



**65** years  
of brighter  
futures

Catholic  
Children's Aid Society  
of Hamilton



Société d'aide à l'enfance  
catholique  
de Hamilton



# A short history of child welfare in Hamilton before CCAS

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*Times have changed - today child welfare agencies take great strides to always respect the confidentiality of the children and families they serve.*

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## Child welfare in the 1800s

If you had no parents and you were under the age of 14 in the 1800s, you had few options. In most cases, you would learn a trade through apprenticeship. In later years, there were also live-in training schools or foster homes. That all changed in the late 1800s, when the Toronto Children's Aid Society was born. As a result, the Children's Protection Act of 1893 was passed. In 1912, the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) was founded. Hamilton Catholic Children's Aid Society is a proud member today.

## Hamilton's home for orphans and destitute children

At the invitation of Vicar-General Gordon, three sisters of St. Joseph arrived in Hamilton in the mid-nineteenth century to open The St. Mary's orphanage. The proceeds of the collections from St. Mary's Church on Sundays and holidays helped the sisters in their work with the orphans.

## The Orphans' Festival

In 1853, shortly after the orphanage opened, the first Orphans' Festival concert took place at the town hall. The festival drew attendance from community members who donated graciously to the operation of the orphanage. The festival was such a success that it became an annual event, with professional musicians as well as performances from the children, who were trained for several weeks by the sisters. By 1902, the festival was being called a "grand concert" and the admission price doubled. It was one of the hottest tickets in town, and raised much-needed funds for the orphanage.

The Orphans' Festival ended in 1956, three years after the founding of CCAS of Hamilton, and the St. Mary's orphanage closed in 1960.





A typical menu from the St. Mary's Orphanage.

## What did the children do all day?

- 6:00 – wake up!
- 6:30 – chapel
- 7:00 – breakfast
- 9:00 – school
- 12:10 – home for lunch
- 1:30 – back to school
- 5:30 – supper
- 8:00 – bed

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## This is our legacy

In 2018, the Catholic Children's Aid Society (CCAS) of Hamilton turns 65.

It's an important milestone that we believe is worth celebrating. We're taking this opportunity to take a breath, to acknowledge our successes, and to communicate with our community about the important work we do every day.

Anyone who works in the field of child welfare will tell you it's a vocation, not a job. Our staff and volunteers are tireless in their efforts to serve children, youth, and families within the Hamilton community. We work to protect the safety and wellbeing of children and youth, strengthen their families and nurture lifelong relationships.

We are one of two organizations that do this important work in Hamilton. In many ways, we are similar to our sister organization, the Children's Aid Society (CAS) of Hamilton. We

take advantage of these similarities by sharing services and expertise to build efficiencies. But we are also different from the CAS of Hamilton in some significant ways – most notably in our faith-based approach to the provision of child welfare services.

What does it mean, to be a faith-based child welfare organization in today's world? Our operations are governed by the same provincial legislation that governs all children's aid societies in Ontario. Our staff are social work professionals who come from a range of different faith traditions. We have the same commitment to service excellence as our fellow children's aid societies in Ontario. All of the people we serve identify as Catholic. So what makes us different and valuable?

We hear over and over again from our service recipients and our community partners that there is a unique sense of caring and compassion in our organization.

We believe that it is inspired by the compassion and mercy of Jesus Christ, who cared for the most marginalized persons of his community with love, respect, and a keen sense of social justice. We take a holistic service approach that honours the mind, body and spirit of each person, and that upholds their human rights in society. We believe that this holistic approach enriches the lives of our service recipients and the child welfare system as a whole, ensuring it is more caring, responsive, just and effective.

As you will learn in this book, our organization has changed greatly over the past 65 years, in keeping with the changes in the child welfare sector and in society as a whole. Our commitment to the safety and wellbeing of children and youth, the empowerment of families, and the strengthening of communities is unwavering.



By Rocco Gizzarelli  
Executive Director, CCAS of Hamilton

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*We hear over and over again from our service recipients and our community partners that there is a unique sense of caring and compassion in our organization.*

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## About this publication

The publication came about with a written documentation of our agency's history, generously provided by Dr. Christine Lei, historian and former member of the Hamilton Historical Board. To our surprise, the history of CCAS of Hamilton had not been written to date. Dr. Lei painstakingly poured over annual reports and board minutes, letters and documents from our agency, and publications that have been written about us. We thank her for her diligence and hard work, and we are pleased to present portions of that history in these pages.

But anyone who has been in contact with CCAS of Hamilton knows there's an added element that has made us who we are as an organization: our people. We have complemented Dr. Lei's work with articles about the relationships we have cultivated over the years, seen through the lens of CCAS of Hamilton volunteers and board members, staff and colleagues. I would like to thank those individuals for agreeing to be interviewed, for adding their voices to the mix.

This document is a culmination of what came before, where we've been and where we're going. We have loosely organized it in sections

that represent our current strategic directions, though in many ways they have always been our strategic aims: safe and thriving children, empowered families and stronger communities.

I've been part of this agency since 1986 – half the length of the agency. It has been open, and promoted learning. It has been my privilege to work with people who have been kind and caring. We've worked as a team, always. We had our challenges, and we got through them, and we celebrate our successes. This document is one of the ways we are choosing to celebrate this milestone.

This is our legacy, as an organization. It is the legacy of the many children, youth and families we have assisted over the last 65 years. It is the legacy of the many staff members and volunteers and partners within the Hamilton community, and the area's sizable Catholic community.

**Thank you – all of you –  
for your contributions and  
support.**



This image, by Hamilton artist Paul Elia, shows the four locations CCAS has occupied during its 65 years. On the left is 90 Stinson Street where CCAS got its start as a member of the Catholic Welfare Bureau of Hamilton. Today, this beautiful building houses Emmanuel House, a hospice and palliative care centre. When 90 Stinson became too crowded, CCAS moved to 627 Main Street East in 1968, staying for 16 years, then moving to 499 King Street East, and nine years later, in 1993, to the current location at 735 King Street East, on the corner of Sanford Avenue CCAS has grown in this location, and just completed a number of indoor renovations to make the space more comfortable and welcoming for staff, volunteers and clients.

# Our early days



Rev. T. Brennan

## The 1950s – our earliest challenges

Before the founding of the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton, child welfare work in the Catholic community was the responsibility of the Catholic Welfare Bureau of Hamilton. Rev. T. Brennan was the first director of the Catholic Welfare Bureau, which is now known as Catholic Family Services of Hamilton. Under Rev. Brennan's leadership, CCAS of Hamilton was established as an independent child welfare agency in 1953, responding to increased community need and concern for the welfare and rights of Catholic children and families.

### Our philosophy in 1954

- Every child and every person has a basic dignity as a human person, given by God
- That every child is a growing human being with rights and needs which must be respected and met, so that he or she might realize his or her full potential
- That each child must be enabled to develop a satisfactory relationship to his or her family, community and Creator
- That the family is the primary unit of Society and that a child's needs are best met within his or her own family whenever possible

### Homes wanted for the children of unmarried mothers

In the 1950s and 1960s, finding adoptive and temporary foster homes for the babies of unmarried mothers topped the list of challenges. Unmarried mothers had little financial assistance, and they were highly criticized for their condition. The agency's first duty was to assist the unmarried mother in her immediate need for accommodation and financial assistance, as well as adequate prenatal care. Once that was taken care of, the agency would work with the mother in planning for herself and her baby – whether she decided to keep her child or place it for adoption.



