CNS Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative Theory of Change

This document presents an overview of the CNS Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative (SNI) and an explanation of how Community and Neighbourhood Services (CNS) believes positive social change happens on a neighbourhood level. A Theory of Change (TOC) is presented— which describes the issue or problem, the underlying causes, the long-term change being sought, and what needs to happen for change to come about. The theory of change identifies the five ‘W’s (who, what, why, when, where) and how. The Theory of Change is based on in-depth research of evidence-based, effective neighbourhood revitalization efforts from across Canada, the UK and the US (see Strong Neighbourhood Research brief and attached link in references). As a complex social change effort this initiative will further evolve over time with new partnerships, new neighbourhoods and new initiatives.

CNS Social Sustainability Framework¹

The What!

CNS is committed to addressing the challenge of growing poverty in neighbourhoods by building the capacity of residents to identify and address issues within their communities. When residents begin to collectively address their own issues they both improve their communities and build their capacity to take on more and greater challenges. “The end result is a strong and self-sustaining neighbourhood that improves the life chances of the children, families and individuals who live there”.² In other words, when neighbourhoods thrive, the people who live there also thrive. The Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative works to improve the lives of Calgarians by working with residents to change community conditions in order to sustain and strengthen neighbourhoods. This strengthening neighbourhoods approach focuses on neighbourhoods as a vehicle for improving social conditions and addressing issues of concentrated poverty and social exclusion. The Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative is one of a number of poverty reduction strategies within the CNS Social Sustainability Framework. What makes this strategy unique is that the poverty reduction work is being done within focused neighbourhoods.

¹ For more information on the Social Sustainability Framework see FCSS Calgary, Social Sustainability Framework PowerPoint Presentation.
The following is the social sustainability framework prism with the focal point on fostering community capacity in the focus neighbourhoods. All elements of the prism are integral to neighbourhood revitalization.

**Social Sustainability Framework Prism: Strong neighbourhood Initiative**

Vision: Calgarians working together to create and sustain a vibrant, healthy, safe, and caring community

The prism describes **what** creates Strong Neighbourhoods: community capacity, individual and family capacity and social infrastructure.

- **Community capacity** is the collective ability of community members to engage and empower residents in decision making, collectively find solutions to particular problems, increase civic engagement and collectively influence higher-level change.

- **Individual and family capacity** refers to skills and abilities, resources, and knowledge that enable individuals and families to address, and have greater control over, conditions and factors that affect all dimensions of well-being, functioning in society, and self-sufficiency across the lifespan.

- **Social infrastructure** is the network of education programs/systems, recreational programs/facilities, health services, safety and security systems/structures/services, housing, employment and income security, programs and policies that build self-sufficiency and care for those who are unable to get by on their own.

**Four Dimensions Create Strong Neighbourhoods**

Research shows that strong and resilient neighbourhoods have the following four dimensions: social cohesion, accessible services, good quality environment and economic development. The Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative is working to strengthen these four key areas in focus neighbourhoods.

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1. **Social cohesion** - good social networks and social support, bonding and bridging social capital, neighbourhood sense of cohesion and sense of community. This includes:

   - a positive social climate with a strong sense of collective efficacy;
   - sense of community and neighbourhood pride;
   - sense of attachment to the neighbourhood; and
   - high levels of participation and neighbour support and interaction.

2. **Accessible services** – affordable, quality programs, services and amenities. This includes a range of important services and amenities, such as:

   - social, health, education, employment and childcare services;
   - public transit, libraries, schools, community centres, parks; and,
   - recreational facilities and programs.

3. **Quality environment** – both built and natural environment. This includes:

   - land uses to enable appropriate development;
   - adequate housing for a range of household types and income levels;
   - environmental considerations such as parks and open spaces, along with air, soil and water quality;
   - infrastructure such as police, fire, and EMS hubs; and
   - community design that promotes safety, health, and active living.

4. **Community economic development** – the process by which neighbourhoods can initiate and generate their own solutions to economic problems. This includes:

   - residents’ individual capacities to be self-sufficient;
   - the neighbourhood’s economic climate, which encourages “appropriate” businesses; and
   - enterprises developed by and run in the neighbourhood that employs residents.

**The Why!**

**Neighbourhood Effects**

A large and growing body of research demonstrates that people are affected by the neighbourhoods in which they live. The influence that neighbourhoods have on people can be either positive or negative, and is referred to as neighbourhood effects. The conditions within a particular neighbourhood can either support or impede individual and family functioning in all areas of life, including social, economic and health performance. In terms of economic functioning, there is considerable evidence that living in a neighbourhood with a high concentration of poverty can diminish the life chances of both children and adults. In short, whether individuals and families flourish or struggle is shaped by a number of complex and related factors, including community conditions.

