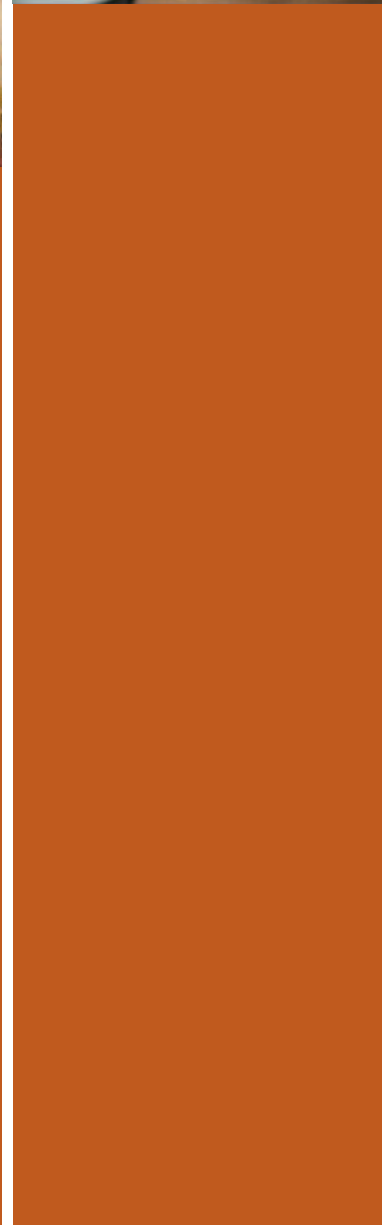


Our Kids Are Worth It Our Third Year

Strategy for Children and Youth



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Our Third Year
Strategy for Children and Youth

March 2011

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Foreword

It is our pleasure to present the third annual report on the *Our Kids are Worth It: Strategy for Children and Youth* for Nova Scotia.

This report focuses on key areas of activity, including piloted programs and increased collaboration. The latter is discussed with respect to the strategy's governance model and collaborative initiatives like the inaugural symposium held in September and the Leaders of Today Annual Youth Summit. It also highlights progress made toward strategy outcomes.

The Strategy's lasting legacy will be ongoing consideration of how best to deliver all programs and services to ensure maximum benefit to Nova Scotia's children, youth, and families.

Broad thinking is required. The days of working in isolation are gone. Our goal is to build relationships and linkages across government departments, social sectors, and communities. Our goal is to keep these relationships strong and healthy and ensure our efforts are always child and youth centred. Creating conditions where youth can speak to the issues and services that affect them is also central to our efforts. The work directed by the strategy is more important than ever.

Our province's fiscal reality calls for new levels of collaboration, innovation, and courageous decision-making. These have been hallmarks of the Child and Youth Strategy since its beginning. They are the foundation on which we will continue to work successfully, even in these challenging times.

In 2010, we saw the departure of the Child and Youth Strategy's first Executive Director, Robert Wright, who has returned to university to complete a Ph.D. in sociology. We wish Robert the best and are sure he will pursue his studies with the same commitment, vision, and dedication he consistently demonstrated as the Strategy's Executive Director. We welcome George Savoury as the Strategy's new leader.

Together, we are setting the direction for the years ahead. Your continued support and participation is much-needed – and very much appreciated.



Dave Ryan
AI Deputy Minister of Community Services



Kevin McNamara
Deputy Minister of Health

Co-Chairs, Better Healthcare Deputy Ministers' Committee

Introduction

“We often forget, though we must realize, that every child is born with a bundle of potentialities. It falls on all who are and who become involved with a child to assist in untying the bundle and developing those potentialities.”

**Justice Merlin Nunn
Spiralling out of control:**

Lessons learned from a boy in trouble

In this, our third report on Nova Scotia’s Strategy for Children and Youth, we would like to share with you our progress, our challenges, and our success. The opportunity for change is now and we are pleased to report that we are moving closer to ensuring children in our province are given all the opportunities possible to be the best they can be, but there is much more work to be done.

Collaboration is a cornerstone of that work. The Child and Youth Strategy was developed with the specific intent to improve services to children, youth, and families through greater co-operation between five key government departments: Health, Education, Community Services, Justice, and Health Promotion and Protection. That collaboration is enabling government to develop and implement local and province-wide initiatives which are increasing access to services for families in communities across Nova Scotia.

We do not work alone. As you will read in this report, Child and Youth Strategy initiatives are grounded in the communities in which they operate, and partnerships are central to their development, implementation – and success.

That has been our approach since 2007, when the government released *Our Kids Are Worth It: Strategy for Children and Youth*, as recommended by Justice Merlin Nunn in his 381-page report, *Spiralling out of control: Lessons learned from a boy in trouble*. One of the 34 recommendations put forward in that report was the establishment of a strategy to identify gaps and guide services for children and youth.

Our Kids Are Worth It does just that. It sets out a comprehensive plan and vision to ensure children and youth are healthy, safe, nurtured, and responsible. The strategy is largely about collaboration and coordination. As such, it is not so much about the creation of new programs as it is about providing a place where new and ongoing services providers can learn about – and from – each other, avoid duplication, and work together to complement existing activities and fill service gaps.

The strategy is guided by a far-reaching vision, which, in turn, is founded on four fundamental goals.

Our Vision

Children and youth are healthy, safe, nurtured, and responsible—and given the right opportunities to be the best they can be.

Our Goals

- Children and youth are well cared for, safe, healthy, and active.
- Children and youth are supported in making successful transitions in their lives from birth to adulthood.
- Children and youth are engaged in ways that support their successful development and their understanding and acceptance of responsibilities for their actions.
- Families are supported in ways that help them meet their needs and responsibilities for their children.

Our Kids are Worth It includes both short-term and longer-term priorities. These are reflected in the strategy's five key directions. These are to:

- Build a strong foundation
- Identify problems, help early
- Co-ordinate programs, services
- Improve access, close gaps
- Engage youth, promote shared accountability

Finally, there is an ongoing need to evaluate our work – and communicate our findings. Accountability is an essential element in the Child and Youth Strategy, as represented by this report, which covers the period from October 1, 2009 to September 30, 2010. Only by assessing our initiatives and measuring our progress can we, ultimately, achieve our vision for all Nova Scotia children and their families. Please refer to our contact information at the end of this document if you would like additional information on the Strategy.

“The true measure of a nation’s standing is how well it attends to its children — their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born.”

UNICEF

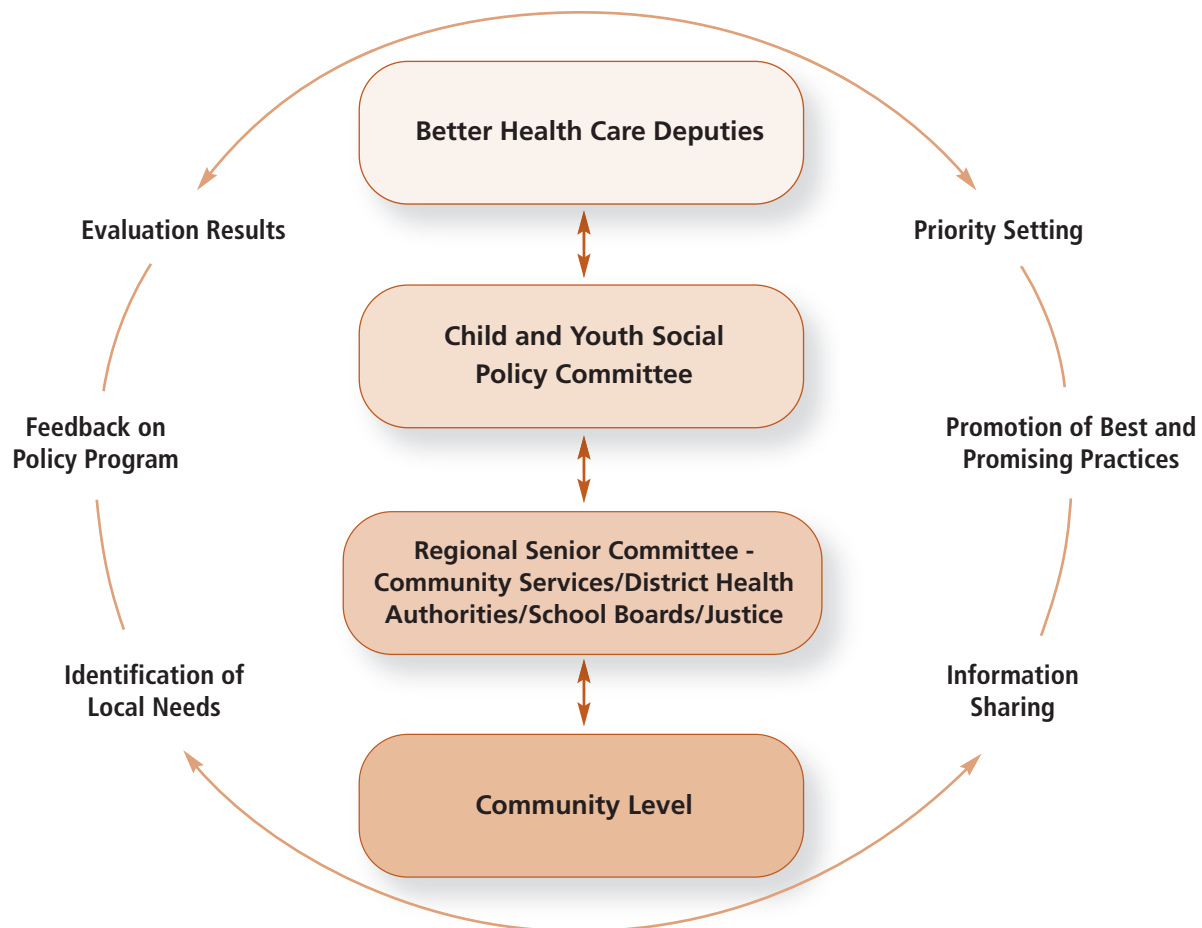
What has the Strategy been up to?

Our Kids Are Worth It, Nova Scotia's Child and Youth Strategy, is central to providing children and their families a foundation on which to build a healthy, happy life. This work cannot be done in silos but must be a collaborative effort, not only between government departments but also with the various community agencies and partners involved in this work. At a time when our social problems have become complex and widespread, it only makes sense that the solutions to these issues are collaborative, innovative, comprehensive, and inter-sectoral.

Child and Youth Strategy – Governance Model

Realizing that the strategy cannot achieve these goals alone, we revised the way we do our work and strengthened our governance model. We moved from a more linear, approach that guided us in our first year to one that supports ongoing interaction and integration of ideas, issues, and initiatives.

Figure 1: New Governance Model



In order for the strategy to be effective, we recognized early on that it needed to be grounded and have meaning to the communities in which we live. This approach connects and involves the five key departments as well as stakeholders across the province. It also allows for continuous feedback so progress can be assessed and changes made as we move forward.

How the governance model works?

The **Community** table operates at the most local level and brings together the key players that know their community best to promote collaborative community-based work to serve children, youth, and families. Typically these groups include front-line staff, service providers and management personnel. These groups work to address regional needs and regionally identified opportunities and move them through the model for action. In the Child and Youth Strategy, they play an essential role in its governance structure.

Members of the **Regional Senior Leadership** tables are appointed by deputy ministers and comprise the regional administrators from the Department of Community Services, the CEOs of District Health Authorities, superintendents of school boards, and senior officials within the Departments of Justice and Health Promotion and Protection. These people ensure that the linkages between regional work and strategy outcomes are substantive and clear.

The **Child and Youth Social Policy Committee** includes senior executive staff from the five government departments of Health, Justice, Health Promotion and Protection, Education and Community Services. They work on the priorities and directions set by the Deputy Ministers' Forum. Also, this group is responsible for ensuring consistent communication of provincial priorities to government departments and to communities.

The Deputy Ministers' Forum coordinates the many activities of government that support the improved health and prosperity of Nova Scotians. The Child and Youth Strategy is one of these initiatives.

Overall, the governance model in Figure 1 represents a large and varied group of people. It includes:

- 5 key government departments
- 5 key service sectors
- 4 regional delivery systems
- 9 local community tables
- many diverse communities
- thousands of children, youth, and families

It is also informed by a provincial youth network (Leaders of Today).

Each group or level in the governance model plays a role in fulfilling the mandate of the strategy. Some have roles that are more direct, but not more important, than others.

It is important to note that the community level is key to the strategy's governance structure. It connects the community and government when identifying local interests and priorities on issues that need to be advanced. The following figures describe the players in each region.

Figure 2

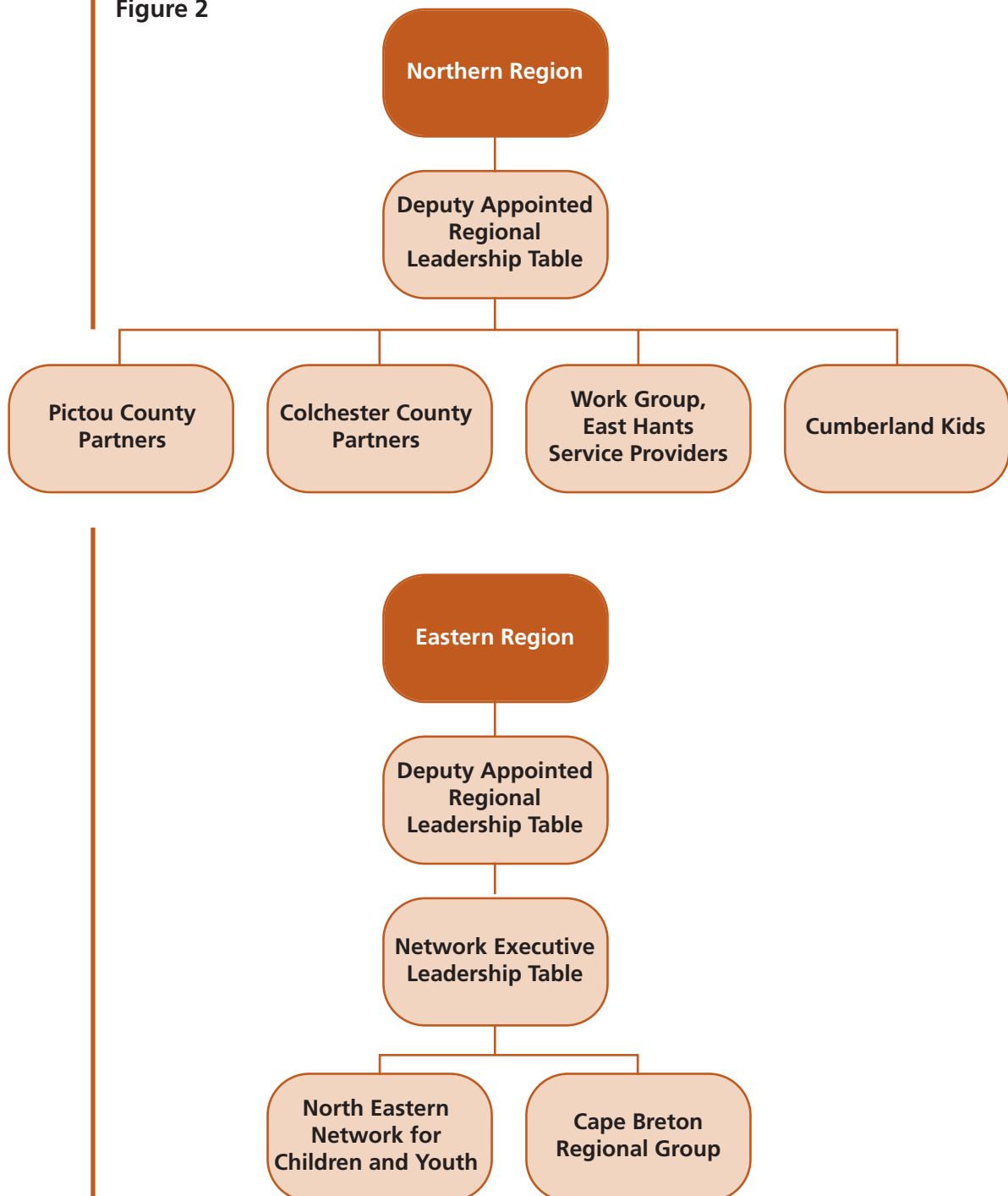
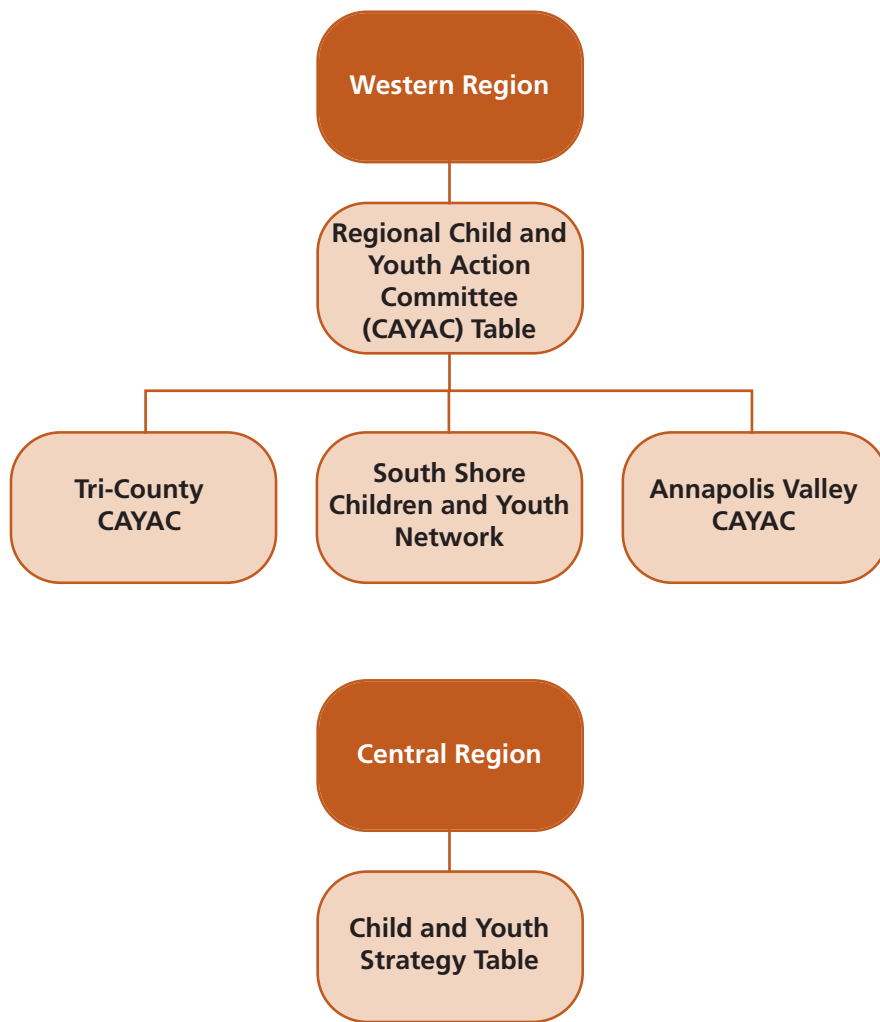


Figure 2 *continued*



Child and Youth Strategy Symposium

Participants from across Nova Scotia, across government, and across service sectors gathered on September 29, 2010 to discuss issues of importance related to the Child and Youth Strategy. They came together to highlight – and celebrate – successes, and to identify areas for improvement, growth, and development. It was, as Community Services Deputy Minister Judith Ferguson noted in her opening remarks, “an important opportunity to take stock of the things that have gone well and to take stock of the things that could be done even better.”

Sixty-five people were in attendance. Included were representatives of all provincial, regional, and community tables within the Strategy, as well as staff from the Offices of Aboriginal Affairs, African Nova Scotian Affairs, Acadian Affairs, Immigration and the Status of Women. The purpose of the Symposium was to:

- *provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to meet;*
- *provide a chance to raise and discuss issues of importance to those gathered;*
- *review the governance structure;*
- *gather input regarding potential future Child and Youth Strategy priority areas.*

It was the first time such stock-taking has occurred since the Child and Youth Strategy was launched. In response to feedback from participants, it is intended that the symposium will become an annual event. Evaluation of this event indicated that, overall, attendees were very satisfied with the Symposium. A total of 97% of the survey respondents rated the Symposium as good to excellent. Some of the comments we heard from participants included:

Better understanding of other agencies and how they deliver programs and services. Some really exciting new ideas for programs and services that we can implement.

Knowledge of initiatives from other areas and connections made during the day.

Feeling good to know that the government is committed to the Strategy.

The great projects and how this strategy is making a difference, as well as the possibilities. There were great questions. The Videos were very good. Enjoyed the comments by Deputy Minister of Community Services.

Understanding of the governance structure and the value of connecting community and district service providers to the community and regional tables.

The importance of horizontal government and also better communication within government about what is working.

All the great work that is occurring all over the province. Also the potential for further collaborations on projects.

Participants spent some time reviewing the strategy framework and the role that each organization, government department, and individual has to play. The linkages are significant – and fundamental, as Heather Christian, a member of the Child and Youth Social Policy Committee pointed out. “This symposium is an opportunity to learn from one another,” she said. “We do not expect to have all the answers, but we have one direction that we are all heading in – together.”

That direction was highlighted in the snapshots of several programs currently in place to help children and youth, and their families, in the province. One of those is the Follow-up Next Day Service, or FUNDS, initiative run by the IWK Health Centre in partnership with the Halifax Regional Police, the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team, and the Department of Community Services.

FUNDS provides next-day intervention services for young people under 16 and their parents experiencing severe conflict. The goal: timely resolution of issues and help moving forward. The program requires the active support and involvement of all the organizations involvement – and that is the key to its success, says Sylvie Ouellette, District Manager with Community Services. “We have a shared passion. There is no door that is the wrong door.”

There is, of course, always opportunity for improvement, and symposium participants spent part of their day exploring key issues and identifying possible next steps. An adapted form of open space technology was used to generate discussion on five critical themes: horizontal governance, youth engagement, collaboration at the community level, making better use of resources, and emerging models of service delivery.

At the end of the day, it was recognized that more of the same is required: innovation, commitment, and collaboration.

Ultimately, it is work that will make a difference to the lives – and the futures – of Nova Scotia children and their families

Promoting Youth Engagement

Since the advent of the Strategy, several innovations have been introduced in government to support and nurture the interest in youth engagement. These include: various print materials, a youth engagement grant program, several youth recognition initiatives, an interdepartmental table of youth program and policy practitioners, an annual Lunch and Learn series, support for regional youth inclusion initiatives, an updated website focused on youth engagement opportunities/information, and a provincial youth network (also referred to as Leaders of Today).

Most recently a youth inclusion promotional video and two workshops have been developed targeting provincial and municipal officials. The purpose of the workshops is to increase awareness about the benefits of youth engagement, and to introduce strategies to implement and deepen youth engagement in Nova Scotia.

Communities are also providing their own learning opportunities. For example, on March 25, 2010 the Network for Children and Youth in Eastern Region hosted a workshop on "Youth Engagement in our Communities." This was facilitated by HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development with participation from local youth and funding was provided by the Child and Youth Strategy.



*Leaders of Today Annual Youth Summit
October 23 - 25, 2009, Bayside Camp Sambro, NS*

Leaders of Today

For the last four years, youth, their organizations, and government have been meeting to explore the power and potential of a Provincial Youth Network. The network has three main purposes:

- to inform the Child and Youth Strategy (and other interested government initiatives);
- to amplify the voice of youth; and
- to create a place of intercultural learning between youth and government.

One of the tools used in this initiative are annual youth gatherings that have become known as LOT, short for Leaders of Today. Work done at these events is guided by the values of respect, courage, equality, shared and personal responsibility, and fun and celebration.

At previous LOT summits, it was clear that a very real benefit of this Youth Network is its ability to bring youth and government together to build trust and respect, dissolve assumptions, and learn about and from each other.

Pilot Projects

When the Strategy was released in 2007, a number of pilot initiatives were also launched to try out and learn about new ways of doing things. Evaluation of all pilot projects is under way and/or completed. Below is a list of Year I and Year II Pilots with their current status.

Year 1 Pilots			
Project and Lead Department	Description/Purpose	Area	Status
Family Help Expansion Department of Health	The Family Help Program is a mental health intervention service designed to deliver care to children and families from a distance. The goal of Family Help is to provide no-wait, early intervention to children who may, without services, become at risk in the future for more serious, unmanageable mental health problems.	Family Help services are available in the Cape Breton District Health Authority	Transitioned to ongoing program
SchoolsPlus Department of Education	To more effectively co-ordinate programs and services by having a team of professionals working together with families and young people at risk to provide direct services to students in the school environment.	Children, youth and families in specific sites of four school boards: Chignecto-Central, South Shore, Strait Regional, Halifax Regional	Transitioned to ongoing program
Kid's Help Phone Community Services	To provide children and youth information, counselling and referral services tailored to their needs.	Children, youth and adults across Nova Scotia.	Evaluation in progress
Child Welfare Mental Health Service Department of Health	To enable more timely access for mental health services to children, youth, and families involved in child welfare services.	Children & families involved in child welfare in the Halifax regional Municipality	Transitioned to ongoing program
Provincial Youth Advisory Network Department of Community Services	To provide continuous youth "voice" and feedback to the Child and Youth Strategy. To build a space for intercultural learning between youth and government cultures	Province wide Youth, youth serving agencies and Child and Youth Strategy team	Evaluation in progress
Parenting Journey Department of Community Services	To promote the optimal growth, development, and well-being of children and youth by providing family support through purposeful, goal-based home visits.	Children aged 3-16 and their families in the pilot catchment areas: Bridgewater, Sydney, Halifax, Port Hawkesbury, Antigonish, Cumberland and Kentville	Transitioned to ongoing program
A Place to Belong Department of Community Services	To engage youth in positive activities that enable them to build self-esteem and develop social, life, and career-related skills.	School-aged children and youth in pilot site catchment areas: Halifax, Dartmouth, Truro, Canning, Shelburne, Sydney, Bay St. Lawrence	Transitioned to ongoing program
Wrap Services Department of Community Services	To provide timely access to coordinated services for at-risk children, youth and their families	At risk children, youth and their families in Pictou, Halifax, Bridgewater, Sydney	Learnings incorporated into regular programming
Youth Navigators Department of Community Services	To provide integrated case planning for youth at risk between 16 and 18 years old	High risk, most often homeless youth (between ages 16 - 18) in Halifax Regional Municipality, Western (Kentville), Eastern, and Northern regions	Pilot has been discontinued and this initiative is on hold

Year 2 Pilots			
Project and Lead Department	Description/Purpose	Area	Status
Family Support Navigation and Intervention Project Contact: Department of Health	This project will provide a way of being more responsive to the needs of children and families in communities in Cumberland County.	Cumberland County This project serves children and families who are clientele of Maggie's Place	Evaluation in progress
Child & Youth Behavioural Consultant Department of Health	While the emphasis will be on support to front line service delivery through a case consultation model, there will be capacity for direct service delivery through office and home based assessment, intervention planning, and short term solution focused intervention as required. In addition to the interagency support with complex case management, the position will also be a resource to the community in the transfer of knowledge on best practice approaches to program and service development to meet the complex needs of multi-problem children, youth and families. A comprehensive operational manual has been developed to assist with the structure and implementation of this service.	Pictou, Antigonish, Guysborough The Pictou County Child and Youth Behavioral Consultant will be accessible to all front line agencies in the catchment area dealing with the complex needs of children, youth and families	Evaluation in progress
Multi-Agency Service Delivery Model (Building Bridges of Support) Department of Health	A multi-agency service delivery model that provides seamless, efficient, effective service delivery that is responsive to youth and families within their communities who are experiencing multi-dimensional difficulties that cross departmental/ service mandates. Provides enhanced accessibility through timely response, flexibility in service provision, innovative solution focused. Builds on the strength of the youth and family, collaborates with service providers, both traditional and non- traditional, champions creativity.	Antigonish & Guysborough counties and Strait area High risk youth and their families requiring a range of services in a timely manner that responds appropriately to the identified needs of the youth and their family	Evaluation in progress
Supporting Youth in Transition Department of Community Services	The Split Rock Learning Centre (SRLC) is an organization in Yarmouth that works with young people in the community to help them overcome barriers and reach their full potential. The Supporting Youth in Transition Program: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Links and connects youth to appropriate services/information/programs etc. - Involves youth in volunteering in community development projects/placements in the community - Program provision (i. e. Warriors of the Heart, Stepping Stones and Warriors without Weapons, educational sessions) - Youth group/Youth Drop in Centre 	Yarmouth and surrounding areas Participants must be youth and identify as having have some risk/crisis issues in their lives	Evaluation in progress

Year 2 Pilots *continued*

Project and Lead Department	Description/Purpose	Area	Status
<p>Follow up Next Day Service Department of Health</p>	<p>An after hours emergency response to stabilize a crisis situation. System collaboration between emergency response services and service providers can maximize the opportunity for the best outcomes. Next-day or immediate follow-up services to facilitate the stabilization of the family crisis and/or follow-up for short-term crisis management. These intervention services include: mediation, parent education and skill building, crisis intervention, next-day follow-up and system navigation.</p>	<p>Central Region - Halifax Regional Municipality</p> <p>Families and youth, under age of 16 years, experiencing severe parent/child conflict either on a first time or on-going basis.</p>	<p>Evaluation in progress</p>
<p>Feed Nova Scotia Helpline (Parenting Helpline) Department of Community Services</p>	<p>The expansion of Feed NS's Helpline to a 24 hour Parent Help Line service supports individuals who experience stress related to parenting. The service delivery approach recognizes that parenting stress oftentimes emerges within the context of other family issues such as domestic violence, loneliness, addictions, mental health issues, food insecurity issues, poverty and housing issues.</p>	<p>Province wide</p> <p>People who access the service are callers (parents or care givers)</p>	<p>Evaluation in progress</p>

SchoolsPlus: An example of one of our pilots

There are many programs and services for children, youth and families in Nova Scotia. That's the good news. However, accessing these programs and services can be difficult for a variety of reasons. New (pilot) programs have been introduced to assist in addressing gaps in services. One of the dynamic, responsive, and effective pilots that is beginning to meet this challenge SchoolsPlus.

SchoolsPlus – a plus for Nova Scotia

School should be a happy place for children and their families, and a place for all of us to learn more about each other and our community. SchoolsPlus gets an A+ on both counts. This initiative makes it easier for professionals to collaborate with each other on behalf of children, youth, and families. Families are served in a place that they are already familiar with — a school in their own community. SchoolsPlus promotes an Integrated Service Delivery model through the co-location and/or partnership of services within a school. Each school board with SchoolsPlus has a facilitator and community outreach worker who is the liaison and link between school and community. Their role is to advocate, coordinate and expand services for students and families.

The services provided at each SchoolsPlus – and four school boards across the province currently have a program up and running – address the unique needs of the student, family and community. Each site has a regional advisory committee with representation from various government departments. The advisory committees help identify gaps in services or resources and help come up with appropriate solutions.

Together they are working towards the development of an array of initiatives and services offered at school sites such as breakfast programs, mentoring projects, homework clubs, child care, employment support, health centres, community policing, adult upgrading, parent groups, community gardens, youth groups, cultural centres, parenting classes, nutritional classes, recreational programs, after school programs, outreach and restorative practices – and more.

The benefits are significant. These include:

- greater community awareness of programs and services;
- increased parental and family involvement in the school and the community;
- development of partnerships and increased collaboration within the larger community;
- increased use of schools during extended hours; and
- enhanced youth engagement through youth involvement in planning for their own success.

"It has been a great learning experience for everyone. We have had a lot of success stories."

— Kim Wood, SchoolsPlus Project Facilitator

**For more information about
SchoolsPlus in Nova Scotia contact
www.ednet.ns.ca/schoolsplus**

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Measuring Our Success

“The true measure of a nation’s standing is how well it attends to its children — their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born.” – UNICEF

Effective programs are programs that are measured, assessed, and evaluated. This is central to all the programs affiliated with the Child and Youth Strategy.

We recognize that the ultimate measure of success will be happy, healthy children who become productive, engaged adults. As our growth as a strategy and a province continues, we continue to look at where we are making progress, where improvements can be made, and how today’s efforts can benefit our children and youth now and in the future.

Here’s where we are today.

Goal 1: Children and youth are well cared for, safe, healthy, and active.

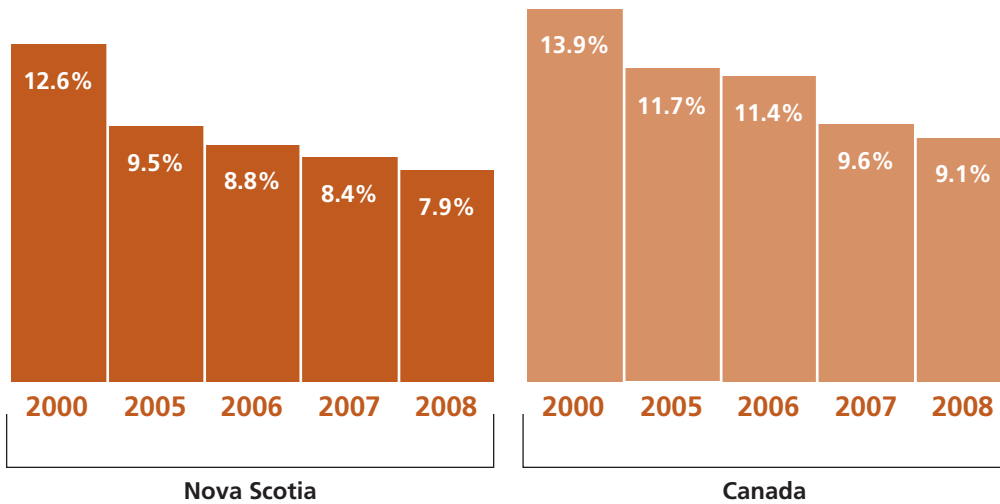
This goal is directly related to what researchers have defined as “population health”. In simple terms, population health links healthy children and families to strong, healthy communities. Two outcomes that would support this goal are “fewer children living in low-income families” and a “higher percentage of youth getting an appropriate level of physical activity”.

Outcome: Fewer children are living in low income families

Our Kids Are Worth It strives to create conditions in which collaborative initiatives can be nurtured to reduce the number of children in low income families. Living in a low-income situation can affect access to adequate housing, necessities for everyday living, health and well-being, and community participation. These are clearly risk factors for children and should therefore be closely monitored.

Two years ago, we reported progress in this area, with significantly fewer children living in poverty in 2005, compared to 2000. Please note that all data is based on Statistics Canada’s low-income cut-off (after tax). We are pleased to report that these numbers continue to decline, with our most recent data (2008) showing the lowest numbers in a decade. As well, we continue to outpace the national average.

Children Living in Low-Income Households



Behind these percentages are the faces of children. Like the percentages, the number of children under 18 living in low-income families continues to drop from 17,000 in 2005, to 16,000 in 2006, and to 14,000 in 2008. That is still too many. We will continue to monitor this number carefully, and support collaboration within government and with communities and families—to reduce it, as well as increase services and support for struggling children and families. One of the ways, government addresses this issue is through the Poverty Reduction Strategy which is a multi-year poverty reduction strategy aimed at addressing poverty in Nova Scotia. It is a partnership between the departments of Community Services, Labour and Workforce Development, and Health Promotion and Protection. For more information on the Poverty Reduction Strategy, please see:

<http://www.gov.ns.ca/govt/povertystrategy/>

As stated in our 2008 report, we continue to want to build on this data, recognizing that all families are different. For example, for many families, making ends meet requires two incomes. That's not possible for lone-parent families.

Not surprisingly, these families are particularly prone to experiencing severe financial strain. In 2006, approximately 32.4 per cent of children in single-mother families lived in low income. In 2008, data indicates the situation is improving, with a drop to 27.2 per cent. However, this is still a concern and one which we need to focus more attention to.

***Please note that Statistics Canada has revised some of the historical data for low-income cut-off (after tax) since our last report.*

Outcome: Higher percentage of youth getting appropriate level of physical activity

Regular physical activity helps children and young people keep physically and emotionally healthy. As well, research supports that participation in physical activity may help reduce the rate of youth crime and contribute to cognitive development and academic performance.

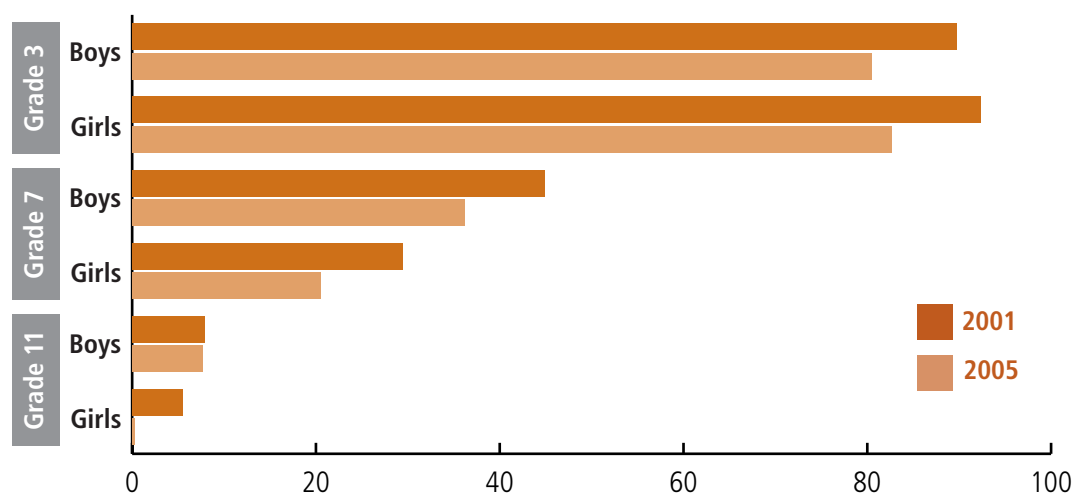
Young people need to accumulate at least 60 minutes a day of moderate to vigorous exercise to become and stay healthy. Unfortunately, activity rates indicate our youth are not nearly this physically active. Activity rates in all grades declined between 2001 and 2005 (see chart below). While a high percentage of Grade 3 students attain the activity levels recommended by Health Canada at least five days a week in 2005, by Grade 7, only 36% per cent of young men and 20 per cent of young women are this active.

Keeping Pace (formerly called PACY) is designed to help keep Nova Scotians up to date on the physical activity and eating habits (Grade 7 and 11 only) of Nova Scotia's young people. It is based on data from the Physical Activity and Dietary Intake of Children and Youth in Nova Scotia (PACY) studies from 2001 and 2005, funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection and the Department of Education and collected by university researchers.

This research is one initiative of the Active Kids Healthy Kids Strategy, which encourages children, youth and families to get the physical activity they need to live the healthiest lives possible.

Here are some of the most recent findings. New data will be available in 2010.

Percentage of boys and girls in grades 3, 7, and 11 from PACY1 and PACY2 who met the recommended standard of physical activity (accumulate 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity on at least 5 days of the week)



Goal 2: Children and youth are supported in making successful transitions in their lives from birth to adulthood.

Two markers, or outcomes, were selected to (a) indicate how “ready” children are when they begin school (by measuring their educational, social and general well-being) and (b) how long they stay in school (dropout or senior student withdrawal rates).

Outcome: Improved rates of school readiness

The first six years of life are the foundation for adult well-being. Studies show that what happens in the early years affects how a person develops and, ultimately, who they become. Getting a solid start in life sets the stage for learning, for social engagement, for mental and physical health.

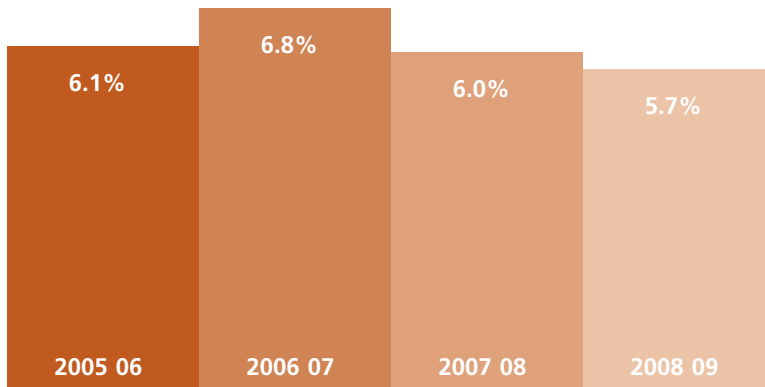
When our young children begin school, we are presented with an excellent opportunity to assess how they have developed in their early years. To ensure that the province’s plans and investments are making a real difference in the lives of our children, the Early Development Instrument (EDI) was piloted in a number of Primary classes across Nova Scotia. The EDI was designed to assess the educational and general well-being of young children, specifically their physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, communications skills, general knowledge, language, and cognitive development.

