

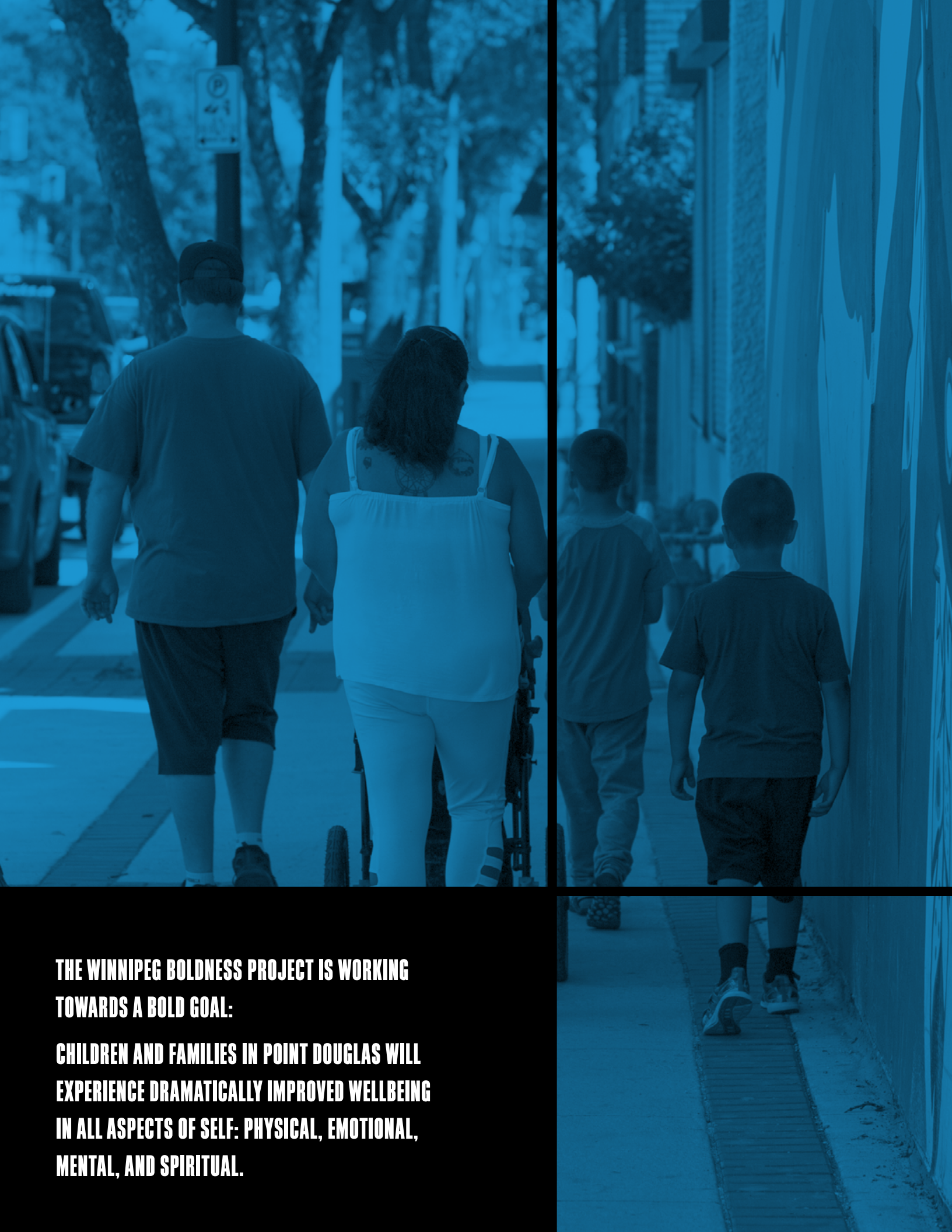
**BOLD
NESS**

**THE
WINNIPEG
BOLDNESS
PROJECT**

HEALTH & WELLNESS PLANNING SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES INVOLVED WITH THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

**PROTOTYPING FOR CHANGE
FEBRUARY 2022**





THE WINNIPEG BOLDNESS PROJECT IS WORKING
TOWARDS A BOLD GOAL:
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN POINT DOUGLAS WILL
EXPERIENCE DRAMATICALLY IMPROVED WELLBEING
IN ALL ASPECTS OF SELF: PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL,
MENTAL, AND SPIRITUAL.