**The Calgary Context**

Calgary has increasing concentrations of low-income individuals and families within a number of neighbourhoods. These low-income individuals and families live in particular neighbourhoods or in concentrated areas within neighbourhoods, which leads to spatially concentrated poverty. Spatially-concentrated poverty is associated with issues such as individual social exclusion, high crime, and a range of other social and economic problems. At a certain point, neighbourhoods at risk of growing poverty and decline begin to tip downward: social and economic programs

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4 For more elaboration on neighbourhood effects, see FCSS, “FCSS Calgary Research Brief No. 5, Outcome: Strong Neighbourhoods, November 2009.

accumulate and intensify, and residents either move away from these neighbourhoods or, if they remain, run the risk of being negatively affected by the place in which they live. There are currently 18 tipping point neighbourhoods in Calgary.

**Why Resident Participation Is Important and Effective**

Neighbourhoods can be effective agents for change by influencing policies and practices that affect local resident quality of life. When residents are given the opportunity to work out their own neighbourhood issues, they can find solutions that can have a more lasting effect than when they are not involved in the problem solving process. Increased resident participation may be considered a short term outcome of community engagement strategies implemented as part of a longer term process of strengthening neighbourhoods. Without resident participation, community change efforts will not have the meaningful engagement; capacity building and mobilization processes required to positively impact neighbourhood effects.

**The Role of Community and Neighbourhood Services**

CNS is ideally positioned to play a meaningful role in preventing concentrated poverty and social isolation based on its position within municipal government. Its unique role not only puts the Business Unit in a position to directly influence change at this level, but to collaborate with other City departments, business units and City Council, along with other levels of government, funders, stakeholders, and funded agencies in order to leverage influence and have a significant impact within the broader community.

**The How!**

In addition to what CNS will do to achieve Strong Neighbourhoods, the prism also describes how CNS will do it. This prevention-focused framework looks at the ways community development, programs and services, and policies and systems can be used to engage and ultimately strengthen neighbourhoods.

**Strategies to Building Strong Neighbourhoods**

The Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative works to build the four dimensions of strong neighbourhoods by three approaches to prevention: community development, programs & services, and policies & systems.

**Strategy 1 - Prevention through community development**

Since social cohesion in focus neighbourhoods is one to the four dimensions of Strong Neighbourhoods, it is important to adopt a community development approach. Community development is an intentional approach to helping community members come together and achieve common goals that improve their collective economic, social, cultural and/or environmental situation. The focus is to increase the capacity of residents to mobilize, devise and carry out plans to address specific issues in the neighbourhood. Over the long term it is intended that communities will have sufficient knowledge, leadership, organizational and practical skills to resolve problems and challenges confronting their neighbourhood and the individuals and families living within it.
This strategy has adopted the following Community Development Model:

The model includes the following steps:

**Steps 1 & 2**  
Community engagement and participation - Engaging and supporting a broad range of community members in community building strategies to ensure the community is always involved in deciding what needs to be done, then designing and delivering the solution and, ultimately, taking ownership of the solutions.

**Step 3**  
Community capacity building - Providing community members with the opportunities to realize and share their talents, increase their skills and knowledge and build on strengths that increase capacity towards collective action.

**Steps 4 & 5**  
Community empowerment and mobilization - Supporting and mentoring community members to create and pursue a shared community action plan that addresses the identified issue(s), articulates a desired result and identifies the steps/resources to achieve the desired result.

**Steps 6 & 7**  
Action and results - Supporting and mentoring community members to implement the action plan based on the identified need(s) and evaluate/learn from the results.

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[This model was developed for the Community Social Development Program, but offers larger application for the Strong Neighbourhood Initiative. For more information see Community and Neighbourhood Services, “Community & Social Development Program: Community Social Worker Core Services & Competencies”, August 2011, page 1 and Community and Neighbourhood Services, “Social Development Community Development Theory of Change, January 2011.”]
Strategy 2 - Prevention through programs and services

Since access to quality programs and services is one of four dimensions of Strong Neighbourhoods it is important to support agencies to identify ways that their programs and services contribute to building community capacity, just as they contribute to individual and family capacity. As agencies are engaged by residents to deliver specific resident-identified and-driven programs and services, they will be able to demonstrate individual and family changes, with the long-term intention of increasing community capacity within focus neighbourhoods.

