



StepStones

IMPACT REPORT 2020

Unlocking the potential of
incredible young people from the
child welfare system





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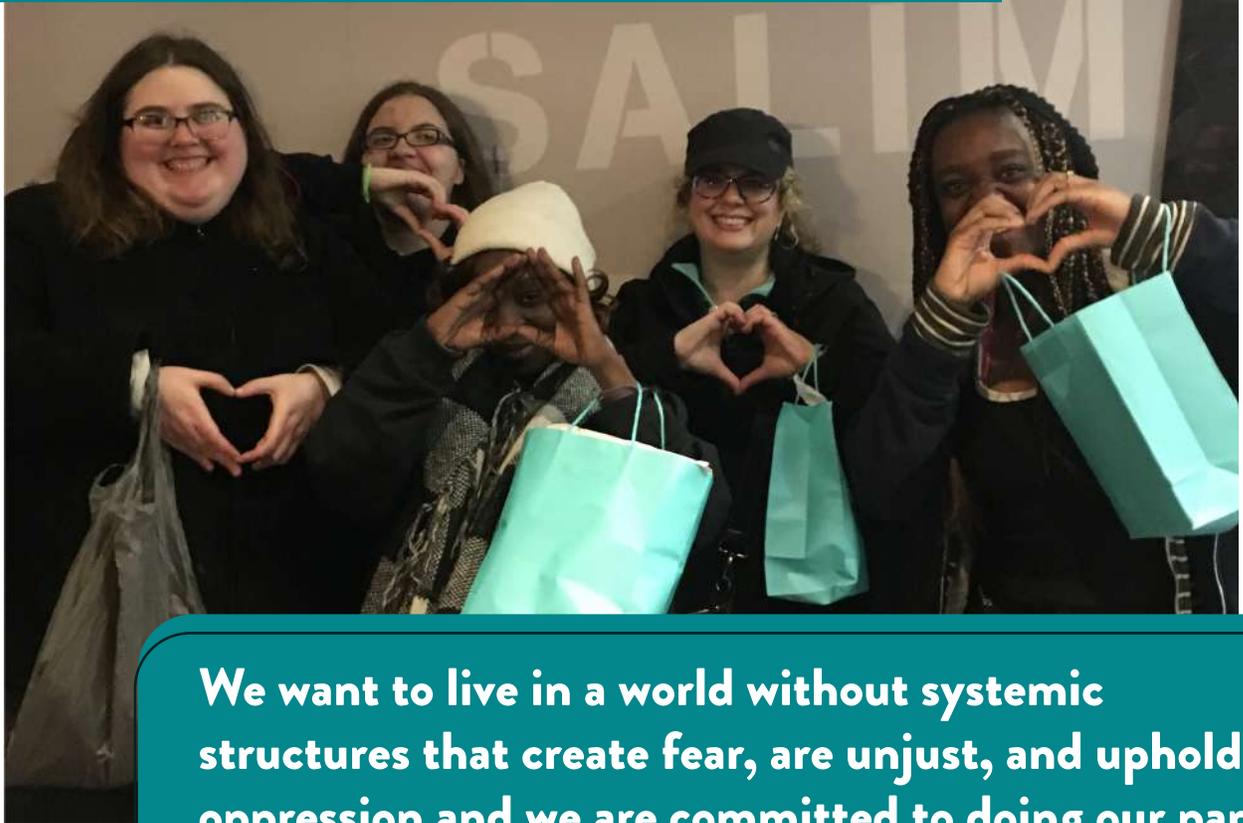
It is with deep gratitude and a strong message of hope that I welcome you to our 2020 Impact Report. I have always valued the importance of community in the work that we do and this past year highlights that value more than ever. I am so grateful to our staff, board of directors, volunteers, community members, and circle of supporters who have remained committed to the youth we serve even when you yourselves were met with challenges arising from the pandemic. We know that meaningful relationships are what get us through difficult times in life, just as youth in our program become more successful when they have people in their lives who care about and support them. Thanks to the generosity of our donors and supporters, StepStones provided food security, safe and stable housing, and community connections to youth who are marginalized and experiencing disproportionate effects of COVID-19. Our staff and volunteers have rallied together in creative ways to meet the urgent needs of youth with physical distancing and in-person safety protocols. Looking ahead, we are eager to launch our new Safe at Home Project offering community-embedded home options to youth at high risk of homelessness. I am so grateful to our new and longstanding partners and supporters who make our work possible and, on behalf of our entire incredible team, thank YOU for believing in the potential of youth from foster care.