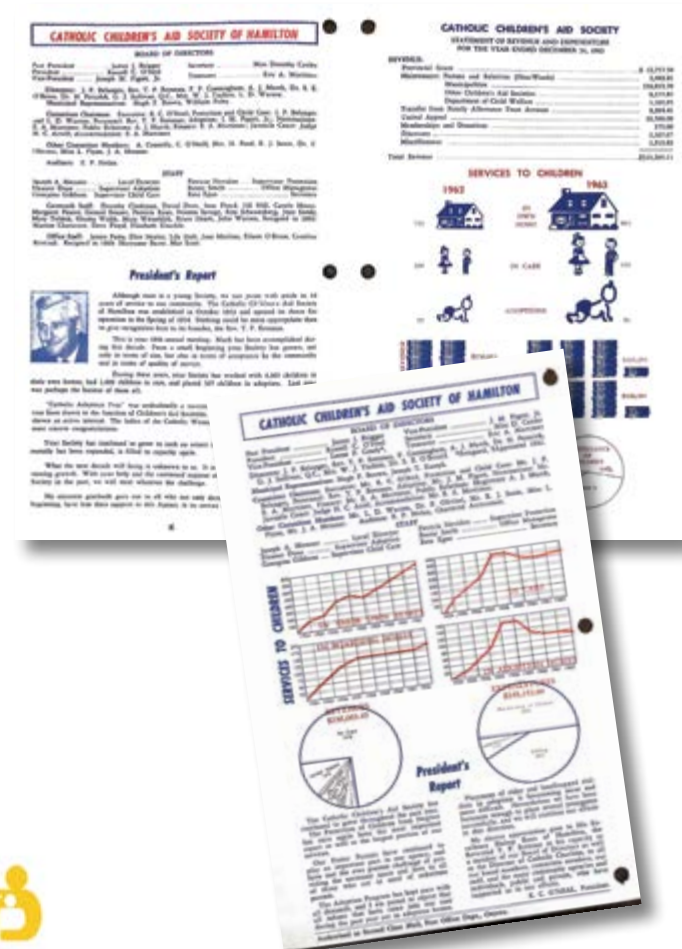


## Our first hire

The new board selected Frank Nearing to be its first managing director. A native of Nova Scotia, Nearing received his Master of Social Work degree from the École de Service Sociale at the University of Montreal in 1945, and was superintendent of the Catholic Welfare Bureau in Montreal the following year. He then served with the Children's Aid Society of Sydney, Nova Scotia. From 1948 to 1952, Nearing was with the Catholic Home Bureau of New York City before acting as casework supervisor with the Catholic Service Bureau of Grand Rapids, Michigan.



These are the CCAS logos that preceded our current logo.



## 90 Stinson

### Getting started

In addition to the three staff that were initially hired, there were a number of committees that carried out specialized functions with the placement and care of children, and the daily working of the Society, such as the Protection Committee, the Child Care Committee, the Public Relations and Publicity Committee, the Personnel Committee and the Adoption Committee. Initially meetings were held at City Hall, and then 90 Stinson Street was purchased.





## Guided by faith

When CCAS of Hamilton was founded in 1953, Catholic communities frequently established their own service organizations in the face of anti-Catholic public sentiment. Since that time, societal attitudes have changed and the role of faith at CCAS of Hamilton has also evolved. CCAS of Hamilton takes a holistic service approach that honours the mind, body and spirit of each person, and that upholds their human rights in society. CCAS of Hamilton believes that this holistic approach enriches the lives of service recipients and the child welfare system as a whole, ensuring it is more caring, responsive, just and effective.



Pat McInnes, pastoral care worker, speaks to the staff after receiving 80th birthday wishes at our 2017 Staff Appreciation event.

**Just listen to people – all people.** That's the tried-and-true approach Pat McInnes, pastoral care worker at CCAS of Hamilton takes to working with the staff, families, children, youth and volunteers he's in contact with.

"When I listened – when I waited to hear where a person was at, I found their own faith, where they had it," says Pat.

"I found very often there wasn't a lot of difference between what a Catholic believes and what other people believe in their own life and their own faith."

Pat worked at the agency for 25 years before retiring the first time. He says he was called back to work in pastoral care, where he's been

providing spiritual support for an additional decade. And regardless of a person's faith, Pat insists working in an agency that is entirely focused on helping children, youth, families, foster parents and volunteers is spiritual work to begin with.

"Our workers as well as our foster parents and volunteers are dedicated people who each day save our children, youth, and families from the devastating struggles of life. They all come with different degrees of faith, and they make such a difference. This is real spiritual service. This is real faith in God, which moves mountains. God sent me here to remind us all, that this is God working in us, for the good of all."

When we pray, we gather together, and our prayer is not only Catholic, but it is always with the hope of bring everyone's faith into the moment."

And while it's true workers aren't required to be Catholic, Pat says it's important they have an understanding of the Catholic faith, and what the agency is founded on, particularly since the children go to Catholic school. Workers need to have an understanding of the sacraments, for example, and the Catholic faith's approach to God and Jesus.

"But the day-to-day life that goes on in an agency? That is already so spiritual," he says.



## Lost beginnings

Pat says working with children and youth has presented its own challenges. In many cases, the children coming to the agency arrive at a time in their lives when they are suffering. Different programs over the years have helped kids and youth reconnect with their faith.

“Many children and youth who come to us have lost all their beginnings, in a sense, and it was important that they understood that we as an agency – workers, foster families and volunteers – were empathetic to the losses they had in their life,” Pat says. “For a period they might lose touch with their family and friends. We tried to help them connect and understand that they were still loved by God, that church is a family, a community, and that they belonged. We didn’t use a lot of churchy expressions – we tried to help it resonate where they were at.”

## Dignity for everyone

Pat says the Catholic community is generous with its support to CCAS of Hamilton families, but in many cases families in need remain isolated. “Many have lost everything. They don’t have proper housing, many go to food banks. In some cases their kids are in foster care or group homes,” he says.

Pat says it’s important to treat everyone with dignity and respect, to treat them as brothers and sisters who are struggling.

“They want to be like everybody else, and they’re no different than we are – they’ve just fallen on difficult times,” he says. “Sometimes that’s because of their own strengths and weaknesses, and sometimes because other people have not treated them in a respectful way. We are all brothers and sisters together. We have a calling by God to take care of our people and to take care of ourselves.”



The opening of the CCAS Chapel of the Holy Family, generously funded by the Ex Corde Foundation of the Diocese of Hamilton.

## CCAS STATEMENT OF FAITH

### FAITH. CARE. COMPASSION. COMMUNITY.

At the heart of the Catholic Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton is a recognition of the sacredness of human life, and the dignity and worth of each person created in God’s image. Our vision and mission are inspired by the compassion and mercy of Jesus Christ who cared for the most marginalized persons of his community and who reminded his followers that “Whatever you did to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” (Mt. 25:40) Governed by civil legislation and our provincial charter to protect children and youth, we are also guided by the teaching and tradition of the Catholic Church, responsive and accountable to the local community we serve.



## Guided by diversity, equity and inclusion

At CCAS of Hamilton, respect for diversity among staff, volunteers, families and children is paramount. It's so important, that the agency initiated a formal policy on anti-oppressive practices more than a decade ago, and leadership continues to seek new ways to include diverse voices at our table.

"We are very proud of the work we have done as an agency to address and correct oppression in many areas in our community," says Rocco Gizzarelli, executive director of CCAS of Hamilton. "We take great pride in the fact that we are a progressive Catholic agency serving the Hamilton community which is so culturally rich."



**Wear it Proud** Marlene Dei-Amoah is Wearing It Proud! During Black History Month, the members of the African-Canadian Employee Resource Group invited all staff to wear clothing on Wednesdays to reflect their cultural heritage. Marlene is wearing a dress made from traditional kente cloth from Ghana.

### The Anti-Oppressive Practices (AOP) project

CCAS of Hamilton has an overarching goal to create an inclusive organizational culture by removing any barriers that prevent the agency from meeting the needs of families and children from diverse backgrounds. This goal neatly fits with the CCAS of Hamilton mission of showing kindness, compassion and respect to all children and families the agency serves.

In 2008, the agency initiated the AOP project to address the needs of Hamilton's increasingly diverse community, beginning with members of the African-Caribbean community and then the Roma community. These early meetings laid a solid foundation to address child removal

concerns among particular groups, and supported opportunities for the agency to increase the number of foster parents from diverse racial and cultural groups, and bolster the agency's sensitivity to cultural differences.

