



**NEW DIRECTIONS**  
FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, ADULTS & FAMILIES



# ROOTED IN CARE

The Impact of Child Home Services  
**PAGE 2**

# THE NORTH STAR

YOUR GUIDE  
TO WHAT'S  
HAPPENING AT  
NEW DIRECTIONS

**WINTER 2025**

# ROOTED IN CARE

## The Impact of Child Home Services

BY KIM KAKEGAMIC



(l) Dr. Alicia Ordóñez, Senior Director of Child Home and Clinical Services  
(r) Leah Sosnowsky, CHS Manager

At New Directions, the Child Home Services (CHS) program is transforming how children, youth, and families receive support. It emphasizes tailored, collaborative care rooted in connection and understanding. This innovative "Roots Approach" is at the heart of CHS's work.

### A Philosophy of Connection and Growth

"When it comes to supporting children and youth, we're probably the most flexible," explains Leah Sosnowsky, CHS Manager. "We always try to meet the kids where they're at. Our goal is to adapt to them and their needs, not have them adapt or change for us." The program isn't about fitting children into predetermined molds. Instead, CHS creates an environment where children can feel safe, loved, and free to pursue their dreams.

**"When it comes to supporting children and youth, we're probably the most flexible."**

This person-centered philosophy is embedded in the Roots Approach, which emphasizes building strong connections as a foundation for growth. "It's about using those connections to give them the tools they need to build skills for a full and fulfilling life," continues Dr. Alicia Ordóñez, Senior Director of Child Home

and Clinical Services. The approach integrates trauma-informed care, child development, attachment, and cultural understanding to develop services that evolve alongside the child or youth.

### A Flexible Continuum of Care

CHS offers a wide range of services, from 24/7 community homes for children to supported independent living for youth transitioning into adulthood. "We try to provide as many opportunities as possible," says Amy Kasin, CHS Manager. "There are a lot of gaps in the system and sometimes we have to get creative. But we're always asking – What are the possibilities here?"

All CHS programs focus on meeting children and youth where they are at. "We support them to keep meaningful connections to family and community, take steps towards reunification whenever possible, heal from past hardships, develop skills to engage in a meaningful life and pursue their hopes and dreams," says Alicia. The specific models range from support in the family home to support outside of the family home in individualized or group settings. CHS is fluid as it walks alongside children, youth, and their circles of influence.

### Key Programs and Services

- 1. Community Homes for Children (CHC):**  
Provides group care homes for children and youth ages 8-18.
- 2. Family Connections (FC):**  
Supports children and youth to continue living with their family or to move into an alternative home (care provider) where they can keep meaningful connections with their birth family and community.
- 3. Family Stepping Stones (FSS):**  
Tailored to families facing significant challenges, FSS collaborates with parents, children, and agencies to build a nurturing home environment. The program supports families in navigating complex factors such as mental health, trauma, and resource limitations.
- 4. Affinity Home:**  
Supports young adults aging out of care to develop a living option with people they have an affinity for and that can support their journey towards adulthood.

**5. Youth Supported Independent Living (Y-SIL):**

Designed to help youth transition to adulthood, Y-SIL offers options ranging from specialized living arrangements with 24/7 support to independent apartments.

**6. Bridge Program:**

A therapeutic out-of-home care model for families with children who have complex needs funded by Children's Disability Services. Parents remain active decision-makers during short-term stays which gives them time to enhance their caregiving skills.



**A Collaborative Team Effort**

The success of CHS lies in its team-based approach, involving children, families, and community partners. "No one does this alone," says Leah. "Our work is about building a team of support around each child and family."

This collaborative effort extends to case managers, clinical teams, support workers, and mentors who work together to adapt services as children and families evolve.

**Looking Ahead**

At its core, CHS is about being responsive and creating opportunities for children and youth to grow, heal, and thrive. "Almost every model we have was a response to one child. If what we offered didn't work for them, we had to sit down and figure out how we could better meet their needs. That is how we have grown," concludes Alicia.

Through its innovative programs and compassionate approach, Child Home Services is transforming lives—one child, one family, and one future at a time.

**"No one does this alone."**

**ROOTED IN CARE**

The Impact of Child Home Services **2**

**CREATING A VILLAGE**

The Heart of Family Stepping Stones **4**

**STEPPING INTO ADULTHOOD**

Finding the Right Fit for Young People Like Lily **6**

**PAUSE FOR PAWS**

How a Few Furry Friends are Bringing Big Smiles to New Direction **8**



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# CREATING A VILLAGE



Halima Wagay, Family Stepping Stones Manager



Youth we support recently collected and donated winter gear to Siloam Mission

## The Heart of Family Stepping Stones BY MADI WESTDAL

When it comes to helping children and families navigate tough challenges, there are few people as dedicated as Halima Wagay. Halima has been with New Directions for over a decade, and was recently promoted to Manager of the Family Stepping Stones program.

