

2023•2024 ANNUAL REPORT



BRUCE GREY
CHILD &
FAMILY
SERVICES





Julie Lipsett
Executive Director



Selwyn 'Buck' Hicks
Acting Board Chair

As we reflect on the last year, we are incredibly proud of the progress we have made and the milestones we have achieved. Despite the challenges of a changing workforce, hybrid office environments, significant legislative and regulatory change, the staff and board's dedication, resilience, and innovative thinking have enabled us to navigate the challenges and embrace opportunities on our journey of excellence.

The second quarter of this fiscal year presented us with the most significant regulatory change in many years; the Quality Standards Framework. These changes required hundreds of internal changes in service delivery and policy while impacting numerous stakeholders. The working group, and many staff, operationalized these changes with calm, empathy and leadership. These changes are better for children and families, and we welcome them.

The strategic plan that was approved by the Board in April makes BGCFS the first known child welfare organization in Ontario to specifically

identify Indigenous Service Sovereignty as a distinct objective. We look forward to working with First Nation communities, if asked, to provide resources and support to them as they move forward in self-governance of child welfare. The additional objectives presented in the strategic plan empower us to navigate the complex work of child welfare, seize opportunities, and meet new challenges with determination and intention.

The past year has been a time of relationship building. BGCFS and Keystone Child Youth and Family Services (Keystone) formed a joint working group to find and exploit opportunities and build synergies to support those engaged with child welfare and children's mental health services. We have also worked together in advocating for complex special needs youth. We congratulate Keystone on the new beds for live-in treatment that they were awarded in early 2024. These beds will support youth to remain in their home communities. Community partnerships develop in many ways and at different times. In 2023-2024, BGCFS was afforded the opportunity to provide Crisis Prevention and Intervention training for a community partner with an immediate need and to allow that partner to meet a larger, community need.

A new partnership developed this year with Big Brothers Big Sisters Grey Bruce and Western Simcoe, Keystone, and BGCFS. We identified that as three youth serving organizations, we had the unique opportunity to celebrate the work we do and fundraise as a collective. To that end, the inaugural Art of Caring Youth Gala, presented by Bruce Power, will occur on November 16, 2024 at Cobble Beach.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) are at the core of our culture. Education and awareness result in better decision making, increased employee engagement and retention while fostering a culture of caring, respect and empathy. All staff and leadership of BGCFS completed three days of EDI training in 2023-24. BGCFS expects to be a destination employer and a community leader. Our commitment to EDI will help foster an environment that makes this a reality.

This year also saw us strengthening our leadership in Board governance. We held a retreat in the fall for a Board Orientation with Brad Quinn from TNG, who specializes in not-for-profit board governance. We have made a commitment to work with three other child welfare agencies to standardize a provincial approach to governance orientation and training. We have also taken steps to ensure our bylaws are up-to-date and compliant with the Ontario Not-For-Profit Corporations Act.

The Board was instrumental in the development of our Strategic Plan with all board members participating in a retreat to craft the strategic directions.

As Executive Director, I am proud of the relationship we have with CUPE 5058. The past year has seen us work together on innovative solutions to new challenges. The year did not see a grievance filed and we look forward to working together in the coming year as the current collective agreement expires and a new one is negotiated.

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the staff, foster parents and volunteers of BGCFS. It is your commitment that ensures children and youth have a sense of well-being and belonging. Your hard work and unwavering dedication are a constant and you are the driving force behind our success.

Julie Lipsett
Executive Director

Selwyn 'Buck' Hicks
Acting Board Chair



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Craig Ambrose

Craig is currently the Chief of the Owen Sound Police Service. He grew up and lived in rural Waterloo region and worked through the ranks of the Waterloo Regional Police Service during his 29 years prior to moving to Owen Sound in 2019.

Brittany Andor

Brittany was born and raised in Montreal Quebec. She received a Master of Arts degree in 2019 from the University of Guelph. Brittany currently works as a sales manager.

Ellen Dirstein

Ellen recently retired after working for more than 40 years with children and families. Ellen has a master's degree in clinical psychology which has allowed her to work in the fields of education, mental health and child welfare. She relocated to the Grey Bruce area after living in Northern Ontario for 30 years. Ellen chose this area as her family has had ties to Grey Bruce going back more than a century.

Alison Fernandes

Alison holds a degree in Social Work and Psychology and worked in Child Protection for many years prior to transitioning her career into the Nuclear Industry. Alison is honored to be a member of the Board of Directors of the Bruce Grey Child & Family Services as she has an innate passion for engagement, collaboration and empowerment with children and families within our community along with supporting the frontline workers of BGCFS.

