NCN Child and Young Person Wellbeing Strategy

A New Approach for Child and Young Person Services

Prepared by: Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation FAMILY AND COMMUNITY Wellness Centre Inc.

Children and young people are our most valuable resource.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A New Approach to Improve the Overall Wellness of NCN Children and Youth

The purpose of the Strategy is to create a framework to improve child and youth wellbeing. The framework provides a shared understanding of what children and young people want and need for good wellbeing. It sets out what we can all do to support them to have good lives.

The Strategy aims to identify the nature and scale of changes needed in policy, funding, and service delivery for children and their families. To make progress, governments, agencies and service providers need to put the wellbeing of children and young people at the very center of policy, service design and delivery, and provide seamless support. Aligning the efforts and investments of these organizations will make the greatest impact.

Continuum of Care – A Holistic Approach

OUTSIDE SERVICES

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SUPPORT

EXTENDED FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

FAMILY/CAREGIVER

CHILD

(Wellness Centre, Schools, Recreation, NCN Entities, C&C)

The Strategy will only be successfully implemented when outcomes for NCN children and young people improve significantly in multiple areas.
NCN values and beliefs are at the heart of the Strategy. Agencies and partners will need to demonstrate an understanding of NCN needs and aspirations, support self-determination in the approach to improving wellbeing, and respond in ways that enable NCN children and young people to have the same opportunities as others to reach their full potential.

