



Ontario Association of
Children's Aid Societies

Annual Report

2025/26



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Message from the CEO and Board Chair

The 2025–2026 fiscal year marked a defining moment for Ontario's child welfare sector.

Across the province, Children's Aid Societies and Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Agencies faced significant pressures — rising complexity of need, structural funding challenges, increasing public scrutiny, and ongoing government-led reviews and legislative reforms. Together, these realities point to one clear conclusion: child welfare as we know it cannot continue unchanged.

This moment calls for bold thinking, meaningful evolution, and a shared commitment to achieving better solutions, stronger outcomes, and a brighter future for children, youth, and families. It demands leadership, clarity, and a sustained focus on building a system that is equitable, responsive, and sustainable.



OACAS has stepped forward to help lead that change.

Over the past year, we positioned the Association — and our members — as constructive, solutions-focused partners to

Solomon Owoo

Chief Executive Officer

Vera Mercier

Chair, Board of Directors



government. We worked to bridge the gap between policy intent and frontline realities, while ensuring that the voices of youth, families, and communities remain central to system transformation.

We advanced practical reforms to reduce administrative burden, supported agencies through regulatory and operational change, and strengthened the foundations of sector excellence through training, shared services, and governance supports. We continued to build understanding with government on the growing pressures in the system including inflation, complexity of needs, service gaps in the broader children's services ecosystem and escalating private placement costs.

At the same time, we expanded our partnerships across sectors — recognizing that child welfare outcomes are inseparable from developmental services, mental health and health, education, and community supports.

Most importantly, we continued to elevate the voices of young people with lived experience — not as an add-on, but as the driving force in shaping policy, practice, and accountability.

Looking Ahead: From Pressure to Transformation

With many of our member agencies operating in deficit, it is clear the sector's fiscal and operational challenges are structural — not temporary. The challenges include:

- Increasing complexity of need
- Rising costs of care and placements
- Misalignment between funding models and practice realities
- Growing expectations for accountability and outcomes
- Lack of service and supports in Northern Ontario
- Lack of capacity in urban areas

The response must be equally structural.

In the year ahead, OACAS will focus its advocacy efforts on:

- Advancing sustainable funding reform



- Strengthening cross-ministerial collaboration to support a more integrated children's services system
- Supporting continuous sector efforts towards Truth and Reconciliation
- Modernizing governance and accountability across the sector
- Expanding shared services and system efficiencies
- Building stronger public understanding of the work and value of child welfare
- Advocating for equitable approaches that address the realities of children, youth and families in the communities we serve, especially in Northern Ontario

The path forward requires more than adaptation. It demands intentional, system-wide transformation and a shared commitment to building a more integrated system that serves Ontario's children.

Closing Reflection

This year has reinforced a fundamental truth:
Child welfare cannot operate in isolation. It is meant to reflect the health, equity, and resilience of our communities.

OACAS will continue to lead with a clear mandate:

- Advocate with credibility
- Partner with purpose
- Act with urgency
- And centre the voices of those most impacted

Our goal is not simply to sustain the current system, but to build one that better serves every child, youth, and family in Ontario. The opportunity before us is clear: to create a child welfare system that reflects the complexity of need, prioritizes early intervention, and ensures that every child not only remains safe, but has the opportunity to thrive.

Together with our members, partners, and government, we are committed to leading that change.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'V. Mercier'.

Vera Mercier
Chair, Board of Directors

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Solomon Owoo'.

Solomon Owoo
Chief Executive Officer

Our Year: Strategic Impact

The work of OACAS in 2025–2026 was focused across four integrated pillars of impact:

1 Driving System Reform
Advancing policy solutions, supporting legislative implementation, and positioning the sector as a partner in transformation.

Strengthening Sector Excellence
Improving financial sustainability, governance, and workforce capacity across member agencies.

2

3 Expanding Partnerships and System Integration
Building cross-sector collaborations to address complex needs and improve outcomes.

4 Elevating Youth Voice and Leadership
Embedding lived experience into decision-making, program design, and advocacy.

These pillars reflect a deliberate shift — from supporting the system as it exists, to actively shaping the system it must become.



1 Driving System Reform and Policy Leadership

The past year required OACAS to operate not only as a member association – but as a system leader navigating change in real time.



