Community Services
Summary Report

2012 Stakeholder Forum

Niagara Region
This report is a summary of the discussions that took place at the Annual Community Services Stakeholder Forum held in Thorold on March 8, 2012.

The event attracted more than 70 individuals from local community agencies and other organizations across Niagara. During the forum, participants were asked to discuss three questions focused on healthy communities – a key priority outlined in Niagara Region’s 2012 -2015 Council Business Plan. The questions were:

• What should a healthy community look like in four years?
• What types of initiatives will help us achieve that vision?
• If you could choose only one initiative, what would it be?

Although this report does not have room to include every idea shared by participants, it reflects some clear themes. These include improving service integration, revitalizing our economy, expanding services to vulnerable seniors, addressing barriers to affordable housing, expanding public transit, and the need for Niagara to speak with one clear voice when advocating for its fair share from other levels of government. These themes are similar to feedback gathered at previous Community Services Stakeholder forums and at other community engagement events and activities. This valuable input helps ensure that we, as a department, are focusing on the right priorities and making the best use of available resources to enrich families and individuals and to strengthen our communities.

On behalf of Niagara Region Community Services, I thank everyone who participated for your contribution to the success of the forum, and we look forward to continuing our important work together on behalf of the residents of Niagara.

Sincerely,
Katherine Chislett
Commissioner, Community Services
Niagara Region

Managing of Change

As we shared at the forum, Community Services is focused on providing services to some of Niagara’s most vulnerable people. We are carrying out this role in a time of transformative change occurring in each area of responsibility. These changes, stemming largely from new legislation, the 2012 Ontario budget and other provincial initiatives, carry significant implications for our operations and the services we deliver.

At the same time, our work is aligned with the goals of the 2012 – 2015 Council Business Plan. Community Services is currently focused on the following priorities in support of this plan:

Council Business Plan Goal – Healthy Communities

• Work with the Local Health Integration Network in support of provincial priorities, including:
  - Transition of patients from hospitals to the right community services
  - Reduced reliance on long-term care homes for the care of frail elderly
  - Specialized community services to better care for seniors with behavioural issues
• Complete the redevelopment of Deer Park Villa, the Region’s long-term care home in Grimsby
• Work with partners to promote age-friendly community concept in Niagara
• Continue to address poverty at the neighbourhood level through the Niagara Prosperity Initiative with a focus on strengthening collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders
• Implement a Housing First demonstration project in partnership with Niagara Regional Housing to address long-term homelessness
• Work with child care and education partners to implement Phase 3 of Ontario’s Full-Day Learning program for 4 and 5 year olds
• Recruit and retain registered early childhood educators to strengthen quality of child care services
Community Services embraces the service hub concept and will explore opportunities to further expand service integration beyond existing multiple-service centres. Examples of current hubs include our Branscombe Early Learning and Family Centre in Niagara Falls where several community agencies, including Adolescent Family Support Services, Speech Services Niagara, Pathstone Mental Health, the District School Board of Niagara and Niagara Region Public Health are co-located. As well, our Community Services offices in Port Colborne, Fort Erie, Niagara Falls and Welland are co-located with other community or government agencies.
1. What should a healthy community look like in four years?

INTEGRATED SERVICES
- One system of integrated services; a “hub” model for employment, financial and health and wellness supports delivered from multiple sites based on a client-centred approach
- Examine and leverage existing valuable assets and initiatives
- A funding model that supports collaboration among service providers to better meet needs
- Strong communities with multi-disciplinary teams
- More investment in prevention and wellness to achieve long-term cost savings
- Additional support services for children with special needs
- Better access to mental health services and supports
- More collaboration among agencies, government and businesses
- Investments in support services for Niagara’s growing senior population
- Adequately funded child care system to enable parents to work, retrain or go to school

POVERTY/HOMELESSNESS
- Improved access to safe and affordable housing; reduced waitlist for housing
- Multi-year funding for the Niagara Prosperity Initiative to enable longer-term planning
- Well-funded homelessness prevention programs
- Increased support for transitional housing
- Better access to jobs with wages that lift people – our youth in particular – out of poverty

JOBS/ECONOMY
- Lower unemployment rate
- Stronger link between social services and economic development
- Higher average incomes – from every source
- Greater economic growth and diversity to attract and retain newcomers, skilled workers and families to Niagara
- More diversity in the labour force

