



# **Let's Touch the Skies!**

## **Final Evaluation Report**

**September 15, 2015**

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Let's Touch the Skies!

## 1.0 Introduction

In 2013, the Cochrane Society for Housing Options (CSHO) received funds from the Status of Women Canada to undertake a community planning initiative to address women's economic security in the rural and small urban communities of Western Rocky View and Cochrane. The goal of the project was to "empower women to achieve financial security and emotional and physical wellness through the implementation of broad based community supports and resources."

### 1.1 Project Objectives

- To complete a Community Plan for women's needs
- To develop and implement programming specific to the needs of women identified in the Community Plan
- To complete a Gender Based Analysis (GBA)

### 1.2 Project Implementation

General project implementation plans were laid out as follows:

- Engage the community and establish relationships that encourage the inclusion of local women and local agencies serving women. Conducting appropriate gender based analysis, focus groups to identify priorities, potential strategies for women to improve economic security
- Develop the Community Plan
- Implement the Community Plan through a collective effort with community partners
  - Increase the community knowledge and awareness of women's' issues
  - Work with community partners to build capacity and sustainable programs and services for women

### 1.3 Project Partners

The following community partners played an active role on the Steering Committee and/or project working groups.

Town of Cochrane  
Cochrane Family and Community Support Services  
Western Rocky View Community Resource Centre  
Economic Development  
Cochrane Society for Housing Options  
Cochrane Community Health Centre  
Cochrane Mental Health & Addictions  
Homecare  
Urgent Care  
Rocky View School Division  
RVS Community Learning  
RVS Adult Learning  
Bow Valley College  
Boys and Girls Club of Cochrane & Area  
Calgary Catholic Immigrant Society

Helping Hands Society  
RCMP  
Cochrane Alliance Church  
Seniors on the Bow  
Calgary Foothills Primary Care Network

## **2.0 Project Implementation Process**

The project was named “Let’s Touch the Skies” (LTTS) and was divided into two distinct phases.

Phase I: Community Needs Assessment and Action Plan – Dec. 2012 to March 2014

Phase II: Implementation of the Community Action Plan – April 2014 to August 2015

### **2.1 Phase I: Community Needs Assessment and Action Plan**

In the first phase, a project coordinator was hired to conduct a community needs assessment based on a gender analysis lens and facilitated in a way that would engage community members in the process. Using Gender Based Analysis (GBA) research, the community needs assessment was conducted through a series of extensive interviews, focus groups and surveys in a broad community consultation process, complemented by a review of research and government statistics. The community needs assessment found that income discrepancies and economic disadvantages for women could be attributed to a number of specific barriers including: non-standard employment, level of education, financial literacy, affordable housing, child care, family breakdown, domestic violence, mental and physical health, transportation and lack of coordinated support services. Based on the research conducted for the GBA, specific recommendations to mitigate some of the barriers were identified and prioritized in a Community Action Plan.

The Community Needs Assessment and Action Planning was summarized in the “Let’s Touch the Skies” report which was widely distributed and presented to Cochrane Town Council, Rocky View County Council; the local MLA and to service providers in the fall of 2013. The Let’s Touch the Skies report was well received by the community. A “poverty wheel” graphic developed to help the community understand the factors contributing to poverty was found to be very helpful. People could envision themselves attached to specific priority areas.

Community engagement in Phase I was so strong that a number of people interested in specific priority areas spontaneously took the lead to establish a number of working groups. Some of these working groups moved into action even before a formal Steering Committee had been established. In some cases working groups were furthering work and initiatives that had already been started within the community but now the work was more collaborative and aligned with the broader LTTS community action plan.



Figure 1: Poverty Wheel

## 2.2 Phase II: Implementation of Community Action Plan

As the project moved into Phase II, a Steering Committee was established to monitor and guide implementation. The Steering Committee was made up of broad representation of community service providers and a citizen representative from the community to ensure a direct voice for vulnerable women. Specific action priorities were developed with progress indicators and timelines, and an evaluation plan was established. (see plan in Appendix A)

As described in Phase I, a number of Working Groups were already active. The Project Coordinator established some additional working groups for those priority areas not already activated (e.g. public policy and workplace wellness) and then turned them over to community leaders. The Project Coordinator maintained communication with all working groups, regularly checking in and reporting back to the Steering Committee.

While Phase II implementation was guided by specific action plan priorities, the implementation process did not set limits on what the community might do, but instead embraced what came forward.



Figure 2: Implementation Plan

Priorities were flexible enough to allow working groups to evolve their action in the direction of the most expedient and/or emerging opportunities. In some cases, new working groups emerged that had not been part of the original priorities. For example, the issue of older women (seniors) living in poverty emerged at the Hub Crawl event in September 2014 and a Seniors Advisory Committee was established to pursue action in this area. In other cases, organizations previously working on similar but parallel projects were able to join forces. For example, groups working on Systems Navigation and collaboration within the health sector broadened their scope to include collaboration with social service providers they connected with at the Hub Crawl event.

### 3.0 Implementation/Action Plan Results

The Implementation/Action Plan was divided into two distinct action areas:

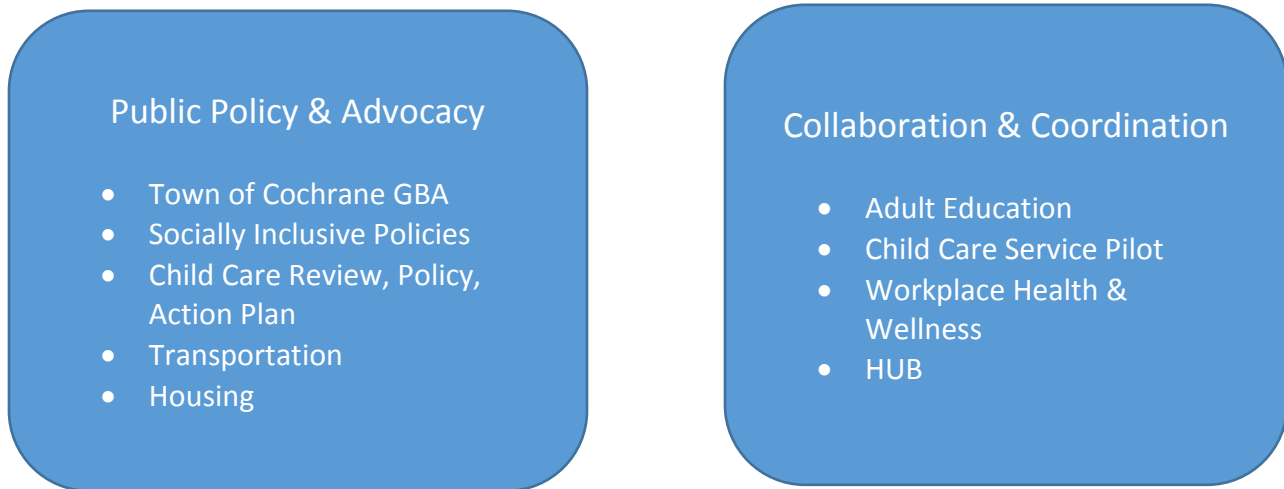


Figure 3: Implementation/Action Plan

Specific activities were set out for each action area and progress was closely monitored by the Project Team and the Steering Committee, with course corrections noted as working group action evolved. Although not all of the original activities were completed as planned due to course corrections along the way, a great deal of progress was made in all areas of the action plan.

