



Family and Children's
Services Niagara

Les Services à la famille
et à l'enfance de Niagara

Family and Children's Services Niagara

Strategic Plan 2015-2019

May 27, 2015

Context for the Strategic Planning Process

In the spring, 2014, the Board of Directors and Executive Director of Family and Children's Services (FACS) Niagara initiated an internal process to assess the status of the 2010 - 2014 Strategic Plan.

The Board, supported by the Executive Director and Executive Team, conducted a detailed analysis of our current plan to aid in determining our next multi-year strategic planning process. We examined the organization's Mission, Vision, Values and Operating Beliefs as articulated in the most recent plan. We also conducted a thorough appraisal of progress made on the six existing Strategic Directions, and related Goals and Initiatives that stemmed from these Directions.

The Board and senior management group concluded that the existing Mission, Vision and Values and Operating Beliefs remained highly relevant and appropriate to continue as foundational elements of a "refreshed" Strategic Plan. Consequently, our approach did not require a complete overhaul of the previous plan. Instead, we have decided to build upon and consolidate some of our previous priorities, and also consider new, emerging opportunities.

FACS Niagara has been diligent in tracking our progress on Strategic Directions. Overall, considerable advancement has been achieved, with some areas being more fruitful than others. Below, we provide a brief summary of these directions and a comment on the status of each:

Direction #1 expressed a commitment to FACS Niagara *making greater internal and external collaboration a major priority*, as stakeholder feedback had indicated that FACS needed to improve in this regard. In this latest planning exercise, we were pleased to receive positive feedback from several service partners who confirmed that FACS has made headway in creating stronger linkages through regular participation in a range of service forums and initiatives. Similarly, many of our staff also reported a sense of accomplishment in this regard.

Direction #2 represented our intention to *become a leader in providing effective community services* – this direction is closely linked to the first item, since closer collaboration with other services can in itself increase effectiveness of service. Several respondents offered that they placed a high value on our staff contributions in various community problem-solving and service planning activities.

Direction #3 identified our desire to *strengthen our organizational health and accountability*. Many internal participants reported that positive strides have occurred in this regard: notably, people referenced the increased resources dedicated to continuous quality improvement and a new performance management system as examples of our commitment to developing a culture of accountability. However, workload demands and administrative requirements remain areas of concern for many staff.

Direction #4 spoke to our commitment to *bolster our governance capabilities* to support top-level stewardship. Once again, a wide range of internal participants at the board and senior management level identified the implementation of a new board composition, structures and practices as being successful in achieving even greater board engagement and performance.

Direction #5 advanced the notion of *improving the public communication of our mandate, role and specific services* to the broader Niagara community. In part, this stemmed from a greater appreciation of the significant growth experienced by FACS in a compressed period. In addition, earlier feedback indicated that we had not done enough to ensure community awareness of all our available services and supports. Careful preparation went into creating an internal "Speaker's Bureau" through which staff were equipped to function as agency 'Ambassadors', conveying information through a variety of forums. These efforts have also served to develop a cadre of highly effective, experienced presenters.

Direction #6 voiced our commitment to *developing a more active and public advocacy role* for children, youth, adults and families in this Region. In acknowledging our Region-wide role and participation in numerous service areas, we have increased our deliberate role – sometimes in a visible leadership capacity, other times in a supportive fashion - to advocate in the interests of the Niagara Region.

Re-freshed Strategic Plan: Methodology

In January 2015, the Board of Directors engaged external consultants to support a re-refresh of our last Strategic Plan. A Situational Analysis was compiled that identified the organization's key internal strengths and limitations or weaknesses, and highlighted external opportunities to be considered, as well as outside challenges or threats that could compromise organizational performance. Board members, front-line staff, foster parents and managers at all levels across the organization participated in interviews and/or small group forums. As well, a number of community partners, including funders and service colleagues contributed to this exercise. Major socio-economic factors impacting the Niagara Region were revisited to better understand the immediate operating environment and its potential influence on the nature and scope of our work. Several meetings were conducted with the Board of Directors, Executive Team and other managers to review and discuss key findings and assess their implications for going forward. These efforts concluded in May 2015, with the Board of Directors' approval of this revised set of Strategic Directions and related Goals. Over the next several months, many staff will participate in the development and implementation of specific, measurable Objectives.

Key Findings

The External Operating Environment:

The Niagara Region continues to experience many socio-economic challenges. Some key indicators have in fact worsened since our last Strategic Plan. Between 2008 and 2012, the Region has experienced a 38% increase in the use of food banks, with fully 1/3rd of users being children. Employment Insurance recipients have climbed from 8,500 in 2004 to 13,800 in 2014. Families relying upon social assistance have also increased: in the 10 year period from 2004 – 2014, the number of individuals in Niagara on Ontario Works has risen from around 7,000 to approximately 11,000. Similarly, the caseload for individuals reliant upon the Ontario Disability Support Program has increased from 8,500 in 2004 to some 14,000 in 2013. Overall population growth has been lower than the increases observed in these identified risk factors.¹

¹ The most recent overall population statistics are obtained from the Statistics Canada 2011 Census. Total population at that time was 431,346, reflecting only a modest increase from 427,421 reported in 2006.

