



2022-  
2025

# Family and Community Support Services Strategic Plan



### 1.0 Executive Summary

#### Situation statement

Yellowhead County is located approximately 94 km west of Edmonton, Alberta. Its eastern boundary is in proximity to Alberta's capital city, Edmonton; and its western boundary is located just a few short kilometers east of the Jasper National Park boundary. Yellowhead County is regarded as part of the North West Region of the province.

Surrounding the Towns of Edson and Hinton, Yellowhead County is an economically strong region with immense opportunities in petroleum, mining, forestry, agriculture and tourism industries. The County has a massive land area of over 22,000 square kilometers (just over seven million acres).

There are approximately 10,500 residents who call the County home; those living in the Hamlets of Evansburg, Wildwood, Robb, Marlboro, Cadomin, Peers, Brule, and Niton Junction and those living on rural acreages across the County.

Provincial government services are primarily offered in Edson and Hinton, although many residents will travel to Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Drayton Valley or Mayerthorpe as those locations may, in fact, be closer. Within Yellowhead County, only Evansburg has a health unit. Community-based services such as schools are available in the communities of Evansburg, Wildwood, Niton Junction and Fulham. Additional community and social service programs, aside from Yellowhead County FCSS, such as playschools, parent groups, seniors' groups and adult learning are delivered by a number of non-profit volunteer agencies. Niton Junction, Wildwood and Evansburg each have a municipal library.

#### FCSS Mandate and Program History

FCSS is an 80/20 grant funding partnership between municipalities (or Metis Settlements) and the province enabled through the *FCSS Act and Regulation*. FCSS services must be of *"...a preventive nature that enhances the social well-being of individuals and families through promotion or intervention strategies provided at the earliest opportunity."*

Prevention is a proactive approach that strengthens the protective factors of individuals, families, and communities to promote well-being, reduce vulnerabilities, enhance quality of life, and empower people to meet the challenges of life. FCSS does not provide crisis intervention or rehabilitative services, but rather seeks to provide a primary and secondary prevention focus to community.

There are both primary and secondary preventions. Primary prevention is the active pursuit of individual, family and community protective factors that lead to the well-being of self and others. Secondary prevention occurs when protective factors address or modify risk factors before restorative supports are required. All prevention is aimed at increasing social well-being of Albertans. Social well-being is a state of living where people experience acceptance, appreciation, connection, contribution, and compatibility within themselves and in a reciprocal relationship with others.

A second key principle of FCSS is local responsibility for service decision-making. The point of the grant funding is to leave it up to municipalities to decide how to allocate funding to best meet the needs and priorities of its communities. Yellowhead County Council and the advisory board it established—the Yellowhead County FCSS Board, guide Administration in FCSS activities through strategic goal setting—the impetus behind the planning process.

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The third key principle of FCSS is community development. Community development is the practice of building connections and capacity between people so they can work together on common issues and opportunities.

Yellowhead County has active delivered FCSS program since 1974--initially in the Villages of Evansburg and Wildwood, then throughout the Improvement District, which is now the County. The FCSS Department is one of five in the municipality's Community Services Department. Cost sharing agreements with Parkland County to allow their west-side residents to access FCSS services in Yellowhead County, and with the Towns of Edson and Hinton to allow Yellowhead residents to access FCSS services in those municipalities, completes the service delivery structure of County FCSS.

### **Legislative, Policy, and Contractual Environment**

Family and Community Support Services delivered using the provincial grant are bound by the aforementioned act and regulation as well as the annual grant agreement and ministry contract and any number of current provincial and municipal government policies.

By provincial mandate, FCSS programs and supports must (five strategic directions):

- Help people develop independence, strengthen coping skills and become more resistant to crisis.
- Help people develop an awareness of social needs.
- Help people develop interpersonal and group skills which enhance constructive relationships among people.
- Help people and communities assume responsibility for decisions and actions that affect them.
- Provide support that help sustain people as active participants in the community.

Services cannot be:

- Primarily for recreation or leisure of individuals.
- Providing direct financial assistance to individuals or a family.
- Rehabilitative in nature.
- Duplicate services provided by a government or government agency.

