

MEASURING OUR OUTCOMES: HOW DO WE KNOW WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

In 2000, an environmental scan identified that FCSS programs did not have the capacity to monitor outcomes of program delivery. They could report on the number of services and projects provided, number of participants, dollars spent, cost per participant - but were unable to answer “So what? What difference do FCSS projects and services make to people and communities?”

In 2001, the FCSSAA piloted a “program logic model” with seven local FCSS programs. Similar to a flowchart, a program logic model provides the basic framework for evaluation based on outcomes, not just outputs (numbers or lists of activities). The Making a Difference (MAD) Outcome Evaluation System was initiated with two basic components: to build the capacity of FCSS programs to develop program logic models, and to support outcome data collection with survey and analysis tools.

Based on feedback from the 2007 FCSS Program Review and feedback from FCSS directors, there were several gaps and needs to successfully implement outcome measures and the practice of continuous quality improvement. In Spring 2009, a Provincial FCSS Outcome Measures Steering Committee was established to oversee the initiative. The work was renamed the FCSS Outcome Measures Initiative. Outcome Measures trainers were assigned to provide support and guidance to FCSS programs and an outcome measures training curriculum was developed.

In March 2012, the “Provincial Outcomes Measures Framework” was released. The document provides the overarching, high level outcomes and indicators for use by all FCSS programs. The intent of the Framework is to provide better qualitative information to supplement the outputs and success stories that historically have represented the fabric of FCSS. Through the use of the FCSS Outcomes Model, FCSS programs are able to contribute more consistent measurement of the collective impact that FCSS funded projects and services have on the well-being of Albertans across the province.

In 2012, all FCSS programs were required to begin collecting outcome data for a minimum of one program/project, and all FCSS programs were required to complete the 2012 Provincial Outcome Report. In early 2013, a letter was sent to all CAOs and FCSS directors clarifying the reporting requirements.

In 2012, the reporting template for FCSS outcomes was added to the FCSS on-line reporting system. Over 50% of FCSS programs submitted their 2011 provincial outcomes reports, which represented an increase of 17% over 2010. For 2012, follow up has been made with all 207 programs to ensure they provide some information, or request an exemption based on their unique circumstances. The information from the 2012 outcomes reports will be compiled and shared with all FCSS programs in spring of 2014.

Work has been completed on the companion measures document (a resource of sample outcome statements, indicators and measurement tools) to support the use of consistent measurement tools for the common outcomes and indicators identified in the Outcomes Model. The document will be distributed to FCSS programs in January 2014.

To ensure that the best information possible is being collected on the FCSS outcomes that align with the Social Policy Framework, the ministry is selecting specific measures for FCSS reporting purposes. This abbreviated set of measures will be provided to FCSS programs along with instructions, in February 2014. FCSS programs can continue to choose outcomes, indicators and measures that are relevant to their local programs/ projects for their own evaluation purposes. For provincial reporting purposes, FCSS programs will be asked to select measures from the abbreviated version.

The information provided through outcome measures data collection and reporting helps in identifying the collective impact of FCSS programs and services on the well-being of individuals, families and communities in Alberta. This information has been valuable in providing data for the RBB review of the FCSS Program.

FCSS PROVINCIAL OUTCOME MEASURES FRAMEWORK

The FCSS Outcomes Model

Vision

Alberta's diverse people building strong communities through positive, caring interaction and mutual respect.

Mission

FCSS is a partnership between the Government of Alberta, municipalities and Métis Settlements that develops locally-driven preventive social initiatives to enhance the well-being of individuals, families and communities.

Statement of Need

Individuals, families and communities in Alberta may not always have the resources or capacity to enhance their own social well-being. Unless the strengths, skills and abilities of individuals, families and communities are enhanced, life challenges can impact their social well-being.

FCSS enhances the social well-being of individuals, families and community through prevention - and that is the overarching goal of the FCSS Program.

Prevention occurs by building resilience, by identifying and enhancing individual, family and community assets. This is done by enhancing the strengths, skills and abilities of individuals, families and community to be more resilient and better able to deal with a stress or challenge that may result in future problems. Prevention also involves building individual or environmental safeguards that enhance the ability to deal with stress life events, risks or hazards, and promote the ability to adapt and respond constructively. Prevention includes addressing protective and risk factors, which can exist within individuals and across the various settings in which individuals live, such as the family, peer group, school and community.

Measuring our outcomes is based on the following FCSS principles, beliefs and values:

- A community's most valuable asset is its people. Investments made in developing and supporting people pay dividends in all areas of community life.
- All people are valuable and we value all people and their capabilities.
- Each of us can make valuable contributions to our communities, and our communities need the contributions of all of us.
- Working together allows us, as citizens, to contribute directly to our community, which in turn is linked to positive outcomes for individuals, families and community.

- Each municipality and Métis Settlement has unique programming needs and is best able to determine what its own needs are, and propose solutions to meet them.
- Municipalities and Métis Settlements can support individuals, families and communities by providing well-designed preventive social programs.
- FCSS programs help people to help themselves.
- FCSS programs create and maintain community connections by mobilizing and engaging the community and using partnerships to address local issues.
- FCSS programs learn from experience, each other and research.
- FCSS programs are accountable.

And so, it only makes sense that if local FCSS programs set priorities based on the social needs and issues in their communities, and provide services directly, or fund projects and services accordingly, then it is more likely that individuals, families and community will have access to preventive services that enhance their social well-being.

Strategic Directions

The FCSS Outcomes Model identifies five Strategic Directions (SD), which are the five regulatory statements in the FCSS Regulation - the statements are what direct the work of FCSS. In addition to being preventive in nature, FCSS programs must do one or more of the following:

- (SD 1) help people to develop independence, strengthen coping skills, and become more resistant to crisis
- (SD 2) help people develop an awareness of social needs
- (SD 3) help people to develop interpersonal and group skills which enhance constructive relationships among people
- (SD 5) help people and communities to assume responsibility for decisions and actions which affect them

These strategic directions may be viewed as a continuum to achieve the overarching goal of enhanced social well-being of individuals, families and community through prevention. However, each one is also unique and distinct within itself.

