

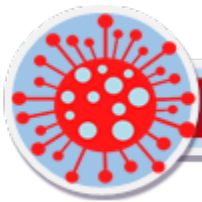


### We Value

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

## REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR THE PERIOD OF February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2020 - June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020

After a three month pause on the completion of my monthly written Board reports due to the pandemic, I am completing this one to reflect the past four months and bring things up to date before the start of summer. I want to start off by saying how deeply grateful I am to have a competent, knowledgeable and supportive Board of Directors during these unprecedented times. I am just as appreciative to the management team and staff for figuring out how to build something as its being built.



## COVID-19

### Pandemic Overview

Like everyone else, the past four months have caused us to make very quick changes in almost every part of our service delivery with limited information and many unknowns about the future. I am pleased to report that we have navigated the bumpy waters well and are looking ahead to the horizon to anticipate what may be coming. The Board has been kept up to date through the Committees and Board meetings, however, the summary below provides an overview all in one spot of the extent of the work and changes thus far. The changes in our service response were done in consultation with the local three First Nations.

I also want to acknowledge that the pandemic has greatly exposed the pre-existing inequities and has differentially impacted particularly Indigenous and Black people. This is because of the ongoing systemic racism and resulting impacts. The killing of George Floyd, the worldwide protests and demands for justice are taking place within the context of the pandemic experience.

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## Service Delivery

We quickly implemented a Face to Face team which had 4 teams of 4 staff each who volunteered to provide in person visits in urgent and emergency situations. Each team was responsible for providing a response as needed 24 hours a day 7 days a week. The remainder of our service was provided virtually using technology based on the comfort and choice of the people we serve. This was in place for two months from March 26<sup>th</sup> until May 27<sup>th</sup>.

On May 28<sup>th</sup>, we expanded our in person visits beyond just urgent and emergency situations. It was clear that some young people and families required in person visits to adequately meet their needs. We also wanted to avoid families/young people experiencing a crisis or emergency because they hadn't been seen in person. The expansion of in person visits has gone well with staff from every department coming forward and agreeing to see people. Visits can be outside, in the community, or in people's homes. It depends on the circumstances and the discussions with the family and First Nations where applicable.

In the beginning, most access visits between families and children were put on hold. We have continued to resume access working through the logistics and interests and health of all the people involved. This has been a difficult issue provincially with all agencies wanting access for children to occur and balancing the public health concerns and recommendations. Consultation with First Nations has also been very important given the unique considerations and impacts on the communities.

Other service changes included:

- Discontinued the use of volunteer drivers
  - Health screening questions prior to any in person contact
  - Learning how to engage with families and children while using PPE
  - Offering face coverings/masks to families and children
  - Offering PPE to First Nations staff if they didn't have any and requested it
  - Delivering food baskets to families and young people
  - Delivering activities to young people in care
  - Moratorium on aging out of care – the timeline for this has been extended by the Ministry to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020
  - Tracking call volumes and in person visits for comparison and to help inform future service provision
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## Technology

- We have nearly all staff working from home with the necessary equipment and technology.
- We provided iPhones and data plans to families and young people who needed them so we could continue service provision through technology. Families and young people from the First Nations were prioritized.

## HR

- We have worked closely with the Union throughout the pandemic and relied upon the positive working relationship we had previously.
- A Letter of Understanding was added to the Collective Agreement providing some flexibility in the carryover of vacation.
- The Earned Days Off program was suspended from March until July 6th in co-operation with the Union.
- We have relied upon staff who volunteer to do in person visits and this has worked out very well thus far. Staff who are not doing in person visits can be assigned other work.
- Pandemic pay was provided to the staff who participated on the Face to Face team for the first two months of the pandemic. We are still waiting for clarification from the Ministry about the \$4 pandemic pay covered by the government and what staff would be potentially receive this according to the government requirements.
- We invited Dr. Shetty to attend a staff meeting to provide local information about COVID-19 which was very helpful and appreciated.

