



Family Services Ottawa

Strengthening individuals, families, and the Ottawa community since 1914.

FSO Report to the Community | 2024-25





A Message from the President

As we reflect on this past year, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our incredible staff, dedicated volunteers, committed board members, generous funders, resilient clients, and the wider community that stands beside us. **Each of you plays a vital role in making our vision a reality, and your support and partnership continue to inspire us.**

Our work remains as important and meaningful as ever. Every program delivered, every life touched, and every barrier overcome reminds us why we do what we do. Being a part of Family Services Ottawa means being a part of an organization rooted in compassion, equity, and the belief that positive change is possible when we come together.

It is a true honour to serve as Board President and to witness firsthand the dedication, creativity, and heart that continue to drive this organization. From key milestones to powerful moments of individual impact, this year was filled with highlights that reflect the strength and spirit of our entire community.

As FSO heads into its 111th year, we will continue to offer a diverse range of programs and workshops designed to address the unique needs of our community and to empower individuals and families to thrive.

Thank you for your trust, your support, and your commitment.

With deep gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lori".

**Lori Bender
President,
Board of Directors**



Family Services Ottawa | Year in Review 2024-2025

2025 has been a year of significant growth, transformation, and deepened impact for Family Services Ottawa (FSO). Our team has remained grounded in our commitment to accessible, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive care—while embracing innovation, strengthening partnerships, and responding to increasing community need across the region.

Thanks to the vision and dedication of our staff, partners, and funders, we expanded core programs, enhanced our technological infrastructure, reached more families than ever before, and continued to serve as a trusted partner in complex systems of care.

Expanding Supports for Families in Crisis

This year, we were successful in our application to the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) for a major three-year initiative that will support over 900 high-risk families involved in the child welfare system. Actioning this project will begin in the coming year, bringing together key service elements—system navigation, parent coaching, financial literacy, and culturally tailored supports—within a trauma-informed, family-centered model. While the full implementation is still ahead, 2024–25 saw important groundwork laid, including increased capacity to serve child-welfare involved clients and expanded access to parent coaching. Parent coaching has also become more deeply embedded across FSO, with supports increasingly integrated into counselling, anti-violence, and family programs, creating a more holistic approach to family well-being. Sustained investment from the Happy Roots Foundation also enabled us to continue refining culturally responsive approaches and strengthening streams for families experiencing mental health challenges, high conflict and/or family violence.

Family Programs this year offered new groups and workshops tailored to parents at different stages of their children’s development. These programs provided practical strategies, peer support, and safe spaces to build parenting confidence and resilience. At the same time, our counselling services enhanced their capacity to serve children, youth, and families, adding specialized approaches to support emotional regulation, attachment, and developmental transitions.

Our collaboration with the Children’s Aid Society of Ottawa (CASO) continued to deepen. Beyond longstanding services like group programming and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), we continue to receive increased referrals for counselling supports across the spectrum—from children and youth, to transitional-aged youth, to women and families experiencing intimate partner violence. These growing connections reflect both the urgent needs in our community and the trust CASO places in FSO’s trauma-informed care.

Strengthening Mental Health Supports and Community Capacity

Counselling services, including group programs and system navigation supports, continued to meet clients where they are, whether in-person, online, or through collaborative service models. Demand for mental health supports remained high, with clients presenting increasingly complex needs driven by poverty, housing insecurity, and systemic barriers. In response, FSO expanded counselling programs for clients of all ages, adding specialized counselling streams, play-based interventions for children, and enhanced support for transitional-aged youth. We also invested in staff development and recruitment, building internal expertise to better respond to the breadth of needs across our community. At the same time, we undertook a comprehensive review and redesign of our intake and service-matching processes, improving efficiency and ensuring stronger alignment between client needs and program supports. These efforts have enabled earlier intervention, stronger family functioning, and greater resilience among clients navigating mental health challenges, trauma, attachment, and challenging life transitions.

**Driving Operational Excellence
Through Digital Transformation**

FSO continued to invest in service quality and operational excellence through significant improvements to our client information and records system (EMHWare). Over the past year, we integrated client surveys directly into the system, streamlined feedback collection, and aligned reporting data with the City of Ottawa’s new portal—improving efficiency and funder accountability. We also consolidated video counselling, invoicing, and payment processing into one secure platform, eliminated duplicate systems, and introduced real-time dashboards for program managers to track service delivery. Organization-wide training supported consistency and data quality, ensuring reliable records across all teams. These digital enhancements have reduced administrative burden and positioned FSO to deliver services with greater responsiveness, accountability, and effectiveness.

