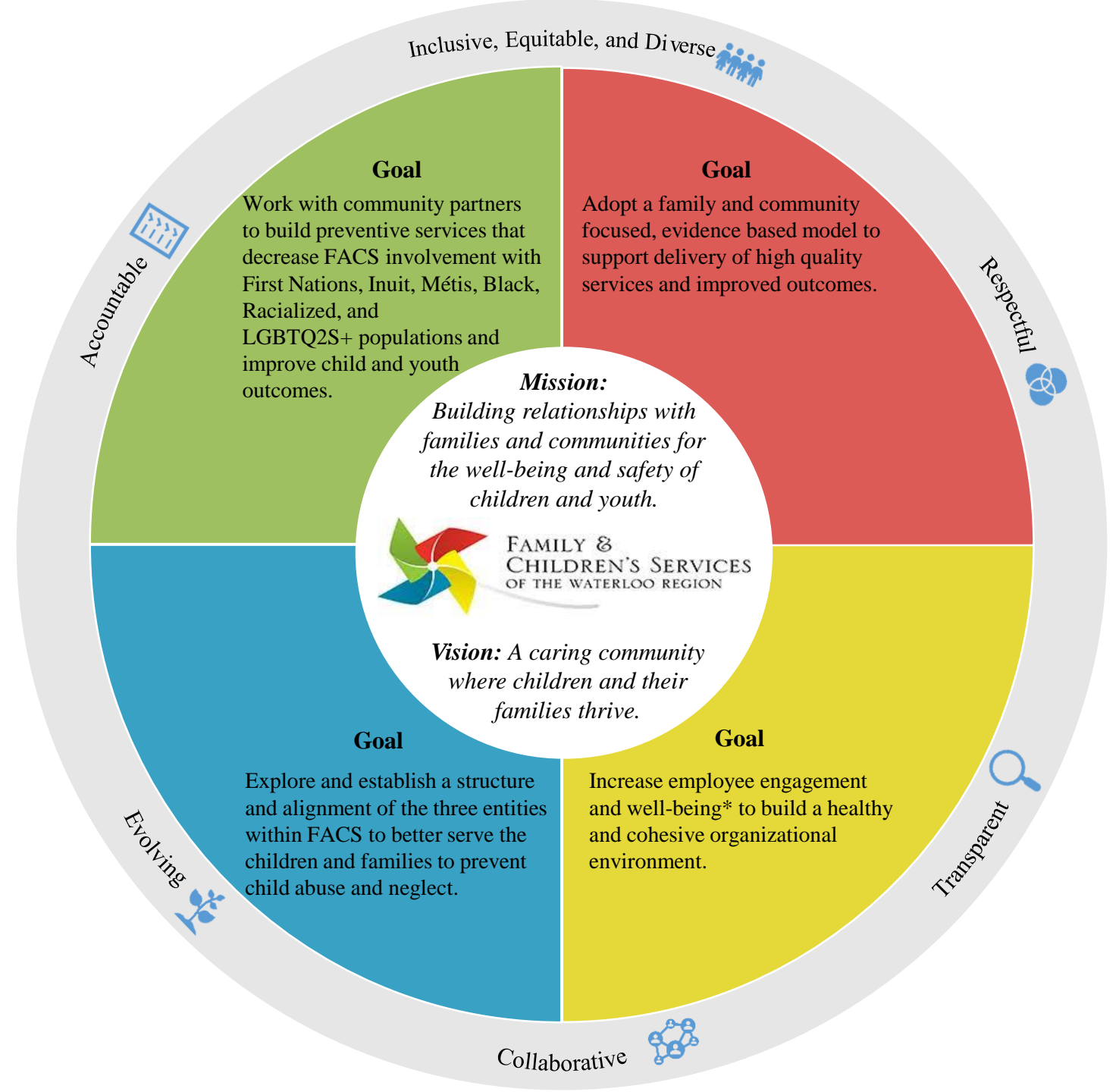
### Inclusive, Equitable, and Diverse

Creating an environment where all individuals with different abilities, races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and gender identities and expressions are treated with the care that they require.



### Accountable

Accepting responsibility and ownership of actions and being a dependable resource for the community.



## Executive Director Report

It's hard to believe another year has come and gone. I'm not sure if it's just me but I feel the days, weeks and months are flying by faster than ever. This year has presented significant challenges for FACS Waterloo and the broader sector. We are witnessing increasing complexities among the children and youth we serve, with fundamental human rights such as access to food and housing becoming unattainable for many families in our region. Additionally, mental health concerns are rising, emphasizing the urgent need for a continuum of care for our most vulnerable families.

