



Highland Shores
CHILDREN'S AID
Protect Care Empower

Highland Shores
Children's Aid
Strategic Plan

2018-
2023

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Message from the Board President and Executive Director

Highland Shores Children's Aid's (HSCA) Board of Directors embarked on a strategic planning process. Our Board is a dedicated group of community volunteers who are responsible for the governance and stewardship of Highland Shores. Highland Shores Children's Aid has an important role in our community, and we know there are many challenges and opportunities before us. We believe that if we are going to continue to have a positive impact in this region, a plan that is exciting and forward looking, actionable, and relevant is needed to help guide our way.

From the outset, our Board believed it was essential to gather input directly from Highland Shores' community of stakeholders. It was especially important that our strategic plan reflect and respond to the needs of our community. We engaged stakeholders and partners across the communities we serve in the counties of Hastings, Northumberland, and Prince Edward, including youth and families who have participated in programs and services, representatives from community partner organizations, FNIM partners, staff and management members, foster parents and volunteers. We asked hard and pertinent questions. The goal was to develop a five-year strategic plan based on real engagement. We began with a critical analysis of the environment locally, regionally, and provincially. We then assessed our organization's capacities and opportunities and together mapped out four new strategic directions to pursue.

We are proud of the outcome and excited about our future—one that will protect, care and empower vulnerable children and youth and their families.

We thank everyone who took the time to participate, share ideas, and give suggestions. Together, we will continue in our mission to work with families to protect and enhance the lives of children.

Sincerely,

Michael McLeod, Board President

Mark Kartusch, Executive Director

Executive Summary

Since 2012, Highland Shores Children's Aid (HSCA) has accomplished a significant amount, from the amalgamation of three societies, to the pursuit of new processes and approaches that support efficient and effective care for children and youth.

Setting out with the goal of creating an inspiring and comprehensive Strategic Plan that captures the foundational work accomplished to date and sets the direction for the future, Highland Shores undertook a comprehensive planning process.

Throughout the process, Highland Shores received meaningful stakeholder engagement and had the support of an engaged Steering Committee. The Signs of Safety approach was integrated into the process. Engagement strategies used to solicit input included focus groups and two online surveys. Throughout the engagement phase, from March to May 2018, input and feedback were gathered from a total of:

- 66 participants in 12 focus groups
- 185 respondents to the online surveys

Through the engagement process, and through further focused engagement with the Steering Committee, Board Members, the Senior Leadership Team, and the Youth Advisory Committee, a new HSCA mission became clear:

*to enhance the lives of children and youth by empowering families
and building engaged communities of support.*

In addition, a new HSCA vision was born:

*We seek to build trusting, engaged, and collaborative communities in which the lives of
children and youth are enhanced; families are strengthened; and staff, foster families, caregivers,
and volunteers feel valued.*

A Strategic Board Retreat took place on May 26, 2018. At this point, engagement results were reviewed, trends were considered, and the delivery of quality services remained the focus through a thoughtful consideration of the future of the society. Considering everything, the Board of Directors, with guidance and support from the Steering Committee and the Senior Leadership Team, has established four strategic directions.

- 1. Delivering Quality Services**
- 2. Strengthening Collaboration and Community Relationships**
- 3. Ensuring Equity**
- 4. Fostering a Strong Organizational Culture**

These strategic directions will serve to focus our work over the next five years. They are driven by our mission, and they speak directly to the challenges and opportunities before us. The Board believes these directions signal to all stakeholders invested in the success of HSCA that this organization is ready and able to meet its future head on.

HSCA is energized. The four directions and the specific actions that support them build upon our many successes to date. They envision a future for HSCA that is bold, ambitious, sustainable, and reflective of our common view of taking care of the children and families in our community. These directions include the voices of our stakeholders, and are connected through meaningful relationships that inspire action and change. Our strategy is to maintain our firm and unwavering commitment to children, youth, families, and communities.

Our new directions are focused on our foundation of caring for children and youth in need of protection in the counties of Hastings, Northumberland, and Prince Edward, while at the same time empowering children and families to be all they can be through various means of educational support.

