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COMMUNI **T** Y

Our Vision

A community where children and youth are safe, valued and heard, empowering them towards strong futures.

Our Mission

To provide support, education and advocacy for children and youth who are or may become victims or witnesses of abuse or crime, and their families, through the criminal justice process in Waterloo Region, Guelph and Wellington County.

2020-21 Board of Directors

The past year has brought forward many challenges and you rose to them all. We are so thankful that you continue to champion our organization. We are in a position of strength and have seen many great successes this past year. None of this would be possible without you, our Board of Directors. Thank you for your dedication and commitment.

Officers

Bernadette Behm (Chair)
Lisa Allen (Past Chair)
Sharon Seifried (Vice Chair)
Dianne Romano (Treasurer)
Olivia Rogalla (Secretary)

Directors

Melissa Crowley
Lisa Goertz
Sloden Lackovic
Jean Markovich
Kelly McLachlin

Laura Park
Alice Schmidt Hanbidge
Laura Shoemaker
Doug Tyson

"We wish to make a donation to the Child Witness Centre in honour of a number of family birthdays. We have decided to do this instead of giving each other gifts. The work that you do is very challenging and unfortunately very necessary."

~ **Bryan and Linda Hodgert**
Long-time Donors and Volunteers

resilience noun

re·sil·ience | \ ri-'zil-yən(t)s

- 1 : the capability of a strained body to recover its size and shape after deformation caused especially by compressive stress
- 2 : **an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change**

source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience>

REFLECTION, RESILIENCY AND GRATITUDE

Message from the Board Chair & Executive Director

As we were reflecting back over this past year and remembering where we were a year ago, it is sometimes hard to believe how far we have come. Back then, we were all just getting used to this new world with COVID-19, learning how to navigate our worlds online and being fearful for what the future would hold and how long this COVID thing would last. While at times things have been difficult and often downright unbelievable, we are struck by how resilient we all are.

It is the resilience of the staff at the Child Witness Centre (CWC) that we are most proud of. Their ability to pivot their normal mode of operation and find ways to continue to serve our community has impressed us at every turn. Their commitment to the young people and families they work so hard to provide support and guidance to is remarkable. The resiliency of our team has meant that we have been able to continue to do the work of supporting the children and youth in our community who have been affected by abuse and crime. Without their dedication many would have fallen through the cracks. A sincere thanks to this amazing team of dedicated staff, volunteers and friends of the CWC who make this agency special.

The work we do is not only important in our community, but also unique. Without the CWC there is no one else that would do the work we do. We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that we could not do our work without the support of our partners, donors, funders and volunteers. We truly appreciate you all and every contribution. Some of you provided emergency funding to deal with the pandemic, others direct program support or allowing us to redirect funds where they were needed most. All of you have assisted in keeping our doors open.

Change appears to have been a constant for many this past year, and here at the CWC it was no different. David Morneau was with us for over a year when he announced that he wished to take a step back and concentrate on his family for a while. David brought new awareness to the CWC from within our community and led our organization with passion and commitment. We know that he will continue to be a great ambassador for the CWC and will remain a close

friend of ours. With David's departure, we opened the door for Kim Rodrigues to join our team. Kim comes to us from Hopewell Children's Homes in Guelph, bringing a wealth of experience and passion to the role as well as a partnership focused approach. Kim will help to guide us into the future and to make us even stronger and more effective in our community.

Discoveries of hundreds of undocumented and unmarked graves of children this year are a horrific reminder about what can happen to children who do not have their voices heard and are subjected to systemic racism and abuse. Thousands of children died because of disease, violence, malnourishment, accidents or suicide. The abuse or death of a child is not a political matter but a matter of public responsibility. The CWC continues to be committed to examining its practices to ensure we are working from an anti-racism and anti-oppression framework. We will continue to be an ally of movements that embrace diversity and will be looking inwardly to determine where we need to improve our own policies, practices and culture. We will reflect upon the past as we remain steadfast on improving ourselves and doing better than we did yesterday.

We take immense pride in the work that we do. During the upcoming year we will be finalizing and implementing a new strategic plan and continuing to build on already strong partnerships. We are grateful to be part of an organization that is championing the rights of children and youth in our community. Thank you again to all our partners, donors, funders, volunteers and staff members, past and present, for your passion for our cause and shared commitment to helping young people to thrive.



