



2021 - 2024 STRATEGIC PLAN

YORK HILLS CENTRE FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

MARCH 4, 2021

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MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR AND CEO

In June 2020, York Hills Centre for Children, Youth and Families (York Hills) began developing its first strategic plan for the amalgamated organization, setting the foundation for a clear and vibrant future.

At York Hills, we recognize the importance of a focused plan that sets out clear priorities, directs our efforts and resources, and ensures alignment with a common purpose and identity. Now over two years' post-amalgamation, and amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of collectively pausing, evaluating, and setting a clear strategy became all the more important. This plan provides York Hills with direction for the next three years.

A dedicated group of volunteers, the Board is responsible for the governance and stewardship of York Hills. Through the provision of mental health services, York Hills supports children, youth and families through social, emotional and behavioural challenges with compassion, expert resources and knowledge, and individualized care.

As we began to envision our future, we turned to our broad community of stakeholders. It was essential for us to gather the thoughts, ideas, and input of those who regularly interact with York Hills. This way, we could ensure the plan reflects and responds to the needs of those we serve. We highly appreciate and were encouraged by the level of commitment and engagement from all, including staff and consultants, Board members, partner and community organizations, children and youth, parents and caregivers, donors and funders, and the general public. Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts, ideas, concerns, and critiques—for being open and vulnerable in a way that will help us continue to grow.

We are deeply committed to pursuing these four strategic directions. Together we will continue in our mission to work in partnership to empower children, youth and families through their mental health journey.

Sincerely,

Steven Rebellato, Board Chair

Dean Rokos, CEO

OUR FOUNDATION

A.1. Mission

Working in partnership to empower children, youth and families through their mental health journey

A.2. Vision

To build hope and resiliency in children, youth and families

A.3. Core Values

Inclusive: We seek to embed equity, inclusivity and diversity at every level of our organization. We are committed to moving forward with intention and by allocating the resources required to effectively break down the barriers preventing equal access to service. We embrace change to ensure a welcoming, open, accessible and responsive environment.

People-Centered: We value and believe in individuals' inherent strength and capacity. Through all we do, we prioritize building supportive relationships that are grounded in trust, authenticity, respect and compassion, ensuring our actions always match our words. We commit to intently listening and ensuring a safe and caring environment where people feel understood, guided and supported.

Collaborative: We recognize and value the circles of care that surround our clients and the collective capacity we all create together. We work beside and for the community, and strive to be responsive and flexible.

Knowledgeable: We celebrate a focus on continual learning and growth, and value the wealth of knowledge, skill and expertise held by our staff. We hold ourselves to high professional standards, with a commitment to evidence-based, client-centered and solution-focused practices.

Courageous: We lean into our strengths and do not shy away from challenging, complex situations. We are willing to push ourselves and the sector, moving forward with creativity and vulnerability.

B. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

York Hills delivers a range of mental health services to children from birth to age 18 and their families. They offer expertise and specialized treatment of social, emotional and behavioural challenges. As an agency, they are committed to providing high-quality practices of care that have been proven to show positive outcomes. From June 2020 to February 2021, York Hills engaged Laridae, a leading management consulting firm, to guide the Board of Directors through a strategic planning process, leading to the adoption of a three-year strategic plan.

The strategic planning approach, based on best practices for non-profit organizations, supported the Board of Directors throughout the process as they championed the planning and provided oversight in developing the final strategy.

B.1. Planning Process

The planning process included qualitative research, a document review, an environmental scan to situate York Hills in the larger context, stakeholder engagement, and ongoing meetings with the Board and senior leadership team to work toward the development of the final strategy.

Stakeholder engagement served as a foundational element of the process, informing subsequent discussion, deliberation, and decision-making. At the outset, the Board of Directors and the senior leadership team created a process that would reach out to engage and listen to York Hills’ community of stakeholders—those who regularly interact with the organization, including staff and consultants, children and youth, partner and community organizations, parents and caregivers, funders, and members of the communities in which York Hills exists.

Strategic plans rely on authentic engagement. Actively engaging with stakeholders helps ensure that the final plan resonates with them, reflects their communities and provides meaningful direction over the course of the plan’s stated duration. The feedback gathered throughout the strategic planning process strengthened and shaped the conversations that followed. By choosing to engage its stakeholders, York Hills ensured that this strategic plan was informed by experience, evidence, and the broadest-held perceptions of all those York Hills serves.

Engagement strategies to solicit input included an online survey, virtual focus groups, client and key person interviews. Throughout the engagement phase, from October 26 – December 9, 2020, input and feedback were gathered from **284 stakeholders**, including:

- 205 respondents to the online survey
- 61 virtual focus group participants
- 14 participants in parent/caregiver and client interviews

- Four (4) key person interviewees

The engagement had two general purposes:

- To engage stakeholders by gathering input, ideas, and suggestions; and by including them in the planning process directly and in a meaningful way.
- To educate stakeholders about and promote the work of York Hills (as a positive legacy of the planning process).

