

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION REPORT 2024/2025



CHILDREN'S
AID FOUNDATION
OF CANADA



Executive Summary

For 30 years Children’s Aid Foundation of Canada (CAFC) has supported young people transitioning out of the child welfare system knowing that access to post-secondary education is an important foundation for lasting change. At the same, we acknowledge the path to and through education can be a difficult one.

Young people from care participate in post-secondary education at approximately half the rate of the general population, mainly due to the profound and complex barriers they face as they struggle with the impacts of abuse, neglect, abandonment, instability and childhood trauma.¹ In Ontario alone, 62% of 16- and 17-year-olds in care hope to pursue post-secondary education², but just 46% of young people raised in the child welfare system graduate high school, compared to 83% of the general population.³

The most significant barrier to education for young people transitioning from care is financial. In Canada, the cost of post-secondary education is estimated at \$35,000 per year, with 77% of this cost comprising rent, food, transit, and phone fees.⁴ Young people transitioning from care who aspire to pursue post-secondary education (PSE) often face the challenge of managing their independence—securing housing, employment, food, and healthcare—while also handling the academic and financial demands of higher education. They typically do so with fewer supports and funding options than the average Canadian student. During the 2024-25 school year we asked CAFC scholarship and bursary recipients voluntary questions to build a snapshot of their experience. The respondents told us that more than half (56%) needed to work during the school year, either part - (44%) or full-time (12%). Seventy percent of respondents reported receiving provincial education loans or grants. However, more than half (53%) indicated they were not accessing other forms of support often available to youth from care—such as full or partial tuition coverage from their province, band, or educational institution, or financial assistance from family, friends, or other sources. Additionally, nearly half (43%) reported paying between \$10,000 and \$25,000 in tuition alone for the 2024-25 academic year.

To underscore the importance of supporting youth from care financially and ensuring they have access to adequate and equitable resources to succeed in their studies, in 2023 CAFC developed and committed to a support strategy to ensure that no youth from care in Canada is held back by financial barriers in pursuing post-secondary education. The strategy commits us to invest in solutions that will remove financial barriers to post-secondary education through direct grants (scholarships) and by connecting youth from care to existing/available funds (navigation supports). The strategy also commits us to engaging in advocacy efforts to reduce financial barriers, increase funding, and mobilize additional support from the government for youth in and from care pursuing PSE.

¹ Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS), 2014, data point refers to 19- and 20-year-olds

² Data obtained through personal communication with CAFC, May 2023. Information from OnLAC, 2022

³ OACAS Gateway to Success Cycle Three, 2014

⁴ Estimate based on data from Statistics Canada: Canadian students, tuition and additional compulsory fees, by level of study (statcan.gc.ca)

The PSE Support Strategy

In 2024-25 CAFC completed a successful second full cycle of the new scholarship structure in line with the our PSE support strategy's first goal, to continue and enhance our direct financial support in line with the recommendations of the National Post-Secondary Education Advisory Council. We used the learnings of the first cycle to further refine the scholarship review rubric for the 2025-26 application, which received a record number of applications. A jurisdictional scan of the PSE landscape of nine provinces was planned and executed to inform CAFC as we work to activate the further goals of the PSE support strategy.

CAFC's 2024-25 post-secondary supports were made up of:

Scholarships, \$5000

Scholarships award young people \$5000 for each academic year until they finish their program through a once yearly competitive application.

Bursaries, up to \$2000

Bursary awards may be available (funding allowing) through the school year to full- and part-time post-secondary students who had applied for, but did not receive a scholarship, or in a dedicated bursary application process later in the year, for either one or two semesters.

Graduation Awards, up to \$2000

Are awarded to prior scholarships and bursary recipients who graduate from their post-secondary program.

The Youth Opportunity Fund, assessed by individual request

Grants for eligible young people including current and former scholarships and bursary recipients for immediate needs in support of their academic or career-related goals.

We also partner with,

Ontario Trust for Student Support (OTSS) Endowed Funds

CAFC endowments at George Brown College, Centennial College, Humber College, and the University of Waterloo which were matched by the Ontario government through the Ontario Trust for Student Support program in 2011. Students are matched with PSE awards through the scholarship review process.

Corsage Project Community Awards of the greater Toronto area

The Corsage Project's funding is administered by the CAFC, including the allocation of the organization's scholarships, and the facilitating of the Corsage Project Community Award payments.

In addition to the PSE program, the Foundation also provides grants to numerous partner agencies throughout Canada to fund education-related supports to young people in all stages of their path to and through post-secondary education.