Bernadette Behm
Board Chair



Kim Rodrigues
Executive Director

TESTIMONIALS

Inspiring messages of hope from clients

“I would like to thank everyone involved with this whole process. It really helps parents and children be prepared to deal with the court and ongoing issues. Much appreciation!”

“I would just like to thank you for the work that you do, day in and day out. I was greatly impacted, in a good way, by the support I received through Child Witness Centre and I can’t imagine how many other kids like me were as well. Once again, thank you!”



“I cannot thank you enough for being there for my children and myself through this whole ordeal. No family should have to go through these types of matters, but the reality is we do and to have an organization such as yours there for us is comforting and reassuring. I felt that I was not alone at any time through the matter – and I only had to pick up the phone to have our questions answered. Everyone was compassionate, non-judgmental and easy to speak with. Thank you for doing what you do to make this a little less horrible.”

“I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for everything. When you’re in a situation like that, you get your knees kicked out from under you... But I am so thankful for your support during it all. When everything was so scattered and we didn’t know what to do, we could turn to you and that made things feel better – you took care of everything for us.”

“Our caseworker was an angel. She kept me together during our worst nightmare.”

OUR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

With your help!

Child Witness Centre

1,556 children and youth

1,067 (Child Witness Program)

489 (Child and Youth Advocate Program)

+ 1,207 parents and caregivers

902 (Child Witness Program)


305 (Child and Youth Advocate Program)

= 2,763 total supported

Waterloo Region Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (CYAC)

Our role in the CYAC is to provide oversight and deliver services through the Child and Youth Advocate Program.

 **522 investigations**

 **828 children and youth involved in abuse investigations**

Our core partners in the CYAC:



FAMILY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES OF THE WATERLOO REGION



Supporting the most vulnerable, when it's needed most

Offering clients information, education and advocacy throughout the whole process.

Providing emotional support and strategies to reduce the generally high levels of stress and anxiety.

Providing crisis intervention, safety planning and coping skills – this is vitally important.

Connecting clients to other community services that will best meet their individual needs.

Helping caregivers be effective in supporting their child(ren).

Offering a safe place that fosters healing, hope and wellbeing.

These examples of our tailored support and resources help to build the foundation for strong futures.

Downstream Ripple Effect

When unsupported, young people are:

4x as likely to report self-harm and suicidal ideation

30% less likely to graduate from high school

With early intervention, the demand for downstream services related to **family violence, mental health, addiction and homelessness** can be significantly reduced.



BUILDING RESILIENCY, HEALING AND HOPE

For the second year in a row, we helped **over 1,500** young people across our two trauma-informed programs. **1,556** children and youth who were victims or witnesses of abuse, violence or crime were supported. For the most part, we have been able to maintain our vital services through the pandemic – but were forced to adapt the way we provide them. While we continue to see the children and youth we work with face-to-face, as we have found that is the best way to connect with them, we have implemented remote communication into our programming.

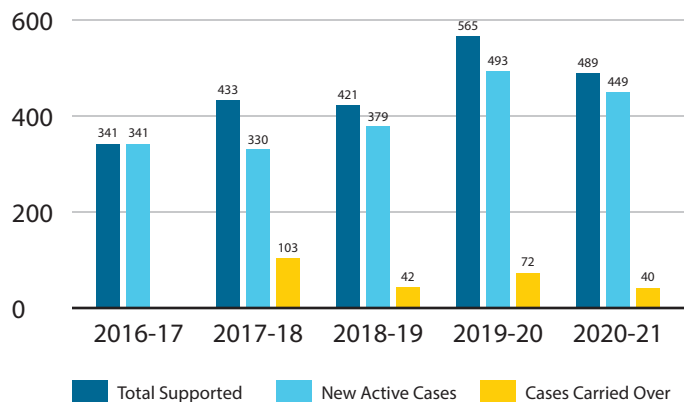
Child and Youth Advocate Program (CYAP) – Waterloo Region Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (CYAC)

Like most community support systems, the services offered by the Advocate Program and CYAC were greatly impacted by COVID-19 and provincial shutdowns. Although the advocates were not able to provide direct interview support during the first few months, we continued to receive referrals from our partners at the CYAC to provide follow-up support to families who were interviewed. Our commitment to providing fulsome supports to these children, youth and caregivers remained strong despite facing obstacles never imagined.

