



# Family and Children's Services

Annual Report 2020-2022



# Contents

- Message from the Director..... 3
- Executive summary ..... 7
- Strategic context.....10
  - Overview of the legislation .....10
  - Demographics.....10
  - Adapting services due to the pandemic ..... 11
  - Implementing *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* ..... 11
- Continuum of supports and services ..... 11
  - Preventive supports to keep families together ..... 11
  - Out-of-home care..... 13
  - Programs and services for youth and young adults ..... 19
- Continuous quality improvement initiatives.....22
  - Realignment of the Child Care Services Unit.....22
  - Recruitment and retention .....23
  - Implementing the Family Case Management system.....23
  - File review .....24
  - File management .....24
  - Signs of Safety .....25
  - Professional development.....26
- Looking forward .....27
  - Implementing legislative changes .....28
  - Cultural continuity project.....28
  - Prenatal services working group .....28



Youth Justice and community support services .....29

Conclusion.....29



## Message from the Director

Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services

Government of Yukon

Dear Minister McPhee,

I am pleased to present to you the most recent report on the provision of child welfare services under the *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)*, as required by section 187 of the legislation. This report will detail service provision from January 2020 to December 2022 including our major accomplishments, how we overcame the hurdles presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the pivotal next steps of child welfare reform in the Yukon.

The last two years have been unprecedented to say the least – a global pandemic fundamentally changed the way we interact with one another, *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families* establishing the minimum standards for child protection services came into effect, and the country was forced to reconcile with the horrors of residential schools.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic reached the Yukon and disrupted service delivery in all sectors, including child welfare. Research indicates that the resulting mandates and restrictions led to increases in substance use, mental health crises, and family violence, as well as decreases in child welfare reports and access to necessary services.

To reduce the service disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic while protecting the health and safety of staff, we implemented numerous practice guidelines and provided necessary supports to continue delivering our mandate under the *Child and Family Services Act*. I am proud of the dedication and commitment our staff have shown to the children, youth, and families that needed our support during this crucial period. Our staff worked to protect children from harm, provided children and youth with the technology to remain connected to their support networks, provided families with the supports needed to create safety, provided housing to youth in care who

turned 19 years of age, and provided caregivers with guidance and supplies to facilitate visits between children and their families, as well as respite.

While new issues emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, we continued with our challenge of overrepresentation of Indigenous children and families in the Yukon's child welfare system. Currently, 95% of the children and youth in out-of-home care are Indigenous.

Guided by the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Calls for Justice from the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, we continue to work with Yukon First Nations and the Council of Yukon First Nations to address this overrepresentation.

Based on our shared values of respect, collaboration, representation, and transparency that we have established over the past five years, our collaborative efforts were stronger than ever before. We entered into negotiations for a Memorandum of Understanding with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, we successfully completed our pilot of the Kwanlin Dün Family Enhancement Team, and made key policy and practice shifts guided by the insight from the Yukon First Nation Health and Social Development Commission. The enhanced working relationship between Family and Children's Services and Yukon First Nations culminated in an innovative approach to amend the *Child and Family Services Act*. We developed a government-to-government legislative amendment process that implemented the 'Required Actions' from the *Embracing Children of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* report and brought our territorial legislation into compliance with the Government of Canada's *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*.

I am indebted to the representatives from the Yukon First Nations and the Council of Yukon First Nations for their participation in the legislative process. Thank you for providing us with your truths and sharing your Indigenous worldviews. You were heard.

During the 2020-2022 reporting period, Family and Children's Services continued our philosophical shift in child welfare practice to move away from an intervention-based approach that bring children into the Director's care to a prevention-based approach

that creates safety within families and communities. The impact of this shift in philosophy has been reflected in changes to practice. Through it, more children have been able to remain in their communities with extended family, instead of being brought into foster care or group care. However, this is just the beginning. We will continue this trajectory through the legislative changes and caregiver support programs to make sure children are able to maintain their connection to family, culture, and community.

As the role that extended family caregivers play in the Yukon's child welfare system becomes more pivotal, we partnered with Yukon First Nations and the Council of Yukon First Nations to launch the Caregiver Strategy. With the shared vision of providing more culturally appropriate out-of-home placements for children in their own communities, this strategy will focus on caregiver recruitment, retention, training, and support initiatives. These initiatives will be co-developed with our Yukon First Nation partners and tailored to fit the needs of each community.

In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's second Call to Action requiring all governments to publish comprehensive data related to child welfare and recommendations from a number of reports to the Government of Yukon, including the 2014 recommendations from the Office of Auditor General of Canada, Family and Children's Services fully implemented a new electronic case management system, called the Family Case Management (FCM) system, in November 2021. We are now better equipped to track the child welfare service provision, determine compliance with legislative and policy requirements, monitor outcomes of children and their families, and report data to Yukon First Nations. By creating a funding program and integrating it with FCM, we also significantly reduced the administrative processes for social workers, thereby decreasing the time it takes for clients to receive funding and increase the amount of time social workers can spend with their clients.

While the last few years presented new challenges, we took them as opportunities to evolve and adjust how we support vulnerable children, youth, and their families. This report will further expand on the above-mentioned initiatives and our successes. I sincerely thank all Family and Children's staff, First Nation Health Directors, Council of



Yukon First Nations, our colleagues from the Government of Canada, and community partners for their work in support our service delivery.

Sincerely,

Leeann Kayseas, on behalf of Geraldine MacDonald  
Director of Family and Children's Services



## Executive summary

This report summarizes the work of the Family and Children's Services (FCS) branch of the Government of Yukon between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2022. Over the reporting period, there have been significant changes to the field of child welfare in the Yukon. This report will detail the work of the past two years, focusing on the provision of child welfare services to children and families, as well as important initiatives intended to improve services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had wide-ranging impacts on the lives of Canadians, impacting financial security, mental health, and physical wellbeing. In order to safely provide services to children, youth, and families in the Yukon, FCS has had to adapt service delivery in all program areas. Some of these changes include providing personal protective equipment to children and families, supporting children in out-of-home care with virtual school, and, when possible, shifting programming to online platforms.