TRANSPORTATION
- Affordable, viable public transportation to connect people with jobs and services

LEADERSHIP
- Strong leadership that speaks with one effective voice for Niagara and is heard at Queen’s Park and in Ottawa

2. What types of initiatives will help us achieve that vision?

SERVICE INTEGRATION
- Expand the number of services at satellite sites
- Gather best practices for service delivery and knowledge exchange to develop innovative and practical solutions for a more integrated, rationalized service delivery model
- Expand health bus/dental services to youth, people who are homeless and other vulnerable residents
- Create a mobile response team for seniors in crisis (addictions, mental health)
- Share and analyze data with stakeholders to identify opportunities for service integration

HOUSING
- Expand supportive housing near schools and hospitals
- Lead the development of a comprehensive, integrated housing plan for Niagara

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/COMMUNICATIONS
- Provide community agencies with a supply of the Niagara Region Directory of Services
- Include updates on Community Services activities in Regional newsletters and other publications
- Support non-profit sector’s efforts to increase awareness of its contribution to community well-being and to regional economic development
- Leverage new regional section of daily newspapers to increase awareness of social services
- Promote 211 (Information Niagara)
- Help agencies communicate their stories
- Support and encourage volunteerism
- Raise awareness about what poverty and homelessness looks like
- Examine civic pride initiatives in other communities, including Buffalo, New York
- Develop core of volunteers to be life-skill coaches
**JOBS/ECONOMY**
- Develop and implement programs to foster or support employment
- Ensure employment services have input into regional economic development initiatives
- Partner with schools to deliver specific training programs
- Coordinate service providers to match job seeker profiles with employment opportunities

**POVERTY/HOMELESSNESS**
- Give community partners the opportunity to collaborate

**FUNDING**
- Provide information on how funding is allocated across the local area municipalities
- Ensure the RFP (request for proposals) process is fair and equitable
- Lead collaboration efforts to secure funding from the Local Health Integration Network for health-related programs
- Continue to advocate for the Niagara Prosperity Initiative
- Increase advocacy for bridge funding to help Ontario Works clients transition from assistance to sustainable employment
- Work to secure equitable and adequate per capita funding for all programs

**3. IF YOU COULD CHOOSE ONLY ONE INITIATIVE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?**

**JOBS/ECONOMY**
- Provide incentives to help small business create new jobs
- Stabilize Niagara’s economy by investing in/supporting entrepreneurs

**SERVICE INTEGRATION**
- Use community health centres to further integrate services at the community level and develop a more client-focused system
- Create a region-wide knowledge exchange for sharing ideas, data and best practices to drive planning and service delivery
- Create family centres where people can access a range of services (i.e. social assistance, counseling, seniors outreach, child care)
- Designate Regional staff to learn about each partner agency and share best practices
- Establish community health centres with an outreach component in neighbourhoods in need of attention
- Align policies to better serve clients

**FUNDING/ADVOCACY**
- Develop a strong business case based on existing data to secure equitable funding
- Regional Council should take a leadership role in advocating for Niagara, working together with community organizations and speaking with one voice
- Address the imbalance in homelessness funding
- Develop a more vocal response to provincial initiatives (i.e. Drummond report, Ontario budgets)

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**
- Develop and promote a volunteer mentorship life skills program
- Develop meaningful engagement with partners with equitable participation and a focus on shared outcomes and client success
- Conduct collaborative planning workshops to identify issues affecting wellness
- Continue and expand the Niagara Prosperity Initiative
- Establish a poverty reduction planning table
- Tell the true Niagara story – take the “Living in Niagara” report off the shelf
- Look to other communities for best practices
- Develop a long-term, comprehensive housing plan that includes the public, private and not for profit sectors

**HEALTHY LIVING**
- Improve access to quality fresh food; Region can lead by incorporating farm-to-table initiatives at Regional child care centres and long-term care homes
Our Vision:
We support and advance the well-being of individuals, families and communities of Niagara. We achieve this by providing and supporting a wide range of community services and partnerships:

- Directly operates five child care centres with a focus on children with special needs
- Contracts with more than 300 centre-based and home child care service providers
- Provides fee subsidies to eligible families and wage subsidies to early childhood educators
- Partners with YMCA of Niagara and 200 community organizations to provide sports and cultural opportunities to eligible children and youth

