



StepStones

IMPACT REPORT 2022

Every young person in and
from foster care deserves
the opportunity to thrive

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INTRODUCTION

A LETTER FROM HEATHER AND THE STEPSTONES TEAM

Welcome to StepStones for Youth's 2022 Impact Report. This report highlights our incredible achievements thanks to the direct impact of our generous circle of supporters. Your belief in our work with young people from the child welfare system improves their trajectories and sustains their well-being. It has also allowed us to expand our team and programming in order to best assist the growing needs of this population. We have a strong team of Connection Coordinators who are helping young people attain education, employment, housing, and improved mental health by connecting them with vital services and developing networks of supportive adults around them.



This year, three times the annual number of youth are simultaneously exiting their foster care placements as the provincial moratorium created at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic ends. With your support, we have built our infrastructure and internal capacity in order to meet the demand for our services. We have increased our housing grants program to assist youth at high risk of homelessness due to this event, as well as the ongoing housing crisis in the city.

This year, our own Safe at Home project was recognized with a **National Youth Homelessness Prevention Award** by the Canadian Observatory of Homelessness and A Way Home Canada. This tells us we are doing something right! We hosted several successful in-person gatherings for youth in our program, and were reminded of the powerful impact that gathering in community has on young people's well-being, inclusion, and sense of belonging. None of this would have been possible without our outstanding volunteers, who have stuck with us throughout the pandemic or have recently joined our organization to provide everything from a drive to our holiday feast to a long-term, one-to-one mentorship role.

Despite the economic situation and other challenges in our world today, our supporters are selfless when it comes to championing our work and the young people we serve. On behalf of the entire team at StepStones, thank you for another great year and please enjoy the read!

Heather O'Keefe
Executive Director, StepStones for Youth

ABOUT STEPSTONES

StepStones for Youth is a charitable organization that creates transformative changes in the lives of young people aged 10-25 who are or have been involved in Canada's Child Protection Services. We help youth develop strong networks of supportive adults to increase their sense of belonging, increase their school engagement, stabilize their housing, and improve their mental and physical health. Our external, evidence-based reviews consistently demonstrate that positive outcomes are achievable when young people feel safe, connected, supported, and empowered.



OUR VISION

A world where all young people thrive and have a sense of belonging with people who love and support them

OUR MISSION

To drive at better systems and approaches for achieving education, securing stable housing, and building long-lasting support networks for youth involved in child welfare

OUR PILLARS



FINDING AND DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

Identifying gaps in service, we research interventions that drive positive, long-term outcomes for children and youth from foster and group home care

DEMONSTRATING SUCCESS THROUGH PROGRAM DELIVERY

We adapt, implement, and evaluate promising interventions to support youth in successfully transitioning to adulthood, with a focus on building connections for youth and supporting them in education, housing, mental health, and community and cultural connections

DRIVING AT SYSTEMS CHANGE THROUGH EDUCATION, INFLUENCE, AND AWARENESS

We leverage our experience and research to raise awareness about youth from foster care through amplifying their voices, engaging with key stakeholders and policymakers, running awareness-raising campaigns, and participating in collective impact and collaborative initiatives

YOUR IMPACT

312 

YOUTH SERVED

51 

WORKSHOPS AND
EVENTS HELD

140 

HOUSING SUBSIDIES
FACILITATED FOR
YOUTH

175 

EMERGENCY FOOD
AND CARE PACKAGES
PROVIDED

14560 

HOURS OF SUPPORTIVE
COUNSELLING AND
SERVICE NAVIGATION
PROVIDED

168 

VOLUNTEERS
MAKING A
DIFFERENCE IN THE
LIVES OF YOUTH

WHERE YOUR DONATION GOES

\$25 

provides a workshop to a
youth, teaching valuable
skills like applying to school
and budgeting

\$100 

gives 2 youth presents on
their birthday to let them
know they're cared for

\$350 

allows 10 youth to attend
our annual holiday dinner at
this special time of year

\$500 

provides 25 healthy meals
for a youth so they can
focus on school and work
rather than on where their
next meal is coming from

\$1050 

gives youth 3 months of
housing subsidies so they
avoid homelessness and
have a place to call home

\$3300 

fully supports a youth in our
program for a year,
including a complete case
management approach to
intervention

ISSUES AND OUTCOMES

HOMELESSNESS

Issue: Young people in and from foster care face complex problems and experience high rates of homelessness and poverty. As evidenced in our program, 98% of youth at intake live below the poverty line and rely on government financial assistance. Even when housed, these youth devote more than half their monthly income to housing, leaving fewer resources and time to attain education, employment, and mental health stability.

