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# Theory of Change

THE CHILD AND YOUTH NETWORK



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on behalf of London's  
Child and Youth Network



# *Table of Contents*

## **SECTION 1**

Background and Context for the Child and Youth Network (CYN) ..... 3

## **SECTION 2**

Theory of Change Definitions and Components ..... 5

## **SECTION 3**

CYN Theory of Change ..... 6

# Background and Context for the CYN

## THE CHILD AND YOUTH NETWORK

In 2007, more than 60 agencies and organizations that provide services for children, youth, and families met to talk about how to improve outcomes for families in London. To move the needle on large-scale and complex challenges, organizations recognized the need to work collectively and came together to form London's Child and Youth Network (CYN). CYN members developed a collective vision to guide the work of the network to 2015:

***“Happy, healthy children and youth today; caring, creative, responsible adults tomorrow.”***

The case for collective action was compelling. In 2007:

- 1 in every 5 children born in London was living in poverty
- More than 1 in 4 were not ready to learn in grade 1
- More than 1 in 5 did not graduate from high school
- 1 in 4 was overweight or obese

In addition, a significant number of children and youth had mental health issues, and a significant number of parents also had mental health and/or addiction challenges.

Not only did statistical research paint a challenging picture of the community, parents themselves identified many concerns. The CYN reached out to families and asked them what they thought of the system of services. Results indicated parents felt the system was difficult to navigate, it had too much duplication, and it took too long to access the services they needed.

It was clear the organizations that provide services for children, youth, and families had to work together to improve outcomes for the 20-25% of children and youth in London who were being left behind.

## THE 2008 CHILD AND YOUTH AGENDA

In 2008, the CYN developed London's Child and Youth Agenda to 2015 – a dynamic, collective plan to improve health, literacy, and well-being for children, youth, and families in London. The first Child and Youth Agenda identified four priority areas for collective focus:

- Ending poverty
- Making literacy a way of life
- Leading the nation in increasing healthy eating and healthy physical activity
- Creating a family-centred service system

In the first three years of implementation, CYN members collaborated on multiple initiatives in these priority areas, impacting the lives of residents across the city; the CYN was recognized multiple times for its work by organizations like Pillar Nonprofit Network (Community Innovation Award for the Westminster Working Group) and the Province of Ontario (Community Integration Leader recognition for the Family-Centred Service System strategy).

In addition to the impact CYN initiatives were having in the community, a fundamental shift was occurring in the service system: organizations were changing the way they worked with each other. Members reported greater levels of collaboration and were turning that collaboration into action:

- The London Public Library, Middlesex-London Health Unit, and the Kiwanis Club of Forest City-London worked together to produce Baby's Book Bags for new parents
- Farmers, food retailers, and Westminster residents collaborated to create a neighbourhood farmer's market
- A host of community partners worked with Glen Caim Public School and the Thames Valley District School Board to provide wraparound supports for grade 7 and 8 students as they transitioned to high school
- London Children's Connection and the South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre partnered to lead Family Centre White Oaks, and the YMCA of Western Ontario partnered with OEYC London Fanshawe to lead the development of Family Centre Argyle

In 2011, the Province named London a "Community Integration Leader" and undertook research to document the evolution of the network.

## THE 2012 CHILD AND YOUTH AGENDA

In 2012, the CYN developed its second three-year Child and Youth Agenda. CYN members confirmed the continued relevance of the four priorities, while articulating three shifts in strategy to refine the network's approach:

1. Deepen the integration of the priorities – this strategy involved identifying more opportunities where priorities intersect to make the most of opportunities to strengthen children, youth and families across multiple dimensions.
2. Increase focus on youth – the first Child and Youth Agenda focused largely on younger children; this approach was broadened in the second Child and Youth Agenda to "feed the evolution" and find solutions that work for youth.
3. Adopt a Collective Impact lens – in 2012, the CYN recognized the close alignment of its approach with the Collective Impact model of structured collaboration developed by FSG; the CYN therefore elected to adopt Collective Impact as a way to understand its collective change effort.

