Keeping it Local

Community Hubs and Integrated Human Services

August 2015

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Introduction

Similar to the provincial government, the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) and its members, the 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and the District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) recognize the potential for community hubs to improve access to services for Ontarians in communities where they live.

The 47 CMSMs and DSSABs, through their councils and Boards, are the service system managers in the areas of affordable housing and homelessness prevention and early learning and child care. CMSMs and DSSABs are also responsible for funding, managing and delivering social assistance and employment programs.

CMSMs and DSSABs understand their communities and their local programs and resources, and are best positioned to link and organize these supports in an efficient and effective way. By leveraging relationships and aligning supports within local communities, CMSMs and DSSABs make the best use of available resources, minimize duplication within the service system and optimize outcomes for people in need.

 As local priorities change, CMSMs and DSSABs are able to act in a timely way to maximize resources where they are needed most. In the end, the goal is to provide the right services, to the right people, at the right time. We agree, people are better served through a system that is streamlined, coordinated, integrated and locally tailored in this way.   In a siloed and fragmented system, those seeking services have difficulty navigating through an uncoordinated array of programs and supports. People are using what little energy they might have knocking on multiple doors, repeating their story, while getting further removed from solutions to their problems.

OMSSA, CMSMs and DSSABs are well positioned and committed to work with the Province on its efforts to plan, organize and implement community hubs and we look forward to doing so.

Following are a number of considerations and examples related to the role of CMSMs and DSSABs in facilitating the potential of the government's community hub initiative and commitment to improving the coordination of and access to services that people rely on.

Community Hub Initiatives

As the Province understands, community need and resources varies across Ontario. In recent years the Province has also come to understand that there is no one size fits all when developing policy and programs and looking for local solutions.

The following provide local examples demonstrating the uniqueness of need and services.

The Etienne Brule Community Centre - Sault Ste. Marie
When the Algoma District School Board closed down one of its schools in downtown Sault Ste. Marie, the local community transformed it into the Etienne Brule Community Centre, a community hub offering the following programs:
- An Urban Aboriginal School, a partnership between the Algoma District School Board and Indian Friendship Centre, with space dedicated to traditional cultural events and celebrations and a classroom environment infused with a curriculum of First Nation cultural values, aspirations, and beliefs;
- The Superior Skills Program that teaches employable skills to eligible Ontario Works clients through eight-week integrative training programs; and
- The Teen Parent Connection providing teen parents with child care and an education.

In addition to these existing programs the Etienne Brule Community Centre is planning to add:
- An Urban Orchard with fresh fruit to train Ontario Works (OW) clients;
- A Child Care Programming and Natural Playground to provide nature-based child care to children ranging from infant to pre-school, and eventually school age;
- A Neighbourhood Summer Program for children in the area;
- An extension of the trails around the hub; and
- A not-for-profit community garden.

The Four Hub Libraries - Simcoe County
For many immigrants residing in Simcoe County, access to language support services was little to none. In order to fill the need for language support services, a pilot project was established using four library hubs to offer immigrants a point of access for community connection. The project was designed to:
- increase the competency of existing library staff to transition to the changing demographics of library patrons;
- increase availability and circulation of multilingual resources in rural libraries; and
- increase the opportunity for partnerships (such as with settlement and language services) and subsequent referrals.

Select staff from each hub were trained and appointed as "Immigrant information Specialists", 100% of which went on to note an increase in their ability to serve the immigrant population.

The Neighbourhood Resource Centre - Sault Ste. Marie

To help a marginalized neighbourhood experiencing high levels of crime and victimization, under the guidance of Ontario's Mobilization and Engagement Model of Community Policing, the Sault Ste. Marie Police Service partnered with 35 local agencies and founded the Neighbourhood Resource Centre. The Neighbourhood Resource Centre not only provides partners space in their agency, but also allows the coordination of neighbourhood activities including (but not limited to) neighbourhood clean-ups, neighbourhood meetings, community partner meetings, training and information sessions, and neighbourhood feasts.

Since the inception of the Neighbourhood Resource Centre in May 2014, there has been a decrease in crime rates, community assets have been recognized, leadership roles have developed, neighbourhood appreciation is more visible, and social networks have been established between residents and agency representatives.

The Edelbrock Centre - Dufferin County

Dufferin County created the Edelbrock Centre to bring together the County's Community Services Department and local agencies into a "one stop shop". Services and supports offered include social assistance, assisted housing, childcare fee subsidy, mental health services, supports for seniors, supports for families experiencing a life threatening illness or bereavement, eviction prevention, and housing stability.

