

COMMUNITY SERVICE PLANNING PROJECT
SYNOPSIS OF FINAL REPORT

SUBMITTED TO:
THE HAMILTON-NIAGARA REGIONAL OFFICE OF
THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY, FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S
SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

The Task

In December of 2001 the Hamilton/Niagara Regional Office of the then Ministry of Community and Social Services asked the four Contact agencies within its jurisdiction (i.e. Brant, Haldimand-Norfolk, Hamilton and Niagara) to begin a process leading to the development of annual community service plans. As a result of this request, the Contact agencies contracted with a consultant to assist them in accomplishing four tasks: identifying the key stakeholders in a community service planning process; building consensus and support for the steps in the process; building consensus on the information and tools to be used in the process; and developing a template for the plan itself.

The Approach To The Project

The Contact agencies took a three-phase approach to this exercise of “planning to plan.” The first phase consisted of an initial round of individual meetings between the project consultant and twenty-four key informants across the four jurisdictions. The purpose of these meetings was twofold. First, to discuss any unique local characteristics that might need to be considered in carrying out the current project or in the design of the approach to community service planning. Second, to elicit ideas that might help clarify the content, process, and participants for the next phase of the project. The individual interviews took place from late February to mid-March of 2002.

The second phase of the consultation consisted of holding sixteen focus groups across the four jurisdictions. Participants in the focus groups represented a cross-section of perspectives, including consumers, board members, service providers, and others such as planners and funders. In all, 146 people participated in the focus groups. The sessions began with a brief overview of the project and the proposed steps, content, and guiding principles for community service planning. The groups then discussed each component of the proposal in turn, recording their views on the merits of the proposal at the end of each discussion.

Although the comments from the focus groups were supportive of the proposed approach, they also included a number of specific suggestions which led the Contact agencies to reconsider and revise the proposal in a number of ways. These revisions were presented at five information sessions, which comprised the third and final phase of the project. The sessions began with a review of the original proposal, followed by a summary of the findings from the focus groups. This was then followed by a presentation of the revised proposed approach, and a summary of the Contact agencies’ recommendations to the Regional Office.

THE PROPOSED APPROACH TO COMMUNITY SERVICE PLANNING

The Contact agencies are proposing that there be five major steps to the community service planning process, along with a set of principles to guide the process. These steps plus the guiding principles constitute the six components of the proposed approach to community service planning, as illustrated in Figure 1 on the following page. Each of these proposed components is described in more detail below.

Step 1: Collect Information On Patterns

The proposal is that the first step in the community service planning process be the collection of information about patterns related to:

- The general population
- The current service system
- Usage rates
- The broader context

This first step is intended to provide a good descriptive overview of the relationship between population variables, the current use of resources, pressures on the service system, and broader contextual considerations.

