



EMBRACING THE UNKNOWN

Family Service Toronto Strategic Plan 2026 - 2031

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Cover Art Credit

Cover image is of artwork developed through The Art of Belonging, an intergenerational queer art therapy group that brought together people of all ages in 2025. It was focused on the idea of belonging, community, connection and collaboration.

Appreciation

The development of FST's 2026-31 Strategic Plan was supported by People Minded Business and Sisonke Inc.

Land Acknowledgement

Family Service Toronto acknowledges that it operates on the traditional and treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Anishinabek. In addition to the Mississaugas and the Anishinabek, this territory has also long been home to the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat Peoples.

Today this land is home to many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. Family Service Toronto has come to operate in these lands as a result of treaties, including Treaty No. 13 (1805) and the Williams Treaty (1923). Treaties reflect our ongoing commitment to share this land and to live together in accordance with our promises to one another.

By acknowledging this history and the enduring presence of diverse Indigenous Peoples in this territory, Family Service Toronto reaffirms its commitment to treaty responsibilities and respectful relationships with Indigenous Peoples in our work. Deepening our understanding of the histories of the Indigenous Peoples who were here before us, and the history of colonialism that followed, is an important way in which we guide Family Service Toronto to better honour treaty promises and to take concrete action towards reconciliation.



Message from Leadership: A bold vision to embrace the unknown

Imagine setting out to design an organization capable of meeting the needs of a city that never stops changing—an organization as complex, dynamic, and interconnected as Toronto itself. You would create something with depth, vision, and enduring purpose. You would create Family Service Toronto (FST).

For more than a century, FST has been defined by dedication, innovation, and unwavering commitment to community. What began as a volunteer movement addressing family poverty in the city has evolved into a sector leader – rooted in relationships, trusted for expertise, and continually adapting to meet emerging needs.

Today, FST is recognized for its excellence across a broad spectrum of services:

Community-based clinical counselling – critical support for victims /survivors of intimate partner violence, court-mandated programs for those who have used violence, violence prevention initiatives that reach into ethno-racial communities, and specialized programs for seniors and caregivers.

Comprehensive case management services for adults and children with intellectual or developmental disabilities – shared services models to extend our impact across the sector that include individualized funding program administration and the evolving collective of colleague agencies known as the Citywide Commons .

Shaping public policy – FST plays a powerful and influential role in shaping public policy at municipal, provincial and federal levels to ensure that the voices of those we serve are heard in the systems that affect their lives.

Our mission, vision and values are all guided by a robust theory of change. These guiding principles ensure that our diverse activities form a coherent whole working to both support individuals and address the root causes of their challenges.

An imperative for change and transformation

We are entering a period of profound transformation. The environment in which Family Service Toronto operates is transforming and evolving at a rapid pace. There are significant changes and challenges in all areas of practice. FST must evolve at the same pace moving from a traditional charity-based service model to a dynamic, agile NGO that leads boldly into the future.

Throughout this evolution, we remain true to our core purpose: supporting people to be resilient and to strengthen conditions for more just, supportive communities.

In such a moment, strategic planning is not simply a process—it is an act of stewardship and responsibility. We believe the best way to future-proof FST is to focus on what will matter the most: authentically embracing the diversity of our city, supporting and developing our most valuable asset – our dedicated staff; strengthening our data capabilities and how we leverage information; and building resilient revenue models that allow us not only to withstand the uncertainty but thrive in it.

Our 2026-2031 Strategic Plan Embracing the Unknown, reflects both the reality of the moment and our collective resolve. It signals our intention to move forward with clarity, courage and ambition, no matter what the future holds.

Olympia Baldrich,
President, Board of Directors

Chris Brillinger,
Executive Director

Vision

Family Service Toronto envisions a city in which people are resilient and thriving in more just and supportive communities.

Mission

We work with individuals, families and communities destabilized by precarious mental health and/or socioeconomic circumstances, to achieve greater resilience, stability and equity. We achieve this through our understanding of poverty and the harmful effects of colonization, marginalization, discrimination and oppression. We direct our energies to support individuals and families in our core service areas – community counselling and mental health, gender-based violence and developmental disabilities. At the same time, we work to influence policy, build knowledge, strengthen communities and advocate for system change.

Values

We are committed to:

- grounding our work in the lived expertise of people and the community
- working from a strengths-based and trauma-informed approach
- celebrating diversity, pursuing equity, practicing inclusion and utilizing decolonization concepts
- being accountable through measurement and outcome reporting
- striving for excellence in all that we do

Our Definition of Family

Our name begins with “family” and we understand it to mean: two or more people, whether living together or apart, related by blood, marriage, adoption or commitment to care for one another.