### Supporting diversity became a full-time job

CCAS of Hamilton partnered with the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC), and invited feedback on policies and practices that could improve services. The agency created a supervisor position to coordinate the anti-oppression organizational change initiative, and arranged mandatory training for all staff on important topics such as anti-racism/anti-

oppressive practice and inclusion. Later, the AOP training was expanded to include foster parents. CCAS of Hamilton also arranged a speakers series that addressed topics such as accessible child welfare services for LGBTQ2S+ youth in care, Indigenous cultural practices and information sessions on immigration services. Some of the agency brochures were translated into different languages, and calendars and posters reminded staff of various religious and cultural observances.

### Taking the lead on anti-oppression

AOP work became so important to CCAS of Hamilton, that leaders began to recognize collaboration was key. Representatives worked hard



“I’m so proud to be a member of this organization, particularly for the efforts the agency has made to reach out to other groups.” Carol Larsen

to build community partnerships with other local agencies. For example, CCAS of Hamilton and the Aboriginal Health Centre jointly requested provincial funding, which led to a new offer of cultural circles for a small group of the agency’s crown wards from 2009 to 2013. Together, the groups formed working protocols with other agencies to strengthen programs for vulnerable and high risk families, and build stronger, more trusting relationships.

“We also really encouraged and wanted to have representation on provincial committees,” says Ersilia DiNardo, former executive director of CCAS of Hamilton. “Whether it was a committee started by government or our provincial association, it was important we have a voice at the table to promote what we saw as important for our families and kids.”

At the provincial level, CCAS of Hamilton became actively involved with the Provincial Anti-Oppression

Roundtable, a committee aimed at building the capacity and advocating for inclusion of anti-oppression principles in child welfare policies in Ontario. CCAS of Hamilton also became a prominent member of the Children in Care with Immigration Issues Committee, which had a goal to develop ways to assist foster youth to achieve permanency and not face deportation.

### **What anti-oppression efforts look like today**

Today, the agency continues to support diversity and anti-oppression in a number of ways. For the first time in 2018, the agency participated in Hamilton’s Pride Celebration, and supported some LGBTQ2S+ youth who represented the Fostering Rainbow Youth group, actively recruited foster parents, and planned a full slate of LGBTQ2S+ Employee Resource Group (ERG) activities for staff throughout the month.

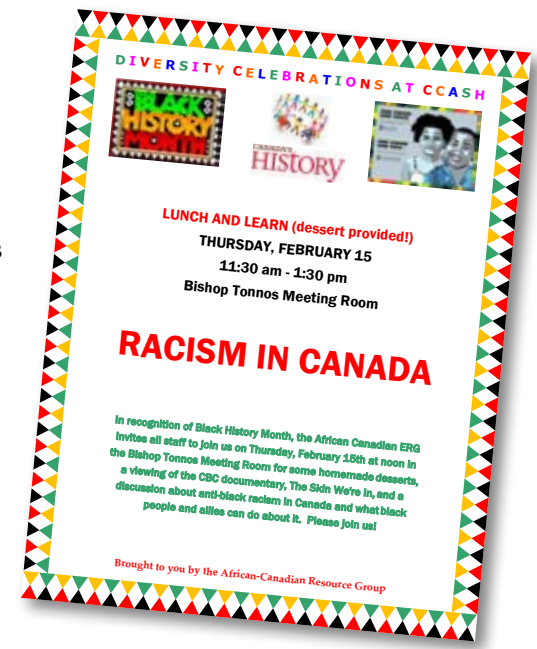
“At the end of the day, CCAS of Hamilton is a social justice organization, and in order to achieve social justice we need to include people in decisions that affect their lives,” says Rocco. “For example, LGBTQ2S+ kids have high suicide rates, and those voices can not be silenced. We have to listen to the voices of Indigenous people. We have to listen to the voices of our new Canadians, and make sure all their voices are heard.”

And the agency continues to grow. For longtime supporter Carol Larsen, it’s one way the agency shows leadership.

“I’m so proud to be a member of this organization, particularly for the efforts the agency has made to reach out to other groups,” says Carol. “The fact that we have an LGBTQ2S+ representative to reach out to out youth in that community, that we prioritize having a board member from the Indigenous community, and other outreach efforts, it says so much.”

For Rocco, the explanation is simple, and it directs back to the agency’s work as a social justice organization, and our faith.

“If we are fulfilling the values of our faith, we are doing what Christ did. We are going to those who have been rejected in the past, and we’re bringing them back into the circle,” says Rocco.





## Brighter futures through empowerment

Sometimes all a person needs to get through a difficult situation is a little strength and courage – and that's what support workers at CCAS of Hamilton, can provide. Rocco Gizzarelli, executive director of CCAS of Hamilton, recalls a situation many years ago when a family was in crisis. The violence was such a threat that Rocco felt he may also have been at risk.

"I remember working with them to the next step, and trying to convey the importance of safety," says Rocco. "I knew that empowering the mother was the most important piece to ensuring the safety of herself and her child. She heard it, but at the time I didn't think she did."

Years later, the mother got in touch. "She said, 'I just want to tell you

where I am in my life, and about the changes I made. I never really had a chance to thank you.' She called to tell me that, and about the impact we had. Those are the reasons I've stayed," he says.

Rocco says despite the agency's best efforts and excellent track record, (98 per cent of children stay safely with their families), some people still incorrectly believe that children's aid societies are punitive organizations that remove children from their homes.

"It's really about empowering families to come up with their solutions, and supporting them, so they create safety and permanence within their family system."

The agency also offers a selection of programs available to meet the needs of families. For example, the

Practising Achievable Collaboration and Efficiency (PACE) program encourages foster and birth parents to meet. By enabling relationship-building, participants often see an increase in trust and improved collaboration. Evaluation shows that children are often returned to their parent earlier.

Parents can also receive pastoral care through the CCAS of Hamilton pastoral care program. And, the eight-week Parenting with Love program, offered in partnership with Hamilton Public Health, provides parents and caregivers the skills required to practice self-compassion, care and regulation that result in positive outcomes in a healthy parent-child relationship.

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*It's really about empowering families to come up with their solutions, and supporting them, so they create their own permanence for their family.*

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## Empowering families through case planning

CCAS of Hamilton workers follow a process of case planning, which prompts them to consider what they want to achieve in working with a family, what strengths and concerns may affect their ability to achieve it, and what next steps are required.

Historically, child welfare professionals involved in a case were responsible for making all the decisions. Now, there's an increasing amount of focus on including the family in the case planning process, to achieve better overall outcomes for the family and the child.

That's in part, due to changes in legislation (the Child, Youth and Family Services Act) that includes "Katelynn's Principle," which has prompted CCAS of Hamilton and

other child welfare organizations to adopt an approach to case planning that deliberately involves the family and the child/youth in this planning process. Called "Signs of Safety," this case planning approach is recognized as a best practice around the world.

"There are many strengths in the Signs of Safety approach that help us to ensure that the voice of the child and the family are central to the case planning process," says Trevor Allen, service director with CCAS of Hamilton.

Trevor says that the core of the process is a case planning meeting that includes the worker, the family, the child (if appropriate) and a support person of the family's choosing.

## We're here to help

At the end of the day, Rocco says it's important to help families and kids get through their challenges by empowering them. He feels most satisfied when children, youth and families take ownership of getting through their challenges.

"I've had youth remember me, or clients who remember me and ask for my help navigating the system with them. In our work we can be the lighthouse for some people," says Rocco. "Sometimes all they need is assurance, and it means the world to them. We play a part, walking alongside them – not above them, not with any arrogance, but together. That's how we help them get through whatever problem is facing their family."



# Brighter futures through permanency



Ersilia DiNardo  
former Executive Director



Susan Clowes-Chisholm  
former Service Director

## Our legacy of leadership

Today, the practice of permanency planning – preparing for long-term arrangements for a child based on the child’s best interest – is commonplace among child welfare organizations in Ontario. But at the time it was expressed in the Ministry of Children and Youth Service’s Child Welfare Transformation strategic plan in 2005, CCAS of Hamilton was among the few organizations that had already implemented permanency as practice.

