

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2014-2015



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### OUR MISSION

We are dedicated to  
the quality of life, safety and well-being  
of vulnerable children and youth,  
honouring diversity, culture and heritage.

### OUR VISION

Engaged and caring communities  
where children thrive in strong families.

### OUR VALUES

Caring ~ Respect ~ Integrity  
Collaboration ~ Accountability

# Executive Message

*"Just never forget to be dexterous and deft.  
And never mix up your right foot with your left.  
And will you succeed?  
Yes! You will, indeed!  
(98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.)"*

*— [Dr. Seuss, Oh, The Places You'll Go!](#)*

Bruce Grey Child and Family Services has experienced another fast paced year of change and consolidation.

We recently marked our third anniversary as a new organization and the integration of work processes with service delivery is still our primary organizational focus. We are guided by our strategic plan and supported by a Board of Directors whose intent is on building a strong sense of community, accountability and service excellence.

We are proud of the leadership that Bruce Grey Child and Family Services brought to the development of a Drug Endangered Child Best Practice Guide. The Crystal Meth and Other Drugs Task Force will launch this guide in late June. First and urgent responders along with professionals who work with children, will find the guide helpful when offering support to children who live in environments where drugs are made, used or distributed. Child safety will be enhanced in Bruce and Grey Counties as a result of this work.



David F. Wyles  
Board Chair



Phyllis Lovell  
Executive Director

The stereotype about child welfare organizations is that we remove children from their homes and serve them through foster care and adoption. In fact, 96 per cent of the people that we provide service to in any given year are ordinary families who are struggling with a challenge of some kind and who we provide support to entirely on a voluntary basis.

The organization wants to express its appreciation to all of the people who contribute to our work. From staff and leaders who work hard to 'mature' our organization, to foster parents and adoptive parents who care for the children and youth we serve. Our appreciation also goes out to the volunteers who support what we do for children and families. We also couldn't do this work without Our Kids Foundation Bruce Grey, who raise funds so that children and youth can participate in camp and community activities, sleep in a safe crib, enjoy warm winter clothing and ride in a safe car seat.

We are grateful to each and every one of them for their commitment and contribution. Together, we are building an organization that puts service first, is responsive to the people we serve, embraces collaboration and lives its values.

The focus of this year's Annual Report is, 'What We do for Families and Children'. You will find stories about some of the people within our organization, but more importantly, stories about the people whose lives our collective efforts impact.



# Financial Statements

	For the year ended March 31/15	For the year ended March 31/14
<b><u>REVENUE</u></b>		
Province of Ontario	\$21,310,150	\$21,636,800
Other	794,559	840,533
	<b><u>\$22,104,709</u></b>	<b><u>\$22,477,333</u></b>
<b><u>EXPENSES</u></b>		
Assessment & Investigation Services	2,319,345	2,148,032
On-Going Services	3,911,171	4,142,818
Non Residential Client Services	309,564	318,074
Children in Care Services	2,453,727	2,640,689
Foster Care Services	1,485,404	1,521,759
Residential Client Services	797,828	940,640
Adoption Subsidy	328,946	313,358
Kinship Service	267,672	228,200
Boarding Rates - Foster and Other	2,814,526	3,335,834
Group Care - Outside Paid Resources	395,040	366,229
Legal Services	698,295	750,244
Direct Service Travel	1,117,582	1,250,606
Infrastructure and Administration	4,340,823	3,931,159
Technology	539,542	580,680
	<b><u>\$21,779,465</u></b>	<b><u>\$22,468,322</u></b>
<b>Excess of revenue over expenses for the year</b>	<b><u>\$ 325,244</u></b>	<b><u>\$ 9,011</u></b>

# Who We Serve



During the past year, 196 children were in the care of Bruce Grey Child and Family Services.

“They come to us for a variety of reasons,” says Julie Lipsett, Director of Service for the Family Based Care Department. “Some come for temporary care because a parent has to have surgery, or may need some respite care and there is no one else available to look after the children. Others come by way of court order.”

Regardless of how they get there, most arrive because of a personal family crisis, often after a year or more of BGCFS involvement. If needed, the organization will find a foster care placement or will move forward with a permanent care arrangement. Available support services range from volunteer drives to appointments, and family resource workers to provide group-learning opportunities for kids in care. Recent sessions included financial literacy and preparation for independent living for older youth.

