

# Strategic Plan

2017 – 2020

*Health Eco-system –  
Connecting one person  
at a time*

**NORTHWESTERN  
COUNSELING**  
& SUPPORT SERVICES



## Our Executive Director's Welcome

The healthcare eco-system is the convergence of otherwise separate entities, such as life sciences organizations, providers and payers, as well as social and government agencies.

Today, the healthcare “system” is now better understood as an eco-system of interconnected stakeholders, each one charged with a mission to improve the quality of care while lowering its cost. To ensure the safety and quality care of persons served while realizing savings, these stakeholders are building new relationships.

As this process evolves it is understandable how many of our local partners may not fully understand the depth of the role NCSS plays in our community. Part of this plan, over the next three years, is intended to help members of our eco-system understand what we do, where we provide services, and the population we serve.

NCSS unites our community by providing services and programs to promote healthy living and emotional well-being. We invite you to review this Strategic Plan and share our vision for how NCSS can play a leadership role within our local health eco-system.



**Ted J. Mable, Ed.D.**  
*Executive Director*

*Our Mission is to ensure that the residents of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties have access to high quality services, which promote healthy living and emotional well-being.*

Northwestern Counseling & Support Services, Inc. (NCSS) has distinguished itself as a quality organization committed to creating a stronger community for Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, one person at a time. What sets NCSS apart is our commitment to quality, our belief in the importance of education and training, our ability to develop innovative programming, our passion for collaboration, and most importantly our committed and dedicated staff.





***Our Values*** provide a foundation and drive our decision making.

- Ensuring the **safety** and well-being of employees and persons served
- **Responsiveness** through timely and effective services
- Delivering services with **compassion** through appreciation of diversity, with empathy and respect
- Unwavering commitment to **integrity** ensures we live up to what we say we are going to do

***Our Organizational Commitments*** reflect our quality.

- A commitment to being the **highest quality** mental health organization in Vermont
- An abiding **concern for the well-being** of our clients and a commitment to improving their lives through counseling and support
- Education and training support of staff to develop new programs based on **evidence-based practices**
- An appreciation of the **diversity and culture** of our staff and clients as well as their individualized beliefs
- Development of **innovative programming** to address community and individual needs

# Accomplishments from our 2011-2016 Strategic Plan

- Developed flexible, coachable and solution-oriented as universal job competencies to enhance our “hire for attitude” model for all employees
- Evaluated our internal organizational structure to align with the changing healthcare environment, alongside developing a career ladder to retain quality employees
- Integration with law enforcement: St. Albans City Police and VT State Police
- Expanded our Diversity Awareness Committee activities and commitment to be more welcoming to our employees, people we serve, and our community
- Leader in implementation of Integrated Behavioral Health in primary care; located in 100% patient centered medical homes
- Implementation of Integrated Family Services
- Statewide leadership role with the development and implementation of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment (CANS)
- Expanded Crisis Services to include Mobile Crisis Outreach
- Successful work with Creative Workforce Solutions and Vocational Rehabilitation to increase employment rates
- Expanded autism services
- Community partner with reducing high emergency department utilization
- Implemented and expanded Youth Mental Health First Aid
- Launched an interactive agency website and increased the use of social media
- Became a Trauma Informed Care agency with a cross divisional committee to support the initiative
- Introduced an Independent Living Assessment at Academy of Learning to track outcomes
- Established a staff Wellness Committee
- Established an Acute Care program for adults stuck in long-term residential placements
- Selected as pilot site for Zero Suicide
- Collaborated with the Health Department, Home Health and Northwestern Medical Center to develop home-based post-partum mood services to better meet the needs of new mothers and their families
- Worked closely with area schools to implement Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports (PBIS), which is a population health approach to overall school wellness
- Engaged with community partners to improve school attendance through a social determinant framework which promotes overall family wellness

# S.W.O.T. Summary

## Strengths

- High quality employees
- High quality services
- Client centered care
- Growth and size of the organization
- Culture of organization; welcoming, warm, inviting and supportive
- Excellent internal and external collaboration
- Strong clinical knowledge
- Strong community partnerships
- National accreditation
- Broad range of services and a continuum of care
- Access: No Wrong Door
- Community outreach
- Expansive Evidence Based Practices
- Strong relationships with other Designated Agencies
- Outcomes based work