“Our agency always had a strong clinical bent,” says Ersilia DiNardo, former executive director of the agency. “I really feel it helped us to stand out in the work that we did.”

CCAS of Hamilton began implementing permanency planning in the mid-1990s, and the agency has had a formal policy since 1996. It was early days to be using the concepts embedded in permanency planning as a foundation for making

decisions for children. Ersilia says the clinical-based approach brought attention to the child’s age, attachment experiences and the impact of the decision on the child.

“Permanency planning really allowed us to bring the child into the picture, and sometimes it meant difficult decisions in terms of the family unit,” says Ersilia.

She notes the team worked closely with clinical consultant Dr. Paul Steinhauer, a Toronto-based child psychologist who DiNardo says wrote the seminal book on permanency planning. And despite funding cuts and other hurdles that impacted the agency during those years, leadership stayed the course on the agency’s clinical focus.

“During times of change, when there were severe financial constraints, an easy decision would have been to cut the adoption unit for example, but we maintained it,” Ersilia says. “When the provincial direction from government started to change and

focus on permanency planning, we were in a strong position because we never abandoned that work.”

Ersilia notes that it was this positioning that allowed for early implementation of kinship programming at CCAS of Hamilton. “We developed and grew many of our programs not to meet regulations, but because they were programs that would help our children,” she says.

## Permanency planning today

For Susan Clowes-Chisholm, recently retired service director from CCAS of Hamilton, permanency planning helps guide decision making for children.

“As a result of our long-term commitment to permanency planning, we are raising fewer children in foster care and we’re really proud of that as an agency,” Susan says. “Kids have a permanency plan that is best for



them, and we work toward that plan together.”

Susan notes that having fewer kids in care is due, in part, to child welfare transformations made in 2006 that introduced the concept of kinship services. Child welfare workers are now required to consider whether a child has a family member that can step forward to care for the child.

“Almost always, the permanency plan achieved for most children

is to return home. If they can’t go home, we have to find the most legally and emotionally permanent plan we can. For some children that will be adoption, for others customary care or legal custody with someone known to them. Some children and youth do stay with committed foster parents and some youth are working toward a plan of independence,” says Susan.”

## Our great responsibility

Every social worker has at least one case that stays with them. For Susan Clowes-Chisholm, it was a small boy who had been through significant hardship.

“There are other children that impacted me, but this little boy – he’s the reason I stayed in child welfare,” she says. “I don’t think there’s been a day in this job that I haven’t thought about him.”

The case was a memorable one, and it arrived early in her career. She remembers sitting in a living room with the boy and his foster mom. The expectant look on his face, saying: so what are you going to do to make my life better?

“I remember him telling me once that he was in an unsafe situation, and he basically asked me if I was so good at my job, why didn’t I come get him,” she says. “I explained that I didn’t know him then, and I didn’t know what was happening to him. If I did know, I would have come to help.”

While she’s never met that boy face-to-face as an adult, the bond stayed with her. Susan says decades later, he left something at reception addressed to her: a picture of his first baby.

“It was a privilege to watch his resilience. I worked with him to sort out where he was going to be safe, and where he was going to belong in his life. Those are huge responsibilities. What an amazing gift that is, and what an amazing responsibility.”

## Permanency planning: What the research says

The importance of lifelong connections with adults who can offer emotional support over the long term is critical. For many youth in care, leaving care is when they struggle the most – and are in the greatest need of consistency, stability, love and guidance.

In child welfare the kinds of relationships that provide this care are described by the term “permanency”.

The formal definition of permanency is “an enduring family relationship that is safe and meant to last a lifetime; offers the legal rights and social status of full family membership; the child or youth has a sense of belonging and affiliation to a family / extended family with significant community connections and provides for physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual well-being.”

### Permanency options

Child welfare recognizes that children and youth can work towards permanency through a variety of situations. In 2005 this recognition was expressed in the Ministry of Children and Youth Service’s Child Welfare transformation strategic plan. The transformation plan focused on expanding and enhancing the range of permanency options available to children and youth in care. This perspective was also endorsed by the Commission to Promote Sustainable

Child Welfare in 2012 when it stated, “We need to recognize that the best setting for a child or youth should be based on his/her needs, not on an ideological framework that promotes one level of care as “better” than another.”

Children’s Aid Societies currently consider a continuum of permanency options for children and youth in their care. The vast majority of children receiving services from Children’s Aid Societies remain with their families of origin (admission prevention). When children and youth are not able to find permanency with their families of origin because of ongoing protection concerns, Children’s Aid Societies will consider the following other permanency options: kinship service, kinship care, customary care, legal custody, adoption and transition to adulthood.

In some instances permanency also includes long-term foster care. Not all children who are in the care of a Children’s Aid Society are suited for or interested in adoption, kinship care or legal custody. For many of these children, permanency and a sense of belonging are found with their long-term foster families. These permanency options are based on the recognition that there are many paths to long-lasting relationships, and that there is no one right answer for every child.

*Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS)*



## Brighter futures through child safety

### Getting children to safety

The most difficult request Carol Larsen ever received in her role as a staff member at CCAS of Hamilton came on a Friday afternoon, just before the office was set to close for the weekend. The call was from a child protection worker who had been assigned a call. Upon arrival, the worker discovered a small girl being abused.

"I still get emotional thinking about that. I consorted with my supervisor. It was one of those horrible situations. Many tears were shed that day," Carol says.

It's not the kind of circumstance anyone wants to think about. CCAS of Hamilton staff attended more than 2,500 child protection calls in 2017 alone. While 98 per cent of children were able to remain in their own homes while receiving services in 2017, occasionally the need arises to temporarily remove children from their situation for a period.

Fortunately on that dark Friday afternoon many years ago, the

CCAS of Hamilton team was able to get help for that little girl.

"Right away I called these foster parents who did a lot of work with traumatized children," Carol says. "I reminded them this child would require a lot of their time and effort in order to heal. They didn't hesitate."

Carol has been involved with CCAS of Hamilton in one form or another since her family returned to the Hamilton area in 1987. She served two terms on the board, volunteered with fundraisers, served as a volunteer driver and in other functions. In 2001, she was approached by CCAS of Hamilton staff with an offer to work in the resource unit as a foster parent support worker.

"Working with foster parents was a wonderful fit, because I had, for a long time, admired the role of foster parents at the agency," says Carol. "To work as a support worker for them was an amazing opportunity."

Carol says part of her role as a support worker was to place the children who came into care. She would consult with children's services workers who were requesting placement, and consult with other team members to ensure they were choosing the best fit for the child and foster family.

"I can't say enough about foster parents," says Carol. "I have seen them put their lives on hold, give up vacations and work through hardships – but they continue to provide safe and nurturing homes for children."

Today, CCAS of Hamilton has nearly 80 foster homes to call on if the need arises, and a further 153 kin homes – homes of extended family and community members that take an active role in nurturing and protecting children or young people who need them, whether by supporting the children's parents, or providing care for the children themselves.



Carol Larsen (left) with one of her daughters, and grandchild, taken at the 2017 Peder Larsen Care Beyond Belief Golf Tournament.



## One foster parent's journey



As CCAS of Hamilton's longest-serving foster parent, Rita Mooney knows a thing or two about adaptability. She's

been caring for foster children in the area for more than 50 years – more children than she can count. Over the decades, in addition to her own four children (some of whom were adopted) she has cared for babies and small children, as well as older children and youth. Some stayed for a few weeks, and others for a longer period. Each one, she says, is different. And the key to success is being adaptable enough to respond to their needs.

### **"You have to have a sense of the child"**

"I fostered babies for many, many years," Rita says. "A newborn is very different than a young child. You have to get a sense of the child. Some of them need a little comforting, a hug sometimes – and for others, no way."

Rita says it's important that they see where they'll be sleeping. She often tells them a little bit about her family,

and what they can expect while they're with her. Her own children, when they were at home, were also welcoming, and would often be quite happy to show them their toys and where to play.