Values and Beliefs
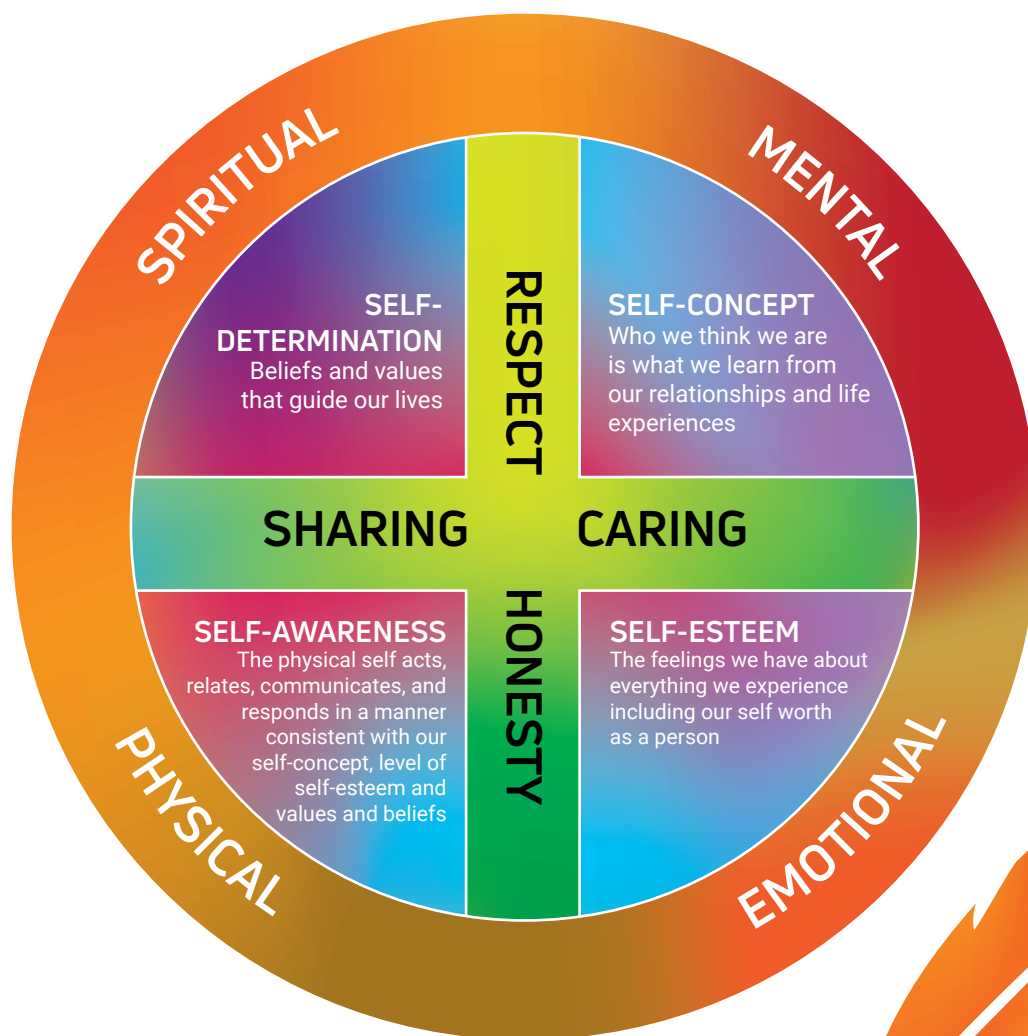
VISION

"NCN is the best place in the world for children and young people to grow, develop and thrive."

This vision is aspirational. NCN has a long way to go to achieve it for all children and young people. Collective action is needed to support each child and young person in the present, as well as ensuring they have the best environment to grow, develop and live a good life. Achieving this vision also means supporting the wellbeing of parents, caregivers, families and the community so that our children and young people thrive. This can be shown like the strands of and sweetgrass braid weaving together to create a strong unified vision.

Support Needs

Nurture Growth

Enhance Development and Learning

Provide Family Supports

CHALLENGES

Improving the wellbeing of those who are missing out.

Too many children and young people are facing significant, often ongoing, hardships and challenges in their lives. These challenges include:

- Growing up in households considered to be in poverty;

- Exposure to sexual and physical violence;

- Being taken into care due to family violence, abuse or neglect;

NCN will never be the best place in the world for children and young people if these challenges are not addressed.

FRAGMENTATION OF EFFORT

Despite investments in policies, services and local initiatives, inequities for many children and young people have proven difficult to shift. Like other communities, a key problem is one of 'fragmentation of effort.' At a policy level, there are too many policies that were developed and implemented in silos. Fragmentation and lack of coordination happens vertically (between national, provincial and local government), horizontally (between different agencies and service providers), by age (such as prenatal and postnatal, preschool, school age, and post-secondary), and by different areas of support (such as parenting support, family violence, job seeker).

This same fragmentation is replicated in government

and non-governmental contracted services. Investment is often ad hoc, not sustained, and with little responsiveness to new evidence or cultural knowledge, including insights from service users (such as children, young people, and their families). This results in different groups all trying to solve different parts of the puzzle. Essentially, there has been no unifying message or way of talking about child and youth wellbeing in NCN or way of aligning efforts to a common set of goals.

Aligning the actions of governments, service providers and the community has the potential to create the transformative change required for the Strategy to achieve its vision.

ACHIEVING TRANSFORMATION

Full implementation of the Strategy will take time and requires collective effort. The Strategy aims to remove barriers and support collaboration. It does this in three ways:

1. It provides a common direction and requires accountability across various governments and agencies so that broader social, environmental and economic policies work better together to drive change and enable collective effort, including locally-grown solutions;

2. It places priority on addressing the challenges and inequities experienced by NCN children and young people and improving services and support for those with the greatest needs; and

3. By committing to achieving wellbeing for all children and young people, and regularly reporting on progress, it creates an environment where informal networks and the family and community members closest to the child can demand change and accountability.

Transformation Will Take Time

Clear Jurisdictions

Improved Policies

Local Solutions

Reduce Inequity

Improved Services

Improved Supports

Improved Tracking and Reporting of Results/Progress

Accountability

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE OUR MOST VALUABLE RESOURCE

This principle recognizes and respects the intrinsic value and inherent dignity of children and young people. This principle means placing priority on children and young people's wellbeing every day and making sure their views inform solutions.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S RIGHTS NEED TO BE RESPECTED AND UPHELD

This principle commits to respecting and upholding children's rights in NCN, including the rights derived from the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (UNROC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

ALL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DESERVE A GOOD LIFE

The Strategy recognizes that all children and young people should experience good wellbeing, regardless of their circumstances. It also recognizes that to achieve greater equity of outcomes, some children and young people need more support. The Strategy prioritizes access to quality, non-stigmatizing universal services that can be supplemented with further support according to need.

