



Evolution and Transformation: Building on the Best of CLASS

Strategic
Operations Plan
2021-2024



Community Living Association for
South Simcoe

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
STAKEHOLDER INPUT	3
CLASS' STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2024	6
IMPLEMENTATION AND COMMUNICATION	11



Introduction

Community Living Association of South Simcoe (CLASS) is a non-profit organization that provides services to people with developmental disabilities and their families.

In April 2021, CLASS embarked on a four-month long journey to develop a Strategic Plan. This document is the culmination of extensive consultation with its' stakeholders and the many planning sessions that took place as part of that process. This Strategic Plan will guide the work of CLASS through to the end of March in 2024.

The people that provided input into the plan were those who know CLASS and its services best, including:

- People receiving services;
- Their families and friends;
- Employees of CLASS, as well as those that work for third-party staffing agencies;
- Black Workers Initiative Council (BWIC) at CLASS;
- Management;
- Board members; and
- Community partners.

In all, 249 people provided input into the plan through an anonymous electronic survey and 68 people participated in focus groups. Participation by stakeholders was extensive and intensive. This resulted in a vast amount of information—more than 200 pages of comments—that was analyzed to identify common points of concern and suggestions for CLASS to consider going forward.

A group of stakeholder representatives was invited to take part in discussions aimed at identifying which of those areas CLASS should focus on in the next three years. In the interests of clarity and organization of the work to follow, it was decided that Board of Directors would have a separate governance plan focusing exclusively on the work of the board. The document you are reading now speaks to the plan for CLASS' day-to-day operations.

Next, a Strategic Planning Committee was formed to further refine the strategic directions CLASS will embrace, and identify the major actions required in each. Members of the committee included:

- Andrew Walker, Executive Director
- Lisa Patterson, Chief Operations Officer
- Debbie Zimmer, Director of Finance
- Lara Macdonald, Director of Human Resources
- Julia Robson, Program Supervisor
- Helen Turchi, Transition Coordinator
- Natasha Shakespeare, Direct Support Professional
- Heather Barzo, Program Supervisor



- Allan May, Direct Support Professional

The plan was reviewed and revised several times. An Implementation Plan was also created. It contains additional detail on the steps to be taken, completion dates and assigns responsibility for oversight of the major tasks.

A communication plan to inform stakeholders about the Strategic Plan, including a schedule for ongoing updates, was also developed.

This plan is both ambitious and aspirational. It represents the undercurrent that permeated the input CLASS received—that CLASS is a good organization that does good work and is highly respected in the developmental services sector. But CLASS also has the potential and the opportunity to be something great. Like a caterpillar that retains the same DNA when it transforms into a butterfly, CLASS has the building blocks that provide an opportunity to create something amazing.



Stakeholder Input

The input for CLASS' strategic plan was provided by all its stakeholder groups: the people it supports, families, employees, Board of Directors, volunteers, community partners, suppliers and other community organizations.

This means all those who will be impacted by the plan contributed to the ideas set out here, including the two hundred and forty-nine people who completed the electronic survey. They were joined by the sixty-eight people who participated in the eight focus groups and four one-on-one interviews.



SURVEYS

Participants:

Of the 249 respondents to the electronic survey, 208 identified themselves, as follows:

- Family – 60 (29% of respondents)
- Staff – 97 (47%)
- Management – 11 (5%)
- Board of Directors – 6 (3%)
- Volunteer – 4 (2%)
- Another organization working with CLASS (5%)
- Other – 10 (5%)

Ratings:

Overall, CLASS' stakeholders had a very positive view of CLASS. Eighty-three percent of survey respondents rated the organization as very good (39%) or good (44%). Its mission and guiding principles, its services, the work of staff and of the administrative team also received high ratings.

