

STRATEGIC PLAN



TEN OAKS PROJECT
2019-2021

RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS



RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

As the Ten Oaks Project enters its fifteenth year, we are reflecting on how the organization has grown in leaps and bounds over the course of our 2015-2018 strategic plan, as well as how much more we still have ahead of us.

For the 2019-2021 strategic plan, we conducted a broad community consultation with past, present, and future campers, camper families, volunteers, community members, seasonal and fulltime staff, and Board members. We conducted an online survey that was distributed broadly on our social media channels and amongst our networks, and held two in-person brainstorming sessions with our staff and Board of Directors.

The themes that emerged reminded us of the need to return to our roots: the five values that form the core of the Ten Oaks Project and guide us in everything we do.

2019-2021 GOALS

- 1. Empowerment Through Play:** Nurturing Our Camp Programs
- 2. Learning By Doing:** Creating a Culture of Philanthropy
- 3. Social Justice:** Living Our Values
- 4. Collaboration and Innovation:** Growing With and Within our Communities
- 5. People:** Sustaining Our Staff and Volunteer Teams

As you will read in the following pages, our objectives are more detailed for 2019 and less detailed by 2021; while our goals will remain constant, the strategies we employ to achieve them may change as we test things out, make mistakes, get feedback, and see what works. We see this plan as a living document that will shift and change depending on the direction from our communities.

Thank you for your support as we dig deep and return to our roots over the next few years.

Hannah McGechie Daniel Engel
Executive Director Board President



MISSION, VISION, VALUES

MISSION: The Ten Oaks Project engages and connects children and youth from LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two spirit, queer) identities, families, and communities through programs and activities rooted in play.

VISION: The Ten Oaks Project is a leader in meeting the needs of children and youth from LGBTQ+ identities, families, and communities. Our work is inspired by camp and grounded in social justice as we strive to create safer spaces and grow positive peer networks for all children and youth.

VALUES

- 1. Empowerment Through Play:** What we do is fun, and lots of it! Our work is grounded in asset-based philosophies that use play to effect personal change, enhance self-esteem, develop leadership, and foster independence. We believe that by bringing children and youth together to play and engage in recreation, we can build their confidence, forge bonds, and facilitate understanding.
- 2. Learning By Doing:** We believe that the best way to understand how the world works, and how to change it, is to engage in it. To facilitate this, we ensure our programs are rooted in experiential education or hands-on learning that inspires active engagement, piques curiosity, and creates spaces where questions can be asked, investigations conducted, successes celebrated, and mistakes learned from.
- 3. Social Justice:** We strive to make the world more equitable, push to see society value all people more, and try to better understand and respect our environment. By critically reflecting upon the way in which human rights are manifested in the everyday lives of people, we are challenged to provide equitable opportunities and representation in a real and substantive way. Our commitment to economic accessibility and respect for the diverse voices in our communities flows from this goal.
- 4. Collaboration and Innovation:** We do things a bit differently. Forging relationships that are strong and collaborative is at the heart of what we do. The communities we serve are engaged in every aspect of what we do. We strive to evolve by adapting and adding our flavour to existing best practices. What we do, we want to do well, and we recognize that the way to do that is to build on the strengths of our community.
- 5. People:** Fundamentally, we are an organization that is built around people – their hopes, their abilities, and their uniqueness. We understand children and youth as persons in their own right and aim to provide experiences that develop, support, and empower them. The organization, at its core, is motivated by the needs of children and youth from LGBTQ+ identities, families, and communities. Moreover, we are an organization built on the strength of our community and we would not exist without the valuable contributions of our volunteers, staff, directorate, sponsors, donors, and community partners.



1. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PLAY: NURTURING OUR CAMP PROGRAMS

The core of our work is our summer camp programs, and we believe they are the primary site of empowerment through play. Our camps have grown exponentially over the past few years: Camp Ten Oaks has doubled in size (2018), Project Acorn took a pause for evaluation (2016) and re-launched (2017), and we started Oak Grove Family Camp (2017) and Camp Lifting Leaves (2018). We've experienced plenty of growing pains along the way and are now entering a different kind of growth phase: nurturing our existing programs and strengthening our capacity to run them.

