

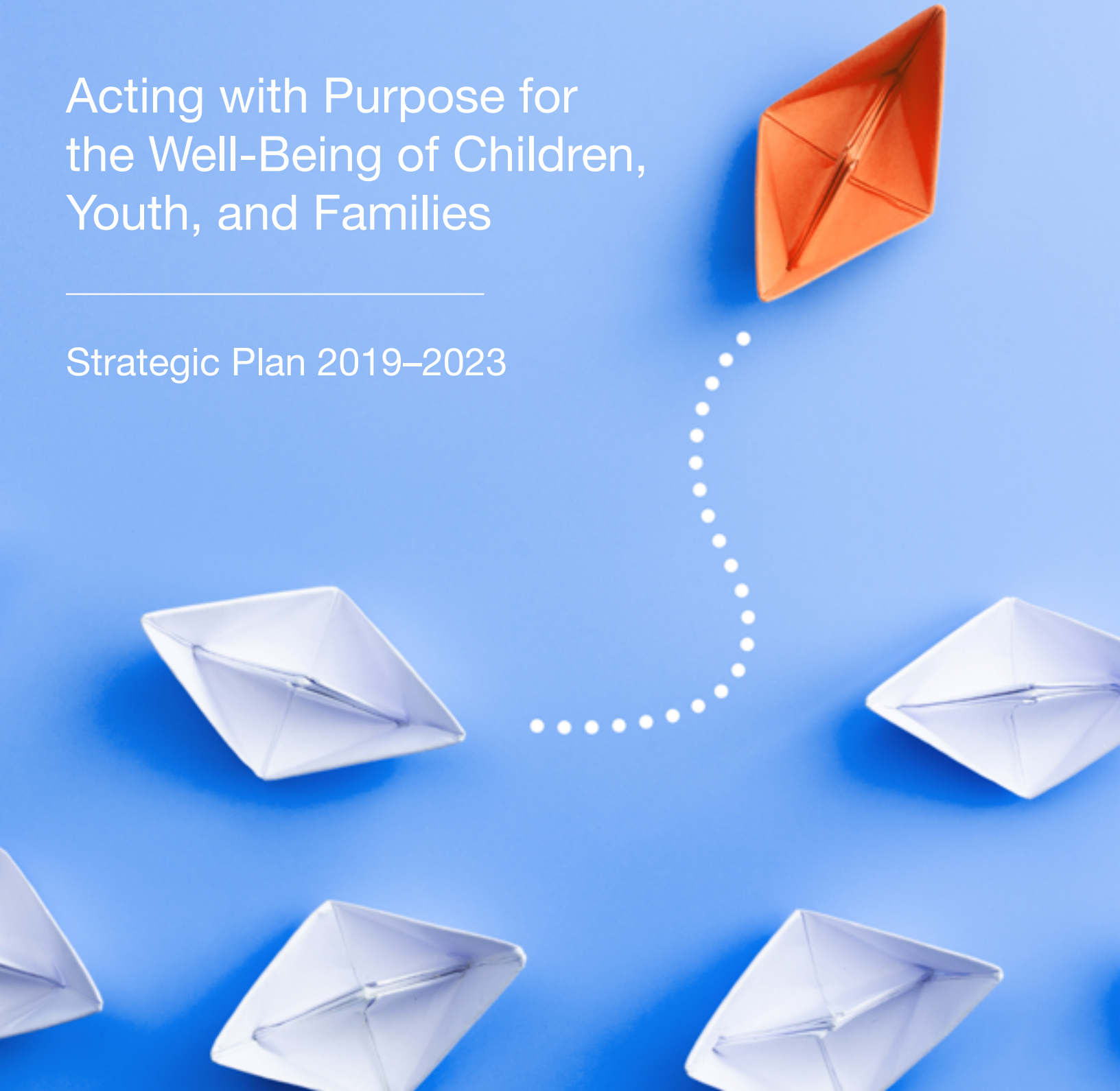


Child Welfare League of Canada  
Ligue pour le bien-être de l'enfance du Canada

# Acting with Purpose for the Well-Being of Children, Youth, and Families

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Strategic Plan 2019–2023





# Contents

- 1 | About the Child Welfare League of Canada
- 2 | A call to action on behalf of children, youth, and families
- 6 | Principles guiding our actions
- 7 | 2019–2023 Strategic Priorities
- 12 | Members of the Child Welfare League of Canada
- 15 | Sources

# About the Child Welfare League of Canada

The Child Welfare League of Canada stands up for children, youth, and families. Established in 1994, we are a national, membership-based charitable organization dedicated to promoting the safety and well-being of young people and their families, especially those who are vulnerable and marginalized.

