



Women's Crisis Services
of Waterloo Region
2021-2024 Strategic Plan

“More Than Shelter”

Final Report

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SOLUTIONS

Background

In the spring of 2020, Dr. Rebecca Sutherns of Sage Solutions (rebeccasutherns.com) was hired to facilitate a collaborative strategic planning process with Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region (WCSWR). Rebecca worked with WCSWR's Strategic Planning Committee, comprised of board and staff representatives, to develop a strategy to guide the organization over the next three years that reflects the current context, as well as anticipates challenges and opportunities that may arise.

The resulting plan articulates how WCSWR can add value for its stakeholders, prioritize and focus its efforts, and further develop its partnerships to achieve its goals. The new strategic plan positions WCSWR to respond to critical issues it faces in its efforts to meet the goals set forth in the plan and continue to build a safer and healthier community.

This report summarizes the output that resulted from an initial stakeholder engagement phase that included a staff survey (11 responses), a survey for external stakeholders (7 responses) and five stakeholder interviews in the summer of 2020, followed by multiple planning sessions to identify and refine the elements of the new strategy outlined here which was approved by the board in the spring of 2021.

Contextual Analysis

This strategic planning process occurred right in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Women's safety has been increasingly jeopardized due to being locked down at home for much of the past year, resulting in stronger need and demand for WCSWR's services and an increase in public awareness of domestic violence. At the same time, demands on staff have been heavy as they have navigated implementation of COVID safety protocols, remote work and the general anxiety, fatigue and burnout that have characterized 2020/2021. It has been both difficult and energizing to plan for the future in that context.

Based on conversations with external partners of WCSWR's, the organization and its leadership are highly regarded in the community and sector. It is seen as being well-positioned to assume a stronger and more creative leadership role now that its leadership, facilities and systems are well-established. As one stakeholder noted, "It's time for WCSWR to rethink its models and dream bigger."

One specific opportunity to do so is in the area of sectoral leadership regionally. Some of the system-level collaborative entities in which WCSWR participates, such as DART and the Family Violence Program, are in need of revitalization and WCSWR could be in a position to provide some leadership to a rethinking of the gender-based violence ecosystem of supports locally. At the same time, this process affirmed WCSWR's specific role in that system as being the specialists in the full spectrum of domestic violence, leaving the leadership of supports related

to sexual assault, human trafficking and other experiences of gender-based violence to other partners.

Stakeholders noted that WCSWR is primarily thought of as a shelter organization and therefore may not be top of mind for prospective clients who could benefit from its other supports. By extension, WCSWR could benefit from extending its domestic violence services more prominently to women who require support but who are not looking for a shelter stay. An extension of service to incorporate full family systems was also mentioned in these early conversations with stakeholders.

Broad cultural trends such as greater recognition of the need for equity, diversity and inclusion will also affect WCSWR's strategic priorities over this planning cycle.

The organization is still seen as being somewhat institutional and traditional in its approaches and is encouraged by some partners to ensure that its priorities remain well-aligned with feminist, anti-oppressive values. Strengthening its adaptability and responsiveness will help it to remain vital and sustainable into the future.

Internally, WCSWR continues to need to build a strong, positive staff culture. Some concerns were raised regarding team morale, trust between staff and management, transparent communication and reasonable workload expectations. Continued professional development and support are needed to ensure all parts of the organization are equipped to deal in healthy, sustainable ways with the trauma they are witnessing and experiencing.

These themes provided the context for the planning conversations that developed the strategy that follows.

Identity Statements

WCSWR's identity statements have remained unchanged for this planning cycle.

Mission

In partnership with our community, Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region empowers and supports women and children to move beyond violence and abuse through the provision of safe shelter, education and outreach services.

Vision

A community free from violence and abuse in any of its forms.

Values

- *Respect, Choice & Diversity* – Treating people with respect, honouring choice and valuing diversity is at the core of who we are.
- *Partnership and empowerment* make us stronger and contribute to our efforts to promote the empowerment of women and children experiencing domestic abuse and violence.
- *Excellence and Leadership* – Our community deserves the best and we strive to be the best in everything we do.
- *Integrity and Accountability* – Doing the right thing promotes honesty and integrity and fosters accountability.

Strategic Pillars

The key priorities within WCSWR's 2021-2024 strategic plan are as follows:

1. **Programming excellence** to address the full spectrum of domestic violence
2. **Community leadership**
3. Broader and more accurate **public awareness**
4. **Organizational health**

This planning exercise affirmed WCSWR's focus and leadership in the domestic violence space, while leaving the leadership of other parts of the gender-based violence arena (e.g. sexual assault; human trafficking etc.) to others, with WCSWR as a willing supportive partner when

needed. It also affirmed the need for WCSWR to work deliberately in the full range of domestic violence experience, not just primarily supporting women in shelters.