Additionally, the Yellowhead County Strategic Plan for 2022-25 sets the following goal specifically related to FCSS and social supports:

#### *Pillar 4.1 Maximize Quality of Life for Residents and Visitors Alike*

*4.1.3 Goal: People and families who want to remain in the County can do so.*

- *Identify how best to support seniors as they age in their communities.*

*Performance Measure:*

- *More seniors choose to remain in their communities each year, either in their own homes or other welcoming locations.*

## 2.0 Mission & Vision

### Vision

Yellowhead County's overall vision is: *"A Responsible and Diverse Community of Choice where Quality of Life Matters."*

The Province of Alberta's vision for Family and Community Support Services is: *"Alberta's diverse people building strong communities through positive, caring interaction and mutual respect."*

### Mission

Yellowhead County's mission statement is: *"Building a Better Community for Present and Future Generations."*

The Province of Alberta's mission for Family and Community Support Services is: *"A partnership that develops locally driven preventive social initiatives to enhance the well-being of individuals, families and communities."*

## 3.0 Yellowhead County Council

Mayor Wade Williams  
Division 1 – Patrick Soroka  
Division 2 – Anthony Giezen  
Division 3 – Penny Lowe  
Division 4 – David Russell

Division 5 – Shawn Berry  
Division 6 – Brigitte Lemieux  
Division 7 – Dawn Mitchell  
Division 8 – Ken Groat

## 4.0 Yellowhead County FCSS Board

Jane Henry, Chair  
Brian Broughton  
Lois Haggart  
Trudy Morrison

Nicole Connolly  
Martino Verheage  
Brigitte Lemieux, County Council  
Mary-Anne Bittner

## 5.0 Yellowhead County FCSS Staff

Community Services General Manager  
Community Outreach Coordinator  
Youth Services Coordinator  
Home Support Workers (3-5 casual staff)

FCSS Supervisor  
Children's Program Coordinator  
Summer staff as required

## 6.0 Environmental Analysis

Social wellness and well-being are complex and influenced by a variety of factors, both internal and external to each of us. When people are not experiencing wellness, it can manifest in a multitude of ways and further impact the individuals, families, and communities in which the person resides. The FCSS program was established to provide preventive social services that support the social well-being of individuals and families through prevention and intervention strategies at the earliest opportunity.

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The FCSS board met in January and March of 2022 to discuss the environment in which FCSS will be operating over the next four years. Identifying issues that are impacting or may impact the social wellness of Yellowhead County residents is an important first step in goal setting. The Board identified the following aspects of the current environment that are likely to challenge the social wellness of Yellowhead County residents:

**Isolation** – People experience isolation in a variety of ways. They can be isolated due to their health. They may feel isolated due to socioeconomic factors or due to their race, religion, changing status of ability (transitioning from one life stage to another), lack of opportunities to meet people, etc. For whatever reason, the impact of isolation on the well-being of individuals and communities is significant. *"There is robust evidence that social isolation and loneliness significantly increase risk for premature mortality, and the magnitude of the risk exceeds that of many leading health indicators."* (Julianne Holt-Lunstad, PhD, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University.)

**Mental Health** – As noted by the Canadian Mental Health Association, "5 in 5 people have mental health." Often, people use the terms mental health and mental illness interchangeably; however, they are distinct. People with mental illness can be leading healthy and productive lives, and being proactive with their care. At the same time, people with mental health can be floundering and challenged to manage thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Being proactive with mental health is as important as being proactive with physical health.

**Resiliency** - Psychologists define resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or other significant sources of stress such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. COVID-19, for example, has presented many challenges to the public in general, requiring everyone to practice and stretch resiliency skills socially, economically, emotionally and physically. Resiliency can help to reduce the impact of social, economic and even genetic risks. Factors contributing to resiliency include: connection, communication, confidence, competence, commitment and control.

**Lack of or Gaps in Services** – Much of the social services landscape in Alberta is comprised of services funded, directly or indirectly, through the provincial government. Children's Services, Community and Social Services, Seniors and Housing and Service Alberta comprise the bulk of social service supports. Alberta Health Services also provides some social services, depending on resourcing. The government uses grants and contracts as a method to ensure services are delivered locally. Examples of this are the Family Resource Networks, Sexual Violence Service Agencies, Woman's Shelters, Primary Care Networks, etc. This suite of services relies largely on well-managed non-profit agencies and their ability to deliver the services throughout various regions, and appropriate funding to provide those services in a collaborative and holistic manner. Gaps exist, such as homelessness supports outside of urban centres, and financial supports for individuals in unique or unrecognized circumstances needing childcare to name a few.

**Access to Resources and Services** – Barriers to accessing services and resources can be most significant in rural and remote communities. As the cost of travel increases, so does the cost to access provincial services in person which continue to be centralized. Additionally, as service delivery continues to shift to the virtual or online world, access to reliable and affordable internet continues to be a barrier. The move to online service provision can also create opportunities for individuals to access services not normally available in rural areas (counseling, workshops etc.), but then they rely on computer literacy, competency, access and appropriateness.

