



FACS
NIAGARA

Family and Children's Services

Les Services à la famille
et à l'enfance de Niagara

SUPPORTING | STRENGTHENING | PROTECTING • SOUTENIR | RENFORCER | PROTÉGER

2024-2025 Annual Report



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**Generosity
of Spirit**

A Message from Board Chair and Chief Executive Officer



David Willer
BOARD CHAIR



Anna Bozza
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER

Over the past number of months, there has been significant discussion about what it means to be Canadian. While there is no consensus about what makes a Canadian, a number of themes continually arise. Although each person expresses it differently, one of our most defining characteristics is that we take care of one another. This is seen in our generosity of spirit, our friendliness, social programs, and strong social safety net.

At Family and Children's Services, we have been caring for our community in Niagara for more than 125 years. This desire to help is expressed in our mission, "To protect, support, and strengthen the wellbeing of children, youth, adults, and families." We are often considered to be the safety net behind the social safety net for families that are experiencing significant challenges.

THE ORCHARD

In 2024-25, we are proud of how our agency was able to continue and deepen this commitment to caring for one another. In January 2025, we were able to open The Orchard group home in partnership with Youth

Resources Niagara (YRN). This new facility for children between 9 and 14 years old allowed us to bring ten of our young people back to the region. Previously, these resilient children had been living as far away as Windsor and Ottawa to access the mental health and behavioural services they so desperately needed. This is now the third home established in partnership with YRN.

At a time when appropriate residential placements are desperately needed, The Orchard brings ten new beds online for the exclusive use of FACS Niagara and frees up beds elsewhere in Ontario for children needing care. This needed resource is expected to result in annualized savings to our budget of more than \$1.2 million. The development of this project was entirely donor-funded. In under one year, our donors provided \$430,000 to renovate the home and make it appropriate for our kids. We are grateful to them for their generosity and sharing our vision of a place where young people can get the help they need and thrive.

The success of the Orchard comes at an important time for the sector and this agency. Approximately three-quarters of CASs in Ontario are reporting deficits. This is largely due to a significant increase in boarding costs for children with complex needs and the shortage of residential and treatment beds resulting in the use of unlicensed placements. We are not immune to these challenges, and for the first time

in more than a decade, FACS Niagara finds itself in a deficit position. We have a long track record of fiscal responsibility and sustainability and are committed to finding innovative solutions to address these challenges. We continue to advocate for support for the important work taking place in our region to best serve children, youth and families.

UNITY

One of the programs we are grateful to receive support for is the Unity Team. This initiative partners our team with Indigenous Advocates to serve families in a way that enhances safety and wellbeing for Indigenous children and youth and respects the right of self-determination. We are grateful to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services for its investment of \$1.7 million over two years to continue this important service.

Our role in supporting vulnerable children, youth, and families naturally requires a high degree of accountability. It is a commitment embedded in our strategic plan and a requirement that we embrace in our pursuit of service excellence. A recent review of compliance and standards demonstrated the care with which our team approaches its work. Our agency earned high scores in the Ministry's Children in Extended Society Care review, with officials praising our approach. Ministry reviewers said they were "blown away" by the number of visits and contact

MESSAGE FROM BOARD CHAIR/CEO

we maintain with our children and youth. They went on to say that our files showed “thoughtful planning” and that our focus on child safety was where the strength of our agency shone through.

A look back at the year would not be complete without expressing our sincere gratitude to our foster parents and volunteers for their continued support. They do this work out of a deep love for children and youth, and a desire to see them be at their best. In a world that needs more compassion and kindness, they stand out as examples of something that we can all aspire to.

We also appreciate the support of our community partners. It’s no secret that we cannot do this work alone, and being able to rely on the support of our community service providers makes a profound and positive difference in the lives of those we serve.

Thanks also go out to the entire FACS team for their dedication to our community. Our agency is home to many different professionals, who all do their work with the utmost care and integrity. Our agency is fortunate to have such committed group supporting the wellbeing of our clients.