Impact To Date

Since the awarding of \$15,000 to nine students from the Toronto area in 1995, over the following 30 years CAFC's post-secondary programs have continued to grow and expand in scope. In 2024-25, we awarded **\$2 million** dollars to **588 individual students** across Canada, bringing the total granted through the PSE program to **\$26.5 million** to **8758 young people** across Canada, totaled yearly, solely through the incredible generosity of donors.

Granting Overview: 2024-2025

588 individual students were supported in the 2024-2025 academic year, with **\$2,048,772** in awards.

Grant Type	2024-25		2023-24	
	Amount granted	Students Supported	Amount granted	Students Supported
Scholarships	\$1,475,000	318	\$1,492,500	319
Bursaries for full- or part-time studies	\$140,000	87	\$311,250	199
Scholarships or bursaries granted through OTSS endowments	\$51,500	17	\$50,000	15
Youth who received grants from the HSBC Youth Opportunity Fund*	\$242,572	154	\$173,073	115
Graduation Awards*	\$138,200	111	\$124,300	100
Corsage Project Community Awards**	\$1,500	3	\$1,500	3
TOTAL GRANTED/SUPPORTED:	\$2,048,772	690	\$2,152,623	790

*Students receiving Youth Opportunity Fund grants and Graduation Awards may also be receiving a scholarship or bursary, which has been accounted for in the total of individual students.

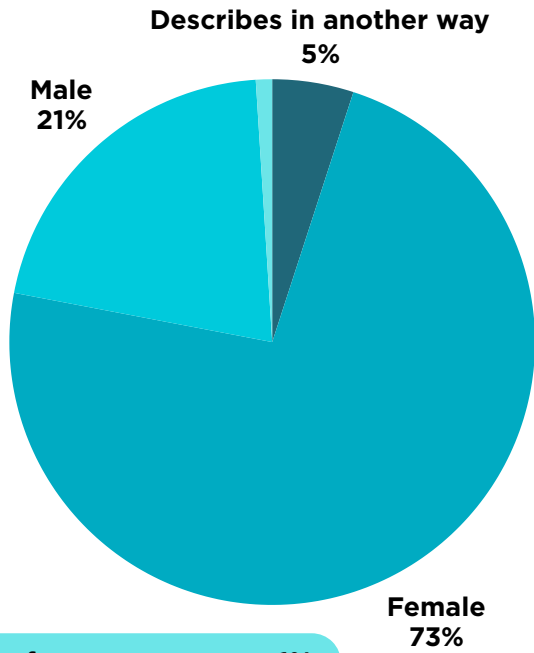
**Other award partially administered by the CAFC

“Scholarships...allow youth like me to feel seen and valued. This is an example of an opportunity that lets us know that we matter, that our futures are invested in and that we are being rooted for. The beautiful thing about this is that the people who are championing youth out of care are strangers to us...So, I am assured that I will not keep the joy, opportunity, success and learning all to myself once I have received them because these are some of the great things in life that I wish to share with other people so that they feel supported and valued too...”