In order for the EDI to be reliable, it is beneficial to have full participation. In EDI pilots, parental consent was required and not universally acquired. Therefore a large percentage of children were not included. As a result, provincial data is limited. Also, in the course of its implementation as a pilot, a number of considerations (such as systemic processes and the current fiscal reality of the province) were identified as needing to be addressed before full implementation of the instrument could take place. The Department of Education is currently working with the Department of Justice to develop the framework for an agreement between the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario (the national repository for the EDI data) and participating school boards to assure that the EDI initiative meets privacy requirements through controls spelled out in the agreement.

Outcome: Lower dropout rate

The Department of Education monitors dropout rates based on senior student withdrawals. More young people in Nova Scotia are staying in school—and the more education our young people have, the more likely they are to have a job, and often a well-paying job.

In 2005-06, the student withdrawal rate was 6.1 per cent. In 2008-2009, we are pleased to report a continuing decline in student withdrawal rates to 5.7 per cent.



While this continuing decline is encouraging, the Department of Education (through consultations with stakeholders and education partners) identifies absenteeism and disengagement as growing problems in Nova Scotia. In response to this growing concern, a Working Committee made up of parents, teachers and principals was struck to address what is considered a chronic problem in schools these days. The mandate of the Minister's Working Committee on Absenteeism and Classroom Climate was tasked to develop recommendations to improve student attendance, increase engagement of students in their education and establish new and effective strategies to support a productive learning environment. The Committee deliberated over a period of three months and engaged key partners in its work efforts. The report, "Promoting Student Engagement: Report on the Minister's Working Committee on Absenteeism and Classroom Climate," was released on January 28, 2010 and contained 13 recommendations. The Department of Education is currently working on the recommendations which include improving the lines of communication with parents and students, implementing better monitoring practices, creating a provincial tracking system, clearer policies for stage interventions in response to student absenteeism as well as more programming options and a way for students to recover loss credits.

These efforts, combined with what is being learned in pilot projects, such as SchoolsPlus, should help students stay interested, motivated, and in school.

The Department of Education is currently working with partners to expand the SchoolsPlus model to an Integrated Service Delivery model. The goal of the expanded model is to provide improved access to a range of services for Nova Scotia students and their families.

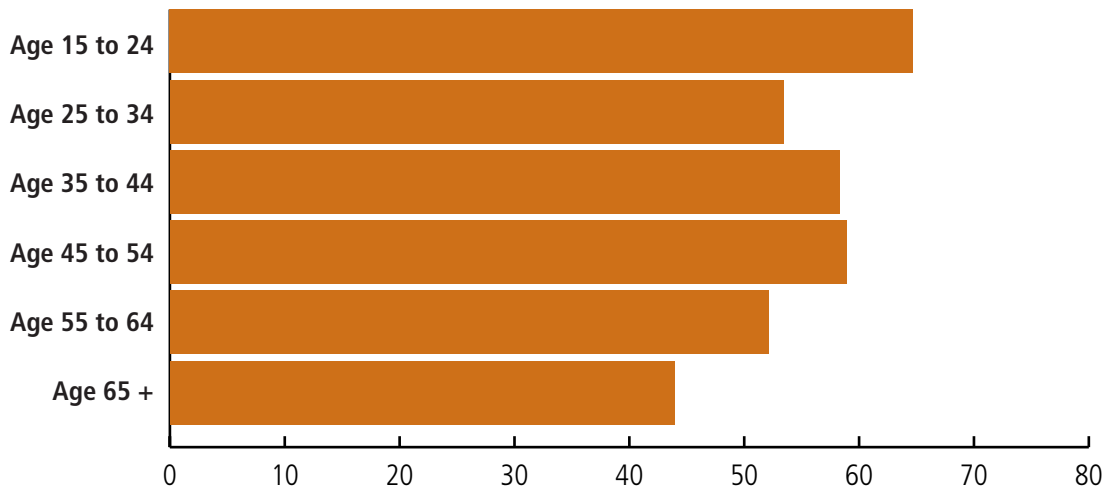
Goal 3: Children and youth are engaged in ways that support their successful development and their understanding and acceptance of responsibilities for their actions.

Outcome: More youth volunteering

According to Health Canada, an important indicator of community health is the level of volunteerism. Nova Scotia has one of the highest rates of volunteerism in Canada. In 2008, we reported a rate of close to 50 per cent of Nova Scotians as volunteering their time and energy to services and programs in our province. The rate of volunteering has since increased and is now at fifty-five percent.

Nova Scotia teenagers are among those making a difference. According to the Statistics Canada 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, the most recent survey, youth, ages 15-24 have the highest volunteer rate – at 64.7% – of all age groups in Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia teenagers contribute 18% more time than their national peers and 90% become involved because they were asked.

Volunteer Rate by Population, Canada 2007



Recognition of Youth Volunteerism - Youth Nominee Luncheon

Each year, communities across Canada celebrate National Volunteer Week with the purpose of acknowledging those individuals who donate their time to help others. This serves to reinforce the values of volunteerism and increase our awareness of the vital role that volunteering plays in our communities. In Nova Scotia, a number of events are held to recognize the contributions of volunteers, including Celebrating Communities, Crime Prevention Awards and the Provincial Volunteer Awards Ceremony.

In 2009, over 70 youth nominations were received from, among others, guidance counselors, leaders in the community, and youth groups. With the provision of only one youth award in each of these provincial ceremonies, more opportunity to acknowledge dedicated youth was in order.

To celebrate the contribution of all our youth nominees, the Department of Health Promotion and Protection (Volunteerism), the Department of Community Services (Child and Youth Strategy), and the Department of Justice (Crime Prevention) proposed and organized a Youth Nominee Luncheon in Halifax on March 29th, 2009. Attending with nominees were the Minister of Volunteerism, the Minister of Community Services and the Minister of Justice.

The Child and Youth Strategy championed the use of the event as an engagement opportunity between the youth and the Ministers of the sponsoring departments.

Nine Leaders of Today (LOT) youth acted as table hosts and facilitated and recorded the conversations between the nominees and the Ministers.

The conversations focused on why young people volunteer and what supports are needed to help them continue. The information was gathered into theme areas and shared back with the Ministers.

Comments from the nominees, the Ministers, the gathered parents and the LOT youth were very positive. Youth were not only celebrated, but their opinions were actively and respectfully sought. The leadership by the LOT youth was skillful and very successful. The partnership between the Strategy, Volunteerism and Justice was also successful.

The event serves as a potential model on a number of planes: celebration of our youth, youth leadership, youth–ministerial engagement and interdepartmental cooperation.