Applying this principle will mean every child and young person has the support they need to participate fully in society and to reach their potential.

WELLBEING NEEDS HOLISTIC AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES

Wellbeing is multidimensional. The broad framing of wellbeing used in this Strategy includes concepts of mental, physical, spiritual, family, community, emotional and environmental wellbeing. People who apply this principle will consider the whole person – lifestyle, relationships, family, community, culture, the environment they live in and access to resources.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELLBEING IS INTERWOVEN WITH FAMILY AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Children should be viewed in the context of their families, family groups and communities. This principle recognizes that parents, caregivers, families and communities need to have the right kind of support at the right time in order to provide a nurturing environment for their children.

PRINCIPLES

CHANGE REQUIRES ACTION BY ALL OF US

Individuals, organizations, communities and governments need to work together and be collectively responsible for achieving good wellbeing for all children and young people. [Recognizing that the best solutions are often locally designed and delivered, government needs to enable more community-led design and delivery.

EARLY SUPPORT IS NEEDED

The best outcomes occur when there is quality early support – early in the life of the child or early in the life of the problem. Adverse experiences early in a child's life can magnify and accumulate beyond childhood and adolescence, with life-long negative impacts. Policies arising from the Strategy should focus on early support and preventing or minimizing negative outcomes for children, young people, and their families and community.

A child or young person's brain biology and behaviours have a higher adaptive capacity during pregnancy through the first five years of life, and in adolescence. Strategies to strengthen wellbeing should be designed to address these two major opportunities. Prevention is the best approach.
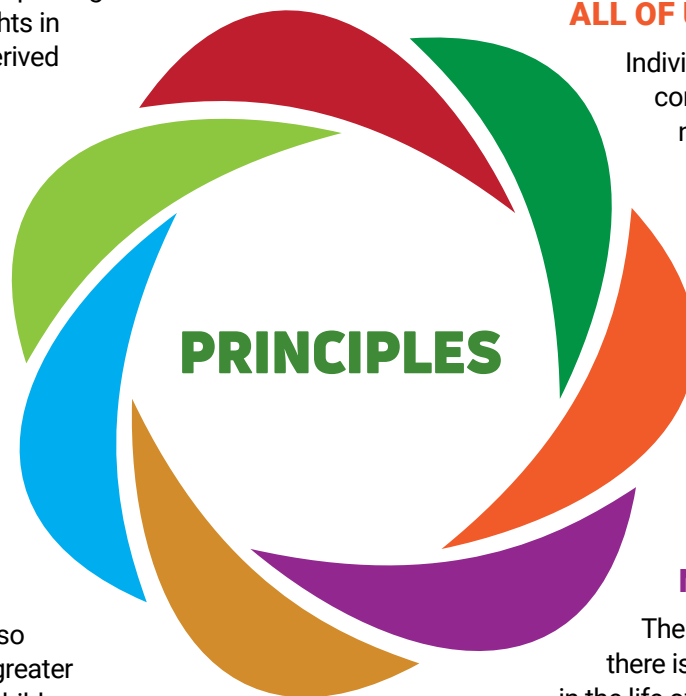
OUTCOMES

Six high-level outcomes for child and youth wellbeing are set out in this Strategy. These outcomes are interconnected and reflect the social and broader economic and environmental factors needed to improve the overall wellbeing of children and young people. Each outcome and why it is important is described in greater detail in Appendix A

This includes loving homes that are free from violence, having time with family, and being safe from avoidable harm and accidents.

This includes support to contribute, be listened to, care for others, make healthy choices and develop autonomy.

This includes income and resources, as well as other important aspects of material wellbeing such as nutritious food and quality housing.

