



## 2022 STRATEGIC PLAN

### Background

Launched in 2003, Nashoba Learning Group (NLG) has been a leader in providing high quality educational programs and developmental services to individuals who are more seriously affected by Autism. NLG now serves over 130 students (ages 3 to 21) and over 50 adults (ages 22+). NLG's customized, comprehensive, and scientifically validated methodologies refined over the last two decades have enabled students and adults to achieve or exceed their educational and developmental goals.

Numerous trends within the greater environment affecting services for those with Autism, including increasing rates of autism, expansion of local public school-based programs, a workforce crisis within the field, and continued shifts in funding, prompted NLG's Board and administrative leadership to engage in a strategic planning process concluding in June 2022. The initiative focused on positioning NLG to continue to lead and meet the evolving needs of students and adults in the face of these market trends.

### Our Mission Statement

Create the best available programs to allow people with autism to achieve their full potential and participate as fully as possible in family and community activities throughout their lives. Share our knowledge to reach more individuals than we can serve directly.

### Our Strategic Planning Objectives

The objectives for our process included:

- To confirm and challenge NLG's current assumptions about emerging trends and needs which may affect its current and future programming, financial position, and overall direction;
- To develop a shared and objective understanding of NLG's current position including challenges and opportunities moving forward;
- To develop strategic priorities that build on the Nashoba Learning Group's strengths and current commitments, are driven by the educational and developmental needs of students, respond to unmet or under-met needs, and offer opportunities for resource development;
- To use the strategic planning process as a way to mobilize the Board and staff around a renewed sense of mission and shared commitment to strategic directions that are compelling and feasible.

### Our Strategic Planning Committee

A Strategic Planning Committee comprised of the CEO, four Board members and seven administrative leaders partnered with a consultant to inform and guide the process.

## Key Strategic Questions

At the start of the process, the Strategic Planning Committee generated five key strategic questions that the plan needed to address in some way. The strategic questions also provided parameters for the collection and organization of internal and external data.

1. What is our core identity? What makes us different? How can we differentiate NLG moving forward?
2. Building on our strengths, what should our portfolio of programs and services be in the future?
3. What is the optimal size and geographical reach for NLG in the future?
4. How do we attract, develop, and retain quality staff within a field susceptible to high turnover and undertrained staff?
5. What financial model will enable NLG to sustain delivery of high-quality services in support of our mission?

## Analysis of the Current Environment

### INDIVIDUALS WITH AUTISM

- Explosion in the number of individuals diagnosed with Autism.
- Increasing efforts by School Districts to serve more individuals internally.
- Population being sent out-of-district has grown but shifted up in age and towards those with more intensive needs, particularly in communication and behavior management.

### STAFFING

- Dramatic increase in number of BCBA's has not kept pace with skyrocketing demand.
  - Vast majority of BCBA's have only 1-3 years experience.
- Demand for SPED teachers has risen and it is hard to compete with public school benefits.
- Shrinking workforce, and increased opportunities for hybrid or remote work have made it increasingly difficult to attract people to this field.

### NLG'S STRENGTHS

- Expertise in increasing appropriate behavior, reducing challenging behavior, and helping more challenged learners.
- Expertise in augmentative communication.
- Fully customized approach and partnership with families ideally suited to serve those with more complex needs.
- Focus on development of clinical talent, adapting programming as population has shifted.
- NLG's Adult Program one of the only programs that continues to utilize expert clinicians to allow high-need adults to thrive.
- NLG has fueled growth and quality through robust fundraising and careful stewardship of funds.

## Our Guiding Decisions and Affirmations:

1. Reaffirm commitment to excellent service for those with intensive needs.
2. Build on strengths, enhance core programs and continue growth.
3. Embrace need for our Adult Program.
4. Grow the Adult Program while working to enhance funding.
5. Look for business extensions that primarily enhance depth of service to current population and their families.
6. Grow within current geography and current segment.
7. Continue sharing our high-impact research to reach those we cannot serve directly.

## OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

- **PHASE 1: Redefine excellence and continue to grow NLG's student and adult programs.**
  - Continued integration of research-based effective practices in programs
  - Investment in our staffing model to support our collective capacity to redefine excellence in the delivery of services and all that we do
  - Ensure we have optimal space to best serve our current students and members and allow for future growth
- **PHASE 2: Build on our legacy of excellence by expanding on our services.**
  - Outreach to families of those individuals who we can serve directly
  - Expand our portfolio of services by developing services in-house or through partnerships that will include a case management model

## Our Operational Goals

In support of the Phase 1 strategic priorities, NLG has set two operational goals to be achieved over the next two years.

- 1. Be the best at serving those with Autism by becoming the best place to work for staff who are inspired by our mission and committed to excellence.**
  - a. Enhance clinical oversight and staff development through organizational changes of July 2021 and ensuing initiatives
  - b. Revitalize recruiting, development, and retention:
    - i. Double recruiting/onboarding staff, increase marketing and outreach
    - ii. Analyze and streamline our onboarding process
    - iii. Significantly increase compensation for direct care staff at all levels
    - iv. Full tuition support for approved graduate study
    - v. Enhance mentoring and training to ensure staff are reaching their potential and feel connected to NLG and opportunities to grow.
  - c. Apply for Tuition changes to cover costs once the current DESE grants end.
  - d. Add Director of Development and work to enhance fundraising capacity and communication, and expand our fundraising sources.
- 2. Re-imagine our space and facilities to provide an excellent environment in which to serve children and adults with Autism and allow for future program growth**
  - a. NLG at capacity in School, will reach Adult Program capacity in 2023
  - b. Ideal configuration of space has shifted with our population over 15 years
  - c. We are looking for a site that will allow us to consolidate, reimagine our space, and expand

- d. We have evaluated numerous options and engaged in marketing of our current buildings. However, we do not yet have a site.
- e. NLG will continue to search for a suitable site but this will take time.
- f. We may look for interim space to allow growth in our Adult Program.

## **Our Ongoing Commitment**

1. NLG's Strategy is to first revitalize its Core School and Adult Programs, enhancing staff recruiting, retention, and development in the face of a shrinking work force, and expanding and re-imagining our space to reflect changing needs and allow growth.
2. NLG will search for a new setting with expanded spaces for current program growth, and potential future additional services.
3. NLG envisions that the School program will grow incrementally over time and the Adult program will grow as students age out of the School.
4. Following this revitalization, we will work to expand the range of services offered to this segment, internally or through partnerships.
5. The strategy reaffirms NLG's commitment to serving those with the greatest needs throughout their lives.