

Our Kids Are Worth It



Strategy for Children and Youth

*Weaving the
Threads*



Our Kids Are Worth It

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1. Executive Summary

Understanding the Context

On October 14, 2004, a tragic event occurred that refocused everyone’s attention on what we are doing for children and families, in particular, for young people “spiralling out of control.” The tragedy was caused when a youth in a stolen, speeding car—just two days after being released from custody—struck another car, ending Theresa McEvoy’s life.

We’ve learned a lot from this tragedy. In particular, we accepted and are acting on each of the 34 recommendations made by Commissioner Merlin Nunn, including the recommendation to develop a comprehensive, collaborative strategy for children and youth.

Commissioner Nunn said the strategy should have a particular focus on preventing youth crime. We agree.

We also agree that the most effective way to prevent crime is to identify and address its root causes.

Summarizing Our Approach

Our Kids Are Worth It has this crime prevention focus. That said, a comprehensive strategy must focus on the needs of all children and youth. We’re doing that.

As well, getting at the root causes of crime must be a long-term, continuing effort, with the most significant benefits coming down the road as our young children develop and grow. However, some of our children and youth—particularly those with complex problems who are at risk of getting into trouble, or are in trouble already—need help now.

Therefore, *Our Kids Are Worth It* contains a mix of both immediate and longer-term priorities. The following two pages present a snapshot of these immediate and longer-term priorities, within the context of our vision, goals, expected outcomes, and five key directions:

- Build a strong foundation
- Identify problems, help early
- Co-ordinate programs, services
- Improve access, close gaps
- Engage youth, promote shared accountability

Where We Want to Go

Our Vision

Children and youth are healthy, safe, nurtured, and responsible—and given the right opportunities to be the best that they can be.

Our Goals

- 1 Children and youth are well cared for, safe, healthy, and active.
- 2 Children and youth are supported in making successful transitions in their lives from birth to adulthood.
- 3 Children and youth are engaged in ways that support their successful development and their understanding and acceptance of responsibilities for their actions.
- 4 Families are supported in ways that help them meet their needs and their responsibilities for their children.

Expected Outcomes

- Fewer children living in low-income families
- Higher percentage of youth getting appropriate level of physical activity
- Improved rates of school readiness
- Lower dropout rates
- More youth volunteering
- Fewer youth involved in crime
- Reduced wait times for appropriate mental health services
- Reduced rates of youth homelessness

How We Plan to Get There

Build A Strong Foundation

- Pre-Natal Programs
- Immunization Program
- Home Visiting Program
- **Poverty Reduction Strategy**
- **Early Learning and Child Care Plan**
- Family Resource Centres
- Programs, Policies Supporting Active, Healthy Kids
- **Well Child System**
- **Social Policy Research**

Items in **bold** are new or expanding projects—or projects under development this year.

Identify Problems, Help Early

- **Parenting Journey Program**
- Programs for Pre-schoolers with Special Needs
- **Parent Coaching, Family Outreach**
- **Assessment Tool for All Primary Students**
- More Guidance Counsellors, Resource Teachers, Psychologists in Schools
- More Professional Development for Teachers

Co-ordinate Programs, Services

- **Executive Director, Regional Specialists, Child and Youth Strategy**
- **Schools Plus**
- **Tailored, “Wrap-Around” Services for Youth**
- Improved Services for Children in Care
- Youth Health Centres
- Government-Community Partnerships

Improve Access, Close Gaps

- **Kids’ Help Phone**
- **HelpZone Website**, Brochure on All Services
- **Better Wait List Measurement**
- **Shorter Wait for Mental Health Services**
- **Family and Youth Services Section**
- **Youth Navigators and Case Planners**
- Policy, Legislation Review

Engage Youth, Promote Shared Accountability

- **Provincial Youth Advisory Network**
- **A Place to Belong**
- Youth in Care Newsletter
- School Code of Conduct, Positive Effective Behaviour Supports
- Come to School, Stay in School Programs, Policies
- Community Programs, Partnerships
- **Crime Prevention and Reduction Strategy**
- Restorative Justice
- Bail Supervision
- Attendance Centre

What's New or Expanding

Our key direction—**co-ordinate programs, services**—is repeatedly emphasized by Nova Scotians. People expect services to be planned and delivered in ways that make sense to them, not limited by departmental or organizational mandates. That means effectively co-ordinating existing and new efforts, and that is why the strategy contains a mix of both.

However, people are understandably interested in new or expanding projects. In brief, this year we are

- introducing and expanding programs, services, and supports province-wide
- piloting six demonstration projects—all with a focus on working together to effectively meet the unique and complex needs of children, youth, and families. Each demonstration project will be evaluated, and those that show the best results will be expanded to other parts of the province.

New or expanding province-wide programs and supports include the following:

- A new **“well child” system**—with standards, goals, and expected outcomes under development—to bring a team and comprehensive approach to support effective parenting and healthy childhood development (pp. 21, 22)
- More **child-care** spaces, particularly in rural communities, making them more affordable, adding bursaries for child-care educators, improving programs for children with special needs, and developing more information for parents (pp. 22, 23)
- A new **screening tool for all grade primary students** to assess their educational and general well-being (p. 28)
- New **Family and Youth Services and Child and Youth Strategy offices** (including regional specialists to work with local advisory groups) (pp. 28, 29, 35)
- A new partnership with **Kids’ Help Phone** to ensure that Nova Scotia youth get relevant, targeted information to meet their needs (p. 41)
- New **youth navigators** to provide integrated case planning, particularly for youth at risk between 16 and 18 years old. This involves working with families, mental health, social workers, probation, and police to help the individual, as well as to keep communities safe (p. 43)
- A **Provincial Youth Advisory Network** where all young people see and help create meaningful opportunities to get involved and express themselves in positive ways (p. 52)
- A **social policy research group** to support effective decision making and evaluation (p. 23)

The new demonstration projects, which are described below, are all built on the principle of co-ordination and collaboration.

- A **Parenting Journey Program** with support services (including home visits) for families needing help with children from ages 3 to 16 (p. 30)
- **Schools Plus** where a team of people and programs are brought together to serve the changing and full range of needs of children, youth, and families in a familiar and welcoming place (p. 36)
- **Wrap-Around Services**, where, again, a team of professionals work together to develop an individual program plan that “wraps services” around the changing needs of high-risk youth and their families, over time and amid changing circumstances (p. 37)
- A **Wait List Measurement and Management** project in mental health, which (a) establishes criteria so wait lists can be measured consistently and (b) shortens wait lists through better front-end screening and greater collaboration among people working with children on wait lists (pp. 42, 43)
- A **telephone coaching and support** program to help families deal with their children's behavioural problems and reduce wait lists for mental health services (pp. 31, 42)
- A **Place to Belong** project, where we work with community partners to help at-risk children and youth learn and develop through non-traditional means, such as art, adventure, and recreation (p. 52)

Making Critical Links

The goals within this strategy will be reached only if our efforts are linked to other critical work within government. This begins with prevention and continues through to law enforcement and safe communities.

For example, we understand that healthy, responsible children are part of healthy families living in strong, healthy communities. We will monitor and link with the work going on elsewhere in government that supports healthy families and communities, perhaps most critically, through the development of our poverty reduction strategy.

Similarly, we believe that everyone must understand and share responsibility for their actions. This includes ensuring that young people expect clear and swift consequences for harmful, criminal behaviour. While we are currently limited in some ways by the federal *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, our work will be closely linked with the provincial Crime Prevention and Reduction Strategy, which will include specific actions related to youth crime.

“Parents and caregivers were identified as needing to be accountable for providing child guidance and supervision, and for instilling values.”

— Minister’s Task Force on Safer Streets and Communities

Understanding Our Shared Responsibility

Parents, too, have a clear responsibility in raising their children, beginning with prevention. They need to instill values and ethics that promote social responsibility, set standards, act as positive role models, and help children understand the risks and consequences for inappropriate behaviour. When a child or youth is facing challenges or is in trouble, parents can and should reach out for help—and that help must be there. But helping keep, or getting young people back, on track is a shared and daunting responsibility. Everyone must do their part.

Charting Our Progress, Reporting on Results

We’ve set the direction. And we are holding ourselves accountable by committing to measure progress on expected outcomes related to each of our goals. We will also evaluate our demonstration projects as we move forward to support decisions on where, when, how—and even if—we should continue or expand them. Finally, we will report annually on our results.

2. Introduction

“The true measure of a nation’s standing is how well it attends to its children—their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born.” – UNICEF

No one can really argue with the logic and common sense behind these words. As parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbours, we all want to do what is best for our kids. As a government, we want Nova Scotia to be “measured” as a great place to raise kids, because we work in partnership with families and communities to

- give kids the best start in life
- help them stay, or get back, on track when challenges emerge
- help them grow into caring, responsible adults

This leads us to our **vision**:

Children and youth are healthy, safe, nurtured, and responsible—and given the right opportunities to be the best that they can be.

to our **goals**:

- Children and youth are well-cared for, safe, healthy, and active.
- Children and youth are supported in making successful transitions in their lives from birth to adulthood.
- Children and youth are engaged in ways that support their successful development and their understanding and acceptance of responsibilities for their actions.
- Families are supported in ways that help them meet their needs and their responsibilities for their children.

and to our **key directions**:

- Build a strong foundation.
- Identify problems, help early.
- Co-ordinate programs, services.
- Improve access, close gaps.
- Engage youth, promote shared accountability.

The Context

Our commitment—and the commitment of all Nova Scotians—to help children, youth, and families is not new. We have more than 100 related programs and services offered by government, and countless more are being delivered by communities. Many of these programs date back a generation or more, and certainly, support for children and families has always been a high priority for Nova Scotians.

The Nunn Commission, Theresa McEvoy's Legacy

This said, a tragic event occurred on October 14, 2004, that refocused everyone's attention on what we are doing for children and families, in particular, for young people "spiralling out of control." The tragedy was caused when a youth driving a stolen, speeding car—just two days after being released from custody—struck another car, ending Theresa McEvoy's life.

A full account of this tragedy—and the circumstances leading up to it—can be found in the Report of the Nunn Commission, *Spiralling Out of Control*, www.nunncommission.ca, and in government's response, *Helping Kids, Protecting Communities*, <http://gov.ns.ca/just/documents/NunnResponse.pdf>.

Our response is clear. We accept each of the 34 recommendations made by Commissioner Nunn. *Our Kids Are Worth It* responds to Recommendation 25:

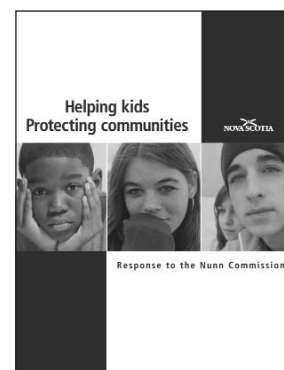
The province should immediately begin the development and implementation of a public, comprehensive, collaborative, and effective interdepartmental strategy to co-ordinate its programs, interventions, services, and supports to children and youth at risk, and their families, with a particular focus on the prevention of youth crime and a reduction in the likelihood of re-offending of young persons already in conflict with the law.

A Pyramid of Needs and Supports

In *Helping Kids, Protecting Communities*, we presented a pyramid that represents the range of needs of children and youth and the range of supports and interventions required to respond. That pyramid is re-created in Figure 1 (next page).

As a starting point, we recognize that most children and youth are healthy, safe, and supported in nurturing families and communities. These children and youth are the 85 to 90 per cent of the children in the base of the pyramid who succeed with basic and preventative programs and services for families, in schools, and in communities. This is part of what we call a "strong foundation."