#### 3.1 Public Policy and Advocacy Action Priorities and Results

##### 3.1.1 Town of Cochrane Gender Based Analysis

Research was conducted into potential GBA/diversity tools that might be piloted in Cochrane. The “Advancing Equity and Inclusion: A Guide for Municipal Decision Makers” tool was chosen by the LTTS Steering Committee and has been well received by the Town. The Town’s Integrated Neighbourhood Design Guidelines will be reviewed with this tool.

##### 3.1.2 Socially Inclusive Policies (Emergent Action)

Based on increased awareness generated by the GBA, the Town has committed to do further research and dialogue with regional neighbours, and to work with the LTTS team to develop a social policy that is responsive to the community (e.g. reduced fees for lower income citizens). A decision was made by the Town to take on an MSW student to work on the development of inclusive social policy. This work will extend to March 2016. The student is also connected with the Resource Centre/FCSS which will ensure that social policy development will be informed by residents/client lived experiences of the municipal and social services.



### **3.1.2 Child Care**

Overall results of research into the community's child care situation show an over representation of private/for profit day care and minimal non-profit representation. This potentially impacts accessibility and affordability for lower income families and restricts women's choices for work and child care. As part of LTTS, examples of municipally supported day care were brought to the Town administration as an example of a more inclusive policy and program delivery model. Examination of the Neighbourhood Design Guidelines will be completed with access to child care in mind. One unexpected result in this area was that after being involved in the research phase of the GBA one local day care provider created 'drop in' spaces for children offering both half day and full day options.

Based on working group momentum and current stakeholder engagement, the 'childcare' issue was reframed to focus on after school care. A meeting was held with school principals, senior Rocky View School administration, senior Town staff and other related stakeholders to coordinate efforts and ideas in this area. Representatives from the Rocky View School District are taking the lead on development of a new Afterschool Care program.

### **3.1.3 Transportation**

Due to increasing demand (30% annually) for subsidized transportation, a request was made to the Town of Cochrane for funding for the CAR program (Community Access Resource) Program: Subsidized Taxi Transportation) previously funded by FCSS and United Way. The request for the subsidized transportation program was granted by the Town for the 2015 budget year. The change reflects the municipality's new commitment to supporting access to transportation for citizens living on low income.

In 2013, the Town of Cochrane completed a transportation study which was promoted by LTTS during the Community Assessment phase. The Town is currently looking at the feasibility of implementing the plan. As a result of the ongoing work of LTTS, more specific information is emerging from Seniors Advisory Committee, Hub Crawl, Housing Forum and other vulnerable sectors on the importance of creating community transportation options. In the interim, an advocacy plan is being developed to influence the Town and other stakeholders to support a more robust "social" transportation program until a full public transportation service is in place.

The community is excited about a funding proposal that has been submitted for a new "Dial a Bus" service and is awaiting final approval. It's anticipated that the "Dial a Bus" service would significantly improve transportation options for low income people until a broader public transportation system can be developed.

### **3.1.4 Housing**

To address the affordable housing shortage in Cochrane, a Housing Forum was held in the fall of 2014 to help inform the Town of Cochrane and Cochrane Society for Housing Options (CSHO) of the dire affordable housing situation in Cochrane, and the specialized housing needs of homeless youth/adults, transitional/safe housing for those escaping domestic violence, and accessible/affordable housing for

seniors, especially single senior women. Forty people attended the Housing Forum. The Chair of CSHO has developed a strategy paper which summarizes the discussion of the Housing Forum and lays out a plan of action on a shared community vision. CSHO continues to work closely with the Town of Cochrane to build further capacity in affordable housing.

There is a current initiative underway presented by the youth homelessness coalition, as well as expressed interest in follow up on seniors housing issues. A private business owner has approached FCSS/Resource Centre with an interest in exploring support for emergency domestic violence housing – to be further developed in 2016.

### **3.2 Collaboration and Coordination Action Priorities and Results**

#### **3.2.1 Adult Education**

One of the action priorities in the area of adult education was to develop a more coordinated approach to education/training opportunities to prevent duplication, create cross-agency awareness/marketing of program offerings and reduce systemic barriers for low income women. First an Adult Learning Needs Assessment was completed in the community. Bow Valley College, FCSS, Library, Rocky View Community Learning, Rocky View Adults Learning, and employers worked together on coordination and marketing of programs for women learners. Bow Valley College offered programs specifically related to LTTS including the Early Learning and Childcare Certificate program; Youth Employment Skills Project; and Hospital Unit Clerk. An Adult Education and Professional Development page was permanently added to the Town of Cochrane Guide under the sponsorship of the Town's Economic Development department. In addition, a Bow Valley College representative completed a community needs assessment to identify systemic barriers to Post-Secondary Education for women in the Cochrane area and shared this document with LTTS to further inform working group efforts.

Some action priority areas overlap in the implementation phase. For example, as part of the Child Care initiative, Bow Valley held a meeting to discuss the Early Learning Childcare Certificate training options, including a presentation on the Canada Jobs Grant funding and a discussion on community childcare and training needs. And in response to the new Seniors working group interest, a Computer Basics Training program for Seniors is being offered.

#### **3.2.2 Workplace Health and Wellness**

Through the LTTS project, Cochrane was successful in receiving a grant for the Community Helpers Program in March 2015. The Community Helpers Program provides mechanisms to identify and support existing "natural" helpers for youth and other vulnerable sectors of the community. The intent of the program is to build a bridge between informal and formal support for youth/adults in the community and to provide awareness of existing supports in the community. The LTTS project team established an Advisory Committee consisting of Cochrane community stakeholders to guide the program. Targets include working with the youth sector and non-profit sector to engage and train community helpers, and working closely with the town Economic Development Officer and the business community to promote workplace wellness. In addition to establishing the Community Helper

program in Cochrane, the project will take over management of the Community Helper program already established in Bragg Creek.