# Theory of Change Definitions and Components

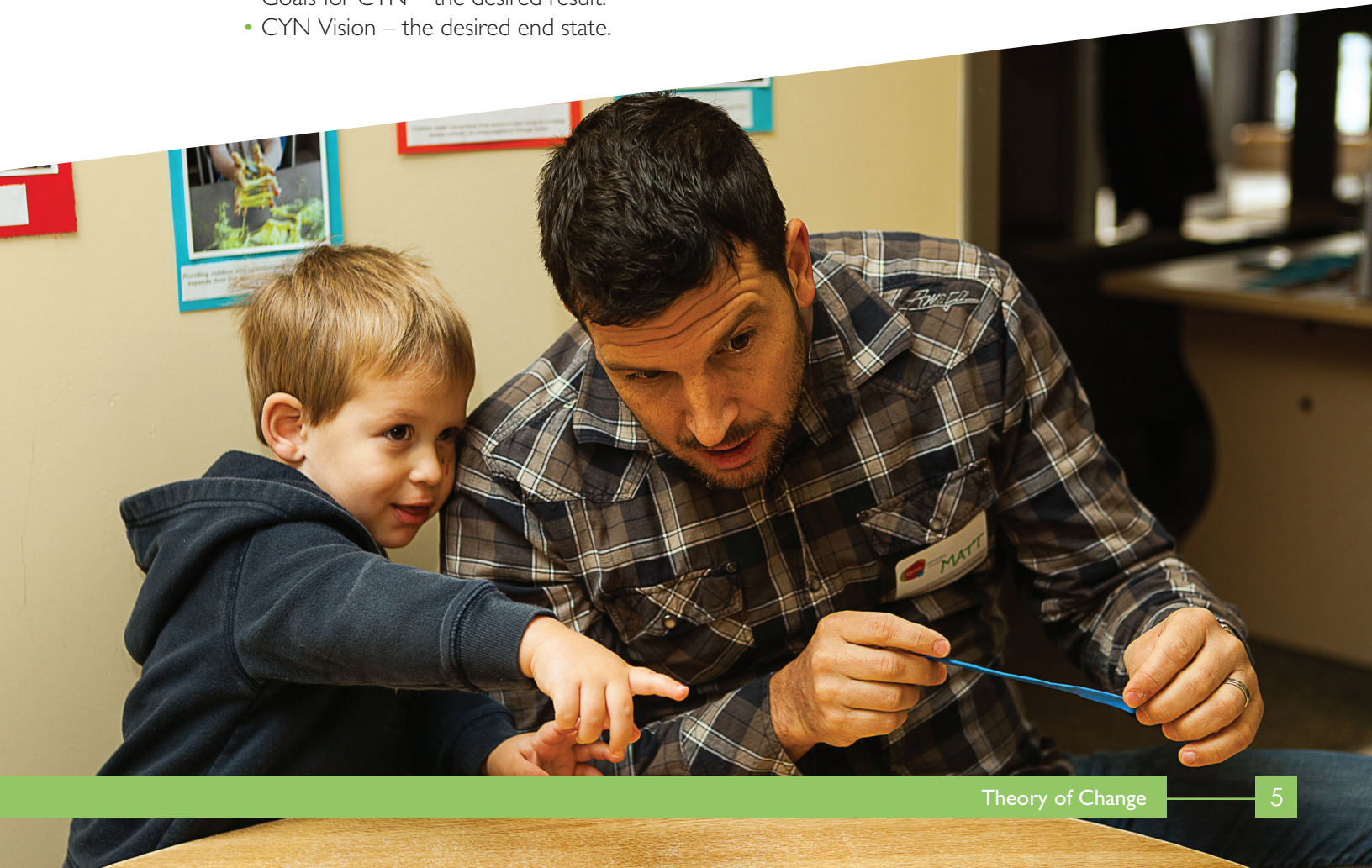
## THEORY OF CHANGE DEFINITION

A Theory of Change (TOC) applies critical thinking to the design, implementation, and evaluation of initiatives envisioned to create social change. Through the articulation of strategic pathways, a Theory of Change serves as a core component of a transformation effort, providing a logical sequence for change to occur. The mapping of the logical sequence is strengthened by critical thinking about the contextual factors and assumptions that influence change.