During the past year, the Advocate Program supported **489** children and youth. The CYAC was involved in **522** investigations, which included **828** young persons. Despite limitations on providing direct face-to-face service initially, the advocates provided support to **54%** of all children, youth and families who accessed the CYAC – an increase of **2%** from 2019-2020.

COVID-19 restrictions and ongoing safety planning remain paramount in assessing how to best meet our clients' needs. Some families have shared how difficult it can be to make connections through virtual platforms and have found having an advocate in attendance and in person to be very beneficial. We will continue to collaborate with our partners to provide 'safe spaces' and increasing face-to-face support to the children, youth and families we serve.

Children and Youth Supported Through CYAP



A parent recently shared the following with the Advocate they were working with:

“Thank you so much for everything you have done, we really appreciated all your help and compassion through this whole process... I am very grateful that your job exists. It’s really unfortunate that it is in such need though.”

The quote above is especially poignant, as we too wish that our roles were not necessary; that children and youth were free from harm and/or witnessing violence. But until that is the case, we are committed to supporting and empowering the most vulnerable.



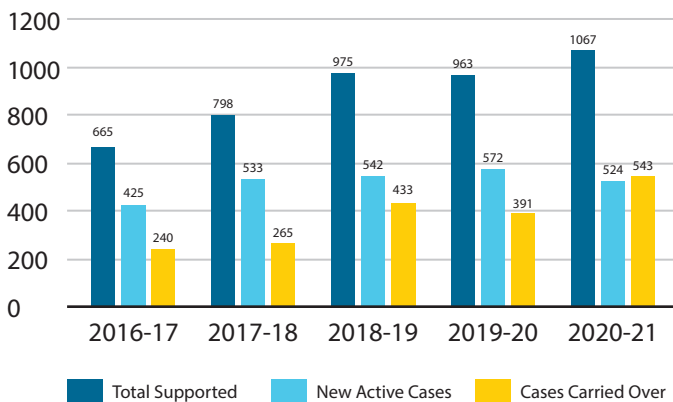
Child Witness Program (CWP)

For the first time in the program's 31-year history, we supported more than 1,000 young people. We helped **1,067** children and youth who were victims or witnesses of crime in Waterloo Region, Guelph and Wellington County. This is an **11%** increase from the previous year.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, courts operations fluctuated throughout the past year, with periods of time when most matters were cancelled. We were relieved when courts were able to resume and run trials/preliminary hearings over online video platforms, thereby facilitating resolutions for some of the families we work with.

The courts implemented remote testimonies and we used our CWC office or other rented spaces as of January 2021. There has been positive feedback and great take-up from our criminal justice partners as well as children, youth and their families.

Children and Youth Supported Through CWP



Our accredited facility dog, Monet, has been busy supporting children and youth and their families during court preparations and other meetings related to their court matters. Caseworkers have consistently noted that when Monet is present to provide support during difficult meetings, clients and their family members expressed that Monet's presence was a positive factor and helped with managing feelings of stress and anxiety. She has recently started to provide support as a testimonial aid to children and youth testifying remotely or in the CCTV room.

One young person described how the CWP helped them with their worries and concerns:

"They broke down the process, and how everything works. Any question I had they would answer, even if they personally did not know the answer, they would ask the person who would and then get back to me. They supported me through the most difficult time in my life, they helped me get through it by simply being genuine and doing their job – but above and beyond what I expected, which helped me big time!"



One parent let us know that what helped their child the most was:

"Being available and supportive, asking open ended questions, performing regular check-ins and offering comfort when meeting in person."

Another young person commented:

"Our caseworker was amazing. I really appreciate the relationship she built with me, like learning my interests and seeming interested in the other things that were going on in my life."

YOUTH SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM



The Youth Symposium is a meaningful and inspiring one day program for Grade 8 students that has been running since 2003. The demand for the program was growing so much so that we added an additional day in 2019 to accommodate **over 4,000** youth. Since its beginning, the Youth Symposium has welcomed **more than 37,000** students!

Unfortunately, the pandemic forced us to cancel the 2020 Youth Symposium. While we had considered going virtual, after talking with School Boards, teachers, social workers and reviewing our own resources, we felt the Youth Symposium is one of those programs that needs to be in person for maximum impact.

