

**UPDATE**

# Our Kids Are Worth It **Our Fifth Year**

Strategy for Children and Youth



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January 2013

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# Introduction

In 2006, Justice Merlin Nunn released his comprehensive report *Spiralling Out of Control, Lessons Learned From a Boy in Trouble*. Out of the 34 recommendations in that landmark report, prepared following a public inquiry into a fatal accident involving a youth offender, grew the Government of Nova Scotia's Child and Youth Strategy.

The strategy continues to grow and evolve, as you will read about in the pages of this annual update. One thing remains constant, however. Our commitment to improving services to children, youth, and families through greater collaboration between four key government departments, Health and Wellness, Education, Community Services, and Justice, and their partners and communities.

Today, four focus areas are at the centre of the Strategy's work: enhancing youth engagement, increasing collaborative service-delivery approaches, improving horizontal (governance) practices, and developing better evaluation, data collection and sharing approaches. Initiatives are under way in four regions supported by partners and service providers across the entire province. In this update, we'd like to share with you some of the work that has been accomplished in the last year and look at what lies ahead.

We are not alone in our efforts. The Strategy is supported by a network of youth and youth agencies called Leaders of Today. This group informs our work, strengthens youth voice, and offers a respectful space for youth and government to learn from one another. As always, collaboration is at the heart of the work we do.

# Focus Areas

## Focus Area 1: Youth Engagement Practices

**Goal:** To promote 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 access. Government will seek to lead by example in this area and will work with communities to support both adults and youth in this work.

### Highlights:

#### *Coming soon to a community near you*

##### **Community Youth Representatives**

Several years ago the Health Promotion Youth Corps was formed to give young people an opportunity to work on projects promoting good health among teens. Now a new initiative is being launched by the Department of Health and Wellness. Starting in the summer of 2013, there will be two paid positions for Leaders of Today youth in each region of the province. Over the course of eight weeks, they will identify health promotion issues, find a community partner (or several) to help, and put in place changes, where possible. This program will involve young people in health promotion issues and create important jobs in our local communities.



Photo right:  
Amanda MacNeill,  
Leaders of Today,  
speaking at the CYS  
Symposium

"Camp opened my eyes to what is actually happening around us."

"I want to say thanks to everyone because this week was amazing and I was glad to be myself and have support."

"Everyone was amazing – I want to come back!"

"I really enjoyed this camp and felt like I was able to make friends easily."

#### *It's off to camp they go*

##### **Health Promotion Youth Corps Camp**

In 2012, the first Health Promotion Youth Corps Camp was held at Brigadoon Village. Forty students came together over March break to discuss health issues that affect youth. The experience was so helpful – and inspiring – that the Department of Health and Wellness will now fund another retreat next spring. Participants and organizers discovered that stronger relationships build with time; it's something that can't be replicated in a focus group or a workshop. At its heart, it is about respecting the youth voice and investing time to hear that voice. This new retreat will also help to build greater interest in Strategy projects among Leaders of Today.

## Focus Area 2: Collaborative Service Delivery Approaches

**Goal:** To promote and provide best practices and principles for collaborative service delivery approaches that promote 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 desired results, and provide value for investments.

### Highlights:

#### *Looking at what others do well—together*

##### **Understanding Collaborative Models**

No door is the wrong door when it comes to accessing government services. That open-door philosophy infuses the work of the Child and Youth Strategy, but transforming the ideal into reality requires planning and a firm understanding of best practices.

Our work this year focused on preparation of a Jurisdictional Review to learn more about collaborative delivery models—ways of working well together. We looked at work being done across Nova Scotia, throughout Canada, and around the world. This included a literature review and interviews with key individuals and organizations. As well, focus groups and online surveys were conducted to better understand the challenges and successes of collaborative service delivery for families, children and youth in Nova Scotia.

We learned that there is a need for early and ongoing commitment from everyone involved in these types of services. Trust needs to be built, and building trust takes time.

Given the complexity of issues facing children and youth today, collaborative service delivery is a promising approach with benefits for everyone involved. Governments are just one group. To be effective, we need to work together with community partners to ensure services are coordinated while any gaps in policy and programs are addressed. The result: better service for Nova Scotians.

The Jurisdictional Review explored a number of challenges and successes, and flowing from this the Working Group developed several recommendations, which are now being reviewed. Among the recommendations:

- Identify ways each department can support collaborative practices in their business plans and review policies to ensure barriers to collaboration are reduced.
- Increase opportunities to learn more and to learn from each other. A workshop on collaboration, for example, could be offered through the Public Service Commission.
- Develop a communications strategy to promote a culture of collaboration, and highlight important practices.

- Explore the possibility of having one system across government for emails, scheduling, and video-conferencing.
- Ensure services to children and youth continue to be identified and mapped through Community Counts.