## CYN THEORY OF CHANGE COMPONENTS DEFINED

The CYN's Theory of Change includes the following components:

- Compelling Case – the rationale for system change and working together differently.
- Strategy – the process through which change is created.
- Approach – how change occurs.
- Priorities – focus areas through which change is created.
- Strategies – initiatives that drive and create change.
- Outcomes – the intended results of the change initiatives.
- Goals for CYN – the desired result.
- CYN Vision – the desired end state.



## *CYN Theory of Change*

### OVERVIEW OF THE CYN THEORY OF CHANGE

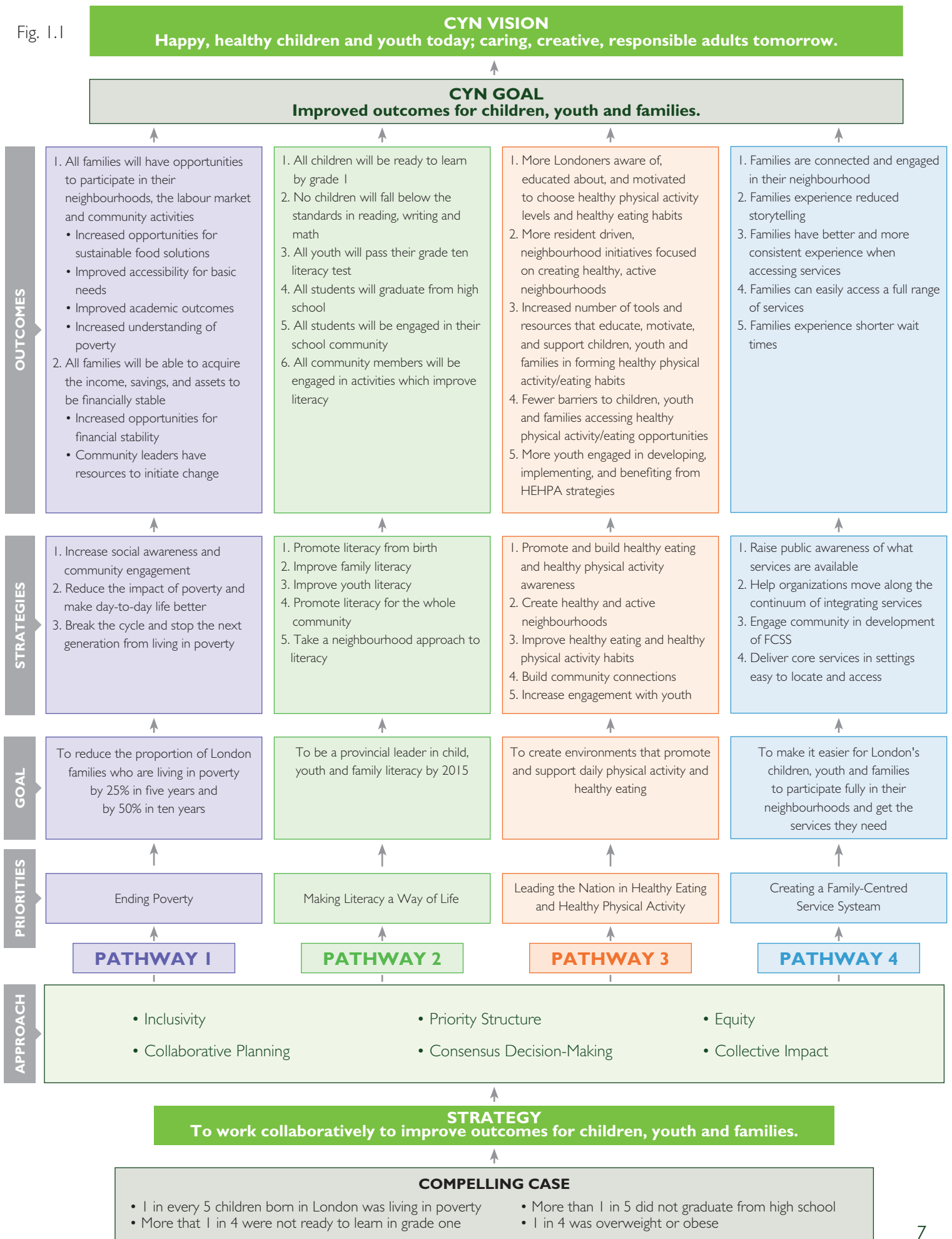
Collectively, the CYN Theory of Change demonstrates how the Child and Youth Network will achieve its vision of **happy, healthy children and youth today; caring, creative, responsible adults tomorrow** through a series of change pathways.