To be successful, a mix of targeted community interventions (program and services) and community development strategies is required. Community residents need to be recognized as agents of change, rather than just beneficiaries or clients as is often the case in our service delivery models. To do this, service providers need to play multiple roles at the neighbourhood level?.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multiple Service Provider Roles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing specific programs and services as identified and informed by residents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing customized programs and services to strengthen and expand social support networks and facilitating resident participation in neighbourhood networks and change initiatives</td>
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<td>Partnering in local neighbourhood change efforts to develop and implement intentional resident engagement strategies as part of a local neighbourhood strategy</td>
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Strategy 3 - Prevention through policies and systems

Since a decrease (or at least no increase) in concentrations of poverty in focus neighbourhoods is a long-term outcome of the Social Sustainability Framework, it is important to understand and influence policies that affect poverty. Many of the challenges and barriers faced by both individuals and communities can be found at a policy or system level. Working to strengthen neighbourhoods requires an understanding of how public policies impact individuals, families and communities.

Policy and system work takes place on three levels?:

- Working with residents to address policies and system practices that affect their community.
- Working on understanding how policy frameworks affect communities and how negative impacts can impede the creation of strong neighbourhoods.
- Working with other internal and external partners and municipalities to influence the provincial and national policy agenda, and to ensure the coordination of these activities both within and among municipalities.

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? For further information see, "FCSS Calgary Research Brief No. 5, Outcome: Strong Neighbourhoods, November 2009."
**Working at Three Levels**

Building strong neighbourhoods is complex work that requires coordination between the three strategic levels – community development, programs/services and system/policy. These three strategies combine to support:

- Residents to identify and address local issues;
- Agencies working with residents to develop broad prevention strategies and build social cohesion; and
- Diverse groups and organizations to work to influence broader systems and to affect policy on a municipal, provincial and national level.

Conceptually each of these three strategies represents a different layer in the change process, and only when all three are working together will CNS impact spatially concentrated poverty and create more positive neighbourhood effects.

**The Who and the Where!**

CNS has selected specific neighbourhoods for focused attention within the Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative. The neighbourhoods were identified because of strengths, needs and circumstances occurring within the neighbourhood. The first filter used was the level of poverty in neighbourhoods, as this is the primary focus of CNS’s prevention efforts to prevent high concentrations of poverty within Calgary. Research indicates that neighbourhoods with poverty levels of 26-39% have increased risk of tipping-over to high concentrations of poverty. With this as the first lens, CNS then used the following additional criteria:

- Existing and potential community leadership;
- Existing infrastructure (e.g. churches, schools, libraries, active community associations, or other community groups);
- Connections with City initiatives or projects (e.g. LRT West Leg, the Genesis Centre of Community or the Calgary SE/17 Avenue Corridor Plan);
- High numbers of residents spending more than 30 per cent of their income on rent; and
- High number of people from a vulnerable group such as recent immigrants, Aboriginal people, families with children or seniors.

The SNI is intentionally engaging and mobilizing the residents in selected neighbourhoods. Resident committees are forming as a way to encourage people to be actively involved in a collaborative process of neighbourhood planning and change. Each neighbourhood resident committee receives significant support from CNS Neighbourhood Services Area Office Community Social Workers, Community Recreation Coordinators and Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) Social Planners, all using a common community development approach. The role of Neighbourhood Services and FCSS staff is to offer support and guidance to the neighbourhood residents and to build their capacity to be effective agents of change (it is important to recognize some residents will not be part of resident committees but may still be active change agents within the neighbourhoods).

**The When! (Creating Long Term Impact)**

The Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative is measuring change and impact at the neighbourhood level, and change at this level is expected to take time. While small changes may be realized within three years, more meaningful change is expected to occur within a six to nine year timeframe.

**CNS Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative Long-term Outcomes**

A decrease or at least no increase in the spatial concentration of poverty in Calgary and increased community/neighbourhood capacity and social and individual capital in focus neighbourhoods.
CNS Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative Intermediate Outcomes

