

**Southern New Hampshire Services, Inc.**  
**The Community Action Partnership for Hillsborough and Rockingham Counties**

**2021-2024 Strategic Plan**

**Introduction**

Southern New Hampshire Services (SNHS) has responded to the needs of low-income individuals and families in the agency's service area since 1965. The core program areas are a mix of crisis services to immediately meet needs such as food, shelter or energy assistance, and engagement to promote long term economic stability through education, employment and training, and financial coaching. While various programs will differ in scope and approach, the goal remains the same - to improve people's lives.

The current environment in which we find ourselves has been dramatically affected by the COVID 19 outbreak. This pandemic, with its impact on the local economy and on public health, has profoundly changed the way individuals interact and go about their daily lives, and how organizations and businesses conduct their operations. SNHS is responding to this crisis in collaboration with our federal, state and local partners, and will continue to do so as long as necessary to ensure that people receive the assistance they need. Since the economic impacts of this crisis will remain even after the serious public health issues have been addressed, the agency response to COVID is an important element of this Strategic Plan.

SNHS continues to deliver services, albeit using a different delivery model given the need to eliminate close physical contact between individuals and minimize the potential for spreading the virus. This experience has provided an opportunity to look at service delivery overall and evaluate how things might be done differently even after the spread of the virus is controlled and the threat to personal safety has been reduced.

This Strategic Plan addresses the areas that SNHS will focus on over the next three years to function more effectively as an organization, and improve our ability to move people toward self-sufficiency. It is a set of goals and objectives aimed at ensuring that SNHS continues to be a strong and effective leader in meeting the needs of low-income individuals. It is informed by the Community Assessment, but also by the evolving landscape of expectations in the world of Community Action and an understanding of what steps need to be taken to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities ahead. The Strategic Plan also reflects SNHS' recognition of the importance of the social determinants of health in the lives of the families we serve. Employment and Income Stability, Education, Housing Stability, Food and Nutrition, and Transportation are not just programs or needs. These social determinants of health are conditions of the environment in which people live their lives, and improving these conditions leads to healthier families and communities overall. Addressing families' crises and immediate needs is vital and necessary, but building on their strengths, helping them to embrace opportunities and allowing them to thrive is the long-term work that will yield lasting results.

**Description of the Organization**

Southern New Hampshire Services, Inc. (SNHS) is a private non-profit corporation chartered in the State of New Hampshire, May 21, 1965 to serve as the Community Action Agency for Hillsborough County in compliance with the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. In July, 2011, Rockingham Community Action (RCA), the Community Action Agency serving Rockingham County, was merged with Southern New Hampshire Services. As a result of this merger SNHS now provides services to residents of the 65 towns and 3 cities in Hillsborough and Rockingham counties.

As a Community Action Agency, it is SNHS' purpose to provide social service programs and advocacy activities for the economically disadvantaged, elderly, youth and other specialized populations in the organization's service area. SNHS operates more than 60 programs, contracting with the Federal, State and local governments as well as other social service agencies and private entities. These include Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Adult Worker program, New Hampshire Employment Program, Child Care, Early Head Start, Head Start, housing assistance and homelessness prevention programs, supportive housing for homeless individuals, Women Infants and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program, Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), Energy and Utility Assistance, Weatherization, Asset Development, and Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

As a non-profit corporation, chartered under the State of New Hampshire, Southern New Hampshire Services is operated by a Board of Directors and administrative staff. The Board of Directors is comprised of 15 members, with 5 from the Public Sector, 4 from the Private Sector and 6 from the Low-income Sector, and representing Manchester, Nashua, and the towns of Hillsborough and Rockingham Counties. There is also 1 at large Low-income Sector representative from the Head Start Policy Council. Members of the Board of Directors are unpaid, volunteer community leaders and representatives who formulate the agency's policy and direction.

### **Mission Statement**

The mission of Southern New Hampshire Services is to provide activities designed to assist low-income participants, including the elderly poor, to secure and retain meaningful employment, attain an adequate education, and make better use of available income; to ameliorate the causes of poverty within the community; to meet urgent and immediate individual and family needs, including health, nutrition, housing and employment-related assistance; and to address the problems and barriers which block the achievement of self-sufficiency.