Each agency operates independently but shares meeting rooms, an employment centre, and parking facilities to deliver their services in the most efficient and effective way. For clients, the Edelbrock Centre has a "no wrong door" policy. Staff connect clients with other agencies in the centre through "warm transfers", physically accompanying the client from one service to another.

Key Players

Some of the key players involved in community hubs across the province include, but are not limited to:
- City and local governments and services;
- The provincial government;
- Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs);
- Best Start Network;
- Police and emergency services;
- Public Health;
- Various not-for-profit agencies and;
- Private sector partners and agencies

Common Locations for Community Hubs

Community hubs are located in a variety of spaces, including schools, community centres, formerly vacant buildings, public libraries, and long-term care homes.

As a result of the Province's *Schools First Policy*, the most common location for community hubs are in schools. The *Schools First Policy* requires community hubs that include organizations such as OEYCs to first explore a school as their physical location. If being located in a school is not possible or practical, the organization must provide a justification for why this is the case.

Long-term care homes can also be ideal locations for community hubs targeting seniors in communities. Two examples in rural communities include the Knollcrest Lodge in Milverton and the West Huron Care Centre in Zurich that offer the following services:
- Community outreach;
- Exercise programs;
- Seniors mental health and counselling programs;
- On-site physiotherapy and clinical services; and
- Healthcare related training.

Integrated Services vs. Co-Location

OMSSA members have provided examples of community hubs that include the provision of integrated services as well as the co-locations of services.

A hub organized with a focus on service integration combines programs with the goal of targeting a specific population and offering a seamless suite of services. Services in an integration-focused hub are able to "piggy-back" on each agency's resources in effect streamlining, coordinating and improving efficiencies and effectiveness.

The Peterborough Poverty Reduction Network's hub at Prince of Wales School in Peterborough, Ontario, is an integrated services hub that includes such programming as a parent coffee club, community picnics, in addition to scheduled dates for OW Case Managers to be on site to respond to queries from clients.

Alternatively, a hub organized using co-location allows each agency to operate independently and maintain separate funding sources. Similar agencies may share resources (i.e. meeting room) and may be grouped together based on their target population; however, the structure maintains each agency's independence. In this type of hub, agencies provide a variety of similar but distinct services under the same roof.

An example of a hub using co-location would be the Barrie Pathways in Barrie, Ontario. Barrie Pathways brought several agencies together under one roof to provide 24/7 services to homeless individuals. Partner agencies housed within Barrie Pathways include:

- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) which provides support to individuals living with complex long-term homelessness;
- The Barrie Out of the Cold which provides quick access to lodging and other basic needs;
- Outreach Housing Services provided through Simcoe Community Services – Barrie Housing Support Services which helps individuals identify housing options, and brokers support for individuals and landlords; and
- The David Busby Street Centre that provides drop-in, mobile outreach, triage and assessment, and harm reduction.

Common Funding Sources

Generally, community hubs do not operate on a single funding source. Rather, community hubs bring together a variety of agencies and services under one roof. Services, administration and human resources are funded through the resources of the community hub partners and other discrete funding sources. Funding will vary in accordance to the unique circumstances of the community. Some common funding sources include:

- Municipal governments;
- The Government of Ontario;
- District school boards;
- Not-for-profit agencies;
- Federal government; and
- Fundraising and private sector donations.

With the diversity of community hubs, there is no consistent funding framework that can be utilized across the province. What is important to note is, similar to the Province, CMSMs and DSSABs play a crucial role in assisting with the funding of community hubs, sustaining existing hubs, and contributing to their ongoing expansion.

But, like the Province, CMSMs and DSSABs are limited in the resources they have at hand to provide services to residents. Sustainability of community hubs is an important consideration as the Province moves forward. Reflective of the discussion above, relying on single funding sources is neither practical nor realistic.

As an example, the Municipality of Chatham-Kent and the County of Lambton reviewed the provincial funding allotted to their 18 Best Start Child and Family Centres. They evaluated where the provincial funding was going and also what the impacts would be if this source of funding was lost. The provincial funding was primarily used to:

- Pay rent for spaces in schools (i.e. clinic rooms used by therapists and physiotherapists, teaching kitchens used to promote cost effective meal planning and healthy eating, and meeting rooms to facilitate collaborative planning);
- Ensure professional staff are available in their primarily rural communities; and
- Provide transportation funds to families and children who otherwise have no means by which to access needed services.