**Deepening Collaboration
and System Integration**

Partnership remained at the heart of FSO’s work this year, as we continued to strengthen relationships across health, child welfare, and social services. Our collaboration with CASO deepened further, enabling integrated supports for children, youth, transitional-aged youth, and families experiencing intimate partner violence.

Planning also began for a new collaboration with the Ottawa Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinic (ONPLC), set to launch in fall 2025. This project will see FSO clinicians seconded to the ONPLC in Ottawa’s east end, creating integrated pathways between medical, social, and mental health services. This collaboration will improve timely access to care, enhance coordination across service providers, support holistic approaches to family well-being, reduce barriers for clients navigating multiple systems, and strengthen capacity for early intervention and preventative care.

At the same time, established partnerships remained strong. Long-standing collaborations continued to provide critical support: CHEO and Andrew Fleck continued their essential partnership in supporting Around the Rainbow; Canadian Mental Health Association remained a close partner through our Quick Response Program (QRC); and our partnerships with family service agencies and community health centres advanced through shared services, such as Counselling Connect and the Walk-In Counselling Clinic. Together, these collaborations supported shared funding applications, coordinated referrals, and integrated resources—ensuring families can access the right care at the right time.

Building Foundations for the Future

Over the past year, we made significant strides in advancing FSO’s digital infrastructure and operational efficiency, streamlining key systems and improving service quality, accountability, and responsiveness.

We continued to strengthen FSO’s internal culture, supporting staff wellness, professional development, and opportunities for growth. Staff benefited from enhanced training, and we increased opportunities for team building and social connection, fostering collaboration, trust, and a sense of community across the organization.

These developments represent a pivotal shift toward deeper integration, increased transparency, and a culture of continuous improvement, establishing a robust foundation for FSO’s sustained growth and responsiveness in an evolving service landscape.



As we look to the future, FSO reaffirms its unwavering commitment to wellbeing, belonging, community, accountability, and client-centered care. Building on strong partnerships, innovative practices, and an adaptive organizational culture, we are well-positioned to anticipate and respond to emerging community needs, deepen our collective impact, and advance the well-being of children, youth, families, and communities across the region.

To our dedicated staff, valued funders, trusted partners, and the thousands of clients who walk through our doors each year—thank you for being part of this journey. We are proud of all we have accomplished together this year and are energized by the work that lies ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elyse".

Elyse Schipper,
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca".

Rebecca Fromowitz,
Associate Executive Director



By the numbers:



4,114

clients received counselling support through our Mental Health and Anti-Violence Programs



982

individuals were supported through our Around The Rainbow 2SLGBTQI+ Programs and Public Education.



361

parents received individualized support through our Parent Coaching and Parenting Courses.



1,082

service providers, family members, and support persons collaborated with us to support



390

family members were supported to safely build relationships through our Supervised Access Program.

178

families towards safety and stability through our Alternative Dispute Resolution Program.

Across all programs

clients reported meaningful gains in safety, skills, and resilience—demonstrating that FSO's services are helping create a real, positive impact in people's lives.

Our Programs in Action: Delivering Impact Across Services

Counselling Programs

The Counselling Programs at FSO address mental health in the context of social determinants, pairing emotional support with advocacy and system navigation to stabilize clients facing complex challenges. Group programs promote healing in connection, offering safe spaces to build social skills and emotional regulation - essential in a world where isolation has increased not only due to pandemic-related impacts, but also because of increased reliance on technology, shifting social norms, and other systemic or personal barriers.

In the past year, our organization experienced continued growth and deepened impact, **serving over 2,000 clients through more than 8,000 client sessions and contacts**—surpassing our annual targets. Demand for trauma-informed and complex-case counselling remained high, with many clients facing significant barriers such as poverty, housing and food insecurity, and challenges related to newcomer status. Our firmly established hybrid model of in-person and virtual service delivery increased accessibility, especially for those facing logistical or systemic barriers. Additionally,

our commitment to culturally-responsive and multilingual services further expanded access for equity-deserving groups, with **services offered in English, French, Arabic, and Spanish**.

We also saw notable developments in our group programming, with increased demand and complexity reflecting clients' growing recognition of the benefits of structured group support. **Over 120 group sessions were delivered to more than 240 clients**, ranging from single-session workshops to multi-week programs focused on skill-building and fostering social connection. Our integrated approach—combining psychotherapy with service navigation and advocacy—enabled us to better support clients with housing, legal, financial, and settlement needs. Our capacity was further strengthened by training new counsellors and students in group facilitation and by hosting **seven student interns from universities across Canada, who contributed approximately 800 direct client hours**. These efforts highlight our ongoing commitment to responsive, holistic care rooted in equity and accessibility.

