

NORTHEAST KINGDOM COMMUNITY ACTION

Strategic Plan 2019 - 2022



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Executive Summary and Agency Description

The Board and Staff at NEKCA engaged in a strategic planning process in December 2018. Selected staff and Board attended a two-day planning retreat to discuss the current vision for NEKCA, strategic realities and goals for the next three years. Across all programs and departments, staff are professional and have compassion for the people NEKCA serves as well as an understanding of the needs and barriers faced by clients. The range of services provided by NEKCA includes:

Education/Training	Child Care	Housing	Emergency Assistance
High School completion Professional development for parents and staff Job Readiness Skills Business Development Learning opportunity and support groups for parents Classes in starting a business and networking Teen Parenting Education Programing Referral to addition social supports Preschool transitions Child Care social emotional classes	Pre-School FAP Specialized Child Care Referral to child care Home Visits Early Head Start Prenatal care Play Groups Infant/Toddler school readiness	Warming shelter Family supported housing Emergency shelter Correction housing	Crisis fuel Electric Food Family services Clothing Youth in crisis Housing

Through the provision of the services listed above, NEKCA is helping the community and individuals in the Northeast Kingdom gain:

- Healthy youth – breaking the cycle of poverty
 - Strong healthy communities
 - Employment and community growth
 - Access to childcare
 - Financial literacy
 - Self-sufficiency – and able to depend on the community for help
 - Increased self esteem
 - Mental wellness
 - Healthy relationships
- Access to transportation
 - Resilience
 - Legal services
 - Safe space
 - Emergency and transitional housing for all
 - Asset building
 - Truancy intervention
 - Confidence
 - Proactive approaches to poverty and addiction

NEKCA Mission Statement: *To empower all generations in the Northeast Kingdom to grow, prosper and thrive.*

Vision Statement: *Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA) is a leading organization in the NEK addressing poverty through education, community collaborations, and community action. We believe in each individual's potential for positive growth and change.*

NEKCA Values:

RESPECT: We will be welcoming, open-minded, forthright, and fair in our interactions with our clients and with one another. We will always respect the confidentiality entrusted to us.

TRUST: We will treat one another with high regard, appreciation, and courtesy. We support an inclusive environment where questions and ideas are valued.

EMPOWERMENT: We recognize individual strengths and practice an empowerment approach when working with our clients and with one another. We will inspire one another to be the best we can be.

COMMUNICATION: We actively seek to understand the perspectives of others by listening with an open mind and communicating directly, honestly with compassion.

TEAMWORK: We have a commitment to common goals and will demonstrate a collaborative relationship with all other departments within NEKCA as to contribute in specific ways to the development of the program and to NEKCA as a whole.

INTEGRITY: We commit to provide the highest quality of service to our clients and to one another.

Community Profile Summary

A **Community Needs Assessment** was conducted in May 2018 by David Tucker. The full report is available by contacting the NEKCA office in Saint Johnsbury or Newport. The report contains extensive demographic details about Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. This is a summary of the agency's progress and challenges congruent with the strategic plan, informed by the most recent community assessment. The agency has two overarching inclusive approaches. One is the very long term strategy to alleviate poverty and increase prosperity. The other is more short term yet ongoing: to build capacity internally as with community partners to deliver high quality to make the agency an integrated, flexible excellent service delivery

Summary: The 64,108 people living in the Northeast Kingdom Community Actions 3 county service area are primarily white, with over 96% of the population identifying themselves as white. The Northeast Kingdom is the most rural region of Vermont, and one of the most rural areas in the US. The area consistently has the State's highest unemployment rates, the highest rates of poverty, and lowest income rates. The economy is driven largely by tourism, dairy farming, and forest products harvesting and processing. Economic development efforts in the region have suffered a devastating blow by the perpetration of a alleged "ponzi scheme" at two large employers: Jay Peak and Burke Mountain.