At our agency, we remain dedicated to collaborating with community partners and actively seeking innovative approaches to our work. A few of our current initiatives and partnerships include:

**The Community Led Needs Assessment** (further details are provided later in this report)

**Black Leadership Circle** – addressing the overrepresentation of Black children in child welfare systems and promoting community-driven solutions

**Collaboration with the Region** to secure crisis daycare placements

**Co-location partnerships** with YWCA and Women's Crisis Services

**The Resilience Project** – a multi-organizational collective focused on early intervention and prevention services for families in our region

Despite these positive developments, there are critical issues that require attention. The child welfare sector continues to operate under an outdated funding formula that does not reflect the evolving landscape. Insufficient funding, coupled with increased complexities and rising costs for outside paid resources ("OPRs"), has resulted in considerable financial pressures across the sector. Without a revised funding model or systems to manage per diem costs for high-needs children and youth in care, the current approach is unsustainable. Our agency, together with our dedicated Board of Directors and under the leadership of our Board Chair, Gary Pooley, has prioritized advocacy efforts this year to highlight these financial challenges.



Family and Children's Services is committed to ***building relationships with families and communities to ensure the well-being and safety of children and youth***. Achieving this mission requires adequate funding, barrier-free access to resources, affordable housing and food, and comprehensive mental health supports. We urge the government to provide sufficient funding as an essential first step. We extend our gratitude to our community partners for their unwavering commitment to the children, youth, and families of Waterloo Region—your support is invaluable.

To all agency staff, thank you for your dedication and hard work throughout the year. Your efforts have been exceptional, and your contributions are deeply appreciated.

Finally, to our Board of Directors, thank you for your guidance and steadfast support. Your willingness to ask challenging questions and remain committed to our vision enables this agency to create ***a caring community where children and families can thrive***.

**Call to Action:**

As we look ahead, I encourage every member of our community—staff, partners, and stakeholders—to continue advocating for the resources and support our families need. Let us work together to drive meaningful change, champion equity, and build a stronger, more resilient future for the children and youth of Waterloo Region. Your engagement and commitment are essential as we strive to create lasting impact.

With appreciation and best wishes for the coming year,

Sonia



## Chair Report

My first year as Board Chair has been both challenging and rewarding. The challenges relate to a child protection sector in Ontario that is in crisis from a lack of funding. The rewards come from working with inspiring individuals who are passionate about the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and youth. They work every day with the Agency's mission in mind – **Building relationships with families and communities for the well-being and safety of children and youth.**

I have the utmost respect for Sonia Dennis and her team who support vulnerable children, youth and families in a very difficult environment. The many challenges include:

- An uncertain economic environment with rising unemployment.
- Housing and food insecurity continues to place significant stresses on families.
- Children, youth and families have more complex needs.
- Mental illness and addictions are impacting more people including children and youth.
- Our Ministry's funding model is not aligned with the Agency's prevention mandate and does not provide funding for essential prevention programs.
- Community-based organizations in the children and youth services sector that provide critical health and well-being support are underfunded.

All the above factors have a direct or indirect impact on the Agency and its ability to provide the services required by vulnerable children, youth and families. I would like to highlight the increase in the number of children and youth requiring high-cost care and the lack of adequate funding from the Ontario government for the support they require.

The child welfare sector has experienced a significant increase in the number of children and youth who come into care because of complex needs including behavioural, emotional, mental health and developmental that haven't been addressed elsewhere in the children and youth services sector. Many of these children and youth don't require protection services but are placed with agencies because their families are desperate for support.

Child welfare agencies don't have the resources to provide the specialized, intensive services and support required by these children and youth. Agencies like ours must look to outside paid resources ("OPRs") for services including housing. The Ontario government, through the Ministry, is responsible for the licensing and rate setting for OPRs that are primarily for-profit entities. The



rates charged by OPRs have increased significantly in the last two or three years, sometimes doubling and tripling. Our Agency doesn't have control over these rates that have driven up costs and resulted in increasing financial deficits.

To date, the Ontario government has not provided additional funding to support these rising costs. In fact, the funding provided to our Agency has decreased and is less than it was 10 years ago. This is not sustainable and can only be addressed with either a change in the funding model or additional funding specifically for high-cost care that should otherwise be provided and funded outside the child welfare system. On behalf of the Agency and children, youth and families we serve, I call on the Ontario government to provide the financial support required by the child welfare sector.

I would like to acknowledge the dedication and passion of our leadership team and staff in providing the services and support required by children, youth and families in these very challenging circumstances. Your work is crucial in supporting the most vulnerable children and youth in our community.