“I came here feeling hopeless. My counsellor listened, helped me make sense of my feelings, and connected me to resources I didn’t even know existed. I’m starting to see a path forward.”



Counselling - Children, Youth and Families Programs

Early intervention through the Children, Youth and Families Programs helps prevent long-term mental health challenges, supports family resilience, and fosters safe, stable home environments. By combining trauma-informed therapy with advocacy and parent support and education, these programs equip families and youth with the tools and supports needed for lifelong wellness.

This year, we continued to respond to strong demand for family-based interventions that address trauma, attachment, and complex family transitions. Our capacity to support transitional-aged youth (ages 16–25) grew meaningfully through targeted hiring, specialized training, and sustained collaboration with the Children’s Aid Society of Ottawa (CASO). We also observed a rise in referrals for individual counselling for children and youth (aged 7+) who identify as 2SLGBTQI+, reinforcing the importance of inclusive, identity-affirming care. Participation in community events with partners like CASO and Centre33 helped to deepen these relationships and enhance service accessibility. Additionally, concerns around technology use, online safety, and digital relationships continued to emerge as pressing themes in our work with young people—an area of increasing relevance in the post-pandemic context.

To meet the evolving needs of children, youth, and families, we delivered counselling and psychosocial skill-building focused on emotional regulation, attachment, and resilience. Parent coaching and family counselling were enhanced to support positive developmental outcomes and strengthen family functioning. We also expanded our specialized trauma counselling services, incorporating developmentally appropriate approaches such as play-based interventions and evidence-based therapies like Emotion-Focused Family Therapy (EFFT) and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). Our ongoing partnership with CASO remained vital in delivering wrap-around supports, allowing us to integrate therapeutic services with broader systems of care for children, youth, and families navigating complex life challenges.

“FSO has been there for my family and the counsellor is so kind and friendly when speaking with my daughter. The staff are amazing and have been very helpful to my family by supporting my child and my needs as a parent. They have so much to offer people who are in need of help.”



Anti-Violence (AV) and CASO-IPV Collaborative Programs

Together, the Anti-Violence and CASO-IPV Programs provide a continuum of trauma-informed services that address immediate safety, long-term recovery, and systemic barriers faced by women and children affected by violence. By combining direct counselling, advocacy, housing support, and collaborative planning with child protection and community partners, these programs strengthen awareness, foster safety, and promote recovery and resilience for those affected by abuse.

Over the past year, women fleeing abuse have faced intensifying systemic barriers, including severe housing shortages, longer wait times for priority housing, limited shelter capacity, and increasingly restricted access to legal aid. These challenges have been compounded by growing public concern around femicide and the slow pace of family court processes, which continue to delay safety and resolution for many survivors. Legal representation through Legal Aid certificates has become more difficult to secure, leaving many women without the support they need to navigate complex legal systems. In response, we strengthened our collaboration with the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa (CASO) to provide earlier intervention and trauma-informed supports for women and children impacted by intimate partner violence (IPV).

“These services have had an immeasurable impact on my life. I came in feeling terrified, confused, and full of self-doubt, but I left with clarity, strength, and hope. The support I received helped me rebuild my confidence, navigate leaving an abusive relationship, and helped me face a contentious court process. I can’t believe this support was available, without cost. It has truly changed my life.”

We also made strategic advancements in programming and partnerships. A new partnership with Nelson House brought a transitional and housing support worker onsite one day per week, expanding access to Transitional Housing Support Program (THSP) services for our clients. This was complemented by our continued partnership with Interval House, where clients received THSP support two days per week. Program evaluation efforts were strengthened through the development of a new Program Logic Model and Client Survey in collaboration with CASO, improving our ability to measure impact and outcomes. We continued to deliver specialized trauma- and violence-informed counselling, safety planning, and coordinated care in close collaboration with CASO and other community partners. Participation in the CASO Violence Against Women Forum and OCTEVAW committees further enhanced cross-sector coordination and referral pathways. Additionally, we responded to emerging needs by planning new group offerings, including an Anti-Violence Mother's Group and a Women's 60+ Group. Community engagement also remained a priority, with active participation in awareness events such as “Take Back the Night” and International Women's Day.

“I didn’t even know what I needed when I first came here, but you did. You gently guided me through moments of fear and shame, reminded me of my strengths, and helped me rebuild my confidence. I am so deeply grateful. This service has been life-changing and is absolutely essential for women in situations like mine.”

