INTRODUCTION

For 50 years, MEND has served the most vulnerable families, individuals, and seniors, with dignity and respect. Over the decades, MEND has grown from an agency operating out of a Valley garage to become a trusted community anchor, responding to the needs of thousands of vulnerable community members with crisis services and long-term intensive case management supports.

Those who access direct services at MEND are predominantly low-income, people of color, and homeless or at-risk of being homeless, who reside in the San Fernando Valley. From its founding, MEND has created and sustained a welcoming environment that embraces all races, cultures, and people. We approach our work as a partner with the people we serve, employing non-discriminatory practices at all times. We listen to our community and invite their feedback in surveys, focus groups and questionnaires.

The strategic plan reflects these values and engagement with the community.

MISSION

With dignity and respect, MEND’s mission is to meet the immediate needs of individuals and families and increase their access to opportunities that strengthen their capacity to thrive.

VISION

All individuals and families served by MEND flourish for generations to come.

Today, MEND operates several key programs and services:

➢ Community Nourishment Programs which include Food Bank, Food Pantry, Buen Provecho Farmer’s Market and Little Health Market
➢ Clothing Center, including diaper and personal care product distributions
➢ Homeless Care Services, which includes providing fresh clothing, a bag of food, and a grab and go meal from our kitchen
➢ Comprehensive Case Managed Services: Family Support and Wellness Programs (Pathways to Wellness and Hope & Care Community Ambassador Program)

During the development of the last strategic plan, the leadership team and the Board of Directors emphasized the importance of offering both relief from the effects of poverty and
providing the level of support needed to move clients toward thriving. The 2018-21 strategic plan also created the framework for an agency turnaround as, at that point, MEND carried significant debt and accumulated deficits of over $1.4 MM between 2011 and 2017. The turnaround was accomplished, and the organization is in a strong position programmatically and financially.

To sustain this, our Board and executive staff have put in place strict oversight measures that ensure that MEND maintains healthy financial reserves and budgets. But these measures were also critical to ensure that MEND can meet the needs of the community, thus ensuring efficient delivery of services, during normal and uncertain times.

The key accomplishments over the last three years included:

- Establishing reserves for the first time in the agency’s history and having sufficient cash on hand to weather occasional shortfalls.
- Eliminating all debt and returning the organization to fiscal health.
- Pursuing and receiving local, state, and federal funds for the first time in the agency’s history, projected to reach just under $1MM for FY 2020-21.
- Launching comprehensive case managed services to vulnerable families.

  - The Family Support Program (FSP), which launched in the summer of 2018, focuses on those families who have depended on MEND for essential services for 10+ years, including those who have relied on support for multiple generations. Guided by individualized plans created collaboratively with a case manager, over the two years of its existence, the program has enrolled and worked with 71 families, even during the pandemic, helping them address and improve overall functioning and self-sustaining.

  - The Pathways to Wellness (PtW) program, kicked off in 2019 (just months before COVID-19 struck), helps food-insecure clients with chronic conditions improve their health and wellness. PtW works with about 250 participants each year helping them access food resources, while addressing the issues that contribute to their health challenges. In 2020, to limit exposure to COVID infection, enrolled clients received home deliveries of 27,156 pounds of food – enough for 22,630 meals.

  - As the northeast San Fernando Valley became the epicenter of COVID-19 infections in late 2020, MEND started and deployed the Hope & Care program, whose outreach teams go out into the community to offer mental health and
COVID information and resources (such as for testing and vaccines.) as well as PPE and home sanitation kits. The team conducts thousands of instances of door-to-door canvassing per month (reaching 18,000 individuals in 2020). Funding for this program, a mix of federal, state, and local dollars, continues through June 2022.

**STRATEGIC ISSUES ANALYSIS**

Developing our strategic framework required an honest analysis of our challenges and a careful attention to community needs.

**Process/Stakeholder Participation**

In 2019, MEND retained the Center for Nonprofit Management to conduct a comprehensive community needs assessment (CNA), which was completed in early 2020. The process included gathering input through interviews, surveys and focus groups from key stakeholders such as community members, program participants, and staff – as well as data gleaned from external sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the Federal Register, Aspen Institute, the City of Los Angeles, and various news outlets, among others.

