



# CWICE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Global Horizons in Child Welfare  
and Immigration: Bridging Borders  
and Building Futures

**June 12, 2024**

**Pearson Convention Centre  
2638 Steeles Ave E, Brampton, ON**



**CWICE**

Child Welfare Immigration  
Centre of Excellence

# About Us

**At Peel Children's Aid Society (Peel CAS),** we believe that children and youth belong at home with their families and will do everything we can to keep families together. We work with approximately 8,000 families each year, who may be facing challenges such as poverty, unemployment, ill health, domestic violence, mental health issues, or caring for a child who has serious physical, emotional or developmental difficulties. Peel CAS works with the family to determine the kind of supports they need and we link them with the appropriate community services.

Through culturally competent services, with the support of our Peel community, we help parents and caregivers build healthy families and provide a safe environment for children and youth. We believe that children belong with their families, and 99 per cent of our work is done with families and children in their own homes.

**The Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE)** was launched in 2018 by founding partners Peel CAS and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS). CWICE provides services related to a range of immigration-related issues within a child welfare context. These include supporting children and families with unresolved immigration status issues (in care and in the community), unaccompanied and separated children, and providing support for newcomers with children who are experiencing settlement issues.

**We are grateful to our sponsors,** the Peel Children's Aid Foundation and ISS Canada, for their generous support of this conference. Thanks also to our partners, OACAS and the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.



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# AGENDA

Time	Topic	Speaker(s)
8:00 am	<b>Conference registrations open</b>	
9:00 am	Welcoming remarks	Anthony Gladue & Harmony Point Singers
9:15 am	Video message	Hon. Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
9:20 am	Opening remarks	Mary Beth Moellenkamp, CEO of Peel CAS
9:30 am	Lived experience panel: Critical issues facing refugee and immigrant children:	Cheyenne Ratnam (moderator); Fatuma Alyaan; Mugginga Antonio; Bernadine Dockery; Antonella Tersigni, Hayley C.
10:30 am	<b>Break</b>	
10:45 am	Video message	Hon. Mobina S.B. Jaffer, K.C., Senator
10:50 am	Guest speaker	Line Patry, Director, Marketing, Consultations and Public Opinion Research, IRCC
11:20 am	Keynote speaker	Debbie Douglas, Executive Director, OCASI
12:00 pm	<b>Lunch</b>	
1:30-2:45 pm	<b>Workshops - National Focus</b>	
<i>Option 1 Hall A</i>	Supporting UASC: A cross-province perspective	Steve Meagher, CRC; Mandisa Sifelani & Alicja Grabarczyk, CWICE; Karissa-Michelle De Cotiis & Hanieh Shahmohammadian, PRAIDA
<i>Option 2 Halls B &amp; C</i>	National Advocacy: A coalition journey	Danette Edwards, BLAC; Andrew Brouwer, LAO; Sarah Pole and Mary Birdsell (CASA/JFCY)
<i>Option 3 Hall D</i>	International Students, Innovative Programs and Emerging Research	Gurpreet Malhotra, Indus Community Services; Rupaleem Bhuyan, U of T and Border(ing) Practices
<i>Option 4 Meeting Rm 1-4</i>	Research about Role and Training for Child Welfare Professionals	Henry Parada & Kristin Swardh, TMU; Claudia Obreque, CWICE
2:45 pm	<b>Break</b>	
3:00-4:15 pm	<b>Workshops - International Issues</b>	
<i>Option 1 Hall A</i>	Repatriations and Reunifications	Cindy McAlpine & Amanda Pimenta da Silva, GAC; Celistine Frampton, CWICE
<i>Option 2 Halls B &amp; C</i>	Relocation, Long-Distance Parenting, Parental Abduction and Hague	Professor Michael A. Saini, UofT; Caterina Tempesta, OCL
<i>Option 3 Hall D</i>	International Social Service: child protection, family reunification across borders	Sylvie Lapointe, ISS Canada
<i>Option 4 Meeting Rm 1-4</i>	Collaboration Pre- and Post-Arrivals: Government Assisted Refugees	Nadia Sokhan, Polycultural Immigrant and Community Services; Rosario Elmy & Abimbola Fajobi, CWICE
4:20-4:40 pm	Closing remarks	Solomon Owoo, Interim CEO of OACAS
5:00 pm	<b>Survey + Conference ends</b>	

# VIDEO MESSAGES



**Michael Parsa** was elected as the Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) for the riding of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill in June 2018.