Family and Community Programs

Parenting Programs & Parent Coaching

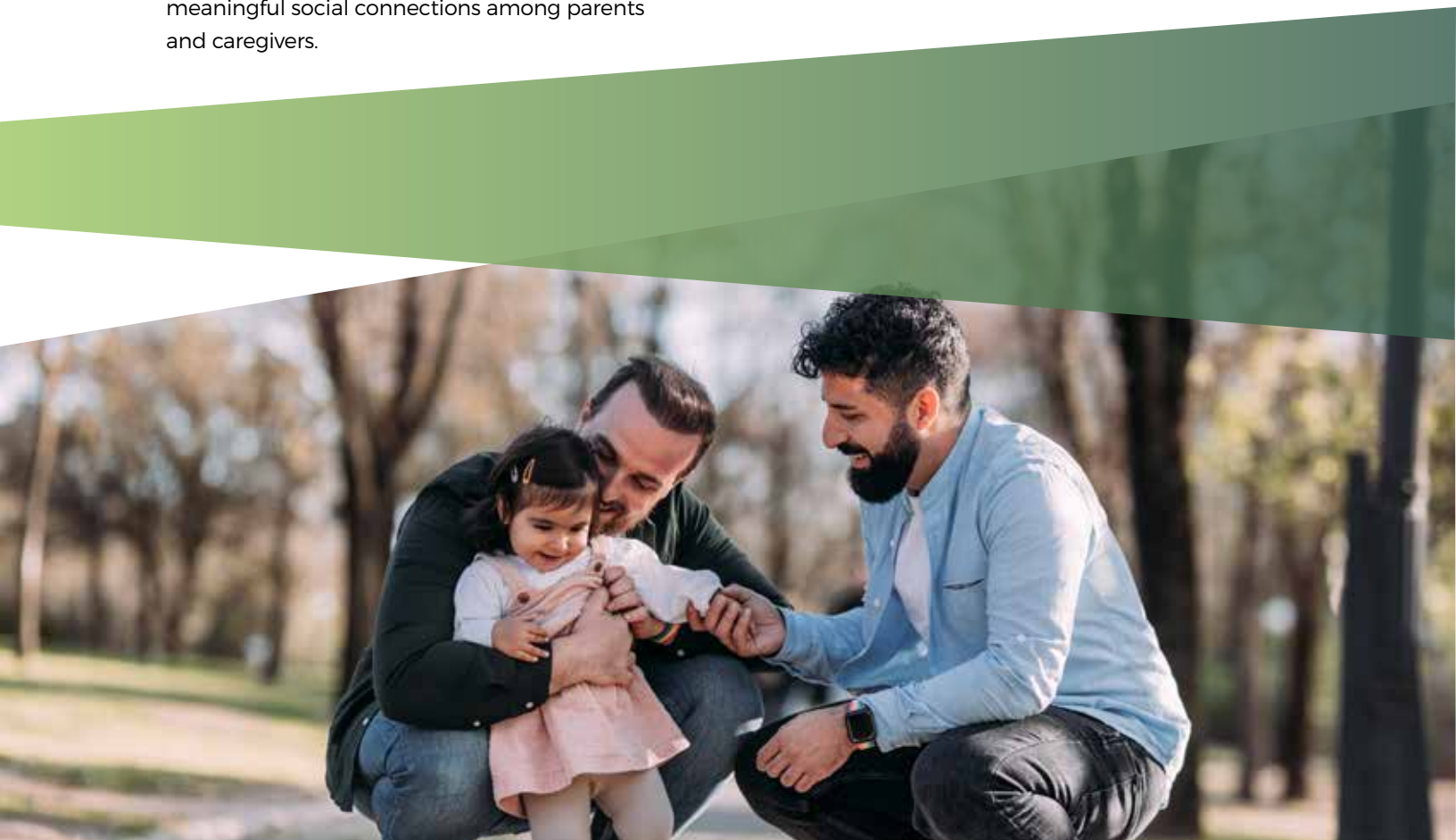
Responsive parenting and strong parenting skills foster healthy child development, family resilience, and positive parent-child relationships. By combining group programs, psychoeducational workshops, and one-on-one coaching, FSO equips caregivers with practical tools to navigate complex challenges, build stability, and strengthen overall family well-being. Integrating these programs with counselling and anti-violence services ensures families receive holistic support tailored to their unique needs, promoting long-term wellness and resilience.