Key strategic opportunities that emerged include:

- Modification of service delivery strategies to address transportation barriers; consider opportunities to provide services locally in high need neighborhoods either through expansion, co-location, or even mobile services.

- Consider other high-need communities and expand populations served (e.g., those above poverty line but below living wage).

- Consider modifying days and hours of service. For the clients that are working or who have childcare responsibilities, it is often difficult to participate in programs offered only during regular working hours.

- Identify options for childcare that encourage parents’ participation in MEND services.

- Consider expanding program eligibility to those living just above the poverty line and up to living wage. Local data shows that the cost of rent alone places an extreme burden on these individuals and families, which places them at risk of falling into homelessness.
• Expand the Family Support Program so that more families can be connected with services and resources specific to individual needs (like homeless diversion or support accessing services available to undocumented community members), particularly in moments of crisis (e.g., facing eviction and homelessness, loss of a job). Consider a similar case managed model for individuals.

• Explore opportunities to increase population-specific services for seniors (age 55+) who are at greater risk of social isolation, homelessness, and chronic health conditions.

• Evaluate opportunities to increase household income: entrepreneurship, paid transitional jobs, job placement & retention services.

• Expand financial literacy classes to include a focus on helping individuals and families understand various public benefits, and to create a plan to increase earned income while decreasing reliance on public benefits.

• Increase access to group and individual counseling to give MEND clients the tools and capacities to work through trauma and periods of poor mental health. Group interventions can foster trusting relationships and create a system of support where they can help each other in times of need.

The Road Ahead

As we assessed our key strategic issues and institutional culture in the context of the last several years of intentional change as well as the unplanned impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, MEND has moved from crisis, through survival and into the stabilization phase. We are also poised to move into reimagining as we stand on steady and solid ground.

Considering the complex needs of the people MEND serves, knowing that we do not possess the core competencies required to meet them all, coupled with the fact that we have approximately 8,000 square feet of former clinic space available, it became clear: our greatest strategic opportunity lies in developing robust partnerships, with some co-located at MEND.
Our scan of providers and research confirmed that co-located providers “make it less likely that families fall through the cracks. Hard-to-reach and at-risk groups appear more likely to participate in ... services that are integrated and co-located”¹ and “Organizations benefit most from sharing spaces in terms of cost-effectiveness and increased service capacity. Clients experience access to many services in one place and higher quality service provision.”²

**Strategic Priorities and Objectives**

Over the next three years, MEND’s overarching priority centers around resilience for both our organization and the people we serve. Each annual phase is described below:

**Year 1: Emerging Resilience**

*“Managing the consequences of past performance is the first step toward building a resilient organization.” Unknown*

MEND’s previous 3-year strategic plan focused on correcting long-term endemic challenges and restoring the organization back to financial health. It was imperative that MEND return to a place where it could sustain operations and weather storms such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, we recognize that if we had not taken the steps we took, we may not have survived. The ability of MEND to continue serving the community is a testament to its will, passion, and thoughtful leadership. Subsequently, the lesson of 2020 and our response in the face of COVID-19, is how resilient we and our community are. As we move out of crisis response mode, the greatest opportunity is to cultivate, build on and advance the lessons learned as we move forward during uncertain times.

As vaccines continue to roll out and restrictions recede, our focus will be on assessment of our current work to ensure that our services support the growing resilience and capacity emerging within our community. We will begin to enlist partners as collaborators and tenants, as well as making necessary adaptations to our infrastructure and continuing to build our financial strength. This is, therefore, a year of recovery and rebuilding.

Year 2: Cultivating Resilience

“Resilience is not only recovering from disaster; it’s about laying the groundwork for success.” Martina Linnenluecke

At its core, “Organizational resilience is ‘the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond, and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions in order to survive and prosper.’” Nonprofits by their very nature are subject to the continuum of both incremental and sudden changes. Being dependent on funding streams that are sometimes unpredictable – whether it be from economic downturns, natural disasters, changes in funders’ priorities, and now, pandemics – adapting readily is essential to ensuring that we remain a steady presence for our community.