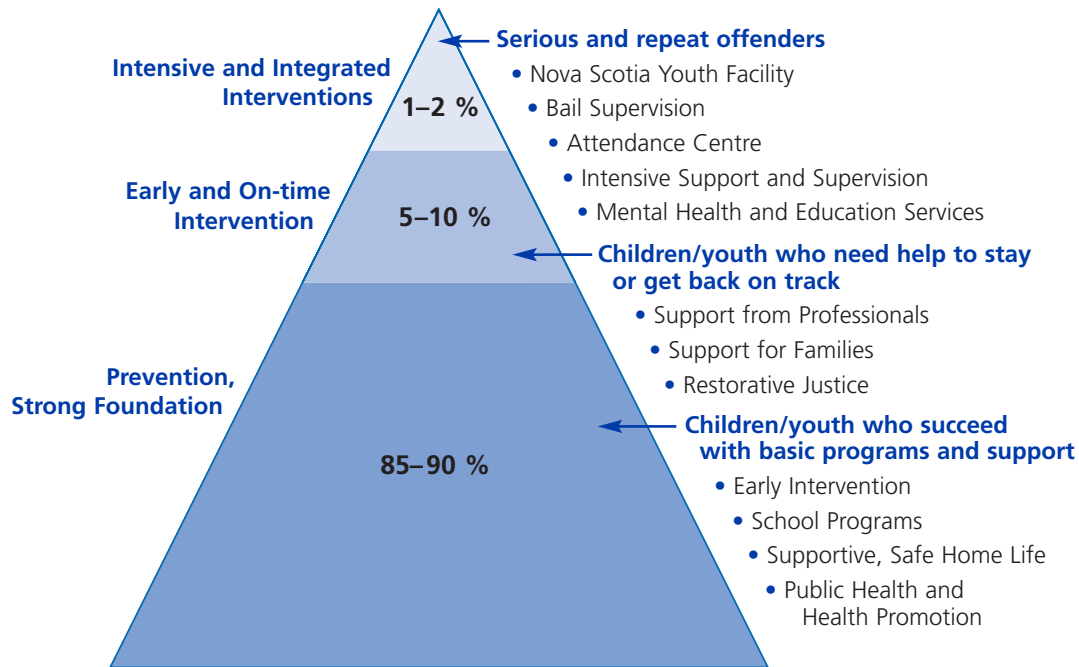
Yet some (about 5–10 per cent) grow up in troubled families, in struggling communities, or are living with physical or mental health illnesses. These children and youth require help at different ages and stages in their lives to stay, or get back, on track.



"The lessons learned from (Theresa McEvoy's) tragic death will now help children and youth for years to come. This surely is part of her legacy, and a way for Theresa's magic to reach those who were denied the pleasure and opportunity to meet her." – *Helping Kids, Protecting Communities: Nova Scotia's Response to the Nunn Commission*

For example, a child may have a behavioural problem that, if identified and properly addressed, can be corrected early. Another child may have a learning difficulty, requiring ongoing, focused support in that area. Yet another example would be a child facing a crisis, such as a family death, who needs help to cope and move on.

Figure 1: Pyramid of Needs and Supports¹



These children and youth are represented in the middle tier of our pyramid, requiring “early, on-time” support from professionals, families, and communities.

Unfortunately, about 1 to 2 per cent of our children and youth are at the tip of the pyramid. These young people face multiple challenges in their lives—from personal health or emotional challenges, to problems at home, with their peers, or in their communities. These are also the young people most likely to commit crime or to engage in other harmful behaviour—often repeatedly—to themselves and to others.

Over time, we believe our efforts in prevention (**Build a Strong Foundation**) intervention (**Identify Problems, Help Early**), and co-ordination and collaboration (**Co-ordinate Programs, Services; Improve Access, Close Gaps**) will more effectively respond to the needs of children and youth in the foundation and middle tier of the pyramid.

¹ Adapted from the “Continuum of School-Wide Instructional and Positive Behavior Support,” National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). <http://www.pbis.org>.

We know that the benefits of our investments, particularly in the foundation, will take time to be truly measured. Our success will be seen only when our youngest children today grow into teenagers and young adults.

For some children and families, the need is too great and too immediate to wait. The young people at the tip of the pyramid need help now—intensive and integrated intervention. This is critical to help them stop harmful behaviour to themselves and to keep our communities safe.

By **co-ordinating programs and services** and by **improving access and closing gaps**, we are responding to these needs. This is also the focus of our fifth key direction (**Engage Youth, Promote Shared Accountability**).

Summary of Our Strategy Approach

Some central and critical themes bear repeating.

First and foremost, the clearest recommendation from Commissioner Nunn—and the clearest message we repeatedly hear from Nova Scotians—is to **work more effectively together**, based on real-life needs. This involves both

- meaningful and effective **collaboration** across government, between government and communities, and among people directly delivering services to children, youth, and families
- effective **co-ordination** of programs and services, more commonly described by Nova Scotians as “breaking down the silos.” To this end, *Our Kids Are Worth It* cannot be viewed or acted upon in isolation of related government strategies, such as the upcoming poverty reduction and crime prevention and reduction strategies. In short, it must be viewed within our overall social policy framework, *Weaving the Threads: A Lasting Social Fabric*.

Second, the context for this strategy, most specifically the Nunn Commission, focuses a lot on the problems caused by youth. The key to this strategy is **helping young people become part of the solution**—developing with them meaningful opportunities to find and use their voices ... to follow their passions ... in creative and positive ways that, when denied or absent, are likely to lead them to express themselves in harmful or negative ways.

Working more effectively together is at the heart of everything within this strategy.

Third, this **strategy is multi-year**, with **short- and long-term priorities**. In year 1, government is providing a leadership role in developing demonstration projects most likely to advance us to our goals and vision. We expect these projects to guide us in the direction we need to head, particularly in the critical area of collaboration.

Consistent with our belief that effective collaboration is from the ground up, not top down, we have purposely left the definition of projects beyond this year to ongoing and future work with communities. As we report on progress on our first-year priorities, we will be able to provide more detail on future work.

Guiding Principles

Based on the context for this strategy and in developing our priorities and actions, we are being guided by the following principles:

| Principle | What This Means |
|--|---|
| Our programs and services must be child- and youth-centred . | Designed to meet the real and practical needs of children and youth, at all ages and stages in their lives (the “whole child”) |
| Our programs and services must be responsive, flexible, inclusive, and accessible . | Available when and where they are needed, adaptable to the needs of different communities and the changing needs of youth and families, and relevant to and respectful of our diversity of cultures |
| Young people must have a voice and meaningful opportunities to help plan, deliver, and evaluate programs and services affecting them. | Provided to all young people, recognizing that they all have something meaningful to contribute and are more likely to understand and meet their responsibilities if they feel valued and engaged |
| Partnerships are critical in effectively meeting our shared responsibilities. | Fostered by providing families with practical and relevant guidance and resources to meet their responsibilities to their children; respecting and relying on the strengths, knowledge, and expertise in communities; and collaborating effectively within, across, and outside of government |
| Accountability for results must be clear to Nova Scotians. | Achieved by basing our strategy and actions on research and evidence of what works best; by evaluating and reporting on our progress; and by demonstrating that our investments will help in the short and long term, benefiting children now and as they mature and grow |

3. Key Directions

We have identified five key directions to help our progress toward our vision and goals:

- Build a strong foundation.
- Identify problems, help early.
- Co-ordinate programs, services.
- Improve access, close gaps.
- Engage youth, promote shared accountability.

These key directions are based on research, on what we have heard from Nova Scotians through consultations and the Nunn Commission, and on our guiding principles. Although co-ordinating programs and services is identified as an individual key direction, co-ordination and collaboration are central to everything in this strategy.

3.1 Build a Strong Foundation

What This Means

Our first years are critical to our success in becoming healthy, happy, responsible people.

Babies' brains are developing rapidly. They are learning to walk and talk. They are observing and mimicking the behaviours around them.

Perhaps most significantly, babies and toddlers are learning how to relate to the people and world around them, based on their relationships with those closest to them and on how they are nurtured and introduced to the world.

We know from experience, and research, that babies and toddlers who develop loving, positive relationships with their parents and caregivers—and who benefit from close attention to their emotional, nutritional, and other health needs—are likely to thrive. Alternatively, babies and toddlers whose needs are less well understood or less well addressed are likely to develop more slowly or to experience health and behavioural problems that get more difficult to deal with as weeks go by.

All families benefit from some support ...

This strategy is based on the belief that all families benefit from some level of support. For example, all parents benefit from pre-natal education, screening, and support programs, and most, if not all, new families can benefit from a little extra help in those first few days and weeks at home with a new baby.

A solid foundation requires a range of flexible, non-traditional, options—that respond to differences in needs, languages, cultures, and even ages—to support the realities in our communities and today’s families.

Similarly, more mothers are in the workplace than ever before. Twenty years ago, less than half of mothers with children under six were working. Now, more than two-thirds are working outside the home, requiring flexible, province-wide child care.

Some children and families need greater support ...

Other families may need a greater level of support, often for reasons outside their control.

In some cases, families simply need access to good information. The changing shape of today’s families must be understood in determining how to provide this.

For example, programs available from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday, aren’t going to work for the growing number of single, working moms or dads, or for families where both parents are working. Similarly, we live in an increasingly diverse province, with increasingly diverse needs. For example, most of our population growth over the next 20 years is expected to come through immigration.

Every child deserves a stable, caring home ...

Every child deserves the opportunity to grow up in a stable, caring home. Our primary objective is to ensure that children get this opportunity in their own homes with their parents and families.

We must accept the reality, however, that despite best efforts, some parents or families cannot provide this care—sometimes temporarily, sometimes never. Building a strong foundation means having responsive and comprehensive child protection services, including foster care and adoption, that support stability and permanency at the earliest possible stage.

Healthy families are part of healthy, strong communities ...

In other cases, the challenge is even broader and is linked to what researchers define as “population health.” In practical terms, this means that families have access to affordable housing in safe communities, adequate health care, adequate income, family-friendly workplaces, educational support, celebration of diversity, and recreational programs.

As just one example, our children and youth need to get healthier. Thirty-two per cent of our children and youth are overweight, above the national average. Similarly, while poverty rates have declined over the past 10 years, about 80,000 Nova Scotians are living in low-income situations.

Community and youth engagement ...

People who live in strong, healthy communities want to be actively involved in issues affecting their children and youth. That does not mean government prescribing a cookie-cutter approach for all communities. Rather, it means respecting strengths, knowledge, and unique circumstances in each community and supporting their efforts in ensuring that people of all ages share opportunities and the responsibility to create safe and vibrant places to live.

Young people will get involved if the right opportunities exist for them to do so. In 2004, 54 per cent (ages 15 to 24) volunteered. This is the second highest rate of volunteerism among all age groups reported by Statistics Canada.

Similarly, the Canadian Community Health Survey reports that 78 per cent of Nova Scotian youth feel a sense of belonging to their communities—above the national rate of 72 per cent.

A solid foundation depends on solid decision making ...

Finally, a strong foundation relies on solid decision making—decisions based on the latest research and current knowledge of activities that are proving to work effectively. Further, consistent with our goal of co-ordinating and integrating activities, people with a wide range of expertise and experience should be able to share information and advice.

This strategy will not repeat every action or initiative under way in government to support families. However, building a strong foundation means linking this strategy to government's overall social policy framework and to other key child-related strategies (see Appendix A). This is essential to our success in co-ordinating activities and resources, so efforts and dollars are not duplicated or wasted.

Many of our young people volunteer and feel a sense of belonging to their communities.

What's Working Now

A baby's development depends on good health for the mother even before birth. Public health professionals (e.g., health educators, nutritionists, nurses, dental hygienists, and others) offer **pre-natal education and support** to all expecting mothers in Nova Scotia. Pre-natal programs are intended to address the physical, social, and mental health needs of moms, dads, and families generally.

Expecting mothers receive important information on their own health and are provided with other nutritional, safety, and health information to help prepare them for their baby's arrival. Further, Public Health screens families facing challenges, ranging from a need for additional parenting advice to addiction support to reducing the risk of violence.