This year saw continued high demand for parenting supports across a wide range of family structures, particularly among those navigating intimate partner violence, separation or divorce, and involvement with child welfare systems. In response, we further integrated our Parenting Programs and Parent Coaching with counselling, anti-violence, and family support services—creating a more holistic, wrap-around model for promoting family well-being. The families we serve often face intersecting challenges, including low income, cultural and linguistic diversity, discrimination, perinatal mental health concerns, and difficulties related to child behaviour or emotional regulation. As demand for in-person services increased, we expanded capacity to meet the need while leveraging hybrid models to foster accessibility, reduce isolation, and build meaningful social connections among parents and caregivers.

“This program gave me a roadmap to parent with confidence, helped me understand my child’s needs, and taught me how to manage my own reactions and stress.”

Over the past year, we delivered **19 parenting groups and workshops, totaling more than 100 parent education sessions** tailored to children’s varying developmental stages. Our Parent Coaching program provided close to **400 individualized sessions to over 120 clients**, offering strengths-based support, practical parenting strategies, and reinforcement of positive parenting practices. Staff trained in evidence-based coaching models adapted the service approach to include counselling interventions alongside psychoeducation and skills development. Partnerships also grew—most notably through a new initiative with the Youth Services Bureau that increased access for families involved with the Children’s Aid Society of Ottawa. Newly onboarded clinicians brought expanded expertise in areas such as adolescent parenting, co-parenting, and support for parents facing mental health or substance use challenges. We were also thrilled to extend our partnership with Happy Roots Foundation, ensuring the continuity of essential early-years parenting supports.

“Parent coaching has changed my life—helping me build patience, regulate my emotions, and strengthen relationships with my child and co-parent.”



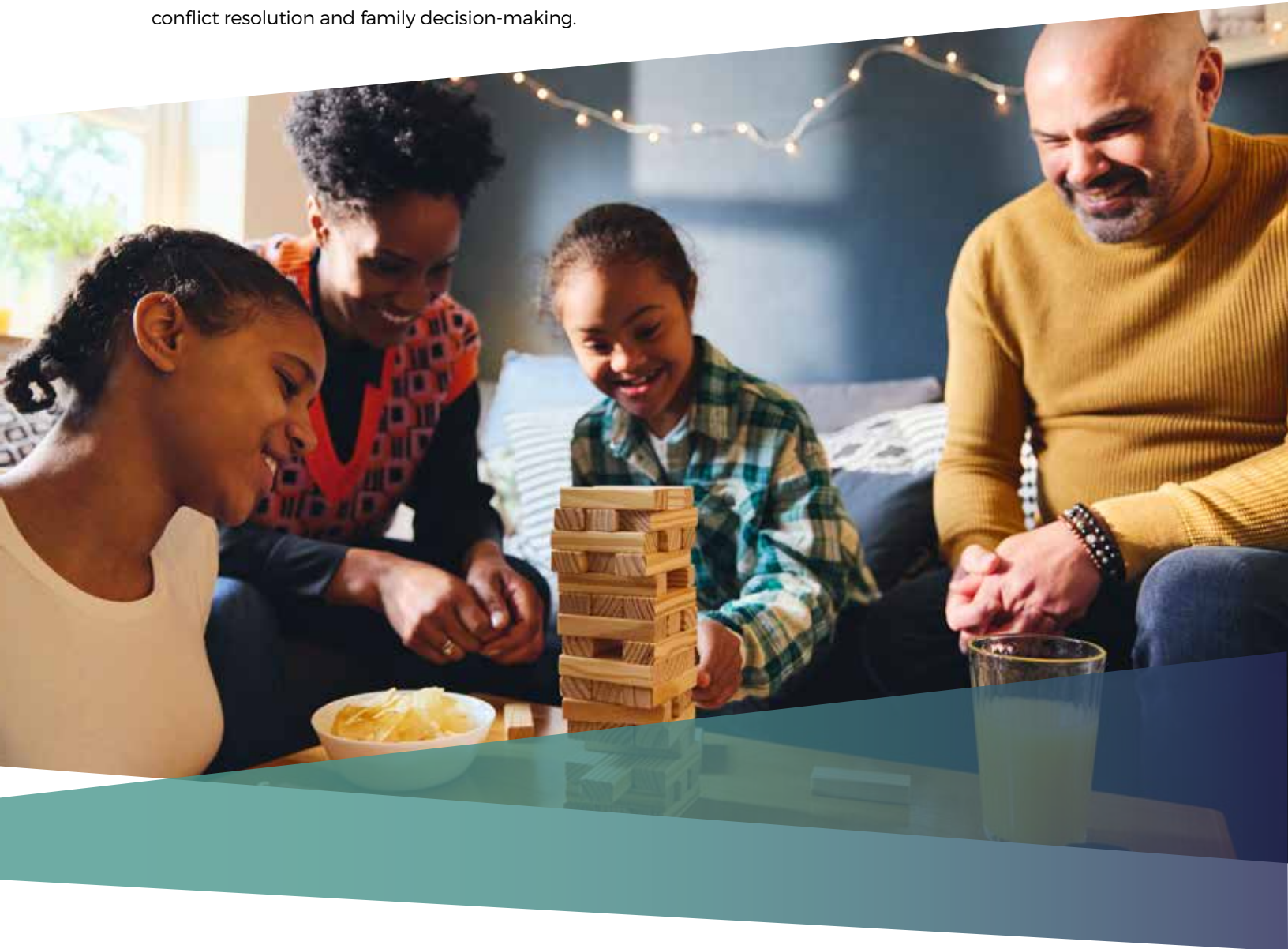
Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Program