"Having a full-time career with New Directions wasn't something I initially planned for," Halima shares. "But once I started, I found a real passion for it. I love being part of a team that's truly making a difference."

Halima's journey with New Directions began as a casual staff member taking overnight shifts. Over the years, she moved from part-time to full-time work and eventually into her current role as Manager with Family Stepping Stones. Her warmth and leadership are evident, and she has made a tremendous impact on her colleagues and the families she works with.

At its core, the Family Stepping Stones program is all about creating a village for children and families in need. Many families face immense challenges—whether due to the legacy of Residential Schools, racism and poverty, or other complex factors such as mental health, trauma, and resource limitations. These difficulties can place children in situations where they may have to enter Child and Family Services (CFS) care.

Family Stepping Stones provides holistic support. The program builds

a team that includes the child or children, parents, relatives, support workers, and CFS, working together to provide the safest and most nurturing environment. It focuses on strengthening parenting skills, establishing routines, and supporting each child's unique needs while embracing culture and tradition.

The program began with just two homes and has now expanded to 20, with more growth on the horizon. Referrals to the program have increased significantly, a testament to its effectiveness but also the immense need.

"Not only do we accept every child that comes knocking, we have never discharged a child due to behaviours. We simply do not do that at Family Stepping Stones. We support them until they transition to adulthood with the skills they need to succeed. This makes us stand out," Halima says, emphasizing the program's long-term impact on children's lives.

One of the things Halima values most about her career is the mentorship and teamwork that have shaped her. "From the first day, I felt connected

**"Having a full-time career with New Directions wasn't something I initially planned for, but once I started, I found a real passion for it. I love being part of a team that's truly making a difference."**

and welcome here. I never felt out of place,” she says. Halima reflects on how knowledge was passed down to her by her mentors and how she now continues that tradition by guiding her own team.

Her gratitude is evident as she describes how her team supports one another, especially when challenges arise. “I am so thankful,” she says. “Whenever there’s a problem, we work together to find solutions.”

# HAVE AN IDEA FOR A STORY?

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## “The only predictable thing about my job is **how unpredictable it is!**”

That collaborative spirit is essential in the Family Stepping Stones program, where the needs are often urgent and complex. “The children and families we support often have nowhere else to go, so we never say no to taking someone in,” Halima explains.

Halima’s dedication goes beyond her professional responsibilities. At one point, she became a foster parent for a child in the program. The young man faced significant challenges, including not enjoying school and feeling a lack of direction. “Things weren’t working

out for him, but I decided to take over as a foster parent. I went in with the mentality of patience and consistency, nurturing and structure. It’s a mentality I use to this day.” With Halima’s care, the young man turned his life around, graduating from school and finding a career path. Now in his 20s, he lives independently in British Columbia, thriving in his career. “He often calls me and tells me he can’t believe how well he’s doing,” Halima says with a smile. “He even wants to reconnect with his family so they can see how far he’s come.”

For Halima, the children she supports are more than just cases—they’re family. “They are all my favorites,” she says. Even when their time with New Directions is over, many children check in with her to share their successes and challenges.

“The only predictable thing about my job is how unpredictable it is,” Halima laughs. But it’s clear that she thrives on those challenges and is ready to take on whatever comes next.



Youth we support visiting Siloam Mission



Backpacks full of winter gear donated to Siloam Mission



Family Stepping Stones builds a team around each child or children to provide holistic support



Lily C., an individual formerly supported by Child Home Services, now with Shift Staffed Homes

# STEPPING INTO ADULTHOOD

## Finding the Best Fit for Young People like Lily

BY KIM KAKEGAMIC AND MADI WESTDAL

Turning eighteen marks a significant milestone for anyone, but for young people aging out of care, it's a journey filled with unknowns. Add to that the need to ensure government funding and new housing are in place, and the journey becomes that much more daunting.

At the age of majority, many children supported by New Directions transition out of Child Home Services and into Adult Services when they are eligible for adult services funding. New Directions' staff are there to make sure these young people don't have to navigate it alone, staff like Case Manager, Ceci DeBraga.

Since joining the team in March, Ceci has already helped 12 youth transition out of Child Home Services. Her role focuses on creating a structured, personalized process for each individual as they move into adult services. With her years of experience in social services, Ceci understands the importance of connecting young people to programs that meet their needs, whether it's housing, education, or employment support.

"It's so important to have a positive outlook," Ceci shares. "My goal is to connect, communicate, and coordinate these transitions. What are their needs and wants, and how can I connect them to that?"

The process starts when a young person turns 16. An internal referral from Child Home Services is sent to Ceci, who works to ensure they qualify for government funding. A large portion of housing support comes

from Community Living disAbility Services (CLdS), which assesses the level of funding needed and helps determine the appropriate adult program placement. But it's not just about securing funding and housing—it's about creating a foundation for a fulfilling life.

One such story is that of Lily, a young woman who has recently gone through this process. Lily's journey is

one of self-discovery, and the search for belonging. It's a story that shows how the right support can turn challenges into opportunities.