### **Service Delivery and Goals**

SNHS is part of a national network of approximately 1,000 Community Action Agencies (CAAs). Beginning in the early 1990s there was an increased emphasis on outcomes and results from publicly funded programs at all levels of government, driven and shaped by elected officials and the general public. This renewed focus on the effectiveness and accountability of CAAs led to the development of a management process called ROMA, which stands for Results Oriented Management and Accountability. ROMA is not a program, but a performance-based initiative designed to maintain the focus of CAAs on helping low-income move toward financial stability, and to promote greater effectiveness in doing so. The 3 ROMA goals which drive the work of CAAs are as follows:

- Individuals and families with low incomes are stable and achieve economic security.
- Communities where people with low incomes live are healthy and offer economic opportunity.
- People with low incomes are engaged and active in building opportunities in communities.

These goals are the focus at all times, but in this environment, in which every member of the communities in which we live has somehow been affected, they have special relevance.

### **Community Assessment Summary**

During the latter part of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, SNHS undertook the development of a community assessment, which CAAs are charged with doing every 3 years. The assessment covered the entire agency service area of Hillsborough and Rockingham Counties.

### Process

To kick off the information gathering process, SNHS hosted a two-day “Issues and Opportunities Forum” with over 30 SNHS service recipients and 50 employees in May, 2019 to solicit in-depth feedback about the obstacles they face to receiving services. SNHS gathered valuable perspective through various exercises in which service recipients provided in-depth feedback about optimal service delivery, what the barriers are to receiving services, and unmet community needs.

To conduct the in-depth assessment on a far larger scale, SNHS solicited input from a variety of stakeholder groups throughout the agency’s service area of Hillsborough and Rockingham Counties. Targeted populations include current SNHS service recipients, community organizations, municipalities, school districts, churches, health care organizations, social service agencies, other partners, and agency staff. Data was collected from surveys targeting these groups. We planned to conduct in person focus groups to gather input on community strengths and needs. Unfortunately, that effort had to be halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic which struck at the same time that SNHS was due to conduct the focus groups. However, we did gather a significant amount of valuable information to be able to effectively complete the assessment.

#### Client Feedback

The client survey was available at SNHS’ ten Resource Centers, made available to Head Start families, emailed to recipients of the Fuel Assistance Program, Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act program, and texted to recipients of the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. A Spanish language version of the survey was also available, and we received about 50 Spanish survey responses. Approximately 2,000 total completed surveys were received which provided valuable data about the needs of low-income households in Hillsborough and Rockingham Counties. This represents approximately 15% of the total surveys that were distributed.

#### Employee Surveys

As part of the Community Needs Assessment process we thought it important to obtain employee feedback about what they are seeing as they live and work in the community. Staff who interact with clients are aware of the struggles these families face, and can provide insight into the issues they face as well as possible solutions. Additionally, a number of staff have been or currently are eligible for services the agency offers, which gives them a unique perspective on needs within the community and the service delivery process.

#### Provider Feedback

To garner a different perspective about the community, SNHS surveyed about 200 community service providers and partner agencies who were asked about services available, gaps in services, and other community strengths and weaknesses. The groups surveyed included community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, the private sector, the public sector, and educational institutions.

To access the Community Assessment go to:

[https://www.snhs.org/images/Annual\\_Reports/Community\\_Needs\\_Assessment\\_2020.pdf](https://www.snhs.org/images/Annual_Reports/Community_Needs_Assessment_2020.pdf)

### **Strategies and Goals**

The purpose of this Strategic Plan is not to address every need indicated in the Community Assessment,

but to outline a direction for the agency over the next few years building on work that is already underway, and integrating information gathered during the assessment process. The Plan provides a framework for meeting the needs we have the capacity to address, and for marshalling the resources necessary to address barriers in 5 areas: Community Awareness; Services; Whole Family Approach Implementation; Agency Capacity and Internal Structure; and Responding to the Ongoing Impact of the COVID Crisis. Each area covered will include key takeaways from the Community Assessment, and how that particular area could be impacted by the COVID crisis. Because COVID impacts so many facets of the agency's overall operation, we have included specific strategies and goals for SNHS in addressing this unique crisis.

There are stated goals, but there are no deadlines identified for meeting these goals. This doesn't mean that the agency is not serious about meeting the goals. On the contrary, the steps SNHS is taking in the areas outlined below are dramatic and exciting. While steps need to be taken in an orderly fashion, much of the work will be going on simultaneously, since many of the elements are so integral to each other. Rather than establish dates, which may or may not be realistic, to accomplish tasks, progress will be measured in regular updates to the Plan and presented to the Board as outlined in the Organizational Standards.

### **Community Awareness**

Key takeaways from the community assessment:

- There is an obvious disconnect in the perception of community members between SNHS as an organization and the programs it operates. Twenty percent of respondents who are currently enrolled in one or more SNHS programs answered "no" when asked if they received services from SNHS in the last 12 months.
- The need for a revised mission statement and coordinated branding initiative to reinforce the Agency's value to the community.

