



# Annual Report

## 2022-2023



# Table of Contents

2	<b>FACS Board of Directors</b>
3	<b>Message from the Board President &amp; the Chief Executive Officer</b>
5	<b>Who we are, what we do</b>
6	<b>Providing Child Welfare Services to Strengthen Families</b>
7	<b>Home for the Holidays</b>
9	<b>Pizza and Permanency</b>
10	<b>By the Numbers</b>
11	<b>FACS Niagara Foundation</b>
13	<b>Financial Highlights</b>



# FACS Niagara Board of Directors

*Thank You*

Our FACS Niagara Board of Directors plays a critical role in ensuring our efforts reflect and support the needs of children, youth, and families across Niagara.

In addition to providing governance, strategic planning and stewardship, the FACS Board of Directors works to help the agency meet its mission, vision, and values by providing guidance, building and strengthening relationships with community partners, and supporting the dedicated team at FACS.

## 2022-2023 Board of Directors

Brian Minard, President

Brian Eckhardt

David Willer, Vice-President

Jay Gemmell

Shaun Adams, Treasurer

Rod Hollick

Betty-Lou Souter, Secretary

Lynda Hughes

Dr. Karim Ali

Wendy Sturgeon

Jessica Dolinski

Sean Worthington

A message from the

# & Board President Chief Executive Officer

**It is difficult to overstate the importance of home.** Home should be a shelter, a sanctuary, and a place of safety. Home comes in different forms. It is both a physical location and it is a feeling. Home can be any place where we feel safe and loved. It is a place where we can shut out the noise of the outside world and focus on the people and things that matter most.

After three pandemic years, we are finally returning to in-person events and have held homecomings of sorts for the people that we have missed so much. During the pandemic, we found creative ways to maintain connections, but nothing can compare to being face-to-face with the young people we serve.

Each year, FACS Niagara brings our youth and their families together for our Home for the Holidays events. These events are opportunities for us to celebrate our youth, for them to come together with others with shared experiences, enjoy a meal, laughs, and gifts. It is significant to the team at FACS because we get to serve youth dinner, check in, catch up, and see if there's anything we can do to help them as they launch their lives and establish their own homes.

Our first in-person home for the holidays event was held before the 2022 winter break and it could not have come at a better time. The excitement on the faces of both our staff and our youth was apparent. Many youth feel these events are so important because they would not otherwise have a holiday celebration. Since then, we have also had the opportunity to bring our youth back together for a Family Day celebration and most recently in the spring.

Through the pages of this report, you'll find examples of how Family and Children's Services Niagara supports the concept of home for those we serve. We invite you to read more about our Home for the Holidays events on page 9 and one example of how we supported the creation of a new home arrangement through adoption on page 10.

Primarily, we work to keep families strong through early intervention and support. This is work our entire team is focused on. **More than 95% of the families we serve receive supports in their own homes and the family unit remains intact.** Everyone needs help at times, and we work to provide culturally appropriate supports that meet each family's unique needs. We provide funding for emergency needs, counseling, and parenting assistance, and support to kin families caring for children.

When children do come into care, our dedicated foster families provide loving homes on a temporary basis while we support the primary family with the goal of a successful reunification.

Our agency has a strong track record of creating those positive outcomes. More than 75% of the time, children return home to their families or communities in less than three months. We are grateful to our incredible foster parents who regularly go above and beyond for Niagara's children and youth.

We are driving much needed change in child welfare by working collaboratively with Indigenous advocates from our Indigenous partner agencies in Niagara. Together with our partners, we support loving, safe homes connected to Indigenous culture and traditional ways of knowing. The work of this team, and the leadership from local Indigenous communities is focused on admission prevention, reducing the number of Indigenous children in care, and keeping Indigenous children connected to their community and culture.

In its second year of operations, the Unity Team has continued to change the way in which child welfare relates to Indigenous peoples. The work of this team is reducing the number of self-identified Indigenous children in care by a total of 44 since January of 2020. This represents a reduction in the percentage of Indigenous children in care by more than 5% since 2020. This is accomplished through reunification, kinship service, and returning children to their home communities.