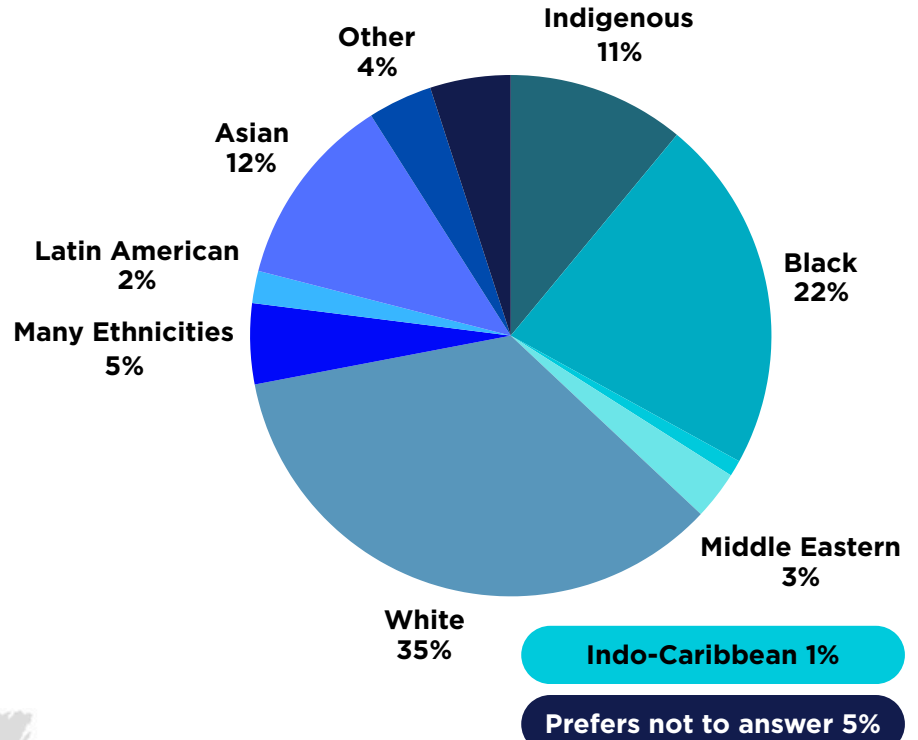
Our Reach

In 2024-25 young people receiving CAFC PSE supports are represented by,

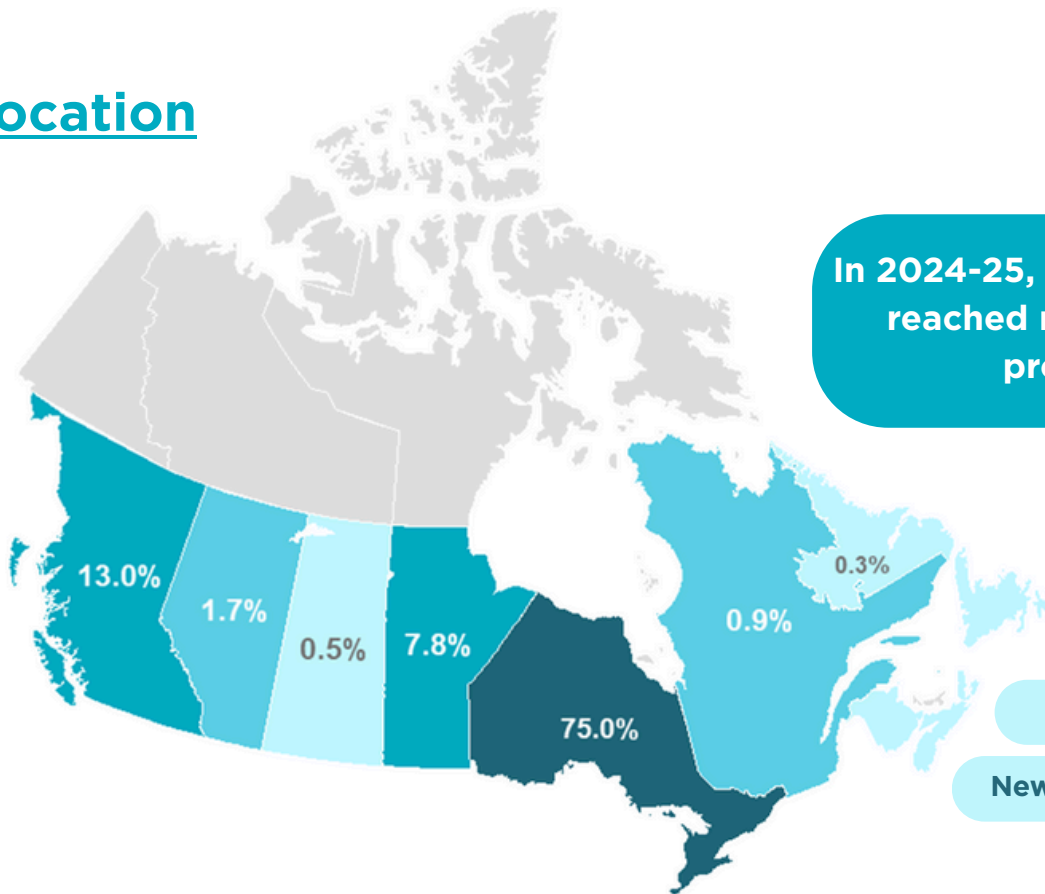
Gender Identity



Ethnic Identity



Location



In 2024-25, the PSE program reached recipients in 9 provinces

- Nova Scotia, 0.3%
- New Brunswick, 0.3%

Scholarships and Bursaries

In 2024-25 CAFC supported **318 scholarship** recipients and **87 bursary** recipients.