### **Focus Area 3: Horizontal Practices**

**Goal:** Develop and practice a shared understanding of horizontal practices within the Strategy that recognizes all levels of ownership, to ensure coordinated activity and to enhance collaborative practices. This 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.

#### **Highlights:**

#### *Around the table*

#### **Fostering greater understanding of governance**

Our goal is to help partners at all levels understand the importance of working together across government and in the community. This, in turn, improves communication and enhances relationships. Ultimately, we collaborate more effectively.

This year we established a work plan that includes five key components:

- Establishing a working group
- Identifying our roles
- Developing a communications framework
- Preparing an education plan
- Finalizing an implementation plan

We've made significant progress. Our first step was understanding the landscape: learning more about the challenges we face and the opportunities that lie before us. We held our first focus group in Sydney in November—with very positive results. We also conducted an online survey to garner more input.

A key activity was the development of terms of reference for the Regional Leadership Tables and committees. This will serve as a template and is being recommended for use by all committees. It recognizes regional diversity and ensures consistency.

Work also began on a communications strategy to help get the message out about the value of horizontal practices. A number of projects are now being investigated.

## Focus Area 4: Evaluation and Data Collection and Sharing Protocols

**Goal:** 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.

### Highlights:

#### *Count on it*

##### **Data collection**

The work done in this area is vital to the Child and Youth Strategy. A commitment has been made to report on the activities, successes, challenges, and outcomes. We take that commitment seriously.

We are also working to strengthen evaluation and data collection—and an understanding of their importance. More and more, requests have been made asking for statistics that are relevant to local families and service providers. It is hoped that an evaluation framework, being worked on in this focus area, will help answer these questions.

Considerable time was also spent in the creation of a new logic model that shows the complexity of the Strategy and its work. We looked at the Strategy as a whole to provide a better understanding of what data needs to be collected, which will guide our work in this area.

The Child and Youth Strategy is accountable to families, to youth, to communities. That means we will continue to monitor our progress, evaluate our projects, and report on our results. Count on it.

# Our Four Regions

## Western

### Profile: Split Rock Learning Centre

In downtown Yarmouth, there is a place young people like to gather to relax, to chat—and to write cover letters and résumés.

The Split Rock Learning Centre is a drop in centre that helps youth do what they need to do to get back on their feet. That might include putting them in touch with the right people to return to school, lending a hand with a job hunt, or helping them with volunteer commitments required as part of their community service.

“It’s almost like being a guidance counsellor for youth outside school,” says Executive Director Josh Purdy. “We do more than make a phone call—and we make sure this is a safe place for youth.”

Housed in the same building as Split Rock is the Yarmouth Homelessness Project, which will now become an ongoing part of the services provided by the drop in centre. In emergency cases Split Rock can arrange for temporary overnight accommodations through a number of supports in the community, including approved homes.

“Housing is an issue,” says Josh. “We have a lot of hidden homelessness. Young people survive by couch surfing.”

Research shows at-risk youth need help connecting with transitional housing, treatment services, education, volunteer and job opportunities. Emergency services alone are not enough to decrease homelessness. In recognition of that reality, Community Services has funded a new program with Split Rock, and the Centre has hired an outreach worker.

Moving forward, says Josh, the emphasis will be on forging new partnerships and strengthening existing ones—so that more youth can be helped more effectively.

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## Central

### Profile: African Nova Scotia Labour Market Strategy and SchoolsPlus

It's all about connections—and collaboration.

In October, Wayne Talbot, Provincial Coordinator of the African Nova Scotia Labour Market Strategy, attended the LOT 6 Summit at Camp Brigadoon. He held a MarketPlace for Ideas on how to engage youth of African descent. As a result of this initiative, Wayne met with the SchoolsPlus Regional Coordinator and the Child and Youth Strategy Regional Advisory Committee. The goal was to link this work to SchoolsPlus in the Central Region.

A work plan was developed and implemented in January to advance the program, increase participation of youth of African descent in higher-wage positions in Nova Scotia, and prepare for the Ships Are Here jobs of the future. In addition, the Leaders of Today are helping to plan a conference to further engage youth of African descent. The conference will help identify their priorities moving forward.



Photo left:  
Simon Mandari, a youth  
facilitator with the Leaders  
of Today Network.

### Profile: The Child and Youth Strategy and SchoolsPlus Advisory Committees

At the 2011 Child and Youth Strategy Symposium in Truro, a joint work plan developed by the Department of Community Services and SchoolsPlus was showcased as a promising practice.

This served as a model for the Central Region Child and Youth Strategy Advisory Committee and SchoolsPlus, which developed its own collective work plan. The initiative included all sector partners: the Departments of Community Services, Justice, Education, Health and Wellness, the IWK, Halifax Regional Police, and HRM Recreation.

