

# *Branching Out*

Rooted in Strength, Growing through Innovation.



## Strategic Plan 2025 - 2027

NORTHWESTERN  
COUNSELING  
& SUPPORT SERVICES

*we're here for you*



# Our Executive Director's Welcome

Dear Friends,

It is my honor and privilege to share with you our **Strategic Plan for 2025-2027**—“**Branching Out: Rooted in Strength, Growing in Innovation**”

This plan represents both a reflection of our past achievements as well as a vision for the future of our organization and the communities we serve.

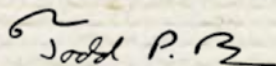
Rooted in the strengths that define us—dedicated teams, resilient partnerships, and a commitment to delivering exceptional services—we now look forward to new growth and innovation. Over the next three years, we will work to expand our impact, deepen our partnerships, enhance access to essential services, and build stronger, healthier communities across Franklin and Grand Isle Counties.

This plan was developed collaboratively, with valuable input from our staff, board members, the people we support, and our community partners. It is a roadmap that not only aligns with our mission but also challenges us to think creatively and strategically about how we meet the changing needs of our community.

As we move forward, I invite you to join us on this journey. Your support, insight, and partnership will be critical as we implement these goals and continue to have meaningful impact. With your support, we will remain grounded in our purpose and pursue opportunities for growth and positive change.

Thank you for being a part of this important work. Together, I look forward to next chapter of progress and possibility.

With gratitude and optimism,



Todd Bauman  
Executive Director





# Our Mission Statement

clearly defines why we exist and guides our development:

Our mission is to ensure that the residents of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties have access to high quality services, which promote healthy living and emotional well-being.

## Our Values provide

a foundation and anchors our decision making:

- 1 Ensuring the **safety** and well-being of employees and persons served
- 2 Delivering services with **compassion** through appreciation of diversity, with empathy and respect
- 3 **Responsiveness** through timely and effective services
- 4 Unwavering commitment to **integrity** ensures we live up to what we say we are going to do

## Our Organizational commitments

reflect our quality:

- 1 A commitment to providing the **highest quality** services in Vermont.
- 2 An abiding **concern for the well-being** of our clients and a commitment to improving their lives through counseling and support.
- 3 Honoring that quality services, require **quality staff**. NCSS will invest in our NCSS Team through onboarding, education, training, and supports.
- 4 Development of **innovative programming** based on **evidence-based practices** to address community and individual needs.
- 5 Actively adapt our behaviors to see and accept the **diversity and culture** of our client, staff, and community as we persevere in being an equitable and inclusive organization.







## *Strategic Plan Accomplishments* 2021 - 2024

- 1 Agency Redesignation by DMH for another 3 years.
- 2 Maintained Preferred Provider status through review process with DSU.
- 3 Successful DAIL Quality Review
- 4 Enhanced availability to provide programming grounded in evidence based practices.
- 5 Implemented client portal to provide online, remote access for clinical records.
- 6 Formalized community partnerships with local Federally Qualified Health Centers, Northwestern Medical Center, local law enforcement agencies, and more.
- 7 Expanded services for Children's Integrated Services to include serving over 1,000 children and families in Chittenden County.
- 8 Expanded residential services for developmental services.
- 9 Successful adoption of flexible and hybrid work schedules.
- 10 Strengthen partnerships within the designated agency system; Continued collaboration with UEMR (partnership with LCMHS, WCMHS, UCS, and NCSS for electronic health record); increased operations and finance support contracts with Lamoille County Mental Health Services.
- 11 Enhanced presence on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.
- 12 Agency redesign to align with state wide initiatives; our new divisions include Early Childhood and School Based Services Division, Community Mental Health Services Division, Developmental Services Division, Psychiatry and Nursing Division, and Administration.
- 13 Enhanced opportunities in DS Employment Team i.e., made connections for more job sites.
- 14 Increased number of days for Academy of Learning supports.
- 15 Upgrade of accounting / ERP system.
- 16 Upgrade of HR / HRIS payroll and expense system.
- 17 Integration of Electronic Medical Records (EMR) and billing system with ERP / accounting system.
- 18 One of two 988 Lifeline Call Centers for the State of Vermont.
- 19 Healthy balance sheet positioning agency for future investment and growth.
- 20 Upgrade of fleet / transportation to support safe, quality transport for clients to 30 total vehicles, including 3 ADA accessible vehicles.