The programming excellence priority emerged with several imperatives in mind: the need to intervene earlier and work more preventatively where possible; a recognition that domestic violence occurs within a full family system and cannot be adequately addressed by only supporting the women involved; an interest in making a wider range of supports available on-site in shelters, particularly related to mental health and addiction challenges; a need to support a more diverse range of clients choosing to address their safety in a range of ways that include but may not be limited to a shelter stay; and an interest in making sure women's experience is seamless within WCSWR and smooth when outside referrals are required.

WCSWR's work occurs within an ecosystem of supports regionally and beyond. This planning process affirmed both the need for that ecosystem to be strengthened (including, for example the Family Violence Program and DART) and for WCSWR to position itself as an initiator and leader of that process. More specifically, the scarcity of transitional, second stage and affordable housing continues to be a bottleneck in the shelter system and WCSWR has decided to engage more actively in efforts to solve that problem.

One limitation to WCSWR's impact is a lack of broad and accurate public awareness about domestic violence in general and its work more specifically, particularly in terms of its activity outside of providing shelter. The third pillar of this plan is therefore designed to build on recent momentum and address that gap.

The goals within the priority of Organizational Health are about making sure that WCSWR has the capacity and resources that will enable and accelerate progress toward its strategic goals. These include data, funds, well-trained staff, a positive culture and an effective Board of Directors.

The three-year goals, objectives and performance standards within each of these pillars are captured in the following table.

Goals, Objectives & Performance Targets

Pillars	Goals	Objectives	Draft Performance Targets
Programming excellence to address the full spectrum of domestic violence.	1.1. Work further upstream, to emphasize prevention and earlier intervention	1.1.1. Strengthen outreach efforts to connect with vulnerable women sooner	Examples and #s stemming from new partnerships for early intervention Example: Compare # of women reached by WCSWR through the FVP before and following expanded partnership with police
		1.1.2. Broaden supports to take full family systems into account	# of programs or people reached – children, youth, men Stories/examples of early intervention with the whole family
	1.2. Expand available supports to better serve diverse community needs	1.2.1 Strengthen access to mental health and addictions supports	Yes/no with examples
		1.2.2 Better meet the needs of more diverse populations	Examples of expansion in locations, hours, languages, diverse staffing etc. Examples of new partnerships
		1.2.3 Encourage a wider and more creative range of support and referral options inside and outside shelters	Revised onboarding/training/performance expectations for outreach staff
	1.3. Increase integration and seamlessness of service delivery	1.3.1 Expand range of holistic supports available onsite in shelters	Improvement from baseline # of new services offered
		1.3.2 Improve transitions and after-care	Examples of quality improvements leading to measures of time supported and/or client stability

Pillars	Goals	Objectives	Draft Performance Targets
Community leadership	2.1 Position WCSWR as the regional system-level leader in domestic violence	2.1.1 Assess and enhance value of involvement in collaborative tables related to family violence	Decision rubric for collaborative involvement Examples of greater effectiveness of DART, FVP
	2.2 Influence the availability of attainable housing for women who have experienced domestic violence	2.2.1 Proactively create capacity for WCSWR to act in this area	Resources devoted to it
		2.2.2 Be present at the tables where housing accessibility is addressed, to advocate for increased options for single women and families	Examples of participation and advocacy messages
Broader and more accurate public awareness	3.1 Build public awareness around the issue of domestic violence and the full range of services provided by WCSWR	3.1.1 Expand reach of domestic violence education	Build a more robust evidence base to demonstrate impact
		3.1.2 Expand reach of messaging about available domestic violence supports beyond shelters	Marketing examples and metrics
Organizational health	4.1 Build a more robust evidence base to demonstrate impact	4.1.1 Develop baseline measures for key impact metrics	Yes/no with examples
		4.1.2 Use data to understand and address gaps in reach and service	Examples of reports/ infographics and decisions made as a result
	4.2 Ensure sustainability of adequate revenue to meet service demand	4.2.1 Increase regional and federal funding	From x% to x%
		4.2.2 Grow overall revenue	From y to y
	4.3 Build staff capacity in emerging areas of professional practice	4.3.1 Train staff in topics such as harm reduction; equity, diversity, inclusions and reconciliation; trauma; addictions and human trafficking	# of courses and people trained Examples of changes made as a result

Pillars	Goals	Objectives	Draft Performance Targets
	4.4 Enhance and foster a positive culture within the organization	4.4.1 Strengthen staff engagement, satisfaction and pride in work done by the organization as a whole	<p>Net Promoter Score increase from z to x</p> <p>Improvement in Workplace Insights Average (year over year) Survey bi-annually</p> <p>Driver breakdown: engagement, culture, well-being, performance</p>
	4.5 Ensure effective governance	4.5.1 Continue to strengthen board governance through educational opportunities and community awareness	Yes/no
		4.5.2 Strive to reflect the diversity in our community in our board composition	Description