## Buildings & Agency Vehicles

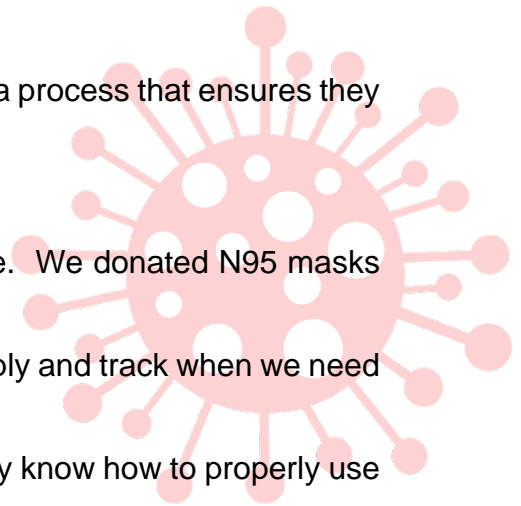
- Although we have continued to provide service since the pandemic began, we closed our buildings to the public in March when staff were required to begin working from home. We are planning to re-open the buildings in September corresponding with when schools may re-open. We are in the process of completing an assessment and planning – everything from office configurations to ensure physical distancing to cleaning and disinfecting. Given our space limitations, we will likely have a combination of a reduced number of staff working in the building and some staff continuing to work from home. Planning will also be contingent upon the COVID spread in the community and public health recommendations. We have access to and have been using any provincial

documents that come out related to this.

- Agency vehicles are still being used by staff. We have a process that ensures they are properly cleaned and disinfected after each use.

### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- We quickly sourced enough PPE for staff and to share. We donated N95 masks that we had to the hospital.
- We complete required weekly surveys on our PPE supply and track when we need to order more.
- All staff have been required to take PPE training so they know how to properly use it.



### Budget Impact

- The pandemic will have an impact on our budget and we have anticipated as best we can with the information we currently have. The Board has approved the internal budget which will be reviewed once we receive this year's Ministry funding allocation. We anticipate cost savings in areas like mileage and travel and more spending in areas like PPE, technology and cleaning/disinfecting. We have submitted an application to the Ministry to cover some of the additional costs and have not heard back yet.

### Connections and Relationships

As we know, the entire world is experiencing this pandemic and we are learning together. Consistent with our approach pre-COVID, we have remained connected to community partners and regional and provincial work. Examples include:

- Provincial COVID Task Force co-chaired by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) and the Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO). The purpose of the task force is to provide quick guidance and decision making to both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous child welfare agencies. We have been meeting twice a week and just recently changed to once a week. The Assistant Deputy Minister David Remington and some of his key staff have also participated in the meetings which provided excellent communication and dialogue and quick problem solving on issues as they arose.
- We've participated in various work groups that reported in to the task force including PPE, residential care, phases of the pandemic, engagement of governors and foster care recruitment.



- Sarnia-Lambton Social Service Network (SSN) has continued to meet monthly. We have also participated on a number of SSN work groups – reintegration back to the workplace; summer camps; leadership & planning; abuse during the pandemic.
- The Indigenous Working Group has continued to meet and check in, flag any issues and quickly resolve them.
- Regular consultation with Lambton Public Health.
- Participation in a Webinar hosted by ANCFSAO on supporting FNIM families during the pandemic.

### Ministry Feedback and Modernization

- Both ADM Remington and Minister Dunlop have provided positive feedback regarding the child welfare sector's response to the pandemic. We are viewed as having best practices and being innovative. Some of them are connected to the work on modernization and will impact it (i.e. high level of communication; quick decision making and guidance; working collaboratively). There will be a process where we will mutually identify what has worked better during the pandemic that we want to keep after it's over (which we can remind ourselves will happen at some point!).
- The modernization table was called back and we have met twice to provide further input.

### Looking Ahead

- As we look ahead, we are aware that we will need to continue to keep up to date and make changes as things emerge. While we intend to re-open the buildings in September, if there is a surge in COVID numbers that will change our plans. Post pandemic, there will be things that we will want to keep because we learned that they worked better for children, youth and families. The entire COVID experience has been one of continuous learning, action, reflection and change.



## Chasing Zero

We are chasing having all children and youth growing up safe with families. It is at the heart of everything we do. Success Marker: Zero children & youth growing up in

care by 2020.

We continue to focus on Chasing Zero and ensuring children and youth are growing up safe with families. We are making progress. This year's Ministry Review of children in Extended Society Care had the lowest number of children that any of us can remember – 6. The other important thing to note is that no Indigenous children or youth were part of the review this year.

We track the children and youth when we are worried they may be at risk for growing up in care. They are reviewed regularly during permanency meetings or in meetings with their First Nation. They are also brought to the attention of the Directors. Indigenous children and Black children are over-represented and we are trying to better understand why and develop plans so they do not grow up in care.



## All at the Table

There is a place for everyone at our table. No one person or group sits at the head. People of all ages, abilities, backgrounds, races, cultures, genders and sexual orientations are welcome to pull up a chair and have their voices help shape our services and decisions. Success Markers: Family involvement in case conferences increases by 10% a year beginning in 2016. Families have a way of telling us if our services were helpful and why.

We have paid attention to the killing of George Floyd and the events that have transpired since. We acknowledge systemic racism, anti Black and anti Indigenous racism and have been working to change it. Thank you to Ryan Bell for co-signing a [public statement](#) with me on behalf of the agency.