In addition to the challenges associated with maintaining standards of services within a pandemic, there have been philosophical shifts in practice at the national and local level that have influenced child welfare practice in the Yukon. At the federal level, An Act respecting *First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* came into effect on January 1, 2020. This legislation acknowledged the rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples to deliver family and child services to their citizens, and established standards for the best interest of the child, cultural continuity, and substantive equality. Many of the standards outlined in the legislation were already part of practice in the Yukon; however, these were further solidified during the review and amendment process for the *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)*.

Under the CFSA, FCS provides a continuum of services that aim to address child protection concerns and assist children, youth, and families. The first part of this continuum are the family support programs offered through Agreements for Support Services for Families and the Family Resource Unit. These provide a range of mandated and voluntary preventive programming. The second part of the continuum of services are out-of-home placements for children and youth who are not able to remain in their family home. Over the past several years, there has been a shift in practice within FCS



that has prioritized placing children with extended family members in order to ensure their connection to family, community and culture is maintained. While the number of children in out-of-home care has remained consistent over the past six years, there has been a 137% increase in the number of extended family care placements, with decreases in foster care and group home placements. The third part of continuum of services focuses on supports for youth and young adults who are transitioning to independence. Youth and young adults involved with FCS are able to receive financial aid and services through agreements until they reach the age of 26. These services can include anything from connections to employment services, funding for education and training, or help finding housing.

Outside the provision of services to children, youth, and families, there have been several initiatives meant to improve programs and maintain relationships with community and Yukon First Nation partners. Memorandums of Understanding have been signed with three Yukon First Nations in order to guide how child welfare services are delivered to their citizens. This work is still ongoing, with an agreement currently under development with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. Other collaborations with Yukon First Nations include the Family Enhancement Team pilot project with Kwanlin Dün First Nation, the Honouring Connections Project and the Caregiver Strategy with the Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN) and Yukon First Nations. Within FCS, recruitment and retention of social workers, continued professional development, and improving data capacity have been prioritized to ensure staff are supported and programs are running effectively.

Under the CFSA, a review of the legislation is required every 5 years. Between 2018 and 2019, an advisory committee reviewed the CFSA and completed the report *Embracing the Children of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, which included 149 required actions to incorporate into legislation and practice. A steering committee was established to explore the implementation of these required actions, with representatives from FCS, CYFN, and Yukon First Nations. The amendments to the legislation was completed through extensive government-to-government engagement between the Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nations, and included changes related to the definition of best interests of the child, preventive supports, imbedding

the importance of community and culture throughout, and clarification of definitions, such as emotional harm. The amended CFSA was tabled on the March 9, 2022 legislative sitting and passed into law on March 31, 2022. Critical changes to the *Child and Family Services Act* operational policies were updated as part of a collaborative process that included representatives from CYFN, Yukon First Nations, Yukon Information and Privacy Commissioner, and Yukon Child and Youth Advocate in time for the legislation to come into force on November 30, 2022.

With the landscape of child welfare rapidly changing across the country, FCS is working to incorporate these philosophical shifts into policy and practice. Over the next year, FCS will prioritize the remainder of the CFSA operational policy changes, the establishment of prenatal preventive supports, and the implementation of cultural plans for all children in care, with CYFN and Yukon First Nations, in addition to continuing to maintain the same standards of service provision to children, youth, and families in the Yukon.



## Strategic context

This report provides an overview of the services and supports provided to children, youth and families by the Family and Children's Services (FCS) branch of Health and Social Services (HSS) from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2022. Over the past two years, there have been significant shifts in philosophy and practice that have influenced the supports and services provided, in addition to the need to adapt services in order to respond to the pandemic.

## Overview of the legislation

HSS delivers child welfare services through FCS, which acts under the authority of the *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)*.

In 2018, the Minister of HSS appointed a six-member Advisory Committee to undertake a broad review of the CFSA and make recommendations to improve the Yukon's child welfare system. The Advisory Committee travelled to all Yukon communities and engaged with many Yukoners to gather their perspectives on the CFSA. The Advisory Committee's report, *Embracing the Children of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, resulted in the subsequent creation of the CFSA Steering Committee in July 2020.

The goal of the CFSA Steering Committee was to evaluate the many required actions brought forward by the report. The committee then established which of the actions required legislative changes and which required policy and training initiatives. Through significant discussions and meeting dates with Yukon First Nations, which were co-chaired by HSS and CYFN, new legislative changes intended on improving the CFSA have been drafted, voted on, and signed into law during the spring session of 2022. The updated Act came into force on November 30, 2022.

## Demographics

The Yukon Bureau of Statistics estimates that the population of the territory, as of June 30, 2022, is approximately 43,964 of which 9,230 (21%) are between 0 to 19 years of age. The majority the population (34,698 or 78.9%) reside in the Whitehorse area. Yukon's Indigenous population, including those with status under the *Indian Act* and

those who self-identified as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, make up approximately 9,548 or 21.7% of the total population, with 58.4% residing in Whitehorse. However, between 80% to 90% of the children, youth and families involved in the child welfare system self-identify as First Nation, Métis, or Inuit.

## Adapting services due to the pandemic

The Director has continued to provide services to families and children in need of support throughout the pandemic. FCS connected with children, caregivers, and families to assess what resources were available to maintain contact, such as personal protective equipment (i.e., masks), computers, cellphones, and internet access. By assessing the differing needs at the individual and program levels, FCS was able to provide targeted supports such as phone minutes, recreation resources in the home, food, medications, and other essential items to ensure that families had access to the supports needed to reduce the negative impacts of the pandemic. Maintaining connections and support systems for children, youth and families was a priority for FCS.

## Implementing *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*

In Yukon, we have made changes to the CFSA to bring services to the federal standard set out in *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Metis children, youth and families*. These changes have provided opportunity to work with all governments to support First Nations in providing direct prevention services to their community members, create the cultural plans initiative, and enhance protection services to children, youth and families.

## Continuum of supports and services

### Preventive supports to keep families together

Keeping families together is a priority for FCS. In situations where there are child protection concerns, FCS staff work with the families to address the underlying issues.

There are several preventive programs offered by FCS in order to create a continuum of services that families can access based on their individual needs.