We advocate for and promote legislation, policy, research, programs, and services that address the underlying causes of vulnerability and trauma. We convene leaders, organizations, researchers, governments, and people with lived experience to learn and improve our practices.

Our member organizations hail from all provinces and territories and include service agencies, Indigenous organizations, community groups, provincial/territorial governments, associations, universities, and child advocates. A full list of members is available at the end of this document.



## The change we want to see

We aspire for all children to thrive, to know that they are loved, and to have a sense of belonging. We want to see more children grow up with their family, their kin and their community, and be connected to their cultural heritage and language. We also want children who are placed in care to have continuous and significant relationships, achieve better outcomes, and make successful transitions to adulthood.

# A call to action on behalf of children, youth, and families

In early 2019, we reached out to CWLC members, partners, and allies across the country, listening to their concerns and aspirations for all of Canada's children and youth. We used this as a starting point to draft four strategic priorities that we then shared through in-person meetings and in an online survey, seeking further input. We asked organizations and leaders to tell us how strongly they felt about our priorities, whether they were the right priorities for CWLC at this time, and whether these priorities would motivate them to engage further with CWLC.

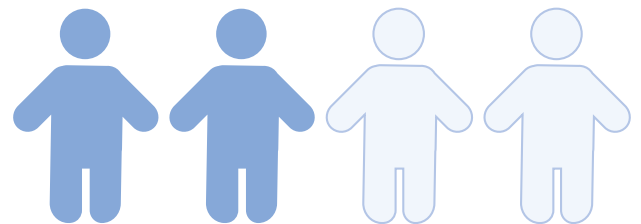
The insight we gathered not only helped determine our priorities, they helped us better understand CWLC's value and purpose—to convene leaders and organizations, facilitate learning and knowledge sharing, and advocate on the issues that matter most to children, youth, and families. We are grateful to the many leaders and organizations who contributed to shaping our future. Below is a summary of what we've heard.

## Poverty is a key factor impacting the well-being of children, youth, and families.

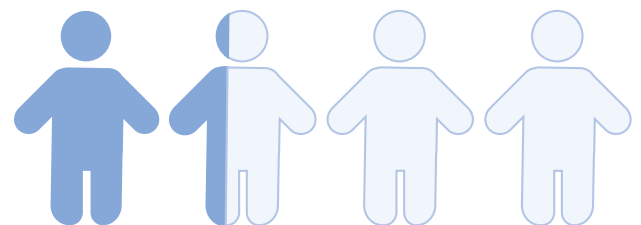
“Caregiver risk, [alcohol or drug abuse, mental health issues, few social supports] and household poverty are significantly related to the decision to place a child, with at least one caregiver risk factor increasing the odds of placement more than twofold and running out of money for food,

housing, and utilities all associated with approximately double the odds of a placement”.<sup>1</sup>

One in five children in Canada live in poverty,<sup>2</sup> but the risk of growing up in poverty increases for children who are Indigenous, those whose parents immigrated to Canada, and those who are racialized.

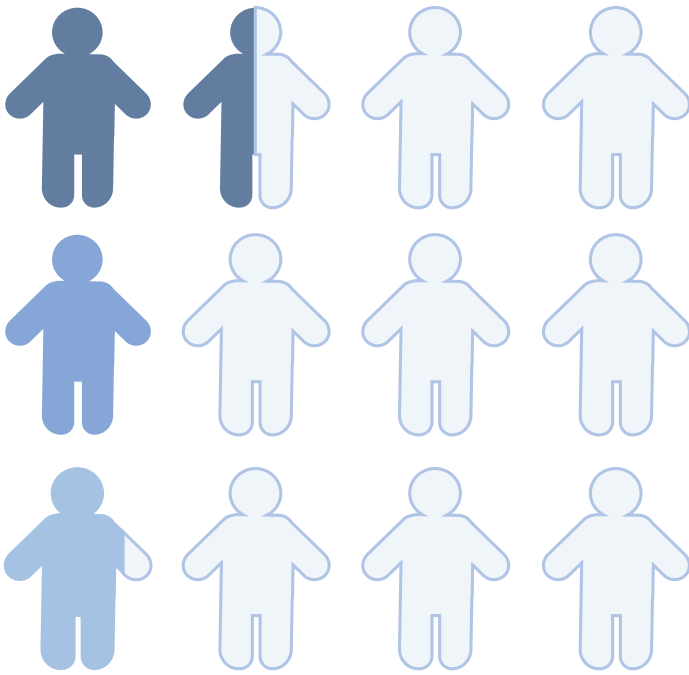


51% of First Nation children live in poverty, rising to 60% on reserve.<sup>3</sup>