We are aware of the impact on Black children, youth and families we serve and Black staff. We reached out to Black children in care to ensure they were provided with support that they might need and to provide their white caregivers with necessary resources. OACAS organized an all Black staff meeting to provide support and solidarity and we encouraged all Black staff in our agency to attend. The meeting was described as powerful and unifying, particularly for people in agencies where there are very few Black staff. OACAS intends to hold quarterly meetings for Black staff across the province.

We have spent time reflecting on the equity work in the agency. Through the daily emails to staff, we have been able to frequently share resources, articles and videos to encourage everyone to continue learning and actively working to disrupt white supremacy

and racism. Updates on our equity plan will be on the Board agenda for June.

The Board received equity training from Jean Samuel in February and has the Board equity plan still to complete. It was delayed due to the pandemic. Jean Samuel has since left OACAS and is doing consultation and training in her own business. We wish her well with that transition and hope that we have the opportunity to work with her again.



There was a CAS Board President's Webinar in June about anti-Black racism. Presidents from across the province shared what they have been doing with their Boards. There were 5 action items shared for Boards to consider. These came from the One Vision One Voice project:

1. Having an equity statement in every agency that includes anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous racism
2. Ensuring each Board has good race based data – possible discussion here about what data, unique considerations in gathering and using FNIM data, what's working, how to get the data from all agencies & some of the challenges etc.
3. Ensuring each Board is reflective of the people who are served
4. Ensuring the Board is hiring EDs/CEOs who reflect the people who are served – how are they are going to do this as a sector given that they all make individual Board decisions about who they hire? What would need to change for a more system wide approach to this?
5. Linking the ED/CEO performance to equity work and anti-racist work – how are Boards measuring this? Are they considering it a core competency?

Jen Dam has been working on the agency's policies and has been paying particular attention to any systemic oppression that may be unintentionally in our policies and procedures. She will be including young people as part of the process this time to get their input and feedback. In the fall, we hope to have these policies come forward to the full Board for review and approval. We have been doing them in partnership with Chatham CAS with the ideal end goal of having one set of policies for both agencies.

June is PRIDE month and we welcomed Crystal Fach to the June staff meeting where she provided an [overview of the history and origins of PRIDE](#). It was helpful to hear the Canadian and Sarnia information and context. To recognize PRIDE, we also shared posts on social media and included information to staff in an all staff email.



## Journey Beside

We will continue to work beside our First Nation partners to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of their children and youth. We commit to learning from one another and sharing our agency's resources to support First Nations children, youth and families. Success Marker – a minimum of 80% of staff, foster parents, Board members and volunteers have participated in at least one local training or [learning opportunity](#) per year regarding Indigenous People.



Leading up to National Indigenous Peoples Day/Solidarity Day on June 21<sup>st</sup> we celebrated by recognizing the work of several Indigenous film writers and directors and sharing their work. These films were shared agency wide and on our agency Facebook page. We also let people know about local and provincial virtual gatherings and celebrations. If you missed out on some of the films they can be accessed using the links provided below:



- [The People of the Kattawapiskat River – Alanis Obomsawin](#)
- [Four Faces of the Moon – Amanda Strong](#)
- [First Stories – Two Spirited – Sharon A. Desjarlais](#)
- [Foster Child – Gil Cardinal](#)
- [Nimmikaage \(She Dances for People\) – Michelle Latimer](#)
- [We Can't Make the Same Mistake Twice – Alanis Obomsawin](#)

I am very pleased to report that we achieved the success marker for the final year of the strategic plan where at least 80% of all staff, foster parents, Board members and volunteers participated in at least one local training or learning opportunity.

Indigenous Cultural Training with Daniel Deleary occurred in June and there were 131 participants including staff, foster parents, volunteers, Board members, community partners and other CAS's.



## Our Stories

By sharing our heartfelt stories, challenges and the changes we are making, we can better educate our community about the valuable work we do with children, youth and families. Success Marker: We have an annual communication plan that provides the public with more information about the work we do.

The foster care recruitment campaign continues – The first round of information nights resulted in several families going through virtual PRIDE training. [Blackburn News posted an article](#) recently about the campaign, had the campaign on the radio stations' hourly news reports and the responses have led us to hold another information night on June 29<sup>th</sup> at 6pm. There are 24 individuals registered to attend. We've also been intentional in seeking more diversity among foster parents so we can better meet the identity needs of children/youth in care. If you or someone you know would like to support the campaign please forward a photo to Nicole for a social media post.



The Social Service Network took out a [full page ad in the Sarnia Journal paper](#) letting people know that we are collectively still providing services during the pandemic. We participated in the ad.