Sincerely,

Anna Bozza
Anna Bozza

David Willer
David Willer



Celebrating the opening of The Orchard with generous donors. From L to R: Danielle Horodenchuk (Exec. Director, Youth Resources Niagara), Anna Bozza (CEO, FACS Niagara), Ellen Schonewille (Senior Manager of Donor Relations, FACS Niagara), Caroline Polgrabia (Board Member, FACS Foundation), Chris Hatch (NOTL Rotary Club), and Cindy Grant (NOTL Rotary Club).



FACS Niagara CEO Anna Bozza with the agency's longest serving foster parent, Betsy Witteveen.



On the Cover

The cover for this year's annual report is a piece of digital artwork created by Vladimir, a college student studying graphic design. Vladimir's piece is a visual representation of the care and support FACS provides. He said, "I aimed for a very serene, inclusive, connecting community from various places vibe, filled with genuine connection and hints of growth through the apple tree and various activities. You can learn more about Vlad by reading his story on page 15 of this report."

What we do

FACS Provides



**CHILD
WELFARE
SERVICES**



**FOSTERING
AND KINSHIP
SERVICES**



ADOPTION



**INDIVIDUAL
AND FAMILY
COUNSELLING**



**DAYCARE
PROGRAMS**

FACS BY THE NUMBERS



6,347

Number of referrals about children who may be in need of protection

3,021

Families served
(Investigation and ongoing)

3,104

Child protection investigations conducted



6,190

Children & youth served

Children in care
(monthly average)