For older children and youth, Rita says it can be traumatic to leave their family and friends behind. They're scared, and it's important to make them feel at home. Though she makes a point of not setting rules right away, establishing a routine – such as sitting together for meals at the table – is important.

"Children are adaptable, and as a foster parent you have to be adaptable too," she says. "I just make them feel very welcome. The first night or two is very hard on them and you have to be prepared to spend some time with them. They seem to settle in eventually."

### **Everyone gets homesick**

Rita notes no matter what situation a foster child is coming from, in most cases they are sad to leave their parents, and they want to go back. For most children, the agency is working to that end as well.

"We never run the parents or the family down, and we have to appreciate that they are attached to their family," says Rita. "Children really miss their families and their neighbourhoods. They're coming from somewhere they've known to somewhere very unknown."

### **Saying goodbye**

While Rita and her husband did adopt one of her foster children, she says it was important to be realistic.

"Lots of times when we had babies that had been with us for a while, the thought went through my mind to adopt them, but we were getting older, and we decided babies needed a younger family. It's a good feeling to help a family become a family," she says.

So what's it really like when a foster child's placement is up, and it's time to say goodbye?

"I put a smile on my face and I let them go," says Rita. "It's not always the easiest thing to do, but it works. And you do miss them. But then you have another one who needs you, and it starts all over again."



### **New foster parents are always needed, especially those who can provide a safe and loving home to:**

- 0-2 year olds (and pre-schoolers up to age of 5) – CCAS requires that one parent is a stay-at-home parent for this age group
- Adolescents and teenagers (12 – 18 years old)
- Children with medical challenges
- Special needs children
- Children with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds

Visit [www.hamiltonccas.on.ca](http://www.hamiltonccas.on.ca) to find out more about how to become a foster parent.

# Brighter futures by helping children and youth to thrive

Safety and protection is the primary focus for children's aid societies, but that can't be all. Children also need opportunities to thrive – that's why CCAS of Hamilton provides a range of enrichment programs for kids in its care.

In earlier days, CCAS of Hamilton offered its own summer camp programming for youth in care, called The Great Escape. Over time, the agency refocused its resources by paying for kids to attend summer programs and camps run by other organizations that were better matched to a child's particular interests. Whether it's sports camp or art camp, kids have an opportunity to pursue what interests them most. Today, CCAS of Hamilton's summer camp program provides more than 200 registrations each summer for children in care.

**Youth Group and Youth Advisory Committee** – Every Thursday after school, the energy at 735 King Street East shifts, as current and former youth in care gather for a youth drop-in. They laugh, they learn, they eat, and they keep coming back! The camaraderie that forms during youth group often results in connections that last long after they stop attending. This is especially important for young people who are aging out of care and are in need of stable friendships and a place to seek guidance and support.

Some of these young people join the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), which meets regularly to discuss ways that CCAS of Hamilton can serve young people better. For example, YAC led a training session for foster parents about youth-related issues. Their important work with the agency ensures their voices are heard.



**Fostering Rainbow Youth (FRY)** For LGBTQ2S+ youth in the child welfare system, unique challenges may arise. The FRY program ensures these youth have a supportive and empathetic place to discuss issues and concerns, and to explore identity-related issues.

As part of its celebrations of PRIDE in June 2018, CCAS of Hamilton put together an exhibition of artwork created by youth in the FRY program, which was displayed at the agency's annual general meeting. CCAS of Hamilton is proud to be recognized in the community for its work with

LGBTQ2S+. The agency continues to encourage staff to contribute to innovative youth programming for the LGBTQ2S+ community.



Artwork created by young people in the Fostering Rainbow Youth Group.





**Tutoring** – During the school year, children and youth are provided with opportunities to work with tutors to help them build skills and confidence. Until recently, CCAS of Hamilton ran its own tutoring program, called HALO – Homework and Academic Learning Opportunities. Trained volunteers worked with children in grades one through eight to assist them with their school work.

Andrew Duong and Ylan Nguyen volunteered with the HALO program for over 10 years, and had this to say about their experience.

“I’ve seen a lot of students come in and out of the program, and I’ve witnessed students learn and grow and develop so much week after week, year after year,” says Ylan. “They inspire me with all their hard work, positive attitude and openness. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to meet so many amazing young people and to play a small part in their lives through the tutoring program.”

Adds Andrew: “Many of these students are brilliant, but due to



Andrew Duong and Ylan Nguyen volunteered with the HALO program for over 10 years.

circumstances beyond their control, they struggle in school. Sometimes it’s academic, but often, the issues are more to do with confidence. I’ve been lucky that many of the students that I’ve been paired with have shown great improvements in school. My goal was always to give them the confidence to be a little bolder in their work and try a bit more.”

We are so grateful to all the HALO volunteers who worked with our kids over the past years. And we are also grateful to the community tutoring services that are now helping our children and youth to thrive.

**Bursary and scholarship program** – Every year, through the generosity of the community, CCAS of Hamilton assists many of its youth and service recipients with financial assistance to pursue higher education or other life-enhancing activities. The bursaries and scholarships are presented as part of the annual general meeting, which gives donors and recipients an opportunity to connect.



Chinelo Yasin (right), recipient, and Ian Preyra, donor and board member, from our 2018 ceremony.

**Individual events and opportunities** – Opportunities frequently arise for youth to participate in activities and events that help them to build confidence and a strong sense of identity. For example, the agency’s African-Canadian Employee Resource Group has been active in creating opportunities for Black/ African-Canadian youth to learn more about their cultural heritage.



Leo Johnson of Empowerment Squared leading a drumming workshop in the basement of Stewart Memorial Church during Black History Month 2018. The workshop followed an engaging talk about the history of Stewart Memorial Church as a Black spiritual centre in Hamilton for close to 200 years.



# Adoption – when a family is formed

Adoption has seen big changes since 1953 when CCAS of Hamilton first opened its doors. At that time, social stigma commonly prompted unwed mothers to place their newborn babies for adoption. Today, CCAS of Hamilton is more likely to arrange adoptions for children of all ages – and adoption is one of many options that Children's Aid Societies consider when looking for lifelong connections for children in care. “We try to identify permanency for kids early on, and that can mean returning home, custody or adoption,” says Laurie Gorchinsky, adoption supervisor for CCAS of Hamilton. “Many children are placed with people known to them through their family, community or culture.”



Laurie Gorchinsky  
Adoption Supervisor

## **Families meeting needs**

For the approximately 25 to 35 adoptions completed through CCAS of Hamilton each year (26 in 2017), there is a waiting list of families at various stages in the adoption process. Regardless of whether the adopting family is known or connected to the child in some way, every family pursuing adoption is required to undergo a home a study and a nine-week training program. “We do a profile on each child that includes everything we know about them, and we look for a family that can meet identified needs and accept any identified needs,” says

Laurie. “It’s always child-focused, it’s always based on a specific child and what family can best meet those needs.”

Each child’s case history is presented to potential parents, noting everything from prenatal exposure and social history to the birth experience and family history.

Laurie says in addition to a detailed history, workers also create life books for every child, which create a simpler life story until they are old enough to read the more detailed document. The life books contain pictures of birth family members, and information about their parents’ life experiences.

“Years ago, adoption was very secretive, and adoptees may have known very little about their adoption,” she says. “More and more there is a focus on openness today. We know it’s important for children to know where they come from.”

## **On birth parents**

Laurie says workers facilitate for whatever openness they can in adoptions, whether it’s in the form of letters and pictures passed through CCAS of Hamilton, or in some cases, face-to-face contact between adopted children and their



birth parents. Birth grandparents are also sometimes given opportunities to visit.

“It can help the child consolidate all of their identity as an adopted child and a birth child together, to have some kind of openness,” she says.

In cases where birth parents are not directly involved, CCAS of Hamilton often requests adopted parents provide letters that can be picked up at the agency if they return.

“We know birth parents don’t totally ever forget, but sometimes, at the place they’re at in their lives, it’s harder to come in and ask for an update,” she says. “They might show up five years later, and if we’ve got a letter for them about how their child is doing, it means a lot to them.”

