



We Value

Safety – Families – Relationships - Collaboration – Being Open & Willing to Change

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR THE PERIOD OF January 27th, 2021 - March 30th, 2021

The past two months have been busy and flew by very quickly. As discussed, and agreed upon in the January Board meeting, we are focusing on three priority areas and I have changed the structure of my report to align with them. We appreciated the break from Board meetings in February.

I want to begin by thanking each of the Board members and Kim for your exceptional leadership. I am deeply grateful and proud of the Board and all the ways each of you support our agency, our work and me as a leader. There are so many examples of how that happens, and I want to highlight a few of the recent ones:

- Advocacy on Bill C-6 and with MP Marilyn Gladu
- Advice and guidance on the interview process when hiring racialized and Indigenous employees.
- Apologizing for micro aggressions, sharing learning resources and then opening up a meaningful conversation about it with the Board
- Connecting with staff so they know the Board is aware of the challenges right now and letting them know they are appreciated – staff meetings, video.
- Recognizing the need to focus on a few priorities right now and providing leadership with permission and support to do so.
- Attending provincial meetings and contributing to the conversations held there.

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!



Equity & Indigenous Services

Bill C-6 work

Since our January Board meeting:

- We released a [public statement in support of Bill C-6](#) and a ban on conversion therapy – it was shared on social media and has been referenced in media reports. My thanks to Adam, Bri and Kim for their assistance in putting together the statement.
- Bri and I met with MP Gladu on January 29th to express our concerns with the petition she brought forward and the harm that it creates. During the meeting, there were clearly differing views. There was agreement that conversion therapy needs to be banned and this will likely be happening since the Bill has passed all three readings in the House without any of the changes she proposed. At our request, MP Gladu agreed to put a statement on her website affirming the identities and rights of 2SLGBTQ+ people and her support for a ban on conversion therapy.
- Following the visit with MP Gladu, she put a clarifying statement on her website and we also sent a [follow up letter](#) to her.

STATEMENT: Clarification on Bill C-6

In response to many inquiries, let me clarify my position on Bill C-6:

I vehemently oppose conversion therapy and support the LGBTQ+ community.

I support freedom of religion and speech.

—MP Marilyn Gladu

- Our gratitude to Lynn who attended a CAS Board Presidents' meeting on behalf of Kim on January 28th. During the meeting, she shared with Board Presidents from across the Province about Bill C-6 and our agency's advocacy work. We have since provided a copy of our statement to the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. I have also raised it in a provincial meeting to make my colleagues aware.

I could not be more proud & impressed by how well our Board worked together on this important issue. Thank you for the unwavering commitment to equity and inclusion.

Grant to support youth who identify as transgender.

Good news that Rebound was awarded a grant to develop a new program to provide support to

youth who identify as transgender and offer resources for their families. Our agency provided a letter of support for the proposal and are happy to see that they were successful. They hope to start the new service in May.

Black History Month

In February, we celebrated Black History Month. Our Black History Month Committee organized several ways to **Educate & Create Awareness**, **Recognize** and **Celebrate** Black History Month. Weekly quizzes were sent out, we celebrated and recognized Black Canadians on social media and the committee organized a day for staff to join on zoom for a celebration with a guest speaker. The event can be viewed here: <https://www.slcas.on.ca/sites/default/files/BHM%20Agenda.pdf>

Respecting inherent rights and jurisdiction

I am sharing this article which provides information and perspectives on inherent jurisdiction and how communities are taking different approaches.

<https://windspeaker.com/news/windspeaker-news/nations-take-different-approaches-asserting-jurisdiction-child-and-family>

Meeting with Ministry

At the request of the Ministry, we met with them to discuss our learning and recommendations when hiring Indigenous staff. My gratitude to both Sondra Gilbert (manager of Indigenous Services) and Jen Thrasher for their willingness to participate and share their experiences and observations.

