

One Voice

A POSITION PAPER



Council for Vocational Services Society

Community Leadership to Support Citizens with Disabilities

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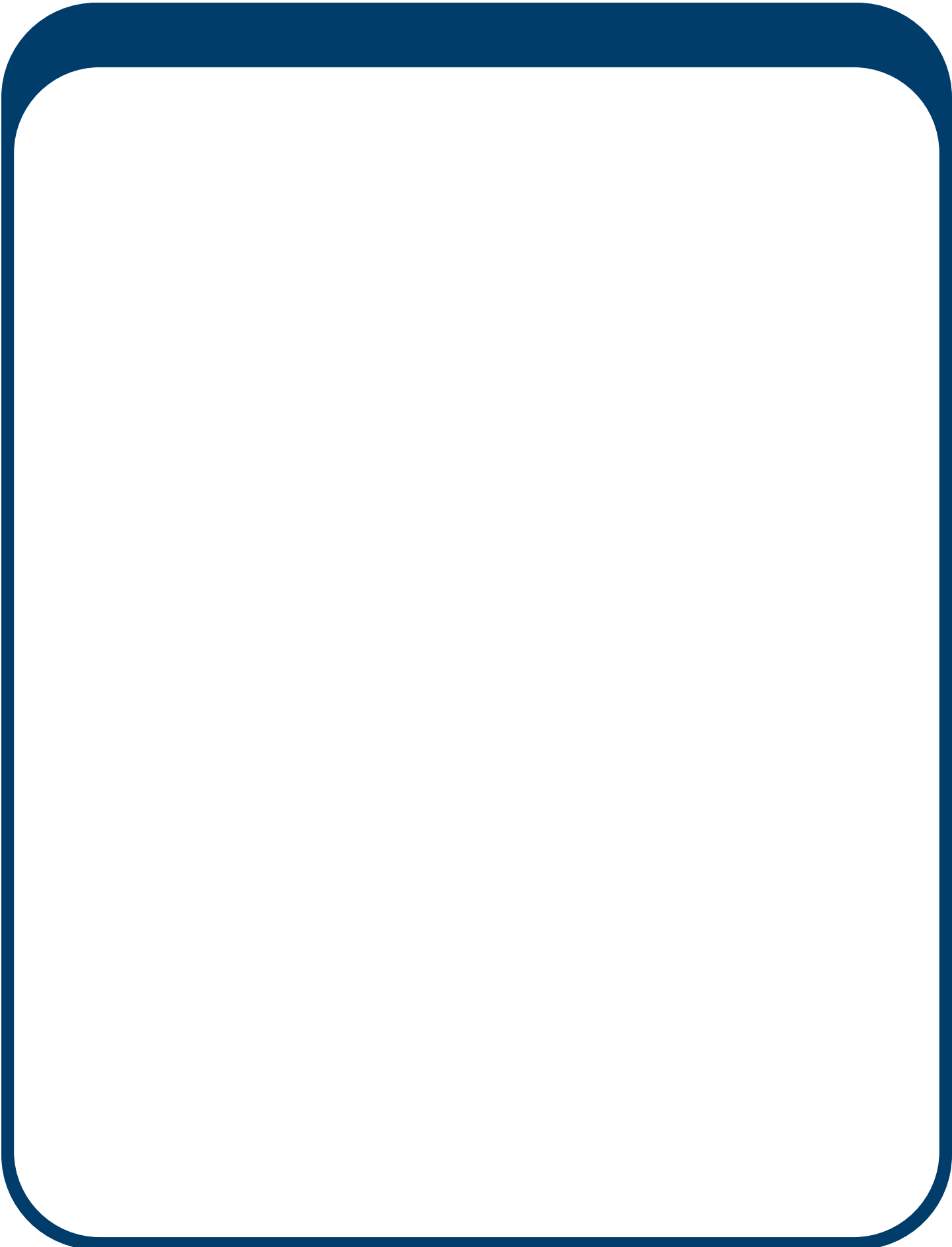
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One Voice

**A POSITION PAPER of the
DIRECTIONS COUNCIL FOR VOCATIONAL SERVICES SOCIETY**

Introduction

The Directions Council for Vocational Services has been operating with a Strategic Plan since prior to 1995, revised in 2002 and again in 2004 with updates in 2005. One major goal has remained the same throughout our strategic planning process:

“To speak with one voice”

As twenty eight member organizations with unique service provision, unique communities and individual governing boards, we have been successful with this goal in a limited fashion. We have now tackled the one voice discussion in a meaningful way by detailing where we have common ground: where we can speak not with just one voice but rather have our views echoed twenty eight times within the province!

The process used to identify this common ground began with surveying the membership on issues, having that data compiled into a usable format, and then Wayne Marsh facilitating a session of developing an agreed upon basis from which to work. Following that session we, in regional and sub groups, further refined the work and lastly, we came together once again to form our one voice statements.