Reducing Administrative Burden and Modernizing Practice

Frontline workers are increasingly constrained by administrative requirements that limit time with children and families. OACAS advanced targeted solutions to address this, including:

- Advocacy for integration between CPIN and SOR-RL systems to eliminate duplicative reporting
- Sector-wide modernization of OnLAC and AAR tools, co-designed with youth, families, and Indigenous partners
- Ongoing guidance to members on evolving privacy and police record check requirements

These efforts are grounded in a simple principle: systems should enable care – not compete with it.

Navigating Legislative Change

OACAS played a central role in supporting the sector through multiple legislative and regulatory developments, including:

Bill 194, Strengthening Cyber Security and Building Trust in the Public Sector Act, 2024

- A framework for the sector's management of cyber assets.

Bill 33, Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025

- Focused on standardization of governance approaches, decision-making and making sure children in-care understand how they voice concerns.

Bill 188, Supporting Children's Futures Act, 2024

- Strengthens privacy protections, and safeguards for children and youth receiving care in Ontario.

Our approach has been consistent:

support implementation, identify operational impacts, and advocate for adjustments where policy and practice misalign.





Supporting Youth Beyond Care

Youth who are ageing out of care need the support to find their way like all young adults. OACAS successfully advocated this past year for an extension of the government's program Ready, Set, GO (RSG).

We support RSG as a critical investment in youth transitioning from care to adulthood and will continue to lend our voice to youth and their advocates to strengthen these supports as a broader, sustainable system response.

2 Strengthening Sector Excellence

A sustainable system requires strong organizations. This year, OACAS focused on reinforcing the financial, operational, and leadership foundations of the sector through practical supports, strategic advocacy, and shared capacity-building initiatives.



Financial Stewardship and Sustainability

The current funding model no longer reflects the realities agencies face. Funding remains heavily tied to historical assumptions and volume-based measures. It does not adequately account for:

- Complexity of needs
- Northern, rural and remote realities (Extremely limited service or placement availability) that disproportionately disadvantages Northern and indigenous youth and families
- Indigenous service delivery contexts
- Escalating placement and staffing pressures
- Cross-sector service gaps

The fact that emergency funding has become a recurring requirement is itself evidence that the underlying funding formula is no longer functioning as intended.

OACAS will continue to advocate for its members that the system requires examination to ensure that government funding supports the sector's ability to deliver the protection, care and support the Ontario's communities count upon.

Equity-Centered Workforce Development

OACAS expanded sector-leading training focused on equity and culturally responsive care:

- Kujali: Centering Black Families in Practice
- 2SLGBTQ+ Youth in Out-of-Home Care curriculum
- Sector-wide self-assessment identifying critical gaps and "turning points" for 2SLGBTQ+ youth supports

This work reflects a clear commitment: equity must move from principle to practice.

Governance and Leadership

Recognizing variability in governance capacity across the sector, OACAS initiated development of a provincial governance training framework for boards.

This marks an important shift toward:

- Consistent governance standards
- Clear roles and accountability
- Appropriate oversight and strategic leadership

3 Expanding Partnerships and System Integration

Child welfare outcomes are shaped far beyond the boundaries of the sector.

OACAS has prioritized partnerships that reflect the interconnected nature of children's needs.

Key partnerships established or expanded include:

- Empowered Kids Ontario (EKO)
- Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO)
- Families in TRANSition
- Family Services of Ontario (FSO)

These collaborations strengthen the sector's ability to deliver integrated, wraparound supports.

Building a Broader System Network

OACAS deepened engagement with critical provincial partners, including:

- Ontario Hospital Association (OHA)
- Ontario Association of Social Workers (OASW)
- Office of the Chief Coroner (CYDRA)
- Police Association of Ontario (PAO)

This reflects a strategic shift toward system-level coordination — not siloed service delivery.

4 Elevating Youth Voice and Leadership



Youth engagement is not a program area — it is a core driver of system change. OACAS continues to embed youth voice into sector conversations, public awareness efforts, and leadership spaces in ways that move beyond consultation and toward meaningful partnership. This was reflected in the youth “Little Wins” script reading at the 2025 Executive Leadership Section (ELS) meeting, where youth storytelling helped ground sector leaders in the everyday realities, resilience, and successes of young people in and from care. It was also demonstrated through OACAS’ partnership with the YouthCAN Provincial Advisory Council (YPAC) in developing the 2025 Children and Youth in Care Day (CYICD) campaign. Youth members helped shape the campaign’s messaging, creative direction, and storytelling approach.