Students have said...

"It's easy to make mistakes, but it's how we move on from them that truly says who we are."

"I realized that every decision I make, every step I take, I should reflect on my actions whether they be good or bad."

"I liked how all the presenters had a story to tell, but they told it in different ways, and they related their stories to us in order to teach us something."

"Very inspirational. The story that was shared made me believe I can achieve anything."

"Love this! I want to come back again next year!"

Teachers have said...

"These opportunities are difference makers for kids. It can't be found in a textbook."

"Very empowering, worthwhile, touched on real issues happening right now in schools."

"Dynamic, energetic, inspirational, humorous!"

"Excellent opportunity for students to understand that there is help, to hear information from presenters and community representatives that support school messages."

"Awesome messages that were very heartfelt and relevant in the minds of Grade 8's."

The Youth Symposium is also about engagement in our community. **Thank you** to everyone who has been a part of the Youth Symposium over its 16-year history. The program has survived and thrived through the dedication of presenters, teachers, volunteers and sponsors.

With the negative impact of the pandemic on children and youth, we believe they need empowerment more than ever. This can be a very important program at a critical moment in their lives. We look forward to returning when it is safe to do so!



FUNDRAISING PUSHES FORWARD

Spring Appeal 2020

We decided to launch our first Spring Appeal with a twist – to support CWC along with others in the community. A matching challenge led us to support **ALS Canada, Food Bank – Guelph, Grand River Hospital Foundation, House of Friendship, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Mood Disorders Society, Ray of Hope** and **We Matter**. During these uniquely challenging times we must stand together to support the needs of one another.

Our Board of Directors, a group of 12 thoughtful, compassionate individuals, also committed to matching funds to the Spring Appeal and donated to several other community organizations, including **Extend-a-Family – Waterloo Region, Hospice of Waterloo Region** and **Women’s Crisis Services**. In total we raised **\$10,250** for CWC and **\$800** for organizations in the community!

Pancake Lunch

Our 23rd Annual Pancake Lunch **went virtual** for the first time in February 2021! While we missed being together in person, we were able to combine some of the traditional elements with a few new ideas to deliver an exciting event.

Our gift bags (shown right) were a big hit with ticket holders, thanks to our generous sponsors. We were also thrilled to have World Series Champion and Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame Member, Pat Hentgen, and Toronto Blue Jays Director of Baseball Media, Richard Griffin, champion our cause.

The Pancake Lunch has always been about bringing together the community for networking and learning in support of our cause. Our 2021 installment was no different. We raised **over \$30,000**, thanks to the wonderful support we received!



Ride for Refuge 2020: Freestyle

Thank you to those who participated in the 2020 edition of Ride for Refuge. Due to the pandemic, we broke into smaller groups for this event. We had **four teams, 27 participants** and **over 120 donors**. With this combined effort, we were pleased to raise **over \$7,500!**

A Strong Creative Boost

We are so grateful to **Capacity Canada** for selecting us to participate in the Creative Day for Social Good (CD4SG). We worked with a team of students and partners who created marketing tools to help build our brand. This was a wonderful opportunity and will have a huge impact for the 17 non-profit organizations that were chosen.

RESILIENCY IN THE COMMUNITY

The value of community in providing care and compassion shines brightly when we partner together. Your support has substantial immediate and long-term impacts on the lives of young people. Here are some of the creative ways our community stepped up to support us during the pandemic.

The **2020 Farwell4Hire Campaign** was a huge success. With the support of the community, a whopping **\$160,588** was raised for six local charities! A big thanks to Mike Farwell and his team, and all the businesses, donors and supporters who made this possible.



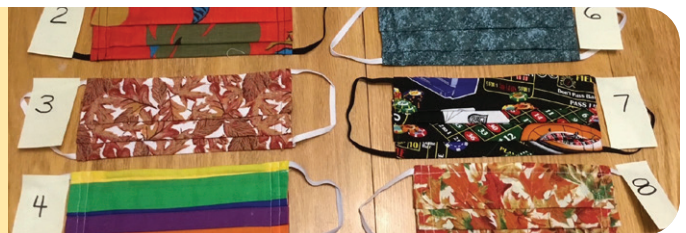
In 24 hours, a **virtual live music concert** on Facebook was organized and raised **almost \$1,000** to support our work. A huge thank you to Rob Maxwell, DQ Boardwalk, DQ King Street (Waterloo) and musician Kevin Coates for putting on a fantastic show!