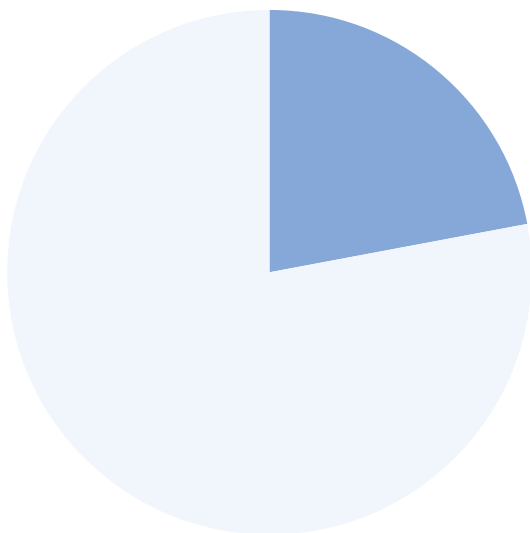
32% is the poverty rate for children of immigrants in Canada.<sup>4</sup>

Despite past efforts, children and youth are still coming into care in disturbingly high numbers and are not achieving the outcomes we all hope for them—this is especially true for First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and youth. Young people of African and Caribbean descent, 2SLGBTQQIA youth, newcomer families, and young people with disabilities are also facing significant challenges.



Rates of poverty are also high for:

- non-status First Nations children at 30%
- Inuit children at 25%
- Métis children at 23% <sup>5</sup>



22% of racialized (visible minority) children live in poverty.<sup>6</sup>

- As reported in the 2016 Census, Indigenous children under the age of 14 represented 52.2% of all children in foster care, despite only representing 7.7% of children in Canada. Of the Indigenous children placed in care, the majority were First Nations (82%), while about 14% were Métis and 4% were Inuit.
- Findings from a study in Ontario indicate that “compared to White children, Aboriginal children were more than twice as likely to be investigated, 41% more likely to be transferred to ongoing child welfare services, and 2.7 times as likely to be placed in out of home care. Compared to White children, Black children were 39% more likely to be investigated, 8% more likely to be transferred to ongoing services and 13% more likely to be placed in out of home care.”<sup>7</sup>
- “Overall, in 10.3% of maltreatment-related investigations [conducted in Canada in 2008], the investigating worker noted a child functioning concern of an intellectual/developmental disability, a physical disability or both.”<sup>8</sup>
- Immigration detention, trauma, financial strain, and the lack of accessible, culturally appropriate resources, increase chances of immigrant families coming into contact with the child welfare system.

There are few statistics on the number of 2SLGBTQQIA in care, but we do know that those who are in care often leave home because of unsafe situations. A lack of resources and knowledge to support 2SLGBTQQIA youth create barriers to coming out while in care.

A higher level of exposure to intense childhood stress has a clear relationship to an individual’s likelihood of developing physical, behavioural, and social difficulties in adulthood.<sup>9</sup>

# Complex trauma and adverse childhood experiences have a significant impact on development, health, and well-being across the lifespan.

- Children and youth who have been maltreated are at increased risk of coming into contact with the justice system as they age—it is estimated that 50% of people in prisons in Canada experienced abuse in childhood.
- The proportion of Indigenous youth in custody across Canada has steadily increased. As of 2007, an estimated 21% of Indigenous youth were in custody across Canada; 10 years later, Indigenous boys and girls made up 47% and 60% of youth correctional admissions, respectively. Provincially, these numbers were highest in Saskatchewan (92% for boys; 98% for girls) and Manitoba (81% for boys; 82% for girls).<sup>11</sup>
- Those who have experienced physical or sexual abuse before the age of 15 are five times more likely to experience hidden homelessness (informal housing arrangements, “couch surfing”, living in a car).<sup>12</sup>
- “Identity-based family conflict resulting from a young person coming out as LGBTQ2S is the most prevalent cause of homelessness among queer and trans youth.”<sup>13</sup>

Responding to these issues will require preventive action to address the factors that are making young people and families vulnerable. Inadequate housing, poverty, mental health problems, substance use related to trauma, and violence against women have a profound effect on the safety and well-being of children (exposure to intimate part-



ner violence represented 34% of substantiated cases of maltreatment in Canada in 2008).<sup>14</sup> These underlying factors need to be addressed if we want to see young people and families thrive.