The Family and Children's Services Foundation provides financial support for prevention services that are not funded by the Ministry. Prevention is a very important aspect of the Agency's mandate. Prevention services are crucial in reducing the number of children and youth in care. Thanks to the Foundation's leadership and Board for the work that you do in raising funds to support prevention programs.

Volunteers play a very important role in helping the Agency deliver services to children, youth and families. They provide transportation, one-to-one support, tutoring, family childcare and other support. Many thanks to the volunteers for all that you do.

I would like to thank our dedicated and engaged members of the Board of Directors for volunteering your time to provide governance oversight for the Agency. It was a pleasure working with you over the past year. Particular thanks to the long-serving members who retired this year and welcome to the four new members who have joined the Board.

As we look to the future, there will be continuing challenges but there are also many positives. Our Agency has a strong leadership team, dedicated staff and volunteers, a supportive Foundation and a committed Board of Directors.



## FOSTER and RECRUITMENT



Foster families are the heart of Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region. In moments when children and youth face uncertainty and hardship, these families open their homes—and their hearts—to provide safety, love, and hope. They offer more than shelter; they create a sense of belonging during some of life's most difficult chapters.

Foster families also work hand in hand with our team to help children and youth heal and, whenever possible, reunite with their families or kin. Their compassion and resilience make an immeasurable difference, and we are honored to share their stories. These testimonials reflect the courage, kindness, and unwavering dedication of families who believe every child deserves to feel safe, valued, and loved.

### Melody

Melody has been a dedicated foster parent with Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region for four years. Alongside her role as an early childhood educator in a Waterloo childcare center—a position she has held for over two decades—Melody felt called to open her home to children in need after attending an agency information session. With an extra bedroom and a desire to make a difference, she began her fostering journey.

Over the years, Melody has cared for seven boys, both in full-time and respite placements. As a single caregiver, she has appreciated the agency's support in arranging childcare for younger children and providing volunteer drivers to assist with transportation needs. This partnership has allowed her to balance her professional responsibilities while ensuring the children in her care receive the attention and opportunities they deserve. The agency also covers recreational activities such as swimming lessons and music programs, helping children experience joy and growth during their time in care.

One of Melody's greatest joys is maintaining connections with children after they leave her home. She treasures updates on their progress and celebrates the bonds formed during their stay. Her extended family embraces each child as part of their own, sharing holidays, vacations, and family traditions together. Melody's home is warm and lively, with two guinea pigs—Walnut and Pistachio—and a playful four-month-old miniature Schnauzer named Francine. Outside of fostering, she enjoys reading, movies, cooking, camping, and caring for her pets.

Melody's story reflects the profound impact foster caregivers have on the lives of children and youth. Through compassion, resilience, and unwavering commitment, she continues to provide a safe and loving environment where every child feels valued and supported.

## Matt and Hanika



Matt and Hanika have been fostering with Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region for one year. Parents to three biological children aged 8, 6, and 2, they have welcomed three pre-teens and youth into their home during this time. Their current placement involves two siblings in middle and high school who have been with them for three months.

Matt's experience with fostering began early—his family fostered throughout his childhood, instilling in him a lifelong desire to provide a safe and nurturing home for vulnerable children. After their oldest child was born with significant special needs, Matt and Hanika paused their plans for several years. In 2023, when their youngest was two months old, they felt ready to explore fostering and began the process.

They appreciated the thorough preparation involved in becoming foster parents, which allowed them to reflect on their family's capacity and determine the best fit for placements. Initially expecting to foster children in grades 1–5, they ultimately felt equipped to care for teens. While fostering teens has been challenging and, at times, overwhelming, Matt and Hanika credit their success to a strong support system—including agency staff, family, church community, and friends—who encourage and validate them through difficult moments.

As foster parents, they carry the weight of daily responsibilities and the emotional impact of witnessing children struggle with past trauma or unhealthy coping strategies. Yet, they also experience the privilege of being a safe, loving presence—sometimes for the first time in a child's life—and contributing to their healing journey. Small moments of trust, such as a request for a bedtime tuck-in or a smile after receiving praise, bring joy and hope that outweigh the challenges. Matt and Hanika remain committed to showing up, offering care, and creating an environment where every child feels safe and valued.



Bob and his family have been fostering for nearly 13 years, beginning their journey when their youngest child started junior kindergarten. After years of discussion, they decided during an anniversary dinner that the time was right to open their home to children in need. Since then, they have primarily cared for infants and young children, welcoming nearly 30 placements over the years.