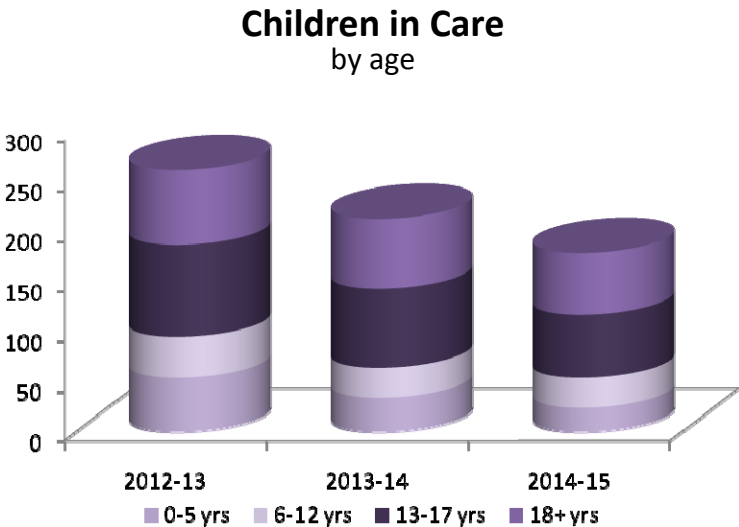
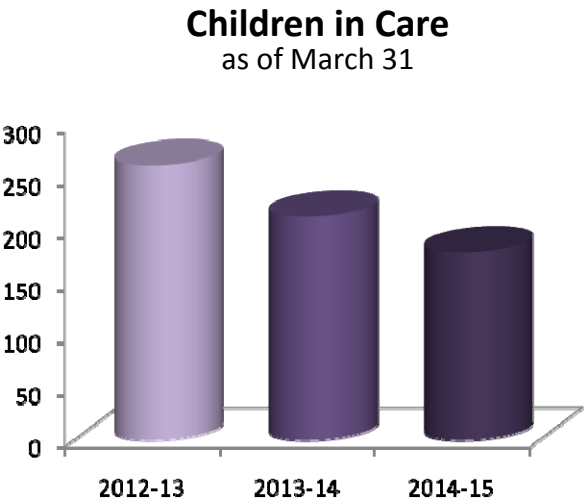
The definition of success is different for each of them. For some, success is finding a safe place to live and a family who cares about them. For others, it is to eventually return home to their parents, and in other cases, adoption into a loving family is a positive outcome.

At times, it goes beyond all of those options to include a post secondary education, which for many was an impossible dream before they came into care. This year, there are eight young people pursuing post secondary education with the support of Bruce Grey Child and Family Services.

“That is an amazing success story for those young people, to overcome the beginnings that they had. A lot of our kids aren't very successful at school because they haven't had a good start there. They have been through trauma, and they check themselves out when they go to school because it becomes a safe place for them, but they can't always concentrate so they tend to fall behind.”

In the case of these eight, they were able to find enough stability to set goals for the future, and that is a big success for each of them.

“The thing that amazes me about these kids is how resilient they are,” Lipsett says, “and how they can adapt to coming into care. Given some of their early life experiences, I think they have a lot to teach us about strength and resiliency and I think they have a lot to teach their peers too.”





## A BRIGHTER FUTURE

Kerri Rice can't remember a time when Bruce Grey Child and Family Services wasn't in her life.

"From the time I was young, there were home visits, and in 2008 when there was no water or electricity in our parents' house, BGCFS helped my sisters and me move in with our grandparents."

Now 18, and about to graduate from Kincardine District Secondary School, Kerri says that move changed everything for her. Her new environment was warm and caring, and she enjoyed the love and support of a family member 24/7, something that had been missing up until that point in her life.

"My experience with BGCFS was life changing, that's for sure. Before, I never really thought that post secondary school was an option for me. I'd just accepted that I probably wasn't going to go far in my life."

Now sporting an 85.7 grade point average, Kerri is on her way to the University of Guelph, with a double major in psychology and criminal justice/public policy. Her ultimate goal is to become a criminal psychologist.



Recently, she was chosen as a recipient of the Clark Bursary, an award created by the Clark family of Caledonia to help youth in care and former wards to achieve their academic goals. The award will provide her with \$3500 a year towards her education during each of the four years she spends in University.