Calls for change are increasing and there is momentum for transforming the way we support children, youth and families who are in urgent or chronic need. Change will require a broad and diverse cross-section of leaders and organizations, working together to address entrenched social issues and committing to new approaches and new ways of relating. We know a lot about what is needed.

- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action<sup>15</sup>, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling on inequitable funding for First Nations child welfare<sup>16</sup>, Jordan's Principle<sup>17</sup>, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society's Spirit Bear Plan<sup>18</sup>, and the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice<sup>19</sup> set out actionable solutions to address inequity.
- One Vision One Voice proposes solutions to address the overrepresentation and experiences of disparities faced by African Canadians after coming into contact with the child welfare system;<sup>20</sup>
- Networks of youth in and from care such as Youth in Care Canada, Care Jeunesse, Fostering Change, and others are proposing solutions that would improve experiences and outcomes for youth in the child welfare system;
- The Canadian and First Nations Incidence Studies collect data on reported maltreatment and the characteristics of children and families who are investigated. Researchers are calling for child and family services to differentiate between urgent child protection cases and chronic need, which may be better met by supporting families;<sup>21</sup>
- Decades of studies and reports on the rights and well-being of children, youth, and families have been prepared by the Canadian Senate that are still relevant today namely, For Canada's Children,

the 1979 report of the Canadian Commission for the International Year of the Child. While progress has been made, much remains to be done.

## Now we need to operationalize solutions.



# Principles guiding our actions

In all its actions, the Child Welfare League will:

- Build **collaborative relationships** with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis organizations and leaders that acknowledge past harms and respect the inherent rights and jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples to care for children and families.
- **Promote equity and inclusion** and advocate so that all children and youth, especially those who are most vulnerable, are safe, thriving, and able to fulfill their potential.
- **Respect, listen to and honour the resilience** of children, youth, families, and Elders with lived experience of residential schools, the 60s Scoop, and those who are or have been in care.
- **Be allies** to youth in and from care who are advocating for change and standing up for young people's rights.
- Demonstrate **exemplary leadership** in advocating with and on behalf of vulnerable children, youth, and families, and align our efforts with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the UN Convention on the Rights of Children, and fundamental human rights.
- **Convene, engage and collaborate** with a strong, diverse coalition of leaders and organizations to **advance social justice**.
- Champion **excellence** in identifying and disseminating practices, standards, and research that advance reconciliation, prevention, early intervention, family preservation, and cultural safety.
- **Examine** and be **transparent** about our own practices.



# 2019–2023 strategic priorities

CWLC's strategic plan will be implemented through four strategic priorities. Each strategic priority is accompanied by priority actions and expected results.

Our plan reflects the need for change and responds to calls for national leadership and coordinated efforts to significantly improve outcomes for children and families who are vulnerable. As we build a diverse and strong movement, we will strive towards a common goal: to stand and act together so that we free the potential of all young people and help them thrive.

**1**

**Support the self-determination of Indigenous peoples and engage non-Indigenous organizations working with children to move forward with reconciliation, so that First Nations, Inuit and Métis children live in safety, dignity and respect.**

**2**

**Transform how we respond to and support children, youth, and families who are vulnerable and experiencing distress, through prevention and early intervention.**

**3**

**Promote positive outcomes for all children and youth in care, with particular attention to Indigenous, newcomer, 2SLGBTQQIA, and racialized children and youth, as well as young people with disabilities.**

**4**

**Strengthen the Child Welfare League of Canada's capacity to pursue its strategic priorities.**

# 1

Support the self-determination of Indigenous peoples and engage non-Indigenous organizations working with children to move forward with reconciliation, so that First Nations, Inuit and Métis children live in safety, dignity and respect.

## Priority Actions

Collaborate with the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and other First Nations, Inuit and Métis organizations and youth on campaigns and actions that advance the rights and the well-being of families, children, and youth.