For example, the percentage of respondents who rated services as either very effective or effective were:

- Passport (Alliston) – 96%
- Passport (Bradford) – 96%
- Bradford Passage – 96%
- Foundations – 80%
- Resource Centre Alliston - 81%
- Bradford Community Program – 95%
- Facilitating Youth Involvement – 93%
- Group Homes – 86%
- SIL – 91%



Ratings for the work of staff and administrative team were:

- Work of staff – 81%
- Work of Administrative Team – 81%

Stakeholders gave lower but still positive ratings to CLASS' facilities and to the work of management and the Board of Directors:

- Facilities – 68%
- Work of Management Team – 65%
- Work of Board of Directors – 70%

FOCUS GROUPS

Participants:

The eight focus groups and four individual interviews involved a total of sixty-eight people:

- Black Workers Initiative Council – 5
- Non-union staff – 6
- People supported by CLASS – 9
- Families – 9
- Staff (full-time, part-time, casual) – 8
- Supervisors – 10
- Agency Staff – 9
- External stakeholders – 8
- Executive Director, Chief Operating Officer, Director of Finance, Director of Human Resources

IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Through the survey and the focus groups, CLASS' stakeholders provided many pages of ideas for making it better. Those ideas covered a broad spectrum that included:

1. Description of the “new” CLASS of the future
2. Positioning Statements (vision, mission, values/principles)
3. Services
4. Staffing
5. Facilities
6. Administration and Management
7. Board of Directors
8. Partnerships / Community Development / Fundraising



Stakeholders want CLASS to:

- Be clear on what it stands for and be accountable to that.
- Look at how CLASS does what it does and ask if it could be done better—for the people it supports, for staff and for our South Simcoe community.
- Improve how it supports people receiving complex behavioural supports.
- Listen to people's goals and aspirations and support them in meaningful ways to accomplish them.
- Provide a healthy, safe workplace where everyone feels valued, supported, and has opportunities to develop skills, contribute input and give feedback.
- Offer more and different accommodation options.
- Support people to pursue more interests and activities in their community.
- Become better at planning change.
- Be more transparent, communicate better.
- Look for more ways to work with other organizations and entities to maximize what it can do for the people CLASS supports.



CLASS' Strategic Plan 2021-2024

As noted, several hundred stakeholders provided input into this Strategic Plan. The planning committee then had to determine which ideas were “strategic” enough to be included in a three-year plan. There were many valid suggestions for improvement that aren't included in the plan because they don't require long-term planning. These were collected by the consultants and passed on to CLASS management for further consideration.

The planning committee also had to consider what changes were within its control and feasible for CLASS to commit to. Organizations in the developmental services sector must consider a variety of external factors when undertaking any planning exercise. CLASS is no different.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has upended services and will have many long-term effects in the years to come. A chronic shortage of people choosing a career in developmental services continues to make it difficult to retain optimal staffing levels. Developmental services for adults are not an entitlement in Ontario—like health care or education—making it a discretionary spending line for governments. That means funding does not increase to meet the demand of new people looking for supports, or to meet changing and more complex needs as people age. The province is also under no obligation to cover the rising costs of providing existing services. In fact, organizations are constantly pressured to serve more people for less money.

And all these pressures are bearing down on a sector that has, and continues to undergo, significant positive shifts in philosophy and best practice in service delivery that emphasize unique, individualized person-directed supports in community over grouped and segregated services. All long overdue changes, but nevertheless, ones that require more financial and human resources.

CLASS' Strategic Plan will guide its efforts and resources over the next three years. It identifies the areas the organization and its stakeholders want to focus on the most. CLASS' chosen Strategic Directions are:

1. Solidify Our Organizational Identity
2. Strengthen Our Person-Driven Services
3. Enhance Our Work Environment
4. Expand Our Collaborations

As they are completed, the actions identified in each direction will bring CLASS closer to the being the organization its stakeholders believe it can be.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION #1: SOLIDIFY OUR ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY

Many people who provided input to this plan expressed a desire to better understand what CLASS as an organization stood for. And along with that, that there was a need for symmetry between what it stood for and how it operated. These are the “guiding stars” of an organization. They are the answer to the question “What kind of an organization is CLASS?”. They are the concepts that, when situations arise, or ideas come forward, can be pointed to and efforts made to ensure responses align with the chosen “stars”. Some of the ideas put forward by CLASS’ stakeholders included: being transparent, communicative, collaborative, a safe place for all employees and planning for change rather than being reactive. These suggestions inform the actions below.