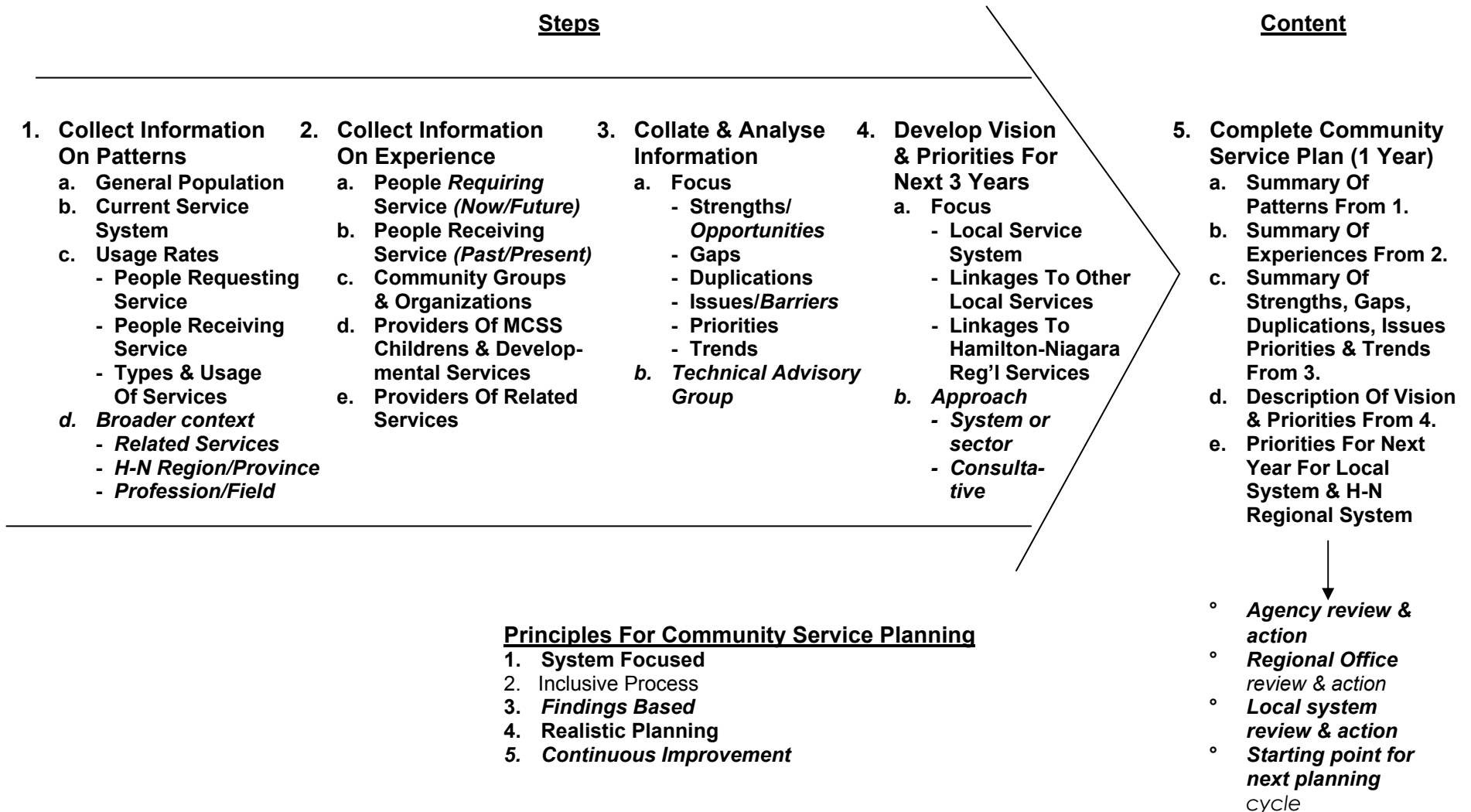
The information collected on the **general population** would profile the local community in terms of population size, distribution, and trends; population characteristics such as age, culture, and language; and conditions similar to those used by the health sector for population health (e.g. income, education, social support). Wherever possible the description of the general population would include comparisons with other jurisdictions or provincial averages.

The description of the **current service system** would focus primarily upon those Ministry directly-funded agencies that fall within the mandate of the Contact agencies: that is, the non-mandatory children's services and developmental services for both children and adults. In the collection of information, the Contact agencies would initially rely upon the data currently collected by the Ministry. Core data would include number of agencies, service descriptions, resource allocations by type of service, units of service provided, and service capacity. The goal is to be able to describe the proportion of total resources in a number of ways, such as: type of service/support by agency and locality; eligibility criteria including age, diagnosis, complexity/severity, and gender; and by where the service/support falls along the continuum of service. Again, wherever possible, the description of the current service system would include comparisons with other jurisdictions or provincial averages.

With regard to **usage**, the Contact agencies would describe those requesting services by referral source, personal characteristics (such as age, ethnicity, and level of need), and type of request; people waiting for services by personal characteristics, type of request, and waiting experience (e.g. number of people waiting, average length of wait); and people receiving services by number of recipients, type of service, units of service, length of service, and personal characteristics.

Figure 3
Community Service Planning For
MCFCS Funded Children's And Developmental Services
Proposed Steps, Content And Principles

(ITALICS INDICATE CHANGES BASED UPON FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES)



In addition, the Contact agencies are proposing that information be collected on aspects of the **broader context**. This broader context would include other Ministry services and programs (such as child welfare, Young Offenders, special services at home, and the Ontario Disabilities Support Program), as well as other sectors such as child care, education and health. It also would include the Regional and corporate levels of the Ministry, and provincial government generally. And it would include relevant information related to the professions and fields that contribute to children's and developmental services. The information included in this section would be high level and factual, with the focus being on relevant policy changes, mandate changes, caseload experience, and other factors that have a potential impact on children's and developmental services.

Step 2: Collect Information On Experience

The second proposed step is to collect information about people's experience with the service system. This information would be more personal and subjective than that gathered through step 1, but equally important. Since different constituencies experience the system in different ways, the proposal is to collect information from at least five perspectives:

- People requesting service
- People receiving service
- Community groups and organizations
- Providers of Ministry funded children's and developmental services
- Providers of related services.