# S.W.O.T. Summary

## Strengths

- Financially and operationally stable organization.
- Long community history, deeply rooted community presence.
- Good leadership continuity; accessible and approachable leadership.
- Extensive community partnerships, including with law enforcement, schools, physical health partners, and other community resources.
- Strong commitment to staff, including dedication to the health and wellness of staff, focus on positive morale and employee satisfaction, unique benefits, robust collaborations to strengthen workforce.
- Continuous offerings and collaborations to enhance professional development for staff.
- Flexibility to promote work-life balance; work from home options that help with retention.
- Unique workforce, a diverse set of experiences among staff enrich client care.
- Culturally aware and diverse workforce, prioritizes a multicultural and inclusive approach.
- A motivated and dedicated workforce.
- Strong communication across teams, culture of mutual support, respect, and collaboration.
- Strong agency culture – a cohesive environment that values team morale and agency vision.
- Willingness to adapt and improve continuously.
- Wide array of program offerings, to meet the needs of individuals from prenatal to elder care.
- Fostering strong direct relationships with clients in a trauma-informed way.
- Timely response to client needs, putting clients' needs and goals first
- Making services accessible and convenient for clients (*telehealth and later hours*).
- Committed to supporting the rights and needs of both employees and clients.

## Weaknesses

- Turnover, vacancies, and challenges in retaining staff. Difficulty competing with private sector in regard to wages.
- Lack of consistent, updated training for new hires and existing staff, lack of career advancement and growth post-licensure.
- State and federal paperwork requirements impacts staff retention and efficiency.
- State funding is unpredictable. Relying on state funding creates financial instability. Funding constraints impact program expansion, service offerings, and competitive salaries.
- Limited investment in preventative services for long-term community well-being.
- Technology challenges, outdated resources, and inefficient systems
- Shortage of crisis beds, limited substance use services, and delays in accessing care.
- Supporting the needs of clients with high clinical acuity.
- Limited number of staff with substance use expertise restricts treatment options.
- Long waitlists for clients to access some services.
- Lack of adequate family resources, especially in the summer, and insufficient parental training.
- Homelessness support and housing options for clients are insufficient.
- Parts of the community have a limited understanding of the agency's role and services.
- Public stigma around mental health services impacts client engagement and referrals for some programs; Negative perceptions may hinder service delivery in certain areas.
- Communication can be strengthened internally and externally.





## S.W.O.T. *Summary*

### Opportunities

- Develop programs to support evolving needs in the community based on our community needs assessments for example, veterans, military members, and their families, eldercare services, childcare resources and more.
- Bridge gaps in service such as transitioning youth to adult services, or children moving into developmental services.
- Increase youth access to services.
- Expand preventative interventions.
- Recruit and retain talented staff.
- Offer more training and professional development for staff.
- Improve informational resources for families.
- Enhance peer support and substance abuse programs.
- Increase use of evidence-based methods.
- More advocacy with client and staff at state level; Increase our advocacy at the legislature – higher wages.
- Utilize AI and EMR systems to improve efficiency.
- Increase internal collaboration and communication.
- Diversify funding.
- Increase community outreach, awareness, and social media presence.

### Threats

- Workforce stability.
- The expense of living in Vermont creates workforce challenges.
- Recruiting challenges impacts workflow, service delivery, and program stability.
- State and federal paperwork requirements risk staff retention and productivity.
- Lack of cross-training – limited knowledge transfer creates skill gaps and service delays.
- State funding has not kept pace with community need or workforce requirements.
- New programming initiatives can strain existing resources.
- Rising clinical acuity and complexity strain resources.
- Wait times affect community perception and client outcomes.
- Public stigma around mental health and substance use deters service access.
- Public misunderstanding of mental health needs.
- Lack of advocacy opportunities.
- Political and regulatory changes – Shifting policies impact program stability.



# Key Objectives & Initiatives

## 2025- 2027

### **Client Care - Ensure equitable access and individualized support for underserved populations.**

#### ELEVATE SERVICE QUALITY

- Implement a continuous improvement framework to enhance service delivery standards.
- Roll out regular training on best practices and evidence-based approaches for all client-facing staff.
- Expand and optimize service delivery to ensure all individuals can access care when and where they need it.

### **Community Partnerships - Foster strategic partnerships with state agencies, local organizations, and stakeholders to improve service integration and reach.**

#### ADDRESS COMMUNITY NEEDS

- Conduct triennial community needs assessments to identify gaps in services.
- Develop and execute responsive programs based on identified community health trends.

#### STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS FOR WELL-BEING

- Formalize partnerships with local and state organizations.
- Establish regular touchpoints with state and regional stakeholders to streamline cross-agency collaboration.

### **Agency Health - Promote fiscal responsibility, operational efficiency, and sustainable growth.**

#### ENHANCING ORGANIZATIONAL WELL-BEING

- Conduct quarterly fiscal health reviews and create corrective action plans when needed.
- Expand services strategically based on community needs and data-driven insights.
- Utilized continuous review process to ensure operational efficiency.