We recognize the need for this work to expand beyond Indigenous communities. We know that Black communities across Ontario are also disproportionately involved with child welfare. This is a crucial aspect of our agency's ongoing equity journey. We have dedicated ourselves to dismantling all systemic barriers, eliminating bias, and ensuring everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

In short, we wish to create a place where everyone - our team, our children and youth, our foster families, volunteers, donors, and community all feel at home at Family and Children's Services Niagara.

Thank you to our entire team, our volunteers, foster families, supporters, and community for joining us in our mission to protect, support, and strengthen the lives of children, youth, adults, and families in Niagara. We look forward to our continued work together.

Sincerely,



*Brian Minard*  
President of the Board



*Anna Bozza*  
Chief Executive Officer





# Who We Are: Our Mission Vision & Values

**Our Mission:** To protect, support and strengthen the lives of children, youth, adults and families.

**Our Vision:**

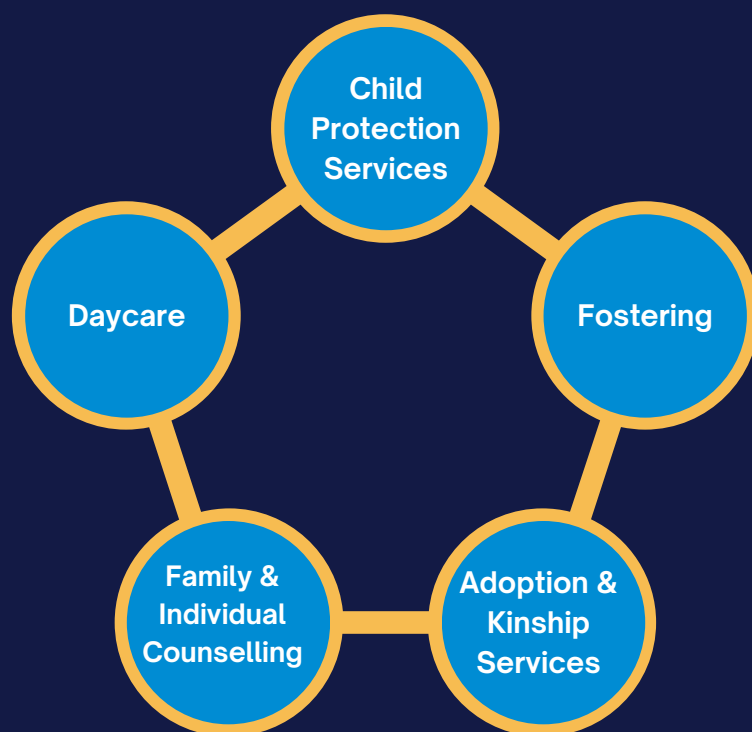
A community where children, youth, adults and families achieve their full potential in a safe environment.

**Our Values:**

**We Are Caring, Respectful,  
Collaborative, Accountable,  
And we Act With Integrity.**



## What We Do



# Providing Child Welfare Services to Strengthen Families



Referrals related to  
children in need of protection

**6,504**

Unique number of families  
served (investigation and ongoing)

**3,550**

**FACS**  
**NIAGARA**

OUR MISSION: To protect, support and strengthen  
the lives of children, youth, adults and families.

OUR VISION: A community where children, youth, adults and  
families achieve their full potential in a safe environment.



Total number of youth served  
18 years and older who  
returned to FACS for services

**24**

Child protection  
investigations conducted

**3,142**



Families receiving ongoing services  
and support at any one time

**600+**

Children and  
youth served

**6,537**

Children in care  
(monthly average)

**437**



# Home for the Holidays

Sharing holiday cheer with youth served by FACS

**Sharing food together and memory are forever linked.** Sometimes, just the smell of a delicious meal triggers the areas of our brains that bring us back to specific times in our lives. This is particularly true around the holidays, when the sights, smells, and tastes of the event brings vivid memories of comfort and closeness.

For some children and youth supported by FACS, that closeness has come from opportunities to get together with others with shared experiences. For years, FACS Niagara has been welcoming children and youth to enjoy holiday celebrations with one another, their workers, and other members of the FACS team.