HEATHER O'KEEFE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

mission

To unlock the potential of youth from foster care



We want to live in a world without systemic structures that create fear, are unjust, and uphold oppression and we are committed to doing our part to create real change.

vision

In order to create long-term and sustainable change, we assist youth from the child welfare system towards achieving educational success, securing employment, attaining safe and long-term housing, increasing mental and physical health, and developing positive connections and support networks they can depend on for life. Meeting these objectives leads to reduced isolation, homelessness, criminal behaviour, adverse physical and mental health, and long-term dependency on social services.

StepStones for Youth is a registered charitable organization in Toronto. We have focused our efforts on reducing barriers to the most marginalized young people in our community with the knowledge that Black and Indigenous children and youth are over-represented in the foster care system. We strive for representation among our staff and volunteers to best support diverse youth from Black and Indigenous communities, LGBTQ+ communities, and newcomer and refugee communities.



THANK YOU to our supporters

Aubrey & Marla Dan Foundation
Beutel Goodman Charitable
Foundation
Bickle-Wilder Foundation
BMO
Canadian Tire
Children's Aid Foundation of Canada
CPA Ontario
Crane Fund
Dymon
Freedom International
Home Depot Foundation
Journey Fitness and Wellness
Kiwanis Club of Toronto
KBSH Foundation
Life of Productivity Inc.
McDonald's Restaurants of Canada
Meridian
MLSE Foundation
Ontario Trillium Foundation

The impacts on the lives of youth in our program are transformative and sustainable and are made possible through the commitment of our circle of generous supporters, donors, and funders:

Prefera Finance Ltd.
RBC Foundation Future Launch
RJJ Holding Ltd
Scotiabank Foundation
Shorcan Brokers Ltd
Speranza Foundation
TD Securities Underwriting Hope
TELUS
TMX
Traquar Family Foundation
United Way of Greater Toronto and York Region
Vector Institute
Williams Wilson Sherport Foundation
The Working Group Inc.
Youth and Philanthropy Initiative
Zukerman Family Foundation



the issue

Young people in foster care in Ontario are at a great disadvantage for transitioning to a healthy adulthood. Most are required to exit this system abruptly at age 18. Low rates of education, unstable living conditions, and mental health challenges result in a profoundly negative trajectory for these youth, many of whom are disproportionately marginalized and racialized. In any given year in Ontario:



of youth from foster care graduate high school



of youth experiencing homelessness have been involved with child protection services



of these youth are victims of crime within one year of their required exit from the system

outcomes

With the invaluable support of our circle of donors, StepStones invests in young people from every angle, as a family would, to improve their long-term outcomes in education and employment, housing, mental health, interpersonal relationships, and community connections.

We ensure that homeless youth obtain safe and stable housing as the first priority



We accompany youth to rental viewings, school meetings, and counselling appointments



We connect youth with counsellors, physicians, and other health care specialists

We acknowledge successes with special events, dinners, and personal recognition



We celebrate diversity, strengths, resiliency, and community



We encourage post-secondary program application and enrolment



We help develop life skills including financial literacy, cooking, and conflict management

COVID 19 and relief program

Amidst challenging requirements of lockdown measures and physical distancing, StepStones is committed to reducing seclusion, increasing community health and well-being, and alleviating mental health symptoms for marginalized youth from foster care.

Our circle of donors and supporters stepped up for StepStones in this unprecedented year to help us maintain our critical services to youth who were made further vulnerable by COVID-19.



55

virtual workshops and events held

90

housing subsidies provided

225

emergency food and care packages delivered

1370

hours of counselling offered

We organized shopping and deliveries of emergency food, hygiene, and essential supplies, including care packages and homemade food, to increase emotional well-being.