Are Loved, Safe & Nurtured

Are Involved & Empowered

Have What They Need

Children and Young People

Are Accepted, Respected & Connected

Are Happy & Healthy

Are Learning & Developing

This includes feeling a sense of belonging, living free from racism and discrimination, having good relationships and being connected to identity.

This includes physical and mental health, spaces and opportunities to play and healthy environments.

This includes education to build knowledge, skills and capabilities, and encouragement to achieve potential and navigate life's transitions.

APPENDIX A – OUTCOMES

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LOVED, SAFE AND NURTURED

This means:

- They feel loved and supported
- They have family and homes that are loving, safe and nurturing
- They are safe from unintentional harm
- They are safe from intentional harm (including neglect, and emotional, physical and sexual abuse)
- They are able to spend quality time with their parents or caregivers, family and community

Why is this important?

The best place for a child is in the safe, loving and stable care of their families. A stable and quality home environment with love and trust influences a child and young person's wellbeing every day, and their ability to form attachments to others. Parental mental health is important during pregnancy and in a child's early years so that parents can establish loving connections during the critical time of babies' development before and right after birth.

Stable, nurturing relationships are critical to many other aspects of wellbeing and to build resilience and social skills. Parents and families need quality time and the right headspace to develop strong connections with their children. Some parents require more support so they can parents as best they can.

"Stable, nurturing relationships are critical to many other aspects of wellbeing and to build resilience and social skills."

Some children and young people live in families with toxic stress and complex needs, such as the combined impacts of intergenerational trauma, long-term unemployment, low income, unaddressed physical and mental health needs, parental alcohol and drug addiction, and family violence. These families need support in multiple areas so they can care for their children and young people.

Children and young people need to feel safe at home, school and in public. Safety includes physical safety as well as being safe to express themselves without fear of judgement, rejection or harassment.

What do the heads of families, elders, children and young people, and community members say about this outcome?

- How is this outcome relevant to NCN?
- What do you believe are the current challenges NCN children and young people, parents, families

and communities face with respect to this outcome?

- What do you believe is necessary to achieve this outcome?
- In your opinion, what should be prioritized, with respect to this outcome?

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE WHAT THEY NEED

This means:

- They and their parents or caregivers have a good standard of material wellbeing
- They have regular access to nutritious food
- They live in stable housing that is safe, warm and dry
- Their parents or caregivers have the skills and support they need to access quality employment

Why is this important?

All children and young people deserve to grow up in families and communities that have the resources they need for everyone to thrive.

Too many families lack the resources to meet their basic material needs, and are excluded from a minimum acceptable standard of living. Poverty can involve various forms of hardship, such as going hungry, living in unsuitable housing, and missing out on important opportunities like school outings and sports activities.

"Too many families lack the resources to meet their basic material needs, and are excluded from a minimum acceptable standard of living."

Children and young people depend on the resources of their parents, caregivers, family and community to meet their basic material needs. Parents may require support and training to develop the skills necessary to gain and stay in employment. The availability of quality jobs that are adequately paid and recognize family responsibilities is critical.

Housing conditions can have a significant impact on children and young people's wellbeing. Evidence suggests that the disruptive impact of moving frequently, living in crowded conditions, and poor quality housing can all have negative health

consequences. Additionally, food insecurity and inadequate nutrition impact negatively on children's health, development, learning and general wellbeing.

What do the heads of families, elders, children and young people, and community members say about this outcome?

- How is this outcome relevant to NCN?
  - Do you feel that NCN children and young people generally have what they need?
    - Why' or why not?
- What do you feel are the most significant barriers that NCN families face in providing children and young people with what they need?
  - What do these barriers stem from?
  - What is their effect on families?
  - What is their effect on children and young people?
  - What is their effect on the community?
- Are there any groups in particular that are more likely to struggle to provide children and young people with what they need?
  - Why do you think this is?
  - What do you feel might be done to lessen the difficulties these groups face?
- What do you believe is necessary to achieve this outcome?
  - What is necessary in families?
  - What is necessary on a local level?
  - What is necessary broadly?
- In your opinion, what should be prioritized, with respect to this outcome?