Public health professionals also contact all families to assess the need for follow-up visits. These contacts allow nurses and other professionals to discuss and assess issues related to the mom's post-partum adjustment, to help mom and baby with breastfeeding and nutrition, to weigh and assess the baby, and generally to provide reassurance and advice. One or two visits are often enough; in other cases, the visits may lead to links with other community resources to support the family, or the visits may continue until the child is three.

Nova Scotia's **immunization program** is critical in protecting babies and children against disease. Given that immunizations are scheduled at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 12 months, 18 months, and four years, this program also presents repeated and regular opportunities for public health nurses and family doctors to monitor and support the healthy development of children.

More than 95 per cent of babies are immunized.

Build a Strong Foundation

- Pre-Natal Programs
- Immunization Program
- Home Visiting Program
- **Poverty Reduction Strategy**
- **Early Learning and Child Care Plan**
- Family Resource Centres
- Programs, Policies Supporting Active, Healthy Kids
- **Well Child System**
- **Social Policy Research**

Finally, more than 40 **family resource centres** offer more than 750 programs across Nova Scotia. They are doing exceptional, extensive work in support of families, with programs including parent and caregiver education, household management and nutrition, children's programs, literacy and adult education, employment support and community economic development, recreation, and leadership development. This is critical in supporting strong families and communities.

What We Need to Do Next

Our First Steps

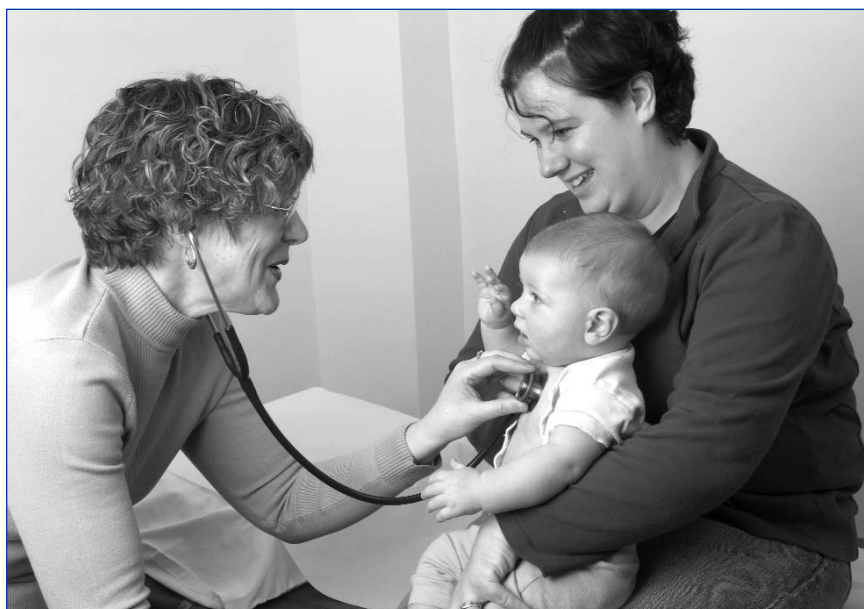
Families have told us that they need more, and better access to, good information.

Good information is tailored to the unique needs of each individual family—based on face-to-face contact, supported by materials and resources that are clear and practical. Access means families know where to find the information and help they need, available at a time and in a place that works for them.

Well Child System

We are currently developing a **Well Child System** aimed at supporting effective parenting and healthy childhood development and helping children make a successful transition into school. Two factors are expected to contribute to this project's effectiveness—practical accessibility and effective co-ordination.

Practical Accessibility: Parents and caregivers can access information and support by doing what they would be doing anyway—for example, by visiting their family doctor or other health-care provider to get their child immunized. The frequency of the visits, beginning at such an early age, allows for an excellent opportunity to monitor and support a baby's healthy development and to identify and address any problems that may exist.



Effective Co-ordination: One visit to one place gives families access to a full range of services and support. A team of health and child-care professionals links together, and their services can be made available to the family—for either prevention or intervention—at the request of the health-care provider who sees the family during the visit.

Team members may vary in different communities, but the co-ordinated team approach will not. Doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers, speech language pathologists, physiotherapists, mental health professionals, early childhood educators, and family resource centre staff are some examples of the people who will work together to support well children.

An environmental scan has been completed. We will consult with health professionals and communities on the best approach to developing the well child system, beginning with expected standards, goals, and outcomes.

Early Learning and Child Care Plan

The **Early Learning and Child Care Plan** is a 10-year, \$140-million project, now in its second year (see www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/elcc.html). The goals are (a) to ensure that all children enjoy a good start in life and (b) to lay the foundation for a flexible, equitable child-care system. This will be achieved by

- creating more child-care spaces, including spaces for infants and in rural communities
- increasing financial support for families needing help to pay for child care
- recruiting and retaining child-care professionals
- ensuring that child-care centres are safe and encourage active play through building renovation and playground improvement grants
- providing flexible options such as family home day care and more subsidized “portable” day-care spaces. A “portable” space belongs to the child, not the child-care centre. This means that a family accessing a portable space can take the space to another child-care centre if they move, giving them more flexibility to seek employment or training.

Our priorities for this year include

- creating more child-care spaces.
- opening our first day cares in family homes. Currently, many stay-at-home parents, and others with an interest in children, want to offer day-care services. With family home day-care providers being monitored by other licensed agencies (e.g., an existing child-care centre), parents will have more child-care options—particularly needed in rural communities—with the added assurance that government standards for quality programs and safety are met. As well, family home day-care providers will have access to professional development and training, other child-care providers and play groups, and resources, materials, and equipment.

We now have more than 3,000 subsidized spaces in Nova Scotia. Of these, more than 1,000 are “portable” and can move with the child, helping families who need to move to get work or training.

- reviewing and enhancing the Supported Child program, helping children with special needs
- changing the rules around income eligibility for subsidies so that more families needing help qualify
- establishing a Continuing Education Fund to provide bursaries and incentives for child-care educators
- developing a strategy that defines what information parents should have and ensures they get it



Social Policy Research

Co-ordinated activities begin with co-ordinated decisions, based on a shared body of information and research. A policy research group is being created to support effective decision making, as well as evaluation.

To support co-ordination, the group will have representatives from all government departments with child-related mandates, as well as from research partners and academics currently involved in youth health and social policy research.

Research will include looking at what other parts of the country and the world are doing and is already showing results. Beyond what is documented elsewhere, the group will examine best practices at work in Nova Scotia communities.

The results will be used to determine which projects should grow and could also identify projects that are less effective. As Commissioner Nunn reported: *“With a rapidly changing society with its corresponding needs, it seems to me that a periodic audit of ... services and activities would be valuable as a means to evaluate whether any particular activity is necessary, desirable, or worth its costs. Quite possibly this could produce savings, financial or staff, that could be applied to family services. That, however, is only my suggestion ...”*

We agree with Commissioner Nunn. This will form part of the work for the social policy researchers.

The Longer Term

Efforts in building a solid foundation must and will continue as part of a broad and long-term priority.

Addressing Poverty and Other Population Health Issues

Government is developing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. This strategy will have direct links to our efforts in building a strong foundation for children and families.

As another example, recent investments and standards have significantly improved access to addiction prevention and treatment services, particularly in rural communities. Communities are now calling for better “withdrawal management”—in other words, youth detox.

Providing youth detox is complex. Literature, experience, and research are lacking on how to meet this need effectively. For example, while Health Canada has published numerous documents on addiction prevention and treatment, it has not yet provided information on best practices related to youth detox.

Research is now under way to review treatment options and best practices in this area nationally. This should lead to recommendations on how we should meet the needs of youth in Nova Scotia.

The work within other prevention strategies is also key and will be co-ordinated with *Our Kids Are Worth It*. (See Appendix A.)

Developing a Well Child System

The standards, goals, and outcomes we are now developing, and the advice we gain through consultation, will lead to a fundamental change in how services are delivered comprehensively to support childrens’ healthy development.

Supporting Effective Team Work

The key to effective co-ordination is to strengthen relationships—in some cases, between and among groups and individuals who have previously had limited opportunity to work together. For example, people working on both ends of the spectrum—those who try to prevent problems and those who want to deal with them—have much to gain from sharing with each other.

Those most experienced with understanding what factors influence overall health can help those who are working with more challenging youth find less traditional or more broad-based solutions. Similarly, those who work with youth at high risk can help target and define prevention programming likely to reduce the risk factors for troubled youth (e.g., programming that gives at-risk youth meaningful ways to express themselves).

Providing Leadership through Training

We will develop a training plan to support prevention-based programs across the province linked to work in family resource centres, after-school programs, and youth-based and other community agencies. Using a “train-the-trainer” approach, programs will include youth leadership development, bullying and abuse prevention, and a personal safety program for children.

3.2 Identify Problems, Help Early

What This Means

We live in a province where most of our children and youth are healthy, safe, and supported in nurturing families and communities. Yet some of our children grow up in troubled families, without the emotional and economic resources they need to meet their responsibilities. Some youth suffering from physical illnesses or mental health problems do not receive the assistance they need. And some communities struggle to provide safe places for children and youth to thrive and grow.

The earlier any of these problems are identified, the earlier help can be provided; and the earlier help is provided, the more likely the problem can be corrected or the risk reduced.

Sounds pretty obvious—so what are the obstacles getting in the way?

Don't Know Where to Look ...

Families may not know how or where to get the help they need. That may be a problem with “navigation”—that is, the help is there, but people don't know how to find it.

Can't Find Time ...

Families may be having a hard time finding the time to seek help, particularly if the help is only accessible during typical work days.

Wait Lists Are Too Long ...

This could be one of two problems:

- we need more people to provide certain services
- people are looking in, or have been referred to, the wrong place within the maze of government and social services

Most likely, it is a combination of both.

Needs Are Varied or Complex ...

Children and youth who get into trouble are usually at risk because of multiple factors that combine and make the problem and response that much more challenging. For example, children struggling at school may also have difficulty making friends or getting involved in extra-curricular activities. In the absence of positive peer role models, they are more likely to turn to other kids in trouble.

Their parents may also be struggling—unable to give their children the extra help they need. This means we need more screening in places where babies, children, and families are most likely to be (such as when they are being immunized or when they are starting school).

Risk Factors ...

Regardless of the situation, appropriate interventions must be applied at the earliest opportunity for children at risk. Research and experience inform us of risk factors to look for:

- children living in poverty
- parents or caregivers who cannot or will not provide consistent, adequate guidance and support
- children who have difficulty learning
- children with behavioural problems, anxiety, or other mental health concerns
- children who have difficulty making friends
- children who are exposed to violence and substance abuse

Reliable assessment tools—complemented by the observations of skilled and sensitive professionals—must be available to identify children, youth, and families that need special support.

What's Working Now

An analysis of the obstacles clearly defines what strategies and activities are needed to ensure that problems are identified and help is provided early. We need

- the right screening programs, at the right times (e.g., before birth, at birth, at regular intervals until school, and upon school entry) to identify problems
- clear, practical relevant information, delivered in a variety of ways
- enough professionals and staff to intervene quickly once a problem is identified
- a co-ordinated, team approach to deal with complex and varied needs

Before Birth ...

Risk factors, such as poor nutrition, family violence, smoking, and drug and alcohol abuse can be identified through our pre-natal programs. Often, the most vulnerable and disadvantaged mothers and fathers have co-existing risk factors, such as addictions and mental health concerns.

Pregnant women struggling with addiction are given priority access to treatment. As well, a new pre-natal record has been introduced, which is reviewed and updated on each visit to a health professional. This record contains information that can help identify maternal depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns. We also work to address these issues with fathers, recognizing the impact that challenges for both parents have on the family.

Before School ...

Early Intervention Programs are in place to support children who have developmental challenges and are at risk of developmental delay. These services—funded by government and delivered by community-based agencies—include home visiting, family support, individual family service plans, and transition planning. We also provide funding, information, and support for children and youth through our **Services to Persons with Disabilities Program**.

