

# Generation IMPACT

Children's Aid Foundation of Canada Strategic Plan 2025-30



# These Are the Children and Youth Being Left Behind

Right now, around 60,000 young people in Canada are impacted by the child welfare system and living in out of home care, in foster homes, group homes or with extended family members. Thousands more are at risk of being removed from their family homes and brought into care.

Children come into care because they have experienced abuse, neglect or abandonment. Poverty, mental health, substance use, and family violence are among the most common reasons for investigations by child welfare agencies.

Moreover, historical injustices and systemic racism, has resulted in Black and Indigenous children, who make up 6 and 7 percent of the child and youth population in Canada respectively, being significantly overrepresented in the child welfare system.

**We know that for children who become involved with the child welfare system, the odds are immediately stacked against them.**

Without the targeted and consistent supports they need, they are significantly less likely to graduate high school compared to their peers, are two to six times more likely to experience mental health concerns and are nearly 200 times more likely to experience homelessness.

For decades, Children's Aid Foundation of Canada (CAFC) has worked hard to fill the gap between what the government provides and what children and youth experiencing vulnerability need to move confidently forward and create a vision of success for themselves. But the challenges faced by these children and youth persist — and their outcomes, without support, are not changing at a rate that reflect the urgency of their needs.



**This is a current reality we are not willing to accept.**

Especially not now, as young people everywhere are faced with the intersecting crises of housing unaffordability, growing poverty and a looming uncertainty about the future ahead. For those involved with the child welfare system, these added obstacles — on top of the trauma and instability they are already navigating — may be impossible to overcome.

**The time for change is now.**



# Persistent Challenges Demand New Solutions

For over 45 years, CAFC has been committed to improving outcomes for children and youth involved with the child welfare system.

Working side by side with child welfare partners across the country, governments and generous donors, we have helped provide supports that most children receive from their families to complete their education, transition confidently into adulthood, navigate into a career and build a healthy support network.

Even with the progress we've made — including new solutions to keep children out of care, support those affected by family violence, and connect young people with mentors — the status quo remains unchanged

**Young people involved with the child welfare system remain at extreme risk of losing not only their potential, but their lives.**

**We believe that every child deserves every opportunity to thrive. That's why, with the launch of our new five-year strategic plan, we're taking decisive action to ignite transformational, generational change for children and youth involved with the child welfare system.**

## BUILDING ON DECADES OF EXPERIENCE

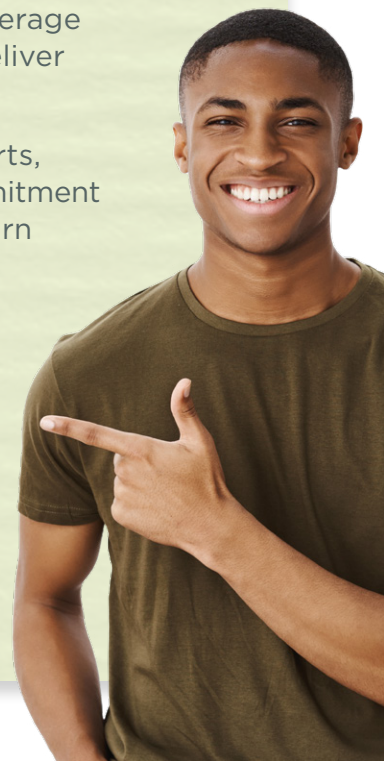
As an organization that operates independently from the child welfare system but engages deeply across it, we are uniquely positioned to drive change — through funding, partnerships, innovation and advocacy for better policies and practices.

Our new plan — **Generation Impact** — will spark our path forward as we leverage decades of experience and knowledge to call out persistent barriers and deliver outcomes-based solutions that help young people truly thrive.

This work will require bold leadership, deeper collaboration with lived experts, child welfare partners, government, and community organizations and a commitment to connecting our supporters with high-impact opportunities for social return on investment.

It will also mean contributing in meaningful ways as Indigenous communities determine their own child protection laws with the recent passing of Bill C-92, *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth and Families* — the most profound change to the child welfare landscape in our generation.