### *Family support services*

Under section 10 of the CFSA, FCS provides a range of supports to families that have child protection concerns. The specific services provided are determined on an individual level, but can include services for children, counselling, in-home support, out-of-home care, homemaker services, respite care, parenting programs, and services to support children who witness family violence. Families are also able to enter into Agreements for Support Services for Families through section 11 of the CFSA. Through these agreements, FCS is able to provide financial supports and connect families with resources needed to address protection concerns and keep children in the family homes.

### *Family Resource Unit*

The Family Resource Unit (FRU) is a universal, barrier-free preventive program where involvement is voluntary. In 2019, FCS realigned the Healthy Families and the Family Support Program into a single program in order to create a continuum of supports for families with children aged 0 to 19. The FRU team offers individual and group programming throughout the Yukon that focuses on assisting caregivers to build confidence and capacity. Some examples of group events offered include lessons on self-care, cooking, craft groups, story sharing, mindfulness for dads group, crafting circles, children's nutrition, and many more. Additionally, workers facilitate other outdoor activities to encourage family participation, social interaction, peer support and self-care for families, including holiday dinners, summer barbecues, and other seasonal activities. Throughout the pandemic, FRU adapted group and individual programming in order to incorporate public health guidelines. This included modifying group programs and individual supports so they could occur virtually, limiting group sizes, and exploring alternate ways of connecting with caregivers and youth.

Over the past five years, the number of families working with the Family Resource Unit has doubled, increasing from 135 in 2017 to 269 in 2021 (Figure 1). This increase is likely the result of the restructuring of the program to include parents and caregivers for



older children and youth, as well as the increase in the number of groups and workshops offered. Between 2020 and 2021, FRU held over 250 events across the territory, with 140 held in Whitehorse and 110 in the communities. These programs collaborate with other governments and community groups in order to develop specific strategies aimed at addressing family wellbeing. With the program modifications to adhere to public health guidelines, FRU has been able to help many families across the Yukon gain more confidence in their caregiving skills, increase their support network, and prioritize wellness.

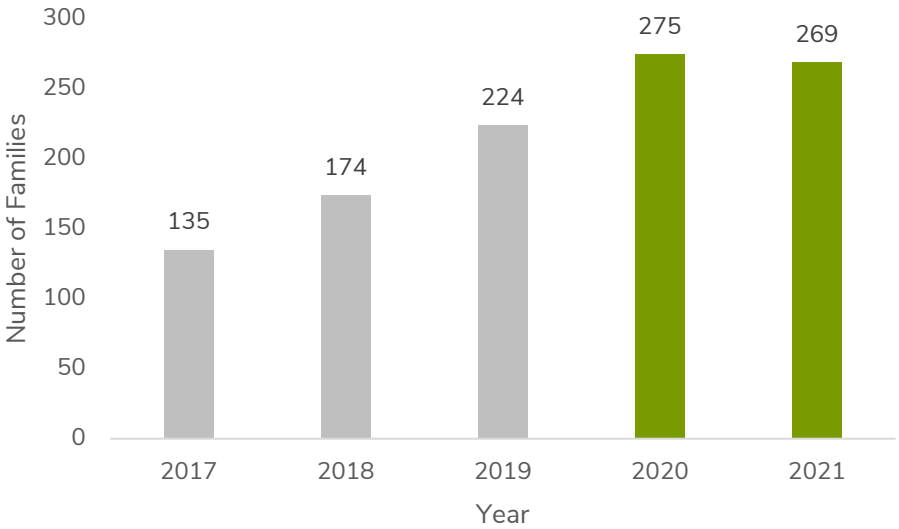


Figure 1 Number of families working with the Family Resource Unit from 2017 to 2021. The data for the reporting period (2020 and 2021 calendar years) are highlighted in green, whereas prior data are grey. Note: The FRU service use data is cumulative for each calendar year. As such, the 2022 statistics are not yet available for reporting.

## Out-of-home care

### *Extended family care*

When it is determined that a child or youth is in need of protective intervention, extended family care is the first choice for out-of-home care in order to preserve a child or youth’s connection to family, community, and culture. Under section 14 of the CFSA, children and youth are able to reside with extended family instead of coming into the care of the Director. Within the legislation and policy, the definition of extended family caregiver goes beyond close family relations and includes any adult who has a parent-like relationship with the child. FCS works closely with the child, family, and Yukon First



Nations to identify potential caregivers for the child. Between 2017 and 2019, a series of policy changes occurred that created parity in supports offered to foster and extended family caregivers. These include expanding the financial aid, support services, and dedicated FCS resources offered to extended family caregivers.

From 2017 to 2022, there was an 8% increase to the number of children and youth in out-of-home care in the Yukon. However, over this same period, there was a 137% increase in the number of children and youth in extended family care (Figure 3). This means that while the rate of children and youth in out-of-home care has remained relatively stable over the past 6 years, there has been a significant shift in the types of placements. During this period, FCS has prioritized placing children and youth in extended family care instead of foster care or group homes. The effect of this philosophical shift can be seen in Figure 2, which compares the percent of children and youth in out-of-home care placement types over the past 6 years. In 2017, prior to the parity in supports for caregivers, the majority of children and youth in out-of-home care were in the custody of the Director, with only 28% having Extended Family Care Agreements. During this period, the main placement type was foster care. As the programming and support changed, so did the primary placement choice. In 2022, 61% of children and youth in out-of-home care were under Extended Family Care Agreements.



