



StepStones

2019

IMPACT REPORT

We believe in the tremendous potential of youth from foster care and the child welfare system. Together, we create positive and sustainable change.





At the dawn of a new decade, it is with great pride that we share with you the stories, statistics, and successes of an incredible 2019 at StepStones for Youth! With tremendous thanks to our donors and supporters, we were able to provide effective support to a greater number of vulnerable youth in more profound ways than ever before. We have seen significant changes in our young people as they settled into stable housing, stayed in school, graduated, and developed their circle of support through their transition from foster care into adulthood. Young people in our program have created an advocacy group for youth in care to share experiences and ideas and to have a voice in our organization. Our youth report feeling excited about their futures, safe in their communities, motivated by their goals, and supported in their journeys. The success of every youth in our program is activated by our donors, sponsors, and supporters, through generous contributions and steadfast belief in the work we do.

Unfortunately, young people in Ontario have incurred a hard loss this year with the closure of the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. As a result, there are virtually no services for children and youth in foster care, or in receipt of child welfare services, leaving some of the most vulnerable young people in our province without support, guidance, legal advocacy, or a voice. We, at StepStones, felt this surge of need this past year and worked determinedly, filling in gaps and picking up pieces to ensure this population continued to receive urgent intervention and preventative support through our specifically-tailored programs. Our dedicated staff, volunteers, and especially our donors, made it possible to do so, but our work is not over.

The coming years will be challenging in the wake of the advocate's closure and, with an ever-rising number of youth in care in need of support, StepStones for Youth's services will be in higher demand. We KNOW that we can make a positive difference in the lives of these incredible children and youth at this critical time and measures are in place to ensure goals for our youth are not just met, but exceeded, in 2020. We will be placing greater emphasis on finding and securing families for children and youth as having stable, natural support people in their lives is the key to their well-being and success. We want to build a network of people to champion youth in foster care and the child welfare system by sharing innovative ideas, spreading the news, donating and contributing to our programs, and helping our organization thrive as one of the most vibrant, sustainable charities in the city of Toronto.

Thank you for believing in the potential of youth and for making 2019 a shining success! We are grateful for your support and the dynamic impact your contribution has on the lives of the youth we work with. We dedicate this 2019 Impact Report to the memory of Ken Leonard, 1949-2019, our beloved chair and the father of co-founder Kathryn Leonard. We will miss you.

Sincerely,

Heather O'Keefe and the StepStones Team



MISSION STATEMENT

StepStones for Youth is a unique charity in Toronto whose mission is to provide urgently required support for vulnerable children and youth from the foster care and child welfare system who have experienced trauma, abuse, and unstable guardian care.

Our objective is to create positive and meaningful connections; increase school engagement, high school graduation, and post-secondary enrolment; increase employability skills and job attainment; increase stable, long-term housing; support positive mental and physical health; and help develop strong support networks. Meeting these objectives results in reduced isolation, homelessness, criminal behaviour, and long-term dependency on social services.



920 LIVES CHANGED

400 YOUTH RECEIVED BASIC NEEDS SUPPORT

2560 
MEALS SERVED

8700 HOURS
SUPPORTING YOUTH

82 
TUTORING SESSIONS

9 LONG-TERM BEDS AT ARRABON HOUSE ARE OFFERED TO STEPSTONES YOUTH PROVIDING TRANSITIONAL, INDEPENDENCE BASED HOUSING FOR YOUNG WOMEN

520 LIFE SKILLS AND COOKING CLASSES

98 
HOUSING SUBSIDIES PROVIDED

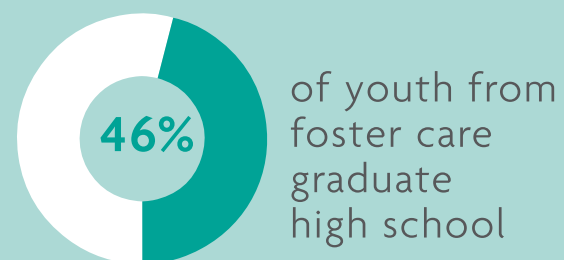
45 DROP IN SESSIONS OFFERED
45 RELATIONSHIPS WITH LANDLORDS CREATED
130 MENTOR MATCHES SUPPORTED

230 YOUTH RECEIVED INTENSIVE SUPPORT SERVICES

THIS WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT OUR **471** VOLUNTEERS!