About Highland Shores Children's Aid

Brief History

In November 2010, it was recommended by the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare that a number of CAS's amalgamate to increase their strength and sustainability. This ultimately led the Children's Aid Societies for the counties of Hastings, Northumberland, and Prince Edward to become one organization: Highland Shores Children's Aid. The intent behind the merger was to improve services to children in care, to realize economies of scale, and to enhance quality service expertise and managerial capacity.

The Amalgamation Plan was announced at a joint press conference in April 2011. At that time, the governance structure was amended to include First Nations/Aboriginal, Foster Parent, and Youth Advisory Committees, to reflect, at the Board level, the importance of direct engagement with these groups.

In April of 2012, Hastings and Northumberland amalgamated with the Children's Aid Society of the County of Prince Edward (PECAS), completing the amalgamation of the three Societies a year later.

In 2014, Highland Shores established its first five-year Strategic Plan. Through this process, HSCA moved forward with a variety of initiatives, including, but not limited to, a new collective agreement, the launch of Signs of Safety, and the implementation of CPIN.

Overview of Planning Process

The Board commissioned the strategic planning process in its role as governor and steward of the organization. The planning scope established a process that would lay out the organization's priorities and position it to evolve in its pursuit of meeting the needs of the community. In order to effectively draw out stakeholder input, the Board engaged the services of an independent firm, Laridae, to facilitate the process.

Furthermore, a Steering Committee was established, consisting of a cross-section of staff, volunteers – including Foster Parent representation – and the Board of Directors, ensuring all stakeholders were represented throughout the planning process. The process took place between January and May 2018.

In addition to the Planning Retreat, the Steering Committee was engaged at four points along the way to ensure the planning approach was appropriate, the right stakeholders were engaged, and that the final strategic directions reflected the internal and external perspectives.

Stakeholder Engagement

Setting out with the goal of creating an inspiring and comprehensive strategic plan, HSCA saw meaningful stakeholder engagement as a critical early step in the process. Before identifying the strategic priorities, the Board reached out to HSCA's community of stakeholders. Their feedback served to strengthen and shape HSCA's future direction. In doing so, HSCA is ensuring that this strategic plan is one that has a solid foundation, informed by experience, evidence, and the broadest-held perceptions.

The online surveys and the focus group sessions had two general purposes:

- To **engage stakeholders** by gathering input, ideas, and suggestions and including them in the planning process directly and in a meaningful way
- To **educate stakeholders** about the work of HSCA and generally promote the work of the Society (as a positive legacy of the planning process)

Two online surveys and twelve focus group sessions were held to engage stakeholders in the strategic planning process. Both surveys were open for just over two weeks, from March 9 – 26, and May 1 – 17, 2018. In addition, two further surveys were sent out to the Steering Committee, the Senior Leadership team, Board members, the Youth Advisory Committee, staff (front-line, administration, and management), and volunteers to help refine the Society's Mission, Vision, and Values. A summary of the stakeholder engagement can be found in [Appendix B](#).

Strategic Planning Retreat

The Board of Directors, Executive Team, and Steering Committee met in Belleville on Saturday, May 26th, 2018, for a day-long strategic planning meeting. Through a series of presentations and facilitated discussions, the strategic issues, data, financial picture, and overall environmental landscape were identified and discussed. The key issues were mapped, along with the opportunities and challenges that needed to be addressed in the new strategic plan.

The Board was then able to distill the information collected from the focus groups, along with the findings from the online surveys, and apply these to the earlier evidence. Themes emerged from this work. The day culminated in unanimous agreement on four draft strategic directions.

Planning Context

As HSCA entered into the planning process, it was important to note that there are some current strategic activities that are underway and that continue to be a priority for the Society. These include:

- **Signs of Safety:** Implementing Signs of Safety throughout the Society.
- **CPIN:** Fully implementing and being skilled at CPIN.

- **Indigenous Commitments:** The acknowledgement and apology in October 2017 for the grievous harm and injustice child welfare has played and continues to play in the lives of Indigenous children and families led Highland Shores, along with each of the Children’s Aid Societies in Ontario, to make a series of commitments to ensure services are provided differently going forward. This includes collaborating with Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child and Family Services (DBCFS) in the restoration of their child welfare mandate for Indigenous children and youth.
- **Leading Residential Shared Services Program:** A new strategic possibility that we will explore is the potential of leading, either provincially or regionally, the Residential Shared Services program.
- **Quality Improvement Plan:** A significant focus on service, particularly Family Services, and improvement of our Ministry measured standards as captured in the QIP.
- **Enhancing Organizational Culture:** Creating a unified Highland Shores culture that supports the organization to achieve its goals.