For Bob and his family, fostering has been a journey of continuous learning. Each child and family brings unique circumstances, and while some relationships have been lasting and others brief, every experience has left a profound impact. They have witnessed biological families work tirelessly—often making difficult decisions—to do what is best for their children. Their own children have learned invaluable lessons, from changing diapers and soothing babies to developing empathy and respect for families navigating challenging situations.

Bob describes fostering as a roller coaster: the anticipation at the start, the moments of doubt, the twists and turns that bring joy and excitement, and ultimately, the decision to do it all over again. While surprised by the amount of paperwork involved, Bob has also been deeply moved by the incredible people he has met along the way. The journey has been humbling, sometimes heartbreaking, but always rewarding. Each child has left a lasting impression—the one who loved pears, the little opera singer, the child with the best belly laugh, and even the one who spent 22 months calling him “that.”

Bob passionately believes in child protection and preserving families. For him and his family, fostering is far from over—it is a lifelong commitment to making a difference.

Family and Children’s Services of the Waterloo Region is currently seeking foster caregivers for children of all ages. Foster families play a vital role in providing safe, nurturing environments for children and youth during times of transition and uncertainty. If you are interested in learning more about how you can make a meaningful difference in a child’s life, please visit our website at [www.fosteringkids.ca](http://www.fosteringkids.ca)

# The Numbers Narrative

## Family Involvement Trends in Child Protection (2020–2025)

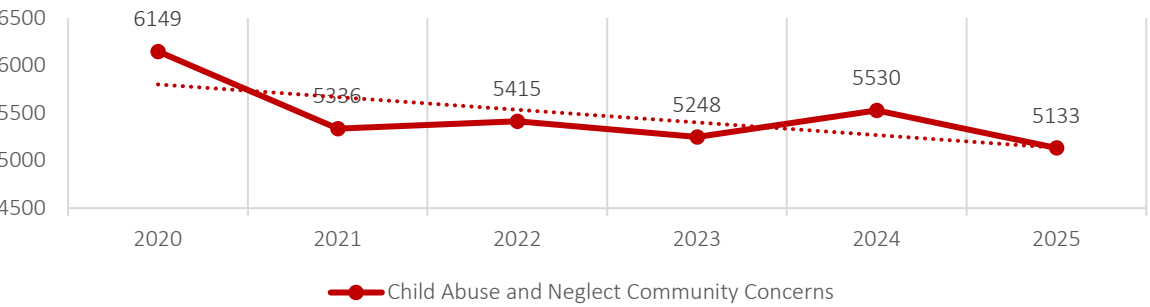
Over the last five years, there have been notable changes in how families interact with child protection services:

- **Fewer Investigations:** The number of investigations has gone down, thanks to better early support and more accurate screening. However, recent challenges—especially after the pandemic—have caused a slight increase, showing that many families still face significant stress.
- **Support Cases:** Fewer families now need ongoing support, but those who do often face complex issues like housing instability and mental health concerns. These situations require help from multiple community organizations working together.
- **Community Concerns:** Reports of child abuse and neglect from the community have decreased, but they are still more common in areas with long-standing social and economic challenges.
- **Equity Matters:** Indigenous and Black families are still overrepresented in ongoing support cases, highlighting the need for approaches that respect culture and promote fairness.

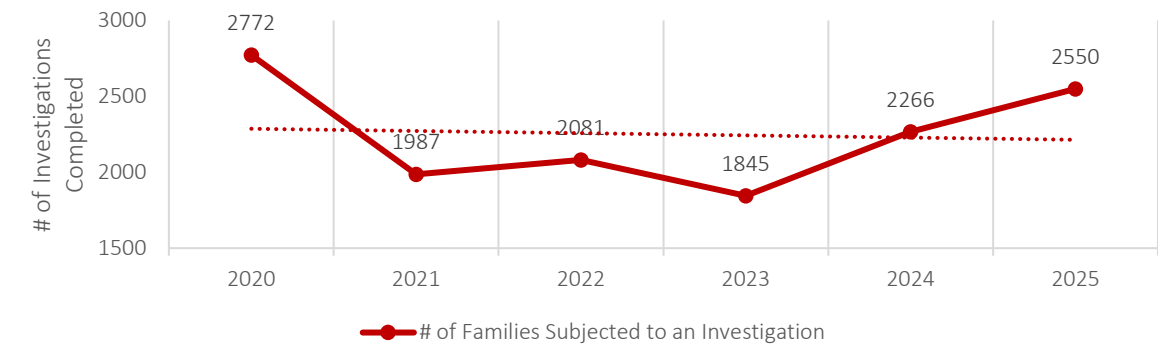
**In summary:** While there has been progress in early intervention and community support, some families continue to face serious challenges. The focus moving forward is on providing help early, promoting equity, and working together to ensure every family gets the support they need.