Another significant success in the area of health and wellness has been the newly developed community connection with the Primary Care Network and the enhanced connection with Alberta Health Services – Community Health Centre.

### **3.2.3 HUB**

The concept of developing a HUB was to enhance system and service coordination/collaboration amongst existing community service providers in order to improve access, and to harness capacity and resources to generate efficient support for women with more successful outcomes. First an internal agency audit was conducted with the services offered out of the Homestead Building (operating as an informal service HUB). Results of the audit indicated a need for improved communication between programs and for more coordinated formal referral and information exchange processes. In September 2014 the information sharing “HUB Crawl” event attracted 63 community service providers including health, social and education service providers. Following the HUB Crawl, a manual of available services, organizational mandates, contact and access information was developed and distributed to service providers throughout the community. A recent follow up survey engaged participants in sharing ideas for improved referral and information sharing. Further work to move the process forward will be undertaken at a second “HUB Crawl” to be held in September 2015.

### **3.2.4 New Initiatives**

In addition to established priorities, the LTTS project supports ongoing program development and new opportunities for women. Two new initiatives that emerged out of community engagement and interest are focused in the areas of services for seniors and development of a community response to domestic violence.

In the area of seniors, the Seniors Advisory Committee is working to raise awareness of the needs and issues of low income seniors in Cochrane and participating in planning activities in areas such as transportation, housing and other support services.

As a result of work in the area of Domestic Violence, there is now a Domestic Violence Offender Treatment program (men’s group) being offered in Cochrane. Mental Health, Victim Services and the Resource Centre/FCSS are exploring opportunities to partner with Peer Support Services for Abused Women to bring a peer support group to Cochrane for women affected by domestic violence.

## 4.0 Community Feedback

Community feedback on the project was derived from a number of sources.

- Survey feedback was collected from 50 participants of the first 2014 Hub Crawl. Hub Crawl participants were primarily service provider representatives.
- A focus group and individual phone interviews were conducted with women from the community who had participated in Phase I identification of community needs and issues in order to check back with them to see if they felt their needs and issues were being actively addressed within Phase II of the project.
- Telephone interviews were conducted with 9 community service partners who were directly involved with the project and with project implementation.
- Key informant interviews were conducted with the project manager and project coordinator.
- Documents produced throughout the project (e.g. Community Needs Assessment report; Implementation Plan; implementation updates; progress summaries) were reviewed.

### 4.1 Hub Crawl Feedback

The Hub Crawl was organized by Let's Touch the Skies as a full day event held in the fall of 2014. It was intended to begin a process of improved service coordination and collaboration. The Hub Crawl event was a first step toward realization of the project's broader priority:

*"A client-centered system that strengthens the capacity of service providers through collaboration, interaction, proximity and efficient use of resources to serve community and encourage peer to peer empowerment."*

The event successfully brought together a broad range of service providers in Cochrane and area. Service providers were given the opportunity to share information about their service mandates and network with one another. The contact information collected on the day was compiled into a reference document and distributed throughout the community to improve the capacity of agencies to coordinate and provide referrals to other services in the community.

Overall, 92% of participants found the Hub Crawl very useful (53.8%) or quite useful (38.5%). Participants noted various aspects they found to be most valuable:

#### **Connecting**

- Opportunity to meet and connect with a diverse cross-section of service providers
- Opportunity for small group discussion

#### **Increased Knowledge and Awareness**

- The short, streamlined presentations that spoke about the services available and opportunity for questions
- The panel discussions and the opportunity for discussion and questions following it

#### **Resources on Community Services**

- Handout/booklet with program and contact information

The overwhelming majority (94.9%) wanted to see the Hub Crawl happen on a regular basis (annually). Based on survey results, it is clear that participants left with a greater knowledge of what was available in their community and that the short presentations in conjunction with the information booklet that included contact information was an effective way to communicate this information.

The Hub Crawl event proved to be a highly successful approach to community engagement. Almost all of the Hub Crawl participants (92.3%) gave permission to use their contact information as a resource for client referral. And 36.8% of participants indicated that they would like to be involved in a committee or task force to develop further ideas for service coordination.

A second survey was sent out some months following the Hub Crawl in order to collect information and perspectives on referral processes that might lead to improved coordination among service providers. Twenty-four (24) service provider representatives responded to the survey to provide insight and suggestions for improved service coordination. The results of the survey will be reviewed at the second Hub Crawl scheduled for September 2015 and will form the basis for discussion and action priorities intended to improve client access to services.

## **4.2 Feedback from Women in the Community**

It was a challenge to re-engage with women from the community who had participated in Phase I of the project as many had moved and/or changed their phone/internet contact. We were able to successfully connect with eight women from the community, who generously took time from their busy work schedules to provide feedback.

Generally women felt that while the project implementation was targeting the needs and issues identified in the initial assessment report, the community is really only at the beginning stages of action for change. Issues such as appropriate “living” wages, access to benefits, access to transportation, further education opportunities and access to affordable housing are all long term issues that will require sustained action in order to see positive change.

Most women were satisfied with the amount of progress made to date. They expressed a strong preference for action, generally expressed as “less talk, more action”. One woman felt that more needs to be done to inform the general community of the needs and issues of its most vulnerable citizens and of the support services they might access within their own community.

*“The project was excellent. I love the way it was handled and put together.”*

*“Where do we go from here? Momentum has to come from the people involved in it (LTTS project). How do we help people (women living in poverty) to have a voice when they are busy trying to survive?”*

*“We should be able to keep up the momentum (for change through the interagency group and Community Hub). The interagency group should be working together to move it (LTTS priorities) forward. There are a lot of kids and families out there who really need help.”*

### 4.3 Feedback from Community Services Providers/Partners

Nine community partners were interviewed for their feedback on the project. Most of the individuals interviewed were directly involved in the project in some way, as part of the Steering Committee, leading a specific working group and/or attending the initial Hub Crawl.

#### 4.3.1 How satisfied are you with the project management?

Overall satisfaction with project management was very high. Partners described the project management as excellent; great; very impressed; hugely satisfied; very pleased with the progress; good teamwork and communication; inclusive.

*“There was a lot of heart in this project.  
It was a bit messy at times but that’s community development.”*

#### 4.3.2 Did the project address the needs and issues identified in the community assessment?

All community partners interviewed agreed that the original needs and issues were addressed to varying degrees. Two thirds (66%) of respondents felt the original needs and issues were “very much or mostly” addressed.