**We're ready.**



# Generation Impact:

Focuses on four urgent, evidence-based priorities identified by youth, communities, and experts – strong families, mental health, education, and employment. Addressing these interconnected barriers is key to creating lasting change and better outcomes for children and youth in care.



## STRONG FAMILIES AND LIFELONG CONNECTIONS

Many young people in care grow up without the stable, caring relationships they need.

Without connection and support, they face greater challenges to their mental health, education, and employment.

### OUR GOAL:

Children and youth have a caring adult in their corner—a mentor, caregiver, or ally—a steady presence that provides stability, allowing them to thrive.



## MENTAL HEALTH

Young people in and from care face higher rates of trauma-related mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Services are often hard to access, delayed, or culturally inappropriate, leaving many without the support they need. Those without strong family or community ties are especially vulnerable.

### OUR GOAL:

Youth benefit from timely, accessible, and appropriate mental health care and opportunities to build well-being.



## EDUCATION

For those in the child welfare system, frequent moves and a lack of support can disrupt learning and limit opportunities. We want young people to stay in school, graduate, and build the future they envision.

### OUR GOAL:

Children and youth have the right supports - tutoring, equipment, and access to enrichment activities - so they can stay on track and succeed.



## EMPLOYMENT

For young people leaving care, a job provides stability and purpose; however, many face barriers, including limited experience, weak social connections, and a lack of support.

### OUR GOAL:

Young people equipped with life and job skills to build successful, meaningful careers.



Our commitment to children and youth isn't changing, but it is evolving. **As a grantmaker**, we'll continue to provide resources that address immediate and urgent needs. **As a partner**, we'll invest and scale proven programs and system solutions to drive lasting change. And, **as an influencer**, we'll amplify knowledge and elevate lived and sector voices to remove barriers to equity and opportunity.





# STRONG FAMILIES AND LIFELONG CONNECTIONS

## The Need:

Children and youth from care have some of the highest Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) scores in the world. Trauma, instability, and family separation often make it hard to build trust and healthy relationships, leading to long-term challenges in all areas of life.

Research shows that creating access to supportive relationships — whether with family members, mentors, caregivers or community members — is among the most powerful means of helping young people engage academically, graduate from high school and move on to a lifetime of stability and success.

## Our Goal:

Empower families and guardians to help young people thrive and ensure children and youth have safe people and places in their lives that they can count on unconditionally.



Over **60%** of children in care are **separated** from their siblings, and many report losing **connection** to extended family, culture and community.



My son didn't have a father figure; I had left his dad, and in his mind, that made me a bad person. His mentor was a strong male figure for him, someone who was Black, someone he could relate to. He changed my son's perspective about what had happened and became a trusted source of support for him. That's when everything started to turn around. He's much, much better. He's not even the same kid."

—Mother who accessed parenting support through a Foundation-funded program



# MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING



## The Need:

Challenges with mental health can create a ripple effect for young people from care, hampering their ability to finish their education, obtain meaningful employment and live full, independent lives.

Young people have told us that access to mental health and well-being support is crucial in helping them achieve stability and thrive.

## Our Goal:

Lead innovative solutions that ensure young people can benefit from timely, accessible and appropriate mental healthcare as well as activities that strengthen their sense of well-being, identity and belonging.



Without this financial aid, I wouldn't be able to go to therapy. Through the challenges experienced in daily life and especially the traumas faced before and during foster care, therapy has been extremely helpful and transformational for me as a step toward healing and thriving."

—Young person who accessed mental health support through the Foundation

Youth in care are nearly **four times** more likely to experience **mental illness** compared to the general youth population, and as many as **75%** of those who age out of care report unaddressed trauma.





# EDUCATION

## The Need:

Young people involved with the child welfare system are significantly less likely than their peers to graduate high school or pursue post-secondary education.

Education is a critical pathway to success for all children — and is especially important and transformative for those impacted by child welfare. Together with employment opportunities, access to mental health supports and strong relationships, education plays a direct role in uplifting young people out of poverty and breaking the cycle of intergenerational involvement with child welfare.