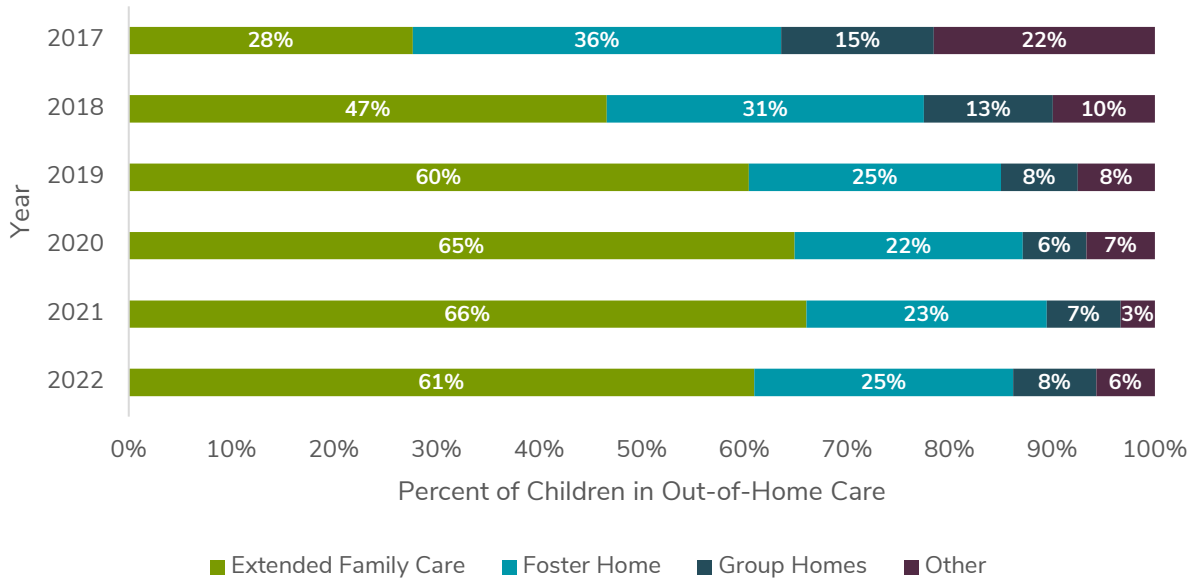


Figure 2 Percent of children in out-of-home care placement types (i.e., extended family care, foster homes, group homes, and other) from 2017 to 2022. Other placement types could include many placement types, including extended visits with family, out of territory placements, or medical placements.

The number of children and youth in extended family care has steadily risen since the CFSA came into effect in 2010. However, the most significant turning point occurred between 2018 and 2019, when the number of children and youth in extended family care increased from 89 to 145 (Figure 3), likely as a result of the parity initiatives implemented during that period. During the reporting period for this annual report, January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2022, there was a slight decrease in the total number of children in out-of-home care, from a total of 225 children and youth to 210. This decrease can be seen across all placement types, with the number of children and youth in extended family care dropping from 146 in 2020 to 128 in 2022 (Figure 3).





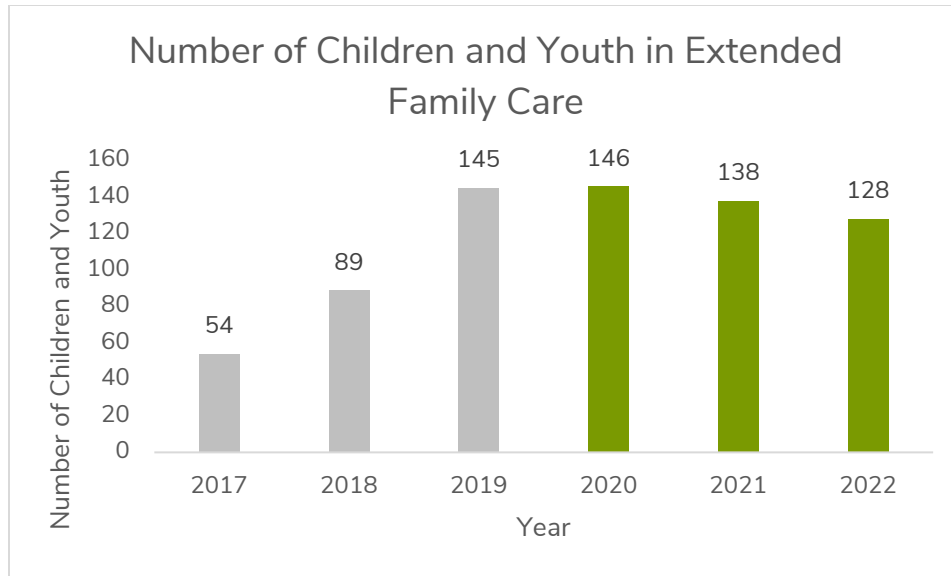


Figure 3 Number of children in extended family care from 2017 to 2022. September caseloads were used for each year due to the reporting structure of the previous case management system and to remain consistent with previous annual reports. The data for the reporting period (2020, 2021 and 2022 calendar years) are highlighted in green, whereas prior data are grey.

### *Foster care program*

Maintaining a child or youth’s connection to family, community, and culture is a priority when a protection intervention results in out-of-home care; however, extended family care is not always possible. In these cases, one out-of-home care option is the foster care program. Foster caregivers go through an extensive application process to determine their eligibility. Once approved, foster caregivers receive financial aid and support services from FCS to provide for children and youth in their care. These supports can include monthly financial support, clothing allowances, respite and childcare services, and homemaker services.

In contrast to extended family care, the number of children in the care of the Director has steadily decreased. Since 2017, there has been a 40% decrease in the number of children and youth in the care of the Director (Figure 4). Similarly, there has been a 24% decrease in the number of children and youth placed in foster homes, dropping from 70 children and youth in 2017 to 53 in 2022 (Figure 5). This change is part of the larger organization shift towards placing children and youth with extended family, as can be seen in Figure 2.



