

Collective of Child Welfare Survivors



To child welfare survivors, community members, and interested stakeholders,

We are a QTBIPOC child welfare survivor-led grassroots organization called the Collective of Child Welfare Survivors (CCWS), in partnership with the Black Legal Action Centre and funded by the Ontario Trillium Fund's Youth Opportunity Fund.

Today, we are officially re-launching ourselves in a moment of grave need for child welfare survivors in this province, particularly Black, Indigenous, racialized, poor and working-class, Two-Spirit, queer, Trans, Disabled, mad, newcomer children, youth, our families, and our communities. You will notice we use child welfare survivor as a term rather than “youth in care.” The repeated reports on the dangerous, harmful, and deathly conditions and poor life outcomes in child welfare make “care” in this system a myth and an experience that many/most survive.

In November 2018, CCWS inaugurated our presence amid the newly elected Ontario government's announcement that they would be repealing *the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth Act, 2007*, and effectively shutting down an integral advocacy space for children and youth in this province. On the morning of December 5th, 2018, CCWS halted traffic at Queen and Bay Street, the former location of the Office of the Ontario Child Advocate. For 12 minutes we expressed our outrage at such a closure to mark and remember the 12 youth who died that year while directly placed in child welfare.

We didn't express our outrage naively when considering the Office's closure. Our co-creators were consistent critics of the failures of the Ontario Child Advocate and the Office under his direction. The refusal to use its independent mandate to engage child welfare institutions with the teeth and spine that child welfare survivors deserved, and to substantively address issues such as anti-Indigenous and antiBlack racism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism within/outside the Office were our consistent criticisms.

However, in the wake of the Office's closure a significant gap in the protection and advocacy in the daily lives of child welfare survivors and our families continues to exist. Despite the new presence of “youth-led” organizations espousing to represent the interests of children and youth in Ontario, this gap remains unaddressed while these same organizations recirculate child welfare

survivor’s narratives without the implementation of meaningful, substantive, and transformative services and advocacy in response to our needs. We witnessed financial, social, and structural resources funneled into some of these organizations and yet see nothing on the ground.

It is in this context that CCWS intervenes through our re-launch. We do not seek to recreate the Office of the Ontario Child Advocate or just act as a temporary fix to the gaps left behind by the Office and other organizations. Rather, we want to usher in a different understanding and approach to supporting child welfare survivors, families, and broader communities.

Our mission at CCWS is to create and implement an organization that addresses and rethinks child welfare and care for child welfare survivors and families. It is our goal to create spaces for child welfare survivors to develop themselves and their relations beyond the various ways that child welfare survivors get blamed, pathologized, and incarcerated in institutions. Ultimately, it is our goal to think and practice beyond what’s currently decided as practice for child welfare.

CCWS represents, and is a space for, those child welfare survivors, advocates, and community members who are often deemed too radical, who are rarely taken seriously, are stepped on by “professionals” and dismissed for our radical imagining of the future for children, youth, and families.

To find out more about us, visit our website www.collectiveofcws.ca and follow us on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook [@collectiveofcws](https://www.instagram.com/collectiveofcws). We are currently looking for volunteer individual advocates, as well as community partnerships to offer comprehensive support to child welfare survivors and families when we begin to take on cases in January 2022.

We look forward to doing all we can to make our mission a reality, and we hope you’ll join us,

-The Collective of Child Welfare Survivors,

Josh Lamers (he/him), Co-Creator, Executive Lead

Ashley Ash (she/her), Co-Creator, Policy & Community Development Advisor

Rachelle Metatawabin (she/her), Case & Community Development Manager