Nearly two-thirds of these youth experience homelessness within the first six months of their mandatory exit from foster care at age 18 (Dworsky et al, 2013) and youth experiencing homelessness are 193 times more likely to have been involved in the child welfare system than their peers (Canadian Observatory Homelessness, 2017).

58% OF HOMELESS YOUTH HAVE
HAD INVOLVEMENT WITH
THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Outcomes: Young people attain long-term, safe, and stable housing through:

- Ensuring their basic needs and appropriate housing are addressed and met immediately after intake
- Connecting with extended family or community members who provide a stable home and a sense of belonging and permanency
- Obtaining assistance with navigating the rental market, attending rental viewings, and understanding tenants' rights
- Receiving housing grants to support rental payments while they enrol in school programs

86% OF YOUTH ARE IN STABLE
HOUSING AFTER 6 MONTHS AT
STEPSTONES

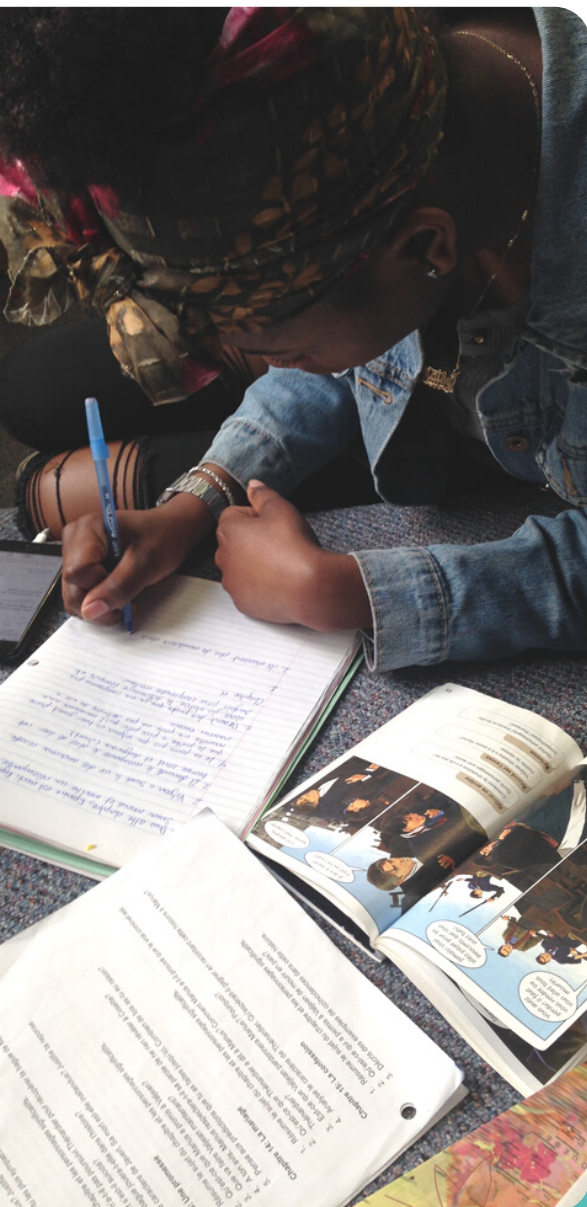


ISSUES AND OUTCOMES

EDUCATION

Issue: Frequent moves between foster and group homes, as well as child protection-related meetings, introduce lengthy school absences leading to missed classes and falling behind. At age 18, youth are then faced with the sudden loss of caregivers and housing and become responsible for managing their own finances; all of which negatively impacts their ability to attend and maintain success in academic programs.

In any given year in Ontario, only 44% of these youth graduate from high school, compared to the 81% graduation rate of their peers (Ministry of Education, 2017) Low educational attainment is linked to chronic unemployment and increases risks of homelessness, poverty, and long-term dependency on social systems.



44%

OF YOUTH FROM THE CHILD
WELFARE SYSTEM GRADUATE
HIGH SCHOOL

Outcomes: Young people improve their educational attainment through:

- Creating educational plans and pathways with Connection Coordinators and volunteer mentors
- Receiving ongoing educational counselling, advocacy for learning disabilities and mental health issues, and tutoring
- Receiving assistance for applying to post-secondary programs, visiting schools, navigating the school system, and achieving success
- Celebrating milestones and accomplishments along their educational journeys

82%

OF YOUTH AT STEPSTONES
ARE CURRENTLY ATTENDING
SCHOOL OR HAVE
GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL

ISSUES AND OUTCOMES

BELONGING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Issue: Frequent changes in foster care placements and schools, as well as being severed from their family unit, extended family units, and communities, create devastating instability and isolation at critical changes of childhood and adolescent development. This negatively affects young people's abilities to develop healthy relationships, self-esteem, and trust in adults and social systems and often leads to increased anxiety and exacerbates untreated post-traumatic stress. At intake to our program, 96% of young people possess at least 4 Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) which has been proven to increase risks of future serious chronic health conditions.