ADR strengthens collaborative family decision-making, reduces adversarial conflict, and ensures family voices are central to child welfare planning. It plays a pivotal role in supporting vulnerable and underserved populations, particularly transitional-aged youth, who often require multiple mediation sessions to identify and prioritize goals in ways that feel both manageable and meaningful to them. By offering voluntary, culturally responsive approaches outside the courtroom, ADR helps families reach meaningful resolutions that support safety, stability, and improved outcomes for vulnerable children and youth.

This year, demand remained high for voluntary, culturally responsive alternatives to traditional court processes for children, youth, and families involved in the child welfare system. Families continued to seek out services that prioritize collaboration, inclusion, and healing—particularly in contexts where conventional legal pathways may feel adversarial or inaccessible. In response to this need, our mediation services surpassed annual targets by 16%, and referrals for Family Group Conferencing (FGC) rose dramatically—by 160%—reflecting increased recognition of these approaches as effective tools for conflict resolution and family decision-making.

We maintained strong, collaborative relationships with regional Children’s Aid Societies and the Office of the Children’s Lawyer, ensuring coordinated and child-centred service delivery. To build system capacity and enhance consistency, we partnered on mediator training initiatives, supporting both new and experienced practitioners in applying best practices. At the provincial level, we contributed to the broader development of ADR services through active participation on the Provincial ADR Advisory Committee. These efforts reflect our ongoing commitment to advancing family-centred, trauma-informed, and culturally grounded approaches within the child welfare system.

“You made a family whole again today. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for this outcome. It’s absolutely the best one for this child.”