We have seen a 17% decrease in child protection community concerns from 2020 to 2025

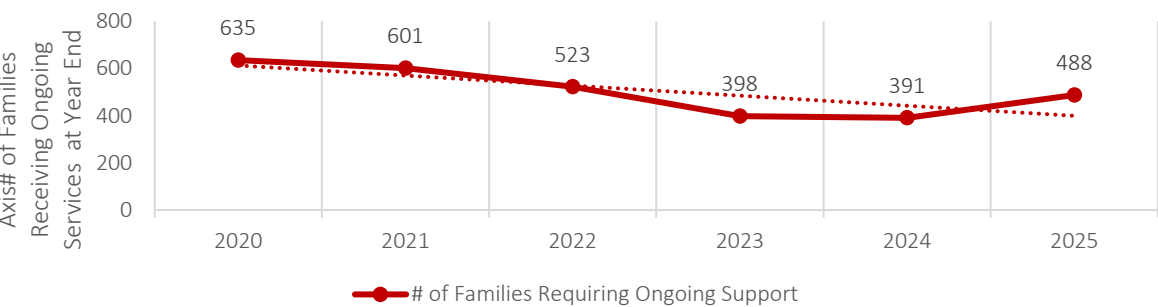
Child Abuse and Neglect Community Concerns



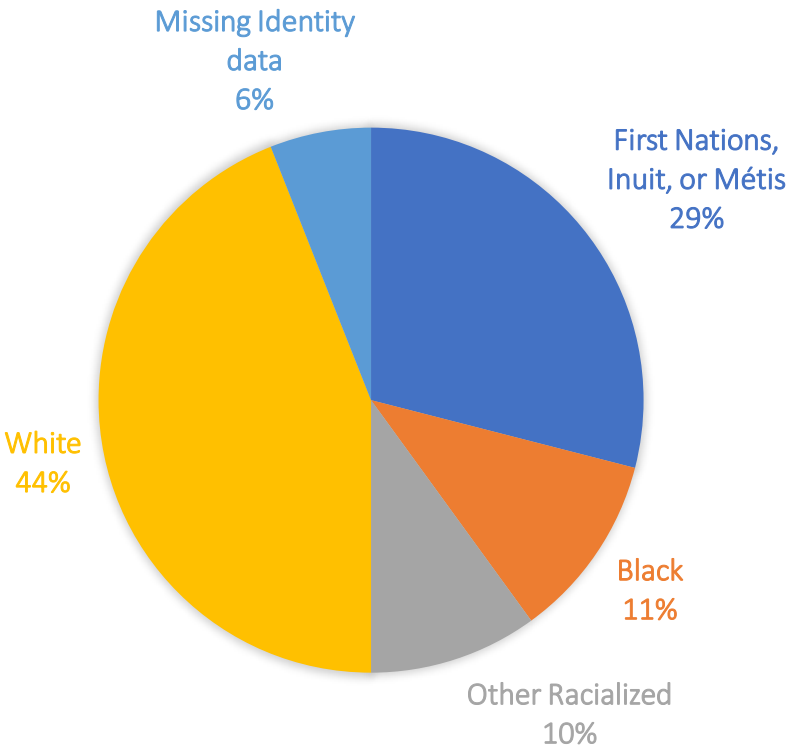
We have seen 8% decrease in families subjected to an investigation from 2020 to 2025. However, post pandemic (2023), these numbers have been rising.



We have seen an 40% decrease in the # families requiring ongoing support. However, those involved tend have layered concerns that require coordinated and collaborative community services.



What are the ethno-racial identities of families requiring ongoing support?



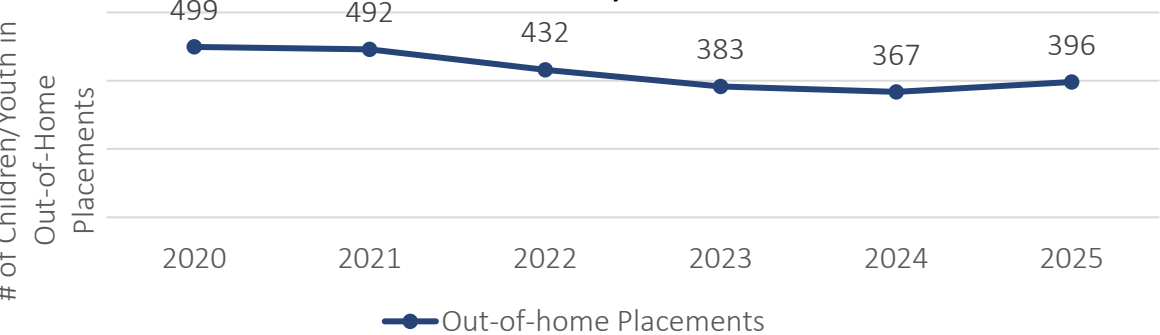
## Who Is Placed in Care—and What Does That Tell Us?