Promote action on reconciliation by creating opportunities for organizations that serve children, youth, and families to:

- Strengthen their ability to work creatively, respectfully, and collaboratively with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples as they exercise jurisdiction with respect to child and family services.
- Operationalize the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, the National Inquiry on MMIWG2S Calls for Justice, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Reflect on their practice, learn from peers and experts, prototype and evaluate.

## Expected Outcomes

### ***Shift in norms***

Increased awareness of colonization, residential schools, 60s and millennial scoop and their impact on children and families.

Increased agreement that acting on reconciliation is important.

Increased sense of purpose by organizations that they can make a change.

### ***Change in capacity of organizations***

Increased capacity of organizations to take concrete actions toward reconciliation.

Increased capacity of organizations to support Indigenous children, youth and families in their care.

### ***Strengthened base of support***

Increased organizational involvement in supporting reconciliation and self-determination.

### ***Improved policies/practice***

Organizations change policies and practices to reflect their commitment to reconciliation and to the safety and well-being of Indigenous children, youth, and families.

### ***Long term impact—changes in social and/or physical conditions***

Fewer First Nations, Inuit and Métis children in care. More children and youth connected to family, kin, community, culture, and language.

# 2

Transform how we respond to and support children, youth, and families who are vulnerable and experiencing distress, through prevention and early intervention.

## Priority Actions

Catalyze social systems innovation in child, youth and family services by:

- advancing understanding of the complex issues facing children, youth, and families who are vulnerable;
- showcasing, prototyping and evaluating ideas that have the potential for transformative, systems-level change, with a focus on prevention and family supports;
- developing an evidence-based legislative framework that enables service providers and governments to better meet the needs of children, youth, and families facing the greatest stresses.

Examine the significance of culture, belonging, and the need to build significant and continuous relationships, and consider the practical implication for systems and services.

Provide learning opportunities through convenings and events and disseminate research and data that helps advance understanding of issues and evidence informed practice.

## Expected Outcomes

### ***Shift in norms***

Increased awareness of existing and innovative solutions to persisting problems.

Increased agreement on solutions that can be implemented.

### ***Strengthened base of support***

Increased collaboration toward shared goals.

Increased political will to implement solutions.

Increased number of people championing solutions.

Increased breath and diversity of partners and champions.

### ***Improved policies/practices/legislation***

New/revised legislative and/or practice frameworks that are evidence informed.

### ***Long term impact—changes in social and/or physical conditions***

Families who experience distress are supported to stabilize; more children are connected to family and/or have continuous and significant relationships.

# 3

Promote positive outcomes for all children and youth in care, with particular attention to Indigenous, newcomer, 2SLGBTQQIA, and racialized children and youth, as well as young people with disabilities.

## Priority Actions

Collaborate with and support youth in and from care who are advancing justice and equality for those in care and those who are transitioning out of care.

Co-develop trainings, tools, and interventions that will promote cultural safety, anti-racism, inclusion of gender identity and expression, and human rights in children's services, child welfare, mental health, and youth justice.

## Expected Outcomes

### *Shift in norms*

Increased awareness of factors that stand in the way of positive outcomes for children and youth who are most marginalized.

Increased agreement on justice and equity focused responses.

### *Change in capacity of organizations*

Increased ability to recognize and respond to the needs of Indigenous, newcomer, 2SLGBTQQIA, racialized children and youth, as well as young people with disabilities.

### *Strengthened base of support*

Increased cross-sector collaboration to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families who are most marginalized.

### *Improved policies/practices*

Organizations have implemented or changed their practices and/or policies to reflect their commitment to justice and equity.

### *Long term impact—changes in social and/or physical conditions*

Improved experience of children & youth in care, especially for those who are most vulnerable.

Better youth transitions out of care.



# 4

## Strengthen the Child Welfare League of Canada's capacity to pursue its strategic priorities.

### Priority Actions

- Engage in robust member outreach and service.
- Develop/strengthen partnerships with like-minded organizations to share services and advance strategic goals.
- Seek foundation and/or government grants to advance priorities.
- Develop a plan for generating revenue in support of CWLC's social mission.
- Build capacity to adapt and deliver content in French.
- Develop an outcomes measurement plan.

### Expected Outcomes

#### ***Strengthened base of support***

- Increased strategic alliances with partners and/or researchers.
- Increased engagement with and among CWLC members, partners, researchers.
- Increased number of champions.

#### ***Change in organizational capacity***

- Funding is secured from private foundations and/or government to advance key priorities.
- Membership base is stable and/or growing (sustainable).
- Revenue is being generated for mission critical priorities.