They are as follows:

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It is our sincerest hope that this effort will enhance our work with the Department of Community Services in the Vocational Review called by the Deputy Minister.

Funding Formula

Funding of Vocational agencies has evolved in a haphazard manner across the province. There exist many variances in an agency's understanding of what is funded, to what percentage is it funded and what is eligible for funding.

The Community Supports for Renewal Discussion paper has stated well the lack of attention to how our member agencies are funded. *"The cost of this program has grown substantially over the past six years. Costs have risen by 78 per cent since 1997-98, from approximately \$77.4 million to \$138 million in 2002-2003. The majority of the cost increase has been in residential services. **Funding to the adult service centres has remained relatively unchanged throughout this period.**"* (Renewing the Community Supports for Adults Program: A Discussion Paper 2004, page 6.)

Although it is important to be cognizant of our history and how our funding and budgets evolved, it is now time to start anew and step away from the shareable and non-shareable distinctions. A common funding formula across the province would ease the historic inequities from one agency to another.

We must be vigilant in balancing our need for viable businesses and the need for the human service component of what we do. The interplay between them is what makes our agencies unique. Many agencies have a varied balance between the business component and the human service component. All have value for the agency's clients.

Our consensus is that we all use the same budget template/format and where possible use the same budget formulas. Ex.: Staff training should be 3% of salary dollars or stipends shall all be \$150 per full time client.

We have designed as a draft the enclosed budget template in two forms, one for budget submission and a more detailed template that would show all the potential items within a category. These are available from the DIRECTIONS office in Excel format.

Human Resources

Salary Guidelines

The DIRECTIONS Council developed a Salary Guideline in the early 1990's. Our process was to establish a guideline for individual agency Boards to aspire to attain and to give some consistency in salaries across the province. In 2004 our guideline was validated when Saint Mary's University School of Business was contracted to provide DIRECTIONS with a Salary Scale. The results were essentially that our guideline was accurate and reflective of our industry.

The consensus of the DIRECTIONS Council is that the Department of Community Services endorse and fund agencies according to the DIRECTIONS Council Salary Guideline. Further that some energy be invested in funding for merit and for years of service.

Professional Competencies

The "Core Competencies for Direct Care" staff introduced by the provincial Department of Community Services is a good first step in acknowledging the professionalism of our industry. One identified challenge is the consistency of professional development which is partially addressed by the Standard Curriculum drafted by the Health Care Human Resource Sector Council and approved by the provincial Department of Community Services. The second is the availability and cost effectiveness of obtaining the core competencies as well as the design and implementation of a Prior Learning Assessment tool or equivalency exam. Also there is a defined need for core competencies for those non direct care positions. The DIRECTIONS Council provided the Provincial Advisory Committee of Community Services with a list of recommendations specific to non direct care, which has not yet been accepted.

The consensus of the DIRECTIONS Council is that the Department of Community Services make available opportunities within the Community College system and elsewhere so the core competencies for direct care and non direct care can be attained by our member agencies in the most cost effective manner possible.

Staff Complement

The last Department of Community Services approved staffing complement was in the Workshop Guidelines for Nova Scotia April 1986. Since that time many changes have taken place both in service provision and the evolving nature of our client base. Many inconsistencies exist as agencies have grown and the staffing complement may or may not have grown accordingly. Or they have grown but the positions have not been recognized by the Department of Community Services.

The following is the 1986 Guideline:

Manager	All should have 1 manager
Coordinators	
40 – 59 clients	1
60 – 100 clients	2
Contract / Sales	
For every 40 clients	1
Secretary/Bookkeeper	
Less than 40	Part time
40 – 70 clients	1 full time
80 plus clients	2 full time
Program	
1 -3 clients	1- manager
4 – 11 clients	1
12 – 19 clients	2
20 – 27 clients	3

Traditionally it has been accepted practice that the staff ratios have been as follows:

Vocational	1:8
Pre Vocational	1:3
Community Employment	Caseload 1:20
Broadening Day Options	1:1 in some cases, variable

It is commonly known that defining the program by client across the province varies and we require a very good assessment tool that another section of this report shall address. However, it is important to note that the staffing complement has not been supported to the extent approved by the Minister of Community Services in 1986 and it is now 2005!

The consensus of the DIRECTIONS Council is that the Department of Community Services along with the DIRECTIONS Council review and amend the staffing complement that allows for the best possible service to our clients.

Relationship with Department of Community Services

Historically the vocational agencies were under the auspices of the provincial Department of Community Services in a division titled Vocational Rehabilitation Services or Voc/Rehab. Within this division there existed a staff member who had been dedicated to work with the vocational agencies. Since regionalization the vocational agencies have lost that dedicated contact and now work within four different regional Support Specialists, who in turn report to four different Regional Administrators.