For **people requiring service**, the emphasis would be on those currently requesting or waiting for service. The Contact agencies would use a mix of methods to obtain information, such as focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires. The information to be collected would be consistent with the kinds of themes identified in step 3; that is, people's perceptions of the strengths of the current service system, potential gaps or duplications in services, and issues, priorities, and trends related to services.

A similar approach would be taken to collecting information on the experience of **people receiving service**. The emphasis would be on those currently or recently receiving services. A mix of methods would again be used to gather information, and the type of information sought would be consistent with the themes identified in step 3. The same approach would be taken with **community groups and organizations**, except that the emphasis would be on groups and organizations that in some way relate to children's and developmental services; for example, consumer groups or multi-cultural organizations.

The approach to collecting information on experience from **providers of Ministry funded children's and developmental services** and **providers of related services** would be much the same as for the other constituencies. In the case of providers of related services, however, the emphasis would be on other points of entry into services, such as child care, child welfare, Young Offenders, and education.

Step 3: Collate And Analyse Information

The third proposed step is to collate the findings from the first two steps and to analyse them with regard to a number of themes:

- Perceived strengths or opportunities within the service system
- Perceived gaps or duplications
- Issues and/or barriers related to the availability or delivery of services
- Views regarding priorities for service
- Potential trends in a variety of areas relevant to planning

The proposal is that this collation and analysis be carried out by the Contact agencies with support and assistance from a **technical advisory group**. This group would be comprised of a small number (e.g. 4-6) of external experts in information collection and analysis, and would provide support to the four Contact agencies and their local processes in a number of ways. It would assist Contact agencies in the design of the information collection tools and methodology, provide advice on the quality and consistency of the information collected, and oversee the collation, interpretation, and analysis of the findings.

The technical advisory group is considered to be a start-up strategy to insure the integrity and quality of the information collection and analysis process in the first few years of the community service planning process. The long-term strategy is to build local capacity through this group assisting Contact staff to develop the skills and expertise to continue the process in the future.

Step 4: Develop Vision & Priorities For Next 3 Years

The fourth proposed step is the development of a shared vision and set of priorities for the children's and developmental services system for the next three years. A three year time-frame was chosen as a compromise between short and long-term planning, to encourage people to think about the future without it being so distant that the exercise would be unrealistic.

The **focus** of the visioning and priority-setting process would initially be on the local system of children's and developmental services, then expand to address linkages to other local services and to Hamilton-Niagara Regional services. The three-year vision should build on the findings from the previous steps in the process, describe a future continuum of children's and developmental services, and describe the desirable characteristics of this service continuum (e.g. ability to measure outcomes, reduction of waiting periods, high levels of consumer satisfaction).

The Contact agencies are suggesting that communities may take either a system or sector **approach** to completing this step. If they choose a system approach, there would be a single process for both children's services and developmental services. If they choose a sector approach, there would be one process for children's services and one for developmental services (both children and adults). However, because of the potential overlap where children with developmental disabilities are concerned, the two sectoral processes will need to link so that there is a coherent overall vision. At the moment, the recommendation from the Contact agency Executive Directors is that

Haldimand-Norfolk take a system approach, and Brant, Hamilton, and Niagara take a sector approach.

The Contact agencies are also proposing that step 4 be completed through a consultative process using a combination of structural and process strategies. The structural strategy would entail creating a visioning group (or groups in the case of a sectoral approach) in each of the four jurisdictions. This visioning group would be comprised of individuals representing a broad cross-section of perspectives, consistent with the kinds of constituencies given priority through the focus group process. Members of the visioning group(s) must be willing to review the findings from the earlier stages of the process, and be committed to operating within the framework of the community service planning process.

The consultative process would begin with the visioning group(s) developing a proposed vision and set of priorities for the next three years that build upon the findings from the previous steps. This proposal would be taken forward for consultation using a variety of methods, including focus groups, consultation with groups and organizations, and written submissions. The findings from this consultation process would then be reviewed by the visioning group(s) for possible revisions to the proposed vision and priorities. If necessary and feasible, there could be a second round of consultation on the revised proposals. This combination of visioning group and consultative process appears to be the most effective way to produce a coherent vision with broad support.

Step 5: Complete Community Service Plan

The proposed fifth step is the completion of the community service plan itself. This step also addresses the question of what a community service plan should contain. The proposal is that the **content** of the plan should begin by reflecting the findings from the first four steps. That is, it would contain summaries of the findings related to patterns and experience; summaries of the perceived strengths and opportunities, gaps, duplications, issues and barriers, priorities and trends; and a description of the vision and priorities for the next three years. In addition, it should include priorities for the next year for the local service system and its linkages with the larger Hamilton-Niagara Regional service system.