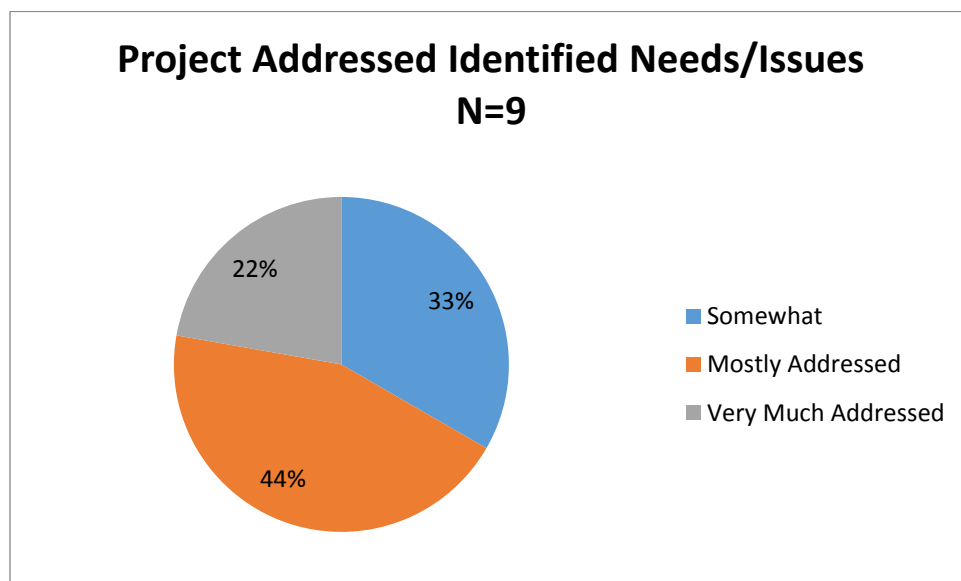


Figure 4: Project Addressed Needs/Issues

One partner noted that there were many needs/issues identified in the community assessment. There were “*too many things to do initially*” so this was “*narrowed down to those things we could get momentum on*”. “*We are starting to address priorities.*” Another partner notes that the project is really big and the work needs to stay focused.

Others noted that *“some issues are very systemic”*. Some change initiatives (e.g. transportation, housing) *“are not going to happen overnight”*. Progress may be slow moving, but *“we are moving forward as long as we keep our focus”*.

Given the nature of community development *“sometimes things identified at the outset can’t always unfold as you would like.”* For example, the *“virtual coordination of services hasn’t gone as quickly as we would have liked”* due to the level of *“community readiness.”*

*“As a community we’ve started to come together; increased engagement; increased awareness and knowledge and increased commitment to address community needs.”*

*“We’ve made a lot of progress and set the stage for a lot of things to continue into the future. We are tackling big issues”* that take time to address.

#### 4.3.3 Overall, how satisfied are you with the progress made on project priorities?

The majority of partners (89%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the progress made on priorities.

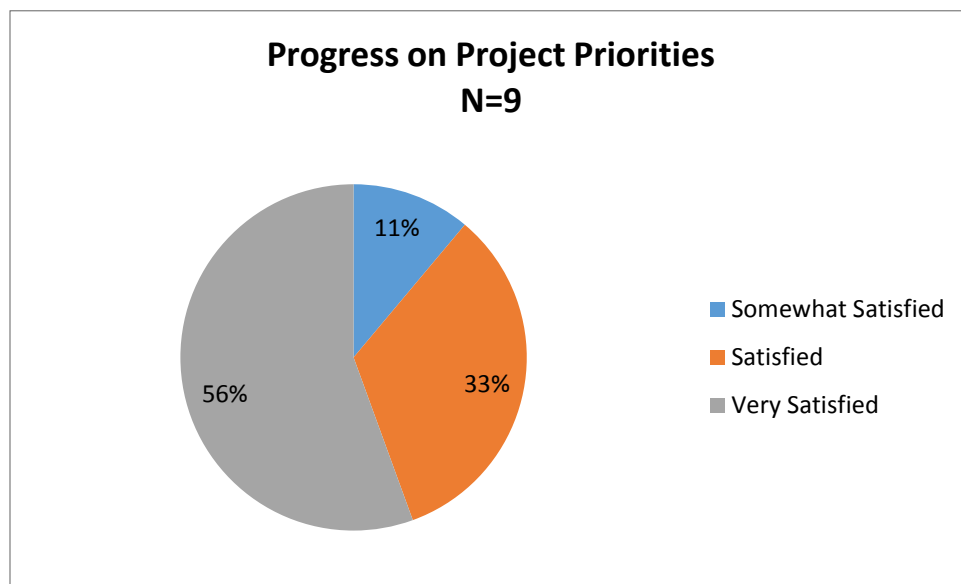


Figure 5: Progress on Project Priorities

*“All project priority areas are moving forward though not yet complete.”*

*“This research project helped to reaffirm that needs exist in our community. It has been used to support action, and has been used by various groups to focus on specific community needs.”*

This project is *“a lot to bite off but we’ve got momentum. A lot of connections have been made. We’re getting people to the table. The community has to take ownership of the project.”*

Some partners noted “*we have high expectations*”. Areas where they would like to see more progress, including the areas of child care, services for seniors and expansion of the Community Helpers program.

#### **4.3.4 Where has the most significant progress been made so far?**

When asked about the most significant progress, each partner spoke to the specific change/priority area they were working in. For example, partners felt that significant progress has been made in each of the following areas:

- **Coordination/Hub Crawl.** “This is a big area – not as small and concrete as some of the other priorities. The project has made the biggest step forward in this area.” The Hub Crawl brings together community supports and helps everyone work a little better.
- **Town of Cochrane administration and town counsellors** are looking at areas they don’t normally consider. They are more aware of poverty issues, domestic violence, etc. and taking more action to make change. The social policy – inclusivity lens – taken on by the Town shows significant progress. The human resources department of the town of Cochrane has embraced the Community Wellness project.
- “Some really big inroads have been made in the relationship with Alberta Health Services. Previously there was a siloed approach between medical and social/community services. The project has brought these two together” and made some good connections.
- **Seniors needs** are being looked into – transportation, housing affordability, etc.
- Significant progress has been made with the after school program and domestic violence. Conversations are happening and we’re starting to look at these needs.