# Members of Child Welfare League of Canada

## ***National organizations***

A Way Home Canada  
Campaign 2000  
Canadian Accreditation Council  
Canadian Association of Social Workers  
Canadian Foster Family Association  
CARF Canada  
Child Witness Court Preparation Program  
Children's Aid Foundation of Canada  
Child Welfare League of America  
International Social Service—Service Social International (ISS-SSI)  
Public Health Agency of Canada  
UNICEF Canada  
Youth in Care Canada

## ***In Alberta***

Alberta Foster and Kinship Association  
ALIGN Association of Community Services  
Aspen Family and Community Network Society  
Boys & Girls Clubs of Calgary  
CASA Foundation  
Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary  
McMan Youth Family and Community Services Association  
Ministry of Children Services, Government of Alberta\*  
Mountain Plains Community Services Society of the North  
PolicyWise  
Calgary & Area Child Advocacy Centre  
The Family Centre of Northern Alberta  
Vantage Community Services  
Wood's Homes\*  
Zebra Child Protection Centre

## ***In British Columbia***

BC Federation of Foster Parents Associations  
British Columbia Injury Research and Prevention Unit  
Burnaby Family Life  
Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver  
Family Services of Greater Vancouver  
Indigenous Perspectives Society  
Ministry of Children and Family Development of British Columbia  
Pacific Community Resources Society  
School of Social Work, University of British Columbia  
The Bridge Youth & Family Services Society  
The Children's Foundation  
The Representative for Children and Youth of British Columbia  
School of Social Work and Human Services, University of the Fraser Valley  
Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society

## ***In Manitoba***

Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba  
Jewish Child & Family Service  
Child and Family Services, Government of Manitoba  
Métis Child and Family Services Authority  
Southern First Nations Network of Care  
The Kinship & Foster Family Network of Manitoba

## ***In New Brunswick***

Department of Social Development, Government of New Brunswick

## ***In Newfoundland and Labrador***

Aurelia  
Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, Government of NL  
Key Assets Newfoundland and Labrador Inc.

# Members of Child Welfare League of Canada

School of Social Work, Memorial University  
Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association

## ***In Nova Scotia***

Department of Community Services, Government of Nova Scotia  
Federation of Foster Families of Nova Scotia  
HomeBridge Youth Society  
Phoenix  
Savoury Consulting Ltd.  
Strongest Families Institute

## ***In the North West Territories***

Department of Health and Social Services, Government of NWT  
Foster Family Coalition of the NWT

## ***In Nunavut***

Department of Family Services, Government of Nunavut

## ***In Ontario***

Boost Child & Youth Advocacy Centre  
Brant Family and Children's Services\*  
Children's Aid Society of Ottawa  
Children's Aid Society of Toronto\*  
Covenant House Toronto  
Durham Children's Aid Society  
Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto  
Family and Children's Services of Renfrew County  
Key Assets Canada Ltd.  
London Family Court Clinic  
Marv Bernstein  
Ministry of Children and Youth Services, Government of Ontario\*  
Native Child and Family Services of Toronto\*  
Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies\*  
Peel Children's Aid Society  
Peel Children's Centre\*

Stepping Stones Foster Care Inc.  
Valoris for Children and Adults of Prescott-Russell

## ***In Prince Edward Island***

Department of Family and Human Services, Government of PEI  
Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI

## ***In Quebec***

Care Jeunesse  
Centre for Research on Children and Families, McGill University  
CIUSSS de l'Ouest de l'Île de Montréal\*  
CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal\*

## ***In Saskatchewan***

Lac La Ronge Indian Child and Family Services Agency  
Ministry of Social Services, Government of Saskatchewan  
Ranch Ehrlo Society\*  
Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth  
Saskatchewan First Nations Family and Community Institute  
Saskatchewan Foster Families Association  
Yorkton Tribal Council

## ***In Yukon***

Department of Health and Social Services, Government of Yukon  
Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office

List represents members as of July 2019. Visit [www.cwlc.ca](http://www.cwlc.ca) for updated list.

*\*CWLC thanks its Sustaining Members for their unwavering support.*



## You are invited to join our movement for change.

We've got a lot to do and children, youth and families can't wait.  
Do these priorities resonate with you? Can we count on you to help  
us improve outcomes for all children, youth, and families?  
Please reach out to our team to find out how you can engage.

[info@cwlc.ca](mailto:info@cwlc.ca)



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