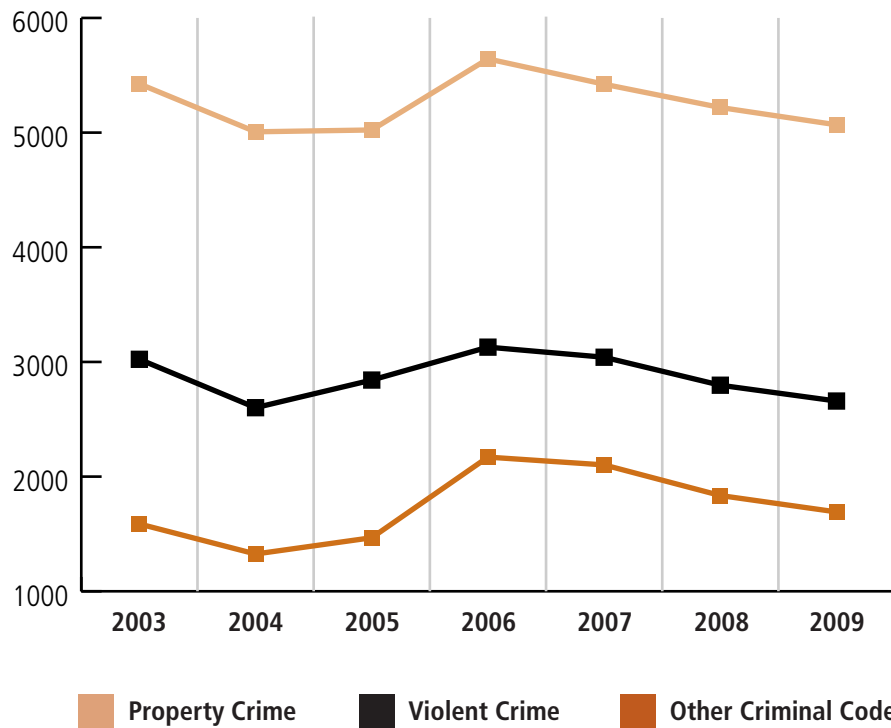
Outcome: Fewer youth involved in crime

The rate of youth accused of crime includes young people who have been formally charged as well as those who have not been charged or have been diverted from the criminal justice system.

In 2009, the rate of youth accused of overall crime in Nova Scotia (9,420 per 100,000 youth) was higher than the national average (6,490 per 100,000 youth). This was also true for violent crime, property crime, and other *Criminal Code of Canada offences*.

Rate of Youth Accused Nova Scotia, 2003–2009

Rate is per 100,000 youth aged 12 to 17 years



Similar to the national picture, the accused rate in Nova Scotia was highest for property offences and lowest for other *Criminal Code* offences. On the positive side, youth-accused crime rates in Nova Scotia have declined for the past three consecutive years. Since 2006, overall rates of youth accused of crime have declined by 14 per cent, youth violent crime has declined by 15 per cent, youth property crime has declined by 10 per cent, and rates of youth accused of other *Criminal Code* offences has declined by 22 per cent. As youth crime rates in Canada have only declined by approximately 5 per cent over the same period, this suggests the gap between Nova Scotia's rates and Canada's is narrowing.

Goal 4: Families are supported in ways that help them meet their needs and their responsibilities for their children.

Outcome: Reduced wait times for appropriate mental health services

Family Help Program

The Family Help Program is designed to help families whose children are experiencing behavioural problems. Families are provided with print materials and videos, then connected with professional coaches by telephone. Families can contact their coaches at any time.

The IWK and Cape Breton District Health Authority have used this program to shorten the wait list for mental health services. Through effective front end screening, children with mild to moderate behavioural issues are transferred from the wait list into the Family Help Program. Family Help has successfully intervened to help families overcome their child's mental health problems.

Families are empowered by learning new strategies. Improvements in family functioning and caregiver depression are also common. Drop out from treatment is rare and satisfaction with care is exceptionally high. Finally, as a result, many children are moved off the wait list, and they and their families receive services more appropriate to their needs.

Child Welfare Mental Health Service Project

This pilot project was developed to enable more timely access to mental health services for children and youth and their families who are involved with the Central Region Child Welfare System. Children and youth who enter care often have behavioural challenges that would not be considered an urgent referral in the mental health system.

Through this pilot project, mental health services are delivered more quickly, thus, providing an avenue for identifying problems early and helping sooner. This project provides direct clinical services to children, youth, parents, and foster parents and consultation to child welfare workers, risk management teams, early childhood educators, family resource agencies, and schools. For example, skills-based groups are offered to adolescent girls, consultation sessions with Community Services staff occur on a regular basis and education sessions are provided for all those involved with these children.



Outcome: Reduced rates of youth homelessness

Homelessness is a complex social problem requiring a collaborative partnership response. Over the past 2 years, progress has been made in helping communities tap into existing resources to address the need for increased knowledge and understanding related to homelessness, immediate need and longer term options, and other supportive services in their own backyard.

The Child & Youth Strategy and its member departments have been focusing efforts on strengthening families and communities so they in turn can support the successful transition of youth into productive, self sufficient adulthood. It has done so, and is doing so, by supporting preventative initiatives in communities across the province that focus on children, youth and families. This approach overtime minimizes root contributors to homelessness.

Future Work

Ensuring that children are safe, healthy and able to meet their full potential is the most important work of any community. Investing in families and communities through services and actions that support healthy child and youth development creates the foundation for a strong community.

Issues affecting children and youth cross many government departments and professional fields. This is both a challenge and an opportunity.

Launched in 2007, the Child and Youth Strategy is now reporting on its third year. It focuses on coordinating resources to fill service gaps between five key government departments: Health, Community Services, Justice, Education, and Health Promotion and Protection.

This year the Strategy revisited and updated its goals based on input and feedback received. The focus for the upcoming year will be on:

- **Youth Engagement Practices** – promoting an environment in which young people are seen as experts on issues that impact them. Youth are engaged in informing, shaping and evaluating responses to those issues thereby improving usage and reducing cost. Government will seek to lead by example in this area and will work with communities to support both adults and youth in this work.
- **Collaborative Service Delivery Model** – developing for implementation across government a collaborative service delivery model that includes a comprehensive continuum of supports that will enable families, children and youth to get the service they need, when they need it, and in ways that are user friendly, achieve the desired results, and provide value for investments.
- **Horizontal Practices** – developing and practicing a shared understanding of horizontal practices within the Strategy that recognizes all levels of ownership to ensure coordinated activity and to enhance collaborative practices. The model ensures clear roles and accountabilities, communication and other protocols and processes that will serve to reflect the multi-partnered, multi – layered nature of the Strategy.
- **Evaluation, data collection and sharing protocols** – data provides valuable information for the improvement of programs and services which leads to better decision making at various policy and practice levels. Currently data is being collected by different departments in different ways that is not always consistent. The Strategy will be working to develop and implement data collection practices that facilitate the sharing of information and evaluation of progress towards the approved outcomes of the Child and Youth Strategy. These should include and value the full range of tools and input from academic study to community knowledge.

The above noted areas of focus for the Strategy are in keeping with government's commitments to improving life for families, better healthcare, economic growth and living within our means.

We all have a role to play in supporting children and youth to reach their full potential. The Child and Youth Strategy provides a forum for dealing with children and youth issues from a broad-based perspective, using the expertise of provincial departments, youth, youth serving agencies and communities in developing strategies and initiatives.

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