STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN

Community Living Essex County
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INTRODUCTION

Community Living Essex County has embarked on a comprehensive planning process called REAL Change – an undertaking that promises to transform the agency's business and service delivery models in order to offer modern, relevant supports within a sustainable and innovative infrastructure.

Effective communication with all stakeholders is imperative for the sustainability and success of the organization in meeting the needs of people and families. A good understanding of our target audiences, the most appropriate avenues through which to reach them and accurate evaluation techniques will be keys to ensuring messaging is effective.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

When planning strategic communications, it is important that the purpose of the organization remains clear and relevant to all stakeholders. The mission and vision are the starting point, and the litmus test, for all communication messages.

Vision:	A community that celebrates inclusion and inspires possibilities.
Mission:	We are committed to support people to achieve their goals and dreams and to realize their value as full citizens.

When composing communications, a clear understanding of where we are headed in terms of goals and priorities will be necessary to lead and engage target audiences. The goals and priorities of the agency, effective February 2016 through 2019, will guide the projects & initiatives and resulting communications.

GOAL: Together with people and their families revolutionize access to services and to information.
- Provide people and their families with easy access to clear and meaningful information about supports.
- Facilitate connections between families to improve access to quality services
- Continue advocacy and action towards the full inclusion of all people in community.
- Provide leadership in creatively addressing unmet needs.

GOAL: Offer people and their families innovative, flexible and affordable supports
- Develop and provide marketable short break options that are driven by the needs and requests of families and people supported
- Design and offer accommodation options that embrace natural support and self-determination

- Provide life long learning options that fulfill social, educational, and employment needs
- Lead the development and improved use of community/existing transportation to affordably get people where they want to go

GOAL: Design a responsive and sustainable business model
- Create mechanisms for growth that enable the organization to develop responsive action plans and to evaluate success.
- Diversify and increase revenue while decreasing costs:
  - Actively pursue funding through government, foundations, and philanthropic avenues
  - Explore and engage in social entrepreneurial opportunities
  - Expand revenue development activities
  - Pursuing joint ventures and creative partnerships
- Develop structures that enable families to easily purchase services using individualized or other resources
- Establish communication and marketing strategies that reach all audiences
- Identify and plan for changes in the local labour market and broader labour environment

GOAL: Lead a modernized Sector
- Strengthen existing and develop new partnerships to create strategies for increasingly innovative and inclusive support
- Advocate for necessary resources to find creative answers to poverty and lack of affordable housing experienced by people
- Initiate a Centre for Innovation and Quality Supports that identifies trends, transitions and transformations that sustain a modernized sector.

With these goals and priorities in mind, we can clearly identify the objectives of the Communication Strategy for Community Living Essex County.

The objectives of the communication strategy:

- Increase brand/public awareness
- Reach existing and potential customers in marketing our supports and services
- Provide relevant and timely information to families
- Further engage internal & external stakeholders in the activities and business of the organization

TARGET AUDIENCES / STAKEHOLDERS

Effective communication has the potential to positively impact a number of agency stakeholder groups. Each of these groups has unique communication needs and preferences, and consideration of the most effective ways to engage them is required. Consideration needs to be given to each group's:

- § demographics
- § interest in the agency
- § needs in terms of relevant information
- § current receptiveness to the agency
- § preferred modes of communication

The target audiences include:

1. People Using Services: The people that the Agency currently provides services to, through various types of supports. The people who use services are both children and adults, although the vast majority are adults. The degree of support provided varies, as does the best way to communicate with them. There is an active advocacy group where some of the people using services are supported to learn more about, and to provide input into, the direction of the organization. Others are provided information through their support staff.

2. People Who Potentially Would Use the Agency's Services (Potential Customers): Also referred to as potential clients, these are the people who are either on a wait list for services, or those who may be interested in purchasing services from the Agency using private money or direct funding from a funder. Potential purchasers are typically individuals who are emerging from children's services (transition aged youth) and are looking for services as an adult. They are often assisted on this journey by their families. Communication with these individuals typically takes place with the assistance of their family members. Along with their families, the people who would potentially use the agency's services should be viewed as decision-makers.