The themes identified in the engagement process were core elements that helped guide the Board of Director’s thinking leading up to and during the strategic planning retreat on January 16 and 23, 2021. From the perspective of York Hills’ most valued stakeholders, several themes emerged as areas where the organization excels or could grow and improve with a newly developed strategic plan. They were:

- Quality of Service
- Staff
- Waitlist
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
- Growth and Amalgamation
- External Communications and Collaboration
- Internal Communications
- Programs and Services
- Human Resources and Workplace Culture
- Accessibility and Technology
- Access and Navigation
- Community and Sector Needs
- Systems and Processes
- Leadership and Sector Change
- COVID-19 Response

“It’s a truly a great organization that I’m really glad to work for!” – Staff Member

“They’re exceptional ... York Hills has saved [our child’s] life.” – Parent

“I’m so grateful to them for all that they do – to have that help for my son when I didn’t know where to turn.” – Parent

Strategic issues, data, financial picture, and overall external environmental landscape were identified and explored through a series of facilitated discussions. The key issues, opportunities, and challenges were determined and prioritized. Offering high-quality mental health services to children, youth and their families remained the focus through thoughtful consideration of the organization’s future. The retreat culminated in unanimous agreement on four strategic directions.

C. OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

York Hills is focused on ensuring that we remain a creative, collaborative, trustworthy, holistic, compassionate organization. At the core of our new directions is a commitment to those we serve—children, youth and families who are experiencing mental health challenges.

York Hills is committing to a three-year strategic plan. As such, these directions are broad and oriented to the future—providing a clear focus and direction while allowing us to respond and adapt as circumstances evolve over the years. These directions provide a strong framework for developing annual operational plans with measurable goals and achievable objectives.

In direct response to what we heard from our community of stakeholders, in addition to the internal and external considerations that shaped the planning process, the following are our four directions:

- 1. Prioritizing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**
- 2. Being An Employer of Choice**
- 3. Delivering Quality Services**
- 4. Empowering Community Capacity**

1. Prioritizing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

York Region continues to experience significant growth and demographic changes, both of which carry impacts on service needs and provisions. To better serve our community, it is essential that we work to ensure we reflect those we serve through the diversity of our staff and volunteers, and that our actions reflect these changes as well. We are committed to becoming an organization that embeds equity at every level, ensuring these principles are present in our systems and processes, and become a foundational element of our identity. While we recognize that change will take time, and that we are working against the legacies of systemic and institutional racism and inequalities, we are dedicated to moving forward with intention and through investment in the continual evolution and growth of our organization. We commit to increasing our reach to the diverse communities across York Region. We will focus on building a stronger understanding of the region, with particular attention to the removal of any barriers that limit access to community members. We will ensure our work to service every individual with excellence is completed through a more equitable and inclusive service delivery model that is culturally responsive and trauma-informed.

Our Commitments

Over the next three years, we commit to *Prioritizing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion* through:

- **A Strong Understanding of the Region:** Building a more nuanced understanding of York Region, mapping out the needs and barriers to service across different communities, particularly marginalized communities and those currently underserved by York Hills.
- **A Diverse Workforce:** Evaluating and adjusting our recruitment systems and hiring practices to increase the extent to which our staff reflect the people and communities we serve.
- **Culturally Responsive Services:** Evaluating and adjusting our programs and services to ensure that they are culturally responsive, accessible, inclusive, relevant, and trauma-informed, while enhancing the capacity of our staff to respond and serve all community members through ongoing knowledge transfer and learning.
- **Broadened Relationships:** Diversifying our partnerships through supportive relationships with smaller, more diverse community organizations to enhance our connections to and understanding of the wider York Region.
- **Community Outreach:** Enhancing our community profile and increasing awareness of York Hills' programs and services, to expand our reach and build a more diverse and inclusive client base.
- **Systems and Processes:** Reviewing all organizational practices, systems, policies and procedures through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Updating any practices that may unintentionally create or enforce existing barriers to service.

2. Being An Employer of Choice

At York Hills, our knowledgeable, supportive and deeply-committed staff are our most critical assets. They work creatively and collaboratively to provide expert, individualized services and to ensure clients feel well respected and heard. To maintain this high quality of care, we recognize the importance of ensuring York Hills remains a workplace that qualified professionals want to join, and where our current staff want to stay and advance their careers. As an organization, we are committed to continuing to build a collective workplace culture that staff are proud to be a part of. We will invest in our recruitment and retention strategies and ensure clear expectations—reinforcing our belief in the value of our work and in our staff's ability to execute it. We will ensure our staff feel supported and appreciated as they go about their work each day. We will continue to provide staff with the necessary supports, resources, and training to be successful, including clear, consistent internal processes and systems.

Our Commitments

Over the next three years, we commit to *Being An Employer of Choice* through:

- **Workplace Culture:** Continuing to build an open, responsive, caring, inclusive and safe workplace culture that is grounded in a high degree of trust, with regular engagement and opportunities to provide feedback.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** Reviewing and investing in strategies to attract qualified applicants from diverse backgrounds, and to retain the skills, knowledge and experience that currently exist within staff teams.
- **Expectation Setting:** Setting clear standards against which to measure and support staff

performance and achievement.