Currently, a number of community hubs, such as the above in Chatham-Kent and the County of Lambton, were established through provincial commitments and priorities. Currently sustained with the support of local funding, it is important to consider that over time, as priorities and funding allocations shift, the existing hubs and its infrastructure are threatened. A reduction or elimination of funding would force the Chatham-Kent and the County of Lambton to close many of the 18 Best Start Child and Family Centres that they, along with the Province.

This is an example of the importance of developing models and funding frameworks that are sustainable and reflect the true cost of maintaining infrastructure and providing services over the longer terms.

Benefits and Impacts of Community Hubs

Client Impacts
"The Hub allows me to have a place to feel comfortable. The programs are vital and extremely beneficial for my children and me. Milton Moms supporting Moms with Post-Partum Depression literally saved my life! I had no one to turn to and was in complete despair until the day I joined the group. It was the light at the end of the tunnel … I believe Hubs fill a void in this neighbourhood. We need a meeting place and a coordination of services to meet the increasing social, educational, health, resource and developmental needs of our community."
- Post Partum Depression support program participant in Halton Region

With multiple agencies delivering programming under one roof, community hubs improve service coordination, increasing access to supports such as counselling, mental health services, healthcare, and child care. They offer a "one stop shop" with "no wrong doors" where clients can participate in a variety of supports without having to retell their story time and time again. The Durham OW Employment Resource Centre offers a variety of integrated services for clients including counselling, employment support and, for Ontario Works (OW) recipients, applications for dental and health programs.

The above is an example of the valuable impact community hubs can have on those accessing services. Community hubs have the potential to provide multiple benefits: improving and simplifying access to services for residents, changing lives, and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the funding, delivery, and outcomes of programs and services.

Community Impacts

Community hubs help build a sense of community and contribute to the social and economic wellbeing of its residents. They are a catalyst to bring people together, both residents and agencies within and outside the community. The community hub structure, which encourages collaboration and integration, can spark action to fill gaps in services where there may not be the will or adequate resources to address previously.

An example of this is the West Huron Care Centre in Zurich, Ontario, which was established in 1965 under the name of the Blue Water Rest Home. In 2007, the Ontario Minister of Health and Long-Term Care made a commitment to redevelop the Home into a community hub that would offer a variety of community-based programs and services. With this new designation the services were expanded and partnerships were built with agencies, including those from surrounding communities. In 2012, the name of the centre was changed to the West Huron Care Centre to reflect the variety of programs and services it provides. Services today include physiotherapy, exercise programs, Meals on Wheels, mental health services, and healthcare training, among others.

Financial Impacts

An important benefit of community hubs is that they provide the opportunity to deliver services with greater client satisfaction at a potentially lower cost. While this generally holds true, it is important to note that savings should not be expected immediately. Initial costs are required to establish a community hub and as identified above, community hubs must be designed and implemented with a plan for long term sustainability.

The financial impacts may differ from community to community and hub to hub. Some rural hubs may be successful at delivering services to communities which otherwise would not have them; however, there may be increased costs to make these services available to residents. Decentralizing agencies so that some of their services can be located in a community hub may require increased staff travel time and mileage costs, or as York Region has found, additional staff and administrative resources.

Furthermore, while community hubs have the potential to deliver real financial savings due to improved efficiency, it should not be assumed that they will eliminate deficits. The establishment of community hubs should be considered an innovative approach to improve services in a cost-effective framework that will pay for itself, along with some minor dividends, over the long-run.

Roles and Considerations of CMSMs and DSSABs

As indicated above, multiple stakeholders are generally engaged in the design and function of community hubs. As a provincially driven initiative, the Province can facilitate the development and implementation of community hubs through a vision, principles and coordination, streaming and integration across relevant provincial ministries on related priorities, funding and mandates.

CMSMs and DSSABs can be engaged to create and support sustainable and responsive community networks and services within community hubs. As the local service system managers and representatives of government, CMSMs and DSSABs are well positioned to support the development of local solutions that address local realities. This includes, integrated long term planning, growing and developing community partnerships, and developing new and innovative approaches to business and service delivery. CMSMs and DSSABs can assist, where it makes sense to do so, in organizing the services and other infrastructure to provide individuals and families with the easiest way to access the levels of support they need to keep themselves or their families at a minimum stable, and at the optimum, thriving.

With multiple stakeholders engaging with the community hub at different levels, streamlined coordination and collaboration is crucial for effective service delivery and overall success.

CMSMs and DSSABs are best equipped to gauge what will work well in their communities and have the knowledge to understand local needs. Key areas of CMSM and DSSAB strength are:

Leadership
CMSMs and DSSABs know and understand the key local players and have strong ties to them. CMSMs and DSSABs are positioned favourably to bring key players together, both as facilitators and conveners.