*Celebrating Home for the Holidays together*

“We started the **Home for the Holidays Program** to ensure the youth we serve have the experience of getting together with those who care about them,” said Anna Bozza, FACS Niagara Chief Executive Officer. “Everyone at FACS looks forward to these events, and having the opportunity to serve dinner to our youth is a highlight that helps reinforce why we’ve dedicated our careers to the wellbeing of young people.”

The Home for the Holidays program brings children and youth who have been in-care together for a holiday meal, gifts, and camaraderie, five-times-a-year. Celebrations occur for Thanksgiving, the winter holidays, Family Day, spring break, and Canada Day.

**"So, you're coming together and it feels like family. It's nice for people like us who just want to have a sense of home."**

“Before I was married and had my own children, I didn't have anyone to spend the holidays with. It's nice here because we're with others in similar situations. **So, you're coming together and it feels like family. It's nice for people like us who just want to have a sense of home,**” said Chauntelle, a young woman who has received support from FACS.



Barb Kovacs, a Youth Worker, said the events are so meaningful because they have known many of the youth from a very early stage in their lives. “I love these events because it gives us an opportunity to be a part of their lives and for them to know that we continue to care very much about them and what they're going through. We check in and see if they need anything or if there's anything we can do to help,” she said.

The Home for the Holidays events are supported by the generous donors who contribute to the FACS Foundation. And it is hard to overstate the importance of these events in the lives of these inspiring young people.

“I became a Crown Ward at 15. It doesn't matter what kind of walk you come from, what happened in your childhood. You're included. **They make you feel welcome as soon as you walk in the front door. That's probably the best part. You're always welcome no matter what,**” said Shay, a young woman who has been attending Home for the Holidays events for a number of years.

**"They make you feel welcome as soon as you walk in the front door. That's probably the best part. You're always welcome no matter what."**



# Pizza and Permanency

Charlotte's homecoming story is nearly 40 years in the making.

Growing up, Charlotte and her siblings experienced an unstable home situation and found themselves moving in and out of foster care. At 15 years old, she decided to begin the transition to independence and left her biological home.

Knowing that she needed an income to support herself, she applied for a job with a local pizzeria. Little did she know, she would be getting much more than a pay cheque. That's where she met Albert DiGirolamo, owner of the Pizza Company, which began a lifechanging journey for both Charlotte and Albert.

"I believed in myself that I wanted better, and I was going to achieve it. It just was difficult," said Charlotte. "And when I had someone who actually believed in me, it changed everything for me."



"All of us want to feel like we're home. We all just want that."

*Albert and Charlotte*

Albert and Charlotte worked closely together at the Pizza Company, but over time, the relationship began to change. Charlotte began to regard Albert as a father figure in her life. "These things don't happen overnight. We built a relationship over time," said Albert.

"There's nothing I can think of that my Dad (Albert) hasn't been there for. I've been very lucky. My kids are very lucky. He taught me how to drive, helped me buy my first house, walked me down the aisle at my wedding, held my children when they were born," said Charlotte.

At 38 years old, Charlotte felt the time was right to honour Albert with his proper title of Dad. "We felt like it was the logical step to go for the adoption and make it official, because the piece of paper matters," added Charlotte.

Beaming like any proud father would, Albert said, "I've got myself a daughter and she's the best daughter that any man could ever ask for." The two understand that some people may have questions about why Charlotte would want to go through the adoption process at 39 years of age.

FACS Service Director Bernadine Qua said these stories evolve out of genuine connections between adoptive parents and children. "You just fall in love with them, and you want to provide them with that permanence and family structure to belong to," said Bernadine. **"I think all of us want to feel like we're home. We all just want that.** And I feel home. I feel like I have that person for me," said Charlotte.