Selwyn Hicks

A partner at Hicks & Hicks – a small law practice in Hanover, Ontario, – Selwyn practices primarily in the areas of real estate and wills/estate planning. A lover of politics, Selwyn was first elected to Hanover Council in 2006 where he served two terms as a Councilor and a further two terms as Deputy Mayor. In 2019, Selwyn was elected Warden of the County of Grey and served three terms in that position. He is the first visible minority person to hold that position. Recently, Selwyn received the Law Society of Ontario - 2023 Lincoln Alexander Award for long-standing public service.

James Rice

James was born and raised in the Kincardine area. James is a former Crown Ward of Bruce Grey Child and Family Services. James attended the University of Guelph where he graduated with an Honours degree in Criminal Justice and Public Policy. James then attended Law School at the University of Windsor. James is now an Assistant Crown Attorney for the County of Grey and the Bruce Peninsula in Ontario's Ministry of the Attorney General.

Dr. George Sanz

George was born in Spain where he obtained his undergraduate education. He studied medicine at Loma Linda University in Southern California, completed his pediatrics residency at Ohio University, and established his practice in Owen Sound. After his retirement in 2001, he spent three years as a Missionary in East Central Africa as Director of the Health Department for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, where he supervised a couple dozen hospitals and numerous medical clinics covering 32 countries and provided education to the membership.

Linda Van Sligtenhorst

Linda is an energetic business owner and volunteer, mother of six, and grandmother of seven. She graduated from Georgian College with a Legal Office Administration diploma in 1986 and worked in this field for several years before shifting to agriculture with her husband. They raised a busy family and became foster parents when their children were teenagers, through which they cared for several children and did respite foster care.

Susanne Snowdon

Susanne recently retired from community nursing at Care Partners Grey Bruce, where she was a manager, as well as her role as program manager of the Women and Childcare and Surgical Units at Grey Bruce Health Services. Susanne's retirement from health services was short, as she is now working in labour and delivery on the Women and Childcare Unit and Brightshores Health System.

John Tamming

John has practiced law for 30 years in Grey-Bruce and has a solid and intimate understanding of the social support and other needs of the region. John has served on numerous boards and committees over the years, including serving as Owen Sound city councilor. John has first-hand knowledge of child welfare as his parents had fostered many children in Middlesex County over the years.

Selena Vander Ploeg

Selena is a mother of four and became part of the Grey Bruce Community in 2009. Selena comes with experience working with some of the busiest law firms in Ontario prior to opening her own practice in 2018. Selena became licensed with the Law Society of Upper Canada in 2017.

Christopher Wren

Chris is a retired environmental consultant. He completed his Ph.D. in Environmental Sciences at the University of Guelph and spent over 35 years providing consulting services to industry and government with a focus on environmental pollution and fisheries science in Canada and internationally. Chris and his wife are former foster parents and now adoptive parents.



**Bruce Grey Child & Family Services
Board of Directors 2023-2024**

Back Row, l-r: Selena Vander Ploeg, James Rice, Craig Ambrose, George Sanz, John Tamming, Christopher Wren
Front Row, l-r: Ellen Dirstein, Linda Van Sligtenhorst, Alison Fernandes, Selwyn (Buck) Hicks, Susanne Snowdon.
Missing: Brittany Andor

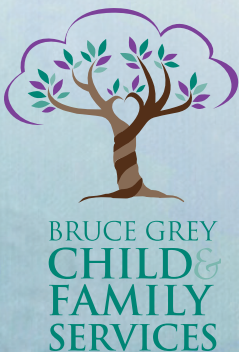
Photo by John Prettie©

SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM



L to R: Chad Zimmerman, Anne Bester, Kelly Ferris, Julie Lipsett, Rebecca Raynsford, Ryan Thompson

The Senior Team welcomed Chad Zimmerman in December of 2023. Chad had spent most of his life in Grey and Bruce counties. His child protection career started with the Department of Community Services in New South Wales, Australia, before he came to join the Bruce County Children's Aid Society in 2004 as a Child Protection Worker, Family Service. Chad has been in leadership since 2015 including position as a supervisor in Human Resources, Quality and with the Office of the Director. Chad was seconded to the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies in 2017 and spent almost four years leading the provincial business harmonization efforts. Chad's role of Director, Business Administration includes Finance, Quality and Governance as part of the portfolio.