Some *challenges* that are highlighted in our data informed our Strategic Plan Goals:

Food Insecurity:

Children eligible for free/reduced lunch in the NEK stands at 55.6%, while the Vermont rate is 38.3%, and the US rate is 52.6%. Essex County's rate alone is 72%

The NEK has a consistently higher rate of the population receiving SNAP benefits over the past 10 years – roughly 1.5 times the Vermont and US rate.

Even though the three county area has a lower rate of fast food restaurants per 100,000 population, there are also areas in Orleans and Essex Counties that are considered to be 'food deserts.'

The population of Essex County, overall, has low food access.

Housing:

Like Vermont as a whole, the NEK has an older housing stock (average age – 40 years) than the national average of 37 years

The drop in homeownership rates has been a national trend since the great recession of 2008. However the drop in homeownership rates in the NEK has been much more dramatic than the national and even the Vermont rate. The NEK rate has fallen from 74% to 53%, the Vermont rate has fallen from 70% to 55%, and the national rate have fallen from 66% to 55.8%.

Like the rest of Vermont, the vacancy rate in the NEK is extremely low, at less than 2%, with virtually no vacant housing units in Essex county, and apparent vacancies only in St. Johnsbury, Barton/Orleans, and Newport.

The NEK has also seen an increase in the % of homes without adequate plumbing, with nearly 2 times the Vermont rate and 3 times the US rate.

Income:

Median and per capita income in the three county area remains well below Vermont and national levels.

Although, not surprisingly, the percentage of the population receiving public assistance is higher in the NEK, at 4.72% than the Vermont rate (4.09%) and the US rate (2.67%), the average benefit amount in the three counties (\$2,835) is below the Vermont average (\$3,171) and the US average (\$3,335).

The percentage of the population receiving Medicaid benefits is higher in the NEK at 56.95% than the Vermont rate of 46.6% and the US rate of 38.48%. It must be noted that much of the Vermont and NEK percentage is made up of children under 18 who benefit from Vermont's 'Dr. Dynasaur' program.

Lack of Social/Emotional Support:

The rate of people at, near, or below the Federal Poverty Level is higher in the NEK than in Vermont. The percentage of people below 50% of the Federal Poverty Level, the so-called 'extremely poor' is significantly higher in Caledonia County than in the rest of the NEK and Vermont, and even higher than the US rate.

The rate of student reading proficiency at the 4th grade level is much lower in the NEK at 43.11% (20.7% in Essex County) than in Vermont statewide (51.52%) and in the US (49.67%).

Stakeholder Assessment: Key Findings

Noonmark interviewed 14 individuals prior to the December NEKCA strategic retreats[1]. Clear areas of focus emerged which provided some early direction as we entered strategic planning. Overall NEKCA has a positive reputation in the Northeast Kingdom and is known primarily for

the large and strong Head Start Program and for the warming shelter in Saint Johnsbury. The food shelf and serving people in poverty were also mentioned as positive strengths. The retreat participants reviewed the stakeholder results and noted the following:

Common Themes emerging from the stakeholder interviews:

- Opioid crisis and substance use
- Community messaging is not inclusive
- Community connections and disconnections
- Funding is misunderstood in community
- References to Newport struggling as a community to meet needs
- Loss of teen center
- Non-efficient spending practices
- Process/system glitches
- Lack of inter and intra agency collaboration
- Lack of transportation
- Everyone is working in silos – no cross communication at NEKCA
- Need systems to communicate who is accessing services across all programs
- Need to develop an organizational culture that values the work and the individual voices of staff
- Housing

Areas to focus on:

- Providing more services in Newport – warming shelter, youth programming, parent support groups
- In general, more focus on housing and literacy
- Increasing collaboration with community partners and between organization departments
- Training staff on responsive and timely communication, build orientation protocols
- Increasing awareness in staff, clients and community partners about all of NEKCA’s services
- Decreasing isolation and increasing contact with staff in more remote areas of NEK
- Building financial systems that engage program staff and Board of Directors