"My life has done a complete 180 degrees in terms of what I see in my future and the kind of person that I am," Kerri says, "and it's definitely all because of Bruce Grey Child and Family Services. In my opinion, they can do no wrong."

She knows there are still young people out there in the kind of situation she was in, and for them, Kerri has some advice.

"I would want to say that it may feel like you're trapped and you have no choice and it seems kind of unfair that these people want to take you from your family. They're not here to make you feel like the victim. They want to make you the hero of your own story, and to give you the opportunity to make your life what you want it to be."



**Kerri accepting her  
Clark Bursary award.**

# How do we do it

## OUR STAFF MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

More than 25 years on the job has given Bruce Grey Child and Family Services child protection worker Terry Foster a much more serene outlook. “I don’t sweat the stuff I can’t change,” she says. What contributed to her more laid-back attitude was learning to take the time to listen to her clients.

“I always hope that if you’re patient and sensitive and kind enough with your clients, they will see that somebody gets them. That somebody understands them”. Even if you can’t help them, “you can listen to their story.”

Looking back on the hundreds of cases she’s handled over the years, one of the things Foster has learned is that most of her clients aren’t intentionally putting themselves in the position of needing intervention.

Foster sees mental health, addictions and poverty at the root of many of the issues that end up on her desk. “I’m still very disturbed by the poverty,” she says. “That hasn’t changed. People are trying to get by on an income that is not sustainable for a family. It’s frustrating.”

Foster says there are myths among the broader population about what Bruce Grey Child and Family Services actually does and when they need to step in.

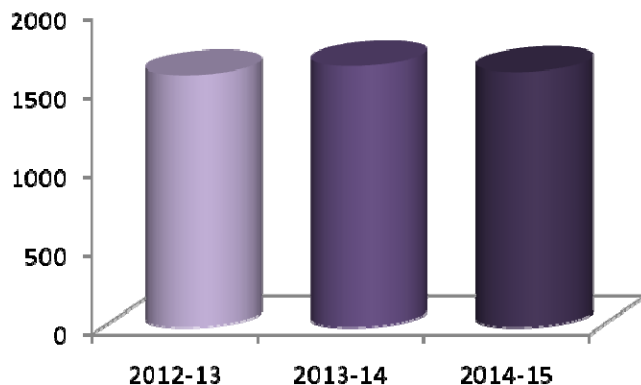
“Our service is primarily voluntary. So unless we have a protection concern that is significant enough and the parents aren’t interested in dealing with it, we have no reason to go to court. That’s really misunderstood.”

A year or so from retirement, Foster has no trouble motivating herself to go to work every day. The “clients, plain and simple” keep her going. “I have loved working with all of them.”

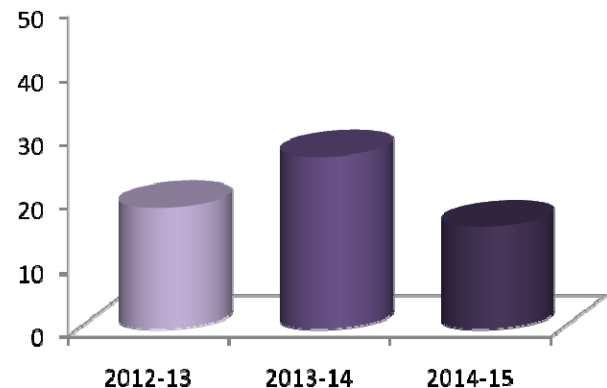


Are you a interested in a career within the child welfare sector?  
Visit [www.bgcfs.ca](http://www.bgcfs.ca) for employment opportunities.

### Families We Serve



### Adoption Completed



## ALL THEY HAD WAS EACH OTHER

After their own children were grown, Moira and Dan started thinking of adopting a child. They began, as many do, with the idea of an international adoption. They did all of their course work, qualified in every way, and at the last moment, the agency they were working with closed.

That's when someone suggested that there were lots of children right here in Ontario looking for a home and a family. So Moira and Dan contacted Bruce Grey Child and Family Services, and their search began.

"It didn't take us long to find out that what we were told was true," Moira says. "There are hundreds of children, especially older ones, who need the love and security they can find in a family."

Though they had only thought of adopting one child, their hearts went out to a pair of brothers from the London area. The oldest had Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and as a result, the pair had been in and out of foster homes for years.

