SOCIAL FRAMEWORK

Evaluation Report • 2021

STRATHCONA COUNTY

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, changing economic conditions were creating challenging social pressures for many families in Strathcona County. Strathcona County Family and Community Services (FCS) undertook Community Talk, an extensive community engagement to better understand resident perspectives and social priorities. Community leaders from non-profit, public and private sector organizations came together in early 2017 to build on Community Talk findings.

The Social Framework was the result – a shared policy document to guide organizations in collective efforts in four priority outcomes – affordability, access to programs and services, safety and connectedness and inclusion. The framework also outlined specific shifts to define how community organizations would work together in new and innovative ways.

The group of community leaders, known as the Social Framework Leadership Table (SFLT), continued to convene, share and reflect together. SFLT members aligned with the direction of the Social Framework and collaborated on small- and large-scale innovative initiatives. FCS also redesigned its business model to support Social Framework outcomes and shifts.

Through this collective work, leaders built trust relationships and deepened their understanding of complex community challenges. They gained a more complete understanding of existing community resources and how they could innovate to effectively address challenges together.

This shared foundation also enabled community leaders to lean in to uncertain events such as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. They nimbly evolved their shared understanding of emerging community pressures and pivoted for new collaborative and community-wide responses.

No one could have predicted in 2016 where the Social Framework would lead. It has been a catalyst for impactful changes, including an engaged citizenry and a network of community organizations mobilized to support ongoing community resilience. The learning journey continues today as leaders seek to embed the collaborative culture while undertaking systems-level integration and innovation through a community safety and well-being lens.

This evaluation document summarizes the Social Framework learning journey over its first four years of implementation, highlighting key patterns, principles and findings central to impacts to date.

INTRODUCTION

Changing times, changing community, changing needs – Community Talk

Strathcona County residents had weathered the boom-bust cycles of Alberta's oil and gas economy in the past. However, the economic downturn of 2016 seemed to signal more fundamental shifts in the global oil and gas economy. Significant impacts were experienced at every level, from decreased revenues for the Province of Alberta, to increased fiscal and social pressures on municipalities as well as Alberta citizens and their families.

In 2016, Strathcona County Family and Family Services (FCS) undertook Community Talk, a public engagement process to find out what mattered most to residents. Almost 8,000 people living and working in Strathcona County were engaged. Conversations created a clearer understanding of residents' experiences and of their perspectives on the community's social priorities. In addition to identifying priority outcomes, the Community Talk engagement underscored the need for a significant shift in how community worked together on social priorities.

A cross-section of community organization leaders came together to distill and build on resident input. In addition to framing priority outcomes, the group was asked to help imagine how organizations could work together to achieve deeper, more durable, and sustained impact. This analysis led to the creation of the Social Framework policy document.
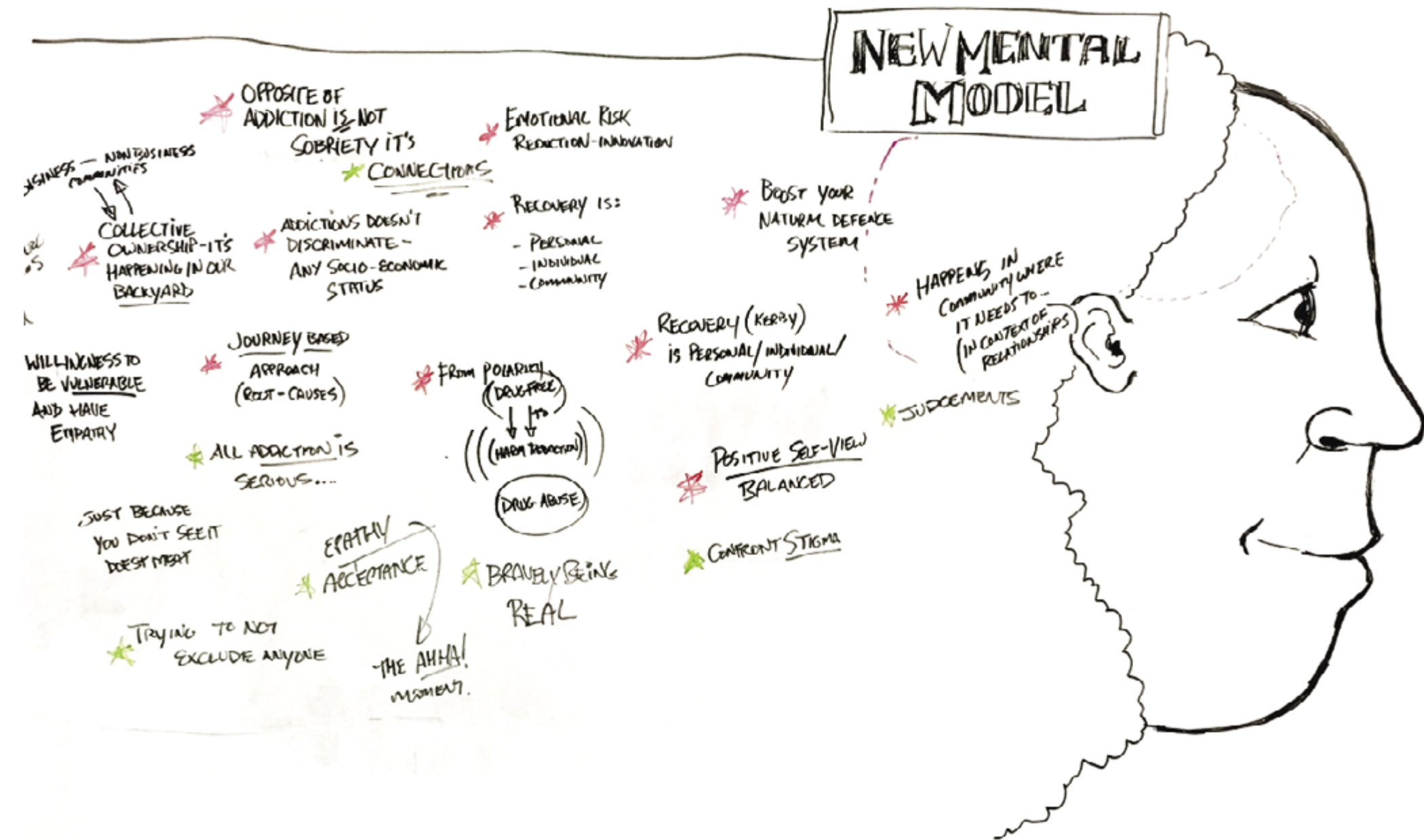
A different approach – the Social Framework