MEET RACHELLE THORNE



RACHELLE, 22- RSG YOUTH

Rachelle was supported as one of our first VYSA youth and from there she transitioned to the Ready, Set, Go program. As with many other youth we support, Rachelle experienced a lot of adversity and challenges that impacted her sense of stability, security, and safety as a young person. Rachelle's strength, resiliency, and patience helped her overcome many uncertainties in her life. BGCFS has had the privilege to support Rachelle's journey of growth and determination to adulthood/independence over a period of 6 years. Rachelle will be transitioning away from our service within a few months and we are proud to highlight and share her story of someone who has faced unfortunate circumstances but used her experience to help ensure she got the life she deserved.

At the end of September 2018, Rachelle began her journey with BGCFS. She would tell you that she

was scared and worried about not feeling heard or having someone believe her. She would also tell you that it was important for her to share what she was going through, even with the possibility of nothing changing in her life. There were periods in Rachelle's life where she felt isolated, forgotten, and neglected by the people who were supposed to love and care about her, and that no one knew or asked how she was doing or what she needed.

Below, is a reflection from Rachelle of the experience she had with BGCFS.

“I left my home and the life I knew, and just hoped that things would be better. My workers from BGCFS initially supported me with getting settled at a women's shelter, helped gather my belongings, and enrolled me in school. I learned about the VYSA program and was provided with the opportunity to be supported in working towards achieving my goals and being connected to a specific person I could call and meet with. I was provided with the opportunity to get my driver's license and what made this more successful was BGCFS supporting me financially in getting my driver's training.

I had ambitions to further my education but was not sure how to do this. To my surprise, I was met with encouragement by my worker to pursue this goal of going to post-secondary school. I graduated high school and was accepted into a college program the following year at Conestoga for Interior Design. I had secured a job in Ottawa with a designer prior to graduating from the program, which meant a move to Ottawa. I worked my way up to a lead designer position where I gained the opportunity to design a half million-dollar renovation. While working in this field, there was something inside of me that did

not feel fulfilled. I made the decision to prioritize my health and happiness and decided to return back to school. During this decision-making process, my worker helped me to work through my decision and to ensure there were no barriers that stood in my way.

Fast forward to today, I'm now about to graduate from Algonquin College in Police Foundations with honors. While doing my final thesis and presentation, one of my professors offered me an employment opportunity that I'm still determining if it would be a good fit for me. What I would like to share is that I'm grateful for the opportunities I have been provided and can see myself working in law enforcement and social justice. I'm currently employed within the Food and Nutrition Department at the Ottawa Civic Hospital. I also work for a food truck company in the summer, which I enjoy as I get to see and be a part of multiple festivals in the Ottawa area.

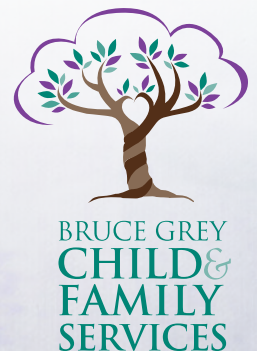
What about my family? Well, in the beginning I was able to live with my best friend and her family who are a huge support to me and continue to be very important people in my life. I have been able to reconnect with my extended family members and have formed meaningful and healthy connections. I have a very strong relationship with my aunt, uncle, and cousin who are nearby. They have been very clear with me that I am a part of their family and have supported my journey.

What I would like to share about the support and service I received from BGCFS is that I appreciated being connected to someone who I

could call and talk with whenever I needed help or to work through a big life moment. My worker always made the time for me, I felt important and heard, and I would like to say she knows me more than anyone else. I was always encouraged to make decisions about my life and the way I wanted to live it and to be independent. I was grateful to have someone ask me questions to ensure that I am thinking about the whole picture. I was always felt supported, which made me feel more connected. The life skills courses, the health insurance benefits, the birthday cards, holiday gifts, the random gifts out of the blue are all things that stood out for me. Going on trips to YouthCAN and other conferences and events to meet other youth that had similar situations to mine were all important opportunities for me.

If I could offer some advice to other youth, it would be to share that you have to be willing to accept help even when you don't want to, even if you feel like you're letting yourself down, to take risks and to live each day with intention. This is what I have learned. I have also learned that I don't need to have everything figured out and that I'm allowed to take my time to truly do something I am passionate about. I want to encourage and remind other youth to be grateful for their life experiences, as they are a part of what makes us strong, resilient, and able to overcome other battles in life. ☺☺

Rachelle, April 2024



***If you are interested in exploring the possibility of becoming a foster parent,
please email inquiries@bgcfs.ca or call (519) 371-4453.***

AS OF MARCH 31, 2024 WE HAD:

Children in Care

66

Children/Youth in
Kinship Homes

60

Youth who have
entered into a
Voluntary Youth
Services Agreement
(VYSA)