"So we met them on a few different occasions, and we really liked them. They were supposed to come and visit us for the March Break. But they ended up moving in with us instead."

The oldest was 10, and his brother was 8. The transition wasn't an easy one for the boys, who had more or less been raising one another all their lives. All they had was each other and the older boy was especially protective of his younger brother. In a lot of ways, he was the parent.

As the boys settled into their new lives, it was inevitable that there would be a few bumps in the road. The one thing their early years had taught them was that adults were undependable and not to be trusted. It was one of the major hurdles the family had to overcome, and Moira says more than a few tears were shed.

"Our older son would have these rages. But afterwards, he would actually break down and start crying and that was when he would open up. And he would say 'you don't know what I've been through, you don't know what it's like to leave your friends. All that pain was coming out.'"

Working together, with the support of Bruce Grey Child and Family Services, Moira and Dan were able to help the boys overcome many significant issues.



"They feel secure now. They know us and they trust us. They know they're not going anywhere and neither are we."

"Safety, love and security are what the boys, and so many others like them, need most in their lives," Moira says. Once those primary concerns were met, the rest was easy. Now 15 and 13, the pair attends school, participate in sports and have many friends in their new community. They have been officially adopted, and now have the same last name as Moira and Dan.

"That was so important to both of them," Moira recalls. "Our oldest wanted Dan to go and lock the papers in the trunk of the car as soon as we had them, just to be sure nothing would happen."

Through the adoption, Moira and Dan learned that the boys had a younger brother who had been adopted as an infant. They contacted the adoptive family, and have been getting the three brothers together every summer since.

"We meet up with them every summer, and during the year, the boys play x-box online together and it was really quite something. And this little boy looks just like his brothers and he acts like them too."

Many people who consider adoption look for a baby, and Moira says she and Dan were the same at first. Now, she has some advice for others who are in the same situation.

"I know that there are a lot of older children out there who need a home. They need to be loved, to have a secure home, and to know what it's like to have a family. For our boys, it was really important to have our name, to actually know they were a part of our family by law, and I think we even had those doubts at first about having older children, but it's been a wonderful experience."

**Will it be easy? No. Will it be worth it? Absolutely.**

**Consider adoption.**

**It may be the best decision of your life.**

## SHARING THEIR LIVES

When Doug and Karen met and married in the early 1980's, it was a second marriage for both of them. Karen stayed at home while Doug worked.



One day, after seeing an ad in the local newspaper inviting people to consider fostering, Karen applied. And it wasn't long before she found herself caring for a baby girl.

They've shared their home with so many children that they've lost count. It may be the ones who stay the longest that make the biggest impression, but all are treated equally when they arrive. For most of them, Doug says, the needs are fairly straightforward.

"They need the love of a family and a safe place. Some of them come from pretty rough circumstances. I hate to say it, but some of these children come from situations where they're the ones raising their natural parents. Their home life hasn't amounted to much."

More than thirty years later, Doug and Karen continue to open their home and their hearts to children in need.

"I guess I'm a compulsive mother," Karen laughs, "even now that our kids are gone and there's not a lot of children in the neighbourhood. I would rather have a bunch of toddlers running around."

It has been very rewarding playing a role in the lives of so many children. Despite the fact that some of them have had a rough start, Doug and Karen try to help each of their kids see that life can be better.

"You know that when you can look at a child and say that they are going to be all right, that we've steered them in the right direction. You hope you have an influence on their lives that they can see a different way forward than the way they were brought up," Doug says.

"Some people like joining services clubs or doing other things as a way of paying back the community. This is our way, by providing these kids with a safe home. We always see on television a request to send money to support kids overseas, and it's time to support kids in our own community. There are so many of them who need it."

They've had kids of all ages stay with them, and many stay in touch after they've moved on. With four biological children from previous marriages, and dozens of foster children, there has never been a dull moment for Doug and Karen. Would they do it all again? In a heartbeat, says Doug.

"I just wish more people would become foster parents. It is very rewarding."

Have you ever considered caring for children who are coping with  
a very difficult time in their young lives?

Please visit [www.bgcfs.ca](http://www.bgcfs.ca) for more information.



## FAMILIES WE SERVE

Every year has its successes, but the past one featured a unique shift in focus, and is considered by Anne Bester, Director of Protection Services, as a change for the better.