In addition, the Contact agencies have clarified their expectations with regards to **follow-through**. The proposal is that at least four things should happen once a community service plan is complete. The first is that individual agencies, having been part of the process and presumably supportive of the vision and priorities, would review the plan with regard to any action they might take to contribute to the achievement of the plan. The second is that local service provider networks, such as Executive Directors groups or planning groups, would review the plan for possible collective action on systems issues. The third is that the Hamilton-Niagara Regional Office will use the content of the local plans as part of their planning and priority-setting exercises, as well as a resource to make a case regarding local needs within the Ministry. The fourth is that the plan, and its subsequent implementation, becomes the starting point for the next annual community service planning cycle.

Guiding Principles

The Contact agencies are proposing a short list of guiding principles that are felt to be essential to carrying out a credible and comprehensive community service planning process. These guiding principles are as follows:

- Focus on the whole and the way the parts contribute to the whole (system focused)
- Strive to hear diverse perspectives and to customize approaches (inclusive process)
- Base each step on the findings from previous steps (findings based)
- Keep the emphasis on achievable change (realistic planning)
- Seek feedback from participants and try to continually improve the community service planning process (continuous improvement)

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

The focus of this project has been on the design of an approach to community service planning. However, a number of issues will need to be considered in order to effectively implement the proposed approach. This section identifies some of the more immediate considerations for the implementation of community service planning. These have to do with managing expectations, the collection of information, the infrastructure to support the process, and the timelines for the process.

Expectations

By engaging people in a discussion of community service planning, the design project process has inadvertently created a variety of expectations in the broader community. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does require the Regional Office and the Contact agencies to be aware of the expectations (some of which are contradictory in nature) and to manage them effectively. The four themes that came out most consistently during the focus group process had to do with the scope of community service planning, whether it is about growing or changing the service system, the extent to which it should be focused on tasks versus process, and the need for acceptance that it will be a developmental process.

Scope Of Process / Plan

During the focus groups, participants raised questions about the proper scope of the community service planning exercise. Some felt that the proposed scope (i.e. developmental services and the voluntary services within children's services) was too narrow; that, for example, the scope should be broadened to include all children's services. Others felt that the scope was too broad; that there should be a planning process for each sector rather than for the two sectors combined.

This tension in expectations is not likely to go away or be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Nor will the recommendation that the approach to the visioning and priority-setting step be decided locally reassure those who feel the scope should be broader rather than narrower. The reality is, however, that the request from the

Regional Office was to begin with a focus upon these two sectors, consistent with the mandate of the Contact agencies.

Growing Versus Changing The System

It was clear from comments during the focus group sessions that some participants see community service planning as mostly about setting priorities for new resources (i.e. growing the service system), while others see it as an opportunity to rethink the current use of resources (that is, changing the system). In fact, the process is about both, and the two expectations should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. However, it is important to consistently get the message across that the community service planning process includes the license to rethink the use of existing resources, so that participants in the planning process understand that the exercise makes no assumptions about the merits of the current design of the system.

Task Versus Process Orientation

This tension in expectations appears to be innate to group process, and the community service planning process is no exception. There are some who put high priority on getting things done quickly, and some who put equally high priority on being inclusive and taking the time to build consensus. Which means that some people will be frustrated that the community planning exercise doesn't put enough emphasis on action, while others will be frustrated that it isn't sensitive enough to process and/or the inclusion of all interested parties.

Once again, these need not be mutually exclusive expectations. However, the Contact agencies will need to be aware of this tension in expectations, and strive to find a balance between process and action that keeps most people satisfied with the overall exercise.

Acceptance Of Developmental Learning

It was clear from comments during the focus group sessions that many participants have high expectations for community service planning, both in terms of the quality of the process and of the value of the plan itself. This is as it should be; everyone involved presumably wants this process to be credible and useful. But it needs to be kept in mind that community service planning is a new and complex venture, and that there is no instruction booklet on how to do it well. As with any new venture, there are apt to be some false starts and mistakes made along the way. Those involved in the process will need to recognize its developmental nature, and be patient and accepting as lessons are learned and the process matures. Both the Regional Office and the Contact agencies can reinforce this message by being direct about the developmental nature of the process.

Information / Data Collection

One of the biggest operational challenges in implementing the proposed community service planning approach will be the collection of good information. There are at least three reasons for this. The first is that the field lacks consistent definitions for describing

consumer characteristics and service-related functions. The second is that it also lacks consistent categories for classifying types of services and counting units of service. The third is that there is a whole cluster of issues associated with the availability of data. Many of these challenges will diminish over time as more and more people enter the system through the single point of access and as the Contact agencies' own information systems become more sophisticated and comprehensive. In the meantime, information collection will remain a considerable challenge to the start-up of community service planning.