The Vocational centres represent an important component of services offered to mutual clients of Department of Community Services and ourselves. However relative to other systems for which Department of Community Services is responsible we do not command the attention within the regional system which we require to function well. In keeping the vocational centres at a provincial reporting level, the Department would be able to develop the expertise to manage this area of their services well.

The effect in the community of this departmental systemic change has been inconsistency in interpretation of directives, inconsistency in availability of funding, lack of communication and an unclear understanding of roles and responsibilities from regional to provincial levels. For many the feeling is that we are too far away from the decision makers and unsure of the quality of the information that leads to decisions being made that affects our industry.

The consensus of the DIRECTIONS Council is that we require one dedicated staff member within the Provincial Department of Community Services that is knowledgeable about day program services in Nova Scotia and elsewhere. We also desire a coordinated plan at the regional and provincial level to address the neglected demands within the system.

Organizational Management

There are several sub issues within organizational management that the Council has discussed over the years and top of the list has always been **Governance**. All agencies have independent Boards of Directors, are duly constituted as non profit agencies under the statutes of the Society's Act and are current with the Registry of Joint Stock Companies. All have Memorandums of Association and By Laws.

The Department of Community Services provides some but not all of our funding in order for us to operate our programs and services. In terms of our Governance; the Board of Directors is responsible for the operational management. Over the past few years it has become increasingly unclear between **funder** and **recipient of funds** as to who decides on operational issues such as salaries, clients served etc. and the terms under which funds are dispensed. The rules seem to change without our agencies being aware of how and why, resulting in agencies becoming unprepared for funding changes and or restrictions. The significant lack of consultation in this area has been a difficulty for each and every agency in Nova Scotia.

The theme we strive to achieve is that we are partners in the provision of services for persons with disabilities.

The consensus of the DIRECTIONS Council is that the style of Governance is the responsibility of the individual agencies and Community Services should support them with professional development activities.

The Department of Community Services in consultation with DIRECTIONS should have clear and measurable outcomes for the funding given to our member agencies.

The Department of Community Services should provide a "review function" and provide follow up support that would serve to support the member agencies.

Program

We continue to struggle with Program issues. A vocational client in one agency may not be a vocational client in another. As long as we continue to want to categorize individuals we will be challenged with this dilemma. One theory for these differences is the uniqueness of our environments and the uniqueness of the individuals we serve. It is the blend of our business, the activity we can provide and the knowledge we have about our clients that allow us to be the authority on what ratios are required for our clients in programs. Hence there shall and will be differences among the agencies in the province.

There remains a need to define the staff ratios within the program title and to staff our services accordingly. The last documented ratios were in the 1986 Guidelines as stated earlier.

The consensus of the DIRECTIONS Council is that we require an intake assessment tool that is common to all agencies that may allow for a standardized approach to services. Within this ratios can be determined and agencies will be staffed accordingly.

Who we serve and who we do not serve is also a challenge. Some of our agencies maintain an application or waitlist and others do not. As a province we unfortunately do not know the unmet need for service.

The consensus of the DIRECTIONS Council is that all agencies should fully document requests for service and be cognizant of the needs of the persons and the services they require. Furthermore, each agency should make every reasonable effort to inform the appropriate funding agencies of the existing need on behalf of each person.

At what age we serve individuals and at what age they retire from our services is yet another challenging Program issue. The school system is graduating students at the completion of their education plan and this can be as early as 18. Traditionally the age of leaving school for our applicants has been 21. Thus an immense gap in services has occurred for these individuals since many admissions policies state the age of admission to the vocational agency as 21.

The consensus of the DIRECTIONS Council is that our age of admission needs to be re-evaluated with the support of the Departments of Community Services and Education.

There is no mandatory retirement age in Nova Scotia nor is there service for those who retire from the vocational agencies. We all know that some of our clients would be better served in a recreation/leisure/retirement option if it was available to them. There continues to be a debate as to who has the responsibility to provide such a program. Some agencies are providing this program option and some are but only to a limited degree.

The client with 'complex needs' is marginally served and we need to evaluate how and to what extent our agencies provide these services. Safety will always be critical within this program issue and determining the appropriate environment and staffing support should be within the person centered planning modality.

The consensus of the DIRECTIONS Council is that we require consultation on who we are funded to serve, how we are funded to serve them and how we can partner with other jurisdictions to provide the best possible service to clients with complex needs. (i.e. education, health)

Conclusion

This is in no way a complete review of all the issues facing vocational and day services in Nova Scotia. It is a work in progress to express our desire to '**speak with one voice**'. As we progress we shall become more articulate and expansive on those issues that are common to all of us. Most importantly we shall ensure that citizens with disabilities in Nova Scotia are provided the best possible service that DIRECTIONS and the Department of Community Services can provide.