### **Staff Development - Cultivate a skilled, engaged workforce through targeted recruitment, retention, and professional development programs.**

#### ENHANCING WORKFORCE WELLBEING

- Develop a sustainable staffing strategy that includes recruitment innovations, retention incentives, and mental wellness support for employees.
- Foster a workplace culture that prioritizes employee engagement and wellness, with a strong focus on prevention and holistic well-being.

### **Wellness and Prevention - Implement preventive programs focusing on mental health, suicide prevention, and substance use.**

#### PROMOTING PREVENTION AND WELLNESS

- Launch community-wide wellness campaigns targeting suicide prevention, substance use, and mental health awareness.
- Partner with local wellness organizations to increase public access to wellness activities and preventive health education.

### **Quality and Outcomes - Enhance service quality through data-driven decision-making and robust outcomes monitoring.**

#### DATA-DRIVEN QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

- Implement advanced analytics tools to track and evaluate program outcomes.
- Regularly train staff on utilizing data to drive improvements in client care and operational efficiency.



# Acknowledgments

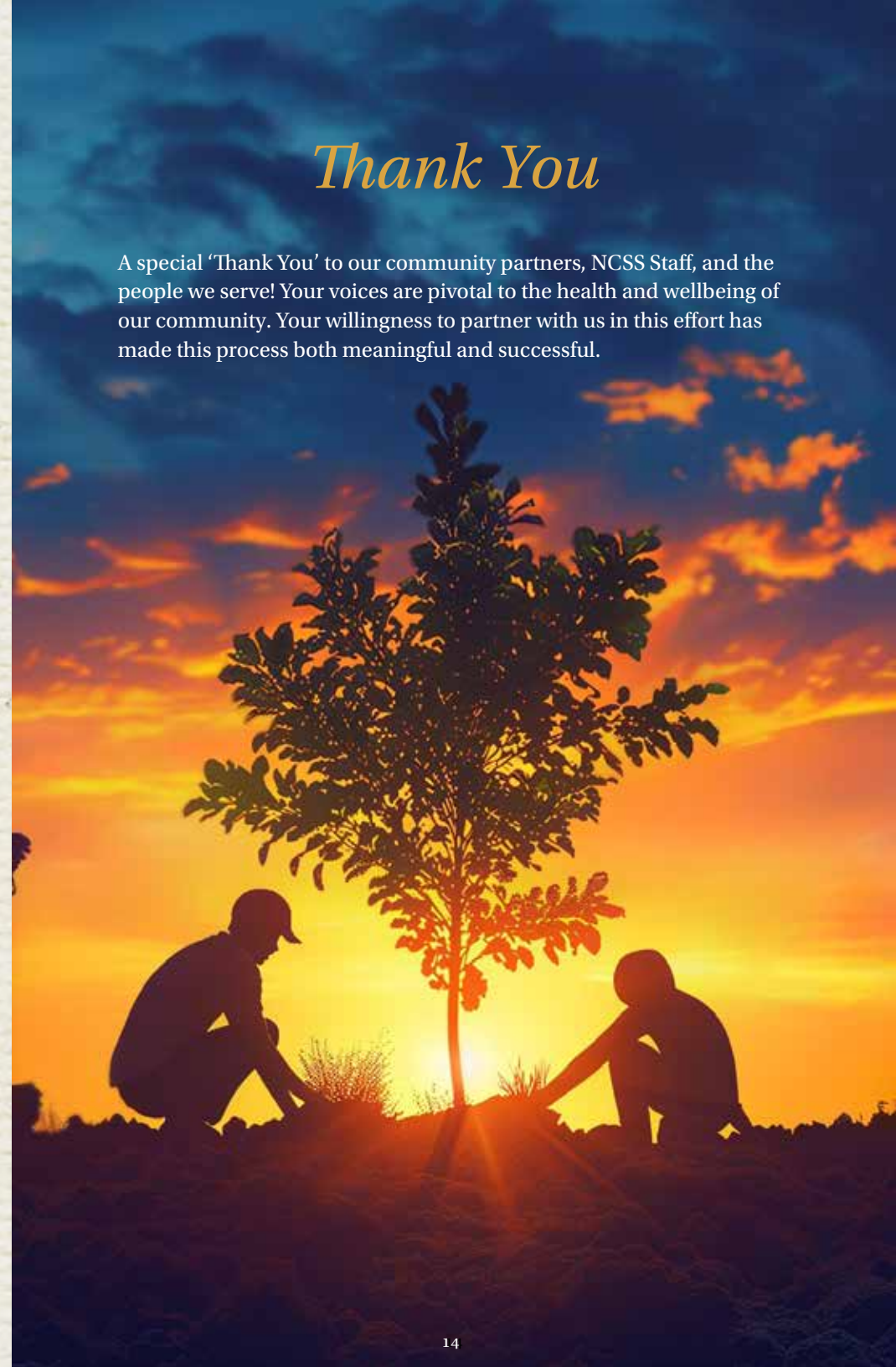
The strategic planning process at NCSS is a dynamic and collaborative effort, made possible by the dedication and expertise of our Strategic Planning Committee. This committed team meticulously analyzed a diverse array of data from our community to shape the priorities and initiatives that will guide us in the years ahead. The resulting strategic plan reflects a comprehensive understanding of our strengths, areas for growth, and opportunities, as well as the diverse perspectives of those we serve. Rooted in a commitment to enhancing the quality of care and advancing the well-being of our community, this plan was thoughtfully developed in alignment with the findings of our community needs assessment.