Susan Clowes-Chisholm, recently retired service director with CCAS of Hamilton, insists that in her experience, unfortunate misconceptions around birth parents are unfounded. They wish

they could do better, she says, and they genuinely wish their circumstances were different.

“In all my 30 years with the agency I haven’t met a birth parent who didn’t love their child and didn’t wish their circumstances were different,” says Susan. “Our birth parents struggle with some major disadvantages. It’s not that they don’t love their child and do not want to be their parent.”

### **A family is born**

Susan says one of biggest privileges she’s had in her career is being in the room when families are born. “I don’t think there’s anything in this job that I have loved more than watching kids and parents find each other,” says Susan.

For Laurie and her team, there are a number of special moments when they’re matching a child with a family.

“To be able to make a call to a couple who has been on our list for years, just waiting to become

parents is pretty special,” Laurie says. “It’s an honour to introduce their child to them.”

Others report it’s being in court – when the final papers are signed. Court isn’t a requirement for the adopted parents, but many attend with their child, and Laurie says some of the judges in Hamilton have developed a reputation for offering a ceremony to make the moment special.

“There are so many heartwarming moments in helping families grow,” says Laurie.

“

*It’s always child-focused, it’s always based on a specific child and what family can best meet those needs.*

”





## Our committed staff team

“

*We're intensely proud of our strong, dedicated and skilled staff.*

”

During the first year of operation, CCAS of Hamilton had only three staff members working at the agency. Today, there are 180 on the team – many who have chosen to journey with the agency for decades.

Susan Clowes-Chisholm, former service director who retired in 2018, says she knew 30 years ago, when she walked into her interview that it was a special place.

“There have been bad days, but I've always stayed because this is such a great place to work, and because of the kids I worked with,” she says. “There's something really special about this agency. You're able to do your work from a real sense of mission. One of my colleagues the other day called it ‘working from the heart’ and I think this is

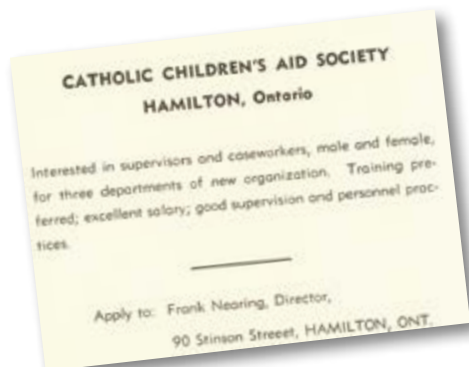
an agency where you're able to do that.”

Ersilia DiNardo, former executive director, says the agency's longstanding commitment to staff support may be among the reasons for its success around employee retention. She notes particular attention was paid to professional needs, and the impact of working in such a stressful environment.

“As a faith-based organization, we always promoted an holistic approach to the work,” says Ersilia. “Our staff are the ones carrying out the work. We focused on giving them training, professional development opportunities and paying attention to work environment and management's relationship with the union.”

CCAS of Hamilton's staff are already highly trained when they arrive on site, many with undergraduate and graduate degrees in social work. Those that are new to child protection receive provincially-standardized training that ensures they have the skills and knowledge to do the job. Ongoing training for more experienced staff includes diversity, equity and inclusion workshops, skill development opportunities, and training in the systems that support the daily work of child welfare.

“We're intensely proud of our strong, dedicated and skilled staff base, and we have a longstanding commitment to invest in their professional development,” says Rocco Gizzarelli, executive director of CCAS of Hamilton.



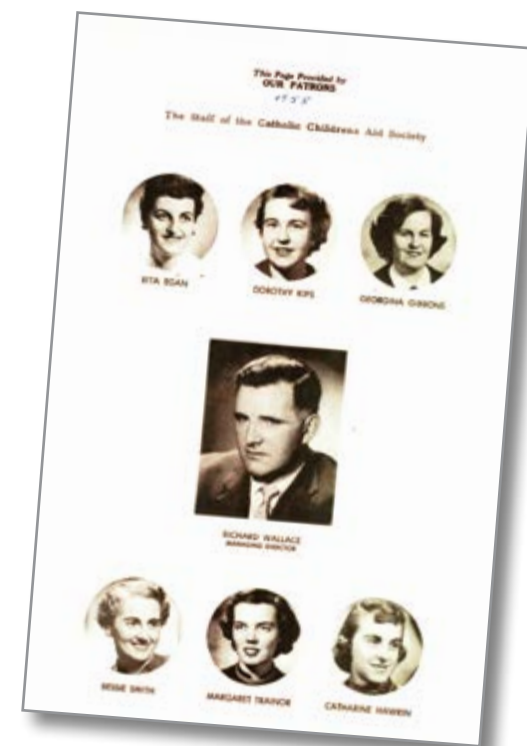


Two of the four strategic directions for the agency in its 2018-2023 strategic plan pertain directly to staff competencies and attitudes: excellence in all we do, and a passionate and prepared team.

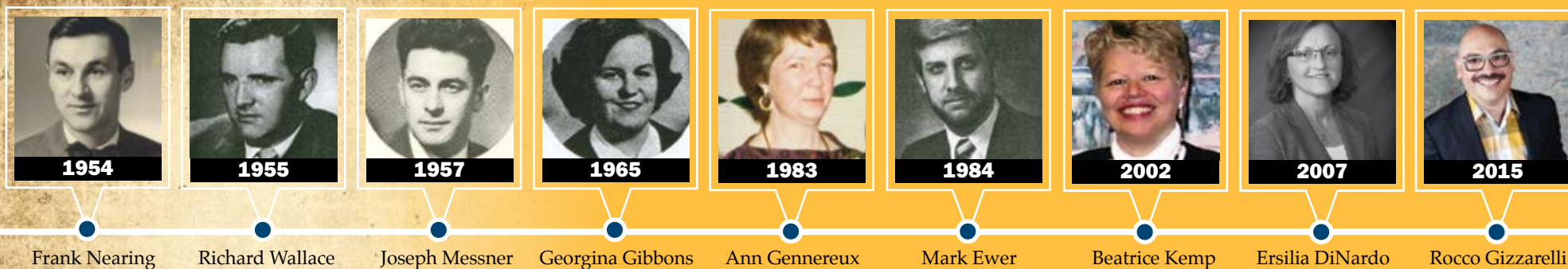
“The respect we show our staff translates directly into the respect that they show to their clients. Investing in staff is one of the best investments we can make for the good of children, youth and families in Hamilton,” Rocco says.



Receiving their 30-year service awards at the 2017 Staff Appreciation event are (left to right): Karen Armstrong, Laurie Gorchinsky, Rocco Gizzarelli, Deanne Smiley, Lillian Iwanowski.



Our sincere thanks and appreciation to CCAS of Hamilton's executive directors.



# The value of giving back



Deb and Ken Lancaster present a bursary at our 2018 Bursary Presentation event. They are pictured with Heather MacKenzie (centre), Children's Service Worker, who is receiving the bursary on the recipient's behalf.

Hamilton residents Deb and Ken Lancaster have a combined 16 years experience on the CCAS of Hamilton board between them. Ken, a partner at a Hamilton-based tax firm, joined the board in 2002 and served three three-year terms. When his terms were over his wife Deb began serving.

"We've always been involved in our parish, and being involved with children in our community is a cause that is near and dear to our hearts," says Deb. And with three boys of their own, it's been important for Deb and Ken to model volunteerism for their own children.

"Our kids saw us commit a lot of time and energy to the agency, and it's been a good thing for them to see us make volunteerism a priority," says Ken.

Deb adds that "I think there's a real need for a Catholic agency.

Faith is important. When kids and families are faced with challenges, their spiritual wellbeing needs to be addressed. If we don't address it, we're missing a key component in helping to heal that family."

## Making an impact

Highlights for Ken in his time on the board were always around hearing the impact the agency's work made on families and children, and the volunteers themselves. The annual foster parent recognition dinner and the bursary programs were particular bright spots for him.