The plan has already had an impact. It has increased access to information and services for children, youth and families in the schools and in the communities where they live; provided training opportunities between the departments and SchoolsPlus staff; and has helped identify and address barriers and gaps for children, youth, families and staff in accessing information and services.

## Eastern

### Profile: Developmental Screening Initiative

In 2012, the Early Years' sector from across northeastern Nova Scotia took important strides forward: partners prepared a document calling for a standardized screening in Nova Scotia. This required working with 10 different committees and two Senior Leadership tables that represent over 100 different agencies and organizations. And it was done in a six-week period—with unanimous support.

The result: a request for support from government departments responsible for delivering programs and services for young children. There is a growing need for universal screening to identify risk factors that can make early school success a challenge.

### Profile: YOUCAN

YOUCAN is a national non-profit organization dedicated to building a culture of peace among youth. It provides training and education in conflict resolution and violence prevention in Canada and abroad. The organization's Mentorship Program is hosted and supported by Family Services of Eastern Nova Scotia.

This year we were fortunate to have formed strong partnerships with Sydney Academy High School, Harbourside Elementary School, and the Whitney Pier Youth Club. We selected 20 mentors from Sydney Academy and 20 mentees from Harbourside Elementary School. The high school youth, who are all trained in conflict resolution, are then matched one on one with elementary students. They work together for over 100 hours during the school year learning new skills to work through conflict peacefully.

## Northern

### Profile: Parrsboro and Cumberland County initiatives

Initiatives being taken in Cumberland County, particularly Parrsboro, exemplify the importance of collaboration and innovation.

Over a two-year period, a significant amount of loss related to youth was experienced by the community of Parrsboro. Unfortunately, public health services were limited here, but there was a desire to do more. That desire became reality this year.

"We wanted to reach into the community to understand better what was going on," says Angela Best, Manager of Public Health Services for Cumberland County.

"Our approach was not to say 'We'll do this and that,'" she added. "We wanted to build relationships. We wanted to build resiliency, and that is happening."

A cornerstone of the work involved meeting with key adult contacts in the community such as the RCMP and the local school. A public health worker and a

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partner from Maggie’s Place, a family resource centre in Amherst, met with many members of the community to introduce themselves and try to better understand the issues facing young people. “It was a great partnership,” says Angela.

As a result of that partnership, Public Health Services is staffing the youth health centre in the high school for one full day a week. This is in addition to the half-day it was currently open.

What Angela calls “the icing on the cake,” however, is a two-day retreat that has now been organized for young people in Cumberland County. It will be held in early October 2012. Hosted by HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development, young people from all over the area will come together to explore issues—and have fun. “We’re trying to raise awareness,” says Angela. “We want to engage youth when they are 13, 14 and 15 years old. Then they will have greater resources to cope when they are full-fledged teenagers—16, 17 and 18.”

Angela points out that the work being done in Parrsboro and Cumberland County complements initiatives already under way in the areas of mental health and addictions. “Together we’re helping young people build greater capacity,” she says.

## Profile: SchoolsPlus benefits families and communities

Education is getting a boost thanks to an innovative program up and running in all eight school boards across Nova Scotia. The school system isn’t the only beneficiary: families, communities, and youth are stronger as a result.

The SchoolsPlus vision is that schools become the hubs of communities: central, convenient and safe places for services to be delivered to students and families. The services provided at each SchoolsPlus site respect and address the unique needs of the community. Each site has a regional advisory committee with representatives from government to help identify gaps and identify solutions.



Children in a SchoolsPlus program. To find out more about SchoolsPlus, visit [novascotia.ca/kidsandlearning](http://novascotia.ca/kidsandlearning)

The goal is to develop an array of programming and services at school sites as well as put in place innovative processes in school. To date more than 100 services are being offered such as:

- summer programming
- mentoring/outreach services
- homework clubs
- employment support
- health and wellness centres
- community policing
- adult upgrading
- parent groups
- community gardens
- youth groups
- parenting classes
- nutritional classes, and
- recreational programming
- after-school programs

The outcomes include:

- Increased parental and family involvement in the school and the community
- Enhanced partnerships and increased collaboration within the larger community
- Greater use of schools for SchoolsPlus programming during extended hours
- Increased youth engagement through their involvement in planning for their success

This year kids and families from Digby and surrounding communities got greater access to services and after-school activities with their SchoolsPlus site when they officially opened a hub site at Digby Regional High School. The hub, a special room for students, will serve as a centre for several schools.

"SchoolsPlus is a place that the student body has helped create," says Vicky Amero, member of the Digby SchoolsPlus student advisory committee. "The room is a reflection of Digby Regional High School's student body, their values and morals. It is more than just a place with a comfy couch and nice reclining chairs, it is a masterpiece of how students think, feel and act."