Listed below are the outcomes for each of these items that we expect to achieve by March 31, 2019. By extension, this means that these five activities will occupy the majority of the Society’s attention beyond the normal daily operations in the coming year.

By March 31, 2019, HSCA will have:

Signs of Safety (S of S)

- Implemented the six-point plan introduced in 2018, representing key areas of support. The six areas include:
 - Mentoring: Three peer mentors will be identified to provide direct, one-on-one and team coaching and mentoring to support use of S of S language, philosophy, and tools.
 - Supervision: A peer mentor supervisor will be identified to oversee the three mentors and offer coaching and mentoring to supervisors.
 - Learning Sessions: Monthly learning opportunities will be provided to supervisors, managers, and directors (Service and Operations) to support implementation of S of S.
 - Power of Partnership Small Group Courses: Participation in this course, which is intended for Practice Leads and supervisors, and to empower HSCA to become independent in providing further training to staff.
 - Reflection: Our Practice Leads group will be reviewed to refresh and recommit to our next phase of work.
 - Signs of Safety Boot Camp: Internal S of S mentors, supervisors, and trainers will attend the spring session of “Signs of Safety Boot Camp” as part of their role in leading this six-point plan.
- Received mentoring and opportunities to improve, and have begun to model various practice principles.
- Clarified how best to use Signs of Safety in all departments, in our work and in our files.
- Determined how to capture daily work in CPIN, including how S of S fits within CPIN processes and design, and how best to capture our S of S work.

- Designed S of S into each business process, such as recruitment; our work with children, youth, and families; and our administrative processes.
- Incorporated S of S into our work with each other within the organization.
- Ensured consistency of delivery of S of S approaches.
- Established approaches to measuring the S of S outcomes and fidelity to design.
- Contributed to building organizational culture by integrating the values of S of S and ensuring constructive accountability.
- Begun building an understanding among community partners as to how Highland Shores uses S of S, to ensure that our partners are able to participate in a meaningful way.

CPIN

- Established a clear sustainment plan, while ensuring CPIN is understood, that processes are consistent, and that we can anticipate future changes, such as business harmonization and system improvements.
- Increased our understanding of all aspects of CPIN, including reporting, accountability, and knowledge of what supervisors need to do and need to know to support staff.
- Established working groups to ensure linkages to S of S.
- Moved beyond basic navigation to drive more support and sophistication, including elements such as milestones to help staff keep on track for QIP reporting.
- Ensured that staff feel confident with CPIN and there is little variability with the quality.
- Set ourselves up to be as successful as possible with Ministry and OACAS.
- Developed understanding and skill within the financial modules and reporting.
- Executed the CPIN sustainment plan, including all areas that we have identified as needing attention.

Indigenous Commitments

- Continued to implement the specific commitments:
 - Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care;
 - Reducing the number of legal files;
 - Increasing the use of formal customary care agreements;
 - Tracking and reporting the number of local Indigenous Board members;
 - Implementing mandatory Indigenous training for their staff;
 - Changing inter-agency protocol to include Jordan's Principle as a fundamental principle;
 - In consultation with the Indigenous communities we serve, developing a unique agency-based plan to further address the needs of those communities; and
 - Continuing to develop relationships between HSCA and the Indigenous communities we serve.
- Worked with DBCFS staff before they are Designated to identify the files of children, youth, and families with Indigenous heritage.
- Clarified our role with Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte and renewed our MOU if we continue to work with them directly or assist them in working with DBCFS.
- Made progress on the Indigenous commitments.
- Aligned with the agencies that alternative caregivers are working with.

- Helped DBCFS to set-up and be successful in achieving their Designation and being the organization they have set out to become.
- Successfully adapted through the restoration of the mandate and the return of children and families who are currently receiving service from HSCA to DBCFS, and that we will have continued to partner effectively with DBCFS.
- Established clear processes post-mandate for reciprocity of the work, such as the identification of files and transfers.