We Know We Are Successful When:

- people live with dignity in thriving neighbourhoods and inclusive communities which are free of poverty and violence
- public policy is grounded in social and economic justice
- programs and services are accessible to those who face barriers
- people build on their skills to manage life challenges
- people are able to realize their potential



Executive Summary

At its 111th year, Family Service Toronto (FST) finds itself at yet another crossroad. Founded in 1914 as the Neighbourhood Workers Association, FST has reinvented itself over the years to remain true in our belief in people and this city, and the determination with which we stand for a fairer, more just society.

FST's overarching vision remains: We want individuals and families in Toronto to have greater stability and resilience in more just and supportive communities.

To achieve this vision, we will pursue a new series of strategic directions that build on our strengths:

FST's theory of change

provides an integrated way of understanding the organization's activities and focus of the underlying forces of poverty, marginalization and discrimination that FST works to alleviate.

FST's three core service areas

– mental health, family violence and developmental disabilities – remain exceptionally relevant and will remain the focus of our work.

FST's commitment to research and advocacy

provides the organization with a distinctive public policy capacity that contributes to systemic change.



Vision for 2031

The Family Service Toronto of 2031 will be a **leader in the understanding and practice of decolonizing practice** in service delivery in a non-profit context.

It will be a **leader in hybrid workplace culture and an employer of choice**.

It will **utilize transparent data driven practices** embedded throughout the organization.

It will be a **leader in shared service delivery** in all aspects: program delivery, administration, and facility utilization.

It will have a **strategic mix of self-sustaining, government funded and voluntary supported services and programs**.

Developmental Services will continue to operate core programs and maintain our position in sector leadership and system design.

Mental Health will have a robust business model supporting innovative programs and services with outcome measures demonstrating impact.

Gender Based Violence will provide a clear, fact-based voice speaking effectively on the root causes of violence against womxn.

The Citywide Commons will be a thriving centre of service excellence and a leader in shared service models amongst value-aligned colleague agencies.

"A single pebble creates ripples that reach for beyond what we can see. Every choice we make sends waves into the lives of others."

Strategic Priorities

The best way to achieve the vision for 2031 is to focus on four priorities over the next five years. They are:

1. **Living Our Values:** Growing in Equity and Decolonizing Practice
2. **Powered by People:** Strengthening Our Internal Capacity
3. **Lead with Insight:** Harnessing Data and Influence
4. **Fueling the Future:** Reimagining Revenue and Financial Sustainability

The world within which FST operates is changing more rapidly than ever before, and in every aspect. Our city is experiencing unprecedented growth and evolving as a place of many different peoples; in essence, the world lives in Toronto. The local, regional, national and international political contexts within which we exist are extremely fluid. Societal stress permeates our lives and is perhaps related to the deepening realities of the "information age."

FST staff are not immune to these pressures and challenges. While FST has achieved high and consistent retention rates and equally impressive satisfaction scores, the workload pressures and burnout risk are very real and pressing.

This environment is not the context for traditional strategic planning. This Strategic Plan articulates a high-level vision for 2031. Under that vision and based on the process we undertook to develop the 2026-2031 Strategic Plan, we have focused on future proofing FST as best as we can. Simply put, we need to build an organization that is both highly resilient and has maximum flexibility.

The 2026-2031 Strategic Plan includes **14 Objectives and 44 Key Performance Results** to guide and measure our journey to address the four priorities. We believe if we get these four priorities right, FST will be well placed to weather the challenges and seize the opportunities that lie ahead.

The priorities, objectives, and key performance results are the path to the realization of our vision of the Family Service Toronto of 2031.

Areas of Practice

Our practice areas remain the same:

- **Community Counselling and Mental Health**
- **Violence against Women / Gender-based Violence**
- **Developmental Disabilities**
- **Public Policy / Social Action**

We are committed to continuing our service excellence in all four practice areas. We know we are needed and that we are effective in these spheres of practice. The strategic priorities will strengthen our work within and across each practice area.





Planting Seeds Creating Ripples

HONOURING TRUTH, NURTURING RECONCILIATION, GROWING A FUTURE TOGETHER

"THINK OF THE RIPPLES OF YOUR ANCESTORS
— WHAT WAS CARRIED FORWARD TO YOU?"

THINK OF THE RIPPLES YOU CREATE TODAY —
DO THEY MOVE US CLOSER TO
RECONCILIATION, OR DO THEY LEAVE WHITE
SUPREMACY UNCHALLENGED?

"THINK OF THE RIPPLES YOU WANT TO LEAVE
FOR THE GENERATIONS TO COME.

by Dr. Peggy Shaughnessy

Family Services Toronto 2025



Reflections

Strategic Priorities, Objectives and Key Performance Results

Family Service Toronto has identified four priorities to guide us over the coming five years. These priorities will serve as pillars to guide every part of FST and underpin all the changes we will undertake in the coming years to better support people, families, and communities better.