The compelling case, strategy, and approach are components that serve as the foundation of the Theory of Change. The Theory of Change then diverges into four pathways, all with distinct, but interrelated, priorities, goals, strategies, and outcomes. The pathways then merge into a common goal and vision.

Fig. 1.1 outlines each Theory of Change component and primary change pathway.



Fig. 1.1



## COMPELLING CASE FOR A CALL TO ACTION

While most children and youth in London were doing well, between 20-25% faced economic, socio-cultural, education, and physical factors putting them and their families at risk:

- 1 in every 5 children born in London was living in poverty
- More than 1 in 4 were not ready to learn in grade 1
- More than 1 in 5 did not graduate from high school
- 1 in 4 was overweight or obese
- A significant number of children and youth had mental health issues
- A significant number of parents had mental health and/or addiction problems
- Families reported the system was difficult to navigate, had too much duplication, and it took too long to access the services they needed

## STRATEGY

To work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

## APPROACH

The Child and Youth Network's approach is premised on open, member-driven collaboration. This philosophy informs the CYN approach in a number of ways:

**Inclusivity** – Membership in the CYN is an “open door” where barriers to participation are minimized; any individual or organization interested in working together on the network's four shared priorities is welcome to participate. Members' degree of involvement varies organization-to-organization and individual-to-individual.

**Collaborative Planning** – Shared planning generates shared commitment. CYN members work together to develop a common plan of action; the Child and Youth Agendas are collaboratively-generated three-year plans that outline the initiatives on which CYN members wish to work together. Through this intensive planning process, members identified shared principles for CYN initiatives. These principles include: building on existing programs and partnerships; using strategies that have proven to be effective; taking a lifecycle approach to planning for children, youth and families; and addressing mental health and safety issues within the priorities.

**Priority Structure** – The “issue-based” priorities - Ending Poverty, Healthy Eating & Healthy Physical Activity, and Making Literacy a Way of Life – are organized into task teams aligned with their strategic plans; these task teams vary in size, structure, and strategy in accordance with the aims of a particular initiative. Typically, an issue-based priority will have a Project Manager, a Community Chair, and a City of London resource.

The Family-Centred Service System priority is organized into a system-wide governance body and multiple neighbourhood planning teams. These groups are comprised of CYN members, with backbone support from City of London staff.



**Consensus Decision-Making** – The CYN uses a consensus model for decision-making wherever possible. All members agree to plans and strategies via endorsement processes; this includes the Child and Youth Agenda, for which CYN members are asked to provide a letter of endorsement. Endorsement for new strategies is sought first at the priority level, and subsequently at the CYN level, before they move forward.

**Equity** – Regardless of an organization’s size, all CYN members have an equal stake in collaborative planning, implementation, and outcomes. The CYN follows the principle of “one organization, one vote” for endorsement requests.

**Collective Impact** – The CYN has adopted the Collective Impact approach as a tool to understand and refine how it approaches collaborative work. The five conditions of Collective Impact include: a common agenda; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communication; shared measurement systems; and backbone support. Further reading on the Collective Impact approach is available at the Stanford Social Innovation Review: [http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective\\_impact](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact).