Overall, one partner notes that:

*“We are at the beginning stages of change. People are now aware of the problems, the potential for solutions and are starting to form committees and take action. These changes will take time.”*

#### **4.3.5 What has been the biggest success of the project? What are you most proud of?**

**Community capacity building:** The biggest success was “the conversation with the community. Getting community buy-in and getting people committed. It’s community driven. It gives people a chance to contribute.” “The community is starting to think differently.”

**Agency capacity building and service coordination:** The project “has developed the capacity of core agencies in the community to be better at coordination and laid the groundwork to move priorities forward. It has been a good capacity building project.” It has facilitated “relationship building among service providers.” “Collaboration is going on with everyone around the table. Everyone got the same insights. The project is opening up people’s eyes and ears.” The Hub Crawl brought together a broad range of people and services.”



**Social inclusion and community wellness:** The project really raised awareness of the need for social inclusion and social policy initiatives at the municipal level. Getting the Community Helper program in place was a success.

#### ***4.3.6 What have been the biggest challenges for the project?***

When partners were asked about project challenges a number of distinct themes emerged.

- **Systemic nature of the issues and short timeframe of the project:** We're dealing with big issues and there is a lot of red tape – working through different layers of government and bureaucracy. It adds up to a lot of work. Therefore it's important to focus our energy and efforts to areas where we can “get the biggest bang for the buck”.
- **Money/Resources:** We need sustainable funding to support a lot of good ideas and good projects. It's a challenge to keep the community motivated and keep momentum in the face of financial constraints.
- **Engagement:** How to meaningfully engage the community in the work. Everyone is busy. Connecting with the right people was tough. The project needs consistent attendance on the Steering Committee and at meetings. There have been challenges in engaging the business community who may need more specific tangible objectives and activities in order to engage.
- **Community readiness:** Would like to see more progress in connecting with businesses around economic development and more progress on the Virtual Coordination of services.
- **Information sharing:** Consent protocols are one of the biggest obstacles to sharing information. It would be good to see a coordinated form for more comprehensive case management.

#### ***4.3.7 Suggestions for improving the process?***

Partners made the following suggestions for how the overall LTTS process could have been improved:

- More dedicated staff time instead of managing the project “off the side of the desk.”
- Commitment of Steering Committee – ensure people understand the commitment and responsibilities and have the time required to participate.
- Communication – keep people in the community informed and aware of the project.
- Getting high level sponsorship is important. Look for higher level leaders in the community to get involved in order to sustain momentum.
- Narrower focus on fewer priorities.
- More action orientation. Physically move things forward rather than just talking about it. More quality vs quantity of meetings

#### ***4.3.8 Overall what difference has this project made to the community?***

**Increased awareness and dialogue:** The project increased awareness of needs in the community. It has “started the conversation”. It increased opportunities for community members to participate and have their voices heard. It brought social needs of the community

to the forefront. It has “opened eyes” on town council and in the community. “People are starting to think and act differently.” There is a realization of the needs and issues. More people are using the same language. Some businesses are coming on board to support projects.

**Strengthened capacity of service providers:** Agency staff have a better understanding of community needs and issues, improved relationships and increased capacity to respond. There has been lots of good networking, and improved coordination of services.

**Increased service accessibility:** Community service providers have an increased awareness and understanding of services available in the community and how to access those services. The project has resulted in improved information sharing, closer relationships, and in some cases has facilitated partnering on key program development (e.g. Learning Connection program).

**4.3.9 To what extent have overall project objectives been addressed?**

The following graph illustrates the average partner ratings with regard to meeting project objectives. Average scores of 4 or more indicate that partners agree or strongly agree that specific project objectives have been met.

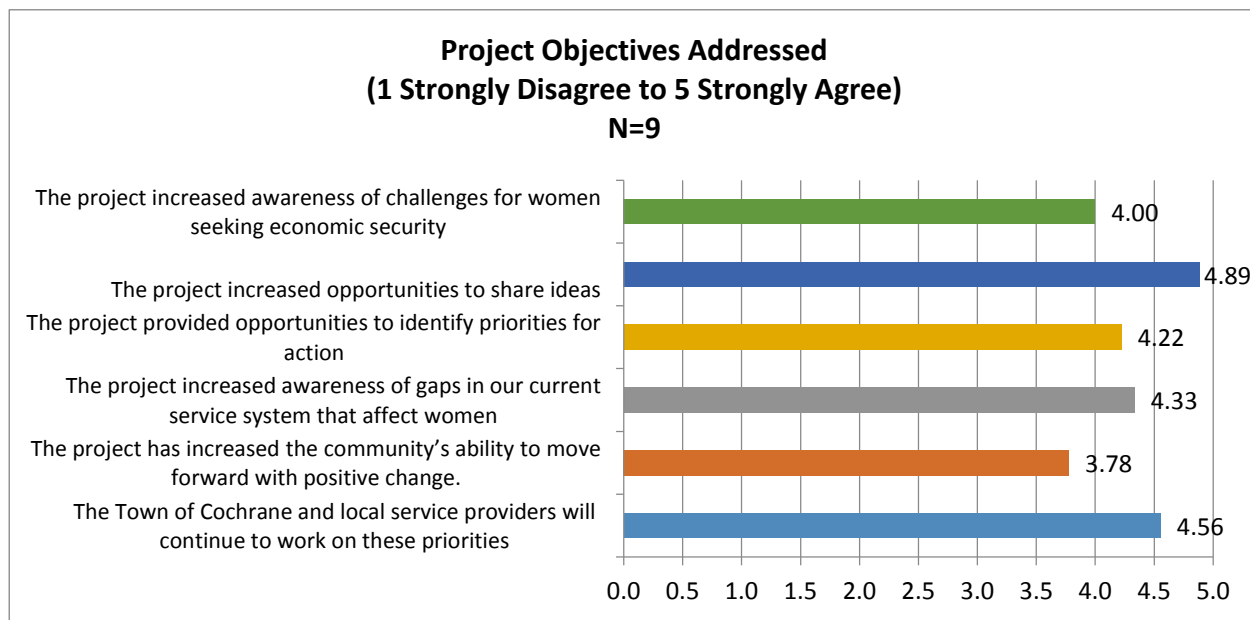


Figure 6: Project Objectives Addressed

#### 4.3.10 Priorities for action over the next two years?

Partners were asked about what they would like to see happen over the next year or two. The range of action priorities generally mirrored the LTTS implementation plan, though each partner had their own priority areas.

