



## Q1 Executive Director's Report

### GENERAL COMMENTS

Family Service Toronto operated under the Emergency Response Plan for the majority of the reporting period. The Emergency Response Team was activated on March 16, meeting daily during the first six weeks of the pandemic. The Emergency Response Team reverted to weekly Strategy Team meetings in June. Under either banner, the FST management team performed beautifully under pressure. We all did exactly what we needed to do to continue to deliver services and keep staff safe.

The first task was to ensure virtual operations. Within the first week, a majority of the staff were supplied with laptops and VPN access. Work at home policy and guidelines were in place soon after. Services for people with Developmental disabilities were up and running within 2 days. Counselling services managed to move to virtual counselling and group programs within a few weeks. The effort throughout the organization was evident and amazing.

Strategy Team provided daily updates to all FST staff through mid-March, April and May. These shifted to 3 times a week in June and are now weekly. All the while, the regular work of running an organization continued. This included, securing tenants at 355 Church, completing our new Strategic Plan, preparing for our year end, initiating the Employee Engagement Workgroup, and hiring and onboarding new staff.

My thanks to all FST staff for their incredible work in this reporting period. In summary, it has been a period of extraordinary teamwork and professionalism that I will never forget.

### COMMUNITY PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

#### Changing Lives Family Violence

The first quarter of FY2021 saw unprecedented change to the way in which CLFV programs deliver service due to the impact of COVID-19. All programs in this area pivoted from office and community-based work to providing service via phone and videoconferencing. Staff jumped into this new reality and worked hard to ensure service continuity for our clients. Managers were instrumental in providing all the support necessary to make this happen. I am most grateful for the incredible work of every person who works in CLFV programs and also want to thank organizational resource staff for the time and energy they put in to assisting us.

COVID-19 has also precipitated unprecedented change in wider system level work. Many networks worked together to support clients and to find new or enhanced ways of working together. In the Violence Against Women area, MCCSS drew together the VAW Service System Planning Table to focus on moving forward the work of system planning. There was a necessity to establish a community agency member as the co-chair of this committee and Lisa Manuel was commended to this position by her peers. In the area of partner assault program delivery, a void was created once programs were forced to suspend group-based programming due to the pandemic. FST connected with as many clients as possible to conduct check in calls and to assess for safety risks. Many clients expressed their appreciation for this service since, in many cases, we were the only organization providing outreach to

them at this time. At the system level, FST joined in province-wide conversations about service delivery in this area and Toronto Region PAR providers came together, with Lisa Manuel providing leadership to the group.

### **Violence Against Women (VAW)**

During this period, the VAW team focused on meeting the needs of the increasing number of women experiencing challenges related to gender-based violence. The team continued to serve clients over the phone and engaged in video counselling with clients when deemed safe and appropriate. The team facilitated a weekly webinar to promote mindfulness and positive coping strategies and led a one-time webinar to promote self-compassion in times of stress. Funding was received to conduct COVID-19 related radio programming for the Tamil speaking community. The six radio programs covered topics such as gender-based violence, community supports and managing your mental health. The team continues to engage in a pilot law project, where members receive workshops on pertinent VAW law topics from a family lawyer. Team members also consult with the lawyer on specific legal issues their clients are facing. The project is ongoing with a total of 9 workshops offered throughout the course of the project.

### **Community Engagement**

Healthy Families, Healthy Communities program continues to provide programs for youth, women and seniors in the Afghan, Somali, Iranian, Nigerian and Arabic-speaking communities, through zoom and teleconferencing. The Neighbours, Friends and Families GBV, public awareness campaign continues to bring gender-based violence awareness to Latino-Hispanic seniors' communities, in Toronto. It offers virtual and phone-based sessions to both cis and trans identified Latino-Hispanic seniors. MCCSS has allowed us to use unspent funds to buy a laptop and special software, from which we will produce podcasts, and purchase 10 smartphones with 12 months of data plans, for 10 isolated seniors.

The Seniors Community programs, (Illahee Community Connections and Seniors Community Connections) is presently developing a 'Podcasting for Seniors by Seniors' funding proposal for a Seniors Community Grant, worth approximately \$85,000. The successful HFHC community building model, whereby vulnerable individuals and families, living in marginalized and racialized communities, who are at risk of or experience isolation, will be replicated online. Within the context of Covid-19 and through a library of accessible podcasts, the goal of this project is to create virtual communities, in four languages (Dari, Farsi, Somali and Spanish). Podcasts, created by both professionals and trained peers (seniors), will offer seniors opportunities to connect with like-minded others and find the information they need, to make decisions that will increase their sense of well-being and belonging. Community radio broadcasts will inform seniors about the project and on how to access the podcasts.

