



NATIVE CHILD
AND FAMILY SERVICES
OF TORONTO

STRATEGIC PLAN

2023 - 2028



A guide for where we are heading, together.



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OUR MISSION

Native Child and Family Services of Toronto strives to provide a life of quality, well-being, caring, and healing for children and families in the Toronto Native Community.

We do this by creating a service model that is culture-based, and respects the values of Native people, the extended family, and the right to self-determination.

INTENTIONALITY OF LANGUAGE USED THROUGHOUT THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This strategic plan uses the term “First Nations, Métis and Inuit” (FNMI) to represent the peoples the Agency works to serve. As always: we encourage people to self identify, as opposed to naming cultural identities based on colonial terms or narratives.

PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN AND HOW IT WAS DEVELOPED

Why this plan was needed, what it intends to achieve, and how it was co-developed with community.

PURPOSE

This strategic plan provides direction for the Agency to remain child-centered, family focused, and community driven. It will guide the Agency's work over the next five years (2023 to 2028).

OVERARCHING APPROACH

NCFST took a collaborative approach to developing this strategic plan to ensure that it captures a wide range of community visions. The Agency engaged with its staff, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, community members, community and youth advisory councils, caretakers and resource parents, and partner agencies to explore NCFST's ways of working and its impact as an organization. Based on community inputs, the NCFST Board members and executive staff developed four strategic directions and initiatives to support the Agency's mission, acknowledging where we've come from and where we want to go. These ideas were presented back to community and later refined to generate our final strategic plan.





STRUCTURE OF THIS PLAN

Distinguishing between the two versions of this plan and what purpose each format serves.

This plan begins by sharing and honouring where the Agency has come from and provides guidance on how it can advance its mission through strategic directions that were developed with, and for, communities. There are two versions of this plan – the summary was written with intention to be comprehensive, yet high-level, so that it can be accessible to community and external stakeholders. It contains the process of developing the plan as well as the main strategic directions and goals. This strategic plan includes more detail about the supporting activities for each strategic direction and how NCFST will operationalize the goals in collaboration with staff and community.

KNOWING WHERE WE'VE COME FROM

Capturing the story of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) to ground where we're going by honouring our past.

Community: Where the Agency comes from

Established through four days of ceremony with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, grassroots leaders, and community members, NCFST was born to provide a holistic, multi-service approach to supporting the safety, health, well-being, and prosperity of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families living and/or accessing services in the city of Toronto. There was an explicit recognition that this work would involve addressing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization, residential schooling, mainstream child welfare, and systemic racism.

Wellbeing: How the Agency has grown

In the 1980's, the Indigenous community in Toronto recognized the need for Indigenous child welfare services, designed and delivered by and for Indigenous community members, to ensure children and families received culturally appropriate supports and care. NCFST was directed to pursue this work and in 2004, was successful in achieving a provincial child welfare mandate. This provincial mandate has always been understood as a colonial one. NCFST has strived to mitigate the impact of colonial legislation, tools, and practice by centering our work in culturally grounded, holistic wellness supports.

Culture: Where the Agency is going

Today, NCFST continues to reflect on how it began to where it stands now – one of the largest multi-service Indigenous agencies in Canada that offers culturally grounded healing and wellness supports and the child welfare mandate for the Toronto region. The Agency must now look forward to the future. NCFST recognizes that healing and wellness must be grounded in trauma-informed relational practices guided by ancestral knowledge, laws, and ways of being through Elders and Knowledge Keepers. To do this work well, colonial practices must be uncoupled from the world of Indigenous child and family well-being, and culture must be re-established in their place.

WHO NCFST IS TODAY?

Elaborating on the Agency's current services and offerings to community.

NCFST's service model

NCFST's service model was developed through four days of ceremony. Today, 35 years since its start, the Agency strives to provide a life of quality, well-being, caring, and healing for Indigenous children and families in and around Toronto. This is achieved by delivering services that are culture-based and respect the values of FNMI peoples, the extended family, and the right to self-determination.

Healing

NCFST continues to support the safety, health, wellbeing, and prosperity of Indigenous community members residing and/or accessing services in the Toronto region. The Agency does this by providing services that strengthen family, community, and Nation connection through culturally guided, trauma-informed supports. The Covid-19 pandemic has made issues such as poverty, social isolation, mental health, family violence, and substance misuse even more acute. It has also pushed the Agency to innovate in new ways to support the needs of community through technology and to remember the profound importance of Land-based practices.

Community

The Agency is strengthened by ongoing, extensive community co-development, relationships with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and through Ceremony and teachings. NCFST's founders envisioned facilitating a strong sense of belonging, by creating physical spaces for the community to call their own as well as providing cultural experiences. That same service model is what guides NCFST in new and innovative ways today, and keeps the Agency grounded in the community that it is privileged to serve.