Residential Shared Services

- Established a strategic framework, value proposition, and risk benefit analysis of whether to take on a leadership role in the Residential Services offering of our provincial shared services program.
- Determined how best to position HSCA as a regional or provincial lead, if a decision to proceed is reached.

Quality Improvement Plans (QIP)

- Improved results in our reporting on Ministry-measured standards.
- Achieved results in the Top 10 within the province for Family Services, Children’s Services, and Resources in QIP’s.

Enhancing Organizational Culture

- Supported leadership development at all levels within the organization.
- Continued with opportunities to increase communication and staff engagement and input across the organization.
- Clarified roles and expectations.
- Furthered implementation of the Psychological Standards and Provincial Worker Safety Reports.

Our Strategic Directions

HSCA is committing to a five-year strategic plan. As such, the directions are broad and oriented to the future. This allows the organization to respond and adapt as circumstances change over the years. The directions offer a framework for the development of annual or multi-year operational plans with measurable goals and objectives.

HSCA cares for children and youth in need of protection in the counties of Hastings, Northumberland, and Prince Edward, while at the same time empowering children and families to be all they can be through various means of educational support. This mandate is at the core of each of our strategic directions.

Aspirations and Guiding Principles

Aspirational Goal

In setting our strategic priorities for the future, the discussions at the Strategic Planning Retreat led to the establishment of an overall aspirational goal that sets the tone for all future endeavours at Highland Shores.

To redefine and achieve operational excellence in child welfare.

What this means, in the context of our work, is that we will continue to strive to deliver service that considers the underlying needs and circumstances of children, youth, and families; that we will seek out creative solutions that are responsive to the needs of those we service; and, that we will explore ways to continuously improve our approaches.

Guiding Principles

In every way possible, at the core of each of our strategic directions, we will:

- Aim to be effective communicators and engage with all the people we work with in meaningful and reciprocal ways, measuring our effectiveness along the way
- Increase awareness and recognize where power imbalances may exist. We will strive to meet everyone we work with as equals. We will be respectful of and exercise our own personal roles with power responsibly, and be respectful of the roles of families
- Continue to be rooted in learning and continuously aim to better ourselves as individuals, teams, circles of care, and as an organization. We will humbly engage others, seek opinions and feedback from all those we interact with when decisions impact them, and always search for more information to make the best possible decisions

Strategic Directions

Following are the four identified directions:

- 1. Delivering Quality Services**
- 2. Strengthening Collaboration and Community Relationships**
- 3. Ensuring Equity**
- 4. Fostering a Strong Organizational Culture**

1. Delivering Quality Services

The child welfare system is effective when we support the growth of trusting, engaged and collaborative communities in which children, youth and families thrive. At Highland Shores, we are committed to providing consistent, high-quality service delivery, while exploring opportunities to increase accountability and collaboration. We recognize that our credibility is tied to the quality of the service and supports we provide, and we seek to continually provide reasons for the community to build their trust in us. We are building a strong foundation for the society, and as we move forward, it will be in a cohesive, evidence-informed, and consistent manner, focusing on the specific underlying needs and unique circumstances of every child, youth, and family.

Our Commitments

Over the next five years, we commit to “Delivering Quality Services” by:

- Ensuring clarity around service delivery expectations through effective communications and training for all staff and resource families, and increasing consistency in service delivery across teams and geographic boundaries, while continuing to encourage creative solutions to be shared across the Society;
- Breaking down ‘silos’ to increase collaboration and the integration of services and supports within the agency, and among community and Ministry partners;

- Focusing on development and training for staff and resource families to expand skills, experience, and knowledge;
- Involving children and youth in all decisions that affect them, and ensuring they are listened to and respected;
- Establishing systems and processes to ensure constructive accountability at all levels of the agency;
- Evaluating and reflecting on programs and processes to ensure that they are evidence-informed, effective, and focused on achieving the correct objectives;
- Exploring opportunities to further engage children, youth, and families in a way that respects all involved;
- Increasing our focus on prevention. This will include defining what prevention means in the context of our work, allocating resources appropriately to be responsive to these needs, and reflecting on our effectiveness to continuously improve our approaches.