The Community Talk engagement had signaled that past approaches were not enough – a more innovative response was required. Community stakeholders came together to describe the 'what' and the 'how' of a new approach by crafting the Social Framework.
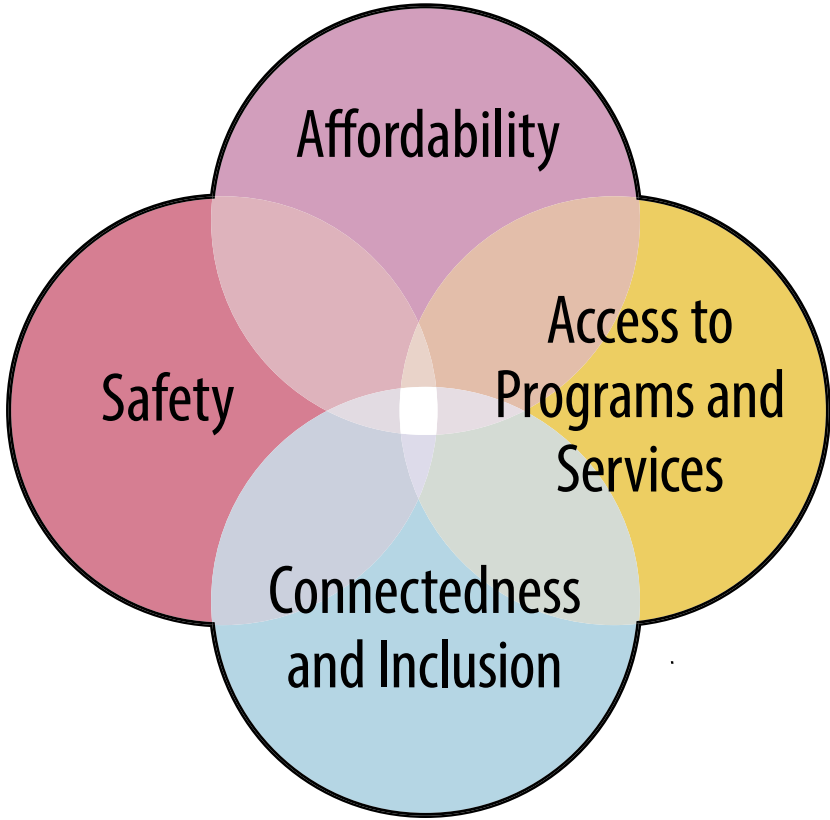
The Social Framework is an overarching policy direction that guides the collaborative work of community stakeholders, Strathcona County departments and residents. Together these County stakeholders strive to create a safe, supported and connected community by pursuing four priority outcomes:

AFFORDABILITY

Citizens have increased capacity to meet their basic needs.

ACCESS TO PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Citizens have straightforward access to programs and services that are easy to find.

SAFETY

Citizens feel physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally safe.

CONNECTEDNESS AND INCLUSION

Citizens are connected to one another and their individual differences are valued and respected.
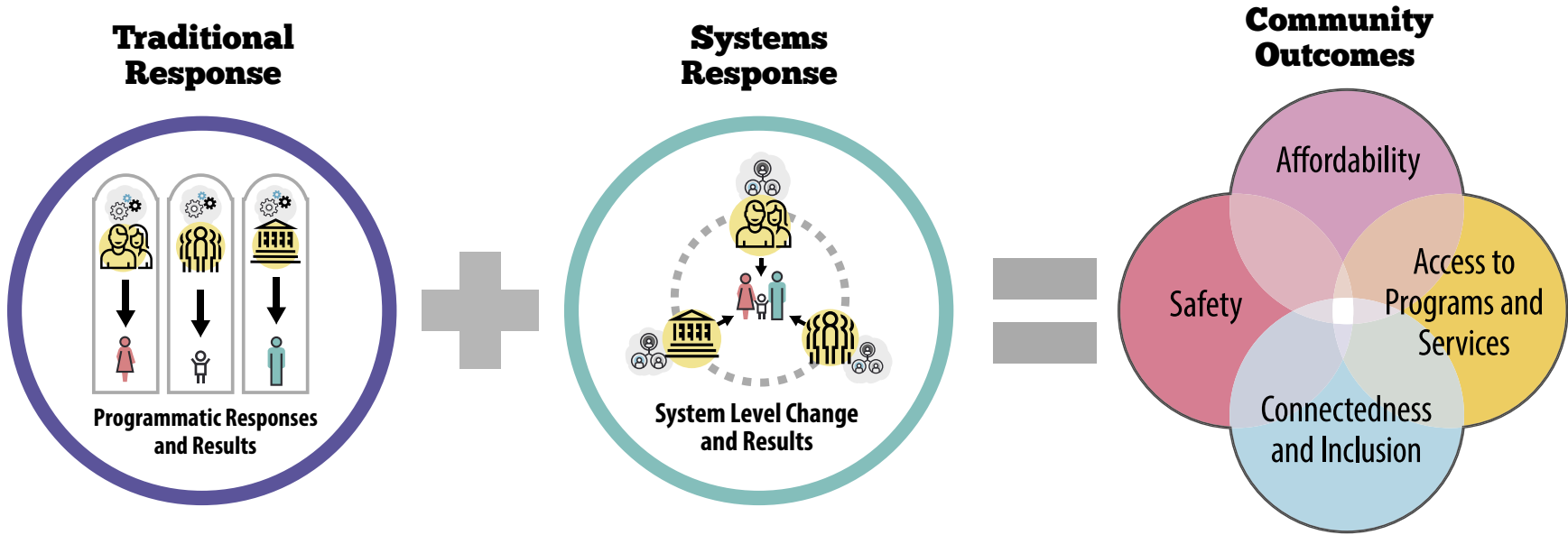
What makes the Social Framework unusual is that it includes not only priority outcomes, but also specific 'shifts' – aspirations of how community stakeholders could work together in new ways.

Collaborative work under the Social Framework seeks to embody the following shifts in focus:

FROM	TO
Programmatic responses	Systemic thinking
Do *for* people	Do *with* people
Incremental, organization-level outcomes	High aspiration and community-wide outcomes
Working in silos	Collective ownership
Focus on symptoms	Focus on root causes

Trying it out – the Social Framework Leadership Table

The group of community leaders continued to meet to discuss strategies and actions to support Social Framework outcomes. Today this group has doubled in size and is known as the Social Framework Leadership Table (SFLT).

It operates as a diverse network of decision-makers from the County's private, non-profit and public sectors. The SFLT has established a pattern of meeting quarterly, though at times has met more frequently to respond to emerging needs in the community.

Organizational leaders have found great value in investing time to:

- Better understand the roles and mandates of other organizations,
- Build relationships and
- Build a shared picture of community social trends.