Local Knowledge
CMSMs and DSSABs are the experts on the needs of their local communities and what initiatives will be achievable and successful.   This valuable insight can support what will contribute to a successful community hub, and also what will prove challenging.

Funding
In many cases, community hubs include programs and services that are resourced or provided by and through CMSMs and DSSABs.

The authority of local government is a favourable factor in leveraging local interest, partnership, commitments, and funding. Local government can build confidence and buy-in for local projects and activities to address public needs. Local authority also ensures accountability, transparency and a commitment to public value.

Coordination
CMSMs and DSSABs understand their communities and their local programs and resources, and are best positioned to link and organize these supports in an efficient and effective way. By leveraging relationships and aligning supports within local communities, CMSMs and DSSABs make the best use of available resources, minimize duplication within the service system and optimize outcomes for people in need. As local priorities change, CMSMs and DSSABs are able to act in a timely way to maximize resources where they are needed most. In the end, the goal is to provide the right services, to the right people, at the right time.

Administration

CMSMs and DSSABs have a strong track record when it comes to managing and delivering services. CMSMs and DSSABs are very client/resident focused and administrative processes are already in place, which allow for efficient service delivery and public accountability.

Accountability
As representatives of local governments, CMSMs and DSSABs are accountable to their communities, subject to oversight of locally elected officials, and local taxpayers and residents. This obligation has a number of implications:

- Accountability goes beyond that established with the Province. CMSMs and DSSABs, in their role as service system managers, are also responsible for meeting local governance requirements and making the best decisions on the allocation of finite resources.
- CMSMs and DSSABs bring to the decision-making and planning tables a sophisticated level of information in terms of data, research, mapping, local economic development, and labour market trends and issues.

The above are all beneficial to the function and effectiveness of community hubs.

Challenges and Recommendations

Following are a number of recommendations and factors we have heard from our members to consider in the provincial community hub initiative.

Flexibility to Set Objectives and Mandates
Each agency operating in a hub has its own distinct culture, goals, mandate and strategies. Allowing greater flexibility in how the agencies achieve their objectives at the local level, including the encouragement of greater consultation with outside agencies when setting mandates, would be beneficial for the establishment and sustainment of community hubs.

Clarification of Provincial Privacy Legislation
In our member's experience, integrating services and working with clients within an integrated approach is limited by a common and critical factor: the sharing of information and privacy.   We know the government is aware of this and has undertaken efforts to address this most commonly through its work on common identifiers.

We encourage the Province in its efforts to move towards a horizontal approach across government in policy design and funding to consider the Province of Alberta's *Children's First Act* as a precedent to move in a similar direction.

Coordination between CMSMs and DSSABs, Local Agencies, and the Provincial Government
Community hubs work best when there are strong partnerships in place between the Province, CMSMs and DSSABs, and local agencies, with an emphasis on local leadership. It is recommended that the

Province provide guidance and a framework, while CMSMs and DSSABs and local agencies, given as much flexibility as possible, develop the community hub to addresses the unique needs of its residents.

Greater Coordination between Schools and Community Hubs
Schools, as pillars of the community and encouraged by the *Schools First Policy*, are an ideal location for community hubs. In order for a hub to operate to its full potential, work needs to be done across the province to move from a siloed approach that sees limits in coordinated efforts of the development of programming and community building, to an integrated approach.

In some areas, coordination between schools and community hubs in terms of access to space requires improvement. The operation of community hubs can be restricted as some schools do not permit access to the school building after school hours, limiting the coordination of meetings and/or services. A stronger partnership between individual schools and the community hubs, with a greater emphasis on facility integration, would strengthen relationships and opportunities for Ontarians.

Locating Community Hubs
When possible, community hubs should be located in places where communities already gather (i.e. schools, libraries, community centres, etc.). In cases where this is not possible, community hubs can be located within vacant buildings that are easily accessible (i.e. public transit, adequate parking) and have safe spaces appropriate to hub programming. The City of Brantford's Wellness Supportive Living Program converted a two-bedroom apartment into a shared office and meeting space in order to provide services to seniors.

When securing a community hub location, it is important that there is adequate physical space. In Sarnia-Lambton, many community hubs, such as their OEYC, lack adequate space to fulfill demand for their services. In the Riverview Central School, a community hub in Port Lambton, one room must serve as both the clinic and the supervisor's office, creating scheduling and service delivery challenges. Additionally, Dufferin County has cited a lack of space as an issue in the implementation of "no wrong door" policies. In fast-growing regions like Halton, acquiring space can be especially challenging as most space in schools is being used to expand student capacity and is unavailable to be converted into a community hub.   Provincial support to ensure that community hubs are established in buildings with adequate physical space for its programming and services would be welcomed by CMSMs and DSSABs.

