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StepStones

IMPACT REPORT

Every child and youth
in and from foster care
deserves the opportunity
to thrive

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Welcome to StepStones for Youth's 2021 Impact Report! Our achievements this year, the second of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, are directly linked to the outstanding support of our circle of generous donors, funders, and partners who believe in our work and in the rights of young people from the child welfare system. With tremendous thanks to you, these pages are populated with success stories, exciting highlights, and inspiring outcomes related to our past year's work. I'd like to extend a very warm welcome to our new team members who are bringing energy and creativity to our programming, and to our new Board members who volunteer their unique skill sets and deep commitment to creating positive changes in the lives of the young people we serve. This past year we developed a new 3-year strategic plan and are excited to begin its implementation. Aligning our mission and values with our intended impacts for young people in and from foster care, this plan will drive us forward in our work to help them achieve permanency, stability, and belonging. With the commitment of our supporters, our Youth Mentor Connections and Homelessness Prevention Projects have been connecting young people with caring adults and long-term housing, both of which are essential for the health, stability, and well-being of young people from the child welfare system. Our work continues in our ever-present commitment to dismantling systemic racism and oppression with the recognition that young people from Black, Indigenous, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities continue to be over-represented in foster care. As we head into our 18th year, I believe we are well poised to increase awareness of the pressing issues and ignite far-reaching and positive changes to the system. Thank you for believing in our work and join me in celebrating the accomplishments of dynamic youth at StepStones!



HEATHER O'KEEFE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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

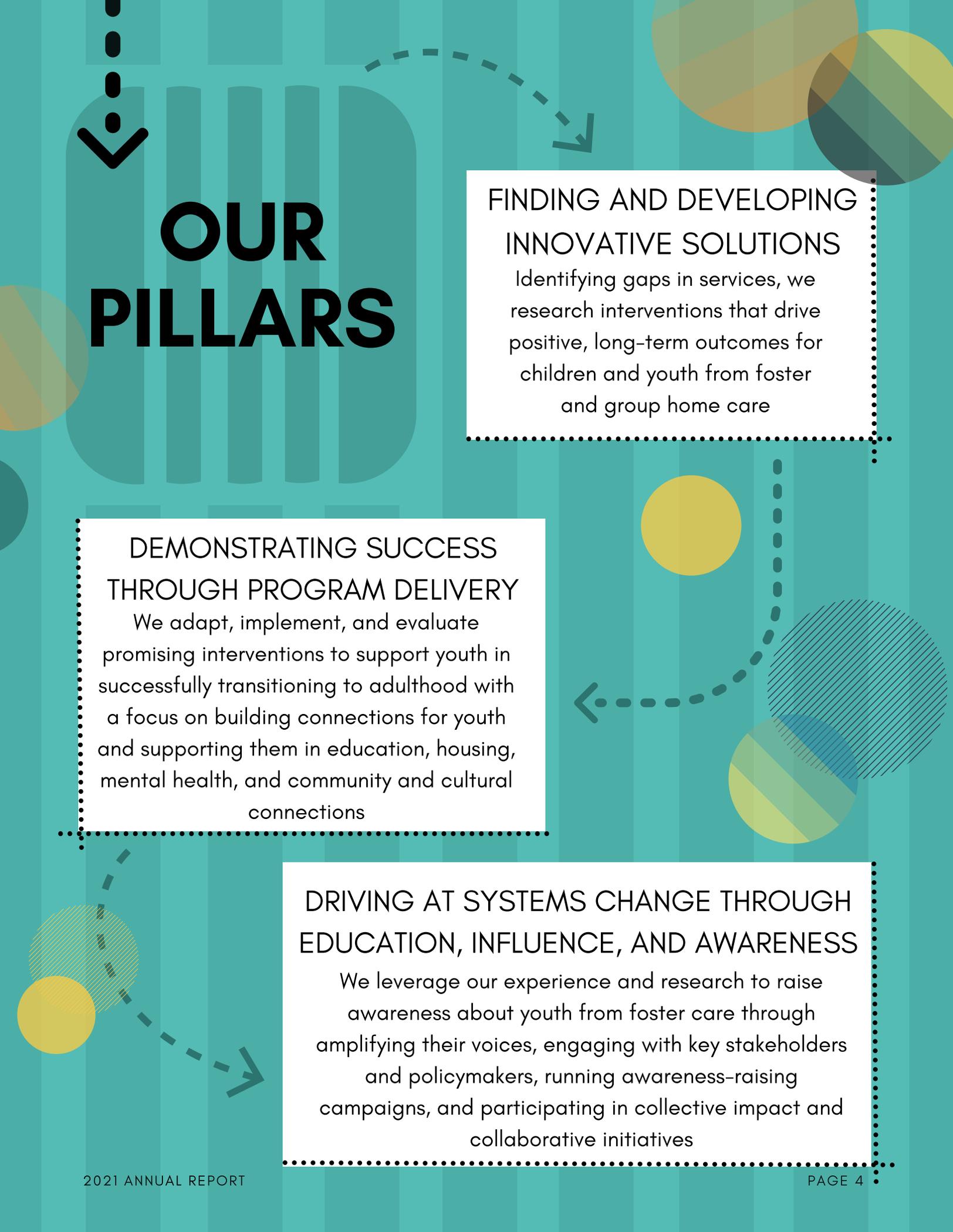


OUR VISION

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



StepStones for Youth is a Toronto charity that creates transformative changes in the lives of children and youth aged 10-26 who are or have been involved in Ontario's Child Protection Services. We help young people develop strong networks of supportive adults to increase their sense of belonging, improve 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 PILLARS

FINDING AND DEVELOPING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

Identifying gaps in services, 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

THANK YOU!