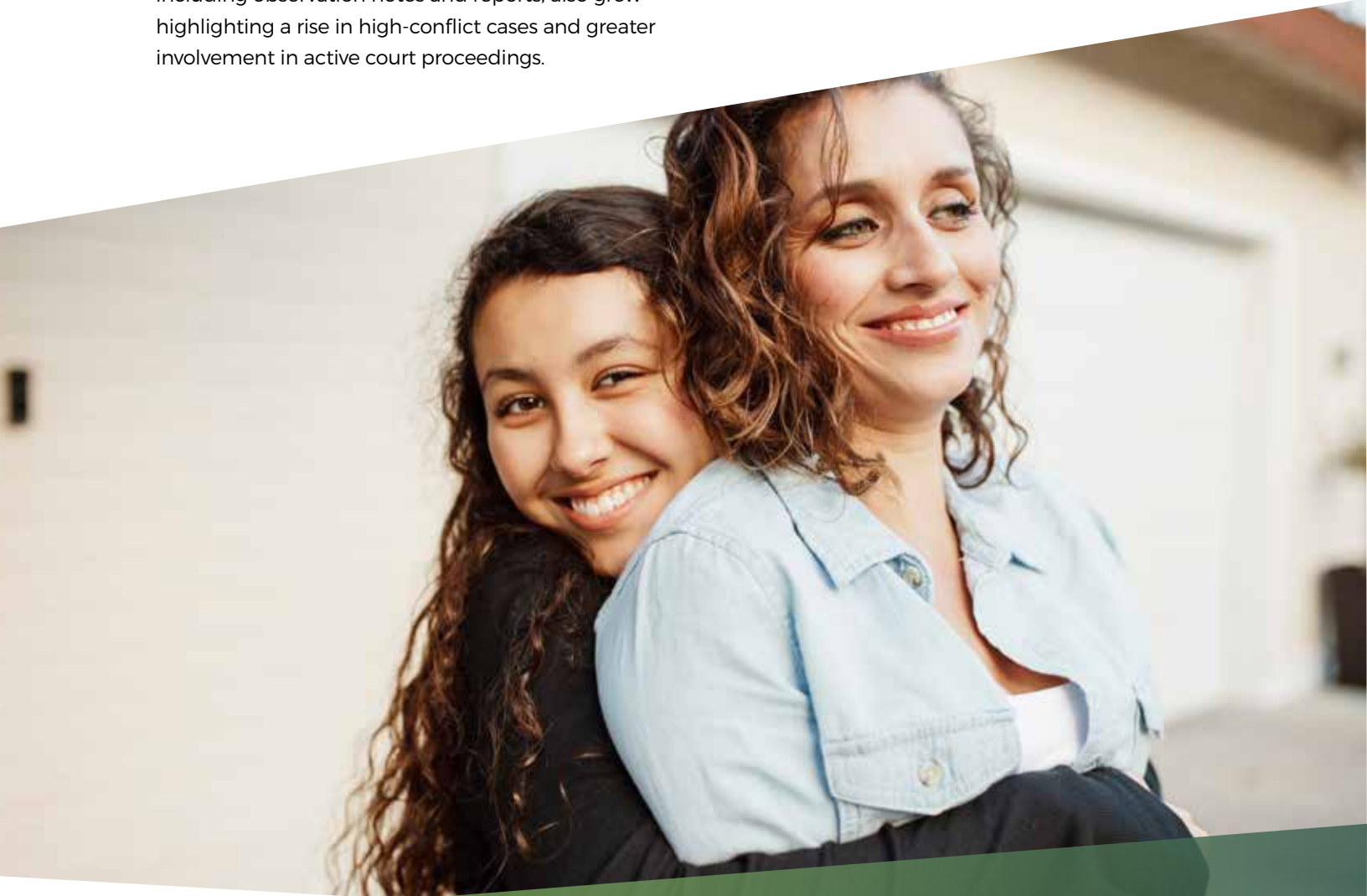
Supervised Access Program (SAP)

SAP provides a safe and neutral environment for children to maintain meaningful relationships with their parents during periods of high-conflict separation, domestic violence, or safety concerns. By reducing barriers to parenting time through shorter wait periods and more accessible locations, SAP helps families navigate challenging transitions while prioritizing the well-being of children. SAP is instrumental in strengthening long-term stability and safety for parents, children and families.

The Supervised Access Program continued to see strong growth in 2024-25, reflecting both post-pandemic recovery and the ongoing need for safe, neutral access services. The number of supervised visits increased from 293 to 344, while inquiries rose from 103 to 166—demonstrating renewed engagement from families and referring professionals. At the same time, the program improved its responsiveness, reducing the average wait time between initial contact and first visit by 11 days. Demand for court-related documentation, including observation notes and reports, also grew — highlighting a rise in high-conflict cases and greater involvement in active court proceedings.

We maintained a valued partnership with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, enabling SAP to continue operating in a child-friendly school setting that supports comfort and accessibility for families. Staff and volunteers completed Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Training, enhancing both safety and service quality. Referral pathways were further strengthened through ongoing collaboration with family law professionals, Children’s Aid Society staff, and members of the Ottawa Family Law Bench and Bar Committee. We are thankful to all program staff including our dedicated volunteer coordinator who has strengthened recruitment, training, and retention of volunteers, key to sustaining the program’s growth and impact.

“The staff were calm, welcoming, and truly focused on our child’s well-being. The visits helped us reconnect in a safe way and move toward a more positive future.”



Around the Rainbow (ATR) Program

ATR provides affirming, culturally responsive services that reduce isolation, improve mental health, and foster a sense of belonging for 2SLGBTQI+ individuals and families. By combining group programs, community events, and professional training, ATR builds inclusive support networks, helping individuals thrive and communities become safer and more connected.

In 2024-2025, ATR played a vital role in promoting the mental health, resilience, and well-being of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals and families across Ottawa. Through a strong focus on prevention and early intervention, the program significantly exceeded its service target **of 620 clients, reaching a total of 982 people**. This included **763 participants who engaged in public education and training sessions**, and **219 individuals who took part in drop-in programs, closed groups, and community events**. Client-reported outcomes were particularly strong, with **83% noting improved mental health**, **89% reporting enhanced coping strategies**, and **100% indicating strengthened connections to family, friends, and community**—underscoring the program’s meaningful impact.

“ATR gave me a place where I feel understood and accepted. I’ve built confidence, improved my mental health, and learned ways to handle tough situations.”