We are working with residents and groups in this neighbourhood to test new ideas to support the wellbeing of children and families. We call these ideas Proofs of Possibilities which support a vision for change in our community. We are exploring possibilities in the following areas:

PROOFS OF POSSIBILITIES



HEALTH AND WELLNESS PLANNING: SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES INVOLVED WITH THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

COMMUNITY VISION

Families have the supports they need to stay together or reunify with their children, to give their kids the best start possible.

Families and natural supports involved with the child welfare system face many additional systems barriers to give their children the best start possible. Community organizations are already working with these families through strength-based and family-centred approaches to drastically improve outcomes for children. This is a model for how organizations and systems can work with families to keep families together and out of the care of Child and Family Services.

We partnered with local non-profit organizations to document how they work with families involved in the child welfare system. In partnership with Andrews Street Family Centre, Blue Thunderbird Family Care Inc., Mount Carmel Clinic, and Wahbung Abinoonjiiag Inc. we supported 7 families over three months through a whole-family health and wellness planning process guided by families unique assets and needs including:

- Building trust and determining family needs
- Crisis stabilization
- Building and strengthening trusting relationships; between families and staff, within families, and between children and their caregivers and natural support networks
- Providing moral and emotional support




- Safety planning
- Help coping with poverty
- Life skills supports and training
- Systems advocacy and supports
- Cultural connections and activities



WHY DID WE FOCUS ON SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES INVOLVED WITH THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM?

Children have many natural supports - their parents and family, the community, relatives, and elders among them. However, these ecosystems need to be strengthened and supported themselves in order to give children their best start.

The child welfare system disrupts children's natural support systems, making it a key place to focus efforts on Health and Wellness planning for caregivers, families, children, and natural support networks to avoid apprehension of children and foster reunification with families.

 Families that are involved with the child welfare system face many broader systems barriers, such as challenges in connecting with Child and Family Services (CFS) caseworkers, as well as accessing housing, Employment and Income Assistance budgets, living with disabilities, and adhering to no-contact orders. These barriers place even greater burdens on families.

Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care and keeping families together is action called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Providing supports like Health and Wellness Planning is an important step in giving children the best care possible.

WHAT BLOCKS SUCCESS FOR FAMILIES INVOLVED WITH THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM?

Natural Supports are not Properly Resourced

Existing supports that are best for a child- their natural supports such as parents and extended family - are not provided the resources that they need to be most effective, leading to families often encountering crises.

Loss of Hope

When a child is apprehended, their natural caregivers lose belief in themselves and their ability to parent. Caregivers may give up on reunification, believing that their child is better off without them.

Loss of Trust

Many of the policies that systems implement can at times be punitive to families, even though they're meant to help those facing challenges. As a result, families will often not seek the help of these systems even in times of need.

Lack of Whole Family Supports

While there are some existing supports for mothers and women, more opportunities to access help are needed that include everyone who cares for children, including men and fathers. Gaps in existing services makes it difficult for whole families to participate in family health and wellness planning.

Rigid Services

Families need resources that meet them where they are at and respond to their individual needs. Existing services should provide more flexible options in order to build healthy, supportive, and trusting long-term relationships with families.

Lack of Preventative Resources

Existing resources are focused on helping families respond to crises, but do not prioritize preventing crises or planning for a healthy future. Many families only gain access to services like counseling after they have had intervention from systems (e.g., gaining access to counseling once children are in professional care).



A NOTE ON SYSTEMS ADVOCACY

One of the main, and most challenging, ways that staff supported families was in helping them navigate and overcome the barriers put in place by systems that are supposed to be helping them. Families that don't have support from staff are entirely on their own. This symbol is used throughout this document to draw attention to the prevalent and challenging systems barriers that drain families' resources.



PUTTING THE CHILD-CENTRED MODEL INTO ACTION

The Child-Centred Model – a way of working for positive change developed by the community of Point Douglas – helps us find the best ways to support families in creating a health and wellness plan.

