



For Immediate Release:

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LOCAL BUSINESS STANDUP SPEAKUP SUPPORTS BETTER FUTURES FOR KIDS IN CARE

OAKVILLE – Today the [Child Welfare Political Action Committee Canada](#) (Child Welfare PAC), a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization of former youth in care, accepted a generous gift of \$7,500 from mother and son and co-founders of [Stand Up Speak Up](#), Karla and Zach Tolstoy of Oakville, to support better futures for kids raised in foster care.

Research over four decades paints a continually bleak future for foster kids. Too often outcomes for youth who age-out of care include low academic achievement, unemployment, poverty, homelessness, poor physical and mental health, and loneliness. The pandemic has exacerbated these difficulties for people raised in care.

Karla explains, "With Stand Up Speak Up, it is our mission to support organizations working toward change and from the moment I became aware of CWPAC, I was inspired by their work. I have volunteered with at-risk youth, in mental health and addiction services and with organizations fighting against trafficking and abuse and through these experiences have met many who grew up in the foster care system. We need to do more to protect these children and ensure they have equal opportunities after aging out of care."

"Better futures for Ontario's most vulnerable youth require a system that is evidence-based, outcomes focused, trauma-informed, and respects the privacy rights of youth who have aged-out of care," said Jane Kovarikova, the founder of the Child Welfare PAC and PhD Candidate at Western University.

The Child Welfare PAC relies on private donations to operate. This funding will go directly to activities supporting policy and legislative changes that will systematically improve life outcomes for youth raised in care – especially the advocacy work surrounding tuition waivers for current and former foster kids at universities and colleges across Canada. With McMaster University being the latest to come on board last week, Child Welfare PAC has now secured 150+ tuition-free places at 12 schools in 4 provinces.

"Our goal is that every college and university coast-to-coast steps up and makes more opportunities for current and former foster kids. After such a rough start, a little help to level the playing field when these students are ready makes all of the difference," said Kovarikova.

"Stand Up Speak Up is leading by example. Karla and Zach know it takes a village to ensure the most vulnerable children in our communities succeed after care," concluded Kovarikova.

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Karla and Zach Tolstoy, co-founders for Stand Up Speak Up, Oakville

Ontario Quick Facts

- There are 12,000 children in state care in Ontario.
- About 60% of foster youth drop-out of high school.
- Each year, about 1,000 exit the system or rather “age-out” – typically at age 18.
- From age 18 to 21, youth receive an allowance of approximately \$875/month.
- At age 21, foster youth are expected to be fully independent, credentialed, and career-ready for life as contributing members of society - unrealistic expectations.
- If studies bear out, only 80 of 400 qualified foster youth pursue higher education each year.
- Stand Up Speak Up’s contribution will support Child Welfare PAC’s work in making post-secondary studies more accessible to current and former foster kids.

About [Child Welfare PAC](#)

The Child Welfare PAC is a federal not-for-profit that represents the interests of children raised by the government. The advisory committee consists of professionals from academia, law, business, advocacy & public service who have lived experience in child protection systems. The complete advocacy agenda may be reviewed here: www.childwelfarepac.com

About [Stand Up Speak Up](#)

Stand Up Speak Up is a family-owned company started by mother and son, Karla and Zach Tolstoy after Karla’s diagnosis with Stage 4 Metastatic Breast Cancer. All of our products were created to inspire acts of kindness and promote hope, healing giving, and gratitude and all proceeds are donated back to community groups and initiatives.



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