## PATHWAYS

The following section outlines the four pathways from priorities to outcomes.



### PATHWAY I: END POVERTY

#### **Priority: Ending Poverty**

Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to experience decreased quality of health and are less likely to graduate from high school or find employment. Poverty is not sector-specific and affects all aspects of our community. In 2008, the community identified Ending Poverty as a priority for London's children, youth, and families. At that time, there were many impactful statistics that illustrated the impact of poverty in London, but there was one that crystallized the issue; 1 in 5 London children will experience poverty during their childhood. This was, and is, intolerable.

To end poverty we must understand and address systemic barriers that exist within our public and private lives. The Ending Poverty team's collaborative approach utilizes the energy and talent of community partners to create opportunities that seek to: increase social awareness and community engagement; reduce the impact of poverty and make day-to-day life better, and, ultimately; break the cycle.

#### **Goal**

The goal of the End Poverty priority is to reduce the proportion of London families who are living in poverty by 25% in five years and by 50% in 10 years.

#### **Strategies**

- Increase social awareness and community engagement
- Reduce the impact of poverty and make day-to-day life better
- Break the cycle and stop the next generation from living in poverty

#### **Outcomes**

- All families will have opportunities to participate in their neighbourhoods, the labour market, and community activities
  - Increased opportunities for sustainable food solutions in London's neighbourhoods
  - Improved accessibility of basic needs for all Londoners
  - Improved academic outcomes and stronger community and neighbourhood connections for young people
  - Increased understanding of issues of poverty that affect our community
- All families will be able to acquire the income, savings, and assets to be financially stable
  - Increased opportunities and accessibility for young people and families to become more financially stable through acquiring income, savings and assets
  - Community leaders provided with knowledge and resources to initiate change in their area of influence (community/business/institution, etc.)

### PATHWAY 2: LITERACY

#### *Priority: Making Literacy a Way of Life*

Children who struggle with literacy will become youth and adults who struggle with literacy. Literacy touches everyone at every stage of life. It is essential for people to reach their full potential. Although London is comparable in terms of literacy – no better or worse than other communities – being average costs the community socially and economically.

Literacy is more than the ability to read, write, and calculate; it is the ability to process, comprehend, and use information. People with low literacy cannot participate fully in social and cultural activities. They also face difficulties competing in an economy that relies more on a skilled information workforce.

To improve literacy for London's children, youth, and families London will use an integrated approach based on collaboration among home, school, and community. Every effort will be made to ensure that literacy initiatives: address the mental health and safety needs of children, youth, and families; are inclusive; and improve access to literacy services for diverse populations.

#### **Goal**

The goal of the literacy-focused priority is to be a provincial leader in child, youth, and family literacy by 2015.

#### **Strategies**

- Promote literacy from birth
- Improve family literacy
- Improve youth literacy
- Promote literacy to the whole community
- Take a neighbourhood approach to literacy

#### **Outcomes**

- All children will be ready to learn by grade 1
- No children will fall below the standards in reading, writing, and math
- All youth will pass their grade 10 literacy test
- All students will graduate from high school
- All students will be engaged in their school community
- All community members will be engaged in activities which improve literacy

### PATHWAY 3: HEALTHY EATING AND HEALTHY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY (HEHPA)

#### *Priority: Leading the Nation in Healthy Eating and Healthy Physical Activity*

Children who are overweight or are not physically active are more likely to develop health problems. They will be at a greater risk of developing diseases such as diabetes, stroke, and heart disease. They may have problems with their growth and development, which could potentially impact their mental health and their readiness to learn. They are more likely to suffer from isolation, depression, stress and discrimination, and they are unlikely to live as long as their peers.

In London, child and youth health statistics are troubling. Approximately 36% of children and youth aged 12 to 19 in Middlesex-London report being inactive during leisure time, and approximately 26% of children and youth aged 12 to 17 report being obese or overweight (Public Health Ontario, 2015).