Further, **Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention** is available for young children not yet in school diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder. This intervention helps children develop communication, play, and other functional skills. The intervention may be provided in the home, at day care and preschools, and in other community centres. Transition support is also provided as the child begins school.

Licensed child-care centres get help through the **Supported Child-Care Program** to include children with special needs. Training is also available to staff to develop programming for children with special needs.



Approximately 88 babies born in Nova Scotia each year have been affected by pre-natal exposure to alcohol.

What We Need to Do Next

In a strategy primarily motivated by the need to improve co-ordination, individual actions and projects should never sit in isolation. For that reason, the actions outlined in **Build a Solid Foundation** are clearly linked to our efforts in identifying problems and helping early.

Identifying Problems

Screening between the pre-natal and pre-school years is being enhanced through our efforts in child-care and family resource centres, as well as through interactions between families and health-care professionals. In particular, the Well Child System (see p. 21, 22) is intended not only to focus on prevention, but also to help identify potential problems and refer children and families who need extra help to the right place.

Beyond these pre-natal and pre-school efforts, a reliable assessment tool at school entry would ensure that all children are screened at an early age.

A new **Early Development Instrument** is being introduced for all grade primary students in this school year. The tool will assess the educational and general well-being of young children, specifically their physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, communications skills, general knowledge, language, and cognitive development. This tool cannot replace a medical diagnosis, but it can point to problems that would lead to a referral to a health-care professional. It can also provide important information for teachers and other professionals.

One of the most significant recommendations from the Nunn Commission was to create a new division within the Department of Community Services that is focused on supporting and keeping families together. Commissioner Nunn pointed out that the primary focus of Community Services is child protection—a critical responsibility. Nonetheless, he believes creating a new division, focused on preventing problems, intervening early when problems appear, and preserving the integrity of the family unit, will ultimately reduce the need for child protection.

We agree. A new **Family and Youth Services Section** was established in April 2007. Its guiding principles include the following:

- Families are the best places to raise children.
- Families should have access to the supports and services they need to meet their responsibilities to their children.
- Children have the right to be raised in families where they are loved, nurtured, and safe.

The educational and general well-being of all grade primary students will be assessed, beginning this year.

The **Family and Youth Services Section** will build on programs and partnerships already in place. For example, work will continue with groups like the Boys and Girls Clubs, women’s centres, and transition houses. Existing prevention, men’s intervention, and outreach programs will also continue.

Building on this foundation, the section will develop a full range of services to support vulnerable children and families. In particular, community-based prevention programs, such as parent education, family counselling, and after-school programs, will be enhanced. Again, consistent with Commissioner Nunn’s recommendations, this work will be conducted in collaboration with all child- and youth-related government departments.

Increasing Help Early for Families

Parenting is often referred to as the one occupation that requires no qualifications, education, previous experience, or training. This assumes that child-rearing skills, love, nurturing, and feelings of protection are not only naturally occurring and instinctive to parents, but require no additional instruction.

That assumption is wrong. Everyone needs some help, whether it’s a tip from a more experienced parent or advice from a professional. Other families need more support.

Identify Problems, Help Early

- **Parenting Journey Program**
- Programs for Pre-schoolers with Special Needs
- **Parent Coaching, Family Outreach**
- **Assessment Tool for All Primary Students**
- More Guidance Counsellors, Resource Teachers, and Psychologists in Schools
- More Professional Development for Teachers

Most researchers agree that there are a number of building blocks or skills that parents should have. These include

- bonding and attachment
- empathy
- a caring and loving touch
- clear limits and boundaries for children
- unconditional love
- honesty and respect
- knowledge regarding children's growth and development



We support families in developing or enhancing these skills in a variety of ways. For example, parents' response to our existing **Healthy Beginnings** home visiting program (delivered by public health professionals) has been extremely positive.

What Families Say about Home Visits

"It's such a wonderful program. We're raising the next generation, and we need help!"

"They come to you. Living where I live—that's important!"

"They don't sit there and say, 'don't do this anymore.' They show you what's happening and when they leave, you have this new skill. You don't realize that you have it until they are gone, and wow!"

However, home visits generally stop when the child turns three.

The **Parenting Journey Program** demonstration project will test ways to build on the home visiting program, extending services to families who require additional support until their children turn 16. The program also builds on services provided by family resource centres.

Consistent with the strategy's overall theme of co-ordination, the Parenting Journey Program will integrate efforts and expertise from Education, Justice, Mental Health, and Community Services. Individual and family counselling, problem solving, crisis management, and skill development are examples of services that could be offered.

These services will be based on clinical assessments and detailed case plans. They will also focus on helping families during times of transition, such as when a family is re-uniting after a child has been in care.

We will also expand a program with a proven track record: **Family Help**. This program provides support and coaching to parents who need help dealing with their children's behaviour.

Parents receive information in print and video to help them respond effectively to particular behaviour problems and are contacted by telephone by trained coaches who can answer questions and provide advice. Parents can also contact their coach at any time when they are dealing with specific concerns.

With the IWK, we will now adapt this program and provide parent outreach—again with information, resources, and telephone coaching—to families within another district health authority.

More Help in Schools

Over the past five years, we have invested \$8.6 million to increase the number of professionals in our schools to support students with special needs. Specific targets have been set—and are being met—to increase the number of resource teachers, school psychologists, guidance counsellors, and speech language pathologists, supporting the efforts of classroom teachers.

Consistent with recommendations from Commissioner Nunn, professional development resources are being developed to support the teaching of students with attention deficit disorder and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. The resources are being developed in partnership with the Learning Disabilities Association of Nova Scotia and the Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation. As well, lead teams of health and education professionals will be trained in recognizing and addressing the problem of teen depression and suicide prevention.

The Longer Term

Co-ordinating Our Related Efforts ...

We have a wide range of programs, and are planning more, aimed at identifying problems and helping early. Those include

- home visits
- parent outreach through telephone counselling
- programs delivered through family resource centres
- early intervention programs delivered by both Health and Community Services
- Parenting Journey Program

A successful parent coaching program will be expanded. In metro Halifax, this program removed almost 200 children with behavioural problems off the wait list for mental health services.

All of these programs target children from birth to age five, with the general goal of supporting healthy child development. Within the broader context of the Well Child System, these programs will be assessed to

- identify and eliminate any overlap
- identify opportunities for collaboration that can have greater benefits, delivered cost-effectively
- identify and fill any gaps that exist in priority areas

Our planned evaluations of our new demonstration projects will form a critical part of this work.

Increasing Access to Early Intervention Services ...

It is no good to identify problems if the professionals and programs are not in place to help. As the regional specialists and working groups are put in place, we will have better information on where more professionals and services are needed. (See also **Improve Access, Close Gaps.**)

Ensuring Efforts Are Responsive to Our Diverse Needs ...

We need to respond effectively to differences in needs, languages, cultures, and even ages. To do so, we will work closely with all communities—including our Aboriginal, Acadian, African Nova Scotian, and multicultural communities—in this priority area.

3.3 Co-ordinate Programs, Services

What This Means

The provincial government delivers or supports more than 100 programs and services related to children, youth, and families.

Commissioner Nunn's most significant recommendation with respect to children and youth was to improve co-ordination among these programs and services, and among the people delivering them. He went on to discuss the obstacles to this co-ordination. Specifically, he spoke about the structure and mandates of individual departments—focused on one time in, or some factors affecting, a child's life—with no single department mandated to look at all needs of the child, at all ages.

Commissioner Nunn recognized the time, cost, and disruption of dismantling parts of existing departments, then trying to fit the people and pieces back together in a way that did not have the opposite effect from what was intended. For example, would having a separate department dealing with children's health issues—separate and apart from those planning overall health policy and budgets—make things better or worse?

“Each of the professionals, whether social worker, health-care official, educator, or justice official testified that one of their major difficulties was a lack of collaboration. More than that, each emphasized it was a serious deficiency in their ability to provide help and services when and where needed.”

– Commissioner Merlin Nunn

A new way of working—not a new place to work—is required, so that professionals who care about children, youth, and families are not limited by their departmental or organizational mandates. They must have opportunities to meet and share information and ideas. They can, and should, bring the expertise and perspectives they have from their home department to the table, but the starting point for each discussion must be the needs of children, youth, and families. Collectively, the resources and programs they commonly represent can then be used to create new opportunities, as well as to meet challenges.

Effective co-ordination must occur at three levels:

- among government departments
- between government and community agencies
- among the people and organizations directly delivering services to children, youth, and families

For example, the provincial Education Department deals with children in school. What happens in the critical years before they arrive is largely outside of their mandate.

Once children arrive in school, a teacher's job is to teach—a big enough job on its own. Yet, children, of course, cannot leave family or health problems outside the classroom.

Teachers are very conscious of, and care very much about, these issues, but they cannot, and should not, be expected to fill the role of nurse, social worker, and other professionals. We must find ways to bring more professionals outside of the school into the school, to benefit children and allow teachers to focus on their critical job of teaching.

What's Working Now

Government policy makers, social workers, teachers, police, and others testified before Commissioner Nunn. He was moved to comment on their *“high professional standards, a deep interest in this whole area of youth and family growth and welfare ...”*

Comments about the need to improve co-ordination should not detract from the extensive collaboration that goes on every day right across the province. Rarely a day goes by that people working in family-related departments are not meeting, talking, or working together on policy development or problem solving. Similarly, in communities, people from multiple organizations come together daily to support children and youth.

We now have the opportunity to build on the projects already in place and to allow our people working in individual organizations to have more freedom, opportunities, and scope to meet the full range of needs of our children and youth.

Improving Services for Children in Care ...

One example of where services are improving is in the area of child welfare.

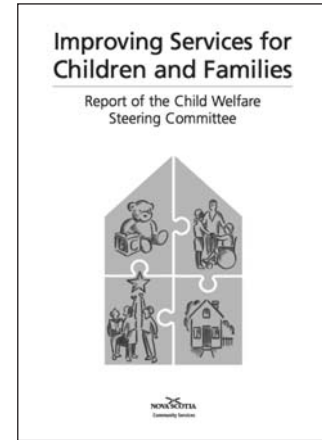
In 2006, we accepted a report from the Joint Child Welfare Steering Committee, entitled *Improving Services for Children and Families*.

Over the past 18 months, we have worked closely with child welfare agencies, residential programs, the Federation of Foster Families, and related community agencies to begin implementing recommendations.

We are making significant progress.

- A new provincial **Emergency Duty System** is in place during evenings, nights, and weekends to receive and respond to all cases of suspected child abuse and neglect. Anyone concerned about a child's safety or well-being can call 1-866-922-2434 and immediately reach a child protection social worker.
- More **adoption options** are being pursued for children in care, with 10 new staff, a streamlined application and assessment process for families wishing to foster or adopt, and a comprehensive awareness and recruitment campaign.

We will continue working with our child welfare partners to increase placement options for children and youth in care. Our efforts range from enhancing outreach and support to foster parents to specialized residential services for young people with serious and challenging needs.



Co-ordinate Programs, Services

- **Executive Director, Regional Specialists, Child and Youth Strategy**
- **Schools Plus**
- **Tailored, "Wrap-Around" Services for Youth**
- Improved Services for Children in Care
- Youth Health Centres
- Government-Community Partnerships

What We Need to Do Next

Our First Steps

Within Government ...

Our Kids Are Worth It is the essential first step in supporting improved co-ordination.

While this strategy does not include every existing child, youth, and family-related program, it links those that are most significant and the most directly related to our vision and goals. The strategy also introduces new programs and activities targeted at our highest priorities. These actions also point to the direction in which we will continue to head, responding to the needs of children and families in a co-ordinated way, and in a way that meets unique needs and builds on the strengths and circumstances in each community.

Even the development of the strategy—by **an interdepartmental Child and Youth Social Policy Committee**, with representatives from across government (as recommended by Commissioner Nunn)—helps to “break down the silos” that once were more evident in government. The process allowed for spirited and focused discussion on how to most effectively meet the needs of children and families. As the strategy is implemented, and the work of this group continues, the benefits of this collaboration and sharing of perspectives will become increasingly evident.