SFLT members have used this forum to identify community-wide trends that align within their mandates, as well as opportunities to innovate together on small or large projects. The last few years have been an eventful period in Strathcona County's history. Community organizations have responded to unexpected and traumatic events including an explosion at the Community Centre on November 6, 2018 and the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in March 2020. These incidents have deepened Social Framework learning as community members sought to 'live the Framework' within emergency contexts.

What have we learned? – evaluating implementation of the Social Framework

Assessing learning and progress is an important part of policy implementation. The Social Framework was launched in the summer of 2017. Since that time a lot has been learned. Leaders from public and private community service delivery organizations, Strathcona County departments and engaged citizens have worked together in support of the Framework. They have engaged in collective learning – reflecting together, building strategies for action, reframing or aligning services and implementing innovative collaborations.

Over 2020 FCS sought to capture observations on implementation of the Social Framework, including observations on results or impacts for individual organizations and collective work in support of the Framework. It also captured learning on effective processes for collaborating in support of the Framework, as well as general observations on fostering change in support of this shared direction. Conversations were held with over forty internal and external stakeholders to identify key actions and events as well as impacts or results. To make sense of this learning, a SFLT evaluation sub-committee came together to advise, guide and review the Social Framework evaluation processes and products. The sub-committee was made up of longstanding SFLT members who could advise on the entire Social Framework implementation experience as well FCS staff who had been central to the realignment of FCS roles and structures to work with community in support of the Social Framework.

The results of that work are shared here. In answer to the questions 'what has been learned', this document:

- Captures the evolution of the Social Framework since 2016
- Synthesizes emerging principles, and
- Summarizes key results, impacts and learnings from Social Framework implementation.

A WINDING ROAD OF IMPACT

The Social Framework learning journey

The Social Framework provides an overarching policy direction outlining social priorities and how community leaders intend to think and work together for sustainable impact. Implementing the Social Framework has been a learning journey for all.

Leaders reflected on Framework outcomes and over time defined strategies or plans, aligned programs or services and developed coordinated actions. Collaborative efforts included numerous small projects or programs as well as larger strategies or events. Sometimes learning was unplanned but proved to be very important, such as how to mobilize quickly in an emergency. Through working and learning together, organizations deepened their understanding of complex community challenges and how to effectively address them together.

A key learning from this journey is that fostering impactful community change is a winding road. No one could have predicted the path from 2016 to 2020, including an explosion at the

Community Centre or the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a shared direction and shared intention enabled community leaders to learn their way through uncertainty, building and evolving a shared understanding of community-wide pressures as well as shared ways of innovating together to address them.

The following graphic summarizes key shifts in shared thinking that occurred as leaders and organizations crafted and implemented the Social Framework. This narrative provides a brief summary of actions, events and shifts that shaped Social Framework learning.

A WINDING ROAD OF IMPACT · Timeline

2016
- ! Economic Downturn
- 💡 Community Talk
- 💡 Challenging times
  - Listen to leaders
  - Listen to community
  - Identify the need
  - Need a way to work differently

2017
- 💡 FCS begins service model shifts
  - Social Framework created
  - Bridging the Gap
- 💡 Think together
  - The Social Framework innovation
  - Sharing intention and aspirations
  - Begin trying
  - Begin building relationships and trust

2018
- ! Community Centre Explosion
- 💡 Strathcona County Community Drug Strategy
  - Opioids Don't Discriminate Exhibit
- 💡 Focus on outcomes
  - Focus on root causes
  - Experiments and prototypes
  - Shared response to crisis

2019
- ! Opioids Don't Discriminate Exhibit wins provincial 2019 Family and Community Support Services Award of Excellence
- 💡 Co-location of partners and services at Family and Community Services
  - Youth Needs and Assets Study
  - Social Summit
  - Family Resource Network
- 💡 Try small and large initiatives
  - Increasing confidence and trust
  - Stronger relationships

2020
- ! COVID-19 Pandemic
  - Opioids Don't Discriminate Exhibit wins national 2020 Willis Award for Innovation
- 💡 Emergency Social Services Response
  - Strathcona County Next Gen youth strategy development
- 💡 Strong relationships
  - Nimble response
  - Cross-system response
  - Adapting to changing circumstances

LEGEND
! EVENTS   💡 INITATIVES   💡 LEARNINGS

2016

In 2016, the Alberta economy was under growing pressure given shifts in the global oil and gas industry. The new Director of FCS engaged individual community organization leaders in conversations to discuss heightened community challenges and appropriate responses. Almost 8,000 county residents were also engaged through Community Talks, an innovative initiative engaging residents where they gathered (e.g., farmers markets, immunization line-ups, recreation centres) to hear residents' experiences and obtain their input on social priorities in Strathcona County.

Community Talks findings illustrated that there was a growing recognition that the issues being identified represented a shared community challenge. Results were released through multiple media platforms including social media. This transparency signaled the intention to engage Strathcona County residents and stakeholders in collective action to address citizen social priorities.

2017

Over 20 leaders from organizations across Strathcona County's public, private and non-profit sectors convened to discuss Community Talks findings. Together they crafted the Social Framework. The experience of co-creating a social policy direction for Strathcona County was a first for many local leaders – thinking and acting together from an integrated community-wide lens.

Upon release of the Framework, leaders turned their attention to working together on pressing priorities. Several noted that in the beginning, the process of thinking together was not an easy one as leaders were asked to resist the temptation to rush to a plan or a solution and instead to reflect and dialogue on complexity or root causes. Many leaders used the word 'struggle' to describe the experience of turning the Social Framework into a continuous stream of innovative action. In retrospect, this experience was formative for beginning to build trust relationships.

Ideas began to crystalize. For example, a sub-table explored implications of rising addictions and opioids use in Strathcona County. Other small groups also formalized innovative initiatives such as Bridging the Gap, a responsive program to provide wrap-around housing and supports for residents in challenging transitions.

Based on stakeholder input, emerging best practice and brain science research, FCS collapsed over 75 programs into generalist service delivery roles. FCS redesigned its business model to support walk-in approaches to counselling and navigations supports. The 'navigation supports' role was piloted to deliver customized, individual supports to participants and to seamlessly connect residents to a range of community services, walk-in counselling and early years generalist roles. This redesign ensured that resident would receive timely, person-centred supports as part of a service continuum.

Community Drug Strategy for Strathcona County - from addictions to connection

An early SFLT initiative was development of a community-led drug strategy. Emerging trauma research was informing understanding of the root causes of substance misuse. The Community Drug Strategy sought to challenge assumptions and foster community conversation. The strategy underscores that the opposite of addiction is not sobriety but connection, and that everyone in community has a role to play in prevention and recovery.

2018

Strathcona County's Community Grants policy was redefined in support of the Social Framework. In addition to core service providers, grass-roots community groups as well as non-profit collaborations could apply for funding to address Social Framework outcomes. The Social Framework informed broader planning underway in Strathcona County, including the Transit Master Plan and the Recreation and Culture Strategy, as well as a more flexible approach to utilities payments.