The contributors to obesity and physical inactivity among children and youth are complex and interdependent. They range across many dimensions - from large-scale factors such as globalization, cultural norms, and policy development, to individual factors such as personal body image, employment status, and general interest in leisure/sport activities. Because of the complex inter-relationships of these factors, no one intervention can be held accountable for changes in obesity or activity rates. As a result, the HEHPA priority uses a multilayered approach with the belief that the more 'collective' action there is related to multilayered interventions, the greater the impact there will be on overall health outcomes.

The HEHPA priority therefore works to address the factors that contribute to physical inactivity and obesity by working collaboratively on projects that engage all levels of our community, including residents, service providers, and different levels of government. To make a difference in the lives of children and youth, our community is taking responsibility for improving access, knowledge, and resources related to healthy eating and healthy physical activity.

#### **Goal**

The goal is to create environments that promote and support daily physical activity and healthy eating.

#### **Strategies**

- Promote and build healthy eating and healthy physical activity awareness
- Create healthy and active neighbourhoods
- Improve healthy eating and healthy physical activity habits through product creation and promotion
- Build community connections to healthy eating/activity opportunities for families
- Increase engagement with youth across all healthy eating and healthy physical initiatives

## Outcomes

- More Londoners aware of, educated about, and motivated to choose healthy physical activity levels and healthy eating habits
- More resident driven, neighbourhood initiatives focused on creating healthy, active neighbourhoods
- Increased number of tools and resources that educate, motivate, and support children, youth, and families in forming healthy physical activity/eating habits
- Fewer barriers to children, youth, and families accessing healthy physical activity/eating opportunities
- More youth engaged in developing, implementing, and benefiting from HEHPA strategies



### PATHWAY 4: FAMILY-CENTRED SERVICE SYSTEM (FCSS)

#### *Priority: Creating a Family-Centred Service System*

When families do not know the full range of services available, they may not receive the right mix of services to help them raise happy, healthy children. When families do not find the system easy to use because it is frustrating to navigate, they may not access the services and supports they need early enough.

London has a large number of organizations that provide services for children, youth, and families. The community also has many other services that are not child, youth, or family specific but that provide services to families, such as the police and the court system, the shelter system, housing programs, and food bank programs. However, London families reported they often have trouble connecting with the services they need; they do not know what services are available, where to find out about them, or how to access them.

In addition to a lack of information, children, youth, and families face other barriers to accessing services, such as transportation, stigma/fear, wait lists, scheduling conflicts, financial barriers, and restrictive criteria that keep families who could benefit from being able to use certain services. Even when families do manage to connect with services, they may have to speak with several different providers and agencies that may not know about each other's work or collaborate to create a more seamless service experience for families.

Organizations in London are committed to working together to improve outcomes for families. The FCSS strategy is fundamentally about strengthening families – about working together to build a more integrated, responsive, and effective service system that helps families access the supports they need to be successful in all aspects of their lives.

#### **Goal**

The goal of the Family-Centred Service System is to make it easier for London's children, youth and families to participate fully in their neighbourhoods and get the services they need.

#### **Strategies**

- Raise public awareness of what services are available and where they are located in the community
- Help organizations move along the continuum of integrating services through the development of partnerships and Interprofessional Communities of Practice
- Engage the community – children, youth, families, service providers, neighbourhoods, and other partners – in the development of a neighbourhood-based, family-centred service system
- Create consistency and continuity amongst neighbourhoods by delivering core services in settings that are easy for parents to locate and access

#### **Outcomes**

- Families are connected and engaged in their neighbourhood
- Families experience reduced storytelling
- Families have a better and more consistent experience when accessing services
- Families can easily access a full range of services
- Families experience shorter wait times