Over the past five years, there has been a significant decrease in the number of children and youth placed in foster care or with extended family—down by 28%. This is a positive sign, but it also raises important questions about which children are being placed and why.

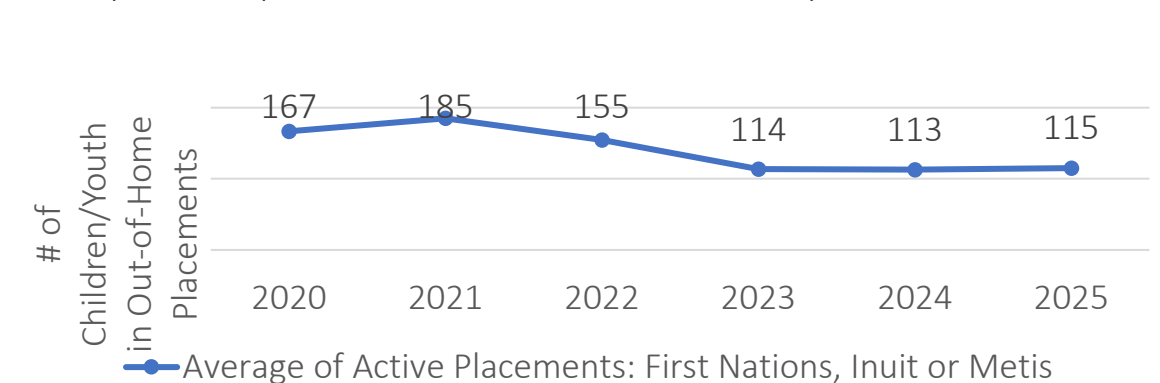
- Indigenous families saw a 12% decrease in placements, but Indigenous children are still placed in care at higher rates than others. This points to ongoing systemic challenges and the need for supports that respect cultural backgrounds.
- Black families experienced a 40% decrease in placements from 2019 to 2022, suggesting that focused efforts to promote equity may be helping, though continued attention is needed.
- Ethno-racial breakdown: While White children make up the largest group in care, Indigenous and Black children are overrepresented compared to their share of the population.

These trends highlight the importance of fair and culturally informed practices, strong community partnerships, and early intervention. Every decision about placing a child in care should prioritize safety, connection to culture, **and support within their community whenever possible.**

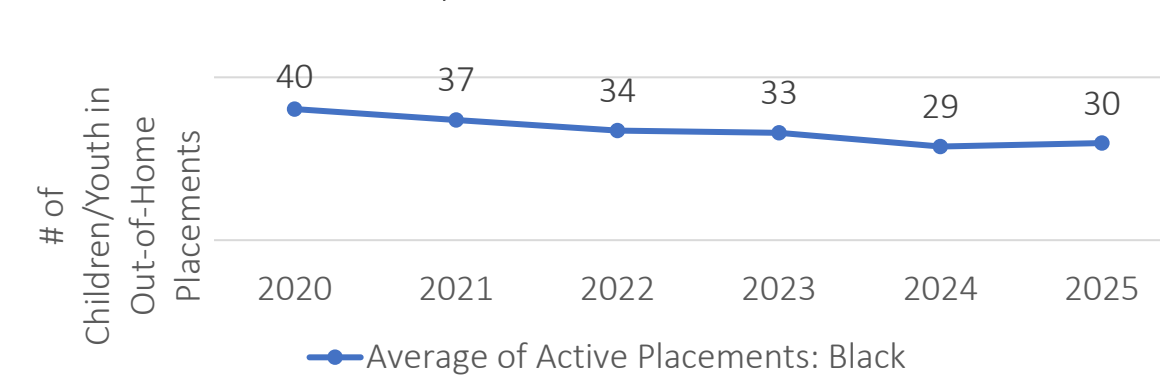
We have seen a 28% decrease in children/youth requiring to be placed in foster care or with extended family from 2020 to 2025.