LOOKING FORWARD THROUGH FOUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

This strategic plan is based on four bold directions that serve as a values-based foundation for the Agency's work. These directions are all interconnected and rooted in Indigenous cultures:

- Child-Centered
- Self-Determination
- All Our Relations
- Community Resilience



The foundation of the Four Directions has been rooted in the chronicles of creation and expressed in form as the sacred Medicine Wheel sometimes referred to as a sacred circle. This concept has been used by generations of various Indigenous Nations for healing, balance, ceremonies honouring life and our connection with the natural world. It reflects the four seasons, the four stages of life, the four races of humanity, the four cardinal directions, plus many other teachings. The Circle embodies the cycle of life, and promotes a balanced relationship with the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual.

The Wheel that we have used honours female life and aligns with our prophecies, stating that this is the era in human history where women lead, where children sit at the center as Sacred Beings. As Lifegivers and Life Bearers, women connect children to Elders, Knowledge Carriers, Aunties, Uncles, Grandparents, Teachers, Spiritual Leaders, Guides, and Ancestors encouraging them to use their gifts from Creator to heal themselves, our Nations, and all of Creation.

This Wheel is interactive and will take you to videos and resources that will support a deeper understanding of how Native Child and Family Services of Toronto has built this Strategic Plan to align with the Four Directions in support of the Indigenous Community.

NCFST STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS SUMMARY

Child-Centered

Children are sacred bundles and the heart of communities. The Agency will deliver services and programs centered on the safety, health, wellbeing, and prosperity of children and their families— where support is provided on a needs-based continuum to nurture thriving communities.

Self-Determination

The Agency will prioritize self-determination, and strive to develop a service system that is free from colonial constructs. Child and family wellbeing services will be designed, owned, and governed by Indigenous communities, rooted in Indigenous cultures, and delivered from Indigenous worldviews, laws, and ways of being.

All Our Relations

The Agency will develop services that are governed by All Our Relations — families, community, land, and culture. The Agency will prioritize Indigenous cultural connections and honour the interconnectedness between All Our Relations and our collective wellbeing.

Community Resilience

The Agency's work will strengthen the collective through the individual, and the individual through the collective. The Agency will advance mentorship, innovation, and strategic alliances to build community capacity and resourcefulness, and support collective healing.

GAINING CLARITY ON EACH STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Elaborating on the goals and supporting activities for each of the strategic directions.

How this plan is put into action will require ongoing conversations between the Agency's leadership, staff, and community. As a starting point, NCFST has gathered community input about activities, initiatives, and changes it could implement to continue making progress within the goals of these four directions.

The following pages present each of the four strategic directions, first defining specific goals of each, followed by tables of supporting activities that can be explored during the rollout of the strategic plan. The supporting activities connect to more than one strategic direction, demonstrating the interconnectivity and holistic lens that will shape the work ahead.



CHILD-CENTERED

Children are sacred bundles and the heart of communities. We will deliver services and programs centered on the safety, health, wellbeing, and prosperity of children and their families, where support is provided on a needs-based continuum to nurture thriving communities.

Together with community, NCFST will explore how to:

- Continue to improve preventative services, move away from colonial child welfare frameworks, and nurture family and community wellbeing to reduce the number of children in care.
- Continue to increase staff training across the Agency to enhance an integrated, child-centered approach throughout our services and programs.
- Work with community to develop new monitoring and evaluation tools and processes to better understand, measure, and improve the impact of our services.

Goal	Supporting action(s)
<i>Continue to improve preventative services, move away from colonial child welfare frameworks, and nurture family and community wellbeing to reduce the number of children in care.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to Indigenize the risk assessment and eligibility spectrum continuum for Child Welfare (CW) and centralize the intake process to maximize family stability and child wellbeing. • Continue to integrate Child and Family Wellbeing with Holistic Services to emphasize prevention and mitigate risks of children needing care outside of family and kin. • Honour the multiple needs of a child from youth to adulthood; and provide supports that address the ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma to spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical health and wellbeing of children and families. • Pursue long-term and stable funding opportunities for services to ensure that all children can access products, services and support they need, when they need them.
<i>Continue to increase staff training across the Agency to enhance an integrated, child- centered approach throughout our services and programs.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and deploy staff training to improve child-centered work with fiscal compensation. • Enhance programs that strengthen child and family cultural identity, including ceremony, land -based programs, and the medicine wheel. • Continue to build NCFST’s organizational capacity to integrate culture and ceremony into internal processes and NCFST’s services and programs.
<i>Work with community to develop new monitoring and evaluation tools and processes to better understand, measure and improve the impact of our services and the experiences of the children, families, staff and partners.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with children, families, staff, and partners who use NCFST services on an ongoing basis and learn stories about their experience with NCFST. • Ensure monitoring and evaluation tools align with the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO) and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) revised evaluation tools..