While it is mission critical to achieve resilience, it requires preparation, planning, and flexibility, centered around a prudent business model. After a year of recovering and rebuilding post-COVID, we are committed to intentional planning. Using the Shewhart Cycle (also known as Plan-Do-Check-Act) as our basis of decision making and proof of concept testing, we will be able to better maximize our resources.

Year 3: Realizing Resilience

“Resilience is all about being able to overcome the unexpected. Sustainability is about survival. The goal of resilience is to thrive.” James Cascio

A resilient community is one with readily available resources in order to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations. This is true too of MEND. Overcoming challenges is not the endpoint; thriving is.

By the third year of this plan, the vision is to have a set of embedded business practices that guide our work, programs and partnerships that coalesce to fulfill the promise of our mission.

Community Resilience

In a parallel process, through our direct intensive program services and those of our onsite partners, these three years will be dedicated to building the resilience of the individuals and families we serve so they develop the tools to manage past traumas and skills to bounce back from emerging challenges.

Enhancing Resilience

Strategic Priorities
The following four major focus areas will guide our work over the next 3 years. Annually, workplans, indicators, and measures will be developed by the staff and leadership allowing for maximum responsiveness to changes in our community’s needs.

Priority 1 – Financial Integrity: Cultivating a viable and sustainable business model

Objectives:
1. Maintain and grow government support
2. Expand fee for service options through foodbank shared cost model, and other partnerships

4 https://www.afsa.org/enhancing-resilience
3. Generate rental income from co-located partners
4. Increase investment earnings and reserves through portfolio diversification
5. Increase annual giving from private sources
6. Explore opportunities for earned income through a social enterprise.

What Success Will Look Like:
• MEND has sufficient resources to cover all operational costs and generate surpluses
• We can set aside funds into reserves
• Audits that inspire trust that resources will be used to achieve maximum impact.

Priority 2 – Program Excellence: Adopting measurable and transformational outcomes

Objectives:
1. Evaluate current programming to identify and improve mission impact (tangible results) and financial viability (covers costs, generates revenue, fundable/viable model)
2. Measure and report key client outcome and impact metrics; implement improvement plans
3. Develop evidence-based, fundable programs that reinforce equity, bolster the community safety net, and promote resiliency
4. Influence policy decisions that address root causes of social and economic conditions that contribute to poverty.

What Success Will Look Like:
• Current MEND programs achieve excellent client outcomes and maintain adequate funding
• New programs are developed with intention and sustainable planning
• MEND achieves individual and community level impact.

Priority 3 – Robust Collaborations: Leveraging expertise and core capabilities of other providers

Objectives:
1. Leverage high-performing partner services to provide holistic support to persons MEND serves
2. Build a coalition of nonprofits that offer reciprocal benefit and collective community-level impact.
What Success Will Look Like:
- MEND becomes a vibrant community of providers that work collaboratively to transform lives
- By leveraging each other’s resources, talents and capability, the safety net is strengthened
- Through data shared among the collaborators there is demonstrated effectiveness in improving the lives of people in our community.

Priority 4 – Organizational Vitality: Improving fundamental capabilities and core strength

Objectives:
1. Attract, develop, and retain diverse, skilled, and engaged members of the Board of Directors
2. Develop appropriate staffing and infrastructure plans that support program success
3. Invest in building staff skills and capabilities
4. Leverage volunteer support to maximize program outcomes.

What Success Will Look Like:
- The Board represents the community served and fulfills its governance and fiduciary responsibilities.
- The Board contributes to MEND’s success through strategic support of leadership and fundraising.
- MEND staff has the skills and resources to achieve program excellence and transformational outcomes.

**Monitoring the Plan**

The executive leadership team: CEO, COO, CFO and CDO will monitor this plan. If any goals and objectives are falling behind, a full review of reasons will be made. If adjustments in the plan are necessary, they will be reported as a part of quarterly monitoring reports presented at quarterly meetings of to the strategic planning committee and the full Board.

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