The Social Framework Leadership Table released the 'Community Drug Strategy for Strathcona County: From Addiction to Connection'. This multi-stakeholder strategy demonstrated many shifts inherent in the Social Framework including addressing the root cause of isolation, bringing systems thinking and community-wide lenses to community problem-solving and collective ownership. The exhibit 'Opioids Don't Discriminate: An Interactive Experience' was a community initiative emerging from this strategy to challenge community assumptions around opioids use and build empathy and understanding.

The 'Opioids Don't Discriminate' exhibit was launched in November but was closed prematurely due to an explosion at the Community Centre on November 6, 2018. This event became a pivotal learning opportunity for the Social Framework Leadership Table as community leaders leveraged the relationships they had built for seamless community emergency response. The temporary relocation of FCS navigation and walk-in counselling services at the community recreation centre, Millennium Place, also raised resident awareness of these new services.

Opioids don't discriminate - an interactive exhibit

An immediate priority in the Community Drug Strategy was the opioids addiction crisis. Opioids don't discriminate: an interactive exhibit was created to educate residents, address stigma and increase empathy. Participants followed the journeys of thee fictional characters illustrating experiences of those living with opioid misuse. Over 1200 people visited the exhibit. Many municipalities have borrowed the exhibit; a DIY kit has been created to assist communities to develop their own exhibit. The exhibit has received provincial, national and international recognition for its innovative approach.

Opioids don't discriminate
Challenge what you think you know

2019

The co-location of services was expanded with other community service providers. FCS navigation services and parent support groups continued at Millennium Place, while navigation supports were piloted at the Strathcona County Library and at the RCMP. Nine co-located partners now offered services in shared space with FCS. This shared space facilitated 'warm handoffs' between navigators and counsellors and other service providers for timely convenient and holistic service access. Social Framework Core and Collaboration recipients also worked together to define shared evaluation outcomes.

The 'Opioids Don't Discriminate Exhibit' was successfully relaunched. Given the exhibit's innovative focus on root causes and building empathy, numerous communities requested to borrow the exhibit. FCS began to prepare a do-it-yourself kit for other communities.

The Social Framework Leadership Table met with a deepened intention to build understanding of organizational roles and to identify emerging collaboration opportunities. Several leaders assisted in guiding a 'Youth Needs and Assets Study'. Other members assisted in planning a 'Social Summit: From Isolation to Connection', a late fall event that explored broader systemic causes and consequences of social isolation. Social Summit participants included residents and organizations from Strathcona County as well as representatives from many Alberta municipal jurisdictions.

The Social Framework Leadership Table also assisted in the preparation of Strathcona County's application for a 'Family Resource Network' hub in response to changing provincial funding approaches to supporting children, youth and their caregivers. The collaborative application represented a community-wide response to secure an important source of support for the community.

Social Summit - from isolation to connection

In late 2019, SFLT members helped to plan and implement the Social Summit: from isolation to connection. Loneliness and social isolation are increasingly seen as public health issues that impact physical and mental well-being. In this two-day event, local and global speakers challenged over 250 leaders, including many from other municipalities, to re-think assumptions and plan for roles they could play in creating cultures of connection. This event was prescient in foreshadowing many complex issues and positive strategies relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic response.

SOCIAL SUMMIT
DECEMBER 9–10 • 2019

2020

The Social Framework learning journey was heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the onset of the pandemic, FCS reconfigured into two distinct but integrated work streams: Emergency Social Services, and ongoing FCS social service delivery within new pandemic public health guidelines. FCS services quickly pivoted to virtual formats. A community phone line was integrated with Emergency Social Services as the FCS Social Support call line. Staff from seven County departments also joined Emergency Social Services to assist in emergency planning and response.

Concurrently, the Social Framework Leadership Table shifted to an accelerated virtual meeting format. SFLT met twice-weekly for the last two weeks of March, weekly for the next month, bi-weekly for another month and then monthly as events stabilized. Leaders shared information and resources (e.g., how to deliver virtual services, WIFI access options for residents). They identified and addressed emerging operational challenges (e.g., accessing personal protective equipment) while at the same time developing nimble supports for the most vulnerable. Sub-committees addressed more complex community risks (e.g., creating a domestic violence tool kit to provide a safe avenue for those seeking help; creating a coherent communications strategy to encourage struggling residents to seek support with the FCS call line as a consistent funnel for support; creating potential templates for advertising the call line tailored to feature individual community organizations).

By the fall, the Social Framework Leadership Table focus had broadened to longer-term impacts of the pandemic response. The Social Framework Leadership Table hosted a joint meeting to advise the Strathcona County Council COVID-19 Citizen and Community Support Task Force on emerging resident needs as well as anticipated impacts on the social service delivery sector. There was a growing awareness of the need to convene expanded tables of community leaders to address emerging priorities, such as a sub-committee on an expanded community- wide violence threat risk assessment protocol to include trauma enhanced systems and suicide prevention/impacts.

Leaders acknowledged the importance of investing time in purposeful strategies to continue to expand the breadth and depth of the Social Framework leader network. This was seen as critical so that this way of thinking and working together could become embedded in the community culture and not be dependent on any one leader.

Domestic Violence Toolkit

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, SFLT members were concerned about Strathcona County residents experiencing domestic violence. Public health orders for social isolation and working or schooling from home significantly limited personal connections and heightened risks. Public health restrictions allowed people to visit pharmacies and this created an opportunity. In just six weeks, a SFLT sub-committee created a Domestic Violence Toolkit and oriented 28 pharmacies in Strathcona County. This alternate connection and referral point created safe access for residents; the kit was also posted online. Within a week of being launched the tool kit generated its first call.

THE POWER OF PRINCIPLES

Principles emerging from Social Framework implementation

The winding Social Framework learning journey, with its twists and turns, shows how a rigid plan (e.g., focusing on pre-determined steps and outcome measures) may not have been helpful in navigating and innovating in such uncertainty. However, a shared direction, agreement on a new way of working together, a willingness to innovate at small and large scales and a commitment to regularly communicate, built the trust required to navigate together for greater impact.

The Social Framework evaluation process engaged numerous community leaders to reflect on how the intention of the Social Framework had informed their work over four years. Across group discussions and individual conversations, coherent themes emerged on 'how we now do things in the community of Strathcona County' in support of the Social Framework. These emerging themes appeared to reflect shared principles – clear patterns of shared intention in what it meant to 'live the framework' in purposeful, thoughtful, evidence-based ways. While work performed would vary greatly across organizations, common themes and language emerged in two areas – service delivery and collaboration, or how we think and work together.