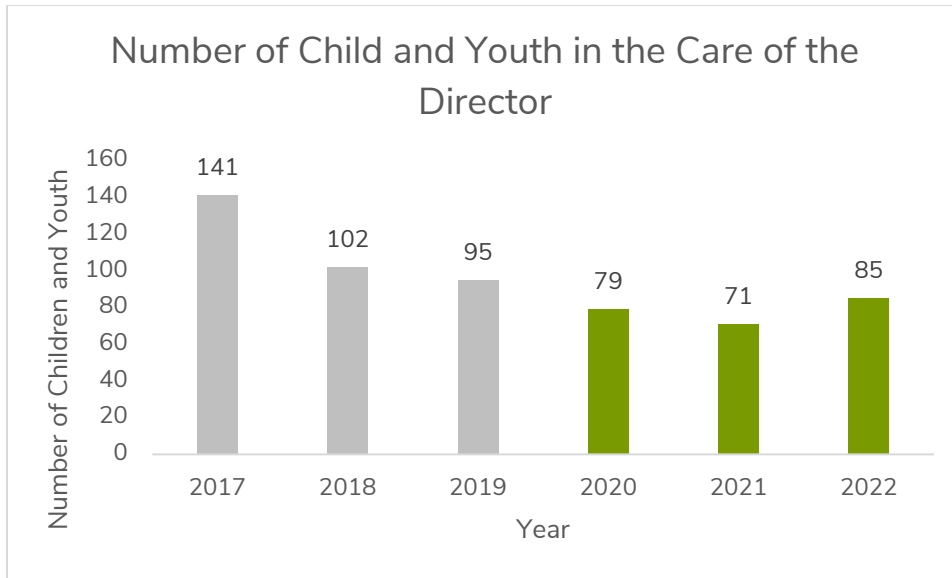


Figure 4 Number of children and youth in the care of the Director in all placement types from 2017 to 2022. September caseloads were used for each year due to the reporting structure of the previous case management system and to remain consistent with previous annual reports. The data for the reporting period (2020, 2021 and 2022 calendar years) are highlighted in green, whereas prior data are grey.

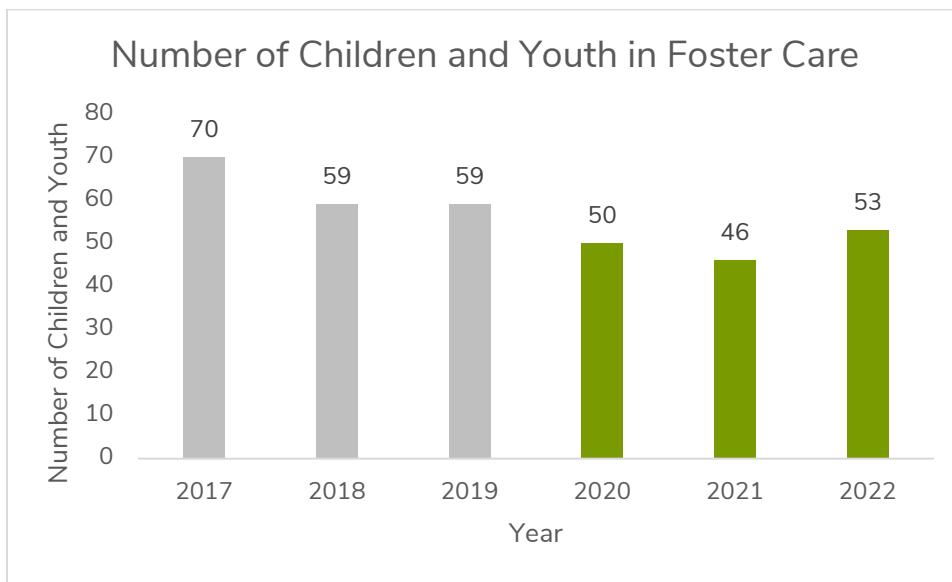


Figure 5 Number of children and youth in the care of the Director who are in foster care from 2017 to 2022. September caseloads were used for each year due to the reporting structure of the previous case management system and to remain consistent with previous annual reports. The data for the reporting period (2020, 2021 and 2022 calendar years) are highlighted in green, whereas prior data are grey.

### *Transitional support services*

Managed through the Transitional Support Services (TSS) program at FCS, group care is a continuously staffed supported living environment that is an alternative housing



option for youth not able to reside with extended family. In addition to working with the youth, family, First Nation, and social worker to develop and implement a case plan, the TSS staff help youth navigate their daily routines and learn the skills required to transition to independent living.

In January of 2021, Nts'äw Chua was realigned under the TSS Manager, in order to support a continuum of care for youth looking to gain more independent living skills while in the care of the Director. Since opening its doors in April 2020, Nts'äw Chua has provided an alternative to traditional group care, offering semi-independent living or supportive housing options, as well as programming aimed to help youth develop the skills required to live independently. The number of youth living in Nts'äw Chua varies month to month, partially because the semi-independent living suites were used to meet the pandemic isolation requirements and accommodated youth who turned 19 during the state of emergency. However, there are generally between four to seven youth living at Nts'äw Chua at a time.

TSS continues to support youth as they prepare to transition to independent living or return to their families. Outreach support and additional supervisory positions have facilitated a shift in focus towards drop-in services and outreach. A pilot outreach program opened in one of the centrally located facilities to support youth and young adults throughout the pandemic and beyond. Based on the success of the pilot, TSS is looking at implementing a longer-term program. A range of services are provided, including transportation, laundry facilities, access to meals, personal protective equipment, and emotional and crisis support. Additionally, changes to legislation and policy now allow outreach supports to continue up to age 26, whereas previously it was limited to 6 months after leaving the TSS program. TSS is continuing to explore opportunities that will allow them to expand the services and care received by youth, keeping the program consistent with changing child welfare policy and best practices.

The best option is for youth to remain within their community and with their family. To this end, social workers continue to focus their efforts on finding alternatives to group care and prioritize extended family care placements. These ongoing efforts have had significant effects, as seen by the 41% decrease in the number of children and youth in

the TSS program from 2017 to 2022 (Figure 6). In 2017, group homes accounted for 15% of out-of-home care placements, whereas in 2022, only 8% of children and youth in out-of-home care lived in group homes (Figure 2). While the number of youth in group homes decreased over the reporting period, there is still a need for families, children and youth to have access to support services. To meet this need, TSS is shifting focus and reallocating resources to match current realities and trends.