## PRIMARY SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR OUR 2025 – 2027 STRATEGIC PLAN INCLUDE:

- NCSS Strategic Planning Committee
- NCSS 2024 Community Needs Assessment
- NMC 2024 Community Health Needs Assessment
- Interview your Neighbor Survey
- NCSS Employee Engagement Survey
- NCSS Person Served Satisfaction Survey
- DMH 10 Year Vision
- NCSS Board of Directors and Local Standing Committee Survey
- NCSS SWOT Analysis activity

# Thank You

A special 'Thank You' to our community partners, NCSS Staff, and the people we serve! Your voices are pivotal to the health and wellbeing of our community. Your willingness to partner with us in this effort has made this process both meaningful and successful.





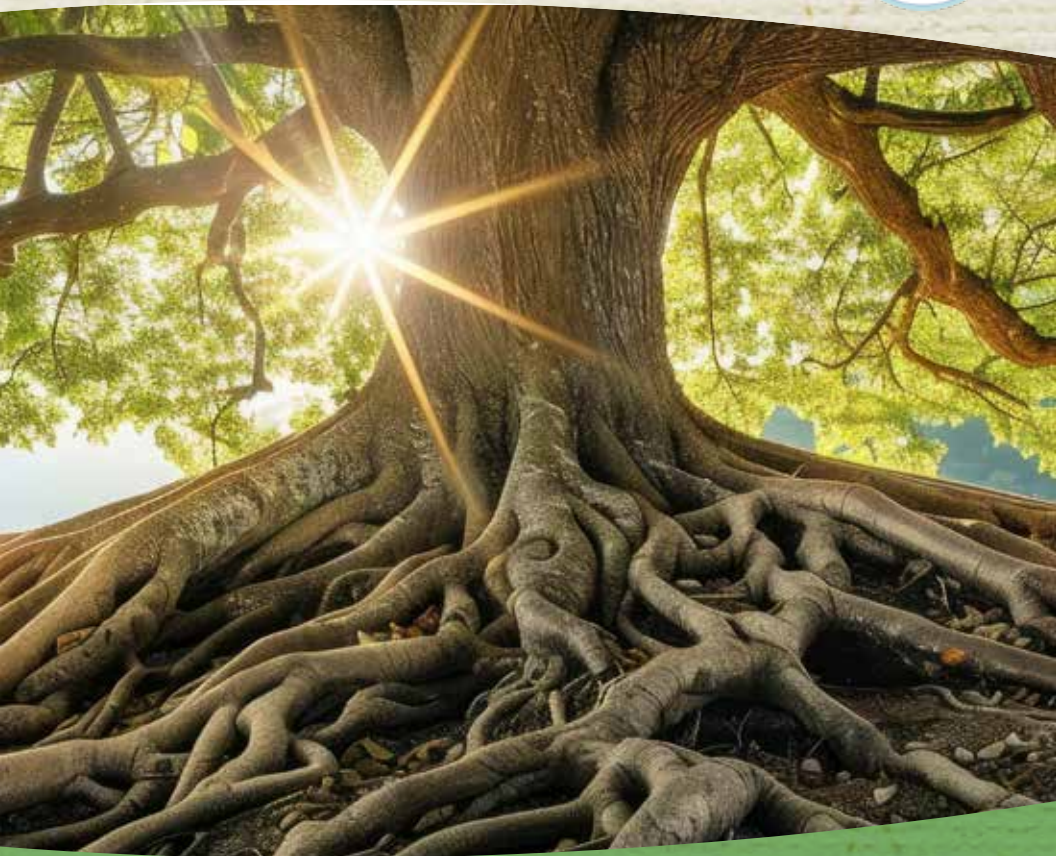
# NORTHWESTERN COUNSELING

& SUPPORT SERVICES

*we're here for you*



NCSS is a member of the Vermont Care Partners statewide network of sixteen non-profit, community-based agencies providing mental health, substance use and intellectual and developmental disability support.



Call (802)-524-6554    [www.ncssinc.org](http://www.ncssinc.org)

107 Fisher Pond Road, St. Albans, VT 05478