We hosted virtual workshops including mindfulness and yoga, healthy cooking with a live chef, and navigating and accessing government COVID-19 supports.

We provided youth at high risk of homelessness with emergency housing subsidies, move-in packages, and assistance setting up their new homes.

We assisted youth with counselling sessions and acquiring mental health supports from the community.



Youth Support Services Program

The first of its kind in Canada, StepStones Youth Support Services Program assists youth aged 15-24 with significant histories of trauma and abuse transition successfully from foster care into adulthood. With one-to-one volunteer mentors and Youth Connection Support Workers, these young people receive the skills, tools, and guidance to set objectives, gain confidence, and accomplish goals in areas of education, employment, housing, mental health, and community and cultural connections.



With tremendous gratitude to our funders...

- ➔ we continued intaking new referrals to our program to meet the increased need for our services during COVID-19
- ➔ we established safe and appropriate housing to meet the diverse needs of youth in our program
- ➔ we ensured food security for youth with deliveries, budgeting assistance, and access to our emergency food bank
- ➔ we tutored students virtually during the spring closure of schools to assist with online learning, completing assignments, and graduating from high school
- ➔ we provided youth with workshops and guidance in developing critical skills, financial literacy, and career and network support
- ➔ we welcomed members of the community in becoming long-term, one-to-one mentors who help, guide, and champion youth in our program
- ➔ we facilitated the StepStones Youth Advisory Council to amplify the voices, stories, experiences, and ideas of youth from the child welfare system



safe at home project

Safe housing and consistent guardianship are keys to the health and well-being of vulnerable youth required to exit foster care. Our new and innovative Safe at Home Project is a sustainable solution in direct response to the increased risks of youth homelessness due to COVID-19.

In Ontario, youth growing up in foster care are required to leave their foster homes at the age of 18.

During the pandemic, the Ontario government has put a pause on this requirement in order to maintain supports and services youth are currently receiving through Children's Aid Societies. When this moratorium comes to an end, there will be a mass outflow of youth simultaneously from their placements – all of whom will be in urgent need of housing.

Thanks to our generous funders and community members who have offered their homes and guardianship, youth are being matched, placed, and assisted with transitioning to stable, caring homes.

Safe at Home meets vulnerable youth's basic needs for shelter, food, and safety, as well as emotional needs for care, guidance, and belonging. With the generous commitment of our partners and funders, this project reduces youth homelessness, reduces contraction rates of COVID-19, and increases long-term support at the community level.