439



96%

Children served in their own homes

15

Completed adoptions

189

Youth under 18 participating in New Outlooks and Beginnings programming

126

Adult Protective Service Clients

Childcare Programs in St. Catharines Children attending Bunting

38



68

Children attending Western Hill

103

Children supported by Resource Consultants

FACS Volunteers



413,371

Total number of kilometres driven

9,240

Number of hours dedicated

134

Total number of volunteers

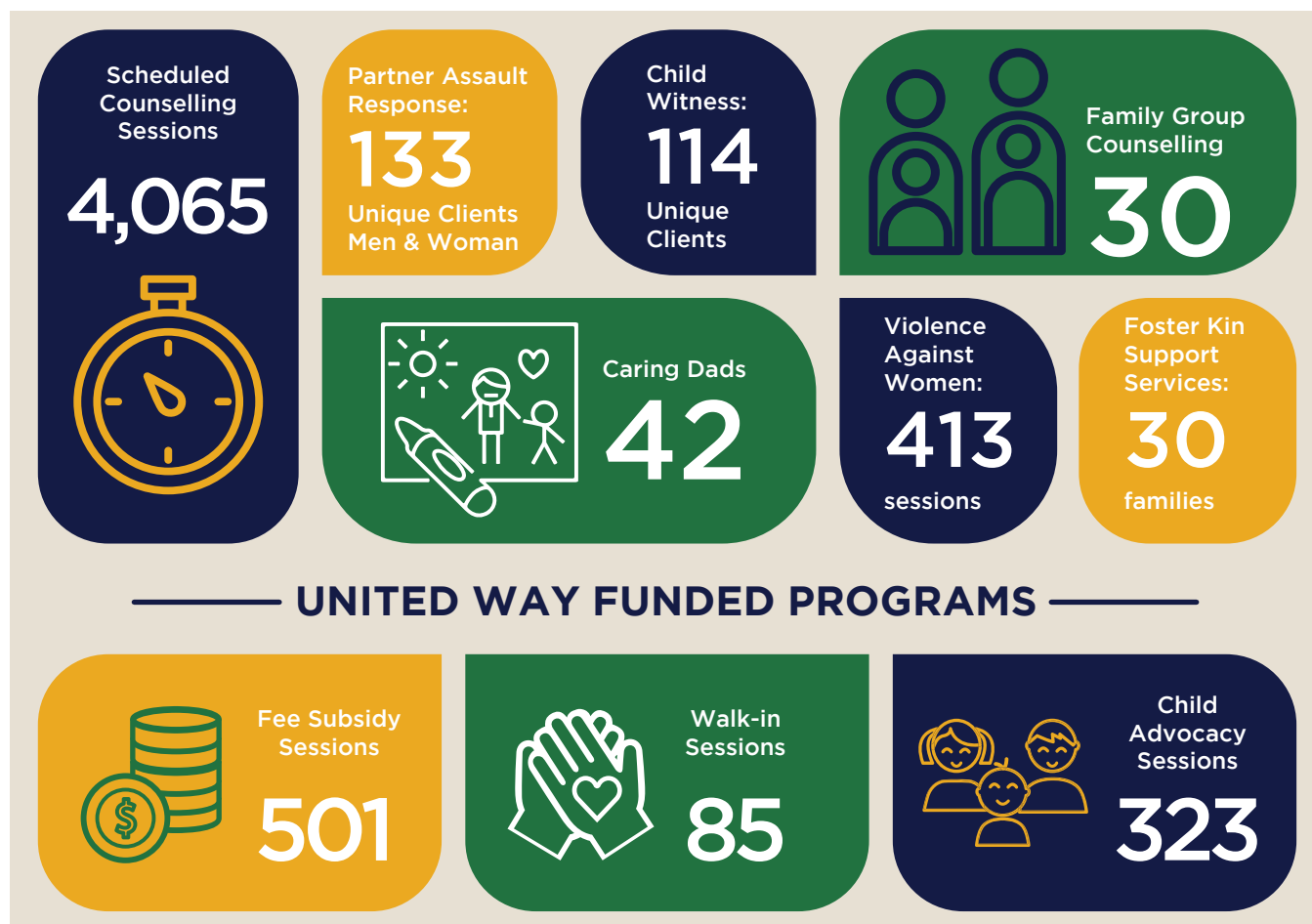




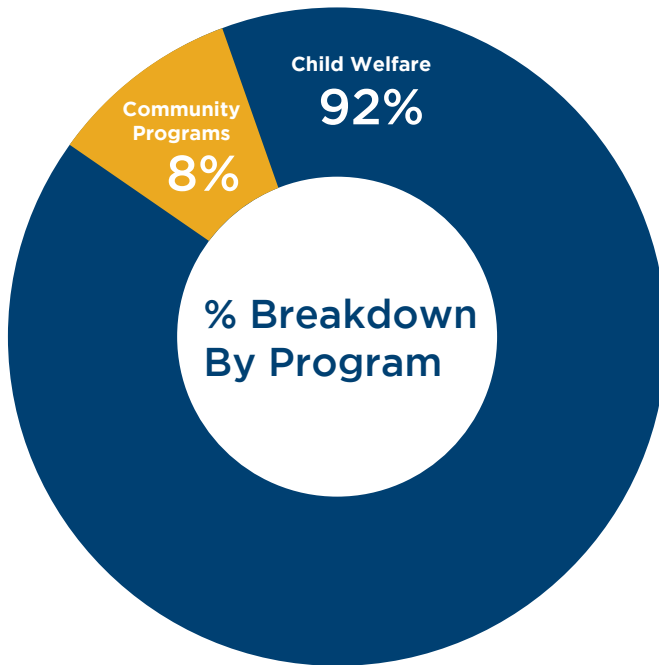
FCC 2024-25 DATA

Family Counselling Centre
Centre de counseling familial

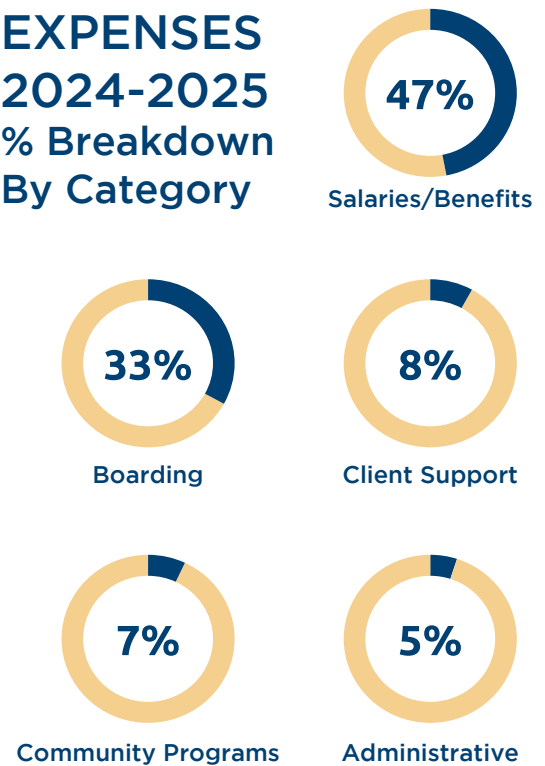
The Family Counselling Centre (FCC) has been offering quality counselling services to individuals, couples, and families in the Niagara Region since 1964. In addition to counselling services, the FCC offers a variety of special groups and programs designed to address specific issues and concerns. The FCC believes that wellness is in reach and they're able to support you on your journey.