3. Families of People Using Services: The families of people using services have identified themselves as being very satisfied with the services that the Agency provides to their family member, and aware of the great demand for similar services. Many of the families have had their family members receiving services from the Agency for long periods of time, are aging and are concerned for the future of their family member. There are also younger family members who are currently receiving services, who are looking for a broader range of options for their family member. Family members of the people using services should be viewed as influencers and opinion leaders. These family members indicated they prefer to receive communications through the Agency's newsletter or via email.

4. **Families of People who would Potentially Use the Agency's Services (Potential Customers):** The families of people who may use the Agency's services are also viewed as decision-makers. There is a waiting list for services, which has created an environment where families who do not receive funded services are becoming frustrated, isolated and disillusioned. They are advocates for the needs of their family members, and are willing to purchase services if economically feasible. The cost of services is a significant driver of the families. They are also the recipients of direct funding, which provides them with purchasing power. It is widely held that these families will provide the Agency with great direction on the types of services they prefer. Their preferences, however, may vary from their family member who will actually receive services. Many of these families are asking for more and clear information about services and the service system. These families indicated they prefer to receive information via email. Some indicated that they will follow links, but that they do not have time for social media.

5. **Employees of Community Living Essex County:** Employees receive information from a variety of sources about agency activities and initiatives. Email, the employees only website, Our Training Room, Share Vision, communication books, staff meetings and their manager, are all means of communicating with employees.

6. **Other Agencies:** Keeping well connected with others in our sector is important to open doors to potential partnerships, collaboration and networking opportunities. These agencies seem to be most receptive to receiving information via presentations and meetings, and will also access information through professional organizations and networking groups.

7. **Funders:** The Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), our major funder, should be kept up to date on agency initiatives and key activities to maintain a positive, cooperative relationship.

8. **Community and Potential Partners:** Engaging community groups, public and private sector organizations and businesses for the purpose of exploring volunteer, employment, donor and partnership opportunities.

MESSAGING & EVALUATION

For each of the target audiences the messages need to be prepared with the above profiles in mind.

It is also important to establish evaluation criteria for each message, so that the Communication Team can be sure that their intended message has been received accurately. Evaluation of results can be achieved through surveys, tracking the number of requests for information, speaking with members of a target audience, online analytics, and participation in activities. The evaluation mechanisms need to be tied to the evaluation criteria.

This process needs to be repeated, at critical junctions.

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

A variety of strategies and tactics can be employed to reach the stakeholders such as social media, print media, videos, email blasts, the agency website, meetings, contests and presentations.

The communication strategies and tactics will need to be reviewed and modified regularly in order respond to the fast-paced, changing environment and to reach audiences that may also have changing needs.

Internal Communications

New Day, Leaders of Today: Advocate Group
New Day members work to increase awareness about what it means to live with a disability. They review internal and external communications ie. websites, policies, etc. to ensure they are in plain language and accessible. New Day members provide training to staff to increase awareness of what it means to live with a disability. They also give monthly updates to the Board of Directors.

Ensemble: Parent Consultants
Ensemble is a parent-directed resource for families caring for a child with a disability. They promote leadership and understanding and work to connect families with each other for support. Ensemble provides training to staff, as well as regular updates to the Board of Directors.

Volunteers
Volunteers include Board Members and event volunteers (gift wrapping, Ruthven Apple Festival, etc.). A variety of communication strategies are utilized to communicate with volunteers, including email, telephone, and social media.

Members
General membership is comprised of family members and other people in the community who pay an annual fee. This fee enables voting rights to guide the agency by electing the Board of Directors. They are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting and are mailed quarterly updates through "The Profile" newsletter.

People Supported and their Families
Open communication between people supported, families, and staff of the agency is promoted through frequent phone conversations, emails, and meetings. The Appeal Process for Individuals/Families (PRO-200-05) is a policy in place to provide opportunities to voice questions, concerns, and ideas.