NEKCA’s Current Reality:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Devoted Staff · Commitment to mission · Multiple programs to meet needs · Staff commitment · Wanting a change · Honesty · Resourcefulness, knowledgeable · Hope · Amazing staff, Longevity of staff · Supportive, caring and dedicated · Staff want change, want to want to work together · Fresh ideas · Having a strong program that people and service providers acknowledge · We are respected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Changing view of NEKCA in the community · Breaking down silos – cross communication · Repair reputation · Invite creative thinking · “we’ve always done it this way…” mind set · Delivering services with little funding · Staff are isolated – promotes lack of creativity, vision and communication · Current lack of organizational culture · Urgent need to implement systems across the agency to support staff so they are able to support consumers · Communicating externally what we are doing, celebrating success · Change in leadership, learning curve
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p>	<p>THREATS</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Non-traditional funding sources · Collaboration with community partners · Leveraging common funding to offer robust services · Shared lack of funding among partners, provides opportunities to work together to share resources and strengthen delivery – opportunity to collaborate on grants · New partnerships · New leadership · New innovative projects · Serving multi-generations – all families · Grant funding · Internal connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Loss of funding · Lack of communication between staff leads to lack of communication with clients · Legislative changes and mandates · Perception of competition from partners rather than seen as allies · Agencies in NEK fighting for funding to stay afloat · Lack of community support · Staff seeking employment elsewhere – other agencies offering a more supportive/competitive package · Need to be open to new perspectives · New leadership and unknowns · New collaborations with partners that were not previously happening · Organization changes will mean a lot of work

Strategic Outcomes

Where should NEKCA focus attention over the next 3 years to create outcomes that match our vision.

<p>Prosperity in the NEK</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Population and economic growth · Stable economy · Safe · Self-sufficiency · Livable wages through micro-businesses in the NEK
<p>Community Connections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Thriving, strong communities · Resources · More youth staying in the NEK · Connected, vibrant and energetic communities
<p>Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Physical Health · Mental wellness · Self-Healing · Better Nutrition
<p>Housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Families will have housing options · No more homeless families; Everyone housed
<p>Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increased literacy · All children have access to preschool · Life skills · Increase in education · Thriving children · Affordable quality child care in the NEK – not just Newport but surrounding towns · Educational foundation

Basic Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Enough food for families · No one hungry · Lower poverty rates · Fewer people in community needing our services · Freedom to pursue more than basic needs · Clients get the help they need and resources to thrive · No more poverty, end to poverty · People are not afraid to access help
Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Empowered clients · All families feel connected - no fee social gatherings
Internal Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increased coordination of services between programs · Partnerships are robust · Support staff · Promote a culture of respect, non-judgement and empowerment · Update out MIS systems to promote cross – departmental collaboration
Client Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Streamline intake process and data systems · Confidential greeting and intake in open reception areas · Use same intake form for all programs · Remote access to services · Agency wide survey on service and programming. Identify what is working and what clients want more of
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increase grant funding opportunities · Secure more funding for front line workers to address and work with clients

Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic placement of programs • Add a Job Coach • Worksite/childcare transportation • Triage emergent need with referral • Create space that is inviting to families and community • Staff have knowledge of community resources
Professional Development & Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training – all employees need to know all services and warm hand off • Agency wide training • Cross training • Educate all staff on all programs and how to access • Dedicate time for professional development • Trauma informed staff • Trauma sensitive environment • Motivational interview skills • Bigger toolbox – to do the job and feel more confident

[1] See Appendix for list of interviewees and complete notes

Strategic Plan Participants:

Board Members:	Staff Members:	Leadership Team:
Ellen Stanley, President Brian Keith Dawn Kelly Sierra Hargrave	Alexis Proia, Jeremiah Schuyler Lauralee Sweeney, Tonya Powers Lynn Forcier, Julie Lamoureux Suzanne Routhier	Amy Burbo, Dawn Powers Nick Perry, Joy Ely Katie Watts, Amy Robinson Stephanie Bowen, Jenna O’Farrell

Strategic Three-Year Goals

To fully address the strategic outcomes by 2022, NEKCA will have developed and sustained a positive, efficient and client-friendly and respectful culture across the organization. To deliver high quality programs and services, NECKA will streamline advice and assistance across programs; staff will be cross-trained, and the community will have an enhanced understanding and appreciation of all the programs and services that NEKCA provides to residents of the Northeast Kingdom.