2011 statistics concerning formal educational attainment indicated Niagara has an above average proportion of workers without high school completion, and the highest proportion of employees in Ontario possessing only a high school diploma. The Region also has the second lowest proportion of workers in the province that have completed post-secondary education.²

In terms of overall economic performance, the CIBC World Markets Metropolitan Economic Activity Index (a measure developed to assess relative performance of major census metropolitan areas in Canada) ranked the St. Catharines + Niagara area 21st out of 25 areas.³

While by no means exhaustive, this information - coupled with data captured in the previous Plan - demonstrates that a great many people in our Region are experiencing significant life stressors. We know that these factors - particularly when two or more are present - place children and families at considerable risk. These statistics remind us that FACS Niagara will continue to be relied upon to offer vital assistance to individuals and families. As a multi-service organization that delivers child protection, early childhood and individual and family counselling services, these mounting risk factors compel us to continuously improve our service capabilities. And, they also highlight the need to maintain our collaborative work with service partners.

The Internal Operating Environment:

The nature of our work is often characterized by emotionally-charged circumstances, instability, uncertainty and risk. Many staff describe their roles as being "intense, tough work". At the same time, staff clearly value the nature of their work, and demonstrate a deep, authentic passion for the people they serve and the functions they perform. Staff express professional pride in their ability to intervene early with young children, prevent and/or decrease admissions into care, treat individuals and families, and place greater emphasis on kinship services, and generally contribute to individual and family well-being.

Front-line staff and managers continue to express concerns regarding work load levels. Staff turnover, coupled with the time required for new staff to incorporate the skilled knowledge needed for direct service roles, or to develop/refine managerial skills, also contribute additional stress to the work environment. Major changes in funding formulae and complex service demands have required the agency to devote considerable time to resolve financial pressures. This has obliged us to institute program and structural changes that have impacted virtually all areas of our organization. Our earlier commitment to develop and maintain a greater community presence and participation at community planning tables has, at times, strained the capacity to provide internal management and supervisory supports. The introduction of a new Information System, and subsequent implementation delays have also demanded much staff time and energy over the past two years. There is prevailing sense that too many priorities may be competing for our attention.

² Niagara Workforce Planning Board, Benchmarking Educational Attainment in the Workforce, April 2014. Source: "Living in Niagara 2014: Critical Indicators Reflecting on Life in Niagara", p. 28.

³ The index examines 9 key macroeconomic measures, including employment and unemployment rates, population growth, personal and business bankruptcy rates, MLS Housing resales, and non-residential building permits. Source: cibcwm.com/economic/public/download/cma-st_catherines-niagara.pdf.

At the same time, there is a strong sense of accomplishment based on a more recent track record of managing complex program and financial issues, building more effective bridges with service partners, developing new program offerings, bolstering our efforts in Information Technology and Continuous Quality Improvement, while still maintaining a focus on client needs.

The following section reiterates and confirms our Mission, Vision, Values and Operating Beliefs, which will be relied upon to guide implementation of new strategic directions:

Our Vision – an image of the future we seek to create -

"A community where children, youth, adults and families achieve their full potential within a safe, supportive environment."

Our Mission – a statement of purpose; our reason for existing –

"To protect, support, and strengthen the lives of children, youth, adults and families."

Our Values – the concepts, beliefs and principles that guide our work –

We are **caring**. We are

- Available and ready to help
- Compassionate in words and actions
- Understanding of people's concerns and problems
- Easy to talk to

We are **respectful**. We are:

- Considerate in what we say and what we do
- Mindful of the abilities of others
- Appreciative and understanding of people's differences
- Inclusive in our work with others

We are **collaborative**. We are:

- Committed to working together on common goals
- Keen to share our knowledge and expertise with others
- Always interested in being cooperative
- Acutely aware that we cannot do it alone

We have **integrity**. We will:

- Be honest and truthful in our actions and words
- Follow sound ethical principles and professional standards in our work
- Provide the highest quality work
- Be consistent in our decisions, our actions and our words

We are **accountable**. We will:

- Listen and respond to the concerns of our clients
- Be answerable to our community, our partners and our funders
- Act to fulfill the organization's mission and vision
- Recognize and reward actions that promote the organization's mission, vision and values
- Seek opportunities to learn and continuously improve our efforts

Our Operating Beliefs – the major principles and perspectives that inform our work –

- We believe in advocating for children, youth, adults and families
- We believe that the family unit is the best environment to support the health and development of children
- We believe in access to services for all children, youth, adults and families
- We believe in family preservation, and permanence for children which secures their safety and well-being including the continuity of important relationships and culture
- We believe in strengthening the health, welfare and ability of all employees

Strategic Priorities: Emergent Themes for 2015-19

This planning exercise has identified a number of **key themes** which have influenced the development of new and refreshed strategic directions and goals for FACS Niagara:

We believe that achieving **service excellence** must be our highest organizational priority. This needs to guide and inspire all other organizational aims. Pursuing service excellence ensures that FACS Niagara creates the greatest public value possible. As well, striving for service excellence encompasses all of our other strategic priorities. This commitment requires us to provide thorough staff orientation, training and development. It means we need to offer all staff value-added coaching, mentoring, monitoring and performance evaluation to ensure our staff provide the best possible service and succeed in their roles.