Finally, and once again consistent with Commissioner Nunn's advice, the strategy emphasizes the importance of evaluation before moving forward too quickly. Too much is being invested—and too much is at stake for our children—to rush ahead without carefully evaluating what we are doing now and testing new approaches and programs before going province-wide.

Between Government and Community Agencies ...

In April 2007, an **executive director** was appointed, responsible for leading the development and implementation of this strategy. The executive director has worked closely with the interdepartmental social policy committee to ensure that the needs of children, youth, and families served by each individual department are collectively represented. The executive director is also working with them in building relationships with their partner agencies and organizations to support the next phase of our work. That second phase is implementing the strategy in partnership with communities.

To further support these efforts, four **regional specialists** are being hired to work across the province. Their primary responsibility is to work with communities in putting *Our Kids Are Worth It* into action. This includes identifying needs, gaps in service, and new opportunities to more effectively and collaboratively serve children and families.

The new Schools Plus project brings related professionals and programs together to help children, youth and families in a welcoming, accessible place.

Among the People Working Directly with Children and Youth ...

Virtually every new initiative in this strategy is based on greater collaboration. Here, we are highlighting two new demonstration projects that involve extensive collaboration at the community level: Schools Plus, and tailored, Wrap-Around Services.

The goal of the **Schools Plus** project is to more effectively co-ordinate programs and services by having a team of professionals working together and with families and young people. Each Schools Plus project supports the “family of schools” in the area to create linkages as children move from elementary to junior high and high school. As well, this demonstration project will consider approaches to issues such as attendance, in-school suspensions, and school attachment, as recommended by Commissioner Nunn.

Children and families should get help more quickly, through swift and easy referral to a wide range of specialist and community services. These services could include speech language pathology, child and youth mental health, parent and family support, crisis intervention, sexual health, and child care. An individual program plan ensures that the programs and services are tailored to the unique needs of the child or youth.

If the family moves, the individual program plan goes with the child to provide continuity and stability. As well, professionals working in different areas—whether the difference is geographic or in program specialties—can benefit from the experience and expertise that came before, both in the written plan and by making direct contact with the previous team members.

A **program delivery co-ordinator** will be hired so youth and families have one central access point in a familiar and convenient place. The co-ordinator, as well as a new **team facilitator**, will support the success of this approach by

- bringing the right players to the table
- helping schools and team members to identify at-risk children, youth, and families
- finding ways to involve and support families
- developing evaluation criteria

Other staff may be hired, based on the unique needs of the community.

The project is also expected to strengthen the links between schools and their communities by making school facilities available to children and families in evenings, on weekends, and during the summer. The project co-ordinator and team facilitator are responsible for co-ordinating supervision of the use of the school during these times.

A point made earlier bears repeating here. The school makes sense because it is a familiar, welcoming place for children and their families. However, Schools Plus cannot become Teachers Plus when it comes to teachers’ workload. In fact, if done effectively, this should bring resources to the school that ultimately reduce the load now on teachers by bringing more professionals outside of the school, into the school. This will allow teachers to focus on their critical job of teaching.

Closely related to the School Plus project, we will pilot tailored or **Wrap-Around Services** presented in case management plans, intended to give children and families swift and easy access to the help they need. These plans are designed around the changing needs of the youth and family over time, and amid changing circumstances. They are intended to support the most challenging children and youth, those who require intensive and comprehensive support to get back on track because they have run into trouble.

Based on a project in Cumberland County called ASIST (Adolescent Support Interagency Service Team), this approach involves regular meetings of key specialists, such as representatives from child welfare, mental health, school board staff, and police. Any team member can bring a case forward, as long as the case involves at least two agencies who, despite best efforts, have been unable to resolve a situation.

The team member is encouraged to bring the youth and family, if possible. After this meeting, the team drafts a comprehensive case management plan. Each agency represented commits that the necessary resources will be made available to fulfill the needs in the case plan without delay.

The Longer Term

The work of relationship building and collaboration, particularly with communities, must never end.

Establishing Regional and Community Advisory Groups ...

Once the regional specialists are in place, a network of regional advisory committees will be created, and local working groups—where young people have a meaningful role—will be established.

We will also be creating advisory groups with parents and multi-cultural groups. If we believe that parents carry a significant responsibility in raising their children—and of course we do—parents must also have a significant role in influencing the policies and programs that help them meet this responsibility.

Similarly, inclusive, relevant, and respectful cultural programs and services cannot be successful through exclusive efforts. Advisory groups with representation from our African Nova Scotian, Aboriginal, and Acadian communities are key. Within a set of standards consistent with the direction of this strategy, these groups can identify the best opportunities and the highest priorities for their communities to collaborate and improve services.



Case management plans and a team approach provide the right mix of services to young people in trouble. The approach is also flexible and responsive as needs change.

Photo: Kings County students Travis Price and David Shepherd showed how young people can make a difference, launching a “wear pink” campaign to speak out against bullying. Their efforts caught attention across North America.

Having the People to Provide the Service ...

We will carefully monitor the need for additional professionals to provide the services identified in the new projects. The success of these projects—and the success of effectively meeting the needs in their broader communities—depends on professionals being available to provide services in time to make a difference. In some cases, more professionals will need to be hired. In other cases, it is expected that working in teams can lead to innovative approaches that can deliver more appropriate services, more cost-effectively.

Evaluating and Expanding on What Works ...

Based on an evaluation, we expect to expand the Schools Plus, and Wrap-Around Services to more communities.

3.4 Improve Access, Close Gaps

What This Means

As Commissioner Nunn pointed out, a much wider range of programs and services are in place today than existed when today's teenagers were born. Significant progress is also being made in linking these programs and professionals in ways that more effectively meet the needs of the people they serve (see **Co-ordinate Programs, Services**).

This said, we have more work to do.

Improving Access ...

Access to programs and services can be limited by a number of factors. In some cases, the program or service exists but people don't know about it. That issue can be addressed by filling gaps in information and by providing central access or entry points where people can find help with one phone call or visit.

Access can also be limited if programs and services are available at inconvenient times or in places that are distant, unfamiliar, or unwelcoming. The Well-Child System (pp. 21, 22), as well as new demonstration projects, are all aimed at improving access by providing services in welcoming, familiar surroundings. They are also designed with flexibility in mind, providing services at different times and in different ways.

Finally, access is limited when people—especially children and youth—have to wait too long for the service they need. The seemingly simple response is to hire more people to provide services. However:

- Some of these professionals are in high demand and limited supply right across the country. We must ensure that those we have now and those we recruit are working where they are needed most.

With better wait list information and management, we can invest in the right professionals, to provide the right services, in the right place.

- We need to have reliable, consistent ways to measure wait times, so we can monitor our progress in reducing them and ensure that any additional professionals are assigned on a priority basis.
- We need effective wait-list management plans so people are receiving the right service, in a way that will provide the greatest benefit, as soon as possible. As one example, a child may be put on a wait list to see a psychiatrist when the issue is behavioural and does not require psychiatric service. This creates a longer wait for that child, as well as for children needing to see a psychiatrist.

Closing Gaps ...

In our preliminary analysis, we have identified

- information gaps
- age- or stage-related gaps
- regional gaps
- program and service gaps

Information Gaps: We have identified gaps in information available to children and families, and gaps in information available to support effective decision making. Closing the first gap is essential to increasing access for children and families. Getting the information to close the second gap is essential to guide strategy decisions and priorities over the longer term.

Age- or Stage-Related Gaps: Gaps have been identified at the following ages or stages:

- High-risk children between ages three and five: After home visit programs end until they enter school
- Children under 12 who commit acts of violence or who destroy property: Too young to be dealt with by the justice system but who need support to get back on track and help to understand that there are consequences for their actions
- High-risk youth between ages 16 and 18

Regional Gaps: All children, youth, and families—wherever they live—deserve access to the same opportunities for success. While it is not practical or affordable for every program and service to be available in every community, a core set of programs and services is critical. These include community-based, family-outreach programs, affordable early learning and child-care programming from birth to school entry, and programs that effectively deal with young people in trouble—helping them get back on track and keeping communities safe.

Program and Service Gaps: Our preliminary analysis identifies certain gaps in programs and services, particularly those that are relevant and respectful of our diverse cultures. Services for Acadians and francophones must also be enhanced.

What's Working Now

Access to Services ...

Waiting for mental health services has a particularly significant impact for children and youth. Quite simply, the longer an issue goes untreated, the more serious the problem can become and the harder it can be to correct.

There is no delay for children and youth referred for mental health services on an emergency or urgent basis. As well, many district health authorities are using wait-list management strategies to ensure that children and youth referred on a non-urgent basis receive help more quickly.

Most significantly, districts are doing **better front-end screening** as children and youth are placed on a waiting list for non-urgent services. The IWK has started a program known as **Family Help**. This program provides information—in print and video form—to parents or caregivers of children with mild to moderate behavioural problems. Telephone coaches follow up with families to answer questions and are available at any time if families need to reach them when dealing with a specific behavioural problem.

The program is showing tremendous results—both in terms of the quality of help being provided and the effect it is having on the wait list.

In other districts, more children and youth are being identified as having challenges most effectively addressed through **group treatments**. For example, children and youth with mood and anxiety disorders often respond better when they learn during group therapy that others face the same feelings. Providing care in this way also removes groups of people from the wait lists, so they, and those who need one-on-one attention, get help more quickly.

Providing help in times of crisis is also critical. The Capital District Health Authority, Emergency Health Services, the IWK Health Centre, and Halifax Regional Police have formed a **Mobile Crisis Team**. If someone needs help, they can reach out by telephone, or the team can come to them without delay.

The team is available to people of all ages, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In the first half of 2007, almost one in four of the calls were from youth or were youth related.

Finally, we have more than 40 **youth health centres** across Nova Scotia, operating out of places that are welcoming and convenient for young people. Through these centres, teens can get help with everything from referrals for counselling to confidential information on sexual health.

Standards are in place, developed in consultation with youth and other stakeholders, to guide how youth health centres operate. These standards include providing services and support in a confidential, non-judgmental way that is respectful and relevant to our diverse cultures. An evaluation committee is now developing tools that can be used by the centres to assess and enhance the impact they are having on the lives of youth. The need for new youth health centres is identified by district health authorities and communities themselves.

What We Need to Do Next

Our First Steps

Access to Information ...

Children and youth will be able to reach out for help through expanded services available through the **Kids' Help Phone**, 1-800-668-6868. This line is Canada's only toll-free, 24-hour, bilingual and anonymous help line for children and youth, providing phone and web counselling, referral, and information services. Phones, staffed by professional counsellors, give immediate assistance to callers seeking help with a range of problems or questions, including calls about abuse, drugs, and suicide.

The Kids' Help Phone will offer Nova Scotian children and youth information tailored to their needs. An additional professional counsellor will be hired and receive training about specific resources available in Nova Scotia. More information on our resources and agencies will be added to their database. Promotional materials, mailed to schools, given to children in care, and made available on websites and in places where kids gather, will be developed, so our children and youth are more aware of this confidential, professional help.

**Kids call 1-800-668-6868
for help.**

Improve Access, Close Gaps

- **Kids' Help Phone**
- **HelpZone Website, Brochure on All Services**
- **Better Wait List Measurement**
- **Shorter Wait for Mental Health Services**
- **Family and Youth Services Section**
- **Youth Navigators and Case Planners**
- **Policy, Legislation Review**

We are also developing a new parent health education resource. *Loving Care* is a set of three booklets, based on advice from parents, that are easy to read, visually appealing, and linked to a baby's development from birth to age three. The first two books, *Birth to Six Months* and *Parents and Families*, will be available to all parents early in 2008.

A new website—<http://HelpZone.ca>—has been launched. As its development continues, it will be home to a wide range of information organized according to age: for children, ages 6 to 12; for teens, ages 12 to 18; and for the adults in the family, 18 and over. Children, youth, and family members can search the site for answers to their specific questions, or submit a question of their own.