1) STAFF AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To develop and implement internal expectations and procedures for Improving communication and professional development for all staff. NEKCA is transparent about what is happening across programs, communication is frequent and effective, and staff have high professional ethics. Delivery is consistent across the Agency, and clients feel welcomed and safe. Staff are trained, have developed personal professional goals and embrace the opportunity to learn. Standard 2.3

GOALS	TIME LINE	STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE GOALS
To develop and implement an internal systematic approach to communicate with staff.	3/2020	Strategies are implemented to improve internal communications and address the following modes of communication: Email etiquette, staff meetings, program updates, utilization of software tools, etc.
	3/2021	Analyze the effectiveness of communication strategies that have been implemented. Staff provide feedback and changes and adjustments are made accordingly.
	3/2022	Strategies are in place to maintain and sustain internal communication.

To develop and implement an external systematic approach to communicate with the community its activities and results.	3/2020	Develop strategies to improve external communications and address the following modes of communication: website, social media, emails, press releases, etc.
	3/2021	Analyze the effectiveness of communication strategies that have been implemented. Community members will provide feedback and changes and adjustments are made accordingly.
	3/2022	Strategies are implemented to maintain and sustain external communication.
To develop a new employee orientation that is inclusive of all the services that the NEKCA organization offers. Standard 7.8	3/2020	Complete update the orientation manual and develop strategies to improve the orientation process to include both agency and program specific on-boarding.
	1/2021	Within 60 days of hire, a new employee will receive orientation that is inclusive of all the services that the NEKCA organization offers.
	3/2022	Evaluate the effectiveness of the new orientation process and changes and adjustments are made accordingly.

2) STRENGTHEN AGENCY SYSTEM AND STRUCTURES: Increasing capacities to improve our results.

Develop and implement a marketing and public relations plan that communicates clearly our mission, vision, and range of services. To be financially sustainable, we need to increase unrestricted funds by promoting agency-wide and program specific fundraisers.

GOALS	TIME LINE	STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE GOALS
Our communities have a clear understanding of NEKCA’s mission and range of services. Standard 2.3	9/2019 9/2021 9/2020 3/2022	Form a marketing committee Review marketing materials for accuracy and consistency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Annual report b. Website and Facebook pages c. News releases d. Communication plan e. Community event information f. Media files of stories published Train staff in unified message to share with community (mission). Survey the community to determine impact of marketing efforts.
Increase private funding and donations by 20%.	9/2019 11/2019 1/2020 1/2021 1/2022	Review and revise website. Promote website as main donation portal. Each program develops a fundraising strategy for special events. Implement annual capital campaign. Board of Directors is trained in donor solicitation.

NEKCA offers competitive wages agency wide.	9/2019	Develop benefits summary that informs employees of what the agency is contributing toward their employment in total (wages and benefits)
	6/2019	Conduct grant review and funding sources.
	12/2020	Hire consultant for wage study/form internal committee to research competitive wages.
	3/2021	Develop wage scale for the agency.

3)STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS TO OFFER IMPACTFUL SERVICES IN THE AREA OF HOUSING

CHALLENGE: There is an insufficient amount of safe, sanitary and decent housing units available for low-income people. Community partners are not always aware of local efforts in assisting low income families. Systems are needed to reduce duplication of services. Coordination does not always take place to create the most efficient service delivery model. See Community Needs Assessment.

GOALS	TIME LINE	STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE GOALS
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NEKCA will achieve the following outcomes by working with community organizations: - coordination of services - improve community planning - improve housing efficiency. Standard 2.1	8/2019	Facilitate Continuum of Care Meeting and lead Coordinated Entry (St. Johnsbury and Newport).
	8/2020	Develop new partnerships and expand existing partnerships in the area of housing.
	8/2021	Evaluate outcomes made possible by the sustainability of community based initiatives.
	8/2020	Expand youth housing options if possible.
Evaluate options for NEKCA in the affordable housing arena.	3/2022	Develop uniform partnerships with agencies providing housing programming in all counties in the NEKCA service area.

