

How can the community get involved?

Make a Donation

Government funding enables us to keep children and youth safe, but private sector funding helps to ensure that they thrive, and that their families receive the best support possible.

Foster, Adopt or Provide Kin Care

Although we do our best to keep children in their homes while providing support, sometimes children have to be removed from their homes for their own safety. A safe and loving temporary home can make a huge difference for a child going through a difficult time.

Volunteer

Volunteer drivers work directly with children and youth in care to meet immediate transportation needs. Event and program volunteers help us to raise funds and provide services for children and families in need.

Provide Material or Financial Support for a Family, Youth or Child

- Create a Christmas Hamper for a family or independent youth
- Contribute a bursary for post-secondary studies or training
- Send a child to summer camp

Attend an Event

Our fundraising events are a lot of fun and they raise a lot of money. Can't attend? Provide a sponsorship or donate an auction item.

Spread the Word

We're on Facebook and Twitter @hamiltonccas. Or you can sign up for our monthly e-newsletter at <http://eepurl.com/c9gww5>. You can learn more about everything we do at:

www.hamiltonccas.on.ca

CCAS of Hamilton: A Guide

OUR SHARED VISION

Safe and
thriving
children and
youth

Empowered
families

Stronger
communities



Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton

A guide for parents, caregivers and
community members

CATHOLIC CHILDREN'S AID
SOCIETY OF HAMILTON
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www.hamiltonccas.on.ca @hamiltonccas

Catholic
Children's Aid Society
of Hamilton



Société d'aide à l'enfance
catholique
de Hamilton

Our Vision

Safe and thriving children and youth

Empowered families

Stronger communities

Our Mission

Guided by Catholic values and teachings, we serve and offer bilingual (English/French) services to children, youth, and families within the Hamilton community to protect their safety and well-being, strengthen families and nurture lifelong relationships.

What we do and how we do it:

For more than 65 years, we have helped create brighter futures for children, youth, and families in Hamilton. We do that by pursuing excellence in all we do, being a passionate and prepared team, and valuing public and stakeholder confidence.



Our Values:

Success for children, youth and families

Compassion and caring for one another and the people we serve

Equity and inclusion

Shared accountability

Family, church, and community partnerships

Transparent communication and collaboration

Social justice

Our Faith:

We serve and respond to the needs of Hamilton's large Catholic population as one of a number of agencies that belong to the Hamilton Catholic Service Organizations group. We take a holistic service approach that honours the mind, body, and spirit of each person and that upholds their human rights in society.

Foster Care

We recruit, train and complete home studies for foster parents who provide out-of-home care, temporarily or long term, for children who are unable to remain with their parents. We provide ongoing support for all foster parents, through one-on-one assistance, and through a formal peer support program.

Adoption

We provide education programs, home studies, adoption placement of children, post placement counselling and support, and fulfillment of legal requirements to finalize placement of children for adoption.

Adoption Disclosure

We provide non-identifying information to adult adoptees, adoptive parents and family members of adoptees.

Community Engagement

We offer many ways for the community to get involved with the important work of keeping children safe and families thriving. There are more details on the next page about how to get involved.

We provide information about our work and about child welfare through a speakers bureau program.





What is the full range of services we offer?

Protection and Prevention

In 97% of cases, we work with families while their child remains at home, to help them build their parenting skills and to address other issues that may be interfering with parenting success. We use a strengths-based and safety-focused approach to child protection, called Signs of Safety, grounded in partnership and collaboration with families. It is recognized globally as a best practice.

Family Visiting Centre

We provide family visiting and supervised access for families of children in our care. These services are offered on-site in the Family Visiting Centre and provide an opportunity for families and children to visit in a secure environment with the guidance of professional staff who provide parenting support.

Child and Youth Development

For the youth in our care, we offer a range of programs that help them to develop life and educational skills needed to thrive as youth and adults.

These programs include a weekly drop-in, specialized support for LGBTQ2S+ youth, tutoring support, summer camp attendance, bursaries for post-secondary education and other life-enhancing opportunities.



Kinship Care

When children cannot stay with their parents, we first seek relatives or someone emotionally close to the children to provide a safe and supportive home until the children can be returned to their parents. We provide ongoing support and training for kin families.

Realities and myths about CASs



We are a children's aid society (CAS). That means that we are mandated by the government to keep children and youth safe. When we become aware of a situation where children may not be safe, we are required to investigate and, if necessary, to do what's needed to create a safe environment for those children.

There are many myths about how CASs operate. This brochure will explain what we do and how we do it.



In 97% of the cases we handle, children remain at home while we work with their parents to help them build their parenting skills.



Only in extreme cases are children separated permanently from their families. We work with parents and kin to ensure ongoing connections.



We know there are many factors that contribute to parenting struggles. We work with parents to identify and help resolve issues that get in the way.



We have an over-representation of racialized and Indigenous children in care. We are working to unlearn systemic racism and to ensure that all families are treated equitably.



How do families come to our attention?

Privacy



The saying “it takes a village to raise a child” is never more true than when we talk about protecting children. Keeping the most vulnerable members of our community safe is everyone’s responsibility.

Most of the families that we work with have come to our attention through community referrals. Sometimes, families contact us directly to request assistance when they are having difficulty meeting their child’s needs for safety and well-being.

We All Have A Duty To Report

Reporting suspected child abuse or neglect is both the right and the lawful thing to do.