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE HAPPY AND HEALTHY

This means:

- They have the best possible health, starting before birth
- They build self-esteem and resilience
- They have good mental wellbeing and can recover from trauma
- They have spaces and opportunities to play and express themselves creatively
- They live in healthy and sustainable environments

Why is this important?

Good health starts early, well before birth. An overwhelming body of evidence shows that what happens in utero affects wellbeing throughout life. It is critical during pregnancy to maintain good physical and mental health, to have access to healthy food and to avoid alcohol and other toxins (which negatively affect a baby's brain development).

Brain development for babies is built by having two-way interactions with the people around them. As babies reach out to the world, nurturing adults respond, cementing brain connections. Time for quality bonding and parental wellbeing underpins successful development in the early years. Without responsive interactions with adults, young children's brain development can be hindered, which can have a lifelong impact.

Parents need good mental health during and after pregnancy, so they can establish a deep and loving connection with their baby. Many refer to the first three months after birth as the fourth trimester, which reflects the huge amount of development happening in those first months. A baby's needs are best met by ensuring parents, caregivers and families have the health and wellbeing the require to love and nurture their baby.

The key to happy and healthy children and young people is having strong, healthy connections to people who love and nurture them. Good physical and mental health is important for wellbeing and as a foundation to achieve developmental milestones, participate in activities and benefit from learning. Good mental wellbeing is critical to positive emotions, social interactions and resilience to stress.

Children and young people also need time and space just to be themselves, to play, explore and create. Homes, learning places, playgrounds, parks and other community spaces need to be inclusive, accessible, welcoming and safe for all.

Children and young people's health and safety extends well into their social environment. This includes access to and regulation of alcohol, drugs, tobacco and gambling in the community. A healthy community with playgrounds, parks, and public spaces encourages good health and wellbeing, and the benefits continue throughout life.

What do the heads of families, elders, children and young people, and community members say about this outcome?

- How is this outcome relevant to NCN?
  - Do you feel that NCN children and young people are happy and healthy?
    - Why or why not?
- What do you feel are the most significant barriers to the health and happiness of children and young people in NCN?
  - What do these barriers stem from?
  - What is their effect on families?
  - What is their effect on children and young people?
  - What is their effect on the community?

- Are there any groups, in particular, that you feel are more likely to experience unsafe or unhealthy environments?
  - Why are these identified groups more likely to experience unsafe or unhealthy environments?
  - What do you feel can be done to lessen the difficulties these groups face?
- What do you believe is necessary to achieve this outcome?
  - What is necessary in families?
  - What is necessary on a local level?
  - What is necessary broadly?
- In your opinion, what should be prioritized, with respect to this outcome?

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LEARNING AND DEVELOPING

This means:

- They are positively engaged with, progressing and achieving in education
- The develop the social, emotional and communication skills they need as they progress through life
- The have the knowledge, skills and encouragement to achieve their potential and enable choices around further education, volunteering, employment and entrepreneurship
- They can successfully navigate life's transitions

Why is this important?

Learning and developing begins with parents, caregivers, families and communities. They have a critical role to support and encourage their children's development and learning throughout their lives. Rich, meaningful experiences and safe and secure relationships in a child's early years are important for children's development and provide a strong foundation for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

Having the time and access to guidance can support parents and caregivers in their child's early years. High-quality early childhood education can also deliver these experiences.

Learning opportunities and experiences develop social, cultural, emotional and cognitive competencies, including resilience, critical thinking and relating well to others. Education has an important role in supporting children and young people to develop the knowledge, competencies and characteristics to be successful in life, and to contribute to their family and their community.

Children and young people learn better when they are engaged, safe and included. This means their needs are understood and their identities, languages, cultures, abilities and personal qualities are recognized, respected and valued. It is critical that NCN's learning environments are inclusive and value and respect NCN identity, language and culture.