We also participated in the provincial #HeretoHelp campaign that was created by OACAS in partnership with other sectors. The video can be [viewed here](#) and below are samples of our local social media posts. The intention was to provide a consistent message that we are open and we are here to help during the pandemic.



Angie Marks is the Executive Director of the Women's Interval Home and the Sexual Assault Crisis Centre. She and I participated in 2 interviews together about our services during the pandemic and some of the worries and needs related to abuse – the Dave Burrows Show and with Sue Storr on Blackburn CHOK. - [Article](#)

I also did radio interviews with the two other stations – 99.9 the Fox and K106.3 regarding our agency's service delivery during the pandemic.





## My Circle

Each of us has the responsibility to ask ourselves “What role do I play in helping us meet our goals?” and “How am I committing myself to our mission?” This is your circle. Success Marker: everyone has a personal goal that helps us achieve our strategic goals.

We have achieved our success marker in this area. Here are a couple of circles:

“To provide support to our employees and community in a respectful manner while employing empathy and inclusivity.”

- Elizabeth Barnfield

“To actively promote and practice the plan No Child will be Raised in Care. Hence I will encourage & advocate with workers to explore other options and consider permanency planning for all children right from the start.”

-Leena Singh



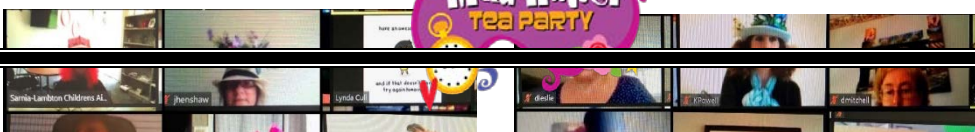
## Getting Better Together

Wellness in the workplace continues as a priority for our agency and we have made progress.

The Guarding Minds Survey was completed for the third year in a row and the results have been reviewed with the Corporate Services Committee, the management team, and staff. It is good news that we have improved significantly over the past 3 years and there are no significant areas of concern. We will continue to use the information from the survey to help us make further workplace improvements.

There have been a variety of initiatives and creativity to keep people's spirits up while working from home during the pandemic. Examples include:

- The Getting Better Together Committee sending out emails and helpful wellness information.
- The Social Committee organized and delivered Giresi's pizza kits to all staff and have set up surprise draws for baskets June, July & August.
- Our staff meetings have gone virtual. We had a sunglasses theme for one and two staff organized a Mad Hatter Tea Party for another.
- A joke of the week sent out by one of our staff. This week's gem:
  - **What's the difference between Santa Claus and a dog?**
    - **Santa Claus wears a suit and a dog just pants!**



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Finally, I would like to send my best wishes to each of you over the summer and my hopes that you and your families are all doing well. In one of my emails to staff, I sent this passage out. It was forwarded to me by one of our managers and we received positive comments about how helpful it was in providing perspective. I will end my monthly report with it

## **WE ARE NOT IN THE SAME BOAT...**

*I heard that we are all in the same boat, but it's not like that. We are in the same storm, but not in the same boat. Your ship could be shipwrecked and mine might not be. Or vice versa.*

*For some, quarantine is optimal. A moment of reflection, of re-connection, easy in flip flops, with a cocktail or coffee. For others, this is a desperate financial & family crisis.*

*For some that live alone, they're facing endless loneliness. While for others it is peace, rest & time with their mother, father, sons & daughters.*

*With the \$600 weekly increase in unemployment some are bringing in more money to their households than when they were working. Others are working more hours for less money, due to pay cuts or loss in sales.*

*Some families of 4 just received \$3400 from the stimulus, while other families of 4 saw \$0.*

*Some were concerned about getting a certain candy for Easter, while others were concerned if there would be enough bread, milk and eggs for the weekend.*

*Some want to go back to work because they don't qualify for unemployment, and are running out of money. Others want to kill those who break the quarantine.*

*Some are home spending 2-3 hours/day helping their child with online schooling, while others are spending 2-3 hours/day to educate their children, on top of a 10-12 hour workday.*

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*Some have experienced the near death of the virus, some have already lost someone from it, and some are not sure if their loved ones are going to make it. Others don't believe this is a big deal.*

*Some have faith in God and expect miracles during this 2020. Others say the worst is yet to come.*

*So, friends, we are NOT in the same boat. We are going through a time when our perceptions and needs are different.*

*Each of us will emerge, in our own way, from this storm. It is very important to see beyond what is seen at first glance. Not just looking, actually seeing.*

*We are all on different ships during this storm experiencing a very different journey.*

Unknown author

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**Submitted by:  
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