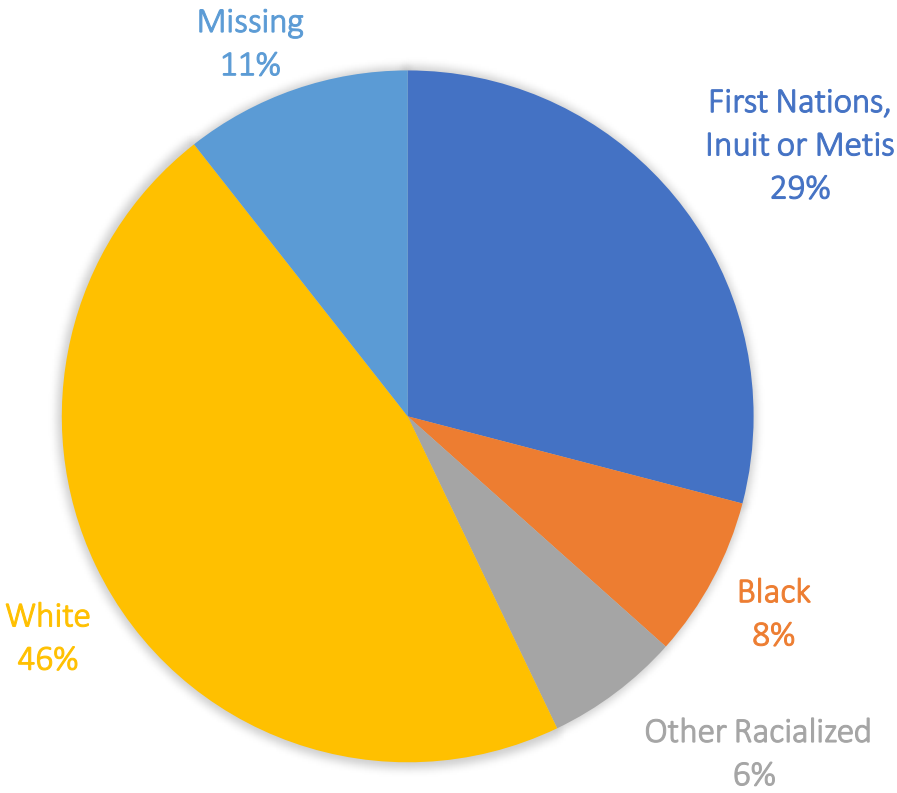
We have seen 12% decrease in First Nations, Inuit, or Metis families requiring their children/youth to be placed in foster care or with extended family from 2020 to 2025.



We have seen a 40% decrease in Black families requiring their children/youth to be placed in foster care or with extended family from 2019 to 2022



What are the Ethnoracial identities of children and youth staying in foster care or with extended family?



## Where Do Youth Go When They Enter Care?

When children and youth cannot safely stay at home, child protection services must decide where they should go next. Most are placed in foster care, where trained caregivers provide support and stability. Others are placed with extended family through kinship care, which helps preserve important cultural and family connections.

- 65% of youth are placed in foster care.
- 35% are placed with extended family through kinship care.
- 40% of youth in care participate in a transitional program called Ready Set Go, which helps them prepare for adulthood.

These numbers reflect both the priorities of the child protection system and the realities faced by families. While foster care is the most common placement, kinship care is a vital option that keeps children connected to their roots. The high number of youth in transitional programs highlights the importance of long-term planning, life skills, and support for older youth as they move toward independence.

Looking ahead, it's important to ask: Are we doing enough to prepare youth for life after care? And how can we strengthen kinship networks to keep more children within their families?



65% are placed in foster care (In Care)



35% are placed with their extended family (Kinship Service)



40% of youth in care were Ready Set Go youths

Children of all ages enter out-of-home care—but most are either very young or transitioning to adulthood. Nearly 1 in 3 are aged 18–25, while children under 9 make up 41%. This shows the need for both nurturing early supports and strong youth transition programs.

# Community-Led Needs Assessment

## Background

In March 2024, Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region (FACS) reaffirmed its commitment to addressing the persistent overrepresentation and service disparities affecting priority populations in the child welfare system—particularly First Nations, Inuit and Métis, Black and other racialized communities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ families.

To meaningfully address these inequities, we recognized the need to understand not only the challenges driving overrepresentation but also the strengths, resources, and assets within these communities. By prioritizing upstream prevention services and wraparound supports, our goal is to reduce child welfare involvement and improve long-term outcomes for children and families.