Previously, he served as Associate Minister of Housing, and has held various positions within the legislature, including Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, Parliamentary Assistant to the President of the Treasury Board, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Finance, Deputy Government Whip, and Deputy Government House Leader.

In March 2023, he was appointed as Minister of Children, Community, and Social Services by Premier Doug Ford. His mission is to build a community where every individual is valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential. As residents of Richmond Hill, Michael and his wife Valerie have always found meaningful ways to give back to the community.

With his values being rooted in hard work, reliability, and dedication to those he serves, he is sincerely honoured to have the opportunity to represent the priorities and concerns of the residents of Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill in the Ontario Legislature.



**Senator Mobina Jaffer** represents the province of British Columbia in the Senate of Canada. Appointed to the Senate on June 13, 2001 by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, she is the first Muslim senator, the first African-born senator, and the first senator of South Asian descent.

After spending almost a decade as Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Senator Jaffer had the opportunity to lead a number of studies including one on the sexual exploitation of children in Canada and the need for national action. A champion of Canada's linguistic bilingualism, she advocates measures to advance the use of English and French in communities across Canada. As public safety has assumed a significant place in national debate and policy, Senator Jaffer raised awareness on the abuse of profiling in counterterrorism measures and the fundamental imperative to respect privacy, human rights, and the rule of law. Communities are at the heart of any successful policy initiative and progress; Senator Jaffer works to engage communities in protecting human rights, celebrating Canada's diversity, and promoting progress.

Senator Jaffer served as Canada's Special Envoy for Peace in Sudan from 2002 to 2006. From 2002 to 2005, she chaired the Canadian Committee on Women, Peace, and Security. Senator Jaffer is often invited to speak at international conferences on security issues, including at the United Nations Security Council on Resolution 1325, which "urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts" and "calls on all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict." As a grandmother, women's rights and children's rights are central to Senator Jaffer's advocacy.

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER



**Debbie Douglas** is the Executive Director of OCASI - Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. Through her work in the NGO sector and particularly at OCASI, Ms. Douglas has highlighted issues of equity and inclusion including race, gender and sexual orientation within the immigration system and promoted the creation of safe, welcoming spaces within the settlement and integration sector.

A well-known face in Ontario and across the country, Ms. Douglas is often called upon by governments to share her expertise. She was a member of the province of Ontario's Expert Panel on Immigration which published the report *Routes to Success* and led to the province's first immigration legislation (2015); she was also a member of the provincial government's Income Security Reform Working Group, which in October of 2017 published '*Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*'. Ms. Douglas is a member of the Immigration and Refugee Advisory Committee of Legal Aid Ontario and the federal government's National Settlement & Integration Council, co-chairs the City of Toronto's Newcomer Leadership Table and was appointed as a member of the provinces roundtable on Violence Against Women, and co-chaired the provincial Anti-Black Racism subcommittee. She is also currently on the Toronto Community Housing Corporation Board of Directors, as well as the Stephen Lewis Foundation Board of Directors.

She has been the recipient of several awards including the Women of Distinction from YWCA Toronto (2004); the Amino Malko award from the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (2008) the Urban Alliance on Race Relations Anti-Racism Award (2014), the Metropolis National Service Provider award (2017); the Pioneer for Change Award (2017); and the Inspire Awards Lifetime Achievement (2017) from the Toronto and area LGBTI+ Community, and most recently was inducted into the Order of Canada (2023).



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## GUEST SPEAKERS



**Solomon Owoo** was appointed as Interim CEO of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) in August 2023. Prior to his appointment, Solomon was the Director of Finance and IT at OACAS for 2.5 years. In that capacity, he led the organization's finance and IT portfolios, as well as played a key role in many important sector initiatives including the Child Welfare Funding Formula, the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN), the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) project, and Shared Services. Solomon has professional designations as a Certified Chartered Accountant (FCCA) and a Certified Internal Auditor (CIA).