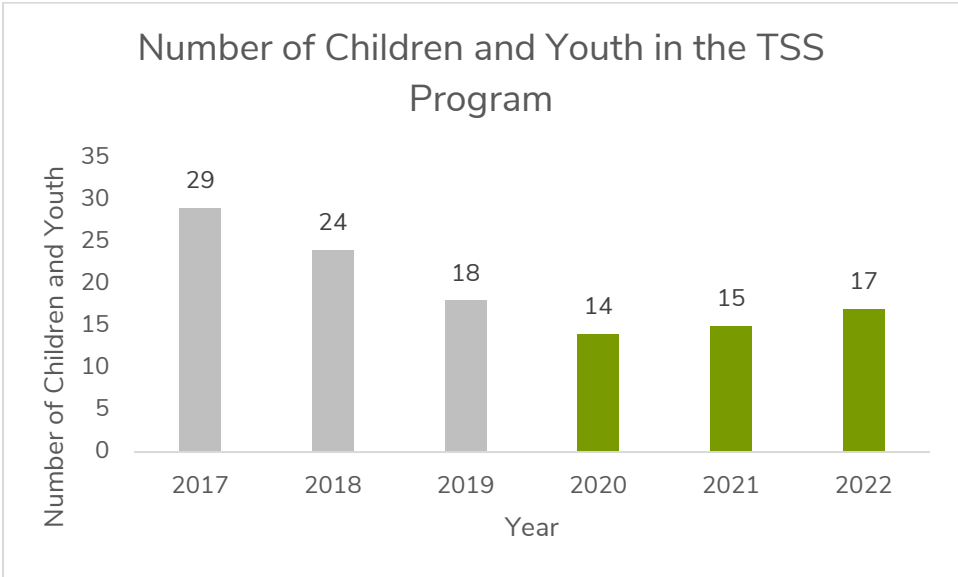


Figure 6 Number of children and youth in care living in group homes from 2017 to 2022. September caseloads were used for each year due to the reporting structure of the previous case management system and to remain consistent with previous annual reports. The data for the reporting period (2020, 2021 and 2022 calendar years) are highlighted in green, whereas prior data are grey.

The pandemic has presented unique challenges for the TSS program, namely maintaining the same level of care while complying with COVID-19 safety standards in a 24/7 home. This includes taking care of youth who caught the virus, providing isolation space, and supporting youth while they participated in remote learning during school closures. These challenges were intensified by the restrictions on gatherings, including activities, workshops, and visitors.

### Programs and services for youth and young adults

When youth and young adults have access to focused programs and supports that emphasize building life skills and connecting with their natural support networks, they are more likely to succeed outside of care. To help facilitate the successful transition to



self-sufficiency and lasting connections, FCS provides the following programs and services for youth between 16 and 26 years of age.

### *Agreements to assist youth and young adults*

Under section 16 of the CFSA, FCS provides supports to youth aged 16-19 through Agreements for Support Services for Youth. These agreements are intended to connect youth who cannot re-establish contact with their families with financial and social supports. This includes providing financial assistance for necessities such as housing, living expenses, and other supports aimed at helping those under the agreements gain greater independence by developing life skills and dealing with concerns such as mental health, substance use, or returning to school. Young adults aged 19 and 26 who were previously in the care of the Director or in extended family care, but have transitioned to independent living are able to receive similar supports through Agreements for Transitional Support Services (CFSA, section 17).

Supporting youth as they transition to independent living is a priority for FCS. Since 2017, the number of youth and young adults using these agreements has increased by 196%, going from 23 to 68 (Figure 7). This means that more youth are connected to services and financial supports that will help them work towards self-reliance.

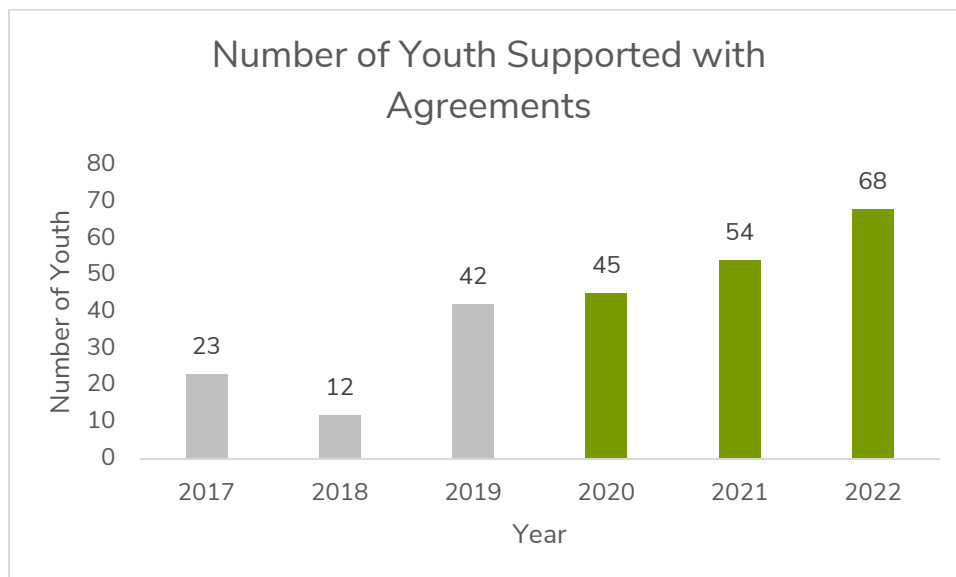


Figure 7 Number of youth and young adults supported through agreements from 2017 to 2022. September caseloads were used for each year due to the reporting structure of the previous case management system and to remain consistent with previous annual reports. The data for the reporting period (2020, 2021 and 2022 calendar years) are highlighted in green, whereas prior data is in grey.

### *Youth Supports and Services*

In accordance with the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) and section 174(3) of the CFSA, the Director of FCS is also the territorial Director of youth justice within the Yukon. This provides Youth Supports and Services with the legal mandate to deliver services under the YJCA and serve youth who are in, or likely to be in, conflict with the law.

Youth involved in the criminal justice system in the Yukon continue to work with either Whitehorse-based probation staff or regional social workers in partnership with Yukon First Nations. This work continues to be supported through a pilot project that is comprised of two different departments (HSS and Justice) to support the possible goal of a one government approach to restorative justice. Youth Supports and Services staff of the Integrated Restorative Justice Unit work with First Nations, community partners, and the Department of Justice on the Restorative Community Conferencing program, which works to provide programs and services aimed at reducing the number of youth entering the justice system.

Over the last few years, the number of youth involved in the justice system has declined, with a significant change in the number of youth that have had the need for time in a secure facility to in-community probation services.

Youth Supports and Services also operates a community-based program through the Youth Achievement Centre (YAC) – which provides programs for youth aged 12-17 who are involved in the youth justice system, in high-risk situations or in need of extra supports. Based on the decrease in numbers in youth justice and through the support of restorative practice and case planning, YAC has continued expanding its services to meet the needs of a changing population of youth in high-risk environments and to provide low-barrier, preventative, community-based services.