Schools and Programs

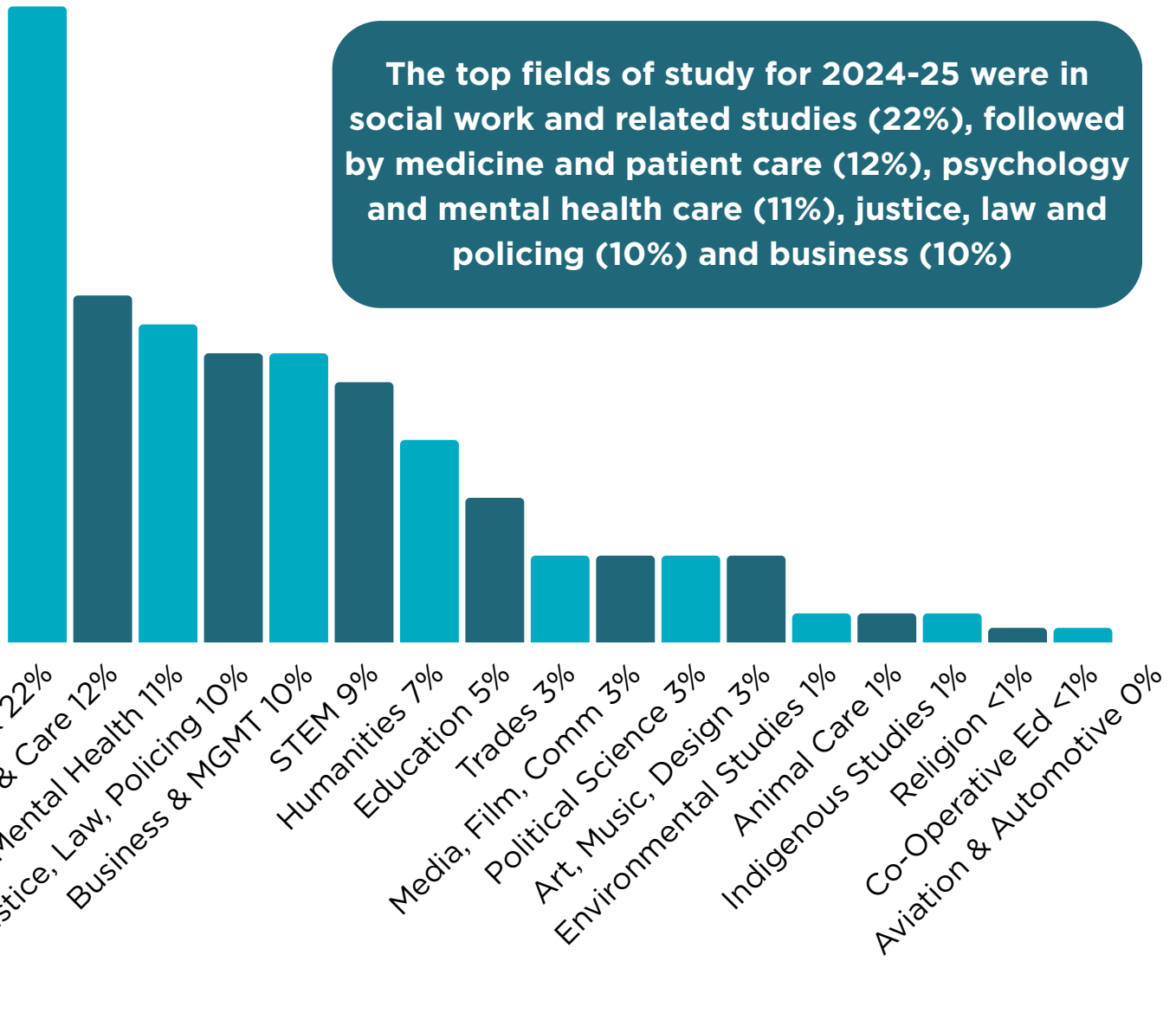
Of both the scholarship and bursary recipients,

- **66%** attended university
- **33%** attended college
- **2%** attended private/career college

- **43** were pursuing a post-graduate or graduate program

**Students
attended 104
different
schools across
Canada**

Programs of Study



Impact - Scholarships & Bursaries

Scholarships

The scholarship program runs on a twice-yearly check-in system to account for students who will be continuing, who will need to take a semester break, and who have completed their studies, without the student needing to reapply for the scholarship each year.

Of the responding scholarship recipients, both with active scholarships, and those who have put their awards on hold, **80%** are on track to continue their studies, or to start their next program, in 2025-26. 13% had or will be graduating and not returning to school, and 5% are waiting to hear about acceptance of their next program before deciding on their next steps.

There was a
93% response
rate to the last
scholarship
check-in

Bursaries

Bursaries are flexible, accepting full- and part-time students attending one or two semesters, or students in alternative programs. At the same time, they are limited to the amount of funding available on a yearly basis, are issued later in the school year and are not renewable. In 2024-25 CAFC granted a limited number of bursaries to young people who had applied for, but did not receive a scholarship.

Asked to reflect on the awards received over the course of their program, both the 2024-25 scholarship and bursary recipients said that CAFC support,

Influenced their decision to begin or to continue in school?