Despite having to cancel their second annual **Widows Sons Grand River Chapter Charity Ride** to support Child Witness Centre, they came through big-time with a monetary donation and supply of hand sanitizer.



FaithLife Financial put on virtual fun staff events throughout November and December to raise **over \$1,000** towards Monet. She is certainly one lucky dog and is set for food, supplies and toys for a few months.

Local community member **Pat Smale** created and sold face masks for the community throughout the pandemic. In December, she provided all proceeds from masks sold to CWC. Every act of generosity means so much to us!



We simply cannot say it enough... Thank You!

2020-21 FINANCIAL SUMMARY



Treasurer's Report

Child Witness Centre (CWC) ended their 2020-21 fiscal year in a strong financial position. The COVID-19 operating environment created many challenges for both management and staff, but I am pleased to report that they handled it all brilliantly.

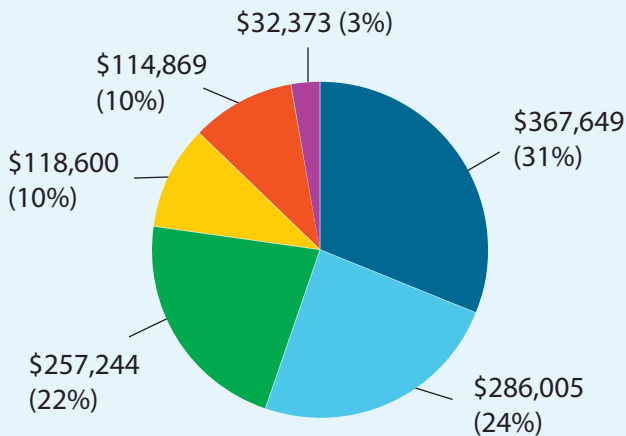
CWC received significant COVID-19 funding from the federal government, to help “keep the doors open and lights on”. As in previous years, funding from government bodies and United Way continued to flow, with additional funds received to meet increased costs related to the pandemic.

Our community also stepped up in many wonderful ways over the past fiscal year. This included providing emergency funding to ensure the continued delivery of CWC's vital services during these stretching times. We are deeply grateful for our funders and donors for your generous support. We are committed to remaining wise and responsible stewards of the monies you entrust to us.

Dianne Romano
Board Treasurer

This annual report shares some highlights and summary information from the audited financial statements for the year ending March 31, 2021. Complete financial statements are available upon request.

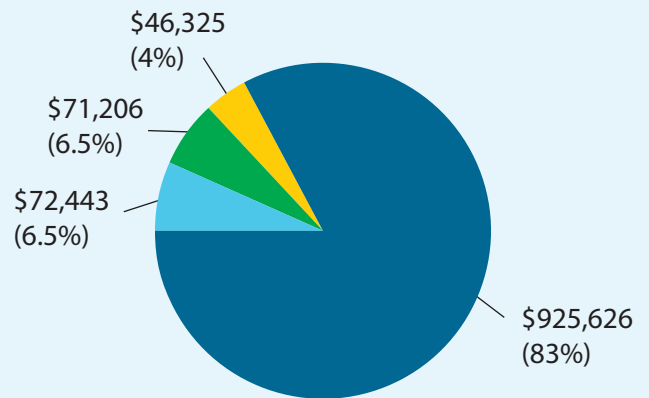
Revenue



Total Revenue: \$1,176,740

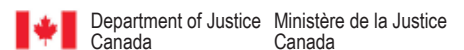
- COVID-19 Federal Subsidies
- Community Donations
- Government
- United Way
- Fundraising Events
- Other

Expenses



Total Expenses: \$1,115,600

- Staffing Expenses
- Facility Expenses
- Amortization
- Administration and Other



Certain funding is provided by the Ontario Ministry of Attorney General. Views expressed in the publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.

T H A N K Y O U

Stronger and more resilient together!

"We're so grateful for the support of our donors, partners and volunteers to press on with our mission. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Child Witness Centre supported over 1,500 children and youth this past year. This means young people in our community are safer, happier and empowered towards stronger futures."

~ Bernadette Behm, Board Chair

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