

# Statement on Community-Based Social Planning

In 1992, the Halton Social Planning Council joined with other social planning organizations throughout Ontario to create the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO). In 1993, the SPC was part of a Task Group created to prepare a brief, defining independent community-based social planning. The following statement was endorsed by the SPNO early in 1994.

## **Purpose and Goals**

Social planning organizations exist to build and strengthen community. This mission focuses on the social impact on individuals, families and communities of larger social, economic, political, and cultural forces in society. It also encompasses advocating for the development of essential community and social supports as provided through human service systems.

In general, social planning organizations are committed to:

***Social Change*** as a continual process towards achieving and sustaining social development for all members of the community.

***Social Development*** as a desired state of community well-being reflected in the achievement of the following living conditions:<sup>1</sup>

- personal and public health
- satisfaction of basic material needs
- economic security and opportunity
- protection from violence, abuse, threat, and discrimination
- sense of identification and belonging with others
- availability of choices and self-determination throughout life path
- active participation and decision-making in community life and larger societal processes
- access to knowledge and personal skill development
- sustainable natural and physical environments

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<sup>1</sup> (Adapted from Planning for *People and Communities-Report of the Provincial-Municipal Human and Social Development Working Group*, Ontario Greater Toronto Area Office, 1992)

## Our Core Values

Social planning organizations subscribe to the following set of core values:

**Community:** The primacy of community is central to social planning, defining both what social planning organizations do and how they function.

**Voluntarism:** Since community members are the primary stakeholders in planning decisions, social planning organizations actively encourage and support voluntary leadership and involvement in issues which affect the quality of community life.

**Diversity:** Social Planning organizations recognize and highly value the multi-dimensional character of community which includes a rich variety of backgrounds and experiences.

**Equity and Social Justice:** Social Planning organizations are committed to equal treatment and fair access to resources for all members of the community.

## Our Operating Principles

Social planning organizations generally function in accordance with the following operating principles:

**Independence:** Being community-driven, social planning organizations have greater freedom to critique existing policies and systems or to propose alternatives than public sector organizations or direct service providers; although it is important to note that the exercise of this independence does sometimes strain relationships with core funders (i.e. primarily United Ways and municipalities).

**Community Accountability:** Social planning organizations are membership-based and are governed by boards which are elected annually by their community members.

**Knowledge-based Action:** Social planning organizations link independent research and community experience to the development of action proposals and solutions to identified problems.

**Citizen Participation:** Social planning organizations promote the active participation of community members in planning and decision-making processes.

**Inclusiveness:** In promoting citizen participation, social planning organizations actively seek to include *all* community members with an interest in the issue at hand regardless of gender, racial and/or cultural origin, religion, age or other self-defining forms of identification.

**Empowerment:** In promoting inclusive citizen participation, social planning organizations strive to build the capacity of community leadership to participate more effectively in democratic processes and to take greater control over decision-making which affect the quality of community life.

**Integrated, Holistic Perspective:** Given the interdependence of the social, economic, political, cultural, and technological dynamics of modern life, social planning organizations recognize the need for comprehensive and interdisciplinary approaches to planning, policy analysis and problem-solving in our society.

## Our Strategies, Roles, Functions

Social planning organizations strive to reflect their values, achieve their goals and put their operating principles into practice by employing the following approaches in their community work:

***Social Research:*** Social planning organizations undertake independent research on social trends, needs, and issues relevant to a variety of constituencies in their communities.

***Policy Analysis and Development:*** Social planning organizations have access to both professional and voluntary expertise on a wide range of social, economic, and cultural issues which enable them to provide sophisticated policy analysis and research-based proposals to public policy-makers at the local, provincial, and federal levels.

***Convening and Facilitating:*** Social planning organizations can serve as a non-threatening "meeting place" for discussion and resolution of difficult community issues and often facilitate the building of community consensus on issues or shared action.

***Partnership and Collaboration:*** Social planning organizations are frequently the community focal point for mobilizing those groups most affected by issues into working and problem-solving partnerships, information networks, and action coalitions.

***Community Awareness and Education:*** Social planning organizations promote broader and deeper community understanding on social issues which affect certain groups or the general quality of community life.

***Service Development:*** Social planning organizations play a variety of roles vis-a-vis the human service system from definition of service needs to coordination and evaluation of program and service delivery.

***Community Development:*** Grounded in their communities and linked in partnership with so many community groups and individuals, social planning organizations facilitate and support positive change which is truly community-driven.

***Advocacy and Social Action:*** Sometimes under their own auspices and sometimes as part of larger coalitions organized around an issue of community concerns, social planning organizations often serve as a catalyst for change and advance the interests of marginalized sectors of the community by advocating specific policy positions to government.

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