As a self-motivated, big picture business professional with over 20 years of progressive experience in finance, governance, strategic management performance management, financial management, auditing, internal controls, and investigations, Solomon uses his strong analytical abilities and strategic thinking, his keen eye for detail, and his desire for continuous improvement to achieve results.

Solomon's career has spanned 3 continents in healthcare, government, public practice, petroleum, information technology, seniors and the children's services sectors. Solomon's leadership style is founded on his core values of respect, integrity and excellence.

Outside of work, Solomon is an active volunteer in his community, currently serving on the boards of directors of both Associated Youth Services of Peel and Our Place Peel. He previously served as a member of the board and Chair of the Finance Committee at Peel Children's Aid Society.



**Beth Moellenkamp** is an accomplished professional and inspiring leader who has dedicated her career to helping children, youth, and families in Peel Region and beyond. The agency's first female CEO, Beth's vision and commitment to partnership, community collaboration, and transparency, are well known and respected throughout the community. Together with our partners and service teams, Beth has led and implemented large-scale initiatives that have had wide-ranging impacts across the child welfare sector. Just a few of these initiatives include establishing the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE), creating the Trailblazers Youth Centre, and leading the child welfare sector's provincial Syrian Refugee Response. Beth is an outcome driven leader who continually strives to innovate, influence, and transform services and supports. She believes actions speak louder than words and ensures that equity, anti-racism and Truth and Reconciliation are at the centre of the agency's practices. Beth is fully committed to addressing anti-Black racism, racism, and all forms of oppression and discrimination against Indigenous, racialized, and 2SLGBTQ+ children, youth, and families, and all equity-deserving communities. Beth holds a Master of Social Work (MSW) from the University of Windsor and is a life-long resident of Peel Region.



**Line Patry** is Director of Marketing, Consultations and Public Opinion Research at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

Line Patry has been responsible for overseeing the management of IRCC's annual research program to assess Canadian perceptions of immigration since 2012. She has been fundamental in the development of the Immigration Matters initiative, which showcases the stories of immigrants who are making a strong contribution to cities, towns and neighbourhoods across Canada. She also currently oversees numerous advertising campaigns and is responsible for managing stakeholder consultations for the department.

From 2017 to 2023 she was also responsible for Social Media for the department and led a number of significant changes and initiatives, including significantly growing IRCC's social media presence, building the government's first social care function and implementing a client service Chabot that uses machine learning and artificial intelligence to answer general questions.

She has held public opinion research, advertising, marketing and federal-provincial-territorial engagement positions at Industry Canada and Environment Canada.

Mrs. Patry has a Bachelor of Arts degree with a Concentration in Communication from the University of Ottawa, and worked as a public opinion and market research professional for a decade before joining the public service.



**Harmony Point Singers** is an esteemed collective that boasts exceptionally talented vocalists from the Toronto area. Recognized for their unwavering dedication to excellence, Harmony Point Singers bring musical artistry and culture to every event they attend. Discover Elegance!



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# LIVED EXPERIENCE PANEL



## MODERATOR

**Cheyenne Ratnam** is passionate about equity, developing inclusive and accessible anti-racist spaces and processes, and social innovation. As a social entrepreneur she has dedicated much of her life/expertise in child welfare, homelessness, & equity issues. She is passionate about youth homelessness, child welfare, Social Determinants of Health, childhood sexual abuse, Gender-Based Violence, youth development, equity, anti-racism, & human rights issues. Her life experiences spanning various identities and histories sparked much of her life's work and recognition. (2016: 'One To Watch' Alumni Award, one of the highest accolades, York University; 2017: 1 of 3 'Women Who Inspire' (International Women's Day), United Way of Greater Toronto; 2024: 'Alumni of Distinction' Award, Centennial College.)