4)PARTNER WITH INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE SELF SUFFICIENCY

CHALLENGE: Low-income people lack the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively advocate for themselves and their own interests. Communities lack the opportunities and resources for low-income families. Systems are needed to teach low-income people leadership skills.

GOALS	TIME LINE	STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE GOALS
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Legislators and Community Members briefed and/or updated regarding the need of those living in poverty within their districts. Standards 2.3, 3.1	3/2020	Ongoing participation in Community Action Day and Early Childhood Day at the legislature.
	12/2021	Offer advocacy trainings to customers to empower them to share their stories.
	12/2019	Hold a small forum to empower our participants to find their voice in giving personal testimonies to legislators and community members.
	12/2020	Share Head Start, Parent Child Center, NEKCA and program specific needs assessments and key findings at regional and state meetings and events.
NEKCA provides capacity building support to low-income community members. Standards 2.1, 2.3	3/2021	Engage local community members through initiatives such as: Financial Literacy, Strengthening Families, Conscious Discipline, Tenancy Classes, Restorative Justice, Youth Programming, VITA, play groups, child development and parenting support.
	3/2022	Offer support to meet basic needs to become self-sufficient: Housing, Food, Fuel, Micro Business, Education, Preschool, Child Care, Social Connections.
Volunteer hours donated by and/or “on behalf” of low-income people thereby improving the number of opportunities and quality of life for families. Standards 1.1, 2.4, 5.1	10/2019	Increase opportunities and initiatives made possible by: Head Start, Workforce Training Programs, PCC’s, Family Self-Sufficiency, Board of Directors, Policy Council.
	3/2020	Create formal policies and procedures to orient volunteers.
	3/2021	Implement consistent method of documenting volunteer hours by or on behalf of low income people thereby improving the number of opportunities and quality of life for families.
	3/2021	Create a system to recruit new policy council or board members to include members of the low income community and those with lived experience.

5) DEVELOP AND ALIGN RESOURCES TO ADDRESS COMMUNITY NEEDS

CHALLENGE: Our May 2018 Community Needs Assessment shows us many challenges in our three county area. The conditions of poverty and needs of our community were identified through the assessment process. Standards 3.4, 6.4

GOALS	TIME LINE	STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE GOALS
Create a systematic approach for collecting, analyzing, and reporting customer satisfaction to the board and public. Standard 1.3	6/2019 6/2020	Implement survey, analyze, and report out data. Release revision of survey based on 2019 findings.
Identify best practices and gaps in services to meet customer and community needs. Standards 2.2, 3.1, 6.4	3/2020 3/2022	Review programs for alignment with best practices; ensure all programs address key levers of poverty reduction. Implement community needs assessment every 3 years, as well as an annual survey, to identify customer and community needs and gaps in services. Review census data and local and State government data as it becomes available to better understand community needs. Outcomes reported to the board. Develop and manage, in real time, a community resource guide.
Expand, develop and implement strength-based programs to fill key gaps in services as identified by the Community Needs Assessment, customer satisfaction survey, and feedback from community partners. Standard 2.2	3/2021	Annually, implement at least one new program or expand an existing program to fill a key gap in the comprehensive continuum of services.

APPENDIX A

NORTHEAST KINGDOM COMMUNITY ACTION STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS
November 2018

What is NECKA doing well?