- A person must personally make a report to a children’s aid society if they have reasonable grounds for suspecting:
 - Abuse or neglect;
 - Domestic violence where there is a child in the home;
 - Substance abuse by a caregiver;
 - Unaddressed mental health problems with a caregiver;
 - Abandonment of a child.
- Members of the public are responsible for reporting concerns, not for proving abuse or neglect.
- When a report is made, trained child welfare staff are able to determine the risk in each situation and to provide the kind of services and support needed to keep children safe.



We operate a staffed phone line 24/7 so that concerns can be addressed quickly. Outside of regular office hours, contact us at 905-522-8053 with any child welfare concerns.

We are required to follow the privacy rules under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017* to keep personal information of service users safe and secure. Service users have the right to know how we may use and give out their service information, and how they can access it.

The Society’s *Notice of Information Practices* will be provided to all service users to outline their rights to access and corrections, as well as our responsibilities under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, Part X*, are known. Questions or concerns about personal information may be directed to the case worker, supervisor or Privacy Lead.

If concerns remain, service users may contact the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario:

2 Bloor Street East, Suite 1400 Toronto, Ontario M4W 1A8

Phone: 416-326-3333 or 1-800-387-0073

TDD/TTY: 416-325-7539 Fax: 416-325-9195

E-mail: info@ipc.on.ca **Website:** www.ipc.on.ca





What supports are available for families during an investigation?

Families who need or want external support during an investigation have these options:

- An advocate is welcome to participate in interviews and meetings with child protection workers. An advocate can be a trusted friend, family member, teacher, social worker, etc. Advocates must have the agreement of the person they are advocating for, and they should not take over or make decisions.
- Translation services are available for anyone who is not comfortable communicating in English or French.



Ombudsman
ONTARIO
ONTARIO'S WATCHDOG • CHIEN DE GARDE DE L'ONTARIO

Not sure where to go for help or what your rights are?
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- Everyone has the right to be represented by a lawyer. However, a great deal of our work with families is done without court involvement. Legal advice and/or representation can be found by contacting Legal Aid Ontario or the Office of the Children's Lawyer.
- The Ontario Ombudsman is available to assist you and your child with any concerns you have about your interactions with a children's aid society.

What happens during a child protection investigation?



Not all calls or referrals to CCAS of Hamilton result in a child protection investigation. Some issues are better addressed through other community resources. For those situations that do require investigation, we will:

- Talk with and observe the child in question - at school, at home or another reasonable location or time. Depending on the severity of the concern, this may occur without the knowledge or consent of the parent or caregiver.
- Speak with the parents about the concerns that have been reported, and assess if there is a risk of harm to the child.
- Speak with and observe all other children in the home.
- Interview anyone alleged to have caused harm to the child, and those who may have information about the situation - including those who can verify facts and information provided by others.

A child protection worker may:

- Request access to any records about the child or the person alleged to have harmed the child.
- Arrange for any medical, psychological or psychiatric examination of the child, if necessary, to ensure immediate safety, or to establish if abuse or neglect has occurred, or is at risk of occurring.

Investigations are typically completed within 45-60 days. We try to determine if immediate services are needed to ensure a child's safety, and if ongoing services are needed to reduce the risk of abuse or neglect and/or to provide help to families. The outcome of an investigation is shared with the parents once complete.

A child protection worker does not require a warrant to enter a home to assess the safety of a child or to remove a child who may be at imminent risk. Police assistance may be requested if needed.



Who conducts an investigation and what are the possible outcomes?



Child protection investigations are conducted by child protection workers, who are authorized under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act*, according to government regulations and standards.

Child protection workers work in an environment that is closely supervised, documented, and subject to examination by the courts and input from other community experts. They have the following qualifications and expertise:

- Bachelor of Social Work, Masters of Social Work or related degrees and experience;
- In-depth, specialized training to work in child protection;
- Thorough knowledge of provincial legislation, policies and standards.

Most investigations are handled solely by staff from our agency. If there is an indication that a criminal offence may have been perpetrated against a child, we must inform the police and work with them according to established protocols for investigation.

After reviewing all information and evidence gathered during a child protection investigation, child protection workers must reach a

conclusion or decision based on that information, even if a person or party to the investigation refused to be interviewed. These decisions are based on the balance of probabilities, unlike criminal court where decisions are based “beyond a reasonable doubt”.

- “Not Verified” — This means that it is more probable than not that harm or risk of harm has NOT occurred.
- “Verified” — This means that it is more probable than not that harm or risk of harm HAS occurred.

We are required to file information regarding the investigation on a provincial child protection database.

What happens when a child has been harmed, or there is a risk of harm?

We believe that children should remain with their families, in their own homes whenever possible. In fact, 97% of our cases involve working with families while their children remain at home.

Children cannot remain in their homes when there is an immediate or extreme risk to their safety and well-being. Children are often placed in the home of a member of their extended family or person in the community who is familiar to them. Where all other avenues of intervention have been exhausted and the child still remains at risk, the child will be placed in the care of the Society.

In circumstances like this, the law allows children’s aid societies to remove children without a warrant or court order. A court hearing must be scheduled within 5 days.

Children who are removed from their homes are placed in kinship homes, foster homes or other temporary lodgings until a longer term plan of care has been developed, which must happen within 30 days.