## Weaknesses

- Stigma
- Not the designated provider for adult substance abuse services
- Employee turnover in key positions
- Lack of knowledge in the community of the services we provide
- Role strain/high case loads
- Access/waitlist for underfunded programs
- Limited public transportation
- Lack of understanding of adult eligibility requirements in Developmental Services
- Frequent changes with compliance, regulation, and internal controls
- Maintaining connectedness with staff at satellite locations
- Limited recreational activities in the community

## Opportunities

- Student loan assistance
- Strengthen community relationships through health care reform
- After school programming
- Residential programing
- Wellness and nutrition activities for clients and staff
- Work with Vermont Care Partners for solution with information sharing
- Peer supports and mentors
- Health care initiatives
- Substance abuse treatment
- Expand co-located services
- Mind-body treatments with meditation
- Value based payments
- Unified Electronic Health Record

## Threats

- Health care and payment reform
- Federal and state budget cuts
- Increase substance abuse
- Limited public transportation
- Limited number of social workers in the field
- Outgrowing of our space
- Student loan debt
- Lack of competitive salaries
- Lack of affordable housing
- Significant housing funding cuts
- Changing political climate
- Lack of local residential programming



# Environmental Scan

## Political

- Changes in state and national government
- Health care delivery and payment reform
- High utilization of emergency department
- Difficulty accessing psychiatric hospitalization statewide
- Out of state residential placements for kids
- Challenges with decentralized psychiatric system

## Economic

- State of Vermont budget deficit
- Low livable wage
- Poverty rate
- Cost of living in Vermont
- Keeping Vermont college grads in state after graduation
- Student debt

## Technological

- Unified Electronic Medical Records (EHR)
- Sharing of health information
- Lack of broadband and cellular coverage in rural areas

## Social

- Substance abuse
- Increased rate of children in DCF custody
- Increased acuity of people being served in the community
- Gaps in service for people with Traumatic Brain Injury, intellectual disability who do not meet DS funding, and geriatric psychiatry needs