## Our Goal:

Advance equitable access to education by ensuring more young people from care can engage in meaningful, interest-driven learning, achieve academic success, and graduate from high school and post-secondary programs free from financial barriers.



Being able to access education meant everything to me; it gave me the possibility of creating a future that was nothing like my past.”

—Young person who received scholarship support from Children's Aid Foundation of Canada



In Ontario, just **46% of kids** raised in the child welfare system **graduate** high school, compared to **83%** of the general population.







# EMPLOYMENT

## The Need:

Youth unemployment in Canada has reached a level not seen in more than a decade — a crisis estimated to cost the Canadian economy billions of dollars in the years ahead. For children and youth from care, the barriers they face to stable, long-term employment are further compounded by limited education and lack of access to skill building, job readiness opportunities and professional networks.

Research shows that young people who participate in job readiness training and life skills training are much more likely to secure sustainable employment and achieve lifelong stability.

## Our Goal:

Deliver solutions that equip young people with the critical skills, resources and networks they need to secure a job, build a meaningful career and establish long-term stability and success.



More than **50% of youth** age out of care are unemployed or underemployed by **age 24** and are more than **twice** as likely to experience poverty or income insecurity.



I loved the opportunity to refine my skills in different areas. The internship forced me to step out of my comfort zone and diversify my skills and knowledge.”

—Young person who participated in the Foundation's Youth Works program



# How We'll Drive Change: Impact Framework and Five-Year Strategic Priorities

**Generation Impact** marks our continued evolution from traditional granting to bold, strategic outcomes-based partnerships and investments.

For over 45 years, we have been committed to meeting the urgent and immediate needs of young people in and from care. That won't change. What's evolving is our focus on creating deeper, longer-term positive outcomes for young people impacted by child welfare.

Keeping children and youth at the centre, we will continue to fund urgent, immediate and direct needs for services and supports that remove barriers and provide opportunities. But we will also bring greater attention and focus to investing in new ideas that have the potential to disrupt old systems responses and build evidence-informed models of care with the potential to replicate and scale — permanently transforming outcomes for children and youth from care for generations to come.



To do this work, we are committed to working with young people, partners, government and donors to make a difference so deep, it will be felt for generations.

## FIVE-YEAR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- 1 Accelerate better outcomes for children and youth:** As an organization, we will shift our focus to working innovatively or long-term impact for children and youth from care in addition to continuing to address their immediate and urgent needs.
- 2 Inspire more Canadians to care:** We will champion brighter futures for all young people in Canada engaged with the child welfare system by building on the success of our \$100-million Futures Transformed campaign, and with a focus on impact reporting, storytelling and data, we will rally a national community of supporters committed to achieving better outcomes for children and youth from care.
- 3 Reach more kids in more places:** We will develop a five-year roadmap for national growth, deepening collaborations with national partners, experts and governments.
- 4 Partner toward Indigenous impact and reconciliation:** With the passage of Bill C-92, we will continue to work to become a trusted partner and support to Indigenous organizations and governments.
- 5 Invest in people, culture and performance:** We will invest in people and tools, deepen our focus on evaluation and build the capacity of our partners to test, prove, scale system solutions.



## MEASURING OUTCOMES

As we pursue our new strategic direction, we are deepening our commitment to measuring outcomes that reflect tangible and lasting impact. This means not only continuing to measure early changes, but expanding our view of impact to include more complex, long-term change.

Each area of focus will be guided by overarching goals, and we will track a range of outcomes for children and youth at different levels of involvement with the child welfare system to assess the real-life impact of our work and adjust course as needed.

With an emphasis on transparency and accountability, we will regularly share our progress and outcomes data with donors, partners and the public, including through public-facing dashboards.



# Working Together for Change

It will take all of us to ignite a brighter future for children and youth involved with the child welfare system — communities across the country coming together for change.

There are many ways to get involved. Whether you choose to donate, volunteer, partner with us, amplify our messages with your network or engage online, every action will bring us closer to a world where young people who have experienced abuse, neglect and abandonment have the strength and resilience to build a lifetime of their own unstoppable success.

**Thank you so much for your support.**

## Get in touch!

Visit us online at [cafdn.org](https://cafdn.org)

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