REVENUES 2024-2025



EXPENSES 2024-2025 % Breakdown By Category



Summary \$000s

	Child Welfare	Community Programs	Total
Revenues	\$54,871	\$4,761	\$59,632
Expenditures	\$58,473	\$4,661	\$63,135
Surplus/(deficit)	\$(3,602)	\$100	\$(3,502)



Coming
Together

Coming Together in Support of Unity

Recognizing the work taking place in Niagara to support Reconciliation, the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services is providing funding to enhance services to Indigenous peoples living in the region. The agency was announced as successful applicants under the government's Child Welfare Innovation and Change program and will receive \$1.7 million over the next two years to support the work of the Unity Team.

The team, named Unity by all partners, pairs FACS Niagara's child welfare workers with Indigenous advocates from local Indigenous organizations. This team elevates Indigenous voices, values, and knowledge within the child welfare response. This work is aligned with the Ministry's pillars of child welfare redesign, including enhancing family wellbeing, increasing youth supports, and developing lifelong connections for children and youth. In particular, child welfare redesign commits to "co-developing approaches with Indigenous partners to improve outcomes."

Funding will increase the complement of Unity members, adding additional child protection workers and Indigenous advocates from the agency's three partners: the Niagara Chapter of Native Women, Fort Erie Friendship Centre, and the Niagara Regional Native Centre.

"The origins of this work can be traced back more than a decade, when the Niagara Chapter of Native

Women partnered with FACS and provided us with the opportunity to earn trust," said Anna Bozza, FACS Niagara CEO. "By working together in partnership, we go much further than we can on our own."

"The team is making a positive difference by enhancing support and reducing the percentage of self-identifying families and Indigenous children in care."

In the years since its inception, the Unity Team has worked to keep Indigenous families together and address the issue of overrepresentation. Its focus on early intervention and admission prevention supports better outcomes for families, children, and youth. The Unity model of service is also a cost-effective and sustainable approach. The support of Indigenous Advocates assisting with family interactions has built trust, allowing the team to assist families at earlier junctures.

"This innovative partnership is evidence of child welfare and Indigenous agencies coming together in a good way," said Sherrie Moore, FACS Niagara Director of Service. "The team is making a positive difference by enhancing support and reducing the percentage of self-identifying families and Indigenous children in care."



Seeds of Growth

Seeds of Growth Planted at The Orchard

From the minute he walked through the doors of the Orchard, Caleb knew this time would be different. As a 14-year-old who was raised in care, Caleb has experienced several different living situations. Up until this point, he never quite found the right place that both felt like home and could offer him the help that he needed.

“I remember coming in and being super excited,” said Caleb. “I love how diverse it is and how many different activities there are here. I really like to play video games with the other kids.”

The Orchard is the latest group home opened in partnership between FACS Niagara and Youth Resources Niagara. It is designed for children between the ages of 9 and 14 living with complex mental health and behavioural needs.

“The kids that we support come from a multitude of different backgrounds and circumstances,” said Danielle Horodenchuk, Executive Director of Youth Resources Niagara. “Many have a history of trauma, neglect or abuse, instability or lack of social supports.”

Youth Resources staffs the home and provides programming to the youth who have been placed in the care of FACS Niagara. A full-time clinical director

works with each youth to create a personalized treatment and growth plan, while also engaging in weekly therapy sessions.

“I get a lot of help with mental health, therapy, and one-one-one support,” said Caleb. “If I ever need to talk to someone, they’re always available to help me.”

“If I ever need to talk to someone, they’re always available to help me.”

The Orchard home addresses a significant issue facing Niagara’s children and youth. Many of the young people living at the Orchard had previously had to leave the region to access the services they needed, with some having gone as far as Ottawa or Windsor.