2. Strengthening Collaboration and Community Relationships

Highland Shores recognizes the value of collaboration. Working collectively creates opportunities to engage in projects that we otherwise could not complete on our own, to better support the well-being of children, youth, and families. Over the past few years, we have worked to listen to our partners and engage in opportunities to work more effectively together, but we recognize that there is room for growth. We are focused on building capacity across the community as a whole. By committing to building and nourishing trusting relationships with community partners and agencies, we will improve the quality of our services and supports.

Our Commitments

Over the next five years, we commit to “Strengthening Collaboration and Community Relationships” by:

- Increasing our presence and visibility in the community and by seeking out opportunities for impactful collaboration and partnership;
- Taking leadership to coordinate/facilitate community-related supports and services, reducing fragmentation and overlap to increase clarity and efficiency;
- Improving the clarity and consistency of our communications with external stakeholders, to establish a trusting relationship and to build awareness around expectations, roles, and resources in our work with families;
- Educating the community to build a better understanding of the dynamics of child welfare, the multiple responses used by the Society, and the impacts of power and authority.

3. Ensuring Equity

Our focus is on ensuring ideals are reflected in our front-level service delivery recipients. We are focused on creating an environment that is shaped by openness and a willingness to learn, dispelling fear and encouraging people to demonstrate their vulnerability. Building on our commitments, we will ensure that equity for all marginalized groups is a key focus for Highland Shores over the next five years. We acknowledge the over-representation and disparity in outcomes that have been influenced by social inequity and many forms of racism, including institutional racism, anti-black racism, and anti-Indigenous racism.

We recognize the importance of building trusting relationships with our FNIM partners that are rooted in respect, equity, and reciprocity, particularly as we move forward with the commitments that we have made through our provincial acknowledgement and apology as well as in the restoration of the child welfare mandate to Dnaagdawenmag Binnoojiiyag Child and Family Services.

Our Commitments

Over the next five years, we commit to “Ensuring Equity” by:

- Understanding the gravity and importance of our Indigenous commitments as well as the need for sustained work. Highland Shores commits to strengthening its relationship with Indigenous communities through the following actions:
 - Enshrining in its policies and practices the intent and purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action pertaining to Child Welfare, as well as the specific commitments developed by Highland Shores and the OACAS;
 - Developing a unique, agency-based plan to better address the wholistic needs of Aboriginal children and families;
 - Increasing collaboration with First Nation communities, including seeking their guidance and counsel in the ongoing cultural awareness and sensitivity training of HSCA’s staff and Board; and
 - Demonstrating, through transparent monitoring and reporting to First Nations communities, how these commitments are being met.
- Pursuing equity of outcomes for all marginalized groups;
- Creating culturally safe spaces;
- Implementing the provincial One Vision One Voice program;
- Providing full and comprehensive education for staff on Indigenous culture and diversity, as well as ongoing supports, in keeping with our Indigenous commitments;
- Demonstrating a commitment to continual learning and engagement in meaningful relationships with these communities;
- Developing our understanding of Indigenous culture and history, enshrining the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action in our practices, and ensuring familiarization with UNDRIP;
- Ensuring hiring practices for staff, resource families, and board members reflect the diversity of our community.

4. Fostering a Strong Organizational Culture

We recognize that Highland Shores has undergone significant changes over the past several years. As we work in a sector that is constantly changing, we will focus on implementing and managing change in a supportive, clear manner, with consistent communication and regular opportunities for feedback and input. We are committed to building and maintaining an environment where everyone feels supported, encouraged, and heard, and where they are able to perform at their best. We will ensure the necessary processes are in place to effectively manage change and ensure quality service delivery and care.

Our Commitments

Over the next five years, we commit to “Fostering a Strong Organizational Culture” by:

- Ensuring staff, resource families, and volunteers feel appreciated, supported, and valued by broadening the array of available supports and the ways in which they can be accessed;
- Re-engaging with staff to find opportunities to enhance our workplace culture and ensure HSCA is a great place to work;
- Including the voices of children and youth, staff, resource families, volunteers, families, and minority communities in day-to-day practices;
- Ensuring clarity and consistency in expectations and support for staff, and explanations when differences exist;
- Providing training to management so that they feel able to best support their staff in a variety of ways;
- Continuing to implement strong change management processes, and creating opportunities for staff to become involved in and understand key changes that impact them.