- **Processes and Systems:** Ensuring staff have the resources they need to do their work efficiently and effectively, including access to technology, tools and software, and streamlined and standardized policies, processes, and procedures.
- **Training:** Continuing to invest in and prioritize training, including skills-specific training, and training on equitable and trauma-informed approaches.
- **Internal Communications:** Building and strengthening an internal awareness of programs, services, and internal pathways; breaking down silos; and bringing staff together under a shared mission and vision.

3. Delivering Quality Services

We are proud to provide high-quality, trusted, and collaborative mental health services to children, youth and families across York Region and beyond. As we move forward, we intend to not only maintain but increase this level of quality, while ensuring we are accessible and inclusive to those who have not yet accessed our services. Through quality of care indicators that reflect evidence-based practices and outcomes, we will ensure that we maintain the individualized support our clients deserve. We understand the extent to which effective, purposeful, consistent and reciprocal communications can increase our presence and visibility, amplify our knowledge and expertise across the region, and help us to hear the feedback necessary to continue to positively impact the lives of our clients and their families.

We see an opportunity for York Hills to strengthen its identity and leadership—underscored by a foundation of quality services and a collective commitment to our vision and mission. As a sector, there's an opportunity to be creative and bold, and we are committed to contributing towards the growth and innovation of the sector as a whole.

Our Commitments

Over the next three years, we commit to *Delivering Quality Services* through:

- **Creative Leadership:** Influencing system-wide change through thoughtful and purposeful leadership, with a commitment to creative and innovative service delivery models.
- **A Strong Identity:** Ensuring a clear, coherent York Hills' identity and understanding of how York Hills differentiates itself from other providers of child and youth mental health services, to support clients in navigating York Hills as part of the service ecosystem.
- **Accessibility:** Increasing our understanding of barriers to service and exploring ways to increase accessibility, such as leveraging technology and virtual service delivery, simplifying navigation between services, and collaborating to facilitate geographic accessibility.
- **Evidence-Based Services:** Focusing on quality and ensuring positive outcomes for clients that are measurable, with evidence-based approaches and training.
- **Transitions:** Evaluating and working to improve transitions into and out of service, including effective waitlist management, transition planning, and efficient intake and navigation.

4. Empowering Community Capacity

At York Hills, we highly value partnership and seek to approach every relationship with an open mind, a willingness to enter into difficult conversations and explore opportunities for collaboration. We see the many sector-wide challenges that involve child and youth mental health, where we can lend our expertise, but we also recognize that there are elements that extend beyond the bounds of our knowledge. As such, we strive to continue to be seen by our system partners as trusting, flexible, responsive and honest, to have a strong foundation from which we can begin to address gaps in service and capacity—for individual clients and across the sector. We will build even stronger relationships with our current and future partners, leaning into our strengths and leveraging those of other organizations. We commit to working in partnership with local Indigenous communities, building relationships grounded in collaboration, consultation, and respect.

Our Commitments

Over the next three years, we commit to *Empowering Community Capacity* through:

- **Enhanced Capacity Across the Sector:** Investing in our ability to train, educate, and share our knowledge and expertise to expand the capacity of other organizations and the wider sector landscape.
- **Strategic Connections:** Continuing to build and strengthen collaborative, authentic, and equitable connections, to address gaps across the sector, streamline services, leverage one another's' expertise, increase quality of care, support referrals and access to services, and expand community capacity, including with diverse community partners and stakeholders.
- **Communications:** Improving communications and information sharing to and with our partners to ensure a clear understanding of who we are, what we do, and how to access our services.
- **Resources:** Exploring opportunities to leverage resources between different partners, such as training, shared space, and technology.
- **Advocacy:** Ensuring the voices of the children, youth and families we serve are heard at community tables, including with the local Ontario Health Team.
- **Reconciliation:** Strengthening our relationships and collaboration with local Indigenous communities, leaders, organizations to better work with, and serve, Indigenous people and communities.

D. NEXT STEPS

Our new strategic directions provide York Hills with strategic focus and a clear framework to drive change and progress. The Board has committed to the following next steps:

1. The strategic plan will be communicated internally and externally;
2. Annual organizational goals and objectives will be developed that align with, and advance each strategic priority;
3. Progress updates will be provided for all stakeholders at year-end; and
4. Feedback will be sought regularly as the directions are implemented and results are known.

E. CONCLUSION

The Board of Directors is proud of the success of York Hills. Through our strategic plan, we will ensure those we serve remain our priority. These directions will help to keep us focused as we continue to build our identity as a newer, amalgamated organization and through the ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impacts it will have on our communities over the next three years. We are committed to using resources in ways that ensure we are purposeful and accountable through all our initiatives.

We thank all those who added their voices by contributing thoughts and feedback. Please know that we have listened carefully.

The Board of Directors looks forward to reporting back on our progress and to building a strong foundation for future success.