SELF-DETERMINATION

The Agency will prioritize self-determination, and strive to develop a service system that is free from colonial legislation. Child and family wellbeing service will be designed, owned, and governed by Indigenous communities, rooted in Indigenous cultures, and delivered from Indigenous worldviews, laws, and ways of being.

Together with community, NCFST will explore how to:

- Ensure that NCFST is led by Indigenous voices, cultures, and worldviews.
- Respond to direction from community and convene a table of Indigenous organizations to explore how we can further integrate and coordinate our services to mitigate risks, strengthen families, and reduce the number of children entering the child welfare system.
- Co-develop an Indigenous Urban Charter for Child and Family Services with other Indigenous- led organizations and communities to further direct the transformation of NCFST's services.
- Work with community, partner organizations, the Association of Native Child and Family Services Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO), and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to increase Indigenous self-determination within provincially mandated Indigenous child and family wellbeing services.
- Continue the development of NCFST's Indigenous Spirit Fund (ISF) to further decolonize philanthropy and increase the resources available for NCFST to co-develop with and deliver services to community.

Goal	Supporting action(s)
<i>Ensure that NCFST is led by Indigenous voices, cultures, and worldviews.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance relationship with and direction from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, community advisory and youth councils, and other Indigenous-led organizations on NCFST's services and programs.
<i>Respond to direction from community and convene a table of Indigenous organizations to explore how we can further integrate and coordinate our services to mitigate risks, strengthen families and reduce the number of children entering the child welfare system.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host community conversations on an annual basis to enhance community voices within NCFST's services and programs. Provide clarity about how this community insight will be used to guide NCFST through multiple communication channels to increase transparency and trust with community.
<i>Co-develop an Indigenous Urban Charter for Child and Family Services with other Indigenous-led organizations and communities to further direct the transformation of NCFST's services.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take leadership role in the co-development of the Indigenous Urban Charter and convene key players and community to define self-determination and ensure that these voices are represented throughout the Charter. Work with NCFST directors and leadership to integrate the Charter into NCFST and decolonize services while enhancing Indigenous cultural connections.
<i>Continue the development of NCFST's Indigenous Spirit Fund (ISF) to further decolonize philanthropy and increase the resources available for NCFST to co-develop with and deliver services to community.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the development of the ISF and promote it amongst NCFST networks. Finalize a long-term strategy for the ISF to achieve community impact. Develop a roll-out plan and evaluation framework for the ISF that emphasizes community impact.

ALL OUR RELATIONS

The Agency will develop services that are governed by All Our Relations — families, community, land, and culture. The Agency will prioritize Indigenous cultural connections and honor the interconnectedness between All Our Relations and our collective wellbeing, as well as appreciate the role past generations play in helping the next generation thrive.

Together with community, NCFST will explore how to:

- Continue to develop services and programs that enhance community healing, honouring the worldview that thriving communities raise healthy children.
- Continue to strengthen the relationships between NCFST and community advisories, Nations, and staff through increased opportunity for connections and partnerships grounded in respect, trust, and integrity.
- Continue to strengthen relationships with sibling organizations to support community healing.
- Embody Indigenous cultures in All Our Relations and continue to practice Ceremony throughout our Agency.

Goal	Supporting action(s)
<i>Continue to develop services and programs that enhance community healing, honouring the worldview that thriving communities raise healthy children.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support holistic programs that address intergenerational trauma of families and communities and find opportunities to bring in cultural knowledge and traditional practices around parenting. • Increase opportunities for NCFST’s staff, leadership and Board to connect with community to share knowledge and experience and ensure that program development and Agency decisions are rooted in community experience.
<i>Continue to strengthen the relationships between NCFST and community advisories, Nations, and staff through increased opportunity for connections and partnerships grounded in respect, trust, and integrity.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase NCFSTs time spent with community, especially senior leadership and Board members. • Increase relationships with Nations in the surrounding areas and enhance Nation-to-Nation collaborations through NCFST services and programs. • Offer annual opportunities for formal engagement and feedback from community about NCFST and offer transparency into how this will inform decisions. • Strive to improve interconnectedness amongst staff so that there is a more coherent narrative and awareness of NCFST and its services, breaking down internal silos.
<i>Continue to strengthen relationships with sibling organizations to support community healing.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to seek out partnerships with sibling organizations and enhance each other’s work. • Emphasize sovereignty within NCFST’s strategic partnerships to empower all Indigenous-led organizations to nurture relationships, culture, children, and community.
<i>Embody Indigenous cultures in All Our Relations and continue to practice Ceremony throughout our Agency.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase NCFST’s participation in community life to enhance cultural connectedness. • Name and list cultural practices and how they are being used within NCFST. • Formalize how we define allyship and what this means for staff composition of NCFST and how non-Indigenous staff can support decolonization.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The Agency's work will strengthen the collective through the individual, and the individual through the collective. The Agency will advance mentorship, innovation, and strategic alliances to build community capacity and resourcefulness, and support collective healing.