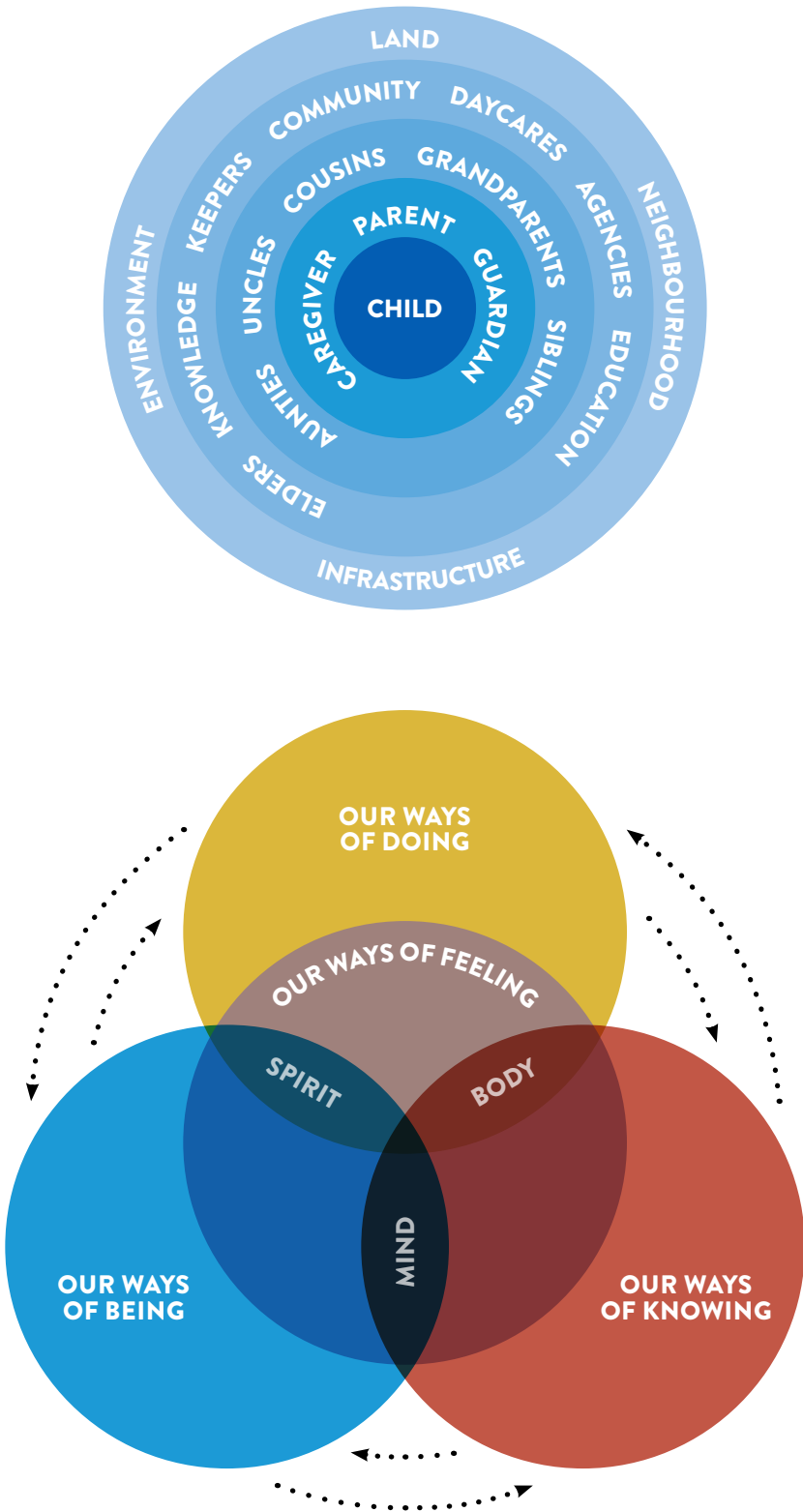
We listen and respond to the help that families asked for, rather than assuming that professionals know better.

We provide support in all areas of need, rather than limiting supports to only one issue.

We welcome families where they are at, supporting the strength of natural supports systems rather than focusing on their challenges.

When we work within the Child-Centred Model, we are able to support positive change for children, parents, families, and the community.

To learn more about the Child-Centred Model, read the full report at winnipegboldness.ca/childcentredmodel



MORAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Staff members were available by phone or text on evenings and weekends, which was critical for three women who lost close family members during the 3 months, helping to prevent or minimize addiction relapses triggered by these losses.