Through opportunities like these, youth are not only sharing their experiences — they are actively influencing how the sector communicates, advocates, and approaches system change.

Direct Support and Opportunities

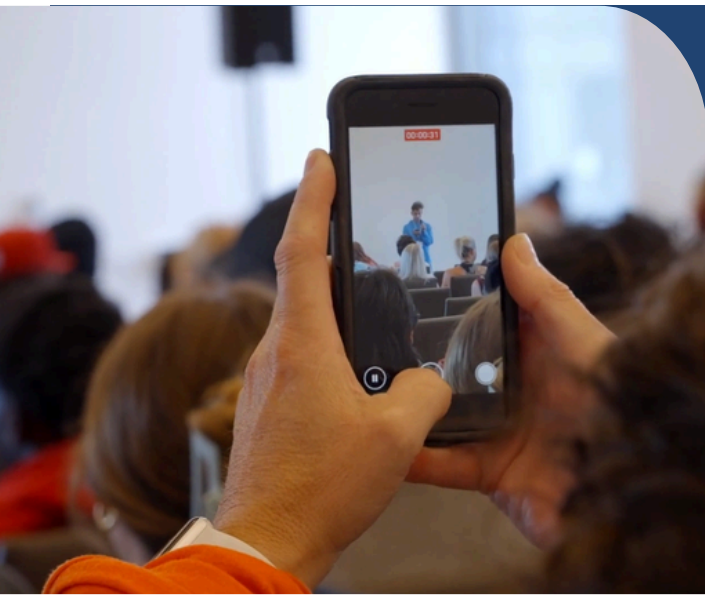
- 191 Clark bursaries awarded to youth pursuing education
- Continued growth of YouthCAN, PowerUp!, and Camp Lifting Leaves
- Expanded participation and diversity across youth programming

These initiatives provide more than support — they build community, leadership, and belonging.

Embedding Lived Experience in Decision-Making

Youth voices directly informed:

- OACAS Strategic Plan (2026–31)
- OnLAC and AAR redesign
- Legislative and policy consultations



As one youth shared:

“Everyone's in care experience is different — but we come together to create collective power.”

This is the future of the system: designed with — not for — those it serves.

OACAS: What We Do, and Why It Matters

A collective organization serving Ontario's child welfare sector

OACAS exists for a simple reason: to do together what no single agency can do alone.

OACAS is not a service delivery organization, and it is not an extension of government. Instead, OACAS serves as the collective voice, backbone, and strategic connector for Ontario's child welfare sector — supported by and accountable to its member agencies.

Everything OACAS does is grounded in three core functions:

- Advocacy that secures resources and shapes policy
- Coordination that strengthens the system as a whole
- Support that builds capacity across agencies

Turning member priorities into provincial action

OACAS' work is guided by the priorities and needs identified across Ontario's child welfare sector. Issues such as funding pressures, complex service needs, workforce challenges, and governance concerns help shape the organization's advocacy efforts and strategic direction.

This work has helped:

- Advance emergency funding to stabilize agencies
- Secure the renewal and expansion of programs such as Ready, Set, Go
- Support the sector through government reviews and build understanding for the realities facing members
- Bring forward evidence, data, and lived experience to inform public policy and decision-making

Through advocacy, OACAS helps ensure that the realities facing children, youth, families, and service providers are reflected in government decisions.

Building capacity across the sector

Beyond advocacy, OACAS strengthens the system by building shared capacity.

Through a range of membership-supported services, OACAS:

- Negotiates and manages sector-wide benefits and procurement supports, helping agencies reduce costs

- Provides governance training and leadership development opportunities
- Delivers data, research, and policy analysis to support informed decision-making
- Offers communications and media support to agencies navigating complex issues and public interest

These are services that would be difficult — or, in many cases, impossible — for individual agencies to develop and sustain on their own.