Having been supported by Child Home Services for several years, Lily recently transitioned to a Shift Staffed Home with New Directions' Adult Services. This new chapter has been a time of much personal growth for her. "It wasn't always easy. The first few

**"Moving is one of the biggest changes a person can go through. But over time, Lily began feeling more and more at home."**



(l-r) Lily's Support Team: Delowara Islami, Roba Arab, Maria Galvez



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Your generosity this holiday season will help provide basic essentials to those in need, while bringing hope and dignity to the people and families we serve.

We are deeply grateful for your compassion and commitment to our mission and the New Directions community.



weeks were tough,” explains Maria Galvez, one of Lily’s Direct Support Workers. “Moving is one of the biggest changes a person can go through. But over time, Lily began feeling more and more at home.”

Today, Lily has not only built positive relationships with her support workers but has also embraced her independence. She’s rediscovered her passion for writing and participates in various activities that bring her joy such as cooking. One of her recent accomplishments was being part of the Shift Staffed Homes Beautiful Yard Contest.

Known to her friends and supporters as “a lone wolf,” Lily chose to centre her yard design around a wolf. With the help of her support workers, her ideas won her yard second place in the contest. “She’s like a lone wolf finding her pack and she expressed that through the yard,” says Roba Arab, another of Lily’s Direct Support Workers. “We try to help Lily explore her independence, make her own decisions, and build a life that feels like hers.”

**“It’s so important to have a positive outlook.”**

As part of that goal, Lily is preparing for another move next year. She recently expressed a desire for some changes to better suit her needs, and Shift Staffed Homes is working to make them happen. Lily’s story is a reminder of how transitions are about more than just a new address. They’re about building a life that supports education, work, and personal goals. For Lily, the move to a new home is also another step in her journey towards community. She’s excited to meet her new roommates and grow even further as part of her new “pack”.

Lily’s story shows that, with the right support, a transition doesn’t have to be intimidating, it can be just the right step. At New Directions, stories like Lily’s remind us why this work is so important. It’s not just about helping youth find a place to live, it’s about helping them find themselves.



*A feature of Lily’s Beautiful Yard Contest entry*



*Lily’s front yard*



Jennelle Andre-Sealey,  
Resource Administrator, CHS

# PAUSE FOR PAWS

## How a Few Furry Friends are Bringing Big Smiles to New Directions

BY KIM KAKEGAMIC

A love for animals, a spontaneous gathering of puppies, and a request from the youth we support all serendipitously combined to create a wonderful new initiative at New Directions.

“I volunteer with K9 Advocacy Manitoba,” explains Jennelle Andre-Sealey, Resource Administrator in Child Home Services (CHS). “I was transporting my foster puppies and had to bring them to the office for part of the day. Word quickly spread throughout the building, and many people came by my desk for puppy cuddles.”

Observing those interactions reminded Jennelle what a great mood booster and stress reliever time with animals can be. She approached her supervisor, Leah Sosnowsky, CHS Manager, to share the benefits of having therapy animals at the office. Leah and Amy Kasin, CHS Manager, returned to Jennelle with a proposal: create an event, hosted by CHS, where the children and youth we support could interact with animals.

“Even though the ideas weren’t fleshed out yet, I’m not surprised they presented an idea like this,” Jennelle says smiling. “Not only does Leah also love rescue animals, but she is always looking for ways to bring new opportunities to CHS.”

CHS offers support tailored to the specific needs, hopes and circumstances of children and youth. As part of its mandate, it has a Youth Advisory Committee that informs decisions, proposes changes, and submits requests. “One thing the Committee recently asked for was the opportunity to spend time with animals and learn more about animal care,” Jennelle states. “Everything just kind of coincided to create the starting point for Pause for Paws.”

kittens, but it goes beyond that,” Jennelle explains. “There was one young boy with some social anxiety who was hesitant at first and would hardly look at them. But by his third visit, he came out of his shell and was smiling and holding the puppies. Animals really are therapy.”

Jennelle even recounts how a young person who visited the puppies asked to volunteer with K9 Advocacy Manitoba. “She now helps out regularly and is also learning the benefits of volunteering. It’s a win-win.”

**“It’s always great to see everyone interacting with the puppies and kittens, but it goes beyond that.”**

Pause for Paws is now held multiple times throughout the year in partnership with K9 Advocacy Manitoba with Jennelle at the helm. It brings kittens and puppies to New Directions’ head office in Winnipeg and offers anyone connected with New Directions a chance to spend time with them. Play time and cuddles are encouraged, but Jenelle also offers education and information for those interested in helping animals.

While it was created with children and youth in mind, many adults we support and staff have also enjoyed the event, finding moments of calm in their busy days.

With new dates set for the New Year, the initiative continues to grow, and its benefits continue to ripple outward. Pause for Paws is a simple yet profound reminder of how connection—whether with a person or a puppy—can make a world of difference.

“It’s always great to see everyone interacting with the puppies and