This fall a hub site will also be established at Truro Junior High School. Students and families from the area will have enhanced access to parenting sessions, employment supports, physical activities, and after-school programming.

## Profile: New approach to support families

The Well Child System Working Group knows well that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The Working Group is establishing what is called a whole-of-government approach to care and support for families with young children.

The initiative focuses on enhancing collaboration across government departments to better coordinate programs and services, and to bring together those involved in working with children. In 2011, a project charter was developed. The focus is on finding a model for families with an 18-month-old.

A process will be identified to help children with developmental delays and/or family stressors by referring them to a community resource. Parents would also be supported to help them improve their parenting skills and give children an opportunity to learn and grow in an enriched, stimulating environment. This work will also help us enhance our understanding of children this age in the province. As well, the data collected will allow us to see changes in how ready children are when they enter school.

In addition, a literature review and other research was presented to the Working Group and senior leaders of the Child and Youth Strategy. It identifies key findings and best practices related to delivering services for families with an 18-month-old child. It is hoped the next step will bring together key players to begin “imagining” what this model could look like in practice.

The possibilities are many.

## 2011 Provincial Symposium

### *What we learned from a Fishbowl—and more*

On October 5th and 6th, 75 people from government came together with community partners and youth for the second annual Child & Youth Strategy Provincial Symposium in Truro. Our purpose was clear—and significant:

- To provide an opportunity for everyone to meet and exchange information
- To provide a chance to raise and discuss important issues
- To provide an update on the Child & Youth Strategy’s Four Focus Areas
- To gather input regarding future Child & Youth Strategy priorities

As part of the two-day event, we looked back—at our roots, our foundations, and our vision. We also looked forward—to next steps, to further progress, to enhanced understanding of issues.

George Savoury, Executive Director, Family & Community Supports/Child & Youth Strategy, reminded everyone that the Strategy’s priorities include initiatives to close gaps, decrease barriers and increase collaboration among and between government and service providers. “We have a lot of work to do. We need to identify opportunities and address challenges,” he noted.

Participants exchanged information about promising practices across the province and in our communities. These practices were simply defined as “good things that are happening, which are easy to implement, take few resources, and can have very positive impacts.”

We also focused on youth—in a Fishbowl. This exercise was an opportunity for young people to answer questions posed to them anonymously. The youth gathered in a talking circle and responded openly to some tough questions submitted by adults.

These included:

- Define youth culture today.
- While teen pregnancy rates are down over the past decade, teens are still becoming pregnant
- How important is social media?
- What are some qualities that you admire in adults who engage youth well?
- How do we increase youth attendance in schools and programs?
- What should the main focus of the Child & Youth Strategy be to increase youth involvement in the Symposium?

“We were impressed by the frankness and genuineness of the responses of the young people—and by their insight,” says one participant.

Finally, we looked ahead. The “Putting it all Together” session yielded impressive suggestions for moving forward. There was excellent discussion into how we can improve and expand initiatives under the Strategy.

Among the areas earmarked for improvement: more opportunities for interactive activities, more conversations on emergent issues, more representation from the early childhood sector, and more input from diverse communities.



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## Looking forward

A lot has happened this past year beyond what is directly captured in this report.

The Child and Youth Strategy continues to promote collaboration as an operational principle and as a practice. This year we developed a workshop on collaboration in complex environments. In the coming year, we expect to improve and expand this into a training opportunity for interested parties.

The development of the SchoolsPlus Information sharing guidelines has been the focus of significant activity this year. A steering committee released a common consent form for SchoolsPlus that permits organizations to share necessary information about a youth in compliance with all relevant legislation and policies. This supports more effective information sharing on complex cases as recommended by the Nunn Commission.

Over the next several months training on the use of the guidelines will be put in place. The training will be attended by representatives of the many sectors involved with SchoolPlus ensuring shared understanding of the guidelines and their application.

Our Leaders of Today Network continues to flourish. This year it hired its first full-time Coordinator. This has improved planning, communication, outreach to communities and government, and support for our young leaders. Over the coming year, we look forward to establishing regional LOT activities that will help sustain and grow LOT in the communities where our young people live.

Individual departments continue to share leadership for collaborative initiatives. Work on the Early Years, the expansion of implementation of the Early Development Instrument, investigation of an Integrated Service delivery Model for a Family with an 18 Month Old, the Mental Health and Addiction Strategy, and Thrive: a plan for a healthier Nova Scotia are all examples of collaborative initiatives led from different places within government.

The Child and Youth Strategy celebrates the work going on at every level, in every community to support our children and youth to be the best they can be. We thank those that drive these efforts, and look forward to continuing to cooperate with you as we seek to improve outcomes for our children, youth, their families and their communities.