URGENT ISSUES:



76% of youth from care were victims of crime within a year of leaving foster care

→ 64% of this was violent crime


 Youth from care are **193** times more likely to become homeless compared to their peers

58% of youth experiencing homelessness were involved with child protection services

57% of youth from care are unemployed and rely on social assistance support

OUR OUTCOMES:

85%  of youth in our program have either graduated from high school or are currently attending

 **89%** of the youth in our program have stable housing after only 6 months in the program

→ **78%** of youth (18 years old and older) have graduated high school

Within 6 months of being in the program, **0%** of youth are involved in criminal behaviour.

WHERE DOES YOUR DONATION GO?

\$3,300

Is how much it costs to support a youth in the support services program for a year. This combines all services for the youth and a full case management approach to intervention.

\$900 funds the mini food bank for one year.

\$800  for the leadership summer camp

\$300  to feed 15 youth at a holiday dinner

\$75 to support a youth moving into their first home with their first "home essentials" such as cleaning supplies and food


 **\$650** to send a child to overnight camp for a week

 **\$125** to feed a kid at camp for a week

 **\$45** to buy a child a present for the holidays

\$250 to provide a life skills workshop for 20 youth

\$20  for one Thanksgiving or Holiday Dinner

 **\$55** to buy a child a present and a cake for their birthday

WHAT IS PROVIDED TO YOUTH?

- 1 to 1 Worker Support (Youth 15-24 Years Old)
- 1 to 1 Mentorship
- Volunteering Opportunities for Youth
- Tutoring Services
- Scholarships
- Employment Counselling and Support
- Education Counselling and Practical Support
- Crisis Counselling
- Life Skills Workshops
- Housing Subsidies, Shared Apartments and Housing Support
- Community and Network Building
- Connection to Medical, Substance Misuse and Mental Health Services
- Overnight Summer Camp for Girls
- Holiday Dinners
- Emergency Fund
- Clothing Bank
- Food Bank

In 2019, StepStones for Youth has demonstrated that sustainable and positive outcomes are possible when youth feel connected, supported, and empowered.



HOUSING & COMMUNITY IMPACT

Reducing youth homelessness and poverty is possible and our circle of donors makes it happen.

Youth from foster care can maintain stable housing and avoid long-term reliance on social services. Our program delivers positive results with housing subsidies, supportive landlords, and mentorship to help stabilize the lives of youth transitioning out of foster care and prevent re-entry into the shelter system.

Corporate dedication to charities that support vulnerable youth is a direct link to a stable future.

A large proportion of youth who are victims of human trafficking are in foster care, group homes, and shelters. Youth in our program receive the guidance and care required to avoid this outcome as they transition to adulthood. StepStones for Youth prevents criminal involvement and victimization, including human trafficking, by providing effective intervention before homelessness occurs.

MENTAL HEALTH

STABLE MENTAL HEALTH AT INTAKE: 61% AFTER 12 MONTHS: 94%

Navigating systems of support can be overwhelming – our team members facilitate mental health.

Youth from foster care, many of whom suffer from trauma-related mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress, benefit from our program's full case management approach to service. Youth are connected with physicians and counsellors, access yoga and meditation workshops, and are accompanied to appointments by our Youth Connection Support Workers to stabilize and improve mental health.

EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT

AT INTAKE, 22.6% OF YOUTH AT STEPSTONES HAD GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL AFTER 12 MONTHS IN THE PROGRAM 52% HAD GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL

Education is critical to breaking the cycle of poverty - our supporters keep our youth in school.

Young people in foster care encounter a number of unique barriers that can negatively impact their academic success. Our donors believe in the potential of these youth and with their support, our program provides the required guidance, financial assistance, and mentorship that allow youth to attend school, graduate, enrol in post-secondary programs, and achieve stability in their lives.

Job skills and financial literacy pave the road to meaningful work and successful independence.

Our donors and supporters provide opportunities for youth to develop essential life skills that lead to employment stability and thriving connections. Youth are involved and mentored in entrepreneurship, culinary arts, employment readiness programs, camp counselling, and networking with partner organizations. The development and practice of financial literacy skills are supported by our dedicated, long-term, one-to-one mentors.