- NEKCA deals with those folks who have issues of poverty – help make sure those clients are served.
- Food shelf strong; matching people with funding; case management; parenting skills
- They are providing warming shelter that is a great strength
- They are seen as the housing experts in community – they are very compassionate group of people who want to do well – real hallmark of the agency.
- NEKCA is an organization with a long history – they have resources behind them. As a CAC they have access to different types of funding that are critical when we address poverty and education as a simultaneous strategy.
- Head Start Program has a big impact by virtue of its size – the trajectory of working with families and children long term impact is put into place. NEKCA is doing that well – some programs in Head Start could use some improvement but overall, it's a strong program.
- Head Start program is high quality and well done and very important to our children who need high level of emotional support. They do that well.
- Jenna coming in and having been a community member is a huge strength – people were looking forward to a shift in leadership.
- People are good at helping people. Everyone is willing to do what it takes to improve the lives of community members in the NEK. Help clients and help each other
- Every program had its own specialty – Outreach (food shelf and crisis fuel) and Parent Child Center work hand in hand – connected.
- NEKCA does really well helping people and being there for support. Truly cares about employees – my director and my team work well together. We have each other's backs.
- Long term employees hold the core of Community Action and why it is meaningful personally and professionally.
- Most positive is correction program. Long history of working well and collaboratively with community and corrections and high success rate. Stephanie has a clear vision to her job – high expectations for her staff. Very clear about why she comes to work every day.
- HR is a positive thing – Amy Burbo is fantastic – walks employees through difficult situations – she is an asset to employees. Well respected.
- We are trying to build the opportunity for people to have a voice – look at individuals being involved – hiring committees, strategic planning etc. Give people an opportunity to share their voice – opportunities to get involved and improve things. We need to do the heavy lifting together.
- NEKCA strengths - we serve the neediest population, and everyone is here for the same cause – people living in poverty get the services they need. I think we do a good job.
- Building a sense of community for families – they are very isolated. We allow people to be whoever they are when they walk through our door and they can build a sense of community here, and then continue their friendships outside of here. Especially single Moms.

Service Gaps and challenges, where should NEKCA focus on over next 3 years?

- PCC beyond Head Start – seems like there are lots of families waiting for service. Very important
- Funding is a big piece, opioid crisis making people vulnerable; less housing stock – harder for folks to afford things – hard to find affordable housing.
- In Newport would like NEKCA to take step in building a warming shelter – build one to help Newport folks. Like to see more family supportive housing, really get involved and manage folks through that in a greater way
- Need a stronger youth program in Newport. NEKCA should step up and help with continuum of care - need a stronger presence. Managers might not have been able to step back and see the bigger picture.
- Newport – need a stronger presence there.
- Opioid Epidemic. Its hitting us all. NEKCA is involved with an initiative as a partner to Community Justice Center. Jenna has introduced idea of being trauma aware and trauma sensitive. Adverse childhood events - staff need to be continually introduced to that. Every NEKCA staff should be trauma informed.
- Housing – emergency housing is a need. We have a warming shelter, but it is time limited and it is also only evening not day. Need resources for a day station. Work with other agencies to provide a more comprehensive provision of services. Permanence, transportation and jobs – should all be part of the package
- Addressing literacy is a huge need – connection to NEKCA around poverty and literacy – NEKCA should emphasize that connection. As a community we have lost a lot of the parents attachment and commitment to their children – SA is interfering to commitment to children. How do we help people get that back. Enhance the bond and relationship and you stand a better chance of a parent putting their needs aside and making sure their children are always cared for.
- There are many people in the area who for the lack of a few hundred dollars – they need financial support to get over the hump. Ex. Motor vehicle reg cost, light bill, NEKCA needs to have a pool of money just to help folks get emergent needs – or to get over the hump.
- **Where should NEKCA focus** – housing is a big need – all of us need to work on this problem. Not sure what they offer for parenting education to the community at large – would be nice to have a parent forum – events for children and parents come and play together and parents get education.
- **Obstacles** – cultural shift needs to happen, staff need to feel supported. Staff need sense of direction and hope. Sense that people may not have been supported and left to their own devices and may not have been trained very well. Confusion about what their job was – needed a better understanding. Jenna’s strengths – sees big picture, comes from a trauma informed lens and a clinical background. All helpful to staff. That may be her job this year – to build from within – empower staff and it will be infectious.
- NEKCA did not have a particularly good reputation in Newport – lack of follow through. “I would hear that clients were not always treated respectfully – particularly in Newport. People might have felt that they were spoken rudely to etc. “