Key highlights from the year included the successful pilot of a new group for gender-diverse children (ages 7-12), delivered in partnership with Crossroads Children’s Mental Health Centre. This initiative addressed a critical service gap and marked an important step forward in inclusive, child-focused mental health programming. ATR also expanded its reach through **36 professional training sessions delivered across 20 organizations**—seven of which were new partners—**supporting nearly 800 professionals in building 2SLGBTQI+ inclusive practices**. Community engagement remained a core part of the program, with visibility and referrals strengthened through participation in public events such as the Youth Worker Race and the WOW Festival.

“ATR has been life-changing. It has provided a welcoming, judgment-free space where I’ve connected with other families and learned how to better support my child. I no longer feel alone on this journey.”



Family Services Employee Assistance Program (FSEAP) Ottawa

FSEAP provides a continuum of counselling and work life services including confidential counselling consultation, and wellness resources to employees and their eligible dependents supporting both personal and workplace well-being. By addressing issues early, the program reduces absenteeism, fosters resilience, and improves workplace culture. In doing so, it helps organizations build healthier, more productive environments that benefit both employees and the broader community.

This year, FSEAP experienced a notable increase in counselling requests, particularly related to depression, addictions, and workplace stress. Employees increasingly sought short-term, solution-focused counselling to better manage mental health concerns and achieve greater work-life balance. In parallel, employers demonstrated a growing commitment to staff well-being, with rising demand for workplace wellness workshops, manager consultations, and critical incident debriefs. Many employers and unions also played an active role in promoting FSEAP services during workshops and benefit discussions—highlighting the growing recognition of accessible, high-quality mental health support as a key component of employee retention and productivity.

Over the year, FSEAP served **more than 30 corporate clients**, providing support to **over 22,000 covered lives** through counselling, wellness seminars, and access to online resources. We delivered a wide range of workshops on topics including resilience, mental health, workplace change and transition, financial wellness, sleep, and nutrition. Our services were tailored to meet the specific needs of different industries, with customized seminars, lunch-and-learns, and presentations receiving consistently high satisfaction ratings. Continued collaboration with corporate partners enabled the design of flexible, responsive wellness initiatives, while participation in client-hosted community events further strengthened engagement. FSEAP also maintained its hybrid delivery model, offering both in-person and virtual counselling and workshops to accommodate the diverse preferences and needs of employees.

“FSEAP Ottawa brought comfort and reassurance to our team and leadership when we needed it most. The professionalism, compassion, and immediate response made a challenging situation feel manageable and showed our employees that their well-being truly matters.”



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Our Funders

- The Province of Ontario**
 - Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)
 - Ontario Health
- Ontario Trillium Foundation**
- City of Ottawa**
- Happy Roots Foundation**
- The United Way of Eastern Ontario**
- Ottawa Community Foundation**

Our Purpose

To strengthen our communities by supporting the mental and emotional well-being of people and families.

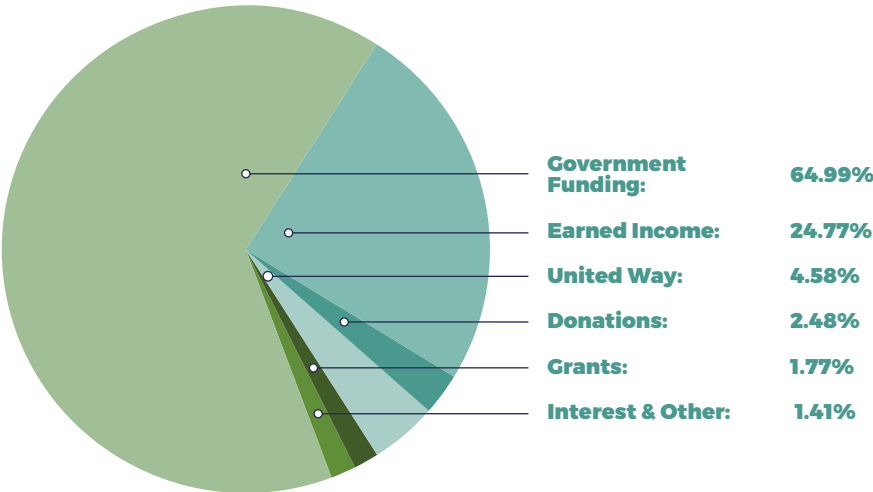
Our Mandate

To offer accessible counselling, workshops and educational programs to adults, youth and families to increase their knowledge and skills, adopt healthy strategies, build human connections and increase resiliency.



FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2024-2025

Where the money comes from



How the money is spent