She is the Co-founder & CEO of the Ontario Children's Advancement Coalition. Member of the Equity & Inclusion Council of the Children's Aid Foundation of Canada, board of Scarborough West Community Legal Clinic, and Association of Community Legal Clinics of Ontario's Race-Equity Working Group. She is an Associate at the KOJO Institute, Child Welfare Equitable Standards Evaluation Model Research Assistant, and is an advocate re: Childhood Sexual Abuse & GBV/IPV - survivor of both. She is the provincial rep on the National Council of Youth in Care Advocates, Board Vice President of Youth In Care Canada, serves on the Canadian Consortium on Child & Youth Trauma CAC and recently joined 360°Kids' Board Government & Stakeholder Board Committee. She is an Advisor Board Member of Spotlight: Child Welfare, an independent consultant, engagement specialist, capacity builder, media commentator, public speaker, and partakes in various communities via volunteerism.



**Fatuma Alyaan** is a former Child in Care who is passionate about supporting children who were previously in the care of the child welfare system and were exposed to systemic trauma. She is a great advocate for children without immigration status who were in the child welfare system and are ultimately facing deportation due to their criminality. She was recently a speaker at the Senate of Canada, advocating for Bill S-235 to be passed. This Bill aims to provide Citizenship for children without immigration status when they transition out of the child welfare agency. Fatuma is a mother who spends her free time with her wonderful children.



**Antonella Tersigni** is a Senior Social Worker. Antonella has a Bachelor of Social Work degree from Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University). She has been with Maple Star since 2007 as a case manager. Antonella supports foster families and the children in their care in addition to mentoring new staff.





**Bernadine M Dockrey** is a 54-year-old mother of two (31 and 21), who arrived in Canada in 2017, as a visitor. Unexpectedly, her son Jordan (autistic, and 14 at the time) had a meltdown during a family vacation to Canada from their home country Jamaica. Bernadine and her family tried desperately to get Jordan home. Several attempts were made and they even sought medical assistance. It was to no avail. Her son was stuck in Canada, forcing the separation of the family, while Bernadine returned home, to prepare herself for the inevitable move to Canada. Her adult daughter who lived in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida moved to Canada temporarily, to help with Jordan's care.

It was difficult, being undocumented in Canada with no way out. As the family tried navigating through this difficult time, they had their first contact with Peel CAS. With their unwavering support, Jordan was able to enroll in school, the family was able to settle into their new life in a foreign country; eventually, Her daughter moved back to Fort Lauderdale, and Jordan and Bernadine pursued permanency in Canada, on Humanitarian & Compassionate grounds. Now, Bernadine and her son are managing well. Jordan has graduated from school and stays with his mom while she works. Bernadine obtained a Culinary Management Certificate, and aside from working full time, organizes a monthly food hamper drop-off for refugee families in need. In her daughter's words, "Although life is not perfect, it has brought out the resilience of this family, who are grateful for the opportunities they have been given".



**Hayley C.** lives in Toronto with her Husband, their four kids, and two dogs. Hayley has worked for a Christian non-profit organization that helps newcomers settle in Canada for the past 15 years. In 2020, she and her husband became kinship caregivers to their now-adopted daughter, Rojin. The entire family is very active in the community and their Church.

## SPECIAL THANKS

**Thanks to all our speakers and everyone who helped out behind the scenes to make this conference a reality:**

### **Conference Planning Group:**

Abimbola Fajobi  
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### **Conference Co-Chairs**

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Mohamed Shaw  
Peter Almounauar  
Shane Vieira  
Tariq Khan  
Zrinka Buric  
Virender Kumar

# WORKSHOP SPEAKERS



**Karissa-Michelle De Cotiis** is social worker with experience in child protection and refugee care, currently working within the Integrated University Health and Social Services Centres in Montreal, Quebec. After completing her Master's degree in social work at McGill University in 2019, Karissa began her career at the Regional Program for the Settlement and Integration of Asylum Seekers (PRAIDA). She spent 4 years working on the unaccompanied minors team, offering psychosocial follow up to asylum seeking minors from their arrival into their settlement in Quebec. She is now team leader of this team, building on her skillset of intercultural intervention, trauma-informed care, and clinical support. Passionate about developing meaningful cross-sectoral partnerships and understanding global migration trends, she is devoted to developing processes and applying best practice to support unaccompanied and separated children in their integration into Canada.



