

Summary of ISANS' operations during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

An evaluation of ISANS' operations during COVID-19 was conducted between November 2020 and March 2021. It involved the consultation of a Project Steering Committee and data was collected through document analysis, the ISANS database, surveys, focus groups, email correspondence, and a targeted interview with the organization's CEO.

Adaptation

ISANS continuously adapted in response to the changing context of the COVID-19 crisis rather than pivoting. The transitions are best described as adaptations because:

- ISANS was able to continue offering the majority of its services online by using technology that was available to the organization
- ISANS has a culture that prioritizes the well-being of clients and staff, and that continued despite the challenges of the pandemic
- ISANS used Connect, an already established intranet system, to replace the communication and gatherings that staff would have previously participated in on-site

Culture

ISANS' culture helped the organization navigate the pandemic. The following core elements of ISANS' culture played a key role in maintaining smooth operations:

- ISANS has always prioritized people first, which allowed ISANS to meet the needs of staff, clients, and community in the middle of a crisis
- Communication is at the heart of ISANS' culture. During the pandemic ISANS communicated frequently with staff, clients, and the community, which enabled the organization to support clients and staff while operating remotely
- ISANS embraces new technology and providing most staff members with laptops in 2017 allowed the organization to rapidly shift to remote operations when faced with COVID-19

Support for the Health and Social Services Systems

ISANS worked with federal and provincial systems to support the health and social services systems during the pandemic. ISANS did this in the following ways:

- ISANS made messages from the health care system accessible to clients
- ISANS assisted clients when they applied for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB)

- ISANS' Communications Team worked with Nova Scotia Public Health to ensure that the province's COVID-19 messaging was accessible for all Nova Scotia residents

ISANS' Unexpected Opportunities

ISANS was able to capitalize on unexpected opportunities during the pandemic by being innovative and nimble. Some of these unexpected opportunities include:

- Staff held digital literacy orientations which helped clients to improve their digital literacy skills and gain access to ISANS' online services
- ISANS offered Online Early Childhood Education to 30 children and it created an opportunity to communicate with the children's families
- Staff from teams that had less work than normal were re-deployed to assist teams that were overwhelmed with work
- ISANS was able to reach a wider geography of clients because of remote and online service delivery

Flexibility

ISANS' staff and clients demonstrated tremendous flexibility and determination to make remote service delivery feasible. The following instances demonstrate the flexibility of ISANS' community:

- Staff met clients where they were at in terms of their digital literacy skills and selected online platforms that their clients could access
- Staff worked hard to provide the majority of ISANS' services online despite having to deal with the uncertainty of the pandemic, stress, and new responsibilities at home
- Clients were resilient and adapted to the changes in service delivery despite the challenges of the pandemic