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**Housing Instability** – Homelessness is a concern in every community, whether it appears overtly with people sleeping in doorways and parks; or hidden, as it is with “couch surfing” or use of substandard housing. There is rarely one cause underlying chronic homelessness and many routes by which people lose adequate or stable housing. The impact of homelessness on community and society as a whole, however, is straightforward and significant. Yellowhead County is challenged to identify as well as address this issue due to the lack of central locations, low comparative numbers, multiple jurisdictions, and lack of stable funding. From the preventive aspect, FCSS services could focus on enhancing personal skills and competencies to prevent individuals from becoming precariously housed and ultimately, homeless. Sudden escalating costs for utilities already experienced in 2022 is likely to further destabilize individuals in their housing in Yellowhead communities.

**Recent Service Disruptions** - Since the last significant review of the FCSS strategic Business Plan, there have been additional changes to the County landscape in which the program operates. These include:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly altered the social interactions and fiscal lives across all communities. Trust in government was changed. Community divisions opened and there is a new restraint in the comfort level people have interacting with others.
- Fiscal changeability in municipal and government spending and service disruptions has created new challenges to planning and implementing FCSS services.
- The Government of Alberta rapidly revised the types and manner in which they contracted services supporting children, youth and families through Children’s Services, creating new model (Spoke and Hub) that is less connected to communities as was the prior model.
- The discontinuance of ParentLink, supporting families with children 0-6, without an equivalent replacement created a sudden and significant gap in services for young families within the County. Replacement services proved to be a fraction of what was previously available to families.

The FCSS Board’s list of environmental factors challenging the County in the span of this Plan is in no way exhaustive, as new factors may emerge quite suddenly and impact the operations of the FCSS Department. The following tabulates the findings of the Board’s SWOT analysis:

<b>Strengths – internal factors that give us an advantage.</b>	<b>Weaknesses – internal factors that place us at a disadvantage.</b>
County increased investment in connectivity County investment in aging-in-place (Evergreen, Home Support) Skilled staff with local connections and knowledge Municipal funding	Access to reliable technology Lack of transportation options Lack of Volunteers Aging of Volunteers Lack of service or non-profit groups to access grant funds Large geographic area to serve

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Opportunities – external elements to exploit to our advantage.	Threats – External factors that can create problems.
Increased Provincial Revenues New Avenues to work, learn, connect Increased comfort with technology People are craving social connection People have changed habits, simplified life Ability to offer hybrid programming. Shifting from transitory worker to resident Market as a full life spectrum area, IE. Age-friendly communities	Provincial Funding/Inflation impacts. Decreased affordability People may seek/ continue isolation - good or bad Feasibility of programs with small populations Sustainability (political) Lack of Volunteers Complexity of systems, non-profit, government, etc.

Following this environmental scan, the Board in their strategic planning session chose the following overarching strategies by which the County can address the issues:

**Advocacy** – Rural communities have unique challenges. They struggle to advocate for themselves, having lower populations, lower critical mass to receive services, fewer agencies and organizations to advocate with, and the dual challenges of maintaining privacy and anonymity while sharing the realities of those with lived experience. The role of an advocate often falls to those with little technical ability, capacity, and political capital. Often, the advocacy role is left unfilled.

**Community Building, Community Development** – Society is more divided than it has been in a long time as a result of recent events. The COVID-19 pandemic unearthed and worsened political and social differences and has even divided families as much as communities. As County communities emerge from the pandemic, FCSS should facilitate the finding of common ground, understanding, tolerance, and inclusion. Interdependencies and working together built the communities of Yellowhead County, and they thrived most when common cause and mutual care lead the way. “It takes a village to raise a child,” is an adage almost everyone can agree with; it’s the collective responsibility we have to ensure the next generation fulfills its potential. Another way to state the value of community is, “If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.”

**7.0 Goals for the Next Four Years**

FCSS has five Strategic Directions and seven Core Outcomes, identified as Goals as set out by the FCSS Act and Regulation. Strategies and activities to meet these goals are at the discretion of individual FCSS implementing agencies. Outcomes and a number of metrics of striving toward these goals are reported to the Community and Social Services Ministry annually, as well as to the FCSS Board and County Council. Board strategies, Administration’s activities, and joint measures and tabulated as follows:

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Goal One:</b> <b>Individuals experience personal well-being</b></p>		
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Connect individuals to existing supports and services	referrals/service navigation Advocacy for individuals to receive services Aid individuals in applications to services refer/support Elder Abuse cases	-staff are successful in connecting residents to services for which they are eligible -# connections between residents and external services increases
Provide opportunities for individuals to learn about available resources	CRA and GOA benefits workshops Wills and Estates workshops Scams workshops It's Not Right workshop	-participant feedback finds the capacity to meet own needs or competence increases
Provide resources to individuals to build emotional resiliency	Personal wellness workshops Wellness Kits Emotional Safe Spot program Bereavement support group Caregivers support group Alzheimer's/Dementia support group	-participants express increased self-esteem, optimism and resilience
Provide and promote supports and services for individuals to maintain independence in the community	Home Support Be a Good Neighbour Promotion Promote (where appropriate) applicable businesses Community Volunteer Income Tax Program	-participants have a growing ability to meet their own needs