**Steve Meagher** works as Director at the Centre for Refugee Children. The Centre provides settlement services and legal support to refugee children and youth in Ontario. He also chairs the Unaccompanied and Separated Children Network, which brings together organizations from various sectors to address issues and barriers that unaccompanied refugee children and youth continue to face across the province. Prior to establishing the Centre for Refugee Children in 2021, he worked as Shelter Manager at Christie Refugee Welcome Centre, an emergency shelter for refugee claimant families in Toronto.



**Hanieh Shahmohammadian** holds a Master of Social Work from McGill University, specializing in Families and Children. She has two years of experience counseling Indigenous children and their families, leading parenting groups at a readaptation center, and conducting research to enhance family support services. Hanieh's community service includes organizing workshops on child protection for immigrant communities and contributing to a symposium on the education system for immigrant youth and families. With over four years of clinical social work experience in hospital settings, Hanieh supported patients facing cancer and mental health challenges, focusing on improving caregiver support. Academically, she conducted an independent study on mental health support for second-generation immigrant adolescents through an ecosystemic and cultural humility lens and served as a teaching assistant for two clinical courses at McGill. Currently, Hanieh is honored to work with the unaccompanied minors team at PRAIDA.



**Danette Edwards** graduated Osgoode Hall Law School at York University in 2022. She acquired broad legal experience in the clinic system, with the provincial government and in the private sector. Danette has extensive litigation experience and has appeared before administrative tribunals, and all levels of court in Ontario, including the Divisional Court and the Court of Appeal. Prior to joining the Black Legal Action Centre, Danette was a family lawyer for over twenty years.



**Andrew Brouwer** is Senior Counsel at Legal Aid Ontario's Refugee Law Office. He leads LAO's law reform and test case strategy to improve access to justice in the area of refugee and immigration law, while maintaining a practice focused on particularly vulnerable non-citizens and complex constitutional litigation. He appears before all levels of court and tribunal in Canada as well as United Nations treaty bodies. He is deeply engaged in the campaign to halt removal and grant citizenship to noncitizens who were previously in the care of child welfare agencies in Canada.



**Sarah Pole** (she/her) Childhood Arrivals Support & Advocacy Program (CASA) Justice for Children and Youth (JFCY). Sarah is the Founder and Director of JFCY's CASA program. She has extensive experience in youth justice education and has focused in particular on youth facing personal and systemic barriers to chosen futures, and on increasing legal sector diversity. Prior to migrating to Canada in 2002, Sarah practiced family, employment and immigration law in New Zealand. Her former roles include Executive Director of the Law in Action Within Schools (LAWS) Program and Director of Education for the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. Sarah's work on behalf of young people has been recognized with awards including the 2024 Ontario Justice Education Network's Chief Justices' Award, a Law Foundation of Ontario Community Leadership in Justice Fellowship, and a Toronto Foundation Vital People Award.



**Mary Birdsell, B.A., LL.B.**, is the Executive Director of Justice for Children and Youth (JFCY). Mary has been a lawyer at JFCY since she was called to the Bar of Ontario in 1996. She is one of Canada's leading experts on children's rights in a broad array of legal subjects; in particular, with expertise on the application of the UN Convention on the Rights of Children in domestic law. For over 25 years she has been a tireless advocate for individual young people facing significant adversity.



**Gurpreet S. Malhotra** has been a professional in Human Services for over 33 years and is currently the Chief Executive Officer at Indus Community Services, which is a leading provider of culturally responsive community and health services. The agency has seven locations in Peel and Halton just west of Toronto and a dedicated staff complement of over a hundred and forty.

Preceding that, he was the principal of his own consultancy and worked at the Region of Peel as the Director of Strategic Planning, Policy and Partnerships in the Human Services Department. Prior to that, he served as a Senior Policy Advisor at the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Gurpreet has more than a decade of experience as a Professor and Program Coordinator of the innovative Community Development Diploma Program at the Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning where he also served as a Human Rights Advisor. He also holds two degrees in Public Policy and Administration and appears frequently in National and Local news as a community advocate on behalf of the many communities he serves.