OUTCOMES

STRATEGIES

- The children and youth of LGBTQ+ identities, families, and communities feel safe, supported, affirmed, and celebrated at our camp programs and know their voices will be heard.
- Our camp programs are held at sites that meet our community and programming needs, and are led by a well-trained and supported staff team.
- Strengthen feedback mechanisms for campers and staff to tell us how to shape our programs.
- Continue to record institutional memory and formalize organizational policies, procedures, and action plans.
- Increase connections between camp programs.
- Increase training opportunities for staff around supporting youth experiencing oppression.
- Review our use of rental camp sites and the impact on resources and staff capacity of being spread across the province.

ACTIVITIES

- 2019**
- Add training around anti-racism and decolonization to camp staff training.
 - Explore and gather feedback from campers and staff around camp sites and scheduling.
 - Explore ways to build connection between camp programs.
 - Review and revise our feedback mechanisms for campers, their families, and staff.
 - Conduct scan of organizational policies, procedures, and action plans and fill gaps where necessary.
- 2020**
- Add training around trauma to camp staff training.
 - Depending on feedback from staff and campers, host as many camp programs as possible at one site and advocate for site to move towards being universally accessible.
- 2021**
- Add training around anti-oppression as needed to camp staff training based on camper / staff feedback.



2. LEARNING BY DOING:

CREATING A CULTURE OF PHILANTHROPY

As we've grown, so has the need for funding so we can continue to offer financially accessible programs. Our fundraising efforts have expanded: we've refined our event-based fundraisers and grown the Bowl-A-Thon; launched a Fall dinner fundraiser; grown our monthly donor base through the Waggy Legacy Fund; and developed new relationships with corporate funders. Requests for camp fee subsidies are also increasing, and we must scale our fundraising to meet this demand. Over the next three years, we will begin the process of creating a culture of philanthropy where everyone in every part of the organization is given an opportunity to engage, contribute, and share stories about the Ten Oaks Project and its impacts. Creating this kind of culture will strengthen the core of the organization, improve our stability and sustainability significantly, and alleviate fear and nervousness that is commonplace – but not necessary! – when folks talk about and ask for money.

OUTCOMES

- The Ten Oaks Project is supported by a wide and diverse range of funding sources, allowing us to offer our camp programs to all children and youth who want to access them, regardless of financial barriers.
- Fundraising is an engaging, fun, and fondly anticipated activity that happens at every level of the organization.
- Donors have authentic, caring relationships with the organization, know where their donations are going and the impact they have, and are keen to continue their support.

STRATEGIES

- Strengthen and deepen long-term, caring relationships with donors.
- Provide opportunities for campers, their families, staff, volunteers, and community supporters to grow their fundraising skills.
- Create a champion program for stakeholders and community members to lead campaigns to support the organization.
- Grow funding base through third-party fundraisers and increased support from monthly donor, major gift, and planned giving programs.

ACTIVITIES

- 2019**
- Create a champion program to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Ten Oaks Project.
 - Launch third-party fundraising and planned giving programs.
 - Grow monthly donor program to 125 donors.
 - Conduct donor survey to learn about reasons for giving, stewardship, and how to grow relationships
- 2020**
- Launch fundraising skill share sessions.
 - Grow monthly donor program to 150 donors.
- 2021**
- Grow monthly donor program to 175 donors.



3. SOCIAL JUSTICE: LIVING OUR VALUES

The Ten Oaks Project has explored and implemented a wealth of strategies over the past few years to increase our commitment to social justice and anti-oppression: we worked with an anti-racism consultant to improve our recruitment, retention, and support of BIPOC staff at Camp Ten Oaks; moved Project Acorn to a physically accessible site; began prioritizing BIPOC and transfeminine campers on our waitlists; began publishing annual program feedback reports with action plans for change; and created a volunteer accessibility fund. Feedback from our community during the strategic planning process reflected these shifts: we repeatedly heard that folks appreciate our commitment to anti-oppression, the accessibility of our programs, and our efforts to meet people where they're at. And we still have work to do: we lack racial diversity on our staff and organizational leadership teams; oppression needs to be better addressed when it arises at our camp programs; and far more can be done to engage and build meaningful relationships with BIPOC and transfeminine communities beyond camp.