1. Living Our Values: Growing in Equity and Decolonizing Practice

Family Service Toronto will continue our journey of learning and growth in decolonizing practice and confronting white supremacy, understanding that we are embedded in a set of systems based on colonized practice.

This includes developing a stronger understanding of how power is held and experienced across the organization and in our relationships with community. We will work to build partnerships grounded in reciprocity, and collaborate with those most impacted by poverty, marginalization, and discrimination to help shape our services and policies. Internally, we will explore and address practices that may unintentionally reinforce inequity. Over time, our aim is to provide better support and uplift the voices and leadership of those navigating systems based on colonized practice.

Objective 1.1.

Innovate decolonizing practices across all HR systems, policies, and processes to ensure authentic representation, equitable benefits, and the removal of structural barriers.

- 100% of HR policies reviewed and updated through an equity/decolonization framework by 2027.
- At least 80% of new hires reflect the language, cultural, and accessibility needs of FST's clients and bring lived experience from neurodiverse and developmental disability communities by 2031.
- Staff survey results show a 20% increase in perception of equitable and inclusive HR practices by 2031.

- Embed decolonizing practice, strengths based, trauma-informed in orientation and onboarding to keep skills at consistent level by 2028.

Objective 1.2.

Strengthen community voice and lived experience by engaging service users, staff, and partners in governance, advisory roles, and decision-making in meaningful and authentic ways based on existing best practices in the organization.

- Establish a policy committee advisory board with Lived Expert members by 2029 with at least 12 active members.
- Lived experts represented on all governance/board committees by 2029.
- Develop and implement anti-tokenism engagement guidelines by 2028.
- Annual report includes stories and impact data co-authored with people with lived experience by 2030.

Objective 1.3.

Align programs, hiring, and partnerships to reflect the needs of the diverse populations FST serves, including language, accessibility, and culturally grounded practices using available data.

- At least 3 new community partnerships developed with culturally specific agencies annually.
- Revise service user satisfaction tools to measure scores in 'accessibility and cultural fit' by 2027.

Objective 1.4.

Transform the Citywide Commons into a shared, equitable hub with co-leadership, inclusive participation, and sustainable structures

- Develop and implement a shared governance model for the Commons by 2031.
- Expand, track and evolve shared back-office services generating \$300K in efficiencies by 2029.



2. Powered by People: Strengthening Our Internal Capacity

Our ability to meet the needs of our communities is rooted in the wellbeing, diversity, and sustainability of our people.

Over the next five years, Family Service Toronto will invest in further cultivating an intersectional approach to workplace culture that prioritizes mental health, reduces burnout, and fosters belonging. We will align staffing and organizational capacity with the evolving realities of service delivery, and implement culturally responsive practices that support staff engagement, leadership development, and accountability.

By addressing systemic barriers within our workplace and embedding inclusive approaches, we aim to create conditions for all staff to thrive and contribute meaningfully to our mission.

Objective 2.1.

Align staffing capacity with organizational priorities to reduce burnout and strengthen belonging.

- Develop service ratio benchmarks for all roles by 2028.
- 65% of staff report workload is manageable by 2028.
- Develop succession plans for key positions by 2027.
- 100% of leadership trained in workload/data management by 2027.

Objective 2.2.

Build an innovative, collaborative culture where staff across programs and roles co-create solutions and explore opportunities together.

- Launch one cross-program innovation project annually based on identified need.
- Document and share three successful innovation stories internally by 2030.
- Engagement survey shows a 10% increase in 'collaboration' scores by 2031.
- Create a physical innovation space by 2029.



3. Lead with Insight – Harnessing Data and Influence

Family Service Toronto will foster a culture where meaningful data is a catalyst for change. From service delivery to policy development, we will strengthen our capacity to gather, interpret, and apply data in ways that reflect and advance our values, including confronting white supremacy and progressing toward decolonizing practices. We will use these insights to shape programs, improve equity in access and outcomes, and support day-to-day decisions. By connecting knowledge across teams and engaging in public discourse, social action, and advocacy, we aim to make our influence visible, grounded in lived realities, and driven by community voices.

Objective 3.1.

Build a data-driven culture with clear KPIs, and tools that build trust and confidence.

- Deliver data literacy training to 100% of staff and board annually by 2028.
- Embed data literacy training into onboarding.
- Develop and track at least 3 KPIs in all programs by 2028.
- Increase demographic data quality 20% by 2028.

Objective 3.2.

Build a continuous service improvement culture by using data to guide decisions and improve client and community impact.

- Develop unit cost models for all services by 2028.
- Client service programs produce annual outcome reports by 2028.
- 100% of managers use data for decision-making by 2028.
- At least 5 program improvements per year implemented based on data insights.