Consistent Definitions

In the absence of common information systems, agencies have devised their own ways of describing who they serve and what they provide. Unfortunately for community service planning, agencies often define things in different ways. So, for example, agencies may differ in who they define as the "client" of their service, with the unit of focus sometimes being an individual and sometimes a family. They may also vary in the way they establish or use diagnostic labels and/or levels of severity or need.

In addition to defining characteristics of the consumer in different ways, agencies also often define service-related functions in different ways. For example, they may vary in the way they define who refers a client, when a service begins or ends, the status of people waiting for service, and the components of various service functions such as assessment, intake, and case management.

What is needed is a standard set of definitions that can be used consistently by all of the agencies providing information to the community service planning process, particularly in relation to step 1 and the description of the current service system and those that use it.

Consistent Categories

Just as there is no common glossary of terms in children's and developmental services, there also is no agreed-upon taxonomy for classifying services and supports. This creates a challenge for community service planning in two ways. The first is that it makes it very difficult to describe the continuum of services and supports with any consistency. In order to consistently classify services and supports there needs to be agreement about where they fit along the horizontal continuum ranging from promotion/prevention through treatment and acute care, and about where they fit along the vertical continuum describing level of generality/specificity. There are at least three levels to this latter continuum. The most general level is service category (e.g. residential), followed by program category (e.g. supported independent living), and then by program component (e.g. life skills training).

The second challenge created by the lack of a consistent framework for categorizing services and supports is that it makes it difficult to get comparable data on the type and amount of service provided. In the absence of a common framework, agencies count in different ways. Some count by numbers of individuals served, some by numbers of families served, and some by the number of hours or units of service provided.

What is needed is an agreed-upon framework of services and supports that can be used consistently by all of the agencies providing information to the community service planning process, so that there is consistency in the description of the current service system and in service usage rates.

Availability Of Information / Data

There are four important considerations with regards to the availability of information and data for the community service planning process. The first is whether the desired information is currently being collected. For example, under step 1 in the process, it might be desirable to have information on the number of individuals with developmental disabilities that are living at home and on the age of their caregiver(s). But unless the individual with the disability is currently receiving services, this information may not be being collected. And even if the person is receiving services, the agency may not collect information on the age of the caregiver(s).

A second consideration is whether the information and data that is being collected can be readily retrieved. This is particularly relevant to the description of service usage as part of step 1. There is all kinds of proposed information for profiling those requesting, receiving, and waiting for services—including age, locality and ethnicity— which may be being collected by agencies, but is not readily retrievable. It may not be readily retrievable because it is not stored in an electronic system, or because the electronic system is not designed to make it easy to retrieve.

The third consideration in the availability of information and data is whether it is collected in such a way as to be useful to the community service planning process. For example, it may be available, but collected only so often so that it doesn't change much from year to year. Or it may be available as part of a larger data set, but can't be disaggregated to be useful at the local level.

A fourth consideration in the availability of information and data is timing. It will take the Contact agencies some time to develop the consistent definitions and categories referred to above, as well as to design and create the necessary information systems to store and retrieve information and data. This suggests that not all the desired information and data will be available in the first planning cycle.

The long-term solution to the challenge of availability of information and data for the community service planning process, particularly in relation to information on consumers and services, is for the Contact agencies to work with their agencies and communities to build a consistent and accurate information collection system.

Infrastructure For Process

Staff Resources

The big challenge with regards to infrastructure is that the process requires a variety of sophisticated skill sets, but only at specific points in the process. The skill sets include:

project management; planning; quantitative and qualitative information design, collection and analysis; process facilitation; and report writing. However, information collection will tend to occur early in the process (steps 1 & 2), collation and analysis mid-way through the process (step 3), report writing towards the end (step 5), and process facilitation at different times (steps 2 & 4). Therefore what is needed is an infrastructure that has both continuity and elasticity.

Another challenge is the layering of the exercise. There is both a Regional dimension and a local jurisdictional dimension, and the two need to link. This challenge raises the question of whether the infrastructure should be centralized (i.e. one Regional infrastructure), decentralized (i.e. four local infrastructures), or some combination.