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<b>Goal Two:</b> <b>Individuals are connected with others</b>		
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Provide opportunities for people to connect with others	Support social clubs/groups (seniors clubs, support groups) focusing on reducing the isolation of individuals  Events in the community that promote inclusiveness - such as a cultural/ethnic dinner  Seniors Appreciation Event(s)	-participants report increased social relationships, trust and belonging

<b>Goal Three:</b> <b>Children and Youth develop positively</b>		
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Provide opportunities to children and youth based on 40 developmental assets	Babysitters and Home Alone courses  Lifeskills Bootcamp  Roots of Empathy  Summertime Adventure Camps  It's Cool to Know Your Way in a Relationship  Take Charge – substance use reduction	-participants express an increase in one or more of the 40 developmental assets
Provide resources to children and youth supporting emotional resiliency	Comfort Boxes – Grade 7 students in County schools  Beyond the Hurt – elementary students  Start Strong – grade eight  Kids have Stress Too	Participants express an increase in one or more of the 40 developmental assets

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<p align="center"><b>Goal Four:</b> <b>Healthy functioning within families</b></p>		
Strategy	Activities	Measure
Support organizations and agencies to connect with families within Yellowhead County	Participate in opportunities to engage with and advocate for local residents (such as regional interagency, Early childhood Matters, etc.)	Staff are connected and knowledgeable about available family services and resources; # of successful advocacies grow
Families have access to information supporting healthy development of children	Parent focused workshops and sessions aligned with children and youth programming, sleep talk series, digital literacy  Fund services supporting families in-county	-participant feedback shows positive family relationships, positive parenting  positive family communication improves  -number of families supported with information and referrals increases

<p align="center"><b>Goal Five:</b> <b>Families have social supports</b></p>		
Strategy	Activities	Measure
Ensure families connect with agencies providing supports (FRN hub and spoke)	Provide referrals to appropriate agencies such as Family Resource Networks (Hub and Spoke), Alberta Health, Children’s Services and supportive agencies.	-families requesting help to access resources needed are helped
Provide opportunities for families to connect with others.	Family-focused Movie Nights  Family Connection Challenges  StoryWalk  Adventure Playgrounds  Intergenerational Rhyme Time  Yellowheadopoly	-families have growing positive social networks

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<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Goal Six:</b> <b>The community is connected and engaged</b></p>		
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Measure</b>
<p>Provide opportunities for community to connect and engage with each other</p>	<p>NeighbourLink Grant Community Garden Cultural Exchange event (with Heritage Services) Regular survey/evaluations Community Engagement Opportunities</p>	<p>-Social engagements increase -social supports increase awareness of the community -attitudes toward others and the community is increasingly positive -number of Neighbourlink Grants issued increases -Community Garden usage is maintained at high levels -number of engagement opportunities continue or increase</p>

\*\*See next page for Goal Seven

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<b>Goal Seven: Community social issues are identified and addressed</b>		
<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Measure</b>
Participate in regional and local collaborations addressing social issues	Interagency meetings Regional Elder Abuse Network Early Childhood Matters Sexual Violence Services	-staff understand and work to address the wider regional community social issues
Support issues that are identified as a priority by Board and Council	Complete a Social Needs Assessment Elder Abuse Cost-Sharing Drive Happiness LGBTQS+ inclusion	-agencies and community members increasingly work in partnership to address social issues in the community -a County-wide Social Needs Assessment is completed -partner FCSS agency services are assessed and regular interagency meetings are held
Support local organizations providing services and programming within County	Grant Program non-profit/volunteer board coaching Grant Connect Volunteer Appreciation	-agencies and community members work in partnership to address social issues -number of local or regional partnerships increases
Increase awareness of issues and concerns impacting the well-being	highlight special days/issues to highlight for promotion in the public and with social media	-the awareness of community social issues grows

**8.0 Closing**

The Yellowhead County FCSS Board and Department seek to improve the social well-being of residents and the community despite current and potential future challenges. Happy, healthy and engaged people promote the long-term viability of the County. Through FCSS programming, the County can build

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the capacity for residents and groups to solve problems, rebound from crisis, and address local concerns and issues with own strengths.

Through County FCSS, residents have access to services and programs that serve their unique needs and enhance County life. Ensuring residents have access to services, supports and programs ensures Council creates communities that are attractive to newcomers, and loved as home by those already here.