Priorities for Future Action	# of partners
Seniors - housing for seniors; engaging isolated seniors; training for those working with seniors	4
Improving social policy	2
Transportation (More access to, improving)	2
Bridge communication between agencies and community; make service access easier	2
Child care; training for those who work with children	2
More awareness/understanding of community issues	1
Engage youth	1
More private business support	1
Keeping on the same path	1

Figure 7: Issues to improve or focus on

#### 4.3.11 How can the momentum be sustained?

LTTS project partners were optimistic that the momentum on action priorities would be sustained even after the formal project wrapped up. They had a number of suggestions for strategies to sustain the momentum.

**Maintain LTTS project structure.** Keep committees alive and continuing to meet. Continue community conversations, face to face meetings, and core connections established through LTTS.

**Maintain LTTS processes.** Continue coordination, relationship building, communication. Continue to bring groups together – like the Hub Crawl event. Keep awareness and dialogue going because this leads to action.

**Build Leadership Capacity.** Invite people to join who are well connected to issues and resources. Engage high level community leaders and get their buy-in and sponsorship.

**Resources.** Keeping up the momentum may require additional committed community volunteers and more resources including financial resources. People have to make the time and be committed.

#### 4.3.12 Partner Conclusions/Comments

*“Community leadership was excellent.”*

*“Everyone had a voice.”*

*“It has been a good project. A lot of good will came out of it because of the inroads made with various government agencies.”*

*“It has been a privilege to be involved. As a taxpayer I’m please we have people here who can do such a good job and provide such leadership in the community.”*

## 5.0 Learnings

The project team helped identify and summarize key learnings from the project that could be helpful to future broad community initiatives of this type. The following learnings could be considered key elements underlying the current and future success of LTTS.

### 5.1 Leadership and Coordination

One of the key factors in the success of LTTS was having a solid project team (i.e. Project Coordinator and Project Manager) to provide focused coordination and project management. Having a Project Coordinator with diverse experience and skills set including a good understanding of community development and government, provided continuity for the project and encouraged momentum. Because the Project Coordinator was independent of any one service organization she could work with everyone equally and represent the broader interests of the community.

LTTS was fortunate to have both a cohesive and consistent project team across the full three years of the project. Having the right people to create a cohesive team and the same people consistently involved in the project was very helpful and positively impacted progress.

### 5.2 Community Engagement

Using a community development approach was critical to the community engagement process. The Project Coordinator made personal one on one contact with local citizens, workers at the frontline, and individuals at the management level. As a result of the Phase I community assessment interviews, people started talking to each other and taking an interest in the potential for action. The Hub Crawl event successfully connected many service providers to take a larger view of issues they could work on collaboratively.

### Key Elements for Success

- Leadership & Coordination
- Community Engagement
- Buy-in & Community Ownership
- Building on Community Assets
- Time Commitment
- Balance Structure & Flexibility
- Emerging Opportunities
- Community Readiness
- Create Platform or Foundation

Three areas where community engagement could still be strengthened are with non-professional women from the community (e.g. getting more direct involvement), in the para-professional community (e.g. faith based organizations, volunteers), and in the business community.

### **5.3 Buy-In and Community Ownership**

Having buy-in from senior management and administrators goes a long way to furthering community action. For example, senior administration at the Town has been very involved and supportive with the LTTS project. They have been willing to have the conversations and ask “what should we do, how, and what are the next steps”. One project partner who was interviewed emphasized the importance of having buy-in from the right higher level community leaders to get behind the project – not just from the Town, but from business and service sectors as well.

Building a sense of community ownership was key to the success of the project. People could see themselves in the priorities set out in the implementation plan which encouraged them to set up and take the lead on areas of interest.

### **5.4 Building on Community Assets**

The LTTS project took a community capacity building approach based on a respect for the wisdom, expertise, skills, interests and resources already existing in the community. The project was able to successfully engage existing community members/resources, connect them with each other and with new information, ideas and resources, and support them to build the overall capacity of the community. In one example, three adult education organization who were previously working separately are now collaborating and coordinating their efforts.

### **5.5 Time Commitment**

Community change initiatives take time, patience and a great deal of work to develop and evolve. It's important that people who take on leadership roles with the Steering Committee or Working Group fully understand the commitment, time and hard work that will be required. Often people are busy with their own work and the extra demands of the project create additional stress. Ideally those assigned to or volunteering to take on these roles should allow for the time necessary to fulfill their commitment. Having a Project Coordinator to provide leadership, coordination and support functions help to keep people on track and keep action priorities moving forward.

### **5.6 Balance Structure with Flexibility**

In broad community initiatives it is important to have both enough structure and focus to guide the project work, and the flexibility to allow the project to evolve as new directions and opportunities emerge. Both the Project Team and partners noted the importance of structural elements such as regular and timely communication, getting together, consistency of meetings and attendance, and follow up identified action items. Although the LTTS project was very broad in scope, the specific priorities helped guide project actions. The project experienced some dynamic tension between keeping the project scope manageable while at the same time supporting community people who were already engaged and enthusiastic about specific areas for change. The project structure (Project

Team, Steering Committee, Working Groups, Action Priorities) provided an excellent platform for supporting independent but guided action, while at the same time maintaining the flexibility to engage and support newly emerging interests and opportunities. The project team noted that it would have been helpful to have the Steering Committee formed at an earlier stage of the project in order to “ensure we were not missing any community perspectives”.

With a project management structure in place, LTTS was flexible enough to build on existing interests/action, facilitate development in priority areas laid out in the implementation plan and allow for the emergence of new action priorities. For example, the Project Coordinator initially established and led the public policy and workplace wellness working groups before eventually turning them over to a working group chairperson. On the other hand, the Adult Education and Child Care working groups were self-initiated. In this case the Project Coordinator simply encouraged and supported their work. People in the working groups felt committed to the project, identified with the issues and took them on as their own. Working groups defined their own project work, activities and focus. Overall the Project Coordinator maintained communication with the Working Groups, checking in and reporting back on progress, issues and opportunities.

### **5.7 Tap into Emerging Directions and Opportunities**

Due to the strong community engagement that occurred during the Community Assessment Phase, and the connections coming out of the Hub Crawl event, a number of community members independently decided to take on additional action areas that were of particular interest or importance to them. Even though these areas were not part of the original action priorities set out in the Implementation Plan, the Project Team supported these emerging working groups and the consequent community action as it emerged. One example of emergent action is the formation of a Seniors Advisory Committee to help identify, track and communicate the needs of vulnerable seniors, advocate for policy changes and service development, and provide a voice for vulnerable seniors in the community. Another example is a new collaboration between the Primary Care Network (PCN) and the social service sector around further development of a Community System Navigator concept. These two groups joined forces thanks to increased awareness and connections made at the Hub Crawl event. Now FCSS/Resource Centre staff are attending PCN coordination meetings creating a stronger link between health and social services.