The recommended approach includes the hiring of one planner/project manager to work with all four Contact organizations. This individual should have considerable strength both in planning and project management skills. This individual will oversee all aspects of the process including the design, planning and implementation of the process. Specific activities include the: identification of data clusters; identification of sources of data; identification of existing tools to obtain data; identification of tools to be developed; development of tools; collection of data and analysis of data. In addition, the planner/project manager will oversee the process of developing consistent terminology and definitions in all four communities. (e.g. service classification, statistics).

Given the scope of the planning process the planner will require administrative support to assist with key functions including, but not limited to: obtaining reports; collecting data; data entry; collation of data; production and dissemination of materials such as invitations, questionnaires, focus group guides, presentations, communiqués and reports.

The workload associated with supporting this process in four different communities will require a full-time equivalent for each of the above positions. At various stages there will be additional skills/ resources required that would be best arranged through purchase of service agreements. These will support activities such as the development of tools, facilitation, report writing, data entry and statistical analysis.

The planner (project coordinator), the four Executive Directors and the administrative support position will form a project management team. Advising the project management team will be a **technical advisory group** consisting of 4-6 voluntary participants with a range of technical expertise relevant to the various phases of the process. These individuals would have an arms-length relationship within the service provider system and would not be in a conflict of interest position. The role of the technical advisory group will be to provide advice regarding sources of data, selection and/or design of tools, analysis of data and process. Additional members of the team will be local leads from each jurisdiction. These members may or may not be the Executive Directors from each of the Contact organizations.

The combination of both local processes and central processes will ensure the development of common approaches, sharing information on local experience, identifying and addressing issues related to the planning process and mutual support. In addition, this type of infrastructure would satisfy the needs for continuity and linkages throughout the community service planning process. One further element to acknowledge is the elasticity/fluidity necessary to the process. In other words, it will be highly probable that at the local level and the regional level activation of resources for specific tasks will be at different phases. Again, cost sharing and economy of scale would be a strong consideration and benefit of this approach.

Although it is somewhat early in the process to be addressing the question of logistics and costs for community service planning, the above infrastructure dictates that certain responsibilities are associated with each potential role and there is a projected cost associated with each of these resources.

Planner = 1.0 Full Time Equivalent

Responsibilities include:

- ❑ Project design and management
- ❑ Identify data clusters required
- ❑ Identify sources of data clusters
- ❑ Identify existing data collection tools
- ❑ Identify tools need to be developed
- ❑ Develop tools that are required
- ❑ Carry out data collection
- ❑ Collate/analyze all data, draw conclusions, etc.
- ❑ Write up results
- ❑ Overall pacing of project
- ❑ Liaise with the four Contact organizations
- ❑ Overall management/coordination of events etc.
- ❑ Member of project management team

Administrative Assistant = 1.0 Full Time Equivalent

Responsibilities include:

- ❑ Assist the planner/project manager with information collection and collation,
- ❑ Coordination of events
- ❑ Mailing
- ❑ Develop presentation materials
- ❑ Create documents
- ❑ Assist with communication/ correspondence

Technical Advisory Group

- ❑ Recommend sources of tools, appropriate design and evaluation
- ❑ Recommend methodology, processes, analysis
- ❑ Advice for sources of data (prevalence, etc.)
- ❑ Involvement at strategic phases
- ❑ 4-6 volunteers (potential honorarium)

Purchased Services

- ❑ Design of tools
- ❑ Data entry
- ❑ Stats analysis
- ❑ Report writing
- ❑ Facilitation

Disbursements

- ❑ Travel
- ❑ Courier
- ❑ Postage
- ❑ Meeting costs
- ❑ Copying/printing
- ❑ Publications/tools
- ❑ Software
- ❑ Telephone/fax

** Consideration may also need to be made for office space, furniture, computer, telephone, and fax.

Timelines

Year One

In theory, there are three options for proceeding with community service planning in 2002. The first is to attempt to carry out the full process, the second is to carry out a partial process, and the third is to use the time remaining as a “design phase” to lay the foundation for future community service planning. The first option (carrying out the full process) does not seem feasible, however, within the time remaining, and would only set up the process for failure. So the only realistic choice is between the second (partial process) and third (design phase) option.

A partial process would entail selective skipping or abbreviating of some parts of the process in order to submit a plan by the end of the calendar or fiscal year. For example, it might be possible to collect less data under step 1, and to shorten the process and/or include fewer participants in steps 2 and 4. The “pros” to this option include getting the process underway, and thereby having the opportunity to “learn by doing.” The “cons” include compromising the rationale for the steps in the process, risking distortions to the plan itself because the process was incomplete, and exposing the Contact agencies to the criticism that they are not honoring the community service planning principles/design. In addition, it is still uncertain whether the Contact agencies can

develop the infrastructure and tools to carry out even a partial process in such a short time.