It's called 'family-finding', and it's a completely different approach when looking at options for kids, both before and after they come into care.

"We want to find an alternative to our foster care system," Bester says, "to provide kids with permanency and give them an option for growing up outside of our formal foster care system if they can't go back home."

Staff received a one-week training session with family finding expert, Kevin Campbell. The core beliefs of the program are that every child has an extended family, and that they can be found. Loneliness can be devastating and is experienced by most kids in foster care; a meaningful connection to family helps a child develop a sense of belonging; and the single factor most closely associated with positive outcomes for children is meaningful lifelong connections to family.

One of the basic concepts of family finding involves looking beyond the family for someone who has a pre-existing relationship with the child, or who has been a key supporter of the child or parents.

"Historically, we would have approached grandparents, aunts and uncles. We might have gone to extended family a little bit further, but we didn't really think about the coach, or the best friend's family. We always stuck with the bloodlines."



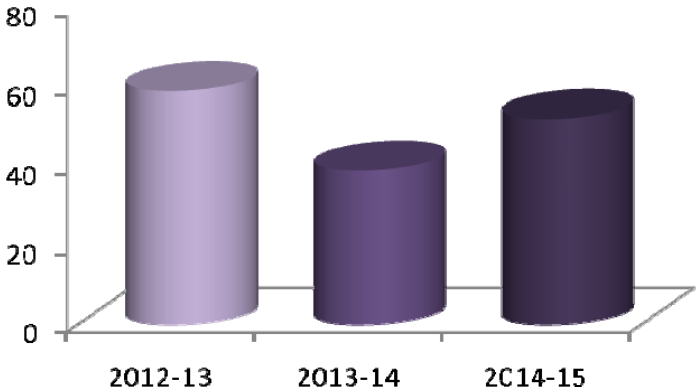
Bester says there are a couple of ways to establish relationships if a match is found. The provision of Kinship Service is done with the family’s consent, but it doesn’t have to be a legal process. On the other hand, Kinship Care allows care providers to go through the system and become foster parents for a specific child or children.

"The underpinning of family finding is that everybody, no matter how isolated you think somebody is, everybody has a network that exists. And it is our job to find that network because a placement doesn’t always end up being the most obvious choice."

The ultimate goal of family finding is to find a place where each child can be accepted, and loved unconditionally. A place where each of them can feel safe in a family, and in their community.

"What family finding teaches us is that there are many good plans and many good ways to find a caregiver. What we are really looking for is someone who has a connection with a child and it doesn't have to be a traditional connection. We have to listen to the story of the family to figure out where that best connection is.

**Average Kids Placed  
In Kin Service Homes**





## FAMILY FINDING: A CASE STUDY

Joe (not his real name) was the oldest of six children.

His family situation was a desperate one of neglect, abuse and uncertainty. His mother had been to the women's shelter repeatedly, but always found her way back to Joe's father. As more children were added to the family, things grew more difficult, until finally the parents agreed to let their four oldest children enter care.

Joe had spent one night in foster care, when a teacher at his school came forward and offered to help out. She knew the family, and knew of Joe specifically. Anne Bester picks up the story:

"And so the teacher came forward and said to us, I can't take the whole family, but I can take him. I know him, I can provide for him, I've known the family, I know where he's come from, and I know the family struggles. I see the potential in this boy, I recognize that he needs stability and he has an established relationship with me and I can provide a home for him."

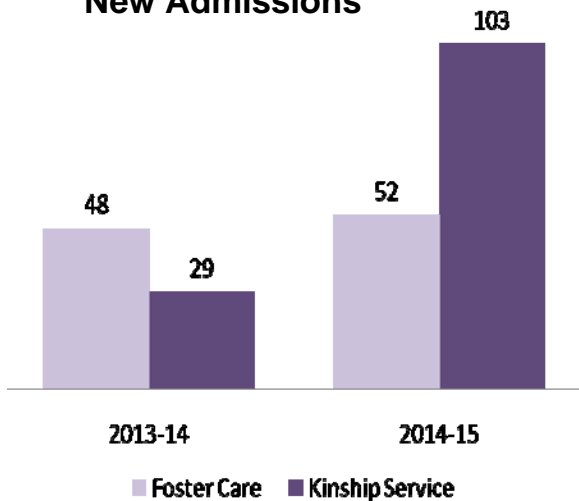
Joe's teacher went through the Kinship Care process and in the end, became his foster parent. She was a strong advocate for Joe, and worked hard to help him maintain contact with his birth family. Most of all, she provided him with the support and stability he needed to thrive.