The advantage of such principles is that they can be applied differently by different people, but still be shared by the group. Approaches can be adapted by individual organizations as circumstances change; yet shared principles create coherence across the whole towards shared direction, desired behaviour and shared outcomes.

The following two sections summarize these concepts in two sets of emerging Social Framework principles. Principles for serving guide the approaches of organizations as they interact with residents in program delivery. Principles for collaborating show how organizations will work together in new ways.

Principles for Serving
Emerging principles for service delivery

CENTER ON THE PERSON
· be person centered and person directed

BUILD ON STRENGTHS
· foster hope and energy for change

GROW RELATIONSHIPS
· strengthen family and community connections

WATCH THE SYSTEM
· take a systems view

PRIORITIZE SAFETY
· be trauma informed and safety alert

FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS
· identify positive actions to move forward

FOSTER SKILLS
· coach and mentor to build skills

LEARN TOGETHER
· be intentional about thoughtful convening and reflection

Principles for Collaborating
Emerging principles for thinking and working together

BE THERE
· commit to regular convening and relationship building

LISTEN AND SHARE
· openly share relevant organizational information to foster awareness and connections

THINK TOGETHER
· foster cross-sectoral participation of leaders to develop community-wide perspectives

DO IT
· respond nimbly and flexibly to shared priorities for action

Principles for Serving - emerging service delivery principles

Implementation of the Social Framework required that leaders engage their teams in ongoing reflection and experimentation to learn how to bring the outcomes and shifts to life through program delivery. Over time, a coherent pattern of intentions in how organizations support residents emerged. These intentions are captured in the principles that follow.

CENTER ON THE PERSON
· be person centered and person directed

Strathcona County residents are individuals with goals, dreams and priority needs. It is important that service delivery focuses on the priorities that residents identify. While people may share complex needs or multiple pressing issues, it is always their choice where to start and which steps they choose to take.

To reinforce resilience, it is useful to locate resident priorities in the context of their whole life; despite feelings of vulnerability they are not 'a package of needs' but a whole person with aspirations, resources and relationships who are experiencing human challenges or transitions. Friendly, welcoming interactions that support curiosity, compassion, dignity and acceptance build resident confidence. A sincere interest to get to know individuals fosters trust and honest conversations - important for residents to plan and act on a change.

In counselling services, staff observe that people can vary greatly in their readiness to make a change. Seeking support is an important first step in building readiness. A person-centred and person-directed approach can build confidence to take a next step.

BUILD ON STRENGTHS
· foster hope and energy for change

Residents have many personal strengths which they bring to problem solving (e.g., personal skills, life experiences, accomplishments, personal networks, etc.). When residents experience feelings of vulnerability or heightened stress, these strengths can be overshadowed. Early conversations with residents can identify, value and even celebrate personal and family strengths of residents. This renewed awareness can build hope and energy for change.

Residents can also be supported in identifying additional strengths or benefits that other changes would bring to their lives. When coupled with the affirmation that residents have the power to choose to make changes, feelings of hope can be reinforced.

GROW RELATIONSHIPS
· strengthen family and community connections

Services can be purposefully designed to create opportunities for relationship-building (e.g., gathering spaces; activities that foster relationships around shared interests or challenges). Initially this may involve building relationships with program staff or partners relevant to resident goals but can also include community members. New relationships can strengthen personal skills and broaden residents' natural networks of support over time.

For example, programs that serve parents can provide opportunities for parents to share experiences and collectively problem-solve on shared challenges. This sharing can foster empathy for others and themselves while encouraging relationship-building.

WATCH THE SYSTEM
· take a systems view

Services take a holistic view of a resident's life situation and the range of personal and community systems impacting that situation. Staff also remain connected to developments in related research fields that may be impacting resident situations. This enables them to better understand what is observed, and more effectively support residents in identifying, understanding and pro-actively addressing underlying issues.

A common assumption of home support services is that staff are present to address a list of household tasks. However, home support staff can be the most regular consistent presence in the home of senior residents which can build strong trust relationships. This relationship and a holistic view enable staff to observe individual challenges and related life transitions. Trust relationships then enable staff to work with their home support team to identify and raise proactive solutions seniors can choose for continued health, safety and independence (e.g., fall prevention strategies; home or equipment maintenance; referrals to other community health supports, etc.).

PRIORITIZE SAFETY
· be trauma informed and safety alert

Many children can experience adverse or traumatic childhood experiences. Emerging brain science research is illuminating how childhood trauma impacts brain development, stress response and how this is manifested as the child grows to adulthood. Trauma informed practice is critical to ensure that residents are not re-traumatized when reaching out for support.

Many processes and practices can make service interactions safer for residents. Safe, comfortable welcoming spaces, prompt service response, simple one-time data capture to prevent retelling their story or seamless 'warm handoffs' for effective service referrals are best practices. The practice of asking every resident seeking services a universal question around personal safety also creates an opportunity for residents to identify personal safety concerns.

To illustrate, the nine community partners co-located at Strathcona County's Community Centre share a spacious reception and meeting space with FCS walk-in counselling and navigation. Close working relationships enable community partners to be invited into conversations when a resident identifies a co-located service relevant to their next steps. Trust relationships enable a 'warm handoff', from inviting in another perspective for information sharing to making a seamless referral. Community organizations with a network of trust relationships can refer residents through a similar, albeit virtual 'warm handoff'.

FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS
· identify positive actions to move forward

Residents seek supports for challenges of varying complexity. Despite this range, a useful stance is to engage residents with the assumption that this may be their only visit. While services offer holistic or systems perspectives, residents also desire pragmatic strategies for pressing issues. It is important that residents walk away with a menu of evidence-based options and strength-based resources that support their goals or immediate priorities. This gives them the power to choose when and how to move forward.

Residents may return for additional solutions-focused conversations. They will also leave subsequent visits with a revised menu of evidence-based options and strength-based resources reflecting evolving goals. While this model represented a significant culture and practice change for walk-in counselling and navigation staff at FCS, data show that residents are positive about the approach and many are successful in addressing priority issues in one or a few visits.

FOSTER SKILLS
· coach and mentor to build skills

Evidence-based service delivery requires that residents understand the 'why' as well as the 'what' of any recommended approach. Sharing the research-based rationale in plain language enables participants to understand the value of a specific behaviour or approach. Modeling can also be an important way for adults to learn; every staff interaction with a resident provides an opportunity for residents to observe positive approaches in action. Activities that embed engaging, skill-building tools, coupled with timely positive feedback, are also critical for participants to practice skills needed to achieve their goals.

For example, Family Resource Network staff understand the importance of these approaches when providing parenting supports. Creating engaging family experiences for kids and parents enable staff to share underlying theory in simple terms, model the behaviour and give parents a comfortable place to practice. In the moment positive reinforcement then reinforces parent confidence and encourages them to practice at home. Some parents have become so engaged in their learning around parenting that they now host peer learning activities for other parents.