Objective 3.3.

Ensure data is accessible, transparent, and shared equitably across teams and with communities to support learning, collaboration, and advocacy.

- Develop a centralized warehouse where staff can easily access the data they need by 2028.
- Publish an annual 'Community Impact Report' with disaggregated equity data by 2030.

Objective 3.4.

Leverage data for influence by identifying systemic gaps, informing public policy and advocacy, and amplifying FST's role in shaping public conversations.

- Produce at least 5 policy briefs annually using FST data.
- Secure 3 media mentions per year citing FST's research, data, community service experience or lived expert storytelling.
- Incorporate FST program data in all Campaign 2000 and FST reports.
- Ensure FST data is cited in at least 2 government or sector policy documents by 2028.
- Ensure FST presents at Legislature and City Hall at least 2x per year, contributes to municipal and provincial budget consultation processes on an annual basis.
- Track and report FST Government Relations and lobbying activities by 2026.





4. Fueling the Future – Reimagining Revenue and Financial Sustainability

To ensure long-term sustainability and impact, Family Service Toronto will explore new funding models that reflect our values and community commitments.

This includes responsibly expanding fee-for-service offerings, piloting alternative economies such as mutual aid and skill-sharing and advocating for equitable and fair government investment. We will assess our organizational readiness to navigate evolving funding landscapes, including individualized funding and broader system reform. As we do this, we remain guided by principles of community accountability, accessibility, and innovation; ensuring our growth strategies support our mission without compromising equity.

Objective 4.1.

Diversify and strengthen revenue through updated fee-for-service models.

- Launch additional fee-for-service model by 2026 generating at least \$250K annually by 2028.
- Increase non-government revenue sources by 20% by 2028.

Objective 4.2.

Optimize FST's physical assets, including completion of the 4th floor, to expand service capacity and maximize community impact.

- Complete 4th floor renovation by 2027.
- Generate \$500K annually in rental by 2029.

Objective 4.3.

Expand and sustain mental health services through innovative, efficient, and long-term delivery models that meet emerging community needs.

- Launch at least two new sustainable mental health offerings by 2028.
- Increase mental health direct client service hours by 20% by 2028.
- Report on both client satisfaction and service impact with mental health services.

Objective 4.4.

Deepen financial and client insight by developing unit cost models and service data that strengthen accountability, strategy, and sustainability.

- Develop and publish annual cost-per-service-unit report by 2028.



Words From Families Supported

FST's Mission is "We work with individuals, families and communities destabilized by precarious mental health and/or socioeconomic circumstances, to achieve greater resilience, stability and equity," so it's appropriate to give people participating in services the first word. One virtual and three in-person focus groups were conducted with roughly 30 service users to hear their opinions on how FST could be better.

FST's clients felt accepted, welcomed, and respected.

The staff, volunteers, and peer supports were viewed as being compassionate, responsive, and genuinely helpful. Its programs were described as life-changing and the group settings fostered connection, belonging, and emotional safety.

The consistent follow-up and long-term relationships with staff were highly valued. People appreciated hybrid service options and flexibility in service delivery.

There was a recognition of FST being a safe, inclusive space grounded in equity values. In part, this was demonstrated by the availability of some multilingual support (e.g., Spanish, French) which was meaningful to those who accessed it.

Clients also appreciated FST's efforts to hire staff with lived experience.

Additional Information

Strategic Planning Process

<https://familyservicetoronto.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Strategic-Planning-Process.pdf>

Trends and Assets

<https://familyservicetoronto.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Trends-and-Assets.pdf>

Situational Analysis Report

<https://familyservicetoronto.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Situational-Analysis-Report.pdf>



Client Voices

"My therapist saved my life. I have recommended FST to many people. I am so thankful." *Violence Against Women*

"FST has helped me a lot to deal with my emotions and to become a better person. You are doing more than enough for me and are doing great." *Walk-In Clinic*

"The social workers are all excellent. I have experienced trauma and abuse from my partner and the services have helped me heal." *Counselling Service*

"My son's Passport Coordinator is professional, knowledgeable, responsive and kind, resulting in pleasant interactions. This is meaningful to me." *Passport Program*

"Wonderful staff. Reach out in meaningful and helpful way to my son." *HFHC, Options Adult*

"Your service has been a lifeline to provide the necessary care for my daughter, who has cerebral palsy." *Passport Program*

"For me it was perfect. They helped me get Rent-Geared-to-Income in six months after leaving an abusive relationship, and because of the help I received today, I'm doing so much better!" *Violence Against Women*

"[...] helped me out so much over the time we had together, and I still use what I learned from those sessions every day." *DKS – HIV/AIDS, Counselling Service*