When he came into care, he was struggling academically because of his home life and he was, on average, a C student. With time, his grades got better and better and by the time he left high school, he was academically gifted with an average into the 90's."

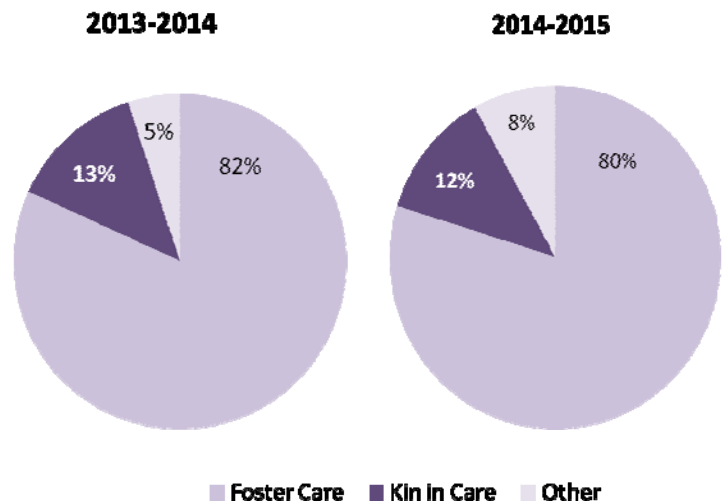
The bond between Joe and his foster mother was so strong, that when she accepted employment out of the area, he moved with her. His high academic achievement allowed Joe to access a number of bursaries, and he attended the Engineering program at the University of Waterloo.

"When we think about this young man and the commitment that the foster home made to him and vice versa, it really begins to explain why kin service and kin care have become a focus in the field."

### New Admissions



### Placement Types



## EXTERNAL PRESSURE, INTERNAL STABILITY

When the Children's Aid Societies of Bruce and Grey Counties made the decision to merge in 2012, a lot of organizational work was completed in the background to make the amalgamation a success.

One of the key issues was bringing together two separate Canadian Union of Public Employee (CUPE) bargaining units to form a new local with a new collective agreement. The negotiation and process of the first collective agreement for Bruce Grey Child and Family Services in advance of the April 1, 2012 merger date were heralded across the Province as an example of a relationship that worked for both the employer and employees.

That first four-year agreement was set to expire in 2016. As the organization began to prepare for a new round of bargaining, several things became clear.

"We were getting signals from the government about upcoming reductions in labour costs across the province for publicly funded organizations," explains Kelly Ferris, Director of Corporate Services. "We also have a lot of work to do for our new child protection information network, the province's new database. We had recently restructured our family based care department, and staff had been experiencing a lot of change. And we had been told by the government that we were going to lose 2 million dollars over 5 years. So taking all of these things into account, we started to wonder how to build labour stability during tumultuous times."

Bruce Grey Child and Family Services came up with a unique solution, which was approved by the Board of Directors in January.

The organization asked CUPE to terminate the existing collective agreement, and was offered a three year agreement with no changes but cost of living increases. The organization would be better positioned if it knew where it was going for three years, as opposed to one year when they would have no idea of what the ground under them was going to feel like.

This 'out of the box' approach was unique, and though it was not the traditional method of bargaining, the union agreed. In April, a new three-year agreement came into effect.

"We think that's a really big accomplishment," Ferris says. "It's about trying to build internal stability while we have lots of external pressure and change in our future."

## BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Two years ago, Bruce Grey Child and Family Services purchased and renovated the old Owen Sound Family Y building to create a new consolidated workspace for staff. The organization owns two additional sites as well, in Wiarton and Walkerton.

Warton is relatively new, it was built right before the 2012 merger. Staff moved into their new Owen Sound offices in December 2013. The Walkerton site was a grocery store in its previous life, and is currently undergoing a facelift..

Walls have been moved, the flooring and paint was updated, and some of the public spaces were refurbished to present a more consistent look across all of the sites.

The comfort and safety of staff and to the members of the public who visit Bruce Grey Child and Family Services is important to the organization and these renovations create a more welcoming and functional space for everyone.