Actions:

- 1.1 Develop a new aspirational description of CLASS that is exciting, motivates its stakeholders and drives planning and decision-making.
- 1.2 Develop inspiring, relatable and easily understood positioning statements for CLASS (vision, mission and guiding principles/values) that accurately reflect the aspirations and efforts of the organization.
- 1.3 Develop and implement anti-racism, anti-Black racism and anti-oppression framework policies and practices.
- 1.4 Develop and implement strategies for enhancing organizational leadership.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION #2: STRENGTHEN OUR PEOPLE-DRIVEN SERVICES

Although CLASS' services were rated very highly by its stakeholders, several themes emerged in their comments and ideas. First and foremost was that all services should be driven by the individual and their unique choices and needs. They also wanted a framework in place to make sure that happened. There was also consensus that changes to the way complex care is delivered would enhance both service quality and supports available to staff.



Actions:

2.1 Address service quality.

Select and implement a standards and accreditation system that ensures the voices of people supported are heard, and they inform all service decisions.

Ensure that adopted person-driven service practices facilitate the identification of specialized care needs for which access to additional internal or external resources is required.

Revamp our approach to existing and future accommodation options to better suit the needs and preferences of people supported.

2.2 Improve CLASS' capacity to effectively serve people with complex care needs.

Review and enhance how complex behavioural support is currently being provided.

Identify and implement practices that will improve how people coming to CLASS are introduced to services and supported during their transition.

Identify and address gaps in other areas of specialized or complex care needs (E.G.: Palliative care).

2.3 Reimagine CLASS' approach to facilitating people's participation in recreation, culture, volunteer and other communities of their choosing.

Develop and implement strategies that meet the needs of the people supported while positioning CLASS as a leader in the sector.

Increase the number and quality of activities participated in, including those that enhance people's connection to their local communities such as volunteering and paid employment.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION #3: ENHANCE OUR WORK ENVIRONMENT

It is the employees of CLASS who provide the services to people with intellectual disabilities. Without them, there are no services. CLASS must rise to the challenge of attracting and keeping the best talent. And that means the spotlight needs to be on ways CLASS can create an even better work environment and in so doing offer even better services.

Actions:

- 3.1** Introduce a comprehensive human resources strategy that supports a well-trained, highly effective staff team in a positive, safe work environment.

Develop plans to address the range of stakeholder issues identified in the surveys and focus groups in the following categories:

- *Diversity, equity, inclusion and safety,*
- *Accountability,*
- *Staffing capacity and deployment,*
- *Staff development, engagement, retention and advancement,*
- *Staff wellness and mental health.*



STRATEGIC DIRECTION #4: EXPAND OUR COLLABORATIONS

The future of developmental services in Ontario is one where collaboration happens to a much higher degree than it ever has before. That means working with other kinds of organizations to address common gaps and needs in our communities. It means looking for ways to work with the business community to develop innovations that can assist in service delivery. And it also means working with families and family groups in new ways.



Actions:

- 4.1 Develop and implement a community communications plan that increases CLASS' profile in our catchment area.
- 4.2 Continue to create and expand opportunities to partner with others and enhance the lives of the people supported by CLASS.
- 4.3 Foster, facilitate and grow the family network and strengthen its relationship with CLASS.



Implementation and Communication

As noted in the Introduction, an Implementation Plan has been completed. It contains more detail about the steps involved, timelines and assigns responsibility for oversight of major tasks.

A significant number of the actions and steps included in the Implementation Plan call for input and participation by staff affected by those changes.

Actions related to communicating to stakeholders about the plan and updates on progress are included as part of the implementation plan.

Initial rollout of the plan is projected for September 2021, with updates on progress following every quarter until the plan's end date in March 2024.