And despite more than a decade – and-a-half associated with CCAS of Hamilton, the positive experiences keep on coming, Deb says. A recent highlight for her was in spring 2018 when she attended a youth day that was produced by and for

youth. "They talked about their experiences aging out of the agency, and the supports that are there for our youth, and I learned so much," she says. "Sometimes it can feel like these kids are so lost, but the Society gives them such hope and support. It was really interesting to hear their stories."

Deb notes that she takes a significant amount of pride in the agency's active efforts to be proactive on social issues such as the need to bring more diversity to the table.

"As a board, we have made it a priority to have everyone around the table, and have representation. That's really important," says Deb. "Different groups that might not have crossed our path 20 years ago, now we see those groups are essential to our work." The 2018 board of directors has a 50/50 gender balance, and



includes representation from the Indigenous and Francophone communities. Policies are being amended to clearly express the Board's commitment to equity and reconciliation.

### **In the driver's seat**

There are many different ways to contribute to the work of CCAS of Hamilton. But perhaps one of the most important, and yet unsung volunteer roles, is driver. Volunteer drivers logged 657,198 kilometres from 2017 to 2018, helping our children in care get to medical appointments, family visits, extracurricular activities and other important occasions.

Volunteer drivers do so much more than drive. They also listen, engage, laugh and care. The fact that they

spend time with our kids when the kids are between important activities makes them great confidants and special friends.



April Cowie (right) receiving a 30-year volunteer appreciation award from then Executive Director Ersilia DiNardo.

# History

## **The contributions of volunteers over the years**

### **1960s**

Local community service organizations showed their generosity at Christmastime in the 1960s by helping 50 families, and collecting presents for teenagers of protection clients. Local firms and organizations arranged Christmas parties. Volunteers helped in other ways too – they transported children, bought Christmas presents and helped with schoolwork.

A toy centre, operated by volunteers saw schools and organizations join together to provide toys for children of clients at Christmas. The toy centre operated like a store: volunteers were the sales clerks, the “credit card” was a voucher issued by an authorized social agency, and the parents presented their vouchers to the toy centre and from a large selection were able to pick out toys for their children.

### **1970s**

Shopping and sewing services, moving help and clothing centres were among the many volunteer contributions in the 1970s. Volunteers acted as friends to troubled adolescents, and there was even a boy's club each Friday evening for 30 young men, where they learned woodworking skills, electrical and car repairs, or played baseball.

Volunteers drove children to visit their families or to doctors, dentists and other appointments, and they babysat for children so parents could attend special groups and other programs. They provided special activities and treats for children both in care and at home or worked with abusing parents, acted as big brothers or sisters to children and assisted in the play therapy program.

### **Later years**

CCAS of Hamilton has hosted many other programs to meet the needs of our children over the years. Did you know “baby cuddler” was once an official function? Volunteers visited babies in hospitals and held them when their parents were unable to be with their newborns.

Our dedicated volunteers continue to contribute so much in many ways. Thank you!



# This is what generosity looks like

## Fundraising at its finest

It takes an army of volunteers to pull off any event, and CCAS of Hamilton has worked with the best. Thank you to the many event organizers, attendees, partner organizations and generous donors who have helped pull off some spectacular fundraisers over the last six-and-a-half decades!

## Christmas hamper program

CCAS of Hamilton's Christmas hamper and toy drive program provides assistance to families during the holidays. Donors sponsor families or teens in care that are living independently. Gifts, toys, food items and basic household staples are all welcomed donations at Christmas. Sponsored families express their gratitude for the hampers they receive and are often overwhelmed by the generosity of our sponsors.



## Remember Lobsterfest?



## The Peder Larsen Care Beyond Belief Golf Tournament

CCAS of Hamilton is proud to honour Peder Larsen in our tournament. Peder was a dedicated volunteer and past member of the CCAS of Hamilton board of directors. He was committed to making a difference in the wellbeing of vulnerable members of the Hamilton community.





Pictures from the Annual Toy Shower, 1960.



### Serendipity Auction

For 29 years, the Serendipity Auction has been CCAS of Hamilton's biggest fundraiser of the year. Thank you to the supporters who attend this fun-filled evening of great food, friendship and active bidding on fantastic auction items. All funds raised assist CCAS of Hamilton in pursuing our vision of safe and thriving children and youth, empowered families and stronger communities.

### Generosity comes in many forms

In addition to the support CCAS of Hamilton receives from individuals and corporations, it also receives government and foundation grants for specific projects. One example is the launch of the agency's French Language Service. The Ontario Trillium Foundation provided funding for CCAS of Hamilton, Children's Aid Society of Hamilton, and the Family and Children's Services Niagara to collaboratively launch a French language intake service, with a dedicated phone line. This was an important catalyst to CCAS's goal to be designated under the French Language Services Act of Ontario as an agency that provides French-language service on an active, permanent basis. CCAS of Hamilton is currently in the midst of the designation process.



**Vous vous inquiétez à propos d'un enfant ou d'une famille dans votre communauté? Y a-t-il un risque d'abus ou de négligence? Si vous ou quelqu'un que vous connaissez a besoin d'aide – s'il vous plaît téléphonez pour signaler vos inquiétudes, demander de l'information ou pour accéder à des services.**

**Les soins et la sécurité des enfants de notre communauté est une responsabilité que nous partageons tous. Il est de votre devoir de le signaler. La sécurité d'un enfant pourrait dépendre de vous.**

Pour accéder aux services en français de la protection de l'enfance dans la région de Hamilton-Niagara, appelez ce numéro désigné sans frais :

**1 855 550-3571** (Lundi au vendredi de 8 h 30 à 16 h 30)

**Vous pouvez nous rejoindre après les heures normales de bureau au :**  
 Niagara – 905 937-7731 ou 1 888 937-7731 • Hamilton CAS – 905 522-8053 • Hamilton CAS Catholique – 905 522-8053

 Family and Children's Services Niagara  
 La Société d'Aide à l'Enfance  
 Ontario Trillium Foundation  
 Hamilton Children's Aid Society



# It takes a community



Since arriving on the scene in 1953, CCAS of Hamilton has worked closely with the Catholic community, as well as other community social service agencies. During the development of its 2018-2023 Strategic Plan, CCAS of Hamilton engaged with community colleagues. The results? The agency was acknowledged for its responsiveness, innovation and collaborative approach. “We were pleased to learn our agency is seen as an important player in the strengthening of the Hamilton community,” says Rocco Gizzarelli, executive director of CCAS of Hamilton.

## Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton

One of CCAS of Hamilton’s most important community partners is the Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton, a secular child welfare organization. With a common goal of protecting children, serving families and producing positive outcomes, these two agencies share a collaborative partnership, and share services where it makes sense.

“Historically there has been a strong Roman Catholic presence in the Hamilton community,” said the late Dominic Verticchio, former Executive Director of the CAS of Hamilton. “We appreciate that families requiring protection services have the option to receive services responsive to their faith, whether it be through the provision of preventative services to maintain children in their families, or

ensuring that foster families are available to respond to the religious needs of children who need to come into care.”

CAS of Hamilton continues to support the CCAS of Hamilton in advocating for the needs of families and children who wish to have their faith recognized and express their beliefs within Catholic family systems and service structures.

“During the history of CCAS of Hamilton, our agencies have partnered on many activities from sharing annual general meeting space many years ago, to initiatives that implement effective cost saving measures such as our shared after hours emergency services program,” said Dominic. “In recent years, one of the most significant partnerships between the CCAS of Hamilton and our agency was the development and implementation of the French

Language Service Initiative, alongside the Niagara Family and Children’s Services, the French school board and French serving community organizations.”

## Community-based work

Ersilia DiNardo, former executive director of CCAS of Hamilton says the agency has maintained strong relationships with other experts in their fields by maintaining a community-based approach.

“We recognized we were experts on protection, but we weren’t experts on other challenges our families were facing, such as addictions or mental health,” she says. “We really worked in partnership with those in the community that were experts in certain areas, and that’s how we were better able to support our families.”



City Hall is lit in purple in honour of Dress Purple Day 2017.