SYSTEMS ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT

Staff were able to prevent an apprehension due to a birth alert, when the terms of a case plan changed unexpectedly.

SYSTEMS ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT

Staff helped a parent keep her housing when she was having trouble meeting the conditions of her housing supports.

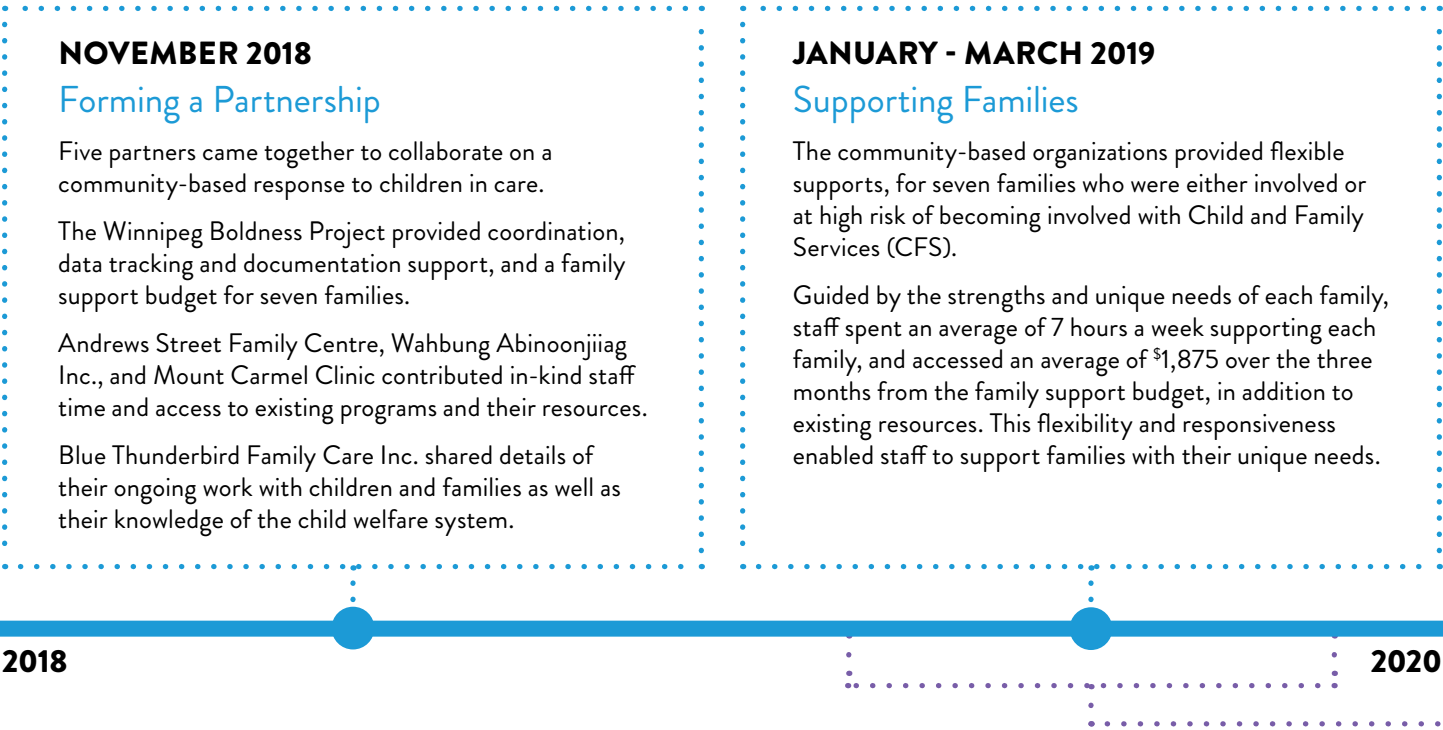
CRISIS STABILIZATION

The organizations gave support for transportation and for temporary housing for a family that had to move out temporarily for bed bug treatment by their landlord.

SAFETY PLANNING

Staff were able to use the family support budget to help a caregiver repair a door and replace locks for her safety and in preparing for reunification with her children.

SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES INVOLVED WITH THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM POP TIMELINE



OVER THREE MONTHS OF SUPPORT...