HIGHLIGHTS OF EVENTS MADE POSSIBLE BY OUR VOLUNTEERS

From wrapping presents to donating generous gifts, our team members contributed to our program in exciting and invaluable ways in 2019. Our corporate teams, supporters, and volunteers made this year one of our most successful yet. Your enthusiastic participation in our fundraisers, events, and daily happenings provides the platform for change for the youth we work with. We could not have done it without you!



Our dynamic corporate teams:

- shared their expertise with us in our office with fresh coats of paint and I.T. upgrades
- got green by planting and gardening in the back yard of Arrabon House for our spring BBQ
- donned aprons to cook and prepare food for camp and donated to our emergency food bank
- volunteered at our Overnight Girls Summer Camp on the shores of Georgian Bay
- hosted, decorated, and donated to our fall Crafting Change Fundraiser
- donated Thanksgiving and Holiday dinners along with gifts for every youth in our program
- provided academic tutoring to youth in areas of math, English, social science, and business
- staffed our bustling Holiday Giftwrap Station fundraiser at Vaughan Mills Shopping Centre



Every child deserves a physically active, supportive, and engaging summer experience.

GIRLS OVERNIGHT SUMMER CAMP

Our unique program supports young girls with histories of trauma and abuse in discovering their talents, developing fitness and healthy living skills, and fostering long lasting friendships in a traditional camp setting on the shores of Georgian Bay. Our donors believe in the tremendous potential of these children and their continued support allows girls to relive their joyful experience year after year.



MEET TWO OF OUR DYNAMIC YOUTH

After spending the majority of my childhood in the care of The Children's Aid Society and in group homes, at the age of 17 I was lost and confused. Unlike most of my friends, I had no plans for my future and was unsure what to do with my life. Growing up in the child welfare system made me feel neglected by both my family and the system. Due to the issues I developed over the years, it made it difficult to trust others but I wanted to escape from the environment.

Fortunately, I found StepStones. Stepstones has impacted my life in many positive ways. The majority of my goals and accomplishments wouldn't have been achieved without the help and support of my StepStones program/family.

Due to the support of StepStones and my mentor Michelle, I was able to find a stable environment that I can now call home after being homeless for 2 + years. I am also working part-time and becoming more confident in my skills. I'm keeping focused on what's important by creating step by step goals, budgeting, and life skills goals, that has helped me develop into the young lady I am today. I know have the ability of bringing some of my creative business ideas to life.

I continue to struggle with my mental health, which has affected my life in negative ways. But I am currently seeking one-to-one help to take care of my mental health with the help and support of StepStones leading me towards independence. I know I have the support I need in order to keep moving forward.

“

A portrait of a young Black woman with long dark braids, smiling and holding a large orange pumpkin. The image is partially covered by a teal geometric overlay.

CINDY

A portrait of a young Black man with a beard, wearing a black t-shirt and a necklace, standing against a dark background. The image is partially covered by a teal geometric overlay.

TRISTAN

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My name is Tristan and I'd like to share with you some goals and accomplishments of this past year. My current goal in life is to become a teacher. It's turning out to be a long path until I can get there, but I am passionate in my decision and will work towards that goal. Currently I am taking General Arts and Science at George Brown to work on my electives. I hope to pursue my teaching idea at Ryerson University, my teachables being English and Philosophy.

One of the courses that I am most passionate about is philosophy – I find it interesting to learn about great ancient thinkers; their ideology about life and the many challenges that come with it. Learning about them is always interesting and insightful.

This past year I volunteered with George Brown College's Student Life Centre where I've made many friends and connections. A three-day retreat at Cedar Glen served as a way for people to get connected and offered employment/volunteer opportunities with George Brown. I still volunteer with them today and am glad I'm still a part of the community.

I also love knitting and completed one of my most ambitious projects to date, making various custom hats and scarfs for my peers.

StepStones has been incredibly supportive in both my education and mental health. The folks there have helped me through school with bursaries that I am so thankful for. Various activities within StepStones like yoga workshops, the annual BBQ, and holiday dinners, have led me to connect with fellow peers and staff members. StepStones is a safe place for me and I feel I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for them.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

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