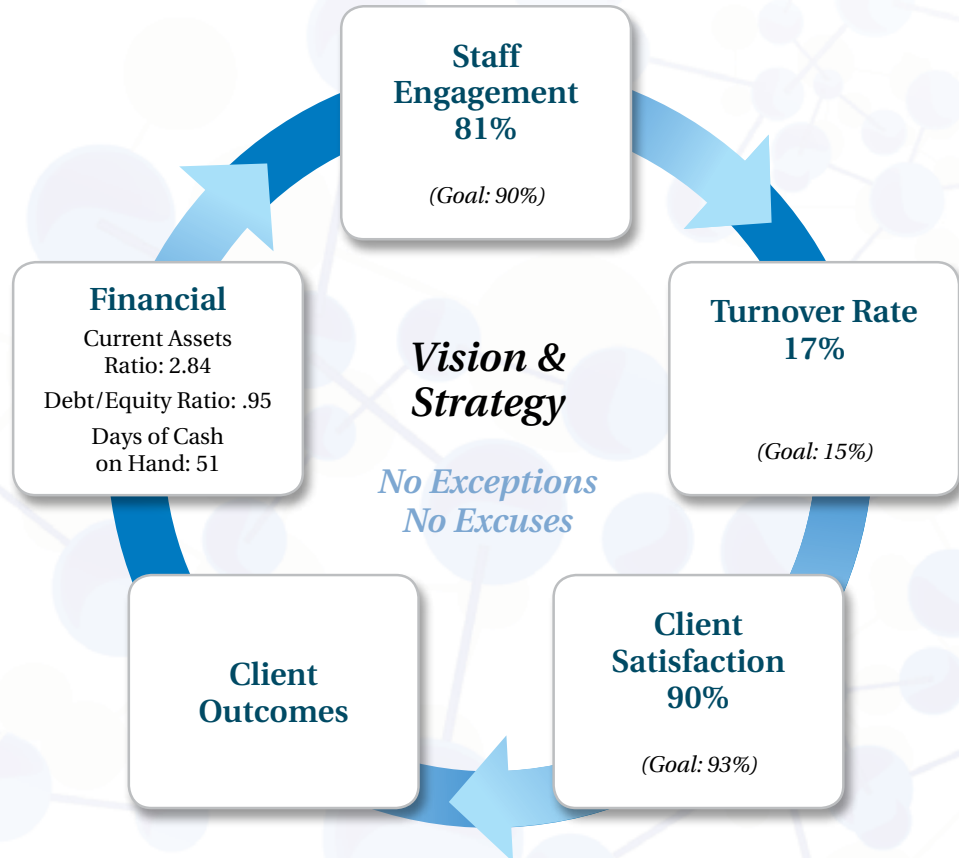
## Demographic

- The state with the second smallest population
- Vermont aging population – ranking #2 in the US
- Aging workforce
- Slow population growth
- Vermont is the 7th highest state for death by suicide



# Balanced Report Card

The balanced report card is a management system that enables our agency to clarify our vision and strategy and translate them into action. It provides feedback around both the internal business process and external outcomes in order to continuously improve strategic performance and results. The balanced report card provides a clear prescription as to what our agency should measure in order to 'balance' the financial perspective with other very important outcome perspectives.



# Key Objectives and Initiatives

Over the next three years, NCSS is committed to focusing on five key objectives that will support the local health ecosystem, expand community partner relationships and enhance the quality of life of those who are served. With the support of their dedicated employees and high quality programs, these key objectives will be accomplished by many initiatives throughout the agency divisions and action-oriented committees.

## Key Objective 1: Recruit and sustain the highest quality workforce in Franklin and Grand Isle counties

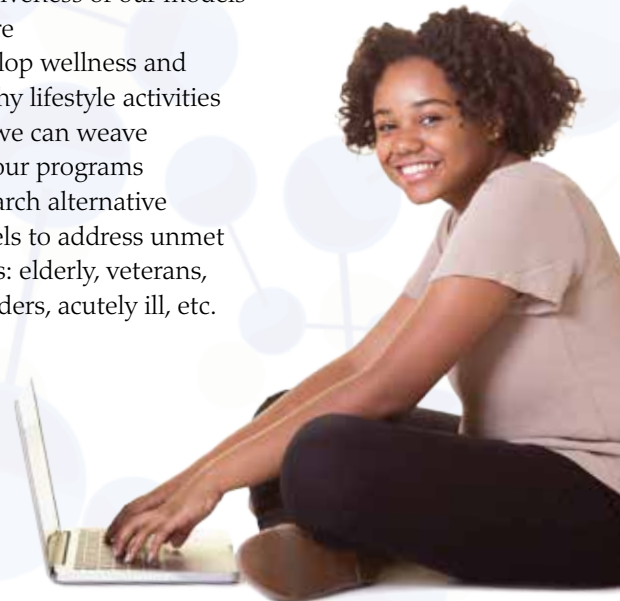
### Initiatives:

1. Work with Vermont Care Partners to align Designated Agency staff salaries with VT state employees, regional partners and area hospital
2. Develop a model of employment that includes creative work schedule or job sharing
3. Identify education support programs with reimbursement and loan repayment options to retain skilled staff
4. Identify specific interests, skills, passions within our staff and find opportunities to develop those skills in a way that aligns with the agency vision
5. Create an incentive program to support staff with licensure supervision and advanced training
6. Hire additional therapists trained in specialties including: Applied Behavioral Analysis, Dialectical Behavior Therapy, Trauma Informed Care, Integrated Health, etc.
7. Enhance work life balance and healthy workforce efforts to further create a safe, positive environment, which includes expanding staff wellness, diversity and recognition programs
8. Support Vermont Cooperative for Practice Improvement & Innovation to enhance staff and peer support trainings throughout the state

## Key Objective 2: Provide the highest quality of services in the most effective way

### Initiatives:

1. Enhance best practices by expanding existing initiatives throughout the agency and conduct national searches for new programming
2. Expand Trauma Informed Care Initiative
3. Create a lifetime span continuum of substance use treatment: Increase communication when clients have dual providers
4. Work with Vermont Care Partners, ACO – Vermont Care Organization and local community partners on defining ‘Care Coordination’ as to reduce duplication of services
5. Engage Leadership with Vermont Care Partners Data Repository and use the information at a program level for enhancements and service delivery improvements
6. Support the process and implementation of a unified EHR within the Designated Agencies
7. Develop a communication tool to include community partners in agency trainings
8. Formalize process of evaluating effectiveness of our models of care
9. Develop wellness and healthy lifestyle activities that we can weave into our programs
10. Research alternative models to address unmet needs: elderly, veterans, offenders, acutely ill, etc.