## Purpose and Approach

The region-wide Community-Led Needs Assessment was launched to strengthen connections between communities and service providers, foster authentic dialogue, and empower communities as active agents of change. This initiative places community voices, lived experiences, and priorities at the center of decision-making. Together, we aim to:

- Assess needs and challenges
- Identify community assets and capacities
- Map available services and programs
- Build community leadership
- Strengthen collaboration and partnerships
- Foster ongoing engagement and empowerment



## **Project Journey**

The project began in June 2024 with 23 community partners, including 12 Steering Committee members. By August, partners raised concerns about the process, describing it as unclear, colonial, and imposed. In response, we paused and undertook a full reset to ensure the initiative was genuinely community-led.

This reset involved ending the contract with an independent researcher, navigating the withdrawal of some partners, and co-creating the project's purpose, methods, timelines, and resource management with remaining partners. While challenging, this process laid the foundation for stronger trust and deeper collaboration.

## **Progress to Date**

Over the past year, significant milestones have been achieved:

- A detailed workplan was established
- A comprehensive desk review completed
- Community partners trained and equipped for data collection
- Key informant interviews successfully conducted
- Community-level data collection now underway

This progress reflects the dedication of community partners and FACS staff working side by side to build a process rooted in mutual respect and shared purpose.

## **Financial Overview**

The original project budget was approximately \$44,000, with FACS allocating \$40,000—the entirety of the community engagement and prevention budget for 2024 and 2025. These funds have been fully utilized for external consultancy, partner reimbursements, and direct engagement expenses. No additional funding is currently planned to extend or expand the project.

## **Governance and Accountability**

The project is co-led by the Director of Community Engagement and Prevention and the Director of Research, ensuring integration across community development and evidence-based practice. This internal approach maximizes available funds but places additional pressure on existing staff capacity.

## **Benefits of Co-Creation**

Although the co-creation process required more time, it delivered lasting benefits:

- Deepened trust through shared power and decision-making
- Increased capacity via training, tools, and mentorship opportunities
- Enhanced ability for communities to articulate needs and strengths
- New partnerships and initiatives, including the Resilience Project

This collaborative approach has strengthened connections, amplified community leadership, and modeled a new way of working that honors community wisdom and collective ownership.

## **Challenges**

The timeline has extended as progress moves at the pace of trust and readiness. Some partners have stepped away, affecting diversity of voices, though relationships continue through other initiatives. Funding constraints remain a significant limitation, with reliance on internal staff and free tools slowing processes.

Despite these challenges, the project prioritizes quality over speed, emphasizing relationship building, cultural safety, and meaningful engagement as the foundation for lasting change.

## **Next Steps**

Data collection will conclude in December 2025, followed by analysis in March 2026 and knowledge translation in April 2026. Findings will directly inform FACS' 2026/27 planning cycle.

This initiative represents a transformative shift in how FACS engages, listens, and collaborates with the communities it serves—paving the way for a child welfare system grounded in healing, trust, equity, and empowerment across the Waterloo Region.

# Family & Children's Services of Waterloo Region Agency

## 2024-2025 Condensed Financial Report

### Child Welfare

Revenue by Source	2024-2025	2023-2024	Expenses	2024-2025	2023-2024
Province of Ontario	\$ 50,531,093	\$ 50,677,085	Salaries and benefits	\$ 32,510,611	\$ 32,357,599
Grants from Foundation	734,868	463,407	Child in care and client related	21,439,072	19,773,557
Family benefit and Child Tax Benefit	1,649,981	1,187,020	Operating expenses	2,882,747	3,092,726
Other*	1,947,001	2,248,379			
	<u>\$ 54,862,943</u>	<u>\$ 54,575,891</u>		<u>\$ 56,832,430</u>	<u>\$ 55,223,882</u>

\* Rebated, interest, miscellaneous income, administration fees

### Summary of Operations

	2024-2025	2023-2024
Revenue	\$ 54,862,943	\$ 54,575,891
Expenses	56,832,430	55,223,882
Excess of revenue over expenses before the undernoted	<u>\$ (1,969,487)</u>	<u>\$ (647,991)</u>
Non-vested sick benefits	57,402	39,420
Other expenditures	-	-
Gain on sale of capital assets	-	-
<b>Other funding (recovery)</b>		
Province of Ontario- deficit funding	-	1,226,890
Province of Ontario- prior years' recoveries	-	(2,268)
	<u>\$ (1,912,085)</u>	<u>\$ 616,051</u>

### Special Program Funding

	2024-2025	2023-2024
Sexual Abuse Treatment Program	\$ 566,620	\$ 564,588
Education Liaison Program	113,734	113,115

All special programs are 100% expended

(Extracted from Audited Statements audited by KPMG LLP Chartered Professional Accountants, Licensed Public Accountants.)

Details for other programs are contained in the audited financial statements.

Until next time....