**Rupaleem Bhuyan** is a Professor in Social Work at the University of Toronto where she teaches community practice, social action, and qualitative research methods. She brings over 20 years of experience working with im/migrant communities who are organizing for rights, safety, and belonging. Dr. Bhuyan's scholarship examines gender-based violence and structural inequities produced through immigration policies and how social and health service providers can better support immigrants who have a precarious immigration status. As an educator and researcher, Dr. Bhuyan is deeply committed to feminist, anti-racist, decolonial approaches to transforming systems that perpetuate inequality and discrimination, while promoting justice and equality for all.



**Henry Parada, PhD** is a cross-appointed professor at Toronto Metropolitan University's School of Social Work and the Immigration and Settlement Graduate Program, and Graduate Program Director (ISS). He has worked and published in the area of child protection and governance of workers and clients, institutional ethnography, the construction of subject locations, and community social work. He has co-edited two books on anti-oppressive research and practice and has recently published a co-authored book, *Central American Young People Migration: Coloniality and Epistemologies of the South*. Presently, Dr. Parada is the principal investigator of a multi-year project working with six Central American and Caribbean countries and their diasporas in Canada in areas of youth migration, child welfare, and violence against youth.



**Kristin Swardh** has a Master of Social Work degree specializing in Social Justice and Diversity from the University of Toronto. Kristin's professional practice includes engaging with social issues surrounding gender equity, human rights, anti-racism and child welfare. Kristin's work has taken her across Canada and the African continent with work in government, academia, and non-profit sectors. Her most recent research with the Rights for Children and Youth Partnership (RCYP) focuses on the intersections of child welfare, immigration, and the justice systems.



**Professor Michael A. Saini** is a full professor at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work and cross-appointed with the Faculty of Law at the University of Toronto (Associate Professor). He holds the endowed Factor-Inwentash Chair in Law and Social Work and is the Co-Director of the combined J.D. / M.S.W. program. Prof. Saini has over 200 publications, including books, published articles, and book chapters that address the well-being of children and their families in systems governed by law, especially family law and child welfare. Prof. Saini is the President-Elect of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC), a Board Member of Access for Parents and Children of Ontario (APCO), Family Mediation Canada (FMC), and the Canadian Coalition of the Rights of the Child (CCRC). He is also an Associate Fellow of the International Academy of Family Lawyers. In 2019, he was awarded the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts' Stanley Cohen Distinguished Research Award, sponsored by the Oregon Family Institute.





**Caterina Tempesta** is senior counsel at the Office of the Children's Lawyer (OCL) where she provides legal representation to children and youth in family law and child protection matters at all levels of court, including cases where constitutional, human rights, immigration and international law issues intersect. She acted in *Office of the Children's Lawyer v. Balev*, 2018 SCC 16, a Hague abduction Convention proceeding, and participated in interventions on behalf of the OCL in *F. v. N.*, 2022 SCC 51, a non-Hague return matter, and *Barendregt v. Grebliunas*, 2022 SCC 22. She also acted as co-counsel for the children in *AMRI v. KER*, 2011 ONCA 417, and *MAA v. DEME*, 2020 ONCA 486, cases involving return applications in the face of positive and pending refugee claims.

Cathy is active in organizations and activities focusing on the advancement of children's rights. She is the current Chair of the Canadian Bar Association Child and Youth Law Section and is a member of its Committee on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which oversaw the development of the CBA Child Rights Toolkit, an on-line resource for legal professionals. In 2019, Cathy completed her LL.M. in Advanced Studies in International Children's Rights at Leiden University in the Netherlands.