Goals:

- Develop a branding and marketing strategy to highlight Southern New Hampshire Services as an entity which supports families and individuals, and not a collection of programs.
- Implement a process to distribute a customer satisfaction survey to clients periodically. Monitor the results and modify the marketing strategy if necessary to reduce the percentage of people who do not identify with the agency.

Impact of COVID: Having to deliver services remotely with no in-person contact in office locations requires the use of technology to convey and gather information, which is difficult for some clients.

### **Services**

Key takeaways from the community assessment:

- There is a need for more coordinated service delivery along with a streamlined and a non-duplicative application process
- The current service mix seems appropriate to the resources currently available.

Goals:

- Develop a universal intake form which can be used for all programs offered by SNHS.
- Identify the barriers to utilizing a universal intake process and develop solutions to remove them.
- Implement an intake process in which demographic data for everyone applying for services is entered into empowOR

Impact of COVID: Agency staff working remotely requires a process whereby clients enter their data into the system via Client Inquiry. The data can then be uploaded into empowOR and the need for specific services can be addressed by the appropriate staff person. The alternatives for those without the technical know how or the capacity to upload information involve mailing applications to individuals and staff entering the information into empowOR, or staff taking information over the phone and entering it into the system.

**Whole Family Approach Implementation**

Key takeaways from the community assessment:

- Transportation is an important issue. This is true in both urban and rural settings, and it is a perennial problem which is not easily solved.
- Financial education is a critical component of the Whole Family Approach. SNHS has developed a curriculum called *Your Money in Action* to teach families skills to better manage their household finances, improve their credit rating, develop and stick to a budget, and make better decisions overall when it comes to their financial resources. The short course is a combination of self-direction and instruction.

Goals:

- Implement a program in collaboration with St. Mary's Bank and Grappone Auto Group which will allow individuals engaged in the Whole Family Approach to purchase a new vehicle.
- Engage insurance providers and explore the possibility of discounts for Whole Family Approach participants who meet selected criteria.
- Expand *Your Money in Action* to a broader group of families and continue to modify the curriculum as necessary based on feedback from participants and results reported, eg. improved credit scores, increased savings, etc.

- Introduce the Benefits Calculator on the SNHS website to allow anyone, especially Whole Family Approach participants, to better understand the relationship between income and benefit levels. Having access to the information the calculator provides will enable individuals to make more informed decisions about employment and promotions, etc.

Impact of COVID: The need to interact remotely has impacted the ability to hold *Your Money in Action* classes and meet with individuals in person. It has also required that all meetings with partners and between staff be held virtually as opposed to in-person.

### **Agency Capacity and Internal Structure**

These issues were not covered in the Community Assessment, but they are integral to the implementation of the Whole Family Approach

- Reorganization of departments to facilitate service delivery within the Whole Family Approach process
- Braiding or blending of funding to allow for staffing flexibility in service delivery.
- Revamped and more integrated workforce development services.
- More effective data collection and management processes.
- Modified service environment and physical space for greater efficiency and increased safety for both staff and clients

#### Goals:

- Reorganize departments within SNHS and eliminate the strict delineations within programs which frequently require multiple appointments for clients and leads to disjointed service delivery, and also contributes to the clients identifying with specific programs as opposed to the agency. This work has begun with the creation of the Family Resource Specialist position. These staff members may have a focus in a specific area such as housing or nutrition, but they will work across programs to assist families with whatever they need. The overall reorientation of resources and responsibilities across the agency may require working with an outside consultant.
- Determine to what extent we will be able to braid or bend funding in delivering services, and if we can, to begin identifying how that affects processes within programs and the fiscal infrastructure, ie. payroll, reporting, etc.
- Examine how the existing workforce programs can be better integrated and reflect the holistic approach which better serves the client and can deliver better outcomes.
- Hire a data person on staff to oversee the data collection and management processes and to provide training to staff.
- Renovate existing facilities to allow for greater safety and more effective service delivery in implementing the Whole Family approach.

- Review lessons learned in the experience of delivering services during the pandemic and determine how service delivery should be managed going forward.

### **Responding to the ongoing impact of the COVID crisis**

Key takeaways from the community assessment:

- The need for housing, food, utility assistance, employment and economic security are going to be more prominent within the agency's service area for the next few years at least.

Goals:

- Continue responding to the essential needs of people in the Hillsborough and Rockingham counties. This will require flexibility and the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.