### **Seniors and Caregivers Support Services**

From April to June, Seniors and Caregivers Support Services (SCSS) focused on meeting the needs of Toronto seniors, many of whom continue to experience isolation due to COVID-19. In collaboration with the Coordinator of Volunteer Resources, the SCSS team developed the Friendly Phone Chat program, where volunteers provide a weekly friendly call to check-in with FST clients. Thirteen volunteers made 174 calls to 26 clients over the 3 months. Team members trained volunteers to provide ongoing support. The team developed a new, ongoing weekly group open to community members called the Seniors Weekly Group Chat. The group provides seniors with a place to connect, talk about their experiences and learn ways to manage their stress and anxiety. Team members also began to hold Zoom groups and individual sessions for clients. Additionally, members participated on the Scarborough Elder Abuse Network and FST run Elder Abuse Consultation Team.

### **David Kelley Services**

The David Kelley Service continues to offer virtual counselling via phone and zoom. The team will begin to work with two students in September. We're in the process of developing a training program for students creating a protocol for virtual supervision and shadowing that includes mock zoom sessions for students to practise basic counselling skills. This is a work in progress and should be completed by September. The emotional skills group continues to operate with clients reporting they appreciate the new delivery (virtual), as this is easier to facilitate in their schedules. Overall, the DKS clients have continued to report the benefits of virtual counselling.

### **Counselling Services**

The counselling team, along with the other clinical teams in Changing Lives Family Violence continue to offer the virtual walk-in. The walk-in offers ten counselling spots daily Monday to Friday. The core walk-in team has been working with counsellors across multiple programs to support them in using the single session model, offering clinical peer support and resources for online training.

Clients are now offered the opportunity to have three single session meetings before accessing the waitlist. When clients are placed on the waitlist, they are given the opportunity to seek support via the virtual walk-in if their circumstances change and they need more immediate symptom management skills.

### **Families in Transition**

The FIT team has been working collaboratively with SAU to virtually meet with all the parents on the waitlist to obtain consent to work with the children. This process has allowed the counsellors to have more room in their schedule to see more clients on a day to day basis. The FIT waitlist for both children and parents has dropped significantly from a wait period of twelve months to three months. The FIT staff attribute this to virtual counselling, stating their clients have felt it fits in more with their busy schedules as parents. The FIT parenting drop-in group will begin in August and offer a virtual peer supported facilitated discussion space for clients who are dealing with challenges of co-parenting and parenting during COVID. The group has received positive feedback from the clients who attended.

### **Social Action**

The focus of Q1 has been a quick pivot to responding to the COVID 19 context. Governments are developing public policy and investing dollars in unprecedented ways. The Campaign 2000 Steering Committee and national coalition have been working collaboratively across the sector to analyse policy and put forward recommendations. On May 5, we sent an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the federal COVID Cabinet Committee that was signed by 254 organizations and individuals from across the country. We put forward recommendations that centre children and families in government response and recovery efforts. This letter led to a meetings with Minister Hussen, minister of Families, Children and Social Development, the All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus (APAPC) of the federal government, subsequent meetings with the APAPC Co-Chair Nathaniel Erskine-Smith and was picked up in the media nationally. Representatives from the steering committee also met with Dan Vandal, Minister of Northern Affairs, which was led by our new member from North West Territories representing Inuit women's issues.

Our work on COVID response and recovery has led the steering committee to focus on three areas:

1. A new campaign that seeks a payment amnesty for people who are low income and have received the Canada Emergency Response Benefit but have subsequently been deemed ineligible

2. Access to benefits for people who are outside of the tax delivery system (people who don't file taxes can't access government benefits and are usually highly marginalized community members/groups)
3. Intentional focus on building and strengthening diverse Indigenous partnerships.

In April 2020, our partners in Manitoba released their annual child poverty report card, and Ontario Campaign 2000 released their annual report card and submitted it to the provincial government as their submission to the provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy consultation.

## **Building Inclusive Communities**

### **Options**

Working is ongoing to reinstating groups and peer support into the Options program.

Options continues to find ways to connect with clients and other service teams. A webinar called Compassion Fatigue and Self Care When the Well is Dry was offered through CMHA to all staff. In the Children's sector, SNAG (Special Needs Advisory Group) has established a sub committee to support clients with immediate requests in the absence of services and supports.