Access to Services ...

The critical first step in improving access to services is to gather consistent, reliable information on current wait lists. All district health authorities measure wait times for non-urgent services, but use different definitions and criteria for who is on the list and for how long. For example, some measure the wait time from when people make the first call to when they see a mental health specialist. Others start measuring from when a referral is made by the family doctor.

We are working with the IWK on standard definitions and criteria that will enable us to gather reliable wait times for their non-urgent mental health services. The goal is to bring a consistent approach to measuring wait lists province-wide.

We also want to shorten the wait lists and ensure that those who are waiting get the service that most appropriately meets their needs. Many children now waiting for mental health treatment are referred there for behavioural or emotional issues—at home, at day care, or in school.

In many cases, the child does not need to see a psychiatrist. Rather, the child and family need help to change the child's behaviour or to help the child cope with an emotional issue.

We are taking two steps that will provide the right services for these children and their families more quickly. As well, by taking these children off the wait list, the children and youth who need mental health treatment will get help sooner.

First, based on the impressive results at the IWK, we are adapting their **Family Help** outreach program (see also p. 31). Telephone coaching can be particularly effective in reaching families whose children are experiencing behavioural problems in more remote or distant communities. We will provide funding to test a similar family outreach program with another district health authority.

Second, in more serious cases, a child's behaviour or emotional issue is causing disruption at day care or in school. In some instances, parents feel they can no longer cope and reach out to child welfare. This, once again, requires a comprehensive, team approach.

Better front-end screening gets children and youth the right kind of help more quickly.

We have developed a demonstration project based on this team approach and on an approach that is working well in dealing with older youth who are in trouble and involved with the justice system. In this case, **two professionals** (e.g., a psychologist and social worker) **will be hired** to work closely with child welfare staff, early childhood educators, family resource centres, teachers, special educators, and, of course, children and families.

As with our other demonstration projects, the right team members will be at the table to develop a plan and package of services tailored to the needs of the child and family. This will provide quicker access to the right service.

Closing the Gaps ...

We will develop and deliver new services for at-risk 16- to 18-year-olds, in school and out of school.

Beyond the work by Family and Youth Services (see pp. 28, 29), five **youth navigators and case planners** are being hired to work across the province. These individuals will have experience and specialized training in case planning and case management for teens and families with complex needs.

The case planners will help teens “navigate the system” and find the help they need. They will generally not provide direct services themselves, but will make the right connections between the youth and social workers, mental health, school boards, income assistance workers, police, probation, and other community and government agencies.

Young people can ask for help themselves, or they can be referred to a navigator by a parent, a professional, or a community agency aware of the need. Young people who have spent time at the Nova Scotia Youth Correctional Facility in Waterville can also receive transitional support and follow-up as they move back with families or into their communities. Again, this is done in partnership with probation officers, families, and others as appropriate.

The navigators will work with the executive director and regional specialists responsible for the child and youth strategy. This will help co-ordinate efforts with all partners involved in youth- and family-related issues.

Projects discussed elsewhere in this strategy will also begin improving regional access and closing gaps. For example, expanding the home visiting program will help fill the gap between age three and when a child enters school. Further, the Early Learning and Child Care plan will ensure that pre-schoolers right across the province have access to affordable, high-quality care supporting their healthy development.

Youth navigators are being hired across the province with specialized training to help at-risk teens.

The Longer Term

Building on Our First Steps ...

Areas of focus in our first year that will allow us to move significantly forward over the longer term include the following:

- Better wait-list information and wait-list management plans will help define where more professionals are needed most.
- The regional specialists, along with local working groups, will help identify additional priorities.
- Our Family and Youth Services Section will develop new ways to effectively help 16- to 18-year-olds. We will work with community agencies like Phoenix House, Laing House, and others to develop innovative ways to reach youth on the streets.

Closing Gaps in Services for Diverse Communities ...

We will further define and fill program and service gaps, such as those for children and families in our African Nova Scotian, Aboriginal, and Acadian and francophone communities.

Research shows that our African Nova Scotian and Aboriginal communities face unique challenges. An effective response to these challenges must be developed in partnership with these communities.

Further, we want to ensure that needed programs and services are available to Acadian and other French-speaking children, youth, and families in their language. For example, more services for French-speaking children with special needs are being developed in partnership with the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial and the francophone community. Further, we want to recruit more French-speaking professionals from a variety of fields to work with children, youth, and families.



Finally, a key goal of our immigration strategy is to support our newcomers and encourage them to stay. Opportunities and support for their children is key. We will build on efforts, such as more English as a second language education in our schools, to support the diverse needs of new Nova Scotians coming from around the world.

Closing Age-Related Gaps ...

We will work with experts, including those who work in Restorative Justice, on age-appropriate ways to help young children (under 12) who commit harmful acts. We recognize that children at this age have complex needs, and helping those children and their families must be the primary focus. This said, children of all ages must understand and experience consequences for extreme behaviour, determined in partnership with their parents or caregiver.

Reviewing Legislation and Policies ...

A review of legislation and policies related to children, youth, and families will identify areas of overlap, as well as gaps, assisting in improving overall co-ordination of, and access to, programs and services. This review will also identify obstacles to collaboration, such as confidentiality requirements.

While a family's right to privacy must be respected and safeguarded, this cannot be at the expense of them getting the help they need. Ways to overcome this and other obstacles will be identified so professionals have the information they need to work together effectively.

3.5 Engage Youth, Promote Shared Accountability

What This Means

The teen years are marked by significant change. Young people are beginning their transition to independence and are establishing their own values and identity. This can be a very stressful time, as many teens feel pressured to succeed academically and to be popular, even as they cope with emotional, hormonal, and physical changes.

Most cope well and thrive in this period of turmoil, but some lack the necessary family, community, or peer supports. They may withdraw or react aggressively as a way to assert their independence, gain attention, retaliate against society, command respect, or compensate for insecurities or limitations. Further, too many young people get involved in high-risk activities, particularly binge and heavy drinking.

How do we help more of our young people cope—and more of those who struggle—make a successful transition from being troubled teens to contributing, responsible adults?

Engage Our Youth ...

It starts with “youth engagement”: encouraging youth to get involved and speak up, and valuing and respecting their opinions.

Some of us are old enough to remember hearing the phrase, “Children should be seen and not heard.” Today, we understand that children and youth should be seen and heard. If we give them them a voice and really listen to what they have to say, they can inspire us and help us to help them.

We're not just talking about the student council members, team captains, or the honours students. We're talking about all young people whose greatest talents are yet to be discovered—or whose personal struggles have limited their ability to showcase their talents.

If we really think about what we know about teenagers—once again from both research and everyday life—ways to engage all young people become clearer.

Children and youth should be seen and heard.

Photo:
Youth taking a break at a community skateboard park.

Provide Fun and Adventure ...

Young people want to have fun and often crave a sense of adventure. Many are restless and need an outlet—either physical or creative—to put their energies to good use. This means helping young people to identify creative, diverse, and non-traditional options to keep them interested and involved in positive ways in their homes, schools, and communities.



Build Positive Relationships ...

Teen relationships with peers and adults beyond their parents are more important now than ever before. If teens have good role models—among their friends and the adults in their lives—they are more likely to stay on the right track and make responsible choices.

Young people respond best when they know what they are doing is meeting a real need or interest among their peer group. This feeling of accomplishment is reinforced when their peers let them know, either by saying so or by actively and enthusiastically participating in a team project or event.

The best adult role models do not only lead by example. They build trust by listening and learning from young people too, and letting them know they value the mutual benefits of the relationship.

If we think about the young people who get into trouble—at the extreme, those who get involved in gangs—we see the parallels. Gangs give a voice to young people who may have been shut out, or shut down, at home or at school. They get positive reinforcement from their peers, perhaps for the first time in their lives. Gangs provide thrills and a sense of adventure. Quite frankly and sadly, they give isolated, misguided youth a place to belong.

The lesson? Understand what young people need and want, and work with them in finding positive ways to express themselves.

Otherwise, they will find ways on their own that are harmful to themselves and to others.

Help Young People Predict Consequences ...

Young people must understand there are consequences to their behaviour. As one example, injury is the leading cause of preventable death of children and youth in Nova Scotia. We also have high rates of sexually transmitted infections and teen pregnancies.

As well, young people must expect and experience a swift and significant response when their behaviour is criminal or harmful to others.

**“... if you care about me,
I will care about you ...”—
Youth quoted in Minister’s
Task Force on Safer Streets
and Communities**

Help Everyone Do Their Part ...

Parents have a clear responsibility, beginning with prevention. They need to instill values and ethics that promote social responsibility, set standards for behaviour, and reinforce the benefits of positive behaviour. When a child or youth is facing challenges or is in trouble, parents can and should reach out for help—and that help must be there. But keeping young people on track is a daunting and shared responsibility. Everyone must do their part.

There are some whose personal struggles mean that best efforts are not enough. For them, we must act quickly, intensively, and comprehensively, so that individuals and communities are safe, and so young people are given every opportunity to get their lives back on track.

What's Working Now

When children are young, they are generally eager to come to school. If they have fun and succeed—academically and socially—that interest is more likely to be sustained through junior high and high school.

This reinforces the importance of early intervention. As well, our **Learning for Life** program focuses on helping all students succeed. This includes a focus on student engagement at the high school level.

Even with this foundation, the challenges of adolescence can take any teenager off what has been a successful track. Yet school remains the best opportunity to reach and influence most teens.

Those who are positively influenced—who are interested in learning and feel connected to the peers, teachers, and all that school can offer—tend to do well when they leave school. Conversely, young people who are not challenged, interested, or connected are more likely to leave school. They then face a harder time finding work and earning money, and they are more likely to get into trouble.

The challenge is to have programs and policies that

- encourage young people to come to, and stay in, school
- promote responsible behaviour and choices
- respond to inappropriate behaviour swiftly, intensively, and comprehensively, with the safety and well-being of all students, teachers, and everyone in the school community in mind

Wanting to Come and Stay in School ...

School programs must be interesting and relevant to young people with varied interests, needs, and abilities. In the early years, the Learning for Life plan has led to significant growth in the number of resource teachers. These teachers assist in developing programs and plans that respond to differing needs and abilities of students.

In junior high and high school, the challenge is to provide programs that students find relevant. For some, that means courses that prepare them for success at the post-secondary level.

For students who are more interested in hands-on, practical learning, a new program called **Options and Opportunities (O₂)**, introduced just two years ago, is showing early promise. Participating schools are reporting fewer attendance problems and greater student success.

This program—available to grade 10 and 11 students—is delivered in partnership with local businesses and community organizations who offer real-world exposure to the world of work. Students also get help with career planning and learn workplace skills in specific fields, such as trades and technology, business education, health and human services, hospitality and tourism, information technology, and arts, culture, and recreation.

For youth in care, it is important to encourage their interest in learning beyond high school. Nova Scotia now leads the country in its level of post-secondary education support for youth in care, covering the cost of all books, tuition, and accommodations.

Engage Youth, Promote Shared Accountability

- **Provincial Youth Advisory Network**
- **A Place to Belong**
- Youth in Care Newsletter
- School Code of Conduct, Positive Effective Behaviour Supports
- Come to School, Stay in School Programs, Policies
- Community Programs, Partnerships
- **Crime Prevention and Reduction Strategy**
- Restorative Justice
- Bail Supervision
- Attendance Centre

Promoting Responsible Behaviour and Choices ...

Anyone close to a toddler knows that even very young children behave better when they clearly understand what is expected of them.

As toddlers grow into young children, their understanding broadens, beyond a list of what they can and can't do, to understanding the reasons that determine what is acceptable behaviour. They can actually help negotiate a set of rules that are acceptable in the family, in school, or in the community. Because the young person has a role in shaping them, they are more likely to be followed.