21 children's living situation stayed stable



10 children stayed at home



11 children stayed in care



3 children were apprehended and placed with family

SUCCESS STORIES

Staff helped prevent one birth alert and one infant apprehension.

Caregivers for six children reported improved quality and frequency of their visits.

Caregivers for 4 children made progress on or started reunification plans.

With support from staff, all 3 recently apprehended children were expected to return to their mother in 6 months.



HOUSING

Four caregivers found and/or applied for suitable housing.



INCOME

One family accessed the child tax benefit.
One family was referred to access disability benefits.



SUPPLIES FOR KIDS

Two caregivers accessed supplies for their new babies.
Three caregivers got furniture for kids, two of them to prepare for reunification.



MENTAL HEALTH

Two caregivers began grief counselling.
One caregiver began post-reunification counselling.

INTERIM OUTCOMES

Participants experienced a wide range of successes during the 3-month period. These outcomes show what families can achieve when they are supported in the right way.



HEALTH AND SAFETY

One family was able to repair a broken home door and lock.
One family was supported to relocate during bed bug treatment.



ADDICTIONS

Staff supported one participant through a relapse, reducing its intensity and duration.
One participant said that the support helped them avoid a relapse.



PARENTING SKILLS AND SUPPORTS

Two participants began attending parenting groups.
One participant connected with the Families First Home Visitor program.



OTHER PROGRESS

One mother strengthened her connection to her culture.
One caregiver was able to stay in school to complete her GED.

WE NEED CHANGE TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



SUPPORTING HEALTHY FAMILIES TODAY

The best ways that we have found to provide support for families, especially as long as today’s systemic barriers exist:

LET FAMILIES DEFINE SUCCESS

There are many steps on the road to longer-term outcomes. Progress needs to be defined by families themselves and respected by service providers.

HELP FAMILIES TO NAVIGATE SYSTEMS

Systemic barriers are a major source of stress and suffering for families. Staff play a key role in supporting families and all of their interactions with government systems.

BE FLEXIBLE FOR FAMILIES

Families are balancing multiple issues and crises. Being flexible in scheduling meetings and providing flexible supports like a family budget helps families participate in planning.

COMMIT TO THE LONG-TERM

Working successfully with families needs a long-term relationship without a planned end. Families need at least two years of support to make progress around child welfare.

HELP FAMILIES RECOVER FROM SEPARATION

Apprehension hurts parents belief in themselves and their ability to parent, as well as a loss of hope. Parents need support to recover and move towards reunification.



CHANGING THE SYSTEM FOR TOMORROW



Through this work we found that there are large barriers that affect families and community members. We need governments, non-profits, and businesses to:

1 | DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY VALUE FAMILIES – A CHILD’S NATURAL SUPPORTS – BY PRIORITIZING KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER.

Our existing approaches to child protection do not prioritize resourcing families in order to avoid removing children from their families. Systems must instead focus on keeping families together and providing them with the tools they need to thrive.

2 | ENSURE THAT FUNDING STRUCTURES ENABLE WHOLISTIC AND FLEXIBLE SUPPORTS.

Existing structures focus on individual family members or short-term, one-size-fits-all programs. Families need long-term, flexible supports to achieve their goals.

3 | BUILD HONEST AND TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FAMILIES AND AGENCIES BY PUTTING FAMILIES’ NEEDS FIRST.

Families have often had negative experiences with systems and agencies, even when seeking help for crises. These relationships need to be healed to be able to truly help children and families.

4 | REMOVE SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO SUCCESS.

The many barriers families face across government systems, from Housing to Justice to Employment and Income Assistance, make it hard for families to stay together. Change is needed to enable families to navigate these systems confidently and independently.

If you would like to learn more about the barriers that families in Point Douglas who are involved with the child welfare system face to health and wellness planning, read the full POP report [reference], read our report on helpful ways to work with Point Douglas [reference], and explore our other POP reports [reference].



**“WE ARE THANKFUL TO
OUR ANCESTORS WHO
ENTRUSTED US WITH
THE CARE OF THIS
GENERATION, AND THE
GENERATION WE WILL
NEVER KNOW.”**

—(MacNeill, 2014, p.29)

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the development and implementation of our prototypes, including our guide groups, partners, community organizations, local residents, and the North End community as a whole.

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