The Options teams are excited to engage in the strategic planning process through conversations about metrics and next steps.

### **Passport**

The Passport team continues to work from home and connect with clients and their caregivers. The focus for our clients during this period has been answering their enquiries around the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) temporary guidelines to the program in response to Covid-19. As part of these guidelines, MCCSS authorized advancing 25% of individuals budget for 20-21 and balance remaining (up to \$1000) from individuals 19-20 budgets. The team is also responding to people around this and explaining the process around submitting invoices for reconciliation as well as explaining how to return funds to FST if they do not want to utilize the advance. The following is a breakdown of voice mail messages left for the team from April to June: April: 1630; May: 1458; June: 1817.

### **PassportONE**

In response to the Pandemic, the Ministry approved temporary changes to the Passport guidelines that allow clients to use their funding for goods and services that may make it easier for them to stay at home during this time and practise physical distancing. In addition to this change, the Ministry also approved advance payments to clients to assist families. Adjustments have been made on CRM to accommodate and manage these changes including functionality, new reports, and advance payment reconciliation process. PassportONE processed over \$70 Million in payments to over 32,500 recipients. The team continued to work remotely and paid over 35,000 claims. The Data Management Team continued to provide monthly investment reports, quarterly reports, and ad-hoc reporting to Passport Agencies.

PassportONE hired an additional fourteen Client Payment Administrators to assist in processing claims, an additional Manager for the client payments team, an Associate Director, and an acting Manager, Systems, Data & Reporting.

Enhancement projects to Transfer Payment Agency Portal and online fillable PDF continued, and both will be rolled out to users by September.

## Knowledge Building

### Evaluation

Work on the implementation of the Resilience project continues. We are currently putting together a report. IRCC has renewed funding for Healthy Families, Healthy Communities 2020-2025. We are working to update the program's evaluation activities to align with IRCC outcomes measures. Annual client satisfaction and exit surveys are a new requirement from MCCSS for the BIC programs. A template was developed and successfully piloted. Full implementation pending.

### Research

Final report for the Caring for Caregivers study was completed and sent to the Ministry. The study protocol paper was peer reviewed and published. FST is part of the Toronto Developmental Services Association (TDSA). This group is coordinating a Sector Pandemic Planning Initiative. FST is a key investigator in two province-wide needs assessment: service agencies and family and other informal caregivers. FST is a participant in a funded, community-based study: The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic Response for People who are Marginalized (MARCO); Strategic Initiatives, University of Toronto. To facilitate timely and relevant FST Response to the COVID-19 crisis, FST is reviewing current literature to examine the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable population we currently serve.

### Grant Submissions

We have received \$240,000 over 3 years from Toronto Urban Health Fund to work with LGBTQ2S+ youth. Funding of just over \$90,000 has been received for various COVID-19 emergency funds made available by the Federal Government. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Fund declined our funding request to continue our pilot research project on women diagnosed with a developmental disability who experienced sexual abuse.

### Students

Recruitment underway for 5 practicum students to start remotely with FST in the Fall.

## ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

### Technology, Communications, Facilities

With continuing office closures and pandemic-related restrictions, our technology focus shifted mostly to supporting staff working from home. This required the purchase and deployment of additional laptops and software licences for virtual meeting software applications such as Zoom and daily online technical support. Planning was also underway for the July configuration and deployment of new devices to replace end-of-life hardware for nightly cloud-based data backups and processes supporting our business continuity strategy.

The department continued to work with the Executive Director on activities relating to the future of the 4th floor at 355 Church and the leasing and design of additional space at Sterling Road to meet the growing needs of PassportONE. The Facilities work will accelerate over the summer with the July approval of a building permit from the City of Toronto and the move of Madison Community Services to leased space on the second floor at 355 Church Street.

The department also drove development of key messaging for external communications relating to FST's response to COVID-19. The department continued to ensure FST's website became the prime channel for updates on everything from our virtual programming to Pride 2020 activities for both clients and staff in tandem with our social media platforms.

**Finance**

During this period, work was completed to close the fiscal year, report on Q4 and prepare for the annual audit.

**Human Resources**

During this period, Human Resources supported PassportOne in the hiring and onboarding of 14 new staff members (Client Payment Administrators) and worked with the union in development of *Physical Distancing and Healthy Practices Guidelines* to ensure and prepare staff for a safe return to work.