- They should be an agency that is welcoming and give a sense of hope. Training is really important – staff need to be embraced and valued and given supervision. People would say that about St. J – absolutely in Newport. Would love to see Newport get more attention. That may be a structure of previous leadership.
- The location of some operations are challenging for some people to access. Challenge is that they own so many facilities it's a financial liability. Maintenance and upkeep are expensive, and that money could be used elsewhere.
- Challenges – they lost a lot of ground – 10-15 yrs ago it seemed that NEKCA was flourishing – loss of grants and things for youth– they have lost a lot of that. What they offer now is basic needs only.
- People want a warming shelter in Newport. Shelter just a band aide for the enormous homelessness problem. NEKCA is in a good position – have good community partners. Lots of room for that to happen.
- General lack of services in Canaan - state doesn't do anything. There is nothing there. Nobody goes there – feels like this is a forgotten part of the state. The further you get away from centers – St.Jay and Newport, the worse it gets in terms of services. How can the organization address that so folks don't have to travel to Newport or St. Jay.
- What to focus on – need more resources available – activities for youth access to counselors and therapists for substance abuse. In a lot of other community's diversion has more resources. Opioids hitting NEK heavily – BAART clinic is not helping that they are always increasing the dose b/c they get federal dollars – big discredit to the community and people that need help.
- Mainstreet in Newport has nothing there. Is there a grant to go into all the empty building there – first year is rent free to establish their business and the 2- 3 years they start paying rent. Need an economic development – business startup grant. We lost our teen center. There is great space for it – just need resources, management and motivation.
- No community interaction – limited – church does get together. Lots of people want social things – ex. Women's and senior groups.

What opportunities exist for increased collaboration?

- In Newport with PCC there are now opportunities to partner more.
- In the past it has been challenging - there was a territorial resistance. New leadership we are looking at more ways we can collaborate more closely. NEKCA can really be beneficial to our clients – look at a wrap around.
- How can we partner to access strengths – micro business programs for ex., food insecurity. New leadership is open to that. Jenna was best possible choice to put in charge – turn around has been remarkable. We are well poised to accomplish great things under her leadership.
- 3-5 years – we need to be more strategic and aligned as partners. We are all shooting for same goals and objective. We want to see NEK residents living their best lives. Leaders of service organizations should come together and start thinking strategically together as opposed to everyone doing their own thing.

- Suzanne AHS is pulling together the leaders to start having this conversation – need to leverage each other as a region for funding and really look at what work we are doing and how to better connect. Ex recovery, community justice, corrections, mental health etc. Develop a real wrap around - actual programming and opportunities. Walk the talk.
- Could consider co-location with other agencies or school systems to provide a range of services – one stop shop. Share resources – ex. Plymouth NH – shared concept – one Admin Assistance, one photocopier etc. That way more funding could go to direct services
- We could rely on each other more internally, good at sharing ideas in general – but not always good at collaborating internally. We sit in a leadership team meeting and say that we collaborate but then there is a lot of “Yeah but” always a reason why it can’t happen. Not quite sure why it doesn’t work. When something is presented people always put up roadblocks. Get people over the hump of thinking outside the box. Don’t say that there needs to be more intra program integration and then say no.
- Should be more cross departmental collaboration – service integration – this should be a main goal. Improve on that.
- NEKCA has very distinct programs and don’t always intersect.
- Should have more connection across the organization - different programs don’t know about each other. How? Start with each center – create a more robust orientation for new staff – include interviewing people in different programs across the agency and even outside the organization.
- I know there is a huge gap between Head Start and the other programs. St. Jay site is the only place that has PCC, CAC and Headstart co-located but there is something that gets in the way of collaboration. The Headstart manager is wonderful, and she is struggling – she is here by herself but it’s hard for her to make a decision because there are so many administrative layers at HS at NEKCA.
- Collective impact – working with other organizations. Community is the driving force. Bringing prosperity to NEK – focus was on language around creating prosperity. Amy thinks those initiative already have momentum. Strategic Plan needs to look at strategies to get out of current situation – how do we change behavior and invite entire community in the help change the conversation – we all need to support each other in our community. How do we strengthen families, education and jobs?
- Have 10 different head start centers and each manager has their own Amazon account – so it is not centralized. All the different centers place their own orders – room improvement in efficiencies. Also, efficiencies in vendor selection - snow plowing, yard care, might be better to bid those job. Contract with one vender. Bid out services.