WE APPRECIATE ALL OF OUR FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS

The impacts on the lives of young people in our program are transformative and are made possible through the commitment of our circle of generous supporters, donors, and partners:

Aubrey & Marla Dan Foundation
Bickle-Wilder Foundation
Brian & Elizabeth Haworth Foundation
Children's Aid Foundation of Canada
CPA Ontario
Diageo
Dymon
George Lunan Foundation
Gordon and Ruth Gooder Charitable Foundation
Freedom International
Forum Equity Partners
Johansen Larsen Foundation
J. P. Bickell Foundation
Lillian Meighen and Don Wright Foundation
Mags and Andrew Moore Fund
Menkes Developments Ltd.
MLSE Foundation
Newlands Family Foundation

Ontario Trillium Foundation
Papro Wine Cellars
Preyra Foundation
RBC Foundation Future Launch
Scotiabank
ScotiaMcLeod Charitable Foundation
Scotia Wealth
Shorcan Brokers Ltd
Sonor Foundation
Speranza Foundation
Sycamore
TD Securities Underwriting Hope
TELUS
Toronto Kiwanis
United Way of Greater Toronto
W.C. Kitchen Foundation
Williams Wilson Sherport Foundation

ISSUES & OUTCOMES

We believe that every young person deserves and has the right to belong with people who love and value them unconditionally. For most children and youth in foster care, and through no fault of their own, they are denied this right. Untreated trauma, unstable living conditions, and a lack of familial support result in a profoundly negative trajectory for these young people:

46%

OF YOUTH SUCCESSFULLY GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL

58%

OF HOMELESS YOUTH HAVE HAD INVOLVEMENT WITH THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

70%

ARE VICTIMS OF CRIME WITHIN ONE YEAR OF LEAVING THEIR FOSTER CARE PLACEMENTS

Our donors know that positive outcomes are possible for children and youth from foster care when the conditions and supports are in place that allow them to thrive and be successful. Within their first year of involvement in StepStones' programs:

85%

ARE ATTENDING OR HAVE GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL

89%

OBTAIN STABLE HOUSING AFTER SIX MONTHS

81%

REPORT IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH AFTER TWELVE MONTHS

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION PROGRAM



Our donors believe that young people from foster care have the right to safe and stable housing

After stays in shelters, foster care, and group homes, Monika is now receiving support through StepStones' housing programs and, this past summer, celebrated a birthday in her first apartment.

StepStones' Safe at Home Project connects children and youth with kith, kin, and community allies who provide long-term, stable home environments and unconditional care and support. Connection Coordinators assist young people identify adults with whom they have pre-existing relationships such as extended family members or neighbors and mentors. Long-term housing and supportive networks of adults help youth achieve their educational goals, improve their mental health, and increase their sense of belonging and community.

StepStones' Housing Grants and Support Project offers young people assistance with critical housing-related activities and expenses. Emergency subsidies help youth maintain rental payments while they focus on school and career objectives. Connection Coordinators help youth meet their basic needs, locate safe and appropriate housing, move into and obtain necessities for their new homes, and build positive relationships with property owners.



YOUTH MENTOR CONNECTIONS PROGRAM

Our donors understand the important role of supportive adults in the lives of young people from foster care



Max was commissioned to create StepStones' holiday cards, a first in his life as a young artist, which is now an idea he would like to explore, along with getting into piloting school with the help of Michael, his wonderful mentor and biggest fan.

StepStones' Youth Mentor Connections Project matches young people with one-to-one, volunteer mentors who provide support for education and mental health, guidance for positive life choices, and opportunities to develop healthy and meaningful relationships. Mentors become substitute family members youth can trust and with whom they can share problems and celebrate successes. By nurturing genuine and trusting relationships with a mentor through initial welcoming activities in the youths' areas of interest, a unique foundation for success is created.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM



Our donors support youth-led programming that engages interests, develops leadership, and celebrates diversity

Working in solidarity with young people who have lived experience in the foster care and child welfare systems, all of our programming and processes are informed by their voices, suggestions, and visions. This year our donors helped us provide exciting and essential skill development through virtual workshops in cooking and nutrition, financial literacy, yoga and mindfulness, and arts and expression. Our inspiring Youth Advisory and Social Committees brought young people together to share their experiences, make suggestions for programming, create awareness campaigns, and strengthen our community.

OUR VOLUNTEERS!

Where would we be without you! We are beyond grateful for the incredible commitment, creativity, and generosity of our outstanding volunteers. During rolling lockdowns and closures this past year, they contributed their time, energy, and care to helping ensure our programming was successful and youth were supported.

THIS PAST YEAR OUR VOLUNTEERS:



Supported young people in crossing the high school finish line



Packed and unpacked moving trucks for young people's new apartments



Organized online fundraisers with their communities



Made dozens of cooking workshop ingredient deliveries across the GTA



Became long-term mentors for young people in our program



Donated generous gifts to our Youth Holiday Gift Drive



Shared their expertise and enthusiasm in a wide variety of virtual workshops



StepStones

RATED A **TOP 100 CHARITY** **ON CHARITY INTELLIGENCE**

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