Following is a summary of the five outcomes identified for neighbourhood strengthening and revitalization work. Within each broad outcome there are a number of specific dimensions of strong neighbourhoods that need to be supported and assessed. There will be a variety of potential data sources, however the primary data collection tools are the Neighbourhood Strengthening Indicators: Checklist and Resident Mapping, and Strong Neighbourhood Resident Survey.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1: Organization/ Capacity</td>
<td>Neighbourhood has the capacity for organization, engagement, and advocacy</td>
<td>• Organizational capacity</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Advocacy capacity</td>
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<td>• Leadership capacity</td>
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<td>• Resident involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Social cohesion</td>
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<td>#2: Social Cohesion</td>
<td>Neighbourhood social cohesion is increased.</td>
<td>• Residential mobility</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Place attachment/sense of belonging</td>
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<td>• Neighbourliness (trust and reciprocity)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Sense of collective efficacy</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Involvement</td>
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<td>• Perceptions of safety/crime</td>
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<td>#3: Programs/ Services/ Amenities</td>
<td>Neighbourhood has increased accessible and quality services, amenities, and infrastructure</td>
<td>• Gathering places</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Amenities</td>
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<td>• Social &amp; recreational programs</td>
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<td>• Services</td>
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<td>#4: Neighbourhood Environment</td>
<td>The neighbourhood’s build and natural environment is healthier and safer.</td>
<td>• Housing</td>
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<td>• Safety</td>
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<td>• Community design</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Public space</td>
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<td>• Environmental conditions</td>
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<td>#5: Economic Well Being</td>
<td>Neighbourhood residents experience increased economic well-being</td>
<td>• Demographics</td>
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<td>• Health</td>
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<td>• Income</td>
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<td>• Basic income security</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Neighbourhood economic climate</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Neighbourhood economic development</td>
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Where the work begins...

CNS and their community partners have begun to engage residents in eight focus neighbourhoods in order to build local change agendas for neighbourhood revitalization. CNS staff started with activities such as surveying residents about their issues and ideas, mapping the neighbourhoods, and organizing residents to engage in small, achievable local improvements.

Through this early work, residents are gaining a better understanding of their community’s context and are being engaged in early successful initiatives; laying the foundation for larger and longer term mobilization. As such, the Strong Neighbourhoods Initiative is supporting residents with the skills, competencies, and opportunities to:

- Realize existing and develop potential skills;
- Assume leadership roles;
- Take responsibility for identifying and meeting their own and other people’s needs; and
- Become more involved in their neighbourhood and in the broader community.

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5 For more information see FCSS Calgary, Guide Book: Implementing Outcome and Indicator Measures for Neighbourhoods, May 2011
Glossary of Terms

Capacity Building: the strengthening of the ability of people, communities and systems to plan, develop, implement and maintain effective approaches.\(^\text{10}\)

Community: a geographical community or a community of interest, identity, or affinity. Community may refer to a specific neighbourhood; it may refer to a religious or spiritual group, an ethnic group or any other grouping that shares specific characteristics and identities.

Community Capacity: the community’s social capital and cohesion, ability to develop or secure resources, and collective skills to bring about desired change.\(^\text{11}\)

Community Development: an intentional approach helping community members to come together and achieve common goals that improve their collective economic, social, cultural and/or environmental situation.\(^\text{12}\)

Concentrated Poverty: is defined in terms of the percentage of households in a geographic area that live below the Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut-Off. The threshold at which problems begin to emerge appears to be about 26%. The “tipping point” for serious problems, which can be very hard to reverse, is about 40\%.\(^\text{13}\)

Focus Neighbourhoods: the eight selected neighbourhoods that are the focus of the Strong Neighbourhood Initiative. Each of these neighbourhoods may use a different name to refer to the initiative in their community.

Neighbourhood Capacity: the ability of residents to work together to find local solutions to particular problems and to collectively influence local and higher-level change.\(^\text{14}\)

Prevention: creating conditions or personal attributes that strengthen the healthy development, well-being, and safety of individuals across the lifespan, and/or communities, in order to prevent the onset or further development of problems in each of these domains. In the research-based risk and protection prevention paradigm, prevention occurs by reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors.\(^\text{15}\)

Social Cohesion: a community or communities where there is a common vision and sense of belonging between people; where the diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and valued; and where people from these different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, and strong and positive relationships are developed between people from these different backgrounds.

Social Exclusion: The process of being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of a person into the community.

Social Inclusion: A socially inclusive society is defined as one where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity.\(^\text{16}\)

Social Isolation: The absence of social interactions, contacts, and relationships with family and friends, neighbours and the broader society.

Theory of Change: describes the process of desired social change by making explicit the way we think about the current situation or problem, its underlying causes, the long-term change we seek, and what needs to happen in society for that change to come about.\(^\text{17}\)

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\(^{10}\) FCSS, “FCSS Calgary Research Brief No. 5, Outcome: Strong Neighbourhoods, November 2009, page 7.


\(^{12}\) CSN, “Community & Social Development Program: Community Social Worker Core Services & Competencies, August 2011, page 1.

\(^{13}\) FCSS Calgary, “FCSS Social Sustainability Framework and Funding Priorities: Preventing Concentrated Poverty-Identifying Focus Neighbourhoods”, 2009, page 1.


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*References are available at www.calgary.ca


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