We need to be more deliberate in **consolidating and aligning our key priorities**. We will do so through a concentrated focus on four key strategic concerns (reduced from six) and by appreciating the interdependence of these activities (that is, our efforts in each strategic area will complement work in other priority areas.) This focussed approach increases our potential to achieve service excellence.

Previous efforts to increase participation in inter-agency and community service planning has produced demonstrable benefits for clients and is clearly valued by service partners. Consequently, **continued community collaboration** remains embedded as an important organizational goal for FACS Niagara.

We recognize that developing and delivering on clear expectations concerning internal roles, relationships, accountabilities and authorities is challenging yet ultimately beneficial for the organization as a whole. **An ongoing emphasis on accountability** serves to build greater trust, enhance working relationships and sustain a healthy work environment.

As well, we commit to placing a greater **focus on service outcomes** by putting greater emphasis on monitoring and measuring the impact of our work with children, youth, adults and families. This forms an important part of our broader accountability, and allows us to better demonstrate our public value. An enhanced understanding of the impact of service interventions will also inform our policies and practices, and further contribute to service excellence.

Increased organizational flexibility and adaptability is another theme that has arisen through internal deliberations. FACS Niagara has more recently commenced activities to explore additional sources of funding. Some of this work has been done in conjunction with community agencies, and other internal projects are also underway. Over the longer term, these initiatives could provide opportunities to expand our funding base and provide us with greater latitude to support and/or expand: 1) existing programs/services; 2) the creation of new services and supports; 3) technological resources that aid in service delivery and improve overall agency performance.

In summary, FACS Niagara intends to sharpen its focus on a reduced number of strategic priorities. We will place greater emphasis on monitoring and improving service outcomes, together with further supporting and developing staff capabilities at all levels of the organization. Increased reliance on technology as a vehicle for supporting staff and clients will assume a growing importance over time. As a longer term, developmental strategy, the acquisition of new resources through alternative fund development strategies will occur to supplement services or expand our technology in support of service excellence.

On the following page, a chart confirms the strategic issues that emerged through this planning process. From these, we identify four broad directions to guide major activities over the next four years. Each of these strategic directions is accompanied by a series of associated goals.

FACS Niagara

Strategic Issues, Key Directions and Organizational Goals: 2015-2019

Area #1

Strategic Issue:	<i>How do we best meet the needs of children and families within available resources?</i>
Key Direction:	Achieving Service Excellence in all that we do.
Goals:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To embed permanency planning as our predominant service priority: a service culture in which permanency for children and youth is regarded as "Job 1". • To emphasize data collection and analysis to better determine the impact of service interventions and inform continuous quality improvement in all service domains. • To increase reliance on evidenced-informed practice to inform and guide service delivery. • To be respectful and responsive to diversity in the community of Niagara.

Area #2

Strategic Issue:	<i>How do we best equip our staff and volunteers to deliver effective, efficient, accountable, high quality services?</i>
Key Direction:	Actively Supporting our People: enhancing staff and volunteer knowledge, skills and abilities.
Goals:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To recruit, develop and retain highly capable, committed and engaged volunteers, front-line staff and managers. • To expand clinical competencies to better assist children, youth, adults and families. • To expand, refine and align managerial leadership capabilities; provide greater consistency and value-added support for staff. • To promote internal staff growth and advancement; foster growth from within by supporting staff to excel in current roles or prepare to assume more complex roles.

Area #3

Strategic Issue:	<i>How do we best ensure our long-term viability and success as an organization capable of continuous improvement, able to quickly adapt to an ever-changing environment?</i>
Key Direction:	Creating a culture of service innovation, responsiveness, and flexibility.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop and/or expand innovative programs, services and supports. • To create a highly integrated multi-service organization that optimizes our knowledge, skills and experience in program design, service delivery and evaluation. • To improve our strategic forecasting and develop pro-active risk management strategies across all organizational domains (governance, finance, operations). • To enhance organizational flexibility and evolving service options through the expansion of Fund Development approaches. • To maintain a high standard of ongoing collaboration and partnership with our community.

Area #4

Strategic Issue:	<i>How do we best utilize technology to support staff and client needs?</i>
Key Direction:	Embracing Evolving Technology as a key enabler of Excellent Services.
Goals:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop a strategic technology plan that identifies prioritizes and maps investment requirements. • To make greater use of technological advances to assist staff in performing their roles. • To enhance client engagement and emerging service provision opportunities through technology.

Special Note: Child Protection Information Network

While the precise timing for introducing this new, sector-wide Information System for FACS Niagara is not known, it will occur sometime during this planning cycle. The preparation, training and development involved in the transition to this information platform will have major operational impacts on most organizational domains. This will require some degree of adjustment to our work plan activities. FACS Niagara is committed to making the necessary adaptations to CPIN while not losing sight of our broader organizational goals and objectives.