Those existing partnerships and the community-based nature of the organization sometimes allowed CCAS of Hamilton workers to work on site with partner organizations, and helped break down barriers with families.

Today, there are a number of CCAS of Hamilton staff teams working in community settings or closely with community partners. The agency's school-based teams are located in nine schools in the Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board. Its domestic violence team works closely with other stakeholder organizations to deliver services wherever they are needed in the community. The SYNC Team (Supporting Young People and their Networks in the Community) works with other community organizations serving youth to deliver services where youth are best able to access them.



### **Building community awareness about child abuse prevention**

For many years, CCAS of Hamilton has participated annually in the provincial Child Abuse Prevention Month and Dress Purple Day campaigns to build awareness about issues relating to child abuse and the role that each person plays in keeping kids safe. Every October, the agency works with local schools and other community partners to help build knowledge about the signs of child abuse, and what to do when someone suspects that a child is in danger.

In 2017, many community partners participated in Dress Purple Day. Hamilton City Hall was lit purple. Staff dressed in purple t-shirts. And, there was great participation from Hamilton schools, including a class from St. Marguerite D'Youville Catholic Elementary School.



### **Addressing youth homelessness**

CCAS of Hamilton is particularly proud of its leadership with the Youth Housing Support Project (YHSP), an initiative that provides a range of housing supports for youth ages 16 to 25.

Youth homelessness is a major issue for the young people the agency works with. Approximately 58 per cent of homeless youth in Canada have histories of child welfare involvement. That number in Hamilton is 52 per cent. These numbers are not surprising, given how many of the children the agency serves experience childhood and/or adolescent trauma, abuse and neglect – all of which are key contributing factors to homelessness.

Since the YHSP began in April 2015, more than 800 youth have obtained and maintained safe and stable housing. Youth who have stable housing are much more likely to succeed in other areas of their lives.

YHSP is a project of the Street Youth Planning Collaborative, led by CCAS of Hamilton in partnership with the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, Good Shepherd Youth Services, Living Rock Ministries and Wesley Urban Ministries – Wesley Youth Services. This project is made possible with funding from the Government of Canada's

Homelessness Partnering Strategy is a program delivered by Employment and Social Development Canada, and administered locally by the City of Hamilton.



# Celebrating our success – 65 years and counting

CCAS of Hamilton has much to celebrate. Thank you to the friends, colleagues, clients and community members who have reached out to us with well wishes and memories from the last six-and-a-half decades. Thank you for taking the time to reflect about where we have been together. It has been a pleasure.

## **The strength of our clients**

In 2004, Debbie gave birth to her sixth child, and was apprehended due to her long-standing drug use. Hamilton Police were on a first-name basis with her.

When I met Debbie, she stood out. Determined to overcome her addiction and to be the parent she had been unable to be, she doggedly completed every task – big or small – we asked of her. She completed an extensive substance abuse program, maintained housing and a full-time job, all while meeting her son's special needs during visits.

In 2006, her hard work paid off and her son was returned to her care. In addition to remaining drug free, she set other goals to be a good parent and give back to others. She worked with Hamilton Police and spoke at high schools about the pitfalls of drugs. For the past 15 years she has worked for charitable organizations and helped those in need. She recently graduated from CMHA's Peer Support Program and is working as a recovery liaison. Her son is a typical teenager and star football player. She has reunited with most of her other children and is also a grandmother.

*– From a children's resource worker*

## **Helping children find happiness**

What constitutes a happy ending for a child in care is totally unique to that child. For example, I worked with a three-year-old girl who was brought into care and placed in a foster home that met all the girl's needs, except that there was no connection to the girl's cultural heritage. Adoption was seen as the best way to achieve permanency for this child, and so we sought an adoptive home for her where she could have a connection to her cultural heritage, and we found one!

Unfortunately, the adoption was not successful and this little girl came back into our care. She returned to her original foster family. That family so wanted her to have a stable, loving home that they adopted her, and maintained contact with the girl's birth mother to ensure that she had an ongoing connection to her cultural heritage. This little girl thrived in her adoptive home.

I think of this story whenever I need to be reminded that happy endings sometimes arise from unexpected circumstances.

*– From a children's service worker*

I took over the executive director role, following Georgina Gibbons, in 1984, and continued in this role until early retirement in 2002. This was a period of growth for CCAS of Hamilton, necessitating a move from 499 King Street East to larger quarters at 735 King Street East. This was a joint development project with Hamilton-East Kiwanis as they were interested in turning former warehousing stretching down Sanford Avenue North into low income housing while CCAS of Hamilton was to occupy the attached office structure facing King Street. This space was shared with the Catholic Youth Organization and Catholic Family Services, resulting in a bit of a "Catholic Corner," to everyone's advantage! Key issues at the time were the management of increased child abuse and neglect referrals, and the need for specialized services for children in care, despite limited funding. We endured one strike during this period, but otherwise a successful labour-management atmosphere prevailed with the support of our CUPE Local. I recall many positive relationships with staff, foster and adoptive parents and volunteers. Management promoted an inclusive and kind environment, not always evident in the fast-paced social service world. – Mark Ewer, former executive director



## Well wishes from the Bishop

Congratulations to the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton (CCAS of Hamilton) as you celebrate your 65th anniversary of "Caring Beyond Belief!" I honour your important and remarkable work of saving lives! You are there when children need extra support in their lives. Remember the past 65 years with gratitude! Celebrate the anniversary with enthusiasm! Move forward into the future with confidence! May God bless your generous and compassionate service! – Douglas Crosby, OMI



Bishop Crosby (right) is wearing a purple t-shirt as part of Dress Purple Day, our annual campaign to raise awareness about child abuse and child abuse prevention. He is pictured here with Christina Mines, director of youth ministry.

## Appreciation from a youth

This letter is regarding the financial assistance I received in the summer. I would like to sincerely thank you as well as anyone else involved for the rapid delivery of the aid.

I have struggled these past few years financially as well as other ways. I deeply appreciate the financial and emotional support I have received over the years, and just know that the work your organization is doing, while underappreciated by most of society, does make a difference.

– From a youth in care

## A former Crown Ward remembers

I think it is fantastic that The Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton is celebrating 65 years! In fact, I am kind of shocked it has only been 65 years. It is scary to think about what child welfare looked like before these agencies were put in place. As a former Crown Ward, I am thankful that I had the devotion and support of the agency when my family needed it the most. Through good times and hard times, I was reminded that I am no exception from life's rules just because my

situation seemed different to others. Today, 20 years later, I am just as thankful, but this time for the life changing opportunity to work for the agency that made it all possible. I feel honored to have such a unique view of the agency as a whole.

– From a former Crown Ward

## The value of foster parents

"Foster parents have had a great and lasting impact on my life. They have shown me that there are people out there who care about me and want to be there for me. My foster family has taught me how to include others in my life and I have learned the importance of family."

– From a foster child



## As the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton celebrates 65 years of service,

I reflect on the remarkable journey I've had with this outstanding organization. What a privilege it was to serve in a leadership role among such dedicated staff, foster parents and volunteers. Our faith based mission empowered us to serve families and children with care, compassion and hope. I think especially of the children and youth whose abilities to overcome adversity inspired us with their courage and resilience. I'm grateful for having met so many people of goodwill in the Hamilton community who shared their talents to create a better life for children and families. I thank our founding members who, despite challenges, believed that their mission was not only important, but essential. These leaders planted seeds for those of us who followed. My association with CCAS of Hamilton is a gift and I look forward to many more years of the society enriching the lives of those served and those who serve with it.

– Beatrice Kemp, former executive director



**Catholic Children's Aid  
Society of Hamilton**

735 King Street East  
Hamilton, Ontario L8M 1A1  
Telephone: 905-525-2012  
Téléphone: 1-855-550-3571  
After hours / En dehors des heures de  
travail: 905-522-8053  
[www.hamiltonccas.on.ca](http://www.hamiltonccas.on.ca)  
[@hamiltonccas](https://twitter.com/hamiltonccas)

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Children's Aid Society  
of Hamilton



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de Hamilton