OUTCOMES

- Our camp programs serve campers / are run by staff and volunteer teams from a diversity of identities and backgrounds, who feel seen, heard, affirmed, valued, and a genuine sense of belonging.

STRATEGIES

- Increase our staff and volunteer teams' capacity to respond to oppressive actions and situations that arise at our camp programs, and create safer spaces for BIPOC and transfeminine campers.
- Strengthen anti-racist and anti-oppressive content in camp programs.
- Increase presence of BIPOC and trans leaders within the organization.

ACTIVITIES

2019

- Host trainings around anti-racism and decolonization for camp staff.
- Conduct stakeholder consultation around decolonizing the language, terms, and acronyms TOP uses.
- Create age appropriate camp programming and policy plans that discuss anti-racism, anti-oppression, and decolonization.

2020-2021

- Consult with BIPOC and transfeminine participants, staff, and volunteers about annual goals to move us towards better living our social justice values.



4. COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION: GROWING WITH AND WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES

The Ten Oaks Project has always been surrounded by a strong community of support and as we enter our 15th year, this community has never been bigger or more enthusiastic about how they can connect with one another, raise funds for the Ten Oaks Projects, form community partnerships, and work at the camps they attended as campers in order to create safer spaces for the next generation. We have a strong reputation, particularly in LGBTQ+ communities, but there are opportunities to grow this reputation in broader networks with improvements to our marketing and communications strategies. This growth will allow us to reach and support more people, grow our staff and volunteer teams, become more involved in and supportive of the communities we are part of and intersect with, and offer us a stronger base of support in our work and fundraising.

OUTCOMES

- The Ten Oaks Project is well-known in both LGBTQ+ and mainstream communities due to its wide base of support, the community relationships it's built, and the support and services it offers to others.

STRATEGIES

- Leverage existing relationships and build new ones with local community groups to better practice acting in solidarity, provide support, and widen our networks.
- Formalize a workshop series around creating more inclusive spaces in camping and recreation.
- Create an alumni network.

ACTIVITIES

2019

- Develop and launch an outreach strategy to build stronger relationships with local community groups.
- Deliver three or more workshops for other camps and recreation organizations.
- Launch alumni network to create a stronger community of support for current and former campers, volunteers, and staff.
- Create and launch a marketing and brand strategy to grow awareness and knowledge of our programs, services, and ways to get involved.

2020-2021

- Create and execute plans to grow community relationships and reach broader networks as needed.



5. PEOPLE:

SUSTAINING OUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEER TEAMS

The consultations we did for this strategic plan included repeated mentions of the strengths of our staff team: they have varied experiences and networks; a positive work culture; and a continual commitment to learning and growing. The challenges that come with a by-and-for model of structuring an organization were also mentioned: a reliance on volunteers means high turnover of seasonal staff; volunteer work is often inaccessible to many and prioritizes those who hold a lot of privilege and can afford to work for free; working in small communities one is also a member of means navigating conflicts of interest, confidentiality, boundaries, and conflict; and the personal ties staff and volunteers can have to the work can be deeply emotional and bring up past and present pain. Some of these challenges are inevitable and come with the terrain, but they can be anticipated and strategies employed to mitigate their negative aspects and offer positive opportunities.

OUTCOMES

- The Ten Oaks Project offers workplaces where fulltime employees, seasonal staff, and program and community volunteers feel supported, valued, and like they have the tools to make positive contributions and grow their own skills.

STRATEGIES

- Continue to support and nurture fulltime staff team through liveable wages, flexible workplaces, professional development and training opportunities, and a healthy workplace environment and culture.
- Review and revise workload, responsibilities, and workplace structure of seasonal staff and program volunteers to create sustainable, accessible work and teams
- Strengthen structure for Board sustainability and succession.

ACTIVITIES

Ongoing

- Offer all staff and volunteers ongoing feedback, support, and reasonable accommodations to grow in their roles and develop their skills.

2019

- Pilot new model for Board meetings, work, and succession.
- Review the cabin sizes at Camp Ten Oaks and critically evaluate what a reasonable number of campers for cabin counsellors to care for is.
- Review camp dates and locations to see how moving their dates closer to one another and sites to closer geographical proximity will impact staff energy levels, skill development, and general wellbeing.
- Hold consultation for community volunteers to hear what would make volunteering more accessible to them.