- **79%** of scholarship recipients & **64%** of bursary recipients said “**Yes, absolutely.**”
- **18%** of scholarship recipients & **26%** of bursary recipients said “**Yes, somewhat.**”

Helpful to decrease stress?

- **93%** of scholarship recipients & **88%** of bursary recipients said “**Yes, absolutely.**”
- **7%** of scholarship recipients & **11%** of bursary recipients said “**Yes, somewhat.**”

Helpful in increasing your confidence or self-esteem?

- **73%** of scholarship recipients & **65%** of bursary recipients said “**Yes, absolutely.**”
- **22%** of scholarship recipients & **30%** of bursary recipients said “**Yes, somewhat.**”

Helpful to plan or prepare for the future?

- **88%** of scholarship recipients & **82%** of bursary recipients said “**Yes, absolutely.**”
- **11%** of scholarship recipients & **14%** of bursary recipients said “**Yes, somewhat.**”

Youth Opportunity Fund

In 2024-25 CAFC processed 195 requests from 154 individual students. Applicants were made up of current CAFC scholarship and bursary students (33%), past students and graduates (49%), and applicants who had not previously received awards (35%).

“This funding has made it possible for me to pursue critical training that would not have been possible for me to afford on my own.”

Types of Requests

Types of Request	Percentage
Equipment and Technology	37%
Short Term Courses	30%
Fees, Academic or Career related	21%
Tutoring	6%
Driving Lessons	3%
Academic Upgrading, High School equivalency	2%
Document fees	2%
Assessments	1%

The average grant amount was \$1,244

The smallest request was \$50 for an Ontario College Social Work & Social Service Workers Registration Fee and the largest request was \$7,500 for professional truck driving qualification and licensing

Most requests were for equipment, and technology necessary for educational success, such as laptops, equipment required by an educational program, or employment. For short-term courses that complement current studies and/or professional development that don't meet the eligibility of either the scholarship or bursary because of length, or immediate need. And lastly fees, which covered application fees and deposits for graduate programs, and for professional organization testing and licensing fees.

Graduation Award

In 2024-25 CAFC supported **111 graduates** who had received scholarships, bursaries or a combination of the two throughout their programs. Of that number, **45** graduated from university, **58** from college, and **8** from career college or trade school.

Of the graduates, **8 students** completed master's, doctorate, or Juris Doctor degrees.

The average amount granted in scholarships and/or bursaries to the 2024-25 graduates over the course of post-secondary studies was \$12,274

Of 2024-25 graduates, 33% received only scholarships, 40% received a combination of scholarships and bursaries, and 28% received only bursaries over the course of their programs.

Six (+) months from graduation, CAFC surveys the Graduation Award recipients, and received responses from 99 individuals (90%). They reported that,

90% of graduates report they have the same career goals as when they first graduated. Of those, 73% said their current activities have either gotten them to their goal, or are helping to work towards it

42% were currently working, and 16% were actively looking for work.

33% were continuing their education or training, and 4% were in a practicum or co-op

The remaining 4% were stay-at-home parents, who intend to continue towards their goals in the future

“As a former youth in care, navigating the path toward higher education has been both challenging and daunting. It has often felt like the odds were stacked against me and obtaining my undergraduate degree was impossible. Your contributions not only helped to alleviate the financial burdens I experienced during the last few years but also reignited my hope and determination to continue pursuing my dreams. It reminded me that there are people in my corner, some of whom I may never have the opportunity to meet, who believe in me and who are championing my success”

Impact - Graduation Award

Asked to reflect on the awards received over the course of their program, 2024-2025 graduates said that CAFC support,

Influenced their decision to begin or to continue in school?

- 78% of award recipients said “Yes, absolutely.”
- 17% of award recipients said “Yes, somewhat.”

Helpful to decrease stress?

- 92% of award recipients said “Yes, absolutely.”
- 8% of award recipients said “Yes, somewhat.”

Helpful in increasing your confidence or self-esteem?

- 72% of award recipients said “Yes, absolutely.”
- 23% of award recipients said “Yes, somewhat.”

Helpful to plan or prepare for the future?

- 77% of award recipients said “Yes, absolutely.”
- 21% of award recipients said “Yes, somewhat.”

The CAFC PSE Program in 2025-2026

The results of the PSE jurisdictional scan will be reviewed by individuals with lived experience and subject matter experts to ensure its accuracy and relevance. These validated findings will inform the continuing work to activate CAFC’s PSE support strategy, including helping young people navigate available support, advocating for the removal of financial barriers, and securing increased government resources. Additionally, efforts will continue to explore and invest in sustainable solutions that eliminate financial obstacles to post-secondary education for young people with experience of the child welfare system.