# FACS Niagara By the Numbers



**95%**

Children served in  
their own homes



**26**

Completed  
adoptions



**172**

New Outlooks &  
Beginnings  
(Youth under 18)



Resources  
consultants  
supported:

**125**

Children



Childcare Programs  
Supported:

**38** children at Bunting

**67** children at Western Hill

Foster Kin  
Support  
Services:  
**31**  
Families

Partner Assault  
Response:  
**42**  
Clients

Adult Protective  
Services:  
**222**  
Clients

United Way  
Funded  
Programs



Child Advocacy:  
403 Sessions



Fee Subsidy:  
779 Sessions



Walk-In:  
113 Sessions

Scheduled  
Counselling  
Sessions:  
**5221**

**Family  
Counselling  
Centre**

Violence Against  
Women:  
**545**  
Sessions

Caring Dads:  
**41**  
Families

Family Group  
Counselling:  
**30**  
Conferences

Child Witness:  
**59**  
Unique Clients



# How Sweet It Is!

**Summer camp is a tremendously enriching opportunity for young people.** It promotes social, emotional, and physical growth. At a cost of \$250 for a weeklong day camp, or \$1,000 for a weeklong overnight camp per child, families don't always have the financial resources to support these opportunities.

Through its new signature event, the Foundation provided funding to give more than 400 children and youth served by FACS a summer camp experience in 2022. **Mountainview LemonAID Day for FACS Niagara** saw children and families across the region set up lemonade stands to raise money for the agency's summer camp initiative.

The event's title sponsor, The Mountainview Building Group, provided everything families needed to host a lemonade stand, allowing 100% of the money raised to go directly to sending kids to camp. In total, 95 booths were set up and kids raised more than \$85,000!



## Foundation Board of Directors 2022

Caroline Polgrabia, President  
Chris Accursi, Vice-President  
Darlene McDowell, Past President  
Sheryl Mathews, Secretary  
Yar Diduch, Treasurer  
Dr. Lorraine Jensen  
Anna Bozza, FACS Niagara Chief Executive Officer

Rhianon Burkholder  
Richard Madume  
Sean Worthington, FACS Niagara Board Liaison  
Ellen Schonewille, Senior Manager of Donor Relations  
Carly Eckhardt, Community Engagement Coordinator  
Brett Sweeney, FACS Niagara Director of Communications & Community Engagement



# Niagara Comes Together for Children and Youth at the Foundation Gala

Although home represents a very special place for all of us – it's always nice to get away for an evening. On April 21, 2023, the Foundation whisked more than 300 community members away to the Italian countryside for its first in-person gala celebration since 2019.

Held at John Michael's Banquet and Event Centre in Thorold, and themed "A Night in Tuscany," attendees were treated to the sights and sounds of Italy with a sumptuous Italian feast. The crowd was wowed by Coulson, a young man who spent time in-care. In a surprise performance, Coulson brought the room to their feet with a rendition of *My Way* by Frank Sinatra.

The evening raised funds to support the children, youth, and families served by FACS Niagara. Courtney, who had benefitted from the support of the agency, was the evening's keynote speaker. She told the audience that, "Throughout my years in post-secondary I have been immensely supported by FACS and the Foundation. Without this support I would not be the growingly successful young woman I have become today." The event brought in more than \$128,000. The Foundation extends its most sincere gratitude to all the guests and donors.



Courtney speaking at "A Night in Tuscany"



Coulson performing "My Way" at "A Night in Tuscany"