"Educators must work to make places of learning welcoming for parents, caregivers, families and the community."

Educators must work to make places of learning welcoming for parents, caregivers, families and the community. Strong relationships promote engagement in education and help make learning relevant. Learning is enabled when every child and young person has regular access to high quality and inclusive learning opportunities. In Manitoba, the educational experiences of children and young people vary, with inequities in opportunities and outcomes. There are a number of reasons inequalities occur, included limited resourcing, racism, discrimination and stigma. This can limit educational engagement, progress and achievement

and the ability of children and young people to fully explore their potential and lead the best lives they can.

Children and young people make many transitions throughout life, including from home through to formal education and into employment. Learners who are also experiencing additional transitions, such as changing home or care situations need more planning and active support. Young people who have been in care or involved with the youth justice system often face more challenges moving into adulthood and independence, including finding secure quality housing and getting social and financial support.

Learning and education involve much more than preparing young people for future employment. It should empower all children and young people, their families and community to establish their own values, connect to their community, set and realize their goals, and live their best lives today and in the future. Young people need support to make the best education choices to enable them to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

What do the heads of families, elders, children and young people, and community members say about this outcome?

- How is this outcome relevant to NCN?
  - Do you feel that NCN children and young people are learning and developing?
    - Why or why not?
- What do you feel are the most significant barriers to the learning and development of children and young people in NCN?
  - What do these barriers stem from?
  - What is their effect on families?
  - What is their effect on children and young people?
  - What is their effect on the community?

- Are there any groups, in particular, that you feel are more likely to experience difficulties with learning and development?
  - Why are these identified groups more likely to experience difficulties with learning and development?
  - What do you feel can be done to lessen the difficulties these groups face?
- How do you feel about what is currently being taught to the children and young people of NCN?
  - Do you feel there are subjects or skills that should be added or emphasized?
- Are there any services or programs you wished that schools would offer?
- What do you think would be helpful to children and youth in navigating life transitions?
- What do you believe is necessary to achieve this outcome?
  - What is necessary in families?
  - What is necessary on a local level?
  - What is necessary broadly?
- In your opinion, what should be prioritized, with respect to this outcome?

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ACCEPTED, RESPECTED AND CONNECTED

This means:

- They feel accepted, respected and valued at home, school, in the community and online
- They feel kindness, respect and compassion for others
- They live free from racism and discrimination
- They have stable and healthy relationships
- They are connected to their culture, language, beliefs and identity

Why is this important?

A positive sense of identity and experience of respectful relationships underpin children and young people's ability to show kindness, respect and compassion for others. Respect for others is important because too many children and young people are bullied and there is no reason to accept this as a normal part of growing up. Friendships and social connections are the foundation for the human need for "belonging" and they protect people from the effects of toxic stress and other adversity.

Children and young people in NCN should live in a community where diversity is not just accepted but embraced and celebrated. Children and young people need safe spaces and time to explore and establish their identities. It is important that they are accepted for who they are without having to fit into narrow and limiting norms.

A strong sense of identity builds higher self-esteem and resilience. Cultural identity is an important aspect of this. Knowing your heritage helps you to understand your identity, connections to others and sense of land, place and time. When children and young people feel connected to their heritage and their community they are likely to have a stronger sense of identity and confidence.

A strong sense of identity builds higher self-esteem and resilience. Cultural identity is an important aspect of this.

The way we communicate, seek information and are influenced by peers, media and commercial interests (online and offline) has increased the information available to, and the pressure placed upon children and young people. Social media, free and uncensored online content (including pornography), and access to smartphones has made big differences to young people's relationships, connections, and the way they see

themselves. Young people need support to navigate the new challenges of real and online relationships and online bullying.

What do the heads of families, elders, children and young people, and community members say about this outcome?

- How is this outcome relevant to NCN?
  - Do you feel that NCN children and young people are accepted, respected and connected?
    - Why or why not?

- What do you feel are the most significant barriers to ensuring that children and young people in NCN feel accepted, respected and connected?
  - What do these barriers stem from?
  - What is their effect on families?
  - What is their effect on children and young people?
  - What is their effect on the community?