Employees
We ensure the Employees Only site is updated with the latest organizational news and information, so that accurate and reliable content is available for our employees. It is the central location for organizational news, policies, procedures, forms, training, information, and community building. Its purpose is to enable the organization to function more effectively and efficiently, and to foster a stronger community and greater employee engagement within the agency.

Database - ShareVision
ShareVision is a person-based database focused on recording all aspects of a person's supports and services. It is a significant communication tool as it provides all staff access to important information regarding people supported and resources specific to the agency. ShareVision uses pre-set dates to send alerts and reminders to staff through the agency's email system.

E-Mail
An agency email account is created for each employee. This provides regular and specific two-way communication between employees, as well as for employees to communicate with people supported and their families. The agency is required to get permission from families to send any electronic communications. In compliance with Canada's Anti-Spam Legislation, families give consent to the agency through the E-Mail Address Request Form.

External Communications

Mission/ Vision:
Repeat the agency vision often; in speeches, publications, and visual presentations that can be translated into a variety of languages.

Positive News/ Examples of inclusion:
Cite examples of activities and initiatives that support the vision. Promote these using integrated marketing strategies, such as through media, personal contact, the newsletter, websites, and publications.

Speakers Bureau:
Enhance opportunities to explain the agency's vision and serve as a mechanism for public education and awareness by having people supported speak to public, community, and municipal stakeholders at local events.

Website and Social Media:
The key goal of our website is to leverage the power of social media. It is used effectively to promote agency programs and services, news and achievements, fundraising and special events, as well as progress towards our vision. The agency utilizes Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Instagram and LinkedIn to distribute information on a large scale to people supported, their families, fellow service providers, and other members of the public, to foster a stronger sense of community.

Newsletter:
Continue to share publications of "The Profile", which is published on a quarterly basis. It provides information highlighting recent achievements, updates from partner groups New Day and Ensemble, upcoming events, and a message from the Director. The newsletter is available on the agency website, as well as produced in print so it can be distributed to locations throughout the agency and mailed to members and families.

Event Promotion:
Enhance community involvement in the variety of annual events specific to the agency to gain positive media coverage. Such events include the Ruthven Apple Festival, Jingle Bell Run/Walk/Wheel, Charity Golf Classic, Mayors Luncheon, and the Christmas Gift Wrapping Booth.

Branding:
Increase community awareness of who we are, what we stand for and what we do. Make emotional connections with people through communications to demonstrate the rich history, values that guide us and our modern, flexible approach to providing quality support and services. Continue to brand the agency consistently through logos, clothing, signage, and messages.

Media and Government Relations:
The agency is committed to quality improvement through conforming to the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Child and Youth Services. Media and government can count on the agency being open and transparent in their relations. We are committed to being accessible for media requests for interviews and access to our facilities, and have a Media and Public Relations Policy (ADM-500-01), which reflects our philosophy. We will continue to build relationships with the media in this manner.

COMMUNICATION PROCEDURES

A communication process is in place where a designated spokesperson, the Executive Director or Manager, Community Relations and Resource Development, will address communication with the media. They are also responsible for reviewing all written and audio/visual resources before they are distributed to the public.

The Manager, Community Relations and Resource Development develops strong relationships with local media outlets. They will monitor all media, presentations, and displays to ensure they are following the agency's communication tools. All communication tools are reviewed annually and revised as necessary.

The Social Media Committee is responsible for generating and publishing content on the agency website and social media platforms. The Social Media Committee consists of people receiving supports, a Board member, a manager from each geography, a Human Resources representative, an Ensemble representative, and a New Day representative. The Manager, Community Relations and Resource Development coordinates and supervises all social media activities through the Social Media Committee, and approves what is posted.

WORK PLAN

The Communication Strategy workplan is a living document that:

- § guides the work of the Communication Team
- § ensures all stakeholders are being reached with accurate and effective messaging
- § identifies appropriate timelines and responsibility
- § provides a method of evaluation for each message

See attached work plan outline.