YAC has continued to maintain its partnerships with community organizations, such as the Bringing Youth Towards Equality program (BYTE), the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, KDFN Recreation, City of Whitehorse, Contagious Mountain Bike Club, and Whitehorse Cross Country Ski Club. Some examples include building mountain bike trails, constructing furniture and cabin construction projects, participation in remote

canoe and hiking trips, naloxone training and naloxone distribution to members of the community.

While there have been many successes, YAC experienced challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Primarily, the significant increase in the number of youths isolating and parents pulling youth from group programming due to health concerns. YAC programs experienced a decline in youth enrollment in its programs, decreasing from 69 enrolled youth down to 53 during the first year of the pandemic. This largely contributed to an increase in the demand for provision outreach services, which ensure young people have what they need to safely isolate. At times, this resulted in YAC staff delivering sleeping mats, sleeping bags, naloxone kits, hygiene supplies, and food. The number of youth involved in YAC programming has since returned to pre-pandemic levels.

While the number of youth dropped slightly during the early stages of the pandemic, the most significant change is the number of hours of youth participation in programming. Prior to the pandemic, youth spent 6,687 hours per year on programs run by YAC. In 2020, this dropped to 2,723 hours. However, the programming hours rose to 3,982 in 2021. This suggests that the decrease in attendance and hours spent in programming was largely due to pandemic-related measures taken by YAC, and that there is demand for their services as restrictions ease.

## Continuous quality improvement initiatives

### Realignment of the Child Care Services Unit

In April 2021, the Child Care Services Unit (CCSU) was moved from FCS to the Department of Education. This was done as part of YG's ongoing strategy to better incorporate responsibilities related to early learning, early learning programs, and childcare, to the Department of Education in order to make the transition to school easier, as recommended by the Putting People First report.

## Recruitment and retention

The relational nature of child welfare practice means that strong partnerships between FCS and Yukon First Nations is essential to ensuring families, children, and youth receive the support they need to thrive. To this end, Yukon First Nations are actively involved in the recruitment process for new social workers, especially for regional positions. This involves co-writing job descriptions, co-creating interview questions, including a representative from Yukon First Nations on the interview panel, and considering their feedback and wishes when determining the successful candidate. Once the position is filled, a Yukon First Nations representative provides an orientation to the community.

The recruitment and retention of staff has been an ongoing issue for FCS throughout the pandemic. The general concerns about safety, as well as uncertainty with the shifting regulations and restrictions, have been a challenge for staff that work closely with the public. In addition to this, difficulty obtaining housing, isolation in remote communities, and burnout have influenced staff retention. Remote communities pose additional challenges, such as reduced access to services, higher cost of living, and potential feelings of isolation for staff who often lack an established support network in the community. These factors all contribute to the difficulty of attracting experienced staff. FCS and the HSS Human Resources branch continue to develop strategies to improve social worker recruitment and retention across the Yukon.

## Implementing the Family Case Management system

The Family Case Management (FCM) system was fully implemented for FCS in November 2021, providing an electronic case management solution. All FCM users were trained prior to system launch using a combination of self-directed online learning modules and one-on-one mentorship from FCM project personnel. The new system has increased the data capacity at FCS and has ensured better compliance with the reporting requirements, as set out in the CFSA. The system also provides increased financial accountability by integrating financial service delivery with other aspects of the case management process within the system itself.



As the system is fully customizable, efforts are ongoing to improve functionality based on user feedback, and changes to child welfare legislation and policy. The reception of the new case management system has so far been positive, and early testing has revealed that front line staff are spending far less time on administrative processes than they were when reliant on a purely paper-based system.

With the successful completion of the FCM project, the branch now shifts its efforts towards support for and ongoing maintenance of the system itself. New training content for users and the identification of system support staff will be key elements in ensuring the FCM system remains a viable case management solution into the future.

## File review

Under section 185 of the CFSA, every 3 years the Director is required to submit a report detailing the review of compliance with service standards. This requirement, along with the prioritization of continuous quality improvement efforts by FCS, has led to the review of files that were active in the 2019-2020 fiscal year. The review measures compliance with standards outlined in the CFSA and the *Child and Family Services Act* Policy Manual. These service standards were then refined based on recommendations from the Continuous Quality Improvement Committee, which is comprised of FCS managers and key personnel.

Currently, the reviews of child protection and child in care files open between April 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020 have been completed, with the reviews of other files types expected to conclude in the 2022-2023 fiscal year. The insights into service delivery gained through this review will be incorporated into policy development, training and professional development opportunities, and ongoing clinical supervision conversations between management and staff. The results from this review will be shared in future reports.

## File management

The Records Unit of FCS consistently works to ensure client information is safe, secure, and in compliance of all procedures and mandated processes. A key aspect of this work has been the development of a comprehensive information asset file management

system, which functions as an electronic master tracker for internal file transfers from communities or to the records centre. The records registry has comprehensive knowledge of the location and whereabouts of all physical records throughout the territory, including the 11 regional offices, records center, and archives. This work will lead into the implementation of InfoLinx, YG's physical records management system for active and inactive records.

Additionally, the Records Unit worked collaboratively with Archives, Highways and Public Works, Department of Health and Social Services departmental records officers to begin developing YG's functional classification and scheduling system for FCS records. This work identified all records, both physical and electronic, that are created by staff, allowing a retention schedule to be developed. Once finalized, this retention schedule will allow for all records within FCS to be indexed and moved to appropriate storage and disposition.

## Signs of Safety

Over the last few years, FCS has undergone a philosophical shift in how child welfare services are delivered. This shift is reflected in a number of organizational changes, including the collaboration between FCS and Yukon First Nations on deciding to adopt the Signs of Safety program, which is a flexible, strengths-based, family-centred, safety-organised approach to child welfare that is consistent with the following:

- the Calls to Action from the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada;
- the Calls to Justice from the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls;
- the Required Actions from the CFSA Advisory Committee's Embracing the Children of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow report; and
- item 5 of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society's Spirit Bear Plan.