A new issue that has emerged and galvanized the community over the past few months is that of youth suicide (as a result of several suicides in the community). Thanks to LTTS community building and the connections developed through the Hub Crawl, the community is well positioned to tackle this emerging issue with a broad and coordinated community response.

### **5.8 Community Readiness**

A key consideration and influencing factor in making progress with community wide initiatives is the level of readiness for change within the community. From this perspective the community appeared to be more excited and “ready” to take action in certain areas while not in others. One priority that did not gain traction was the concept of a “Community Index Fund” which was described as “soliciting local community donors to diversify existing and new community funding and jointly determining a

community priorities index which responds to high community needs”. While best practice models were researched and community funders were contacted to initiate dialogue there appeared to be a lack of interest to continue work on this initiative. As a result, the Community Index Fund initiative has been set aside for future consideration.

### **5.9 Providing a Platform or Foundation**

One of the successes of the LTTS was that it provided a platform through which the community working groups could apply for grants and respond to opportunities as they arose. Some examples of this include the Community Helpers program, the Dial a Bus project and Town social policy initiatives.

## **6.0 Areas for Further Consideration**

Some areas for future consideration that would support the community economic development benefits for women include the following:

### **6.1 Continue to Engage the Business Community**

More fully engaging the business community should be a priority as the LTTS work moves forward. Although efforts were made in this area, and LTTS is strongly connected to the Community Economic Development manager at the Town of Cochrane, the business community has not yet fully engaged in the work of LTTS. The LTTS project team would like to see more engagement of large employers of low wage people (No Frills; Safeway; Canadian Tire; Walmart, etc.). Due to the recent economic development in Cochrane, some of these employers are new to the community – just opening around the time LTTS Phase II was launched. In particular, there is an opportunity for the new Community Helper program coordinator to engage with local businesses over the next two years of that project. There may also be an opportunity to hold a Wellness Conference with the business community to increase awareness of workplace wellness.

### **6.2 Develop a “Backbone” Organization to Support Collective Impact Initiatives**

One of the challenges in moving forward with broad collective impact initiatives is the limitations created by the specific mandates of any given organization and the limitations on government organizations (e.g. FCSS, AHS, etc.) when applying for grants or other funding. Currently the community has no broad based community organization that can support the types of integrated community development initiatives taken under LTTS. The LTTS Steering Committee might consider development of a stand-alone organization that could facilitate the collective voice of the community; encourage collaborative action; advance community public policy solutions affecting all citizens; promote full civic participation; be a catalyst for the community to gain greater understanding of issues affecting the community; and build community capacity across service sectors.

### **6.3 Consider Needs of Aboriginal Women**

The LTTS project team points out that although citizens of Cochrane live in close proximity to a First Nations reserve with significant levels of poverty there was no mandate under the current Status of Women funded project to address the needs of Aboriginal women who often seek services in

Cochrane. While dealing with this significant pocket of poverty was outside the scope of the current project, it remains an area for future consideration as community action continues to move forward.

## 7.0 Conclusions

Let's Touch the Skies has been a highly successful project intended to address women's economic security in the communities of Cochrane and Western Rocky View County. Completion of the Community Needs Assessment based on gender based analysis in phase I identified the many contributing factors related to economic security for women and resulted in strong community engagement that helped to build momentum for action. The project showed a good balance of structure and flexibility that helped community members address action priorities while allowing for course corrections to address new or emerging interests and opportunities as the project unfolded. Significant progress was made in each of the identified action priority areas, except the Community Index Fund concept which has been set aside for future consideration. Community members and service partners are very satisfied with how the project was managed and with the progress being made so far, keeping in mind that some higher level community change initiatives take time to unfold (e.g. transportation, housing, etc.) and will extend beyond the timeframe of the project. There is strong community ownership of the project and community members are optimistic that the project's momentum for community change can be sustained given the organizational infrastructure that has been set in place (i.e. Steering Committee; Working Groups). Additional areas for future action have been identified as further engagement of the business community, possible development of an umbrella organization for ongoing coordination and resourcing of broad community initiatives, and potential to address issues of Aboriginal women accessing services in Cochrane.

The Let's Touch the Skies project has energized and activated the Cochrane and Rocky View community on many levels to build community capacity to address the issues related to women's economic security.



## 8.0 Appendix

Original SWC Approved Results Statements
<p>A community plan to advance local women's economic security and opportunities for prosperity has been developed.</p> <p>Project participants and stakeholders can identify the institutional and other barriers to women's economic security and are aware of local supports.</p> <p>Community partners and stakeholders collaborate to identify gaps, priorities and opportunities and to implement effective mechanisms, supports, strategies and/or solutions.</p> <p>Stakeholders have taken specific actions to address the economic situation of women living in their community.</p>

Priority Area Outcome Statements (2014) Public Policy & Advocacy	Activities 2014-15 Public Policy & Advocacy	Indicators
<p>Town Council and Administration are aware of how Public Policy impacts all sectors of Town population.</p> <p>Town of Cochrane Council supports GBA / Diversity approach to policy and program development</p>	<p><b>GBA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research best practices for Municipalities who have processes to implement inclusive policies</li> <li>• Research and choose GBA / diversity tool to pilot</li> <li>• Educate Town Council, Admin, SPUR, other stakeholders on GBA / diversity analysis</li> <li>• Conduct a GBA review of one Town Policy</li> <li>• Identify champions within Town Admin to advocate for socially inclusive policies</li> </ul> <p>2015-if time permits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present policy analysis to Town Council</li> <li>• Create GBA (diversity) policy review template</li> <li>• Town adopts GBA (diversity) review process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partners have Increased awareness of GBA</li> <li>• A Town policy has been reviewed; process/ findings are documented</li> <li>• Internal champions are identified &amp; trained</li> <li>• GBA/ diversity policy &amp; practice developed</li> </ul>
<p>Partner awareness of the inter-dependency between Town economic development and growth and child care policies.</p> <p>Partner knowledge of town/ provincial economic and social development policy impacts on all sectors of Town population.</p>	<p><b>Child Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct further research on childcare spaces and gaps in community as identified in GBA document</li> <li>• Conduct further research into local parent use of alternatives to licensed childcare and related risks, benefits, implications.</li> <li>• Communicate Results to government representatives, community</li> </ul> <p>2015</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review land use bylaws and other policies with Town of Cochrane planning department to ensure bylaw and related policies support development of additional and accessible childcare facilities and options.</li> <li>• With partners, develop a child care policy and program action plan</li> <li>• Present research/ policy action plan to partners (town and province)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness of community access to child care spaces; related policy impacts and barriers</li> <li>• increased awareness of parental use of unlicensed child care/ risks/ benefits</li> <li>• Childcare policies reviewed</li> <li>• Child care policy and action plan</li> <li>• Increased awareness of child care policy and action plan</li> </ul>