Financial
As discussed, there can be a number of financial challenges that arise while establishing and operating community hubs.

Access to Capital Funding
One challenge in renovating and securing sites for community hubs is accessing capital funding. A solution to this is to simplify the process of transferring unused public assets over to community hubs. If a school is to sell any excess properties they do so at fair market value within a 90-day response time. This short period does not always provide community hubs the time needed to secure the necessary

capital to purchase the property. Giving priority to transferring excess public assets to other public agencies or increasing the response time beyond 90 days, would be very beneficial.

Stable Funding
As indicated previously, developing a sustainable framework for community hubs is necessary.

With interdependent agencies involved in the creation and operation of a single community hub, what affects one agency, within a hub, affects all agencies. Financial stability is important. Not only does a lack of stable funding prevent community hubs from being able to adequately plan for the long-term, it also changes the mentality of the community hub from excellent service provision, outcomes for clients and community health and wellbeing to struggling to "keep the doors open and the lights on".

Community hubs must be positioned to use potential "savings" to redirect back into the infrastructure and services of the hub.

It is also recommended that relying on time limited funding be avoided. Scrambling for time limited or only project specific funding (though it is recognized this will play a role) can result in the fragmentation of services and dismantling of integration. When community agencies compete for time limited funds without the use of local evidence planning and community planning, it can lead to service silos developing in the community hub.

It will be important for the Province to consider moving forward with a framework and with municipal and DSSAB partners on shared areas of interest and responsibility and, at the right time, as partners. The Province and CMSMs and DSSABs must develop a strategic approach at the provincial and local levels that includes understanding, aligning and streamlining the many resources currently in the system to support community hubs.

At the provincial level, it is time, across provincial ministries, to look at current efforts and objectives with an eye towards how each program aligns and, where appropriate, can integrate comprehensively towards the broader goal of sustainable community hubs.

Lease Agreements with Schools
In the current climate of scarce resources, the lease agreements offered by schools tend to leave little room for community hubs to negotiate terms. This can result in escalating rents for the community hub.

Schools should consider making their rental policies for community hubs more reasonable and equitable. Currently some tenants, such as OEYCs, are offering rental rates lower than those for other types of community hubs.

While it is understandable that schools will be interested in an additional revenue stream, it is also important for them to be aware of the non-financial benefits that come with being a home for community hubs. These include: having agencies that provide services to their students in the same

location, having a more pronounced role in their community, and, in cases where they are significantly under capacity, a reason for the school to remain open.

Improved Evaluation Techniques
Finally, it is recommended that improved evaluation techniques need to be implemented to more accurately measure the total financial costs (including overhead) of opening and operating community hubs, and the savings they generate.

Rural Ontario
Rural communities in Ontario face a number of unique challenges.

The Schools First Policy
While Ontario's *Schools First Policy* has many benefits, it does present a challenge for rural communities. With declining populations leading to school closures, it is difficult for a community to plan a community hub without knowing whether or not a location will be available over the long-term. In Bruce County, 10 schools across Bruce Grey have been identified as potential closures. Even if some of these schools are eventually removed from the list it would be impractical for Bruce County or the other communities across Ontario where this is also a concern, to take the risk and designate one of them as a hub.

Fortunately, in many cases there are options. If a school is operating significantly under-capacity then the school and community hub may want to consider facility sharing. If a community can justify why it would not be possible or why it would be impractical to locate a community hub within a school, they can be granted an exemption as long as they choose an alternate location which is as closely connected to a school as possible.

A Smaller Economy of Scale
Lacking "economies of scale", rural communities must balance the realities of lower participation rates with the principle of access to services by children and families. The delivery of many services in the hubs of smaller communities can be prohibitively expensive to operate without assistance. The Province should keep this in mind when developing funding formulas.

Conclusion

In order to increase the success of community hubs across the province, and ensure that they will thrive while supporting residents, we must build upon our strengths. CMSMs and DSSABs can serve as strong leaders, cultivating local solutions to local problems. With sustained leadership and investment and a long term goal, hubs can develop and thrive. When multiple partners and stakeholders, including several layers of government, rally around a shared vision and commitment, Ontarians will benefit.

Creative solutions are necessary to meet unique local needs. Keeping it local and working with your partner CMSMs and DSSABs, strengthening community hubs and encouraging their development is a clear step forward in our quest to build a better Ontario.