**Nadia Sokhan** has an international master's degree in psychology and over two decades of progressive experience in the non-for-profit sector. She currently holds the Director of Programs Development and Strategic Partnerships position with Polycultural Immigrant and Community Services. Nadia is an expert in developing and evaluating employment, settlement and resettlement programs, language training, and gender based violence programs for newcomers, refugees, isolated seniors and at-risk youth. Nadia has led many initiatives involving partners from healthcare, VAW and employment sectors. Nadia was chairing the Women Against Violence action group of Toronto West Local Immigration Partnership, is a member of the Newcomer Leadership Table and Collective Impact working group.



**Sylvie Lapointe** is the Executive Director of International Social Service Canada (ISS Canada). Sylvie started working for ISS Canada as a part-time social worker in 2001. With now 22 years of experience, she has worked on numerous cross border cases and continues today to provide insight on high level cases at the ISS Canada office. For the last 5 years, Sylvie has served as the vice-chair of the ISS Professional Advisory Committee and has been the Master Trainer for the ISS Network, training new members and partners from across the globe on cross border casework methodology. Sylvie had the opportunity to travel to Africa as she contributed to ISS global project 'A better future is possible' in Mauritius (2015 and 2016) and she worked with ISS General Secretariat staff to provide training on child protection, children's rights, and adoption in Guinea in July 2017. Sylvie was given a special award from a Canada based regional police association for her role in the successful return of two Canadian children who had been wrongfully detained by their parent in a foreign country.



**Cindy McAlpine** is the Deputy Director for the Vulnerable Clients unit in consular operations at Global Affairs Canada. She has worked in international development, consular, and emergency management for the last 24 years in a range of countries for Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and a number of international non-governmental organizations.



**Amanda Pimenta da Silva** works as the Consular Liaison and Partnerships Coordinator in consular operations at Global Affairs Canada. Originally from Brazil, she studied International Human Rights Law in Egypt, worked with a refugee resettlement in Cairo and as a Consular Officer at the Irish Embassy in Canada.

## CONFERENCE CO-CHAIRS & MCs



**Liz Okai, RSW** (she/her & grateful to be on Treaty 3 land). Liz has a BSW from McMaster University and an MSW from the University of Toronto. She is a dedicated child welfare professional and leader with nearly 20 years of experience. Liz currently co-manages the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence, overseeing its operations and strategic vision, and significantly advancing knowledge and understanding of the intersection of child welfare and immigration. Liz promotes equity in practice through research, education, advocacy, and collaborative partnerships. She strongly advocates for including migration histories and stories in child welfare assessments to ensure timely and successful resolutions of immigration status, settlement, and integration challenges for children, youth, and families. Additionally, Liz is a part-time faculty at Sheridan College, where she teaches Migration and Settlement Studies.



**Danielle Ungara, RSW** (she/her & is grateful to be on Treaty 13 land). Danielle's professional experience spans two decades and includes social work, leadership, and program management. Danielle currently co-manages the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE), which offers services across Ontario, provides training and research nationally, and operates an international consultation centre. Danielle's portfolio encompasses service, strategies for capacity building, communications and data, research, and partnership development. Danielle has consulted widely on policy and legislative changes, and she has been invited to speak about the rights of children/youth and system innovation. Danielle currently sits on a number of multi-year advisory panels including equity integration for the profession of social work with the Ontario Association of Social Workers. As well, Danielle is a Contract Lecturer with the School of Social Work at Toronto Metropolitan University.

# CWICE REPRESENTATIVES



**Mandisa Sifelani** is a Child Welfare Immigration Specialist at Peel CAS' Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence. Mandisa specializes in immigration matters at CWICE and focuses on supporting newcomer families and unaccompanied or separated children, aiding in the regularization of their immigration status and ensuring their safe transition into Canadian life. Mandisa prioritizes the Best Interests of the Child, emphasizing their perspective and needs within the child welfare system. Mandisa co-led focus groups and the report, funded by IRCC, is entitled *Unaccompanied and Separated Children Under CUAET: A call to position Canada as Best in Class Leader in the protection and welfare of children & youth.*



