November 2012, Center for Families is completing phase 2 of the 3 phases of our merger – phase 2 being strategic planning. In phase 1, we decided upon and enacted a transition model of management consolidation that ensured the successful transition of 4 small agencies into one merged entity. That initial merger formally began January 1, 2011. Through the generosity of a $30,000 grant from the Madison Community Foundation, we began phase 2 of the merger a year ago. With this support, we were able to hire Mary Stelletello from Vista Global Consulting to guide us through strategic planning.

Mary has worked with management, staff, board and community members to lead us through a process which addresses our original goals – to determine program development strategies – to study the current programs and determine how to consolidate, redesign and/or expand programming; to address gaps in the children, youth & families system – to bring in the community to advise us what Center for Families should be; to strengthen fund development – to find new methods of using our consolidation and our space to open up new revenue streams; and to maximize our physical plant - to determine how we can best use the building to meet the needs of vulnerable parents and children.

We began strategic planning with an analysis at the organizational level that is grounded in our mission, vision and values. Through this analysis the board approved new vision, mission and values:

**Vision:** Center for Families envisions a community where families have access to resources to be successful, resilient, competent and confident for generations to come.

**Mission:** The mission of Center for Families is to partner with parents in their efforts to nurture, protect and teach their children.

**Values:**

- Build on strengths
- Create safety
- Cultivate collaboration
- Demonstrate compassion
- Foster trust
- Honor differences

We then looked at our current role in the community and business model – our customers, programs, geographic scope, and funding model. We discussed other key players in the field and identified our significant competitive advantages.

From this work we developed a strategy screen consisting of criteria to guide strategic decision-making. We identified several strategic options which address the key questions facing the organization and applied the strategy screen to help us review these options.
The strategy screen is a tool that will change over time; however the application will continue to assist us in future decision-making.

Following the development of a strategy screen, we identified our biggest areas of need – or the key questions facing the organization – and grouped them into 3 main areas. These 3 main strategies were approved by the board. Through the entire process we have developed a way of working together that has built strategic thinking skills. This process has not only provided us with a blueprint in the form of an action / implementation plan – it has also helped us utilize a process that we will be able to continue to use as the community’s needs and resources change, as do ours as well.

**Strategy 1**: Center for Families, as a hub of services, is dedicated to addressing the broad needs of families. In order to implement this strategy, we need to identify what parents need to nurture, protect and teach their children; determine the available community resources; and establish strategic partnerships to deliver the continuum of services.

**Strategy 2**: Center for Families assures the visibility and sustainability of our work. In order to implement this strategy, we need to create a comprehensive external communications plan; build a fund development plan that emphasizes donor acquisition, cultivation, and retention; and enlist the board as part of the team which cultivates donors and enhances visibility.

**Strategy 3**: Center for Families is committed to fostering a positive organizational culture. In order to implement this strategy, we need to enhance internal practices and policies that strengthen communication and foster cohesion; create opportunities for staff to transcend isolating program structure; design the physical space to facilitate positive internal and external interactions; and build a board with a holistic commitment to the organization.

What follows this introduction is an action plan that outlines phase 3 of the merger – that phase during which we implement the strategies developed in phase 2. Each strategy and sub-strategy is broken down into action steps that include a desired outcome, a list of who is responsible for seeing that the action occurs, and the time within which we hope to accomplish the action.

All action steps have been entered into a timeline – or a Gantt chart – which gives us a roadmap for the work we have ahead of us. We have tried to be deliberate in this work – making sure that Center for Families proceeds in