Southwest Indigenous Gathering

Once a year, the child welfare agencies, the First Nations, and some of the Indigenous serving organizations in the southwest area meet to discuss a variety of topics of common interest. We met in late January and shared the most recent results of the provincial Indigenous Commitments. The Children's Aid Societies were asked to analyse and share the reasons why First Nations children are coming into care; why we going to court and our use of Jordan's Principle (is it done in consultation with the First Nations and reasons for applying). We have committed to getting this additional information and sharing with the First Nations.

Jordan's Principle

We continue to honour Jordan's life by honouring Jordan's Principle and continuing to work in consultation with the First Nations.

"Sixteen years ago today, little Jordan River Anderson passed away. His family gifted us with Jordan's Principle. Thousands of children have been helped in Jordan's name and the fight for justice continues. Today, please say a prayer for Jordan and his family."

– *Cindy Blackstock*

<https://fncaringsociety.com/jordans-principle>

Have a Heart Campaign for First Nations Children:

In February, we recognized Have a Heart Campaign:

Have a Heart Day is a child and youth-led reconciliation event that brings together caring Canadians to help ensure First Nations children have the opportunity to grow up safely at home, get a good education, be healthy, and be proud of who they are. (First Nations Caring Society)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LchiS8eQ7UM&feature=youtu.be> (with Dr. Cindy Blackstock)

Kiwanis Presentation

Thank you to Kim Godin and Adam Kilner for their support during a recent presentation I did for the Seaway Kiwanis Club. It provided an opportunity to share information about our work and the changes that we have made over the past decade. I focused on risk, racism, and relationships.

<https://www.sarniathisweek.com/news/local-news/cas-director-talks-about-agencys-priorities-past-and-future>

Social Services Network Anti-Racism Committee

The Social Services Network is a group of Executive Directors/Senior Leaders from about 30 local agencies. We meet monthly to share information, network and look for opportunities to collaborate in our service delivery. In the fall 2020, the anti-racism committee was created to make recommendations to the Social Services Network on how we can collectively take action against systemic racism. I co-chair the Committee with Andrew Bolter from Community Legal Assistance Sarnia. My thanks to Kim for her participation and advocacy on this Committee as well. There will be [a public statement](#) and media release next week about anti-racism and the work we are doing together.



Getting through the Pandemic

High Quality Service Delivery

At the corporate services committee meeting, we provided an update in a number of areas regarding our COVID planning and decisions. More details are in that Committee's report.

- We made a decision to continue as is until April 30th. Staff are primarily working from home. Front doors remain locked but the office buildings are still accessible for meetings and visits to occur.
- Virtual services have continued. Decisions about in person service are being made on a case by case basis with the staff and manager and in consultation with the First Nations where applicable.
- Two of the First Nations are in a lockdown due to increased numbers in their communities and our staff are not attending the First Nations. We continue to work in partnership with them.
- We have not made it mandatory for staff to be vaccinated. We will continue to provide good information about vaccines and encourage vaccination. 67% plan to be vaccinated and another 25% are unsure.
- We provide up to 2 hours of work time for staff to get vaccinated. We've asked staff to voluntarily report so that we will have an overall percentage of vaccination rates of staff.
- My thanks to Dr Ranade who gave a [provincial presentation on the rollout of vaccinations](#) with 1300 people in attendance. We received great feedback about his presentation and how helpful it was.
- To ensure we are in compliance with tracking self-screening we have an app that staff complete before entry to any of the buildings or conducting in person visits.

Pandemic Impact on Families

Local Radio Interview

Angie Marks (Executive Director of the Women's Interval Home and Sexual Assault Crisis Centre) and I were interviewed by Sue Storr regarding the impact that the pandemic is having on families. The link to the interview is below as well as the follow up news article that was written.