**Alicja Grabarczyk** is a Child Welfare Immigration Specialist at Peel CAS' Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence. Alicja joined Peel CAS in 2011, as a child protection worker, and joined CWICE in 2018 just prior to its launch. Alicja has been a Child Welfare Immigration Specialist for over five years and co-manages the international consultation centre. Alicja has always pursued immigration-related courses as part of her post-secondary studies, and on-going professional development. This includes obtaining a certificate in Customs and Immigration from Humber College and she previously worked in the settlement service sector. In 2023, Alicja had the opportunity to testify about the positive impact of Senate Bill S-235, during community consultations co-hosted by Senator Mobina Jaffer and Peel CAS' CWICE. In 2022, Alicja worked on the CWICE project team that published recommendations supporting a national framework for UASC. Alicja co-led focus groups and the report, funded by IRCC, is entitled *Unaccompanied and Separated Children Under CUAET: A call to position Canada as Best in Class Leader in the protection and welfare of children & youth.*



**Claudia Obreque** holds a Master of Social Work degree and boasts over 30 years of rich experience in the social services sector. Claudia joined as the pioneering staff member in the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE) established in 2018. In this role, Claudia emerged as a subject matter expert, co-developing an 8-course certificate program. She later developed programs to support foster caregivers' learning in 2022 and professionals across other sectors in 2023. Throughout her career, she has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to serving vulnerable populations, including victims of intimate partner violence, new immigrants, refugees, and individuals living in Canada without immigration status. In her role as a Child Welfare Immigration Specialist and Lead Trainer in CWICE, Claudia champions awareness of the intricate nexus between child welfare, immigration, settlement, and border-related issues across Canada and was recently appointed as an Adjunct Professor in the School of Social Work at York University in 2023. Claudia continues to mentor and inspire the next generation of social work professionals, leaving a lasting impact on the field.





**Celistine Frampton** is a dedicated Registered Social Worker and Child Welfare Immigration Specialist at Peel Children's Aid Society, playing an integral role in the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence. Celistine co-chairs CWICE's Immigration Status Project, examining the intersecting identities of children, youth, and young adults living in out-of-home care. Celistine also provides training to child welfare professionals through the CWICE certificate series program. Her passion for writing, research, and advocacy work drives her commitment to ensuring the well-being of vulnerable children and families in need.



**Rosario Elmy** is currently a Child Welfare Immigration Specialist with the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence at Peel CAS. She has worked with Peel CAS for 13 years, and during this time she has had the opportunity to work in various departments with the agency including as a Family Placement Worker, Case Conference Facilitator, Community Engagement Presenter, and with the Syrian Refugee Response Project. She has developed an ongoing relationship with the settlement sector to provide services to families in the community. Her educational background is in Marriage and Family therapy and School Counseling. In her current role, she has worked closely with various organizations at the local, provincial, and federal levels, including CBSA, IRCC, IRB, Global Affairs Canada, other children's aid societies, and OACAS. Rosario is bilingual and bicultural.



**Abimbola Fajobi** is a Child Welfare Immigration Specialist in the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence at PCAS. Abimbola joined PCAS in 2017, and joined CWICE in 2018 as a protection worker. In 2022, Abimbola transitioned into her current role where she continues to collaborate with child welfare professionals and community partners in supporting children, families and youth in navigating their immigration status in Canada. Additionally, she co-leads the Citizenship Project which aims to support youth navigating Citizenship, with a focus on supporting those who are criminalized. Abimbola is a Registered Social Worker who holds a Master of Social Work degree and a Master of Art in Globalization Studies.



**Prasad Nair** is the Director of Youth Success and Innovation at Peel CAS, and project sponsor for this conference.

With over 25 years of leadership experience in Child Welfare, Family Well-being, and Human Resources Management across both for-profit and non-profit sectors, Prasad Nair is a dedicated and experienced professional. He holds a Master of Social Work and a Bachelor of Law degree from India, as well as a Master of Social Work from York University.

Currently, Prasad oversees a diverse portfolio that includes the Child Welfare Immigration Centre of Excellence (CWICE), Youth Success initiatives, Trailblazers Youth Centre, and Volunteer Services. He also serves on the Peel Children's Aid Foundation board as the Peel CAS liaison, demonstrating his commitment to fostering positive outcomes for children and youth.



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