A design phase would entail using the rest of fiscal 2002 to lay the foundation for community service planning. Rather than initiate the planning process, as would occur in the partial option, the Contact agencies would initiate a developmental process to complete a number of tasks such as developing an infrastructure to carry out the planning process, confirming the community partnerships that will assist with different aspects of the process, working with the Regional Office and service community to develop consistent definitions and categories, and developing the tools/ methodologies to collect the information/data and to facilitate the various processes. The big advantage to this option is that it moves the process forward without compromising the principles or approach. It also adds to the likelihood that the planning process, once launched, will have the necessary infrastructure, partnerships, tools, and expertise in place to be carried out reasonably successfully. The disadvantages to this option, are that it delays the completion of a first plan by another year and could result in community impatience or loss of momentum.

The preference of the Contact Executive Directors is to proceed with the design phase option. This would provide them with adequate time to develop their local approaches, build their infrastructure, and design the many tools they will need to carry out the planning process. They also feel that along with attending to the many start-up tasks over the remainder of the fiscal year, they would likely be able to complete much of step 1 in the process as well.

Subsequent Years

One of the questions raised during the focus groups was whether the entire community service planning process needs to be completed each year. Some participants felt that it may not be necessary or even feasible to carry out each of the steps to the same extent every year. For example, participants pointed out that the census-based information on the general population does not change annually. Also they wondered whether it was necessary to complete the more time and process- intensive steps, such as the collection of information on experience with the current system and the development of a three-year vision, every year.

The Executive Directors of the Contact agencies have discussed the question of how frequently to complete each of the steps to the community service planning process. Their feeling was that they do not have enough information to make an informed recommendation at this time. Their preference is to complete one full planning cycle and evaluate the process in terms of time, cost and benefit, before making a recommendation regarding the frequency of carrying out the full approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Part of the mandate of the community service planning design project is to make recommendations to the Regional Office on a number of design features, including the steps in the process, the content of the plan, and the principles that should guide the process. Although many of these recommendations are implied elsewhere in this report, they are all reiterated in this section so that they may be reviewed as a total package.

Recommendation 1: That the community service planning process consist of five steps, as follows:

- **Step 1: Collect information on patterns**
- **Step 2: Collect information on experience**
- **Step 3: Collate and analyse information**
- **Step 4: Develop vision and priorities for next three years**
- **Step 5: Complete community service plan**

Recommendation 2: That step 1 include collection of information on:

- **The general population including demographics, population characteristics, and socio-economic conditions**
- **Ministry funded children's mental health services and developmental services including the number of agencies, eligibility criteria, type of service/support, and the continuum of services**
- **Usage characteristics for people requesting service, waiting for service, and receiving service**
- **Comparable information on the general population and services from other jurisdictions and/or provincial averages**
- **The broader context including relevant directions or experiences in related services, the Ministry and provincial government, and professions and professional fields**

Recommendation 3a: That step 2 include collection of information on the experience of:

- **People requiring service either now or in the future**
- **People receiving service either now or in the recent past**
- **Community groups and organizations that relate to children's and developmental services**
- **Providers of Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services children's and developmental services**
- **Providers of related services, with emphasis on other points of entry**

Recommendation 3b: That the collection of information in step 2:

- **Use a mix of methods (including focus groups, questionnaires, and individual interviews) to obtain information**
- **Ask about experience with the current system consistent with the themes identified in step 3**

Recommendation 4a: That step 3 include the collation and analysis of information with a focus upon the following themes:

- **Strengths or opportunities within the current children's and developmental services system**
- **Perceived gaps or duplications in current services/supports**
- **Issues or barriers related to services**
- **Priorities for the future**
- **Trends related to services**

Recommendation 4b: That a technical advisory group be formed:

- **Consisting of a small number of external experts in information collection and analysis**
- **To provide support to the Contact agencies and the local processes regarding the design of the information collection tools and methodology, the quality and consistency of information collected, and the collation and interpretation or analysis of the findings**
- **To strengthen the capacity of Contact agencies to carry out these tasks over time**

Recommendation 5a: That step 4 consist of the development of a vision and set of priorities for the next three years that:

- **Focuses upon the local system of children's and developmental services, linkages to other local services, and linkages to Hamilton-Niagara Regional services**
- **Builds on the findings from the previous steps in the process**
- **Describes a desirable and achievable future continuum of services**
- **Describes desirable and achievable system characteristics**

Recommendation 5b: That the approach to developing a vision and set of priorities:

- **Be determined locally in terms of whether the process is organized by sector (i.e. children's services and developmental services) or system (i.e. the two sectors combined)**
- **Link the vision and priorities for children's services and developmental services for children, if the local decision is to take a sector approach**
- **Be organized by system in Haldimand-Norfolk and sector in Brant, Hamilton and Niagara**

Recommendation 5c: That the approach to developing a vision and set of priorities be consultative:

- **Use a combination of structural strategies (i.e. a visioning group or groups) and process strategies (i.e. a mix of methods to obtain views on proposals)**
- **Begin with the visioning group or groups developing a proposal which would then be reviewed through a consultation process, and revised by the visioning group(s) as required**

Recommendation 6a: That step 5 consist of the completion of an annual community service plan consisting of:

- A summary of patterns from step 1
- A summary of experiences from step 2
- A summary of strengths/opportunities, gaps, duplications, issues/barriers, priorities, and trends from step 3
- A summary of the 3-year vision and priorities from step 4
- Priorities for the coming year for the local system of services and the Hamilton-Niagara Regional system of services

Recommendation 6b: That the follow-through on the annual community service plan include:

- Review by agencies with regard to any action they might take to contribute to the achievement of the plan
- Review by local networks of service providers with regard to any action they might collectively take to contribute to the achievement of the plan
- Review by the Regional Office as part of its planning and priorities-setting processes, and use of the plan as a resource regarding local needs in discussions with other parts of the Ministry
- Providing a frame of reference for the next annual community service planning cycle

Recommendation 7: That there be five guiding principles to the community service planning process as follows:

- Focus on the whole and the way the parts contribute to the whole (system focused)
- Strive to hear diverse perspectives and to customize approaches (inclusive process)
- Base each step on the findings from previous steps (findings based)
- Keep the emphasis on achievable change (realistic planning)
- Seek feedback from participants and try to continually improve the community service planning process (continuous improvement)

Recommendation 8a: That the infrastructure for the community service planning process consist of:

- A full-time planner/project manager to work with the four Contact agencies and to oversee all aspects of the process including its design, planning, and implementation
- A full-time administrative assistant to assist with the key functions in the four jurisdictions
- A local community service planning lead for each Contact agency, who may or may not be the Executive Director of the agency
- A project management team consisting of the planner/project manager, administrative assistant, and the Executive Directors of the four Contact agencies
- A technical advisory group consisting of 4-6 volunteers with a range of technical expertise relevant to the various phases of the process, to provide advice to the project management team

Recommendation 8b: That the Regional Office allocate resources to support the community service planning process.

Recommendation 9: That the Contact agencies use the remainder of fiscal 2002 to:

- **Build the foundation for community service planning including,**
 - **Develop the infrastructure to support the process**
 - **Create the technical advisory group**
 - **Develop consistent service-related definitions and categories**
 - **Develop the information collection tools and methodology**
 - **Develop a local database of participants in planning process**
 - **Confirm local approaches**
 - **Develop the evaluation tools and methodology for continuous improvement of the planning process**
- **Begin collection of information on patterns for first annual planning cycle**

Recommendation 10: That the steps in deciding how often to carry out the complete community service planning process include:

- **Complete the “design phase” in fiscal 2002**
- **Complete the full planning process in fiscal 2003**
- **Review the experience from carrying out the full process in order to decide upon process from 2004 on**

CONCLUSION

The community services planning design project has gone a long way towards defining an approach to community service planning across the Hamilton-Niagara Region. The project was asked to clarify a number of features of community service planning and to build community support for an approach. This report contains a set of recommendations which address the design questions, and it is clear from the findings from the focus group sessions that there is strong general support for the proposed approach. The final task is to make some suggestions about how to proceed from here.

Next Steps

There are two things that have to happen in order to keep the community service planning process moving forward. The first is to confirm the approach(es) to be used across the Region. The second is to begin implementation.

Confirm Approach(es)

Since implementation hinges upon design, the next step in the process needs to be Regional Office review of the recommendations contained in this report, and a decision regarding the approach to community service planning and how to proceed. Once this decision is made, it would be useful to confirm the approach adopted and next steps to the affected agencies, as well as to all others who participated in the design process. One option for communicating the approach would be to provide people with either a revised or condensed version of this report.

Initiate Implementation

Once the decisions have been made about the approach to community service planning and a budget to support the process is agreed upon, the four Contact agencies can proceed with implementation. Recommendation 9 identifies a number of tasks that need to be completed early on including building an infrastructure, creating the technical advisory group, developing tools and methodologies, and developing databases for participants. Once the decision has been made confirming the approach, the project management team can proceed with hiring and implementation.