In September 2019, FCS supervisors, managers, and the Director met for a leadership engagement session. Between June and August 2020, FCS staff attended Signs of Safety engagement sessions, where 9 FCS teams and a total of 50 staff members

participated. Several trainings have been offered throughout the implementation of Signs of Safety, with 4 introductory training sessions and 5 advanced sessions. Yukon First Nations Family Support Workers and CYFN Family Preservation case workers also attended the introductory training sessions. These trainings provide in-depth information on the framework, the practical application of the Signs of Safety tools, and how they can support ongoing child welfare practice.

Although, the COVID-19 pandemic caused some delays in implementation, FCS will continue making strides in adopting Signs of Safety while ensuring the safety of everyone.

## Professional development

The philosophical shift in practice at FCS has been grounded in the training and professional opportunities offered to employees. The trainings covered a range of topics related to child welfare best practice, including trauma-informed care, the importance of natural support networks, Signs of Safety, CORE training, and land-based cultural events.

### *CORE training*

CORE training is considered an essential knowledge base for social workers who practice in the field of child protection in the Yukon. The training is based on information outlined in the *Child and Family Services Act* and operational policy, but also covers critical subject areas including documentation, ethics and boundaries, worker wellness, supervision, and reflection of practice. This training is a required component for social workers to be delegated under the *Child and Family Services Act* to act on behalf of the Director and requires ongoing assessment during the training itself. Yukon First Nations Family Support Workers and Health Directors as well as CYFN staff involved in child welfare are invited to attend CORE training.

Due to the high number of Indigenous children and families involved in the Yukon child welfare system, ongoing work toward reconciliation, and essential working partnerships to deliver increasingly culturally mindful service to First Nation families, it was critical to re-design this training in collaboration with CYFN. CYFN was able to

offer detailed review and feedback of suggested FCS content, as well as invite knowledge keepers and experts to speak to topics vital to cultural awareness, including: Truth and Reconciliation, Jordan's Principle, CYFN's Family Preservation Unit, a First Nation legal perspective, impacts of child welfare work and colonialism in the Yukon, as well as the curation of a half-day experiential learning opportunity on the land.

#### *Land-based cultural workshops for staff*

FCS has collaborated with CYFN to offer land-based cultural workshops open to all FCS frontline staff. This training is meant to increase the cultural competency of workers and improve their understanding of land-based programs. Developed by CYFN, each session includes key cultural learnings, activities, preparations, and knowledge sharing of what traditional life could look like for Indigenous people during the different seasons on the land.

#### *Forensic interviewing*

Forensic interviewing training is provided to FCS staff through the StepWise training program. This training focuses on developing and strengthening advanced strategies and skills required to conduct a person-centred, trauma-informed, strength-based forensic interview. While this training is geared toward advanced techniques for interviews for adults, these techniques can be successfully adapted for interviews with children and youth. The basic training, known as StepWise 360, was offered in April 2021 for both FCS and RCMP staff. This was followed with a refresher course in November 2021, Advanced Training in April 2022, and another offering of the base course in September 2022.

## Looking forward

The changing landscape within child welfare at the national and territorial level means that practices and processes within FCS constantly need to adapt. In the upcoming year, FCS will focus on implementing the legislative changes, including adapting policy to align with the amendments, all while continuing to support children and families across the Yukon.

## Implementing legislative changes

The critical operational policies were updated to reflect the intent of the updated CFSA in a collaborative process with the CFSA implementation working group. Going forward, the more minor policy changes will be made collaboratively with CFYN and reported back to the First Nations Health and Social Development Commission on a regular basis.

## Cultural continuity project

As of November 31, 2022, each child in care is now required to have a plan that outlines how the child will maintain a connection to their language, culture, practices, customs, traditions, and ceremonies. This plan is to be developed collaboratively and have an associated budget that can be used to participate in events. For Yukon First Nations children and youth, the plans are developed by individual Yukon First Nations or CYFN, with support from FCS if requested. The specific cultural events that the child attends is dependent on their own interest and culture, but could include access to traditional language classes, materials to participate in traditional activities, or regalia.

As part of the larger cultural continuity project, CYFN and Yukon First Nations will host frequent events for children and youth in out-of-home care, in both Whitehorse and the communities. These events will help maintain connections to culture and community when out-of-home care is required, as well as presenting an opportunity for children and youth to increase their support network. The specific events will vary, but could include on the land activities, culture camps, or cultural workshops. In addition to group events for children and youth, CYFN is currently developing culturally appropriate caregiving classes and workshops, such as speech and language playgroups.

## Prenatal services working group

Between 2019 and 2022, FCS and CYFN worked to conduct multiple scans of maternal and child health programs available in Yukon communities, with the goal of improving access, availability, and quality of programs. The scans examined several prenatal programs in the territory to better understand what services are available, what those services look like, the successes of the services, their limitations, whether those facilities

serve at-risk mothers, and to identify other potential gaps that providers may be experiencing.

The scans identified areas of success, such as programs being able to operate regularly with steady attendance from children and families, increased numbers of referrals from other health facilities, and strong community relationships. However, the scan also identified several communities with limited access to pre-natal and child health programs, as well as other gaps and challenges experienced by service providers, such as staff shortages and limited space. The information gained through the scans will be used as the foundational material for a pre-natal working group that will work to create programs designed to address any identified gaps in services available to at-risk expectant and new parents.

## Youth Justice and community support services

FCS will be working with Yukon First Nations and CYFN to look at Yukon policy updates in youth justice, as well as support the continued work of the development of pre-charge and post-charge restorative programming. Through the coordinated efforts and the continued relationships that FCS has built with CYFN, Yukon First Nations, and community stakeholders, the redesign and update of our policies and programs for youth will support the national changes that have been prioritized by the Government of Canada, National Indigenous leaders, and provinces and territories to create systems that support preventative vs punitive outcomes.

## Conclusion

The past few years have presented several challenges to the delivery of child welfare and youth support programming, namely the global pandemic and adapting services to meet these new situations and needs. However, there have also been many opportunities. The passing of the federal legislation, the amendments to the CFSA, and continued partnerships with Yukon First Nations and CYFN have been part of a larger philosophical shift to the field of child welfare within the Yukon. As the field evolves, FCS is committed to continuing to work closely with Yukon First Nations and other

community partners to ensure children, youth, and families receive the supports they need to thrive.