Research and experience back this up. **School codes of conduct** based on respect for all students—and all members of the school community—are the most effective. Respect is fostered by having students themselves involved in setting and communicating the expected standard of behaviour, as well as the consequences for breaching this standard. With students themselves helping to develop and deliver the message, it is more likely to be heard, understood, and accepted.

As well, our new **Provincial Alcohol Strategy** focuses on the effects of youth drinking. This strategy builds on successes, such as P.A.R.T.Y. (Prevent Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth) aimed at helping grade 10 students understand the risks of drinking.

Alternatively, school policies based only on punishment and exclusion don't always work. For example, consequences that exclude students from activities can intensify their feelings of isolation.

A **Positive Effective Behaviour Supports Program** is now in place in more than 300 schools in Nova Scotia. This program is fully consistent with the principles discussed above: based on a clear code of conduct, built on respect, with students fully involved. Again, the program is showing real benefits.

Health Promoting Schools also reinforce positive behaviours. When you go into a Health Promoting School, you'll know it—from the clean and clutter-free corridors to the brightly decorated walls boasting student and staff achievements. This recognition and celebration of the unique gifts of the whole school community are key in engaging all students in positive ways.

Research also links healthy food choices and physical activity with higher academic achievement, fewer discipline problems, and fewer emotional problems. Health Promoting Schools provide opportunities for daily physical activity. Further, students support each other—and are supported by their teachers—as they take risks in participating in new challenges.

A 2002 survey showed that 83% of boys and 79% of girls drank alcohol by grade 12, with 28% of students reporting drinking until intoxicated within the month before the survey.

Bullying must never be ignored.

Responding Quickly to Inappropriate Behaviour ...

Focusing on positive behaviour and respect does not deny that unacceptable, and sometimes dangerous, behaviour is still going on in our schools. Bullying, as just one example, remains too common an occurrence and must never be ignored. Cyber-bullying is a relatively new and worrisome trend that also must be recognized and dealt with.

The safety of students, teachers, and everyone in the school must be the top priority. Again, a comprehensive, school-wide approach involving parents, students, teachers, volunteers, and community agencies is the most effective.

The fact is, young people who repeatedly cause trouble are likely in trouble themselves because of problems at home, problems with friends, or personal struggles with anything from academics to addictions. Dealing with this requires an intensive, swift, and comprehensive approach that reaches across all aspects of the youth's life.

Engaging Youth Outside of Schools ...

The **Youth in Care newsletter**, appropriately titled *The Voice*, is written, produced, and distributed by youth in care in the Halifax Regional Municipality. It includes articles where youth can share advice and criticism, as well as poems and artwork, enabling them to share their feelings, hopes, fears, and dreams. *The Voice* is in its seventh year and has helped young people learn new skills (improving their employability), share a common, positive experience with their peers, and build self-esteem. It also provides a positive, creative outlet and a forum where their voices are heard. (See <http://www.youthnewsletter.net/>)



Photo:
The Youth in Care
newsletter team

Community initiatives and partnerships offer some of the most innovative approaches to engaging youth. We look forward to learning more about these efforts as our work with community and youth groups intensify in the coming months.

What We Need to Do Next

Our First Steps

In Schools

Our first step is to expand what is working well in schools:

- Encouraging more students to want to come to, and stay in school: Options and Opportunities (O₂) has expanded from 27 to 32 schools this fall.
- Encouraging responsible behaviour: Positive Effective Behaviour Supports is expanding from more than 300 schools to all schools in the province by March 2008.

Consistent with Commissioner Nunn's recommendations, we recognize that out-of-school suspensions can contribute to the process of a young person "spiralling out of control." Given that for many teens school presents the best opportunity for a bright future, putting them out of school, even for a short time, can prevent them from making the connections and getting the help they need.

Information is now being gathered on existing in-school suspension programs in junior and senior high schools across the province. Those that are working well will be identified, and more will be added where needed. As a result, more in-school suspensions will be possible, as long as the safety of students and everyone in the school community is assured.

Students who are suspended in school must continue to have access to professionals beyond the classroom teacher. While maintaining a connection to school work, the main focus must be on addressing the underlying problems that are no doubt leading to the suspension. Suspension approaches will be evaluated as part of the Schools Plus and Wrap-Around Services projects, but all schools will be encouraged in their efforts to identify help and partners from their communities.

In Communities

We need to practise what we preach. We have said repeatedly that we can learn from youth if we give them a voice. A **Youth Advisory Committee, Provincial Student Education Council**, and **Conseil jeunesse provincial de la Nouvelle-Écosse** already exist.

- The Youth Advisory Committee represents 15- to 24-year-olds and advises government in a range of ways, most recently, participating as a focus group for the Minister's Task Force on Safer Streets and Communities.
- The Provincial Student Education Council advises on school issues, ranging from nutrition, to youth leadership, to bullying.
- Conseil jeunesse provincial de la Nouvelle-Écosse represents Acadian youth.

As well, the Council on African Canadian Education has recently announced that it will establish a youth council.

We will ask these groups to advise on building a **Provincial Youth Advisory Network** that can provide continuous “voice” and feedback to this strategy.

The Youth Ombudsman’s Office will also advise on how to form this network. In particular, the Youth Ombudsman’s Office reaches out to children and youth in care, as well as to youth in custody. This will help ensure that all youth have an opportunity to express themselves purposefully and constructively.

Again, this network must tap into the perspectives and talents of youth from all backgrounds and experiences—in school and out, at home or in care. This year, we will begin looking for ways to

- effectively engage youth in ways that assist with policy and program development and evaluation
- help more young people gain leadership and life skills that support their development into responsible, contributing citizens

A **youth networking conference** will be a starting point in both defining how we engage young people and in developing leadership and life skills.

We believe that youth at risk can get the most help *from* their communities, *in* their communities. Getting parents actively involved is also key.

A new project called **A Place to Belong** will be tested to find ways to build on the experience and expertise that already exist in our communities. We will work in partnership with, and provide targeted funding for, groups providing programs that help give vulnerable children and at-risk youth a sense of belonging with their peers and caring adults.

We want to help children and youth learn, as well as develop positive social skills. This learning and development should take place through experience with art, drama, music, or sport and recreation. Program staff and volunteers will serve as positive role models and mentors and will empower children and youth to make positive lifestyle choices and decisions as they experience success within new experiences.



This program is built on the evidence that children who feel competent, cared for, and empowered are less likely to continue with defiance, crime, and other self-destructive behaviour. As such, this program is also being considered, and may be expanded or adapted, as part of the provincial crime prevention and reduction strategy, now being developed.

Helping Young Offenders Get Back on Track

If we want young offenders to get their lives back on track, they must understand that there are immediate and certain consequences for breaking the law. Court processing delays work against this goal.

We have taken significant steps to reduce these delays.

- A new standard has been issued to police and the Public Prosecution Service to have youth accused of committing a serious offence in court within seven days.
- We have set a new case processing target to get all youth accused of a crime into court sooner. We will revise and meet this target by continuing efforts with our justice partners to identify and resolve issues that cause delays.
- The Public Prosecution Service has hired two additional youth Crown attorneys.
- We have invested half a million dollars to hire clinical social workers and psychologists to speed up mental health assessments—addressing a problem that was significantly delaying the court process. As well, more timely assessments ensure that those offenders with mental health issues get the help they need sooner.

The **Restorative Justice Program** offers an opportunity for youth who have committed a crime to meet with the victim of the offence, community members, and representatives of justice and other youth-servicing agencies. The purpose is to consider the harm caused by the offence and to determine actions to redress the harm done.

Research shows that youth justice programs work best when they maintain strong connections with schools and when police and probation officers (who must supervise and enforce rules) work with the young people and other professionals in building a trusting relationship that can help young people get back on track.

We are providing funding for an additional **250 police officers** over the next three years. We are also developing a provincially funded **training program for youth liaison officers** to help maintain a connection to the school that should help prevent youth crime and get young people back on track.

The **Halifax Youth Attendance Centre** opened in February 2007. This includes space for 20 full-time students, along with evening, weekend, and summer programming for about 220 youth under community supervision. Programs include education, counselling, recreation, career skills, and weekend recreation.

A **Bail Supervision Program** also got under way in the Halifax Regional Municipality in February 2007. This program provides intensive supervision and links participating youth with supports (e.g., counselling, employment opportunities, etc.) that help reduce the risk of them re-offending and increase the likelihood that they can make a successful transition back into their communities.

Youth accused of crime will be brought to court sooner.

The Longer Term

Engaging Youth ...

Although significant progress is expected this year, developing an effective network of youth leaders—that is truly representative of the needs and aspirations of all youth—will require focus and effort over the longer term. Our work with the Youth Ombudsman's Office, consultation with youth and community groups, and results of the first annual networking conference will help inform specific next steps.

Responding Swiftly and Seriously to Youth Crime ...

We will begin to evaluate the Halifax Youth Attendance Centre and the bail supervision program in January 2008. The approaches and programming available in the Halifax Regional Municipality could be expanded, following this evaluation.

We will also continue to lobby for a tougher *Youth Criminal Justice Act*.

While the federal legislation works for most youth offenders, a small number of youth who are out of control and are violent must get a clear message: there are swift and serious consequences for crime.

Nova Scotia's justice ministers have met several times with their federal counterpart to press for changes. Youth criminal justice experts and Nova Scotians—through the Minister's Task Force on Safer Streets and Communities—have also sent a strong message to Ottawa.

In October 2007, the federal Justice Minister announced proposed amendments to strengthen the act and a complete review of the act starting in 2008.

Although this is an important start, we will continue to advocate for changes, so young people understand there are clear consequences to criminal behaviour, and so they can be linked to rehabilitative programs that help them as well as keep our communities safe.

Linking Directly with the Upcoming Crime Prevention and Reduction Strategy ...

People working on the provincial Crime Prevention and Reduction Strategy, were at the table with people who worked on *Our Kids Are Worth It*, because the links are direct and critical. As a result, more and related actions, directly reflecting recommendations from the Task Force on Safer Streets and Communities, will be contained in the Crime Prevention and Reduction Strategy.



Photo:
**Learning at the Halifax
Attendance Centre**

**We will continue to lobby
the federal government
for changes to the *Youth
Criminal Justice Act*.**

4. Conclusion

We end this strategy where we started—with a restatement of our vision:

Children and youth are healthy, safe, nurtured, and responsible—and given the right opportunities to be the best that they can be.

We will only know the true measure of our success in a generation, when today's youngest children have grown. That said, we can, and have a responsibility to, mark progress toward our vision and goals. We will meet this responsibility by

- defining key indicators and expected outcomes linked to our goals
- monitoring progress toward our expected outcomes
- staying accountable for results by reporting on this progress

Defining Outcomes, Monitoring Progress

Goal 1: Children and youth are well cared for, safe, healthy, and active.

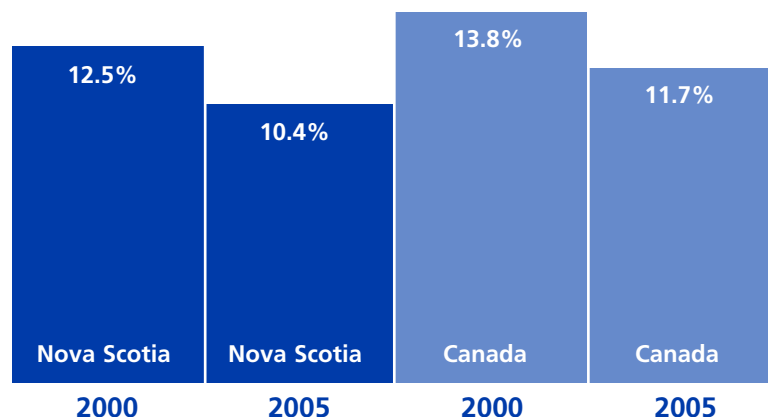
This goal is directly related to what researchers have defined as “population health.” In simple terms, population health links healthy children and families to strong, healthy communities.