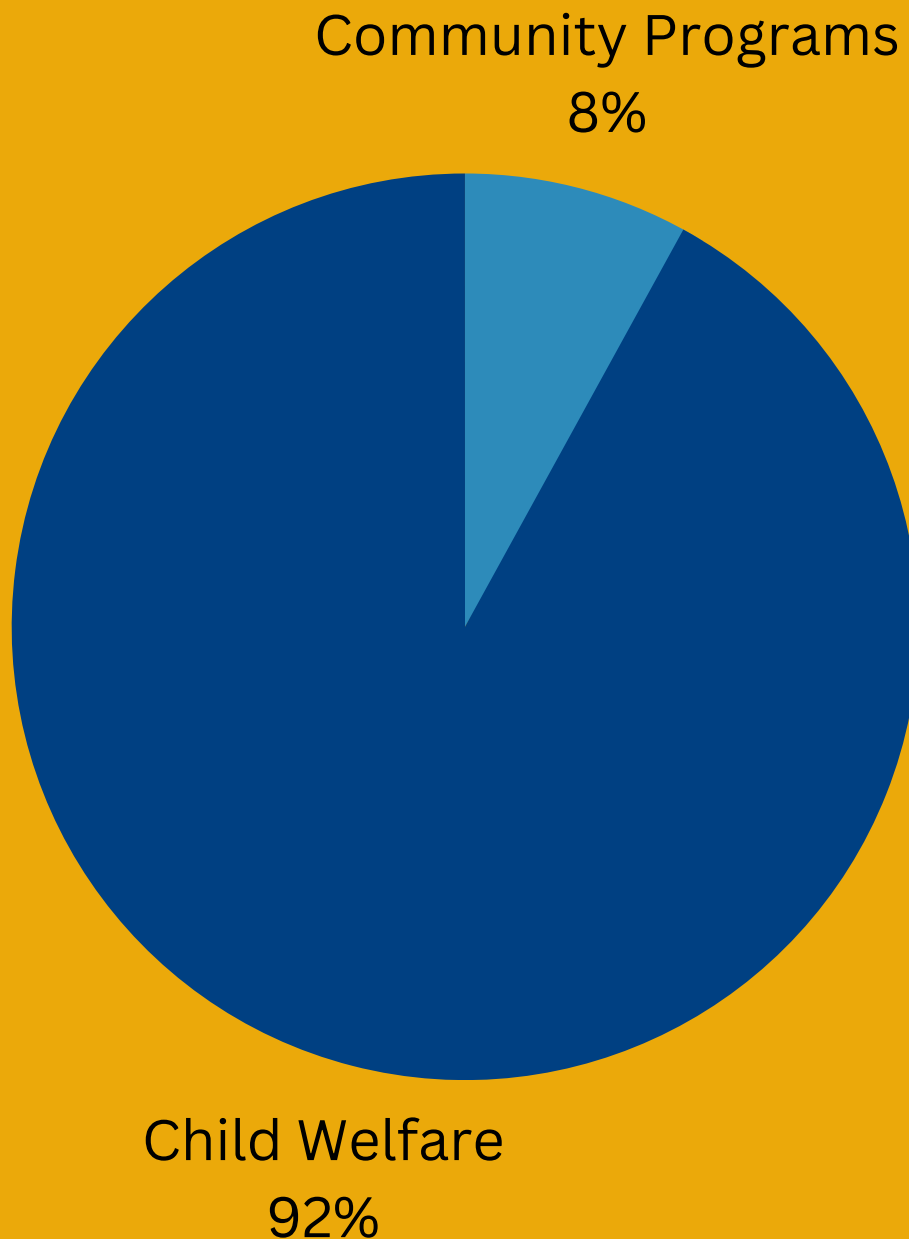
## Education Grants

FACS Niagara and the FACS Niagara Foundation are pleased to support young people like Courtney pursuing a post-secondary education. In 2022-23, FACS and the Foundation expect to provide more than **60 youth** with financial grants to assist with the cost of college and university.

# Financial Highlights

Revenues 2022-2023:

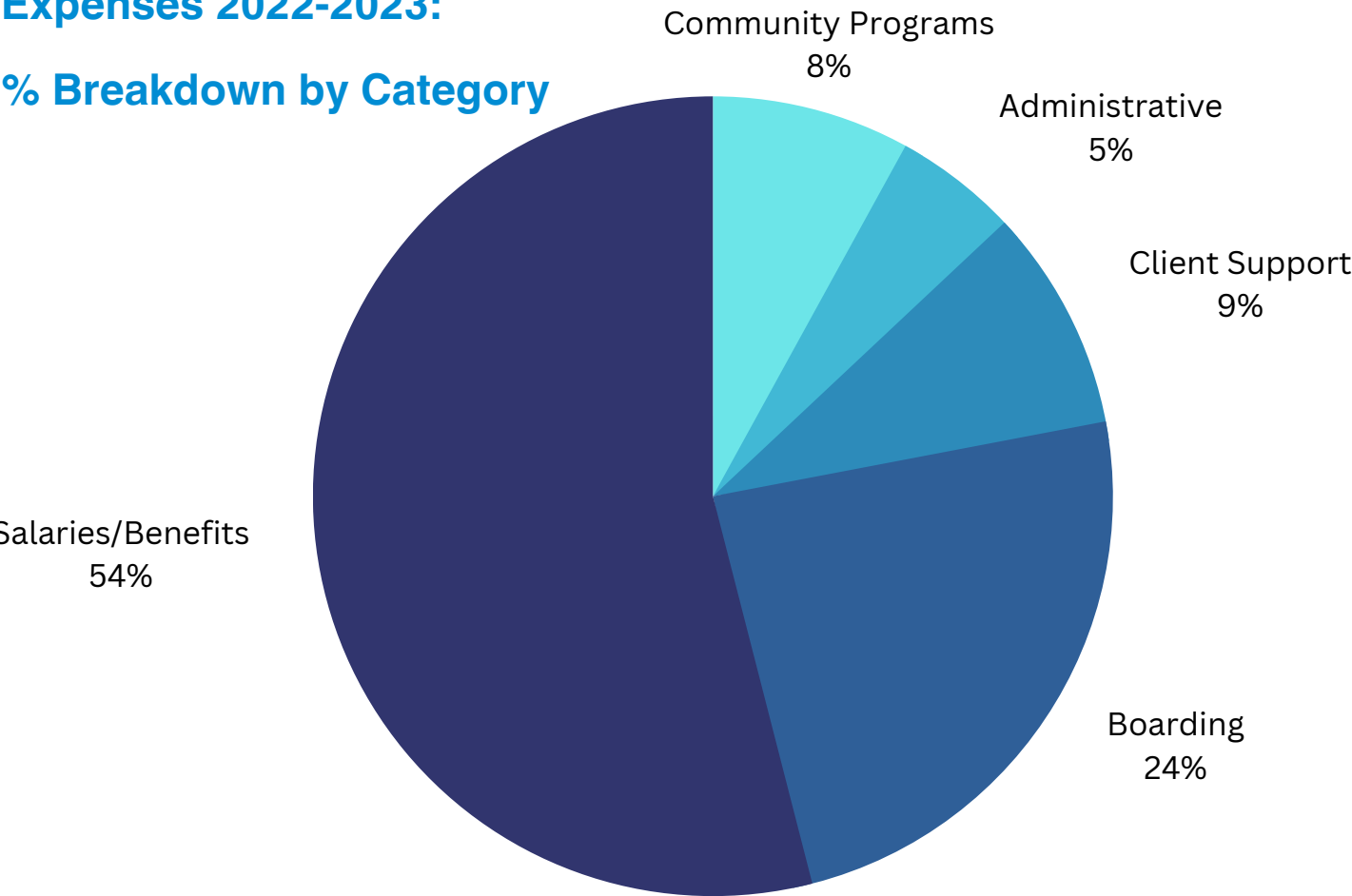
% Breakdown by Program



# Financial Highlights

## Expenses 2022-2023:

### % Breakdown by Category



	Summary \$000s		
	Child Welfare	Community Programs	Total
Revenues	\$49,909	\$4,223	\$54,132
Expenditures	\$49,433	\$4,110	\$53,543
Surplus/(Deficit)	\$476	\$113	\$588



**FACS**  
**NIAGARA**

Family and Children's Services  
Les Services à la famille  
et à l'enfance de Niagara

SUPPORTING | STRENGTHENING | PROTECTING • SOUTENIR | RENFORCER | PROTÉGER

Phone: All locations: 905.937.7731 / Toll Free: 1.888.937.7731 / TTY: 905-937-8105

All Faxes: 905.646.7085 / All Mail: P.O. Box 24028, St. Catharines, ON L2R 7P7

[info@facsnigara.on.ca](mailto:info@facsnigara.on.ca)

[facsnigara.on.ca](http://facsnigara.on.ca)