<b>Priority Area Outcome Statements (2014) Public Policy &amp; Advocacy</b>	<b>Activities 2014-15 Public Policy &amp; Advocacy</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<p>Town Council and Administration is aware of how Transportation Policy and Programming impacts all sectors of Town population.</p> <p>Town of Cochrane Council supports GBA / Diversity approach to policy and program development</p>	<p><b>Transportation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resource Centre review of existing subsidized transportation (CAR) program for women (and other residents) living on low incomes –identify and advocate for additional resources</li> <li>Inform community members and other stakeholders about transportation needs of women (and other residents) living on low incomes</li> </ul> <p>2015</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resource Centre, SPUR and Town Administration to review proposed transportation policy (GBA/ Inclusion).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased awareness of transportation needs</li> <li>Increased collaboration between Town and social sectors</li> <li>Enhanced services specifically in areas of transportation</li> <li>GBA/inclusive transportation policy</li> </ul>
<p>Town of Cochrane Council and Administration are aware of the impacts of housing policies on all sectors of Town population.</p> <p>Town of Cochrane Council and Administration supports GBA / Diversity approach to policy and program development</p>	<p><b>Housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town revisit the service agreement with CSHO and provide additional support.</li> <li>Support Town in its review of Housing policy and relationship with housing partners.</li> <li>In partnership with CSHO, Town hold a Housing Forum to understand the needs of all community housing stakeholders including youth, seniors and women fleeing violence.</li> <li>Town Neighbourhoods Planning document to be reviewed for GBA/ Diversity and adapted accordingly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Town Council, Admin and Community members have increased understanding of mutual housing needs across diverse sectors of community</li> <li>Meetings with MLA, Ministry responsible for Housing and other government stakeholders</li> <li>Revised Planning policies to encourage diverse/inclusive housing options</li> </ul>

<b>Priority Area Outcome Statements (2014)- Coordination &amp; Collaboration</b>	<b>Activities 2014-15 Coordination &amp; Collaboration</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<p>Development &amp; coordination of services and programs that will support the gaps within the community for education and employment opportunities for women</p> <p>Enhanced partnerships and awareness of current services and supports for education</p>	<p><b>Adult Education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Satellite Working Group Established</li> <li>Multi education/ support system barriers to women's engagement are identified through tracking case examples- systemic barriers report is created for advocacy purposes within systems</li> <li>Develop community education program plan</li> <li>Mapping of educational/training opportunities (HUB activities)</li> <li>Relationship building with local agencies and staff members (HUB activities)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educational needs assessment completed</li> <li>Local educational training needs are identified</li> <li>New referrals and resources are being used</li> </ul>

Priority Area Outcome Statements (2014)- Coordination & Collaboration	Activities 2014-15 Coordination & Collaboration	Indicators
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RVS learner support worker obtains outreach space at the Cochrane Learning Centre</li> <li>• RVSLs partner with Cochrane Employment Services to offer "Job Searching" workshops</li> <li>• Community needs assessment on barriers to Post-Secondary Education for rural women (BVC)</li> <li>• Engagement of Town of Cochrane/FCSS and RVS and BVC to prevent duplication of services and to create cross-agency awareness/marketing of program offerings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner supports has space at the Learning Centre</li> <li>• Workshop participants increase job search skills</li> <li>• Barriers to post-secondary for rural women identified</li> <li>• Improved cross-agency awareness of educational programs</li> </ul>
<p>Partner awareness of the inter-dependency between Town economic development and growth and child care policies.</p>	<p><b>Child Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Childcare discussion panel to get community input into needs (FCSS, Child care specialists, Policy/program developers)</li> <li>• Stakeholders (Adult Education Satellite and FCSS, Town, Business, Community Services) partner to explore program options- (HUB activities)</li> <li>• FCSS look for resources &amp; pilot child care services with 1 to 2 family life education programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness of community access to child care spaces; related policy impacts and barriers</li> <li>• increased awareness of parental use of unlicensed child care/risks/ benefits</li> <li>• Increased access to resources for policy makers and community programmers</li> <li>• Increased access to FCSS programming for parents</li> <li>• Increased collaboration between Town and social sectors</li> </ul>
<p>Employers and Employees are aware of the benefits of safe, healthy and supportive work environment.</p> <p>Business Sector supports preliminary changes to work culture to create work/life balance and job security measures.</p>	<p><b>Workplace Health and Wellness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research Best Practices of work/life balance policies/strategies within regional employers</li> <li>• Town of Cochrane Economic Development to initiate dialogue with Chamber of Commerce members, and other business and employers on connection between positive work place culture (health and wellness) policies / practices and economic development.</li> <li>• Community Helpers Program (CHP) will be explored for local implementation</li> <li>• Coordinate a Business/Employer Forum with key speakers and information on evidence based practices which support employee health and wellness programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Community has increased awareness of work/life balance impacts</li> <li>• Business sector has increased awareness of social issues impacting employees and production.</li> <li>• Community has increased awareness of programs to mitigate stressors impacting their work/life balance.</li> </ul>

<b>Priority Area Outcome Statements (2014)- Coordination &amp; Collaboration</b>	<b>Activities 2014-15 Coordination &amp; Collaboration</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<p>A client-centered system that strengthens the capacity of service providers through collaboration, interaction, proximity and efficient use of resources to serve community and encourage peer to peer empowerment.</p> <p>The resulting successful wraparound services will create the necessary foundation for clients to increase economic security.</p>	<p><b>HUB</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asset mapping of current services and gaps in the community; communicate findings</li> <li>• Utilize Homestead building as a pilot as a starting point to determine how collaboration is occurring, determine gaps and opportunities for improvement. Begin to create mechanisms to address.</li> <li>• Research evidenced based coordinated case management models which support a systems navigator approach</li> <li>• Establish a working group of core service agency professionals to examine, identify and advocate to adjust existing policies, programs and services to create a systems navigator framework.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased service provider knowledge of relevant agency mandates and protocols</li> <li>• Client's increased knowledge of relevant community resources</li> <li>• Increase in relevant referrals between agencies</li> <li>• Draft systems navigator framework</li> </ul>