7% OF YOUTH DESCRIBE HAVING STABLE MENTAL HEALTH AT INTAKE TO STEPSTONES

Outcomes: Young people improve their mental health and sense of belonging through:

- A new mental health grant that allows youth to attend 6-10 sessions with a trauma and permanency trained therapist
- Forming long-lasting relationships with volunteer mentors and new caregivers who support them on their journeys
- Connecting with physicians, counsellors, and culturally-appropriate and relevant mental health services
- Engaging in meditation, yoga, and mindfulness workshops that promote healthy living and educational attainment
- Participating in engaging and diverse activities, StepStones community events, and seasonal celebrations to increase belonging

75% OF YOUTH AT STEPSTONES HAVE STABILIZED THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AND/OR ARE ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS



OUR VOLUNTEERS

Where would we be without you! We are beyond grateful for the incredible commitment, creativity, and generosity of our amazing volunteers. They contribute their time and energy to help ensure our programming is impactful to best support the young people who benefit from it.

In 2022, volunteers:

- Became long-term mentors for youth
- Provided support at events like our spring BBQ and our holiday dinner
- Painted and revitalized our office spaces
- Generously donated and sorted supply kits for youth
- Kept our emergency food cabinet fully stocked
- Provided presents for our Youth Holiday Gift Drive
- Supported youth with finding and moving into their new home
- And so much more...



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Diavin Miller - Chair
Tanya Sinha - Vice-Chair
Steve McMillan - Treasurer

Katherine Brown - Secretary
Heather O'Keefe- Director
Erin Needra - Director

Lorna Freeman - Director
Roman Lifshitz - Director
Sharon Beers - Director

ADINA'S STORY AT STEPSTONES



When Adina first came to StepStones she was living with addiction issues and an eating disorder. Unable to cope with school during this time she had dropped out. She also struggled to find stable housing and was staying at the YWCA's Woodlawn shelter in Toronto.

Adina reached out for support and decided to join our Safe at Home program. She was also matched with a mentor, who has been there with her through her sobriety journey. With a little encouragement and help, Adina has reached two years of sobriety!

Adina re-enrolled in high school and thrived, graduating with distinction and being accepted into the Social Work program at Toronto Metropolitan University. With her intelligence, compassion and lived experience, she'll be a top student and inspiring social worker. She is already offering the benefit of her experiences to youth facing similar challenges as a volunteer for StepStones.

Adina's StepStones Connection Coordinator and mentor admire her ability to adapt and her determination. She sets goals for herself and when she faces an obstacle, she pivots and comes up with a new plan and pursues that with gusto. She also follows through with her commitments, and holds herself accountable when she's unable to.

While she still faces some challenges, Adina has created a safety plan for herself and has a strong network of support through Safe at Home and her StepStones mentor to lean on. It's inspiring to see her gaining confidence in her abilities and becoming excited about what the future holds for her.

**"ADINA RE-ENROLLED IN HIGH SCHOOL,
GRADUATING WITH DISTINCTION AND BEING
ACCEPTED INTO THE SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM
AT TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY."**

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

A huge thank you to our generous circle of supporters for believing in the rights of young people from foster care:

- Airlie Foundation
- Alex Caridia
- Allan Levitt
- Andrew Grimes
- Aubrey & Marla Dan Foundation
- Bickle-Wilder Foundation
- Brian & Elizabeth Haworth Foundation
- The Cavelti Family Foundation
- Children's Aid Foundation of Canada
- CPA Ontario
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- Diageo
- Don Langill
- Elizabeth Chisholm
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- Forum Equity
- Four Oaks Foundation
- Frank Salmonds
- Freedom International
- Gordon and Ruth Gooder Charitable Foundation
- Government of Canada's Support for Student Learning Program
- Imperra
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- Preyra Foundation
- Raising the Roof
- RBC Charity Day
- RBC Future Launch Foundation
- Robert Kerr Foundation
- Salesforce
- Sandra Dye
- Sandy Walker
- Shorcan Brokers Ltd
- Shreya Shah
- Sonor Foundation
- Speranza Foundation
- Starbucks Foundation
- Susan & Graham Denton
- Sycamore Fund
- TD Ready Commitment
- TD Securities Underwriting Hope
- TELUS Friendly Future Foundation
- United Way of Greater Toronto
- W.C. Kitchen Family Foundation
- Williams Wilson Sherport Foundation
- Youth and Philanthropy Initiative



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