Next Steps

Our new strategic directions provide HSCA with strategic focus and a clear framework to drive change and progress. The Board has committed to the following next steps:

1. Organizational goals and objectives will be developed that align with and drive each strategic direction;
2. The strategic directions will be communicated internally and externally;
3. Regular feedback will be sought on the progress of implementing Strategic Plan; and,
4. Progress on the directions will be reviewed and strategies amended as circumstances change over the next five years and reviewed annually with key stakeholders.

Conclusion

The Board of Directors and management are proud of the success of HSCA. Keeping kids at the centre of everything as we move forward has been a core and common goal throughout the years. Through our new strategic directions, we will ensure children and youth remain our priority, and the directions will help to keep us focused as new opportunities arise and our landscape shifts. We are committed to using resources through appropriate systems and processes that ensure that we are efficient, accurate, and accountable through all of our initiatives.

We thank all those who lent their voices by contributing thoughts and feedback. We have listened.

The Board of Directors looks forward to reporting back on our progress over time and to a strong track record of performance over the next five years.

Appendix A: Mission, Vision and Values

Mission

To enhance the lives of children and youth by empowering families and building engaged communities of support.

Vision

We seek to build trusting, engaged, and collaborative communities in which the lives of children and youth are enhanced; families are strengthened; and staff, foster families, caregivers, and volunteers feel valued.

Values

- **Respect:** demonstrating acceptance, empathy, and honesty.
- **Advocacy:** giving a voice to those we serve, ensuring safe solutions, taking creative approaches, and championing the rights and resources needed by children, youth, and families.
- **Collaboration:** working together with our staff, volunteers, families, community, and Indigenous partners to establish approaches that are responsive, inclusive, complementary, and seamless.
- **Compassion:** leading with empathy, understanding, and kindness when establishing safe, supportive environments.
- **Integrity:** showing genuineness, courage, responsibility, and mutual accountability for our actions and attitudes.
- **Communication:** engaging people to have input into decisions that affect them, listening respectfully to their needs, and offering timely feedback.

Appendix B: Stakeholder Engagement Summary

Two confidential online surveys and twelve focus group sessions were held, engaging over 249 participants in the strategic planning process. Highland Shores invited the following audiences to participate in the engagement:

- Families who have participated in programs and services
- Community partners
- Front-line staff and management
- Volunteers
- Steering Committee
- FNIM Partners
- Board of Directors
- Youth Advisory Committee

Both surveys were open for just over two weeks, from March 9 – 26, and May 1 - 17, 2018. The first survey was open to anyone, including, but not limited to: children, youth and their families, community partners, volunteers, staff, FNIM community members, and board members. An additional online survey was available to youth in care. A total of 185 individuals participated in the surveys.

A total of 64 people participated in the twelve focus group discussions, including staff, management, community partners, FNIM partners, volunteers, youth and families, with opportunities for in-depth conversations and comments. The participants were engaged during each of the focus groups and a comfortable rapport was perceived during the sessions. The sessions were held between March 8th and 26th, with additional sessions on May 11th and May 16th, 2018.

Throughout the sessions, it was clear that confidence is improving in the services and programs that are being delivered by Highland Shores. Although there are inconsistencies in implementation throughout the society – site to site, department to department, and staff to staff – generally participants recognized that there is a society-wide effort underway to improve outcomes for families, children and youth, whether through enhanced community partnerships, the introduction of the Signs of Safety model, an increased focus on Kin family placements, or on keeping children in their bio-homes when it is safe to do so.

In addition, two further surveys were sent out to the Steering Committee, the Senior Leadership team, Board members, the Youth Advisory Committee, staff (front-line, administration, and management), and volunteers to help refine the Society's Mission, Vision, and Values.

Survey Results

- **Good Engagement:** 185 people responded to the surveys. 64 participants attended the focus groups in total.
- **Good Level of Satisfaction:** 70% rated their overall impression of Highland Shores as "excellent" or "good."
- **Strong Awareness:** 90% of respondents identified that they could explain what Highland Shores offers.

Engagement Themes

The following are the most consistent themes that emerged from the focus groups and the surveys:

- Workplace Culture
- Community Partnerships
- Service Delivery
- Engagement and Communications
- Internal Systems