## CYN GOAL

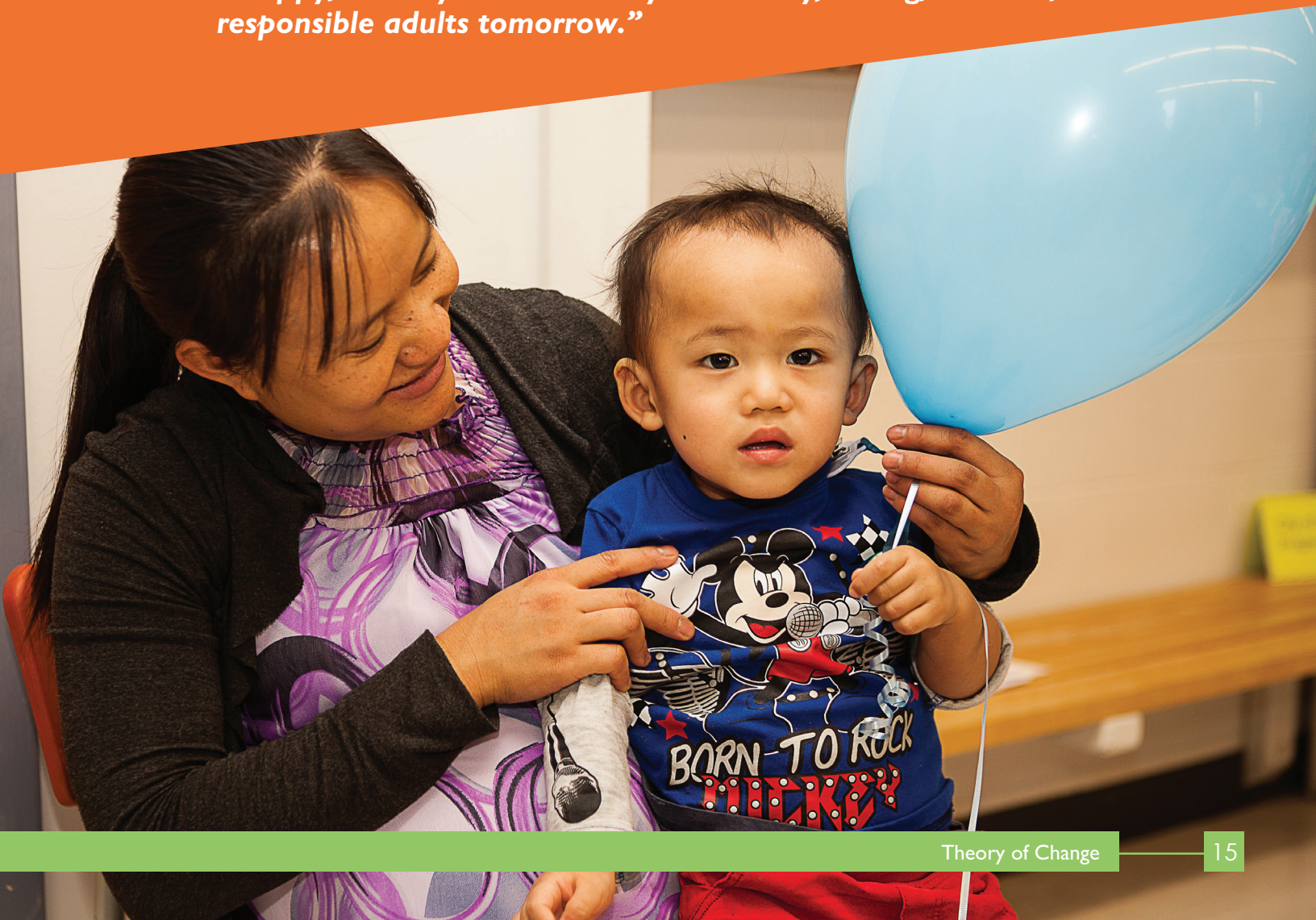
The CYN's priorities are a reflection of community need. To help children, youth, and families to be successful, CYN members rallied their collective efforts around four interrelated priorities that support London families in an emergent and holistic way. All four pathways converge at the CYN goal:

***Improved outcomes for children, youth and families***

## CYN VISION

Achievement of the CYN goal will lead to the achievement of the CYN vision:

***“Happy, healthy children and youth today; caring, creative, responsible adults tomorrow.”***



# *Theory of Change*

THE CHILD AND YOUTH NETWORK