LEARN TOGETHER
· be intentional about thoughtful convening and reflection

Purposeful, strength-based reflection fosters resilience in residents, organizations and systems. It is important for programs and organizations to build in reflection time so that all become aware when valuable learning has occurred. Reflection on learning enables program participants to value their personal learning and build awareness and reflection skills; program staff evolve their person-centred understanding. When staff teams schedule time to individually and collectively reflect, teams can purposefully integrate learning for increased effectiveness or innovation.

Groups of community stakeholders can also contribute to shared learning reflections. The Social Framework Leadership Table quarterly meetings include shared reflection on observations, challenges and collaboration opportunities within the Social Framework outcomes. Social Framework Grant recipients have also collectively reflected on Social Framework outcomes and indicators to share learning.

It is important that when groups are brought together regularly, careful consideration is given to the ongoing process design. The forum, the questions and flow of discussions all impact the effectiveness of the experience and the quality of relationship-building. Flexible processes that support open sharing by all, collective learning experiences and ongoing reflection on changing contexts foster high engagement and continued participation.

Principles for Collaborating – emerging principles for thinking and working together

In implementation of the Strathcona County Social Framework, community leaders at the Social Framework Leadership Table (SFLT) used similar language and themes to describe approaches. These themes of shared intentions also illustrate an emerging set of principles on how Strathcona County community leaders have learned to 'think and work together' to effectively support Social Framework outcomes. These principles are described below.

BE THERE
· commit to regular convening and relationship building

Social Framework leaders convene predictably (i.e., quarterly or more frequently as required). A commitment to regular participation promotes relationship building across this network of leaders. Attendance also reinforces the strength and resilience of the collective; leaders observe that they are part of an active community-wide network in support of the Social Framework. In-person gatherings are preferred, as members engage in informal connections before meetings or at breaks. However, changes in response to COVID-19 have demonstrated that virtual connection can be equally important in maintaining and promoting network resilience.

Strathcona County's Social Framework Leadership Table has continued to convene since the Framework creation in 2017. The Table has grown, and there has been transition in individual leaders (e.g., retirements). Despite transitions, organizations consistently send their leaders, demonstrating that these meetings remain a valuable investment of time.

The value of an established active network was underscored with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Pivoting to bi-weekly virtual meetings and working as a collective, members were able to discern a more comprehensive picture of rapidly unfolding events, share pivotal information (e.g., where to access personal protective equipment or WIFI) and undertake collective problem-solving. For example, communication enabled organizations like Volunteer Strathcona to channel volunteer resources to address urgent community needs (e.g., getting food and medication to the County's most vulnerable and isolated residents). Organizations were also able to quickly and efficiently coordinate efforts for joint funding applications for emergency response.

> The more we talk, the more we understand how we all serve the same people, the same community - SFLT Member

LISTEN AND SHARE
· openly share relevant organizational information to foster awareness and connections

Social Framework Leadership Table members provide regular updates on 'their piece of the puzzle', i.e., observations on trends (e.g., shifts in demand, patterns of needs), operational challenges, opportunities for collaboration or resources to share. This enables organizations to better understand what each organization contributes to the service continuum in Strathcona County. This also supports more effective referrals and catalyzes ideas for possible synergies, collaborations or resources to be shared. Leaders can then make connections between meetings to build formal collaborations.

Bridging the Gap is an example of an innovative partnership that emerged through collaboration between Sherwood Park and Heartland Alliance churches, Heartland Housing and FCS. The program combined short-term funding for housing with wrap-around supports for people transitioning through difficult times. In another example, Elk Island Catholic School Board shared that they wanted to establish a mentoring program but were having difficulty working out transportation challenges. Big Brothers Big Sisters followed up and worked with Boys and Girls Club of Strathcona County to exchange volunteer recruitment for the transportation of mentors to Elk Island Catholic School sites.

THINK TOGETHER
· foster cross-sectoral participation of leaders to develop community-wide perspectives

As community organizations understand the range of community resources, they are better able to think holistically and strategically as a community. Through focused conversations, leaders sense how different systems or sub-systems are experiencing community trends, discern where issues are linked and understand where symptoms may be masking other underlying issues. This enables the creation of innovative strategies or initiatives that can more directly address a root cause underlying community trends.

The 'Social Summit: From social isolation to connection' was another Social Framework Leadership Table collaboration. Designed by community partners, the event hosted world-renowned and local speakers. It provided a learning opportunity for citizens and organizations to better understand the issue of social isolation, a root cause for many social challenges, and talk with fellow participants about pragmatic responses. The Social Summit foreshadowed many of the pressing social issues that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DO IT
· respond nimbly and flexibly to shared priorities for action

The Social Framework Leadership Table demonstrates ongoing learning on how to effectively support Social Framework outcomes. Collaborations emerge organically to leverage the power of the collective, including smaller informal connections and/or formal collaborations (e.g., opportunities for shared services; innovations to address service gaps, etc.) as well as address larger collaborations.

In the two recent disasters in Strathcona County, community leaders repurposed this established network for urgent response. The diversity of participants ensured comprehensive thinking about community impacts and creative use of infrastructure and resources. Successful funding applications secured additional resources to address food security concerns and mental health supports.

> (We have) a willingness to work together and lean on each other in unprecedented times and in unprecedented ways - SFLT Member

NOW WE KNOW

Summary evaluation findings

The following section outlines the overarching summary findings from the Social Framework evaluation. To provide a comprehensive picture of learning, evaluations can take different approaches or lenses to capture a diversity of findings.

• **Summative findings** – what was the overall impact or result of the work?

• **Formative findings** – what processes or approaches to implementation were effective?

• **Developmental findings** – beyond impact or effectiveness, what learning has emerged about how to foster social change in support of the Social Framework?

This evaluation captures summary findings through each of these lenses.

Summative Findings – impacts of the Social Framework

Community leaders observed that the Social Framework provides an effective, coherent direction for social action and provides a shared platform under which diverse community stakeholders can convene and address shared priorities.

Specifically, the Framework:

- Aligns organizations in Strathcona County's public, non-profit and private sectors to more effectively address residents' priority outcomes and desired shifts in collaborative behaviour

- Enables focused supporting structures that build capacity and collaboration (e.g., Social Framework Leadership Table; Social Framework Community Grants Policy)

- Reinforces a cultural shift in how organizations think and work together. Collective responses address immediate community pressures and underlying complex issues through systems thinking, evidence-based approaches and consideration of community-wide impacts.