- Are there any groups, in particular, that you feel are more likely to experience difficulties with feeling accepted, connected and respected?
  - Why are these identified groups more likely to experience difficulties with this?

- What do you feel can be done to lessen the difficulties these groups face?

- What do you believe is necessary to achieve this outcome?
  - What is necessary in families?
  - What is necessary on a local level?
  - What is necessary broadly?

- In your opinion, what should be prioritized, with respect to this outcome?

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED AND EMPOWERED

This means:

- They contribute positively at home, at school and in their communities

- They feel a connection to the land and nature, and the importance of taking care of it

- They have their voices, perspectives and opinions listened to and taken into account

- They are supported to increase their autonomy as they age and to be responsible citizens

- They and their families are supported to make healthy and informed choices around relationships, sexual health, alcohol, tobacco and other drugs

Why is this important?

Children and young people feel more empowered and are more likely to get involved when they feel positive and comfortable with their own identity. Feeling a sense of value and belonging is a powerful motivator to contribute at home and in communities. Schools and clubs can play a big role because being a part of a team and getting together for sport and recreation helps people feel like they belong and strengthens community participation.

Young people are experts in their own lives and this needs to be valued. Children and young people want their voices to provide insight and perspectives on what matters to them. This Strategy must highlight the rights of children and young people to have their voices heard in matters that affect them. There is an expectation that central and local service providers seek, hear, and empower the views and voices of children and young people.

Children and young people value becoming more independent, from achieving toddler milestones, getting themselves to school, developing their own relationships and online presence, to finding their own place in the world. Actively supporting children and young people to increase their autonomy enables personal growth. Children and young people should be supported to increasingly take part in decision making processes and determine their own futures.

Youth are active, motivated and capable. People have never before been so connected to each other and in touch with community and global issues. Youth-driven enterprises, initiatives and campaigns are common in today's world, and demonstrate young people's motivation and ability to galvanize their peers and influence change.

When children and young people know more about the risks they face and the choices they can make, it helps them to be purposeful about their own wellbeing. Young people and their families want good, accessible and culturally appropriate support to help them make informed choices about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, health and relationships.

What do the heads of families, elders, children and young people, and community members say about this outcome?

- How is this outcome relevant to NCN?
  - Do you feel that NCN children and young people are involved and empowered?
    - Why or why not?

- What do you feel are the most significant barriers to ensuring that children and young people in NCN are involved and empowered?
  - What do these barriers stem from?
  - What is their effect on families?
  - What is their effect on children and young people?
  - What is their effect on the community?

- Are there any groups, in particular, that you feel are more likely to experience difficulties with being involved and empowered?
  - Why are these identified groups more likely to experience difficulties with this?
  - What do you feel can be done to lessen the difficulties these groups face?

- Are there any areas that you feel NCN children and youth are particularly involved in?
  - If so, what areas?
  - How do you feel this involvement benefits children and youth?
  - What has led to this level of involvement? (Policies, programming, community initiatives, etc)

- Are there any areas that you feel NCN children and youth would benefit by being more involved in?
  - If so, what areas?
  - What would that involvement look like?

- What would the benefit of this greater involvement be?
- What do you believe is necessary to achieve this outcome?
  - What is necessary in families?
  - What is necessary on a local level?
  - What is necessary broadly?
- In your opinion, what should be prioritized, with respect to this outcome?

QUESTIONS

- What do you think of the Strategy?

  _____

  _____

- Are there any outcomes you feel are missing?

  _____

  _____

- Are there any outcomes you feel should not be included?

  _____

  _____

- Which outcomes or specific areas do you feel should be prioritized?

  _____

  _____

- What do the children and young people of NCN mean to the community?

  _____

  _____

- Which groups/organizations/governments need to 'buy-in' to the Strategy for it to be successful?

  _____

  _____

- Is there anything you feel is missing from the Strategy?

  _____

  _____