Seniors Services

- Seniors Services provides services primarily for older adults and their families, including:
  - The operation of eight accredited long-term care homes for nearly 1,500 people each year
  - The delivery of community programs to support more than 4,000 people who live in their own home

Children’s Services

- Children’s Services ensures access to a coordinated, diverse range of affordable quality services and supports for young children and families. As a service system manager, Children’s Services:
  - Oversees 9,700 licensed spaces

Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities

- Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities (SAEO) provides financial assistance and employment supports, in partnership with community agencies, to enable participants to achieve independence through sustainable employment. Specifically, SAEO is responsible for:
  - Delivering the Ontario Works program for families and individuals in financial crisis
  - Administering homelessness prevention programs, and working with local service agencies, Niagara Regional Housing, and the Niagara Homelessness Advisory Committee
  - Addressing poverty through the Niagara Prosperity Initiative, a community partnership funded by Niagara Region
Helping seniors remain independent

Niagara Region is benefiting from over $2 million in Aging at Home and related funding from our Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) to help address the increasing needs of Niagara’s higher than average seniors population.

The funding has helped Niagara address provincial health care priorities of Emergency Department avoidance and improved use of hospital beds by better managing the Alternative Level of Care issue. It has also helped foster new levels of collaboration and integration among health care and community services partners. For example, recent funding to the Region of $178,000 enabled it to leverage its partner resources to launch a Health and Wellness Centre for the underserviced Niagara South community. Located at Niagara College’s new Applied Health Institute in Welland, the centre’s services include an enhanced adult day program with a wellness component for vulnerable seniors along with stroke rehabilitation services, a foot care clinic, and geriatric assessment services in partnership with the Niagara Health System.

Fighting poverty one neighbourhood at a time

Established by Niagara Region in 2008, the Niagara Prosperity Initiative (NPI) is a partnership among the public, private and non-profit sector that is addressing poverty at the local level. It uses a research and neighbourhood-based approach ensuring resources are allocated to areas where they are needed most.

With annual funding of $1.5 million, the NPI funds projects to help prevent, reduce and alleviate poverty in Niagara. In 2012, 26 projects selected by a community review panel will be carried out by 21 community agencies, with further projects to come.

Projects include a variety of programs for children and youth such as after-school tutoring, literacy, skills development and mentorship.

The NPI is a force for positive change in neighbourhoods where people need help and hope for a better future. The investment in families and individuals helps break cycles of poverty by empowering residents and neighbourhoods to build better lives and stronger, healthier communities.

New levels of collaboration and integration among health care and community services partners.

Student placements from all the applied health disciplines at the College complement staff in providing the on-campus services for seniors, which adds a real intergenerational learning dimension to this integrated health care service.
Forum Participants

Community Addiction Services of Niagara
Alzheimer Society of Niagara
Bethlehem Housing and Support Services
Boy’s and Girl’s Club of Niagara
Bridges Community Health Centre
Business Education Council of Niagara
Canadian Mental Health Association
Church of St Thomas Children’s Day Care Centre
Community Addiction Services of Niagara (CASN)
Community Care - St. Catharines and Thorold
Community Legal Services of Niagara South
District School Board of Niagara
Employment Help Centre
FACS Niagara
Gillian’s Place St. Catharines
Habitat for Humanity Niagara
Hannah House Maternity Home
Hospice Niagara
Information Niagara
Job Gym, Youth and Community Employment Services
Laurie Flasko Consulting
LHIN, Hamilton, Niagara, Haldimand-Brant
LHIN, Waterloo Wellington
Ministry of Community and Social Services
Ministry of Children and Youth Services
Niagara Age Friendly Community
Niagara Community Foundation
Niagara Employment Help Centre
Niagara Falls Community Health Centre
Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre
Niagara North Community Legal Assistance
Niagara Regional Housing
Niagara Research and Planning Council
Niagara Social Assistance Reform Network
Niagara Workforce Planning Board
Pathstone Mental Health
Project Share
Quest Community Health Centre
Saint Elizabeth Health Care
Sandra Summerhayes and Associates
Southridge Church
Start Me Up Niagara (Out of the Cold Program)
The Hope Centre
United Way of Niagara Falls and Greater Fort Erie
Wee Watch Enriched Home Day Care
Welland Heritage Council
Women’s Place of South Niagara (Nova House)
YMCA of Niagara
YWCA Niagara Region

Niagara Region Community Services
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