Tri-Protocol

Many community organizations have been collectively implementing a Violence Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA) Protocol. Community leaders know the valuable impact that this collaboration has had in minimizing violent events in community. As part of COVID-19 response, an SFLT Sub-Committee is now broadening this protocol to include Traumatic Events Systems and Suicide prevention as research shows that such events are fluid and issues are enmeshed. This protocol is one of the first of its kind in North America and is to be implemented in fall 2021.

Formative Findings – what is working?

Community leaders observed that ongoing reflection, cross-sectoral conversations and collaborative action have yielded important learning on 'what works' to meaningfully address Social Framework outcomes and shifts.

While work across organizations differs greatly, two emerging sets of principles appear to be guiding coherent, effective community responses to social issues in Strathcona County. These include service delivery principles that reinforce consistent approaches to responsive, evidence-based and person-centred services, as well as collaboration principles that shape how community leaders and organizations 'think and work together' to foster trust, build collective ownership and undertake nimble responses for community-wide impacts.

An emergent strategy uses approaches at different scales that can engage diverse groups for ongoing community impact, i.e.,

- Small scale innovative collaborations engaging a few organizations

- Larger scale community-wide strategies that convene larger tables of engaged community organizations and residents for cross-systems work

- Awareness and public education events that build deeper community understanding of issues, encouraging individual residents and grassroots groups to act, and

- Targeted communication strategies and ongoing navigation services that link residents to timely supports as they are ready to make a change.

COVID-19 Communications

The SFLT Communications Sub-Committee and Emergency Social Services developed shared community messaging to support residents along their trajectory of COVID-19 recovery. To destigmatize and normalize asking for help, a series of ten relatable vignettes were developed for social media to encourage people of all ages and life stages to reach out – 'any door is the right door'.
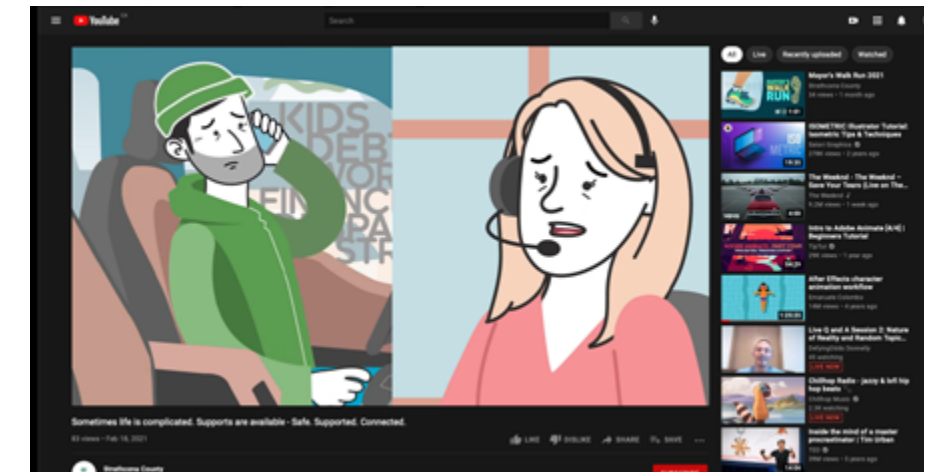
Developmental Findings – fostering positive social change in support of the Social Framework

The breadth of work in support of the Social Framework has underscored the following learning on how positive social change can be fostered in Strathcona County.

Residents want to support each other in pursuing the outcomes of the Social Framework. Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have underscored this (e.g., the large response to Volunteer Strathcona's engagement of residents to deliver food and medication or reach out to isolated seniors).

Organizational leaders see value in investing time to meet and work together to address Social Framework outcomes. This continued time investment enables leaders to better understand community challenges and capacities, undertake strategic problem-solving, build networks of trust relationships and support effective community-wide responses.

These networks of trust relationships become important community resources which can be mobilized to address pressing community priorities and larger systems challenges (e.g., a community-based response to the Family Resource Network application for provincial funding; pivoting for nimble response to address COVID-19 pandemic impacts on vulnerable Strathcona County residents).

There appears to be a growing readiness in community leaders to tackle systems-level initiatives that address root causes. A clear example of this readiness is the evolution of work on a Violence Threat Risk Assessment protocol to include emerging research on trauma-enhanced systems and suicide prevention. These issues are often enmeshed; the protocol under development will represent an expanded community-wide and cross- systems response. Numerous organizations in Strathcona County have undertaken shared learning as a baseline for this work.

Another example of this readiness comes in the form of the Strathcona County Next Gen Strategy, which is being developed as a next step to respond to the recommendations from the 2019 Strathcona County Youth Needs and Assets Assessment. Using a participatory approach, youth and young adults, along with Youth Serving Organizations are working together to develop a strategy and policy responses for youth and young adults in the community. Strathcona County youth and young adults are taking a key leadership role in development of the strategy and guiding participation in Next Gen Action Groups which are based on lived experience and expertise regarding what youth and young adults need to thrive now and into the future, resulting in a stronger community that is safe and well.

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

Priorities for expanded impact

Community leaders identified several priorities for the next chapter of Social Framework implementation:

Continue to 'fail forward'

Social Framework implementation has required leaders to innovate and try new strategies for effective social service response. The COVID-19 pandemic has only underscored this imperative - leaders have been learning their way forward in these unprecedented times. Organizations must continue to be willing to embrace innovative strategies to achieve outcomes, and not all will be successful. However, ongoing information sharing, nimble response to changing contexts, and responsive adjustments of strategies as required will continue to advance Social Framework learning and effectiveness.

Strathcona County youth-serving organizations and Next Gen are learning what it means to 'fail forward' by rallying together in innovative ways to respond to the priority areas identified in the 2019 Youth Needs and Assets report and emerging needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Strathcona County youth-serving organizations have stepped up with open hearts and open minds to listen to the unique needs and experiences of youth and young adults throughout 2020. In 2021, Next Gen Action Groups and youth-serving organizations are continuing to work together to support the achievement of a Next Gen friendly Strathcona County and help youth and young adults navigate through the setbacks of the pandemic.

Embed the way of working for lasting impact

A cohort of leaders has been instrumental in leading Social Framework implementation. For lasting impact, it will be important that additional leaders be engaged in Social Framework implementation.

This includes involving additional organizations and using new processes to make involvement accessible so that the impact of the Social Framework continues to 'ripple out' (e.g., sub-tables on specific priorities or issues). It also includes deepening the relationships in emerging networks, so that leaders at multiple organizational levels are involved in shared communication, relationship-building and collaboration.

Tell the quantitative Social Framework story

Community leaders in Strathcona County now have shared concepts and shared language to describe 'what is working in Strathcona County' to promote positive social outcomes. This foundation now enables leaders to build on complementary evidence-based concepts and frameworks that are aligned with Social Framework findings. This has the potential to inform and accelerate the capture of quantitative findings on Social Framework impacts.