In addition to being a benefit for children and youth, the Orchard also represents a fiscally responsible development. “The Orchard is estimated to result in annualized savings of \$1.2 million dollars to the FACS budget. It also adds capacity in the province at a time when residential placements are greatly needed in Ontario,” said Anna Bozza, FACS CEO.



Youth Spotlight

Youth Spotlight: Moving From Surviving to Thriving

Vlad is like many of the young people FACS is fortunate to work with. He is a survivor. Coming from a world of uncertainty and instability, he's had to be.

At too young an age, Vlad learned how to fend for himself. His parents, dealing with their own challenges around addiction and poverty struggled to provide the basics that people can take for granted.

"We were poor, sometimes homeless, always scrambling just to make it through the day. Life was incredibly hard," he recalled.

Family and Children's Services Niagara was a constant in Vlad's life. The agency did what it could to help the family. Workers brought gifts to help make the holidays feel more normal. They assisted by ensuring the family had food on the table.

"My family and I worked incredibly hard to hide our struggles, so the pieces never quite came together," said Vlad. He kept hoping that the next intervention would be the one that brought lasting change.

At the age of 16, Vlad left the family home and entered into a Voluntary Youth Services Agreement with FACS. "For the first time, I encountered true compassion and patience. I felt seen. I felt like I mattered."

The agency helped Vlad find a stable living situation – an apartment of his very own! From there, Vlad received help navigating the new world of independence. He got to see a dentist, an optician,

and a family doctor who developed a treatment plan to assist with his diagnoses.

"FACS stood by me every step of the way. With practical support and with a warmth and genuine care that I hadn't known before,"

"As I got older, FACS continued to offer me experiences I never dreamed of," said Vlad. He participated in the New Outlooks and Beginnings program where he learned to cook, learned to care for his home, and developed so many of the life skills that would help him become a successful young adult.

"FACS stood by me every step of the way. With practical support and with a warmth and genuine care that I hadn't known before," he said.

Today, Vlad is completing a graphic design program in college. He is a valued member of the agency's Youth Advisory Committee that helps give recommendations and advice to help improve the experience for other youth growing up in care. Vlad has found rewarding employment and volunteers to help animals. He now looks to the future with a great deal of optimism.

"FACS has change my life in ways I never could have imagined. They didn't just help me survive; they helped me thrive. For that, I will be forever grateful."



Foundation Rolls out the Red Carpet at the Hollywood Soiree

The FACS Foundation hosted its most successful gala in its 26-year history this year. More than 300 community members helped raise more than \$120,000 (net total) to support local children and youth being served by FACS.

With the gala themed around the sights and sounds of Tinseltown, youth being served by FACS were the stars of the event. Brittany, one of the evening's keynote speakers, told the crowd that, "FACS didn't just help me survive my childhood- they helped

me build a future. To every worker, advocate, and supporter who has walked alongside youth like me: you are the reason so many of us are able to dream bigger, reach higher, and become who we were always meant to be."

Programs supported by the gala proceeds will assist youth with making a successful transition to adulthood. This includes life skills training, post secondary education grants, and mentorship through the Home for the Holidays get togethers.

Foundation Board of Directors

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Yar Diduch (Treasurer)

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(FACS Niagara CEO)

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Jashan Jayan

Dr. Lorraine Jensen

Richard Madume

Robert Miller

Nina Jain Sheehan

Agency Support

Ellen Schonewille
(Senior Manager, Donor Relations)

Carly Eckhardt
(Community Engagement
Coordinator)

Brett Sweeney
(Director of Communications and
Community Engagement)



Gifts

In 2024, the generous support of donors allowed the Foundation and agency to provide:



Holiday gifts to
362
children



90
holiday gift
baskets for youth
living independently



Home for the
Holidays events
5



post secondary
education grants
70+



47
life skills
training sessions
for youth

“We are grateful to our donors for sharing our vision of a thriving Niagara. Their generosity resulted in the Foundation raising more than \$984,000 in 2024, which will make a real difference in the lives of children and youth being served by FACS Niagara.”

Ellen Schonewille, SENIOR MANAGER, DONOR RELATIONS

Mountainview LemonAID Day

With your support, we provided more than 600 weeks of summer camp to children being served by FACS. Thank you for helping to create lifelong memories of summer fun!





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