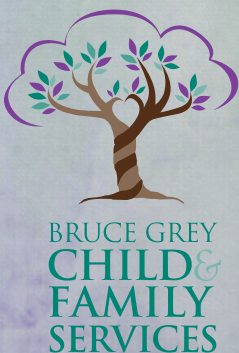
9

Customary Care
Homes

7

Youth in the
Ready, Set, Go
(RSG) program

9



BETWEEN APRIL 1, 2023 AND MARCH 31, 2024
WE HAD:



1310

CASES OPENED TO INVESTIGATION

AT ANY TIME THROUGHOUT THE YEAR, WE HAD:

338

FAMILIES
OPENED AT
ONGOING
SERVICE

3200
to
3500

PEOPLE
INVOLVED
WITH OUR
SERVICES



Vision Statement

Collaborative and caring communities where children and youth are empowered to achieve success with their self-identified families.

Mission Statement

We are dedicated to the well-being and sense of belonging of children and youth through equitable services in collaboration with our community partners.

OUR COMMITMENT TO THIS WORK

In late spring 2023 BGCFS launched an initiative related to a wraparound approach to caring for children and youth with complex needs. This initiative was intended to better meet the needs of children and youth as well as reduce the need for Outside Paid Resources (OPRs – otherwise known as group care). Over the past year a group of foster parents came forward to support the initiative and offered to participate in providing extra support to children/youth and their placement(s) when needed. In order to build skills, we offered specialized training by Anchor Rehabilitation Support Services and twenty-six foster parents are participating in this training. In addition, Family Resource Workers who provide 1:1 support to children and youth when there is a specialized behavior modification program in place are being trained in behavior approaches and implementation of these approaches. We have also focused on a targeted recruitment of new foster families who might be interested in caring for children and youth with complex needs and have some interested potential foster parents who are currently in the review process. In terms of successes, in the past six months one youth exited their group care placement and is now living with their parent. Another youth has moved from an unlicensed placement to a licensed placement

and as a result is receiving more stable care and this new placement also nets the agency a savings of about \$30,000 per month. We are currently working on another plan for a youth to exit their group care placement out of area and return to a foster home placement in this area. We believe that children and youth are best supported within their own family network, however, we also believe they can receive quality out of home care right here in Grey and Bruce and are working hard to make this accessible when it is needed.

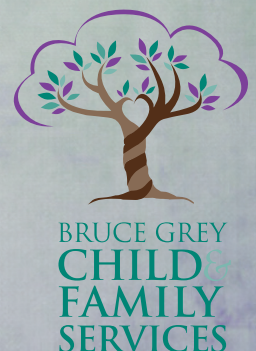


ARE YOU INTERESTED IN BEING A VOLUNTEER?

Volunteers serve in various ways at Bruce Grey Child and Family Services helping to achieve our vision of collaborative and caring communities where children and youth are empowered to achieve success with their self-identified families. Currently volunteers help with drives to appointments, community events and mentoring/tutoring support. Volunteers play an important role in the lives of those we serve. This year with the support of BGCFS volunteers:

- A youth was supported by a volunteer after an emotional day at court.
- Children were driven home by a volunteer driver who responded quickly to an urgent request to pick them up from an unsafe situation.
- Children were driven to access visits with parents and family.
- Community connections were made at various public events.
- A youth received mentoring to support them with their independent studies.
- A high school student was supported in getting to a college tour.
- A teen was provided mentoring and shadowing experience in the profession that they are hoping to pursue.

To learn more about volunteering please fill out an inquiry form on our website: www.bgcfs.ca/volunteer/ or call 519-371-4453.



GET TO KNOW US!

BRUCE GREY CHILD & FAMILY SERVICES

Join us for an afternoon of fun!!

Also, learn how you can support
your community by becoming a
foster parent or volunteer.

**July
30**

1:30 - 4:30pm

Dunsmoor Park, Kincardine

📍 park pavilion

Lot's of games, make your own
sparkle tattoos and other fun crafts.
Fun giveaways and snacks provided

**August
8**

1:30 - 4:30pm

Lions Pavilion, Dundalk

📍 250 Owen Sound St

Sponsored Swim: 2:30 - 4:30

Games & snacks provided
Fun giveaways and much more.

This event will be rescheduled with a rainout date. Check the events page on BGCFS website.

**We're here to answer any questions
you have!**



BRUCE GREY
**CHILD &
FAMILY
SERVICES**

For more information call 1-877-552-4453

Or submit inquiries to:

<https://www.bgcfs.ca/contact-us/>