Together with community, NCFST will explore how to:

- Develop individual and organizational capabilities through mentoring, innovation, and practice to increase staff capacity, retention, and wellness, and to nurture future community leaders within NCFST's programs and services.
- Continue to strengthen our connections with sibling agencies, centered around a common vision for community healing, and to encourage specialization of services, programs, and strategic partnership.
- Diversify the Agency's funding mechanisms and emphasize long-term funding opportunities to increase stability and impact.
- Advance the development of the Indigenous Spirit Fund (ISF) to support the urban Indigenous community in working together to support collective wellbeing and grow strategic alliances that benefit children and families for generations to come.

Goal	Supporting action(s)
<i>Develop individual and organizational capabilities through mentoring, innovation, and practice to increase staff capacity, retention, and wellness, and to nurture future community leaders within NCFST's program and services.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire, support, and retain Indigenous staff through affirmative hiring processes and intentional capacity-development opportunities. • Mentor and grow children and youth from programs to employment opportunities within NCFST and partner organizations. • Enhance tech automation and virtual services where possible to increase efficiency and resilience.
<i>Continue to strengthen our connections with sibling agencies, centered around a common vision for community healing, and to encourage specialization of services, programs, and strategic partnership.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage specialization of NCFST's clinical holistic services and offer these program supports to other agencies in formalized partnerships within scope outside our Agency, including housing stability, poverty reduction and advocacy, and food security. • Focus on synergies with other agencies and work with them on collective frameworks and visioning pieces for urban Indigenous wellbeing, including updating schedules of communication about funding opportunities; building mutual systems for how we do client referrals; and leveraging our shared skills to support in challenges.
<i>Diversify the Agency's funding mechanisms and emphasize long-term funding opportunities to increase stability and impact.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on long-term funding streams with less administrative burden per dollar.
<i>Advance the development of the Indigenous Spirit Fund (ISF) to support the urban Indigenous community in working together to support collective wellbeing and grow strategic alliances that benefit children and families for generations to come.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the development of the ISF and promote it amongst NCFST networks. • Finalize a long-term strategy for the ISF to achieve community impact. • Develop a roll-out plan and evaluation framework for the ISF that emphasizes community impact.



INTEGRATING THE FOUR DIRECTIONS INTO NCFST'S WORK

Introducing three steps to operationalize, evaluate, and embed the strategic plan into the Agency.

This strategic planning provides the vision, direction, and goals for NCFST over the next five years. Effective operational planning will translate this strategy into everyday execution so that this plan becomes the lens through which NCFST modifies and advances its work, and view new opportunities, risks, and decisions. First, the plan needs to be understood and owned by staff and community so that its language is integrated into the Agency. This way, it becomes a living, valuable part of NCFST and does not sit in isolation. This begins with effective communication about the plan and its contents. Second, the plan needs to be used to actively guide the work within each portfolio and the Agency as a whole.

Steps to implement and operationalize this plan and its four directions:

- NCFST directors and managers within each portfolio review the strategic plan to create workplans of programs, services, and projects, including how the strategic plan will be used to inform opportunities, risks, and decisions, and enmesh the strategic plan into daily operations
- The Quality Assurance and Decolonization team develops an evaluation framework that is principles-based, underpinned by the four directions.
- The Board and NCFST portfolio directors deploy cadence of reviews to interpret evaluation data, determine how to make improvements, and share outcomes with community

PRINCIPLES-BASED EVALUATION

Exploring what a principles-based evaluation is and what it will enable for NCFST.

Principles-based evaluations explore how values are turned into actions and how Agency goals emerge within complex, multifaceted programs and services. They are an effective evaluation methodology to bridge Indigenous and non-Indigenous world-views and evaluation objectives – they are grounded in values and tell a story of impact without predetermined outcomes or metrics. A principles-based evaluation will help NCFST determine how the strategic directions of Child-Centered, Self-Determination, All Our Relations, and Community Resilience show up within existing programs, services and Agency processes and decisions, and inform future program and service development from more grounded, community-based perspective.

The Quality Assurance and Decolonization Team will develop the principles-based evaluation for this strategic plan, including steps to create tools for cycles of learning and data collection and analysis, and ensuring the inclusion and embeddedness of community perspectives. This will ensure that the principles guide, inform, and inspire the Agency's work.





LOOKING FORWARD

NCFST is committed to working with staff and community to deepen their understanding of the four strategic directions and ensure that we collectively imbed them in their work. This will involve developing policies and practices for staff to carry out the plan and providing continuous opportunity for feedback and adaptation of how the plan is executed, centered around community and frontline staff perspectives and socio-political contexts as they evolve.



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