girls overnight summer camp program

YOGA



ROBOTICS



CAMPFIRES



CANOEING



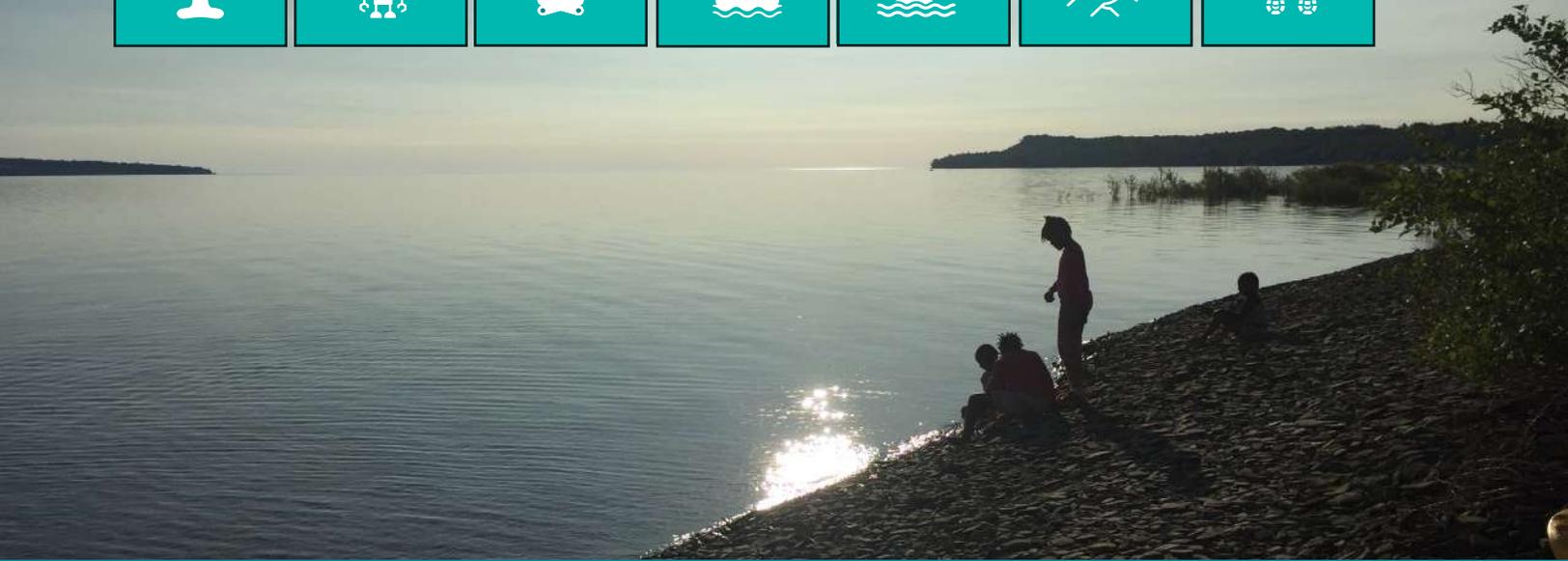
SWIMMING



TEAM
SPORTS



HIKING



StepStones' Girls Overnight Summer Camp offers traditional camp activities and interpersonal development opportunities to marginalized girls aged 6-14 with histories of trauma and unstable guardian care. Girls develop confidence, self-esteem, healthy friendships, and trust out in beautiful nature.



We know that camp is much more than a physical destination – it is the heart of community! In 2020, our funders made it possible for us to connect with our camper community through deliveries of activity kits and exciting virtual workshops in fitness, arts and crafts, yoga, and science.

The dedication and compassion of just one person can make a world of difference in the lives of youth from foster care.

STEPSTONES FACILITATES THESE TRANSFORMATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS THANKS TO OUR CIRCLE OF SUPPORTERS:

CHELSEA

“Before meeting my mentor, I was nervous but StepStones managed to match me with one hell of a mentor, Jen. She is my confidant and my role model. She has shown me my own strength in times I thought there was none.”



CINDY

“I appreciate and treasure everything Michelle has taught me, including her great sense of style and all the amazing advice. She has given me a new perspective on life and opened my eyes to new stages of opportunity and strength.”



DAEHANI

“I have been with my mentor Kelly for about 2 years. She’s become my best friend, she’s become my family, and it’s nice to know there is someone else in the world who reminds me that I am a valuable member of this universe.”



THANK YOU

to ALL of our amazing volunteers, in our mentorship program and beyond, for building the foundation that supports success for youth!

From painting rocks to wrapping skateboards, our vast team of volunteers and supporters made 2020 a most memorable year full of highlights. Your enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication helped us help youth move through this challenging year with pride and accomplishment:



Over 20,000 masks donated

2020 highlights

A massive holiday gift drive for youth in our program



A hugely successful Love Rocks summer social media campaign with a CityTV spot



The launch of our new "Swag Store" with all proceeds going directly to youth



Virtual Thanksgiving and Holiday dinners for our youth



Hundreds of kilometers of food, care package, gift box, and activity kit deliveries

The biggest Giving Tuesday fundraiser in StepStones' history

A delicious donation of homemade chili for our freezers



StepStones

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"I AM SO THANKFUL FOR A PROGRAM LIKE STEPSTONES THAT HAS GIVEN SO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH SUCH WONDERFUL PEOPLE. WE ALL NEED RESPECT, COMPASSION, AND UNDERSTANDING NOT TO MENTION OPPORTUNITY AND THIS IS A PROGRAM THAT PROVIDES JUST THAT. THANK YOU STEPSTONES, YOU HELPED MY FAMILY GET JUST A LITTLE BIT BIGGER AS WELL AS MY LIFE JUST A LITTLE BIT BRIGHTER!"
- CHELSEA



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