OACAS Board Members

2025-2026

Vera Mercier

Chair / Agency Board
Director

Ela Smith

Past Chair

Derrick Drouillard

Treasurer / Agency Staff
Director

Dannielle Samuel

Agency Board Director

Catherine Leclair

Agency Board Director

Priscilla Manful

Agency Staff Director

Amanda Colacicco

Agency Staff Director

Cléo Charlebois

Agency Staff Director

Nancy LaFrance-Rich

Agency Staff Director

Daria Allan-Ebron

Agency Staff Director

Patricia Codner

Associate Member

Monica Romero

Associate Member

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Balance Sheet

March 31, 2026, with comparative information for 2025

			2026	2025
	Operating Fund	Special Bursary Fund	Total	Total
Assets				
Current assets:				
Cash	\$ 5,138,634	\$ 103,452	\$ 5,242,086	\$ 3,337,389
Short-term investments	–	–	–	1,000,000
Accounts receivable	845,367	2,000	847,367	996,221
Prepaid deposits and expenses	287,050	–	287,050	348,101
Assets held for sale	607,292	–	607,292	–
	<u>6,878,343</u>	<u>105,452</u>	<u>6,983,795</u>	<u>5,681,711</u>
Capital assets	3,042,190	–	3,042,190	3,800,008
	<u>\$ 9,920,533</u>	<u>\$ 105,452</u>	<u>\$ 10,025,985</u>	<u>\$ 9,481,719</u>
Liabilities and Fund Balances				
Current liabilities:				
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	\$ 1,395,325	\$ –	\$ 1,395,325	\$ 1,611,058
Deferred revenue	1,723,565	–	1,723,565	1,544,866
	<u>3,118,890</u>	<u>–</u>	<u>3,118,890</u>	<u>3,155,924</u>
Fund balances:				
Invested in capital assets	3,649,482	–	3,649,482	3,800,008
Special bursary fund	–	105,452	105,452	105,452
Operating fund	3,152,161	–	3,152,161	2,420,335
	<u>6,801,643</u>	<u>105,452</u>	<u>6,907,095</u>	<u>6,325,795</u>
	<u>\$ 9,920,533</u>	<u>\$ 105,452</u>	<u>\$ 10,025,985</u>	<u>\$ 9,481,719</u>

ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES

Statement of Revenue and Expenses

Year ended March 31, 2026, with comparative information for 2025

	Operating Fund		Special Bursary Fund		Total	
	2026	2025	2026	2025	2026	2025
Revenue:						
Government of Ontario	\$ 7,696,241	\$ 7,362,843	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 7,696,241	\$ 7,362,843
Membership fees	3,669,124	3,160,754	-	-	3,669,124	3,160,754
Donations	-	-	443,250	439,206	443,250	439,206
Sales and registration fees	266,474	315,878	-	-	266,474	315,878
Other	261,989	604,631	2,072	5,073	264,061	609,704
	<u>11,893,828</u>	<u>11,444,106</u>	<u>445,322</u>	<u>444,279</u>	<u>12,339,150</u>	<u>11,888,385</u>
Expenses:						
Salaries	5,156,233	5,266,151	29,562	27,844	5,185,795	5,293,995
Contracted professional services	1,874,343	1,775,299	-	-	1,874,343	1,775,299
Employee benefits	1,438,080	1,360,989	5,600	6,664	1,443,680	1,367,653
Direct contract	1,362,968	1,333,579	-	-	1,362,968	1,333,579
Office and administration	701,458	694,261	6,910	5,271	708,368	699,532
Bursaries and grants	74,609	30,000	403,250	404,500	477,859	434,500
Facilities and equipment	388,832	392,325	-	-	388,832	392,325
Amortization of capital assets	169,639	193,945	-	-	169,639	193,945
Other	98,715	48,037	-	-	98,715	48,037
Business travel and hospitality	27,514	31,233	-	-	27,514	31,233
Training development and recruitment	20,137	13,947	-	-	20,137	13,947
	<u>11,312,528</u>	<u>11,139,766</u>	<u>445,322</u>	<u>444,279</u>	<u>11,757,850</u>	<u>11,584,045</u>
Excess of revenue over expenses	\$ 581,300	\$ 304,340	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 581,300	\$ 304,340



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