Cross-systems integration, and responding to emerging challenges

Community safety and well-being is a systems-level approach that will foster such strategic alignment. In November 2020, Strathcona County Council initiated a motion That by the end of the first Quarter of 2021, Administration will provide a report on options and possible next steps for developing a Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy for Strathcona County.

While Strathcona County is a safe community, circumstances are changing due to the global pandemic. Social isolation, employment interruptions and financial pressures associated with the pandemic have the potential to increase risk factors for mental health challenges, substance abuse, violence and criminal behaviour. Drawing on the lessons and experience of the Social Framework, the community has the opportunity to respond proactively in this new context. Community partners, the RCMP and administration are working to develop a Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. This requires community wide collaboration to collect and interpret information. This will allow leaders to prioritize risks and strengthen capacity to respond to emergent vulnerabilities and the unique circumstances of Strathcona county residents and the community.

CONCLUSION

The Social Framework has provided a platform that allows community organizations to collaborate and innovate towards shared outcomes. It also provides direction on how community leaders and organizations can think and work together differently in the context of complexity and uncertainty towards shared outcomes. Through this shared learning process, community leaders have developed networks of trust relationships, a valuable resource in taking purposeful action in uncertain times. Most importantly, this shared focus and collective learning has increased community resilience to respond to unexpected events while simultaneously addressing complex community needs.
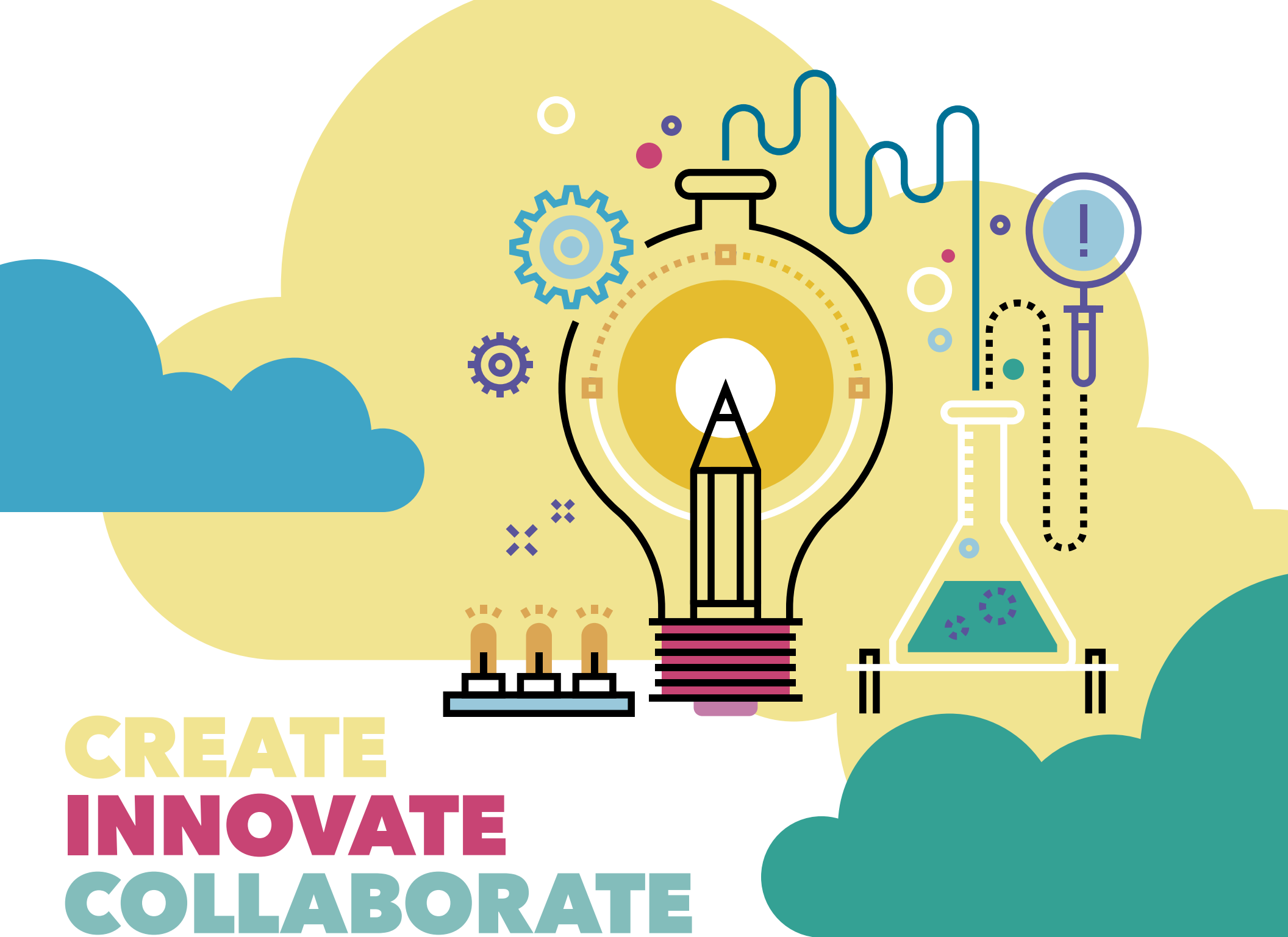
Epilogue - community leaders in their own words

At the January 18, 2021 Social Framework Leadership Table meeting, leaders were asked to reflect on the reasons why they continue to make it a priority to regularly show up and actively engage in work emerging from the Table.

The leader comments - in their own words - echo many of the themes described in this report. They articulate the value of the Social Framework for the information sharing, collaboration and shared trust that can arise from a network of community leaders assuming shared ownership for community-wide outcomes:

- (The Social Framework Leadership Table provides) an opportunity to think and work together to create a caring community; (we have) mutual respect and shared goals

- The more we talk, the more we understand how we all serve the same people, the same community

- A sense of strength and comradery – we are all dealing with similar challenges

- To gain an awareness of opportunities, and the community connections that can result

- Seeing each other as partners (versus operating in silos)

- A willingness to work together and lean on each other in unprecedented times and in unprecedented ways

- We are better together; areas of overlap lead to synergy and collaboration

- Great to be part of a community-wide approach representing the needs of the whole community

- An amazing foundation of community building – grateful to everyone

- Continued learning from the breadth of knowledge and expertise at this table; (work here is) pollinating other groups

- (It underscores) our collective responsibility to support the whole community and specific groups (e.g., students in schools)

- (We are) engaging community leaders and developing home-grown solutions that are best for our community

- (We have) the ability to respond to and impact change (e.g., decrease gaps), moving things forward through a network

- It slows me down, I am forced to reflect

CREATE
INNOVATE
COLLABORATE