We have selected two key indicators and outcomes most directly related to this goal to guide our focus in monitoring and reporting progress.

Outcome: Fewer children living in low-income families

Our Kids Are Worth It does not include specific actions to reduce the number of children in low-income families. However, low income has been identified as a risk factor for children and should therefore be closely monitored. Further, consistent with our overall theme of co-ordination, the work within related strategies, such as the planned Poverty Reduction Strategy, must be closely linked.

Children Living in Low-Income Households



Outcome: Higher percentage of youth getting an appropriate level of physical activity

| | Grade 3 | Grade 7 | Grade 11 |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 2001 – Male | 90% | 62% | 12% |
| 2001 – Female | 92.3% | 44% | 6.9% |
| 2005 – Male | 96.7% | 45.3% | 9.7% |
| 2005 – Female | 96.1% | 23.8% | < 1.0% |

Goal 2: Children and youth are supported in making successful transitions in their lives from birth to adulthood.

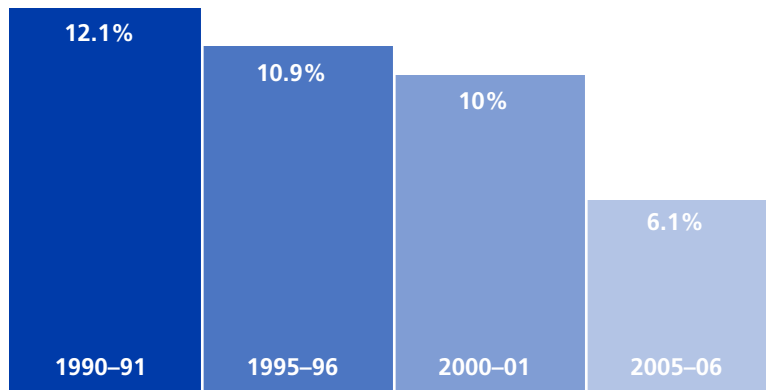
Outcome: Improved rates of school readiness

The new screening tool (Early Development Instrument) being introduced for all grade primary students this year will assess the educational and general well-being of young children. This information will be key in measuring our progress toward school readiness.

Outcome: Lower dropout rates

The Department of Education monitors dropout rates based on student withdrawals. The senior withdrawal rate is the percentage of students from grades 10, 11, and 12 who withdraw in a single year, compared with the total enrollments for those grades.

Student Withdrawal Rates



While progress in this area is encouraging, we must analyse which young people are dropping out—and why. This information can be used to continue tailoring strategies to meet the needs of at-risk youth.

Goal 3: Children and youth are engaged in ways that support their successful development and their understanding and acceptance of responsibilities for their actions.

Outcome: More youth volunteering

The most recent Statistics Canada data (2004) reports that 54 per cent of young Nova Scotians (ages 15–24) volunteer. This is the second highest rate of volunteerism among all reported age groups.

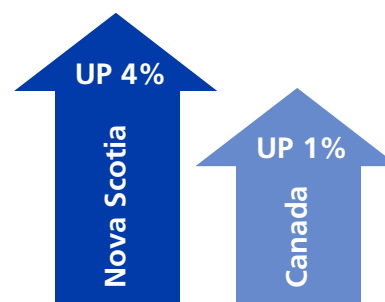
Outcome: Fewer youth involved in crime

Youth crime rates are on the rise in Nova Scotia, creating significant concern.

Rate of Youth Accused of Crime—Overall (2003–2006)



Rate of Youth Accused of Violent Crime (2003–2006)



While we cannot diminish the significance of any increase in the youth crime rate, we must also identify the reasons behind it. For example, as the largest volume of youth crime occurs in the Halifax Regional Municipality, part of the increase may be the result of stepped-up efforts of police to charge youth who violate conditions placed on them while they are out on bail. This analysis will continue, as part of efforts to both monitor and reduce youth crime.

Goal 4: Families are supported in ways that help them meet their needs and their responsibilities for their children.

Outcome: Reduced wait times for appropriate mental health services

Currently, there is no delay for children awaiting emergency or urgent mental health services. We will monitor this closely to ensure that this situation continues.

For non-urgent, yet necessary, mental health services, we are working on standard definitions and criteria that will enable us to gather reliable information on wait times. This information will enable us to monitor progress toward this outcome.

Outcome: Reduced rates of youth homelessness

Reliable data do not exist at this time to measure rates of youth homelessness. While some information exists for the Halifax Regional Municipality, we must work with Phoenix House, Laing House, and others across the province on ways to gather this information so we can chart progress.

Being Accountable for Results

Organizational Accountability

Accountability for results begins at the Cabinet table, shared by all ministers responsible for child- and youth-related activities in government. The Minister of Community Services, who is also Minister responsible for Children and Youth, is the lead minister to ensure that all efforts are well co-ordinated and to provide a clear, single line of accountability.

Ministerial accountability is being supported at the most senior administrative level in government. The Deputy Minister of Community Services chairs the Social Policy Committee of Deputies.

A new executive director of the child and youth strategy was hired, with clear accountability for co-ordinating related activities across government. The executive director is supported by an interdepartmental Child and Youth Social Policy Committee—all of whom will have partnership and co-ordination responsibilities built into their job descriptions and performance appraisals.

New regional specialists, reporting to the executive director, will be accountable for providing leadership and co-ordination at the community level.

Accountability to the Public

Everyone shares an interest in, and responsibility for, creating the best possible future for our kids. To meet this responsibility, we need to share information and progress with Nova Scotians on a regular basis.

- Research and evaluations conducted by the social policy research group will be made public.
- Evaluation of the demonstration projects will be shared publicly.
- The interdepartmental social policy committee will develop an annual business plan, closely linked to *Our Kids Are Worth It*. The plan will include targets and specific actions. Progress will also be reported annually and tabled in the Legislature.

Final Words

How do you sum up almost 60 pages of text in a few final words and sentences?

No question, this strategy is detailed—because it should be.

This strategy is also comprehensive—showing how new and existing initiatives fit together—because that is what Commissioner Nunn told us we needed to do.

And this strategy points us in the right direction—to do everything possible to ensure that our children and youth are healthy, safe, nurtured, and responsible.

But Nova Scotians really want one big question answered. How will this strategy make a difference in my child’s life, in our experiences as a family, and—for those without children—in the future of our young people and our province?

Time will tell the full story. But our confidence in our ability to make progress, and ultimately succeed, is this: This strategy is not about doing more things—it is about doing most things differently.

We are firmly committed to working more effectively together—within government and with communities (of different size, location, culture and ethnicity). This includes creating meaningful opportunities for parents, young people, and all community members to get actively involved. It also means developing programs and services that meet the unique and changing needs of children, youth, and families. Again, this involves teams of people sitting down together—not individuals sitting alone developing independent plans and programs.

We firmly believe that shared responsibilities create shared opportunities. If you are still reading this document—after almost 60 pages—your interest in and commitment to working with children and youth is unquestionable. We look forward to working with you, to put the words on these pages into action in ways that make an immediate and lasting difference in the lives of our children, youth, and families.

This strategy is not about doing more things—it is about doing most things differently.

Appendix A: Related Frameworks, Strategies, and Action Plans

| Framework, Strategy, Action Plan | Description | Lead and Partner Departments | Status |
|--|--|--|-----------------|
| Active Kids, Healthy Kids | Intended to increase the number of children and youth who accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate or higher-intensity physical activity on a daily basis. Regular activity improves self-esteem, increases relaxation, and enhances healthy growth and development. www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/physicalactivity/publications/ACTIVEKIDS_Jan03.pdf | Health Promotion and Protection, Education | Under way |
| Alcohol Strategy | Incorporates the vision of broad cultural change, where Nova Scotia is a society in which individuals, families, and neighbourhoods support responsibility and risk reduction in the use of alcohol. www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/addictionprevention.html | Health Promotion and Protection | Under way |
| BLAC Report on Education | Improves educational and training opportunities for African Nova Scotians, raising educational attainment. | Education | Under way |
| Crime Prevention/ Crime Reduction Strategy | Intended to prevent and reduce crime by working in partnerships with communities and individuals. www.gov.ns.ca/just/minister/safer_streets.asp | Justice | Being developed |
| Drug Strategy | Promotes the health and well being of individuals, families and communities across Nova Scotia by preventing illicit drug use, treating and reducing harms associated with such drug use and undertaking enforcement initiatives to reduce the supply of illicit drugs. | Justice, Health Promotion and Protection | Being developed |
| Early Learning and Child Care Plan | Intended to (a) ensure that all children enjoy a good start in life, nurtured and supported by caring families and communities and (b) lay the foundation for a flexible, equitable child-care system. www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/elcc.html | Community Services | Under way |
| Framework for Action Against Family Violence | Initiated to improve the response of the justice system to incidents of spousal/intimate partner violence. www.gov.ns.ca/just/publications/docs/russell/summary.htm | Justice | Under way |
| Healthy Beginnings: Enhanced Home Visiting | Provides families facing challenges with intensive home visiting support for the first three years of their child's life. The program focuses on promoting a healthy parent-child relationship, fostering healthy childhood development, and linking families with community resources that further enhance opportunities for the healthy growth and development of both the child and the family. | Health Promotion and Protection (Delivered by district health authorities) | Under way |

| Framework, Strategy, Action Plan | Description | Lead and Partner Departments | Status |
|--|--|--|-----------------|
| Healthy Eating Nova Scotia | Outlines objectives in four priorities: breastfeeding, children and youth, fruit and vegetable consumption, and food security. School nutrition, particularly improving the available food and beverage choices, is key. www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/repPub/HealthyEatingNovaScotia2005.pdf | Health Promotion and Protection, Education | Under way |
| Health Promoting Schools | Provides an overall framework for key school health initiatives in the province, including healthy eating, physical activity, youth sexual health, tobacco reduction, addiction, and injury prevention in the school setting. | Health Promotion and Protection, Education | Under way |
| Immigration Strategy | Intended to improve the retention of immigrants to 70% for the 2006–11 census period and to attract 3,600 immigrants per year by 2010. www.novascotiainmigration.com | Office of Immigration | Under way |
| Improving Services for Children and Families | Reviews and strengthens four key areas of child welfare service delivery: placement services, emergency after-hours services for child protection, foster and adoption services, and opportunities for shared services between the province and community child welfare agencies. http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/departments/documents/Child_Welfare_Committee_Report.pdf | Community Services | Under way |
| Injury Prevention Strategy | Intended to reduce the physical, emotional, and economic impact of injury. www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/repPub/NSIPReport04.pdf | Health Promotion and Protection | Under way |
| Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together | A four-year plan for public school education. http://brighterfuturestogether.ednet.ns.ca/ | Education | Under way |
| Mental Health Standards | Established for the core mental health services and for selected specialty services to establish an accepted quality and level of mental health service in Nova Scotia. | Health | Under way |
| Nova Scotia Family Pharmacare | Provides universal access to drugs for Nova Scotians who lack prescription drug coverage. | Health | Under way |
| Poverty Reduction Strategy | A multi-year poverty reduction strategy aimed at addressing poverty in Nova Scotia. | Community Services, Environment and Labour | Being developed |
| Social Policy Framework <i>Weaving the Threads</i> | A co-ordinated, collaborative effort on behalf of all social policy departments that provides a context for issues and initiatives promoting the social vision for Nova Scotia. | Community Services | Under way |
| Strategic Framework to Address Suicide | To enhance the necessary societal, policy, and individual supports required to address suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among Canadian children and youth aged 10 to 24 years. www.gov.ns.ca/hpp/injuryprevention/suicideframework.pdf | Health Promotion and Protection | Under way |

| Framework, Strategy, Action Plan | Description | Lead and Partner Departments | Status |
|--|--|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Youth Sexual Health Framework for Action | Developed to improve the sexual health of youth; provide a comprehensive, strategic direction for youth sexual health; and suggest roles for youth, communities, community-based agencies, and all sectors of government in improving youth sexual health. | Health Promotion and Protection | Under way |