### Key Objective 3: Enhance and expand community partnerships to deliver holistic care approach and community wellness

#### Initiatives:

1. Work with community partners in facilitating internal and external substance use focus groups to understand unmet needs
2. Formalize current working partnerships
3. Explore opportunities to collaborate with other Designated Agencies
4. Enhance and expand working partnerships with the Federally Qualified Health Centers in our two counties
5. Be an active member and leader in our region's Unified Community Collaborative to prepare for health care reform changes
6. Identify local and state partners in researching and developing models of care for people who need geriatric psychiatric services
7. Explore new partnerships in our health ecosystem
8. Expand school partnerships to promote a culture of wellness across the school population
9. Research the benefits of placing psychiatry in Primary Care Providers
10. Community partners training on the supports and services of Developmental Services
11. Develop new school partnerships that are aligned with local school and Agency of Education goals



## Key Objective 4: Branding - Who we are, what we do and where we are going

### Initiatives:

1. Identify and celebrate our community partnerships
2. Create new welcome signs at each site that are diverse to all populations served
3. Create a clearing house of small one page articles detailing the treatment models of care we use
4. Provide education, training and information to community partners on the services we provide, the models of care, and the populations we serve
5. Collaborate with Vermont Care Partners and the other Designated Agencies to have a unified branding approach
6. Enhanced presence on social media and communication to educate and raise awareness of NCSS programs and services
7. Create an annual anti-STIGMA plan
8. Build on established community training offerings, Grand Rounds and Mental Health First Aid, to inform and educate more community groups
9. Utilizing NCSS blog to address subjects, issues and gaps in services in a more in-depth manner
10. Expand recently launched Did you Know... campaign to educate, raise awareness, and reduce stigma relative to NCSS programs and services



## Key Objective 5: Setting standards, holding ourselves to excellence, adding value to our community

### Initiatives:

1. Identify and demonstrate our value in our local population health and All Payer Waiver outcomes
2. Build and launch our Clear Impact Scorecard
3. Explore opportunities to work with Department of Mental Health with sharing information in Clear Impact Scorecard
4. Being an active member in the Vermont Care Partners Center of Excellence pilot
5. Be an active member in our local population health and determine what outcomes our organization impacts
6. Supporting employees with community based services



# A Very Special Thank You!

NCSS conducts a strategic planning process every 3-5 years and puts in about a year's worth of work into developing our plans. Our review considers internal and external factors that impact the services provided to the people in our community at a national, state and local level. Through this process we conducted several different types of surveys and interviews from the clients we serve, to our dedicated employees, to the governing Standing Committees and the Board of Directors, to our strong community partners and the people who live in our community. We would like to thank each of you for your contributions to our efforts in this insightful process.

## Resources:

Northwestern Medical Center 2016 Community Needs Assessment

HealthyVermont 2020

Vermont State Plan on Aging for Federal Fiscal Years 2015 – 2017

VermontDigger: Slow Population Growth Might  
be the Norm in Vermont 02.21.16

We would also like to thank the following employees, individuals and organizations for their time and valuable input:

- Strategic Planning Committee – 26 staff and peer members
- All agency programs for SWOT analysis
- Division Standing Committees and Board of Directors
- All agency staff conducting neighbor and community member interviews
- External consultant and agency leadership for community partner and legislative interviews
- Community Partner Leadership for their interviews:
  - Northwestern Medical Center
  - Northern Tier Center for Health (NOTCH)
  - Department of Mental Health
  - Department of Children and Families
  - Grand Isle Supervisory Union
  - Franklin Central Supervisory Union
  - Franklin West Supervisory Union
  - Franklin Northwest Supervisory Union
  - Franklin Northeast Supervisory Union

# NORTHWESTERN COUNSELING

& SUPPORT SERVICES

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*Connecting people to the  
right services  
one person at a time.*



NCSS is a member of the VCP network of designated agencies and special services agencies throughout Vermont



NCSS is an active member of the National Council for Behavioral Health



NCSS is recognized with the highest level of accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities