FOR STEP STONES YOUTH



2025 IMPACT REPORT

Supporting children and youth involved in the child protection system

Land Acknowledgment

In the spirit of reconciliation, StepStones for Youth affirms our respect for the traditional territories on which we operate, including the lands covered by various treaties such as Treaty 13, Treaty 14, Treaty 16, Treaty 18, Treaty 19, and the Williams Treaties, which encompass the Municipality of Toronto and surrounding regions. We are humbled by the longstanding stewardship of these lands by many nations, including the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat, the Chippewa, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. StepStones is grateful to the diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples who continue to contribute to the health and vibrancy of these lands today.

The ongoing impacts of colonization and systemic discrimination are deeply entrenched in Canada's child protection systems. Indigenous children continue to be disproportionately overrepresented in foster care, perpetuating cycles of intergenerational trauma, cultural erasure, and systemic marginalization. These injustices reflect a legacy of policies designed to disconnect Indigenous people from their cultures, families, languages, and communities, resulting in profound and lasting harm.

StepStones for Youth upholds our responsibility to confront and address these inequities in our work. We are committed to educating our team about the history and ongoing impacts of colonization to deepen our understanding, expand our empathy, and shape our approach to better support Indigenous youth who are inordinately impacted by the injustices of the child welfare system.



Illustration by:
Tehatsistahawi (Tsista) Kennedy
Anishinaabe and Onyota'a:ka woodland-style artist belonging to Beausoleil First Nation and Oneida Nation of the Thames

Our Commitment to Anti-Racism and Inclusion

Among the youth StepStones serves, several groups are overrepresented in child protection services. In 2021, Indigenous children accounted for 7.7% of youth under 15, but for more than half of all foster children (53.8%). Among all children in Canada under 15, Indigenous children were 14 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be in foster care (Statistics Canada, 2024). Researchers at McGill University have also found that child protection investigations centred on Black children were 2.27 times the rate of white children, and Black children were placed in care at more than twice the rate of white children (3.1% vs. 1.5%) (McGill University, 2026). According to recent studies, 32-34% of young people in child protection systems identify as 2SLGBTQ+, likely an underrepresentation given that many 2SLGBTQ+ youth choose not to disclose their identity (Homeless Hub, 2024).

Our programs are designed with these inequities in mind. We are intentional in the creation of our inclusive programming and spaces where all youth feel seen, supported, and empowered. Our evaluation processes help us ensure that outcomes are equitable for Indigenous, Black, 2SLGBTQ+, and other marginalized youth by refining our work to close gaps and dismantle barriers.

Our team reflects the diversity of the youth we serve, and we prioritize culturally appropriate and responsive supports. We provide staff and volunteers with training in anti-oppressive practices, cultural competency, and inclusive support strategies, and engage youth in meaningful actions.

We pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent and those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery. StepStones is committed to continually acting in support of, and in solidarity with, Black communities seeking freedom and reparative justice in light of the history and ongoing legacy of slavery that continues to impact Black communities in Canada.



We remain unwavering in our commitment to anti-racism and inclusion—celebrating identities, amplifying marginalized voices and working toward systemic change so every young person has the opportunities and support they deserve.

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A Letter from our Leadership

Greetings from StepStones for Youth! We are proud to present our 2025 Impact Report, along with our tremendous gratitude to our supporters who made the content in these pages not just possible, but thriving. Our organization is celebrating growth in scope and reach, and we have you to thank for prioritizing the futures of youth from foster care who continue to experience poor trajectories without support.

This year we went back to our roots in a new partnership with Boundless Adventures who offer wilderness camp experiences to youth at risk. The COVID-19 pandemic required us to halt our founding summer camp program, so we were thrilled to get back to the woods and whitewater, led by an amazing organization providing therapeutic activities that build confidence and connections.

We were also forward-focused with the purchase of our very own property to become Canada's first hub and housing facility for youth involved in child protection. Our monumental project is underway with thanks to donors and partners who believe in our vision of supported housing with onsite, multi-sector services that youth can easily access.

In the fall we publicly launched our capital campaign with our Building Brighter Futures event. A heartfelt thanks to all who attended! We are continuing to fundraise, but will need your help to open our doors and welcome our first youth residents in the spring of 2028.

Most of all, we are proud of the many accomplishments made by young people in our program this past year. We exist for them – they inspire us daily and remind us of how capable and driven they are to achieve their goals and dreams. Thank you for believing in them and for your unwavering support of our mission. We hope you enjoy the read!

With gratitude,

Heather O'Keefe
Founder & CEO

Lorna Freeman
Board Chair

StepStones for Youth: An Overview



Our Vision

A country where all young people thrive, have a strong sense of belonging, and are surrounded by people who love and support them.

Our Mission

We support children and youth involved in the child protection system. We work to improve educational outcomes, secure stable housing, and build long-lasting support networks.

About Us

StepStones for Youth is a unique charitable organization addressing systemic barriers and improving youth outcomes through direct service delivery and collaborative approaches to systems change. We assist young people involved in child protection services who have significant histories of trauma and abuse and are at high risk of educational disenfranchisement, homelessness, and poverty. Our evidence-based and upstream methods of prevention improve the trajectories of youth exiting foster care who lack family support and natural connections. We believe every young person deserves to thrive, and our vision, partnerships, and national leadership across the sector reflect our commitment to improving their outcomes.

StepStones

Strategic Priorities

2025-2028

Deliver What Works

We will continue offering trauma-informed, high-impact programming, including housing, family and natural connections, mentorship, counselling, food and income security, and education support — and expand our model to other regions.

- Serve 600+ youth per year;
- Replicate our program in two new Canadian jurisdictions;
- Improve youth outcomes in housing, mental health, connection, and education.



Share Results Widely

We are investing in stronger evaluation and communications so we can be transparent, improve our services, and help others replicate what works.

- Launch modern evaluation systems;
- Publish evidence-based insights;
- Participate in national research.

Build for the Future

We're strengthening our infrastructure to ensure long-term sustainability for our youth and our organization.

- Diversify and grow our funding base;
- Renovate our permanent property with housing and program space;
- Build eight affordable housing units for youth from foster care;
- Improve staff support, human resources, and performance systems.



Drive Systemic Change

We will advocate for policy change and raise awareness to transform how Canada supports youth from care.

- Collaborate on a national strategy for reform; The Change Project;
- Lead campaigns to reduce stigma;
- Host monthly sector learning exchanges.

Outcomes
2025

Youth served	808
Workshops and events facilitated for youth	78
Housing and mental health subsidies facilitated for youth	562
Emergency food and care packages provided	1103
Hours of supportive counselling and service navigation provided	8820
Volunteers making a difference in the lives of youth	522



Our Programs

Building Connections



All young people traversing childhood and adolescence need guidance and support from trusted adults who have their best interests at heart. Our evidence-based program helps youth from foster care build long-term, positive connections with extended family, volunteer mentors, and community allies. Supportive individuals reflect young people's cultures, identities, and life experiences and are provided with trauma-informed training and best practices for helping youth with complex trauma histories.

Youth at StepStones obtain secure, long-term housing through:

- Engaging in mobility mapping exercises with one-to-one Connection Coordinators to map their life stories;
- Exploring individuals from their past and present with whom they may like to connect or reconnect;
- Meeting mentors who reflect their interests and can help with school, employment, and life skills;
- Participating in our weekly youth community dinners to connect, celebrate, and build community.

NSIMBA'S CONNECTIONS STORY

Before he joined StepStones, Nsimba was at one of the lowest points in his life. Isolation weighed heavily on him, and the sense of belonging he longed for felt out of reach. Everything changed when a close friend, already part of the StepStones community, invited him to attend a StepStones event. That simple invitation became the first step toward building meaningful connections and a community of people who care.

Through StepStones, Nsimba received guidance, mentorship, and opportunities in 2025 that changed his trajectory. Weekly events provided a consistent setting to connect with people who cared, and community resources gave him the tools to move forward. Subsidized housing and employment opportunities provided stability, allowing him to focus on what mattered most: his education and mental health.

"StepStones is the reason I stayed out of trouble," Nsimba reflects. With housing security, he could concentrate on finishing high school - a challenge that once felt impossible. Struggling to earn credits in math and science, Nsimba found success through mentorship. His mentor's experience and encouragement helped him with schoolwork, navigate life as a young adult, and eventually believe in his own potential.



82%

of youth in our Building Connections Program have belonging in the community.

Building Connections

Homelessness Prevention

Our Building Connections Program houses three key focus areas: Homelessness Prevention, Education and Employment, and Mental Health and Belonging

StepStones addresses the urgent need for stable housing for young people exiting foster care. Safe, affordable housing provides the essential foundation for youth to be able to continue prioritizing school over working to pay the rent. We ensure young people attain housing that meets their unique needs to divert them from shelter involvement and homelessness, a trajectory that renders youth involved in child protection 193 times more likely to experience than their peers.

Youth at StepStones obtain secure, long-term housing through:

- Connecting with supportive individuals who can provide community-embedded housing solutions;
- Receiving individualized housing service navigation assistance and accompaniment to rental viewings;
- Accessing culturally appropriate housing and food security supports;
- Securing short-term StepStones housing grants accessible through our Youth Housing and Mental Health Subsidy Portal to remove financial barriers to stable housing.

92% of youth in our Building Connections Program are in safe housing

58% of youth experiencing homelessness have been involved in child protection



MALACHI'S HOUSING STORY

Malachi's journey has not gone the way he once imagined. His love for basketball runs deep, so the injury that forced him to leave school wasn't just physically painful—it meant stepping away from a dream of playing basketball in post-secondary and facing the unknown. It would have been easy to give up, to feel angry or defeated.

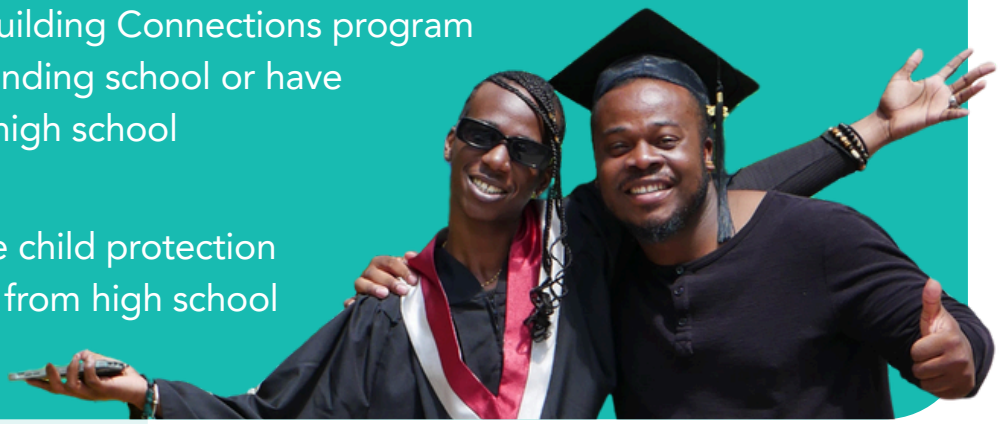
But Malachi chose a different path. He met change with courage and humility, adapting to his new reality with grace. His attitude is a reminder that life rarely unfolds according to plan—but how we respond can define the future we build. That is when StepStones entered the picture. With support from his Connections Coordinator, Malachi was able to find affordable housing, sharing a place with his best friend, and having a strong head for managing his money, he has been able to maintain stability and independence. Over coffee, Malachi and his Connections Coordinator searched for feasible opportunities, and not long after, he landed a job in landscaping. It has been a chance to build his resume, save towards the future, and re-visit his educational goals. He is motivated, reliable, and focused on making the most of each opportunity.

Building Connections

Education & Employment

94% of youth in our Building Connections program are currently attending school or have graduated from high school

48% of youth from the child protection system graduate from high school



StepStones helps youth break the cycle of poverty by ensuring they can achieve their educational goals. We support youth in graduating from high school, pursuing post-secondary education, developing strong employability skills, and achieving jobs and careers of their choice. We help youth increase their capacity for prioritizing school to expand future options and become financially stable. Youth at StepStones attain education and employment through:

- Collaborating with one-to-one Connection Coordinators and volunteer mentors to develop personalized education and career plans;
- Receiving educational counselling and advocacy for learning disabilities and mental health challenges;
- Navigating post-secondary applications, school visits, and the complexities of the education system with support;
- Accessing community employment and career events and networks for Black, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQ+, and women-identifying youth

QUINCY'S EDUCATION STORY

Immigrating to Canada on your own can be isolating, but Quincy has built a strong community around him. He arrived at StepStones reserved, quiet, and in urgent need of various supports for education, housing, and mental health. After meeting members of our front-line team and attending several weekly community dinners, he began to open up.

He was connected with an alternative high school program, provided with housing grants, and supported with his health and well-being. His sparkling personality began to shine at our recreational outings, on the roller rink and beyond. Developing his sense of self with strengthened community and belonging,

Quincy is now exploring options for post-secondary programs and careers in fashion and esthetics. His high school graduation in 2025 was a springboard to a young adulthood full of opportunities and pride. In Quincy's own words: "I recommend StepStones to anybody, no matter what the situation is, they are the best, the key. I was about to give up on school, and Frankie saw it, Denise saw it. I had lost myself. These guys saw what was happening, and they brought me back."

Building Connections

Mental Health & Belonging

StepStones helps youth whose primary childhood traumas have not been addressed and who require intensive and individualized programming to feel secure. We co-create customized mental health plans and pathways with youth and provide support for accessing what they need, when they need it.

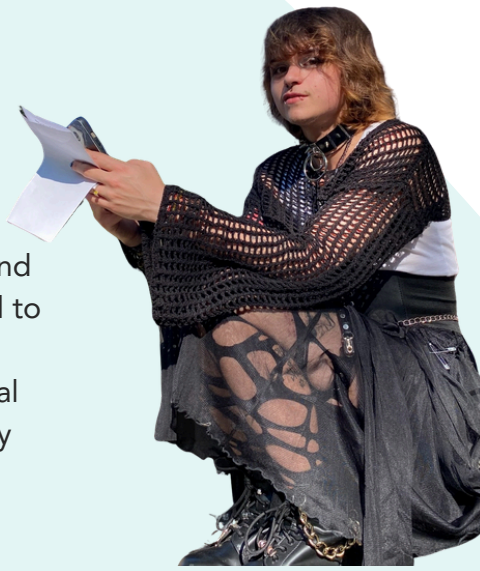
83% of youth in our Building Connections Program have stable mental health

24% of youth describe having stable mental health at intake with StepStones

Youth at StepStones improve their mental health through:

- Connecting with culturally appropriate mental health practitioners, services, and supports;
- Accessing StepStones' mental health grants through our Youth Housing and Mental Health Subsidy portal to remove financial barriers to therapies and therapists;
- Building strong support networks of volunteer mentors, community allies, and other trusted adults;
- Increasing engagement with cultural, social, and interest groups to improve self-esteem, belonging, and community.

DEREK'S MENTAL HEALTH STORY



Derek navigated years of mental health challenges and systems that were not designed to meet his needs. Leaving home to escape abuse and instability, he experienced precarious housing and a lack of support. While in high school, several teachers helped him connect with organizations, and he eventually found his way to StepStones after graduation. In Derek's own words, he did not need to be fixed but "given the space to breathe and to be reminded that what I was experiencing didn't have to be the end of my story." With individualized mental health, housing, and educational supports, Derek recently completed a culinary program at George Brown College, was awarded two scholarships, finished a 150-hour internship, landed full-time employment, and signed his first rental lease. "This life I'm living now was once unimaginable.

I still have bad days. Recovery isn't a straight line. But the fact that I'm here, writing this, is proof that it can get better. To anyone reading this who's struggling, I want to say: Don't give up. Channel the inevitable disappointments back into your craft. Break moulds. Think. Create. Stay strong and power to the local dreamer."

Our Programs

Youth Engagement

StepStones' engagement strategy helps youth feel secure with staff and invested in programming that improves their outcomes in education, employment, housing, mental health, and connections. Engagement activities include a diverse variety of arts and life-skills workshops, group recreational outings, seasonal celebrations, and a weekly youth community dinner. We remove barriers to attendance with the provision of food, transit subsidies, frequent outreach, and offer:

- Expert-led workshops in cooking, arts and photography, health and wellness, financial literacy, and small-business development;
- Group recreational events like go-karting, bowling, and roller skating for physical fitness and peer camaraderie;
- Inclusive events celebrating diversity throughout the calendar year during Black History Month, Pride, and National Indigenous Peoples' Month;
- Seasonal celebrations, including our annual spring BBQ, fall harvest feast, and holiday party and youth gift drive in December;
- Weekly youth community dinners with diverse cuisine prepared by a professional chef.



1,384

attendees at StepStones workshops, events, and dinners in 2025



Youth Housing and Mental Health Subsidy Portal

With the backing of our donors, we have launched an innovative online solution that assists vulnerable youth in and from foster care in need of housing and mental health support. Young people can access mental health therapists and apply for StepStones' housing and counselling grants directly through this youth-friendly portal. These critical supports can be distributed to youth throughout the country who are connected with youth-serving agencies and organizations.



Our accessible and inclusive project increases agency for youth who have been institutionalized in child protection systems and who have experienced barriers to self-determination, health, and well-being. The vision for our online solution is to place in the hands of youth involved in child protection a tool to unlock stable housing and improved mental health on their own terms.

With our target population facing some of the highest rates of homelessness and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), our portal increases timely access to culturally relevant and individualized services supporting housing and mental health to improve their long-term outcomes.

562 **housing and mental health subsidies were distributed to youth in 2025**

Youth Testimonials

"Because of generous donors, StepStones has been able to play a pivotal role in my journey towards independence and personal development. Transitioning out of foster care was a difficult experience, and I found myself lonely and lacking in connections or support. StepStones' housing grant program has alleviated my financial burden, allowing me to focus on my education without worrying about rent."

- Shavesha

"I've faced several barriers over the past few months as I've prepared to move out on my own. Finding employment and housing was a huge accomplishment for me, and I am working hard to ensure I can support myself if any obstacles were to arise through this transition. Receiving this housing grant has been an immense support and is providing me with a little more safety while I transition into independence."

- **Andie**

"StepStones' housing grant has allowed me to have a place of my own. I currently have roommates, and we're all getting kicked out unexpectedly. Things are tight, and it is helping me stress less about money. It will also help me to stay on track with school as I've had trouble completing my high school due to life circumstances."

- **Etienne**

"This support has helped me and my five-year-old son get on our feet and enjoy life a little bit. Growing up in the system was hard, and with this support, I am able to give him more. There are little things that I'm not able to enjoy with him normally, and this makes a difference."

- **Chelsea**

"StepStones' housing support helped stabilize my living situation. I now feel safer living in my current housing accommodation and have reduced the risk of getting evicted or becoming homeless. It helped me cover my rent expenses for the summer until my OSAP payments started in September. It has given me the space and opportunity to work on my future goals more efficiently."

– **Shania**

"Donors' willingness to give has made a real impact on my life, and I can say with confidence for other youth in StepStones too. Even though we may never meet, your support is felt every day, and I am truly grateful for everything you guys have done to help make things possible for us."

- **Loriann**

Highlights from 2025

In late July, youth from StepStones travelled with our team to the Madawaska Valley for a wilderness trip with The Boundless School, an experience that blends high school curriculum, outdoor adventure, and emotional growth. Through whitewater paddling, group challenges, and hands-on learning, youth in our program had the opportunity to disconnect from screens, develop new friendships, and see what they are capable of, all while earning a high school credit. A huge thanks to The Boundless School for hosting us and creating such a powerful and unforgettable experience!



For a second year, a talented group of StepStones youth engaged in self-expression through photography, working with professional-grade equipment in our Visual Voices workshop. Led by local artists Gilad Cohen and Kristen Avery, this five-week workshop not only taught industry-level photography skills but also provided opportunities for embarking on journeys of self-discovery through the lens of self-portraits. We are in awe of the work these youth created, sharing their vulnerability and ideas through an art form that can be viewed and appreciated by all. Thank you to Gilad and Kristen for this transformative workshop.



Richard Parker starred in a professional short film highlighting his story and StepStones' mission, produced pro bono by professional videographers from the Aubrey & Marla Dan Foundation. The crew interviewed Richard and shot footage to create a stunning portrait of a young man from foster care who is now a beloved StepStones front-line Connections Coordinator. The team, led by producer-director Zack Bernbaum, captured the essence of how we amplify and empower youth. You can find this inspiring short on our YouTube channel. We are so grateful to Zack and the crew for this amazing experience and generous offering, and the Aubrey & Marla Dan Foundation for making it all possible!



In 2025, StepStones for Youth also:

- Received 5-Star and A+ ratings from Charity Intelligence – Canada's go-to source for rigorous and independent research to make the charitable sector more transparent, accountable and focused on results – including a place among their Top 5 Charities in Canada;
- Facilitated the largest youth holiday gift drive in our history, securing over 250 gifts for youth and their children;
- Participated in the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness annual conference in Montreal, where we shared the importance of customizing approaches for each young person in and from foster care to achieve stabilized and long-term housing and improve individual outcomes with policymakers, researchers, community leaders, and front-line workers;
- Had our most successful Home for the Holidays fundraising campaign;
- Participated in the Toronto Waterfront 5K as a team for the first time;
- ...and more!

2025
TOP 5 CHARITY
Charity Intelligence's Highest Rated Charities



StepStones Integrated Hub and Housing Facility

The recent purchase of our own property in downtown Toronto will become Canada's first integrated hub and housing facility for young people involved in child protection. Our permanent home will be the nucleus for young people, volunteers, and staff; community events and sector conferences; and innovative supported housing, all with the tremendous backing of our supporters and custom-designed by youth from the child protection system.

Our property will integrate supported living spaces with accessible, multi-sector services for youth in critical need of preventative support. It will offer eight studio apartments with private bathrooms and kitchen spaces designed from a trauma-informed lens with communal spaces for building healthy interdependency. Our property will also host spaces for coordinated approaches to addressing youth's various needs, removing barriers to services that are traditionally siloed and challenging to access.

Innovative aspects of design include:

- On-site support from StepStones staff, and access to a variety of diverse service providers for education, employment, health, housing, and parenting;
- A full teaching kitchen for cooking and nutrition workshops, hospitality industry training opportunities, and celebrating cultural and calendar observations;
- Flexible and accessible spaces for confidential counselling, symposiums, youth art shows, and collaborative work with grassroots and community partners;
- Access to amenities and technology that support education, mental health, and well-being;
- Community dinners for youth residing in the units, youth in our broader program, and youth's support networks of friends, family members, volunteer mentors, and community allies; and
- An eco-roof and green space for meetings, workshops, collaborative youth events, and a community garden for growing vegetables and pollinator plants.



We have gathered input on our design and functionality from the young people we serve and the Connection Coordinators who work with them, exploring themes related to "home" to reflect youth identities and experiences. Youth have told us that apartments with private bathrooms and private kitchens are important for creating spaces that do not resemble the institutionalized group homes where they have lived. Their expressed excitement invigorates our plans to make these spaces their own.

We launched a capital campaign in October 2025 to share our vision and raise funds to support the construction and renovation of our new property. Our Building Brighter Futures event at the beautiful Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Arts gathered donors, supporters, and community members who champion StepStones, our unique programming, and better futures for young people involved in child protection. We acknowledged the invaluable supporters of our monumental initiative, and the vivacious John Malcolmson, who led our silent auction. Thank you to everyone who attended, contributed, and celebrated!



Volunteers in Action

StepStones volunteers are the driving force behind the success of everything we do. We are so grateful for their generosity, hard work, and dedication to the young people we serve.

Here are some of the ways volunteers empowered our youth, staff, and programs this past year:

- Prepping, cooking, and serving meals at our weekly youth community dinners;
- Supporting celebrations for youth, such as our Pride BBQ and Youth Holiday Party;
- Serving as long-term one-to-one mentors;
- Providing wish list items for our Youth Holiday Gift Drive;
- Creating kits for youth with essential health and well-being items;
- Stocking our emergency food pantry with non-perishable groceries;
- Leading vibrant workshops in cooking and the arts;
- Supporting the success of our capital campaign launch event, Building Brighter Futures, and;
- Serving as a member of our Board of Directors.



Our volunteer community includes both dedicated individual volunteers and corporate groups who generously give their time and skills to support youth. Together, they play an essential role in strengthening our programs, building community, and creating meaningful experiences for the young people we serve.



With thanks to our amazing volunteers:

- **2,740** meals were served during community dinners
- **250+** gifts were wrapped during our Youth Holiday Gift Drive
- **3,362** volunteer hours were provided to support youth





2025 Board of Directors

Lorna Freeman
Chair

Tanya Sinha
Vice Chair

Brendan Cochrane
Treasurer

Katherine Brown
Secretary

Sharon Beers
Director

Sanjay Chatrath
Director

Judy Jarvis
Director

Jessica Kim
Director

Diavin Miller
Director

Andrew Rudyk
Director

Marina Sampson
Director

Finding Community through Volunteering



Tamara's StepStones Experience

When Tamara found out that youth at StepStones were interested in more creative, arts-based workshops, she immediately knew what she could offer. A longtime supporter with a background in textile design, Tamara suggested a basket-weaving workshop. Several youth signed up for a four-week session and loved it so much that we brought it back in 2025.

Using natural, hand-dyed reeds, Tamara taught techniques for weaving a variety of patterns and shapes, encouraging each youth to create a unique basket that represented their natural inclination and their story. She notes that hands-on, creative activities can instill a sense of calm and well-being that can benefit everyone.

"To me, art is a tool for healthy self-expression," Tamara shares. "I see how basketry instills so much in the youth: a sense of accomplishment, confidence, and positive social connection. I even see participants develop planning and problem-solving skills along with the technical skill of weaving." She has taught three basketry workshops at StepStones over the past two years and is thrilled when youth return.

Volunteering brings happiness and meaning to Tamara's life, and she believes it is an important way to give back. She also enjoys the social aspect of her workshops and the opportunities they present to get to know young people in our programs. She believes that the StepStones model is both unique and comprehensive, helping isolated youth from child protection explore and build identity and connections while receiving support for education, housing, and mental health.

"StepStones is great at integrating, training, and appreciating volunteers. I think StepStones is an amazing, highly effective, people-centred organization. StepStones staff and youth are awesome!" We think the very same of you, Tamara!



Donor Spotlights

Pelletier Youth in Transition



For more than 40 years, Pelletier Youth in Transition has been dedicated to helping at-risk youth aged 16 to 24 make a successful progression toward a healthy young adulthood. Their mission has always been to provide the foundation young people need to thrive: access to education, counselling, stable housing, and essential life skills. In 2008, recognizing a shared vision, they formed a partnership with StepStones for Youth and have generously supported our work ever since.

Pelletier Board member Judy Jarvis says, "Pelletier believes deeply in StepStones' vision to create a dedicated youth hub with eight supported housing units that will provide safety, community, and opportunity for young people working toward interdependence and well-being. Our donations to support this project represent both our legacy and our confidence in StepStones' leadership in shaping brighter futures."

Lillian Meighen and Don Wright Foundation



The Lillian Meighen and Don Wright Foundation is named after philanthropist Lillian Meighen Wright, the daughter of Canada's 11th and 13th Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen, and her husband, Donald Wright, an accomplished musician and choral director. Priscilla Wright, Lillian's daughter, is not only the Foundation's Executive Director and Chair – she is a singer with an impressive career in songwriting and performance. She has performed with Canada's top big bands and musicians, including Peter Appleyard, Mart Kenney, Moxie Whitney and Eddie Graf.

Priscilla's Foundation supports a range of groups, including women and children experiencing abuse, end-of-life hospice care, individuals with disabilities, and music therapy for these populations. They have been supporting StepStones for Youth for over five years and are enthusiastic champions of our work and of the young people we assist. StepStones and Priscilla are mutual fans. "All our Directors feel that StepStones for Youth is a special organization that is vitally needed in society today, and we are so happy to be able to help. StepStones is on fire (in a very good way!)"

Donor Spotlights

Loredana Cunti



Loredana Cunti, an accomplished children's author and chef, was the inspiration behind a number of the weekly youth dinners at StepStones in 2025. She volunteered her time to teach youth how to prepare and cook healthy meals, and her menus and time spent serving led to countless full stomachs and conversations around the dinner table.

Beyond her extensive contributions as a volunteer, Loredana released a cookbook in 2025 with proceeds supporting youth at StepStones. “StepStones is special because it meets practical needs while also creating something just as important: a sense of community,” says Loredana. “Helping young people build essential life skills and meaningful connections gives them the support they need to truly flourish. Even with all the skills in the world, none of us can truly flourish without community.”

“When you meet anyone at StepStones, you immediately feel the warmth and dedication of the staff and see how that care extends to the young people they support. It’s a joyful organization to contribute to.”

Thank You to Our Supporters

StepStones’ supporters believe wholeheartedly in the rights and potential of youth in and from foster care. Their commitment to our work and mission helps us transform futures. To our supporters, thank you for your generous contributions and for standing with us!



2025 Individual Supporters:

Diamond Supporters ($20,000+)

- Ian de Verteuil & Linda Glover
- Barbara Hooper & Allan McLean
- In Memory of Dr. Monika Langer
- Anonymous (1)

Platinum Supporters ($10,000-$19,999)

- Jim Byrd & Carol Bagozzi
- Katherine Gurney & André Nowakowski
- Judy & Craig Jarvis
- Don Langill
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Front and back cover photos by April and Quincy, youth participants in StepStones' 2025 Visual Voices Photography Workshop.

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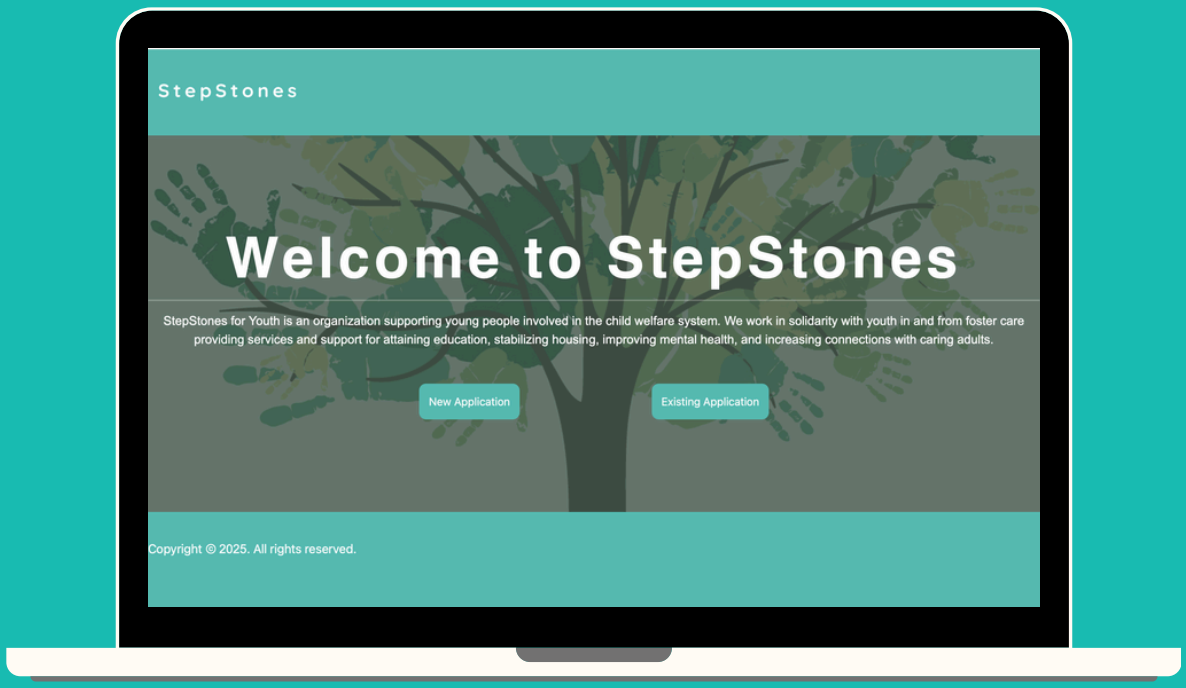
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Youth Housing and Mental Health Subsidy Portal

With the backing of our donors, we have launched an innovative online solution that assists vulnerable youth in and from foster care in need of housing and mental health support. Young people can access mental health therapists and apply for StepStones' housing and counselling grants directly through this youth-friendly portal. These critical supports can be distributed to youth throughout the country who are connected with youth-serving agencies and organizations.

Our accessible and inclusive project increases agency for youth who have been institutionalized in child protection systems and who have experienced barriers to self-determination, health, and well-being. The vision for our online solution is to place in the hands of youth involved in child protection a tool to unlock stable housing and improved mental health on their own terms.



With our target population facing some of the highest rates of homelessness and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), our portal increases timely access to culturally relevant and individualized services supporting housing and mental health to improve their long-term outcomes.

292 **housing and mental health subsidies were distributed to youth in 2025**