- <https://soundcloud.com/blackburnradio-sarnia/covid-19-dawn-flegel-childrens-aid-and-angie-marks-womens-interval-home>

- <https://blackburnnews.com/sarnia/sarnia-news/2021/02/02/cas-director-seeing-worst-levels-family-trauma-25-years/>

Meeting with Minister Jill Dunlop

Following the recent homicides of women in our communities, Angie Marks requested to meet with MPP Bob Bailey. Minister Jill Dunlop and several community partners were invited to participate. I attended on behalf of our agency. The important messages that were shared during this meeting:

- Further investment is needed for prevention.
- Early education in elementary school focused on healthy relationships and increased awareness of community resources is critical. Community agencies need to be included in the education of young people in schools.
- We asked for provincial and local community messaging so that people know that during the lockdown, people can leave their homes if they are experiencing any abuse or threatening situation. MPP Bob Bailey agreed to include in his social media messages and the local community TV Queens Park Report.
- Any programs to prevent domestic violence need to be sustained regardless of which government is in power.
- Partnerships and collaboration is critical across sectors and with each First Nation.
- When safety increases for women, safety increases for children.

Complex Special Needs

There are anecdotal reports across the province about concerns for children's mental health caused by and exacerbated by the pandemic – increases in the numbers of young people being seen and the intensity of need. As we know, the capacity within the children's mental health system was limited before the pandemic. The worry is now that the needs will exceed capacity by an even greater extent. There are a number of meetings occurring and advocacy happening with respect to this with different Ministries.

Changes with Youth Leaving Care

When the pandemic started, the Ministry made a change so that no young person would age out of care during the pandemic. Since then, a great deal of advocacy has occurred, including by young

people, that turning a certain age shouldn't be used as the criteria for leaving care. Instead, it should be based on the young person's readiness to leave care. The Ministry is supportive of this change and work is now underway. In the meantime, the moratorium on young people leaving care has been extended to September 30th, 2022. This is great news for young people in care and a credit to their continued advocacy.

- <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-changing-child-welfare-system-aging-out-1.5932470>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-39-metro-morning/clip/15827638-at-18-cheyanne-ratnam-foster-care-own-changes>

COVID Connection

Our children's services team has continued to work with the community and young people to provide monthly COVID connection packages to young people on Continued Care & Supports. The feedback from the young people about this supportive initiative has been really positive.



Strategic Planning

The strategic planning team has been setting up as many meetings as possible to get input and hear experiences from different perspectives. They have also been collaborating [with HairStory](#) to facilitate some sessions with Black young people.

Gabe will be joining the March Board meeting to provide an update.



STAFF WELLNESS

We continue to pay attention to staff wellness and ways to support our staff. We are aware that some staff are struggling. Despite the challenges, staff continue to provide excellent service to children, youth and families. We provided all staff with an additional day off which provided a four day weekend for them in February. Our thanks to the After Hours team who covered the service. We received positive feedback about the day off and how helpful it was for them.

The Getting Better Together Committee

This Committee has continued to support staff wellness throughout the pandemic. During the Board meeting, they will provide an overview of what has been offered to staff.

Staff Recognition Event – Years of Service

We missed not getting together to cook a pancake breakfast in the wee early hours of the morning. Although it was not the same, we did gather on a zoom call with fun activities to start the morning followed by the [celebrations of staff reaching service milestones](#). Kelly Lane, our children's services manager who just retired this month was honoured for her 30 years of service. We hired a company to spend a fun hour with us (<https://www.fundamentalsofplay.ca/>) which we ended with a music video with Ryan's favourite song. Thank you to the Board members who were able to join us.

Check it out here: <https://vimeo.com/517289658/87c5dfd7c9>

#TrulyDedicated Campaign

The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies in partnership with the Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies of Ontario and the Child Welfare League of Canada, launched [#TrulyDedicated](#) / [#Vraimentdévoués](#), a campaign to thank child welfare staff for their commitment and care throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. For the remainder of the month of March, there will be a spotlight on showing appreciation to child welfare staff. The links below will take you to Yvette Uwitonze, a protection worker, who was highlighted and Minister Jill Dunlop who shared a video on her Twitter account. The provincial COVID Task Force also put out a video of appreciation.

- <http://www.oacas.org/2021/03/trulydedicated-yvette-uwitonze/>

-
- <https://twitter.com/JillDunlop1/status/1369333052615311362>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByoGrdgk2uw>

**DAWN FLEGEL, M.S.W., R.S.W
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.**