What are some areas of internal concern?

Communication:

- Have the higher ups actually understand what we do – they see what transitional housing does on paper, but they used to not come down – since Jenna has started she has come down and meet us. It works better b/c they better understand what we are dealing with - give them a better big picture.

- There have been some issues in bigger offices to getting things done more smoothly – lots of road blocks – lack of communication. People need to be looking at systems
- How would you improve communication – should be some standards re: expectations of a reply to emails.
- Entire staff gets together once a year. Could it be more frequent?
- Communication should be improved – at Lincoln Center we have never had supervision, staff meetings happen 1x2 times a year. Should have regular staff meetings and supervision. Create a culture where people respond to emails – need some basic communication skills.
- Need to have a greater presence in the community.

Facilities/Maintenance:

- We should focus on looking at buildings that NEKCA owns and take a deep dive into considering what the future is of this location. Many of the bldgs. Are older – lots of deferred maintenance. Need a lot of work. Never have enough funding to complete the projects we want. Focus on maybe divesting and potentially look at rent instead of ownership. Facility management is on the shoulders of finance department to take care of property.

Marketing/Branding:

- A lot of people just see NEKCA as Head Start and Food Shelf. People are not aware of all that NEKCA does. People don't know what NEKCA has to offer. Every employee needs to know as well.
- Community awareness about everything Head Start does – what comes and the amount of services that are available – need referrals for community. Lack of understanding.
- Need to strength message around NEKCA and supports in the community form all organizations and businesses

On-Boarding and Training

- There are areas where things are not followed through. Did not get any training. Nobody at main office can help – don't answer the phone or can't help. Was thrown into a job and there was not any guidance, which makes it hard to do the job and do it well.
- Need orientation and training specific to the department you are working in.

Funding

- Employees don't have a clear sense of how they are funded so their jobs get murky.
- Directors and managers don't know what their budgets are – Board doesn't get monthly reports.
- No clear process around financial piece. Murkiness goes into program delivery. People don't know their jobs – get people trained to enter their own data

- People are hired out of pots of money that are not necessarily flexible. Overlap with community need. Have to identify the money to meet needs, but money is being used to plug holes internally and hire people into weird jobs.
- Some burn out, some staff working the front lines – lot of funding restrictions – lack of it can wear on people. Some folks might feel like it is not enough. Being in the NEK the challenges of having jobs and transportation and other more day to day insecurities that folks go through. Staff feel the burden – how to make more with less funding. Feeling frustrated with how limited they feel they have in terms of impact. Grants being reduced eliminated etc – people are frustrated feeling like they don't have a good understanding of what goes on in NEK. Adds to burnout of things – stress can be a difficult thing to tackle.
- Funding never have enough \$ to complete the services that we would like to complete. Level funding with small increases. Challenging to learn different grant streams.
- Financially needs a better sense of how we budget – way to look at core funding to bring in other positions to build capacity – increase administration.
- Challenging is the fact that we are limited by budgets – every year has to implement new approaches in order to spend down – more reporting and paperwork. Has to find balance in time for administrative work – frustrating. Everyone has an agenda and that is frustrating. Why are you making this so hard? Why can't there be a better process?
- Would like more money. Raises are few and far between – only 3 raises in over 11 years. Makes it difficult – love where you work but the pay is not competitive with state workers. It's disheartening. A lot of money spent on things that shouldn't be – need to free up \$\$.

People Interviewed:

Board Members:	Community Members:	NEKCA Staff:
Brian Keith Maryellen Griffin	Michelle Tarryk, NEKLS Marcia Stricker, NKHS Suzanne Legare-Belcher, VT AHS	Amy Burbo, Holly Ross Nick Perry, Suzanne Routhier, Amy Robinson, Jenna O'Farrell, Tonya Powers, Alexis Proia

