***LEADING FOR CHANGE, PLANNING FOR GROWTH***

***STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2020***

In June of 2015, staff and board members of the Nelson Food Cupboard Society participated in a planning session with a local consultant which involved reviewing the vision, mission, goals and purposes of the organization. The intent of the session was to confirm the direction the society would take over the next five years.

**INTRODUCTION:**

Overall, the Nelson Food Cupboard (NFC) was described as a stable, well-functioning operation, with systems that work and numerous resources in place, including human, physical, financial and social. Looking to the future, the question was: What additional work might the NFC take on, and how would that work be accomplished? Many members of the board and staff expressed a desire to see the organization move beyond the original purpose of providing emergency food services/a food bank (subsistence level) to a more problem-solving approach (need prevention).

A review of the vision, mission, goals and purposes revealed that expanding the work of the organization would continue to fit within these statements, providing the work continued to focus on providing food to individuals in need, and raising awareness of food-related issues for individuals in economic need.

**DEVELOPING THE VISION:**

The group took some time to explore the core business of the organization, which basically could be described as “*get food and give it to people*”. After discussion, this description was modified and expanded to “*getting good food (from a variety of sources) and making it accessible to people in need (in a variety of barrier-free ways) in Nelson and surrounding area (primarily Area E and F), while providing education to the broader audience of customers, friends, the public, and policy makers”.*

Although there were many ideas for how the NFC could grow, participants in the discussion were also aware of the need to plan carefully for any growth, keeping in mind the capacity of the organization. There were a number of “reality checks” which emphasized the need to evaluate existing programs, services and resources before charging ahead.

It also became clear that a “continuum of services” would be necessary within the different categories of “acquiring food” and “making it accessible”, to different people with different levels of need. The primary focus would continue to be on vulnerable individuals (as per the vision, mission, goals and purposes) however an added element would be creating more opportunities where people from the mainstream could be involved in NFC activities. This would build awareness and increase impact.

In the broader context of Nelson and its surrounding communities, it was noted that the NFC is uniquely positioned to play a lead role in advancing food security related issues. Other organizations in Nelson providing food to people in need all have additional aspects to their mandates (such as housing or early childhood), or they are part of larger organizations with a religious component to their work. Meanwhile the NFC is focussed primarily on issues related to food, and has already been a champion of work in this area with its production of a Food Security Asset Mapping and Gaps Analysis Project in fall 2014.

**MOVING FORWARD:**

As discussion continued, board members and staff were asked what activities or actions they felt should be included in the plan for the future. Suggestions were collected and prioritized, with the result that a number of themes were identified. **The following five areas were supported as places where growth should occur.**

1. **Increase ways to acquire, grow and produce food** – could include garden projects, use of community green spaces, backyard gardener matching programs, food rescue operations
2. **Diversify accessibility opportunities for food** – could include mobile food services, low cost choices, pop-up markets
3. **Engage in issues at the systemic level** – could include participating in policy discussions, research opportunities, community events such as “Chew on This”
4. **Create customer capacity building opportunities** – could include cooking workshops, community kitchen, food preserving sessions and gardening opportunities
5. **Improve the physical space (short term and long term options**) – could include short term reconfiguring or improving, long term new location.

At the same time, the core business of running existing programs (the food bank) would continue, but with an in-depth evaluation of how the services are offered. This would include looking at such aspects as how often customers are served, portions, packaging and how to make the space more welcoming and educational. This was not so much a question of what should be eliminated, or where energies should be shifted, but rather a question of how current service could be maintained while additional areas were expanded so both could be offered successfully.

As mentioned earlier, an additional aspect of the plan to move forward was finding more ways to integrate the mainstream population into the work and activities of the organization, ideally in all the theme areas.

The need for increased resources, especially financial, to deliver increased activities was clearly identified. The creation of a formal Fund Development Plan/Strategy was supported as a necessary next step for growing the organization.

Supporting all these activities was the understanding that building/maintaining relationships with other partners in the community would be critical, and that being involved in the emerging Nelson Food Policy Council would be both necessary and beneficial. It will also be important to consult with community stakeholders, current and potential customers, and other service providers to get a clear picture of where the need is greatest and where other service providers are already planning activities.

A graphic representation of the five theme areas and the supporting concepts was developed in the shape of a flower, with each petal representing an area. See appendix A below.

**CONCLUSION:**

The Nelson Food Cupboard is well-positioned to evolve from its current successful level of service to a larger, more diverse organization with a stronger focus on addressing causes of food insecurity and potential solutions. In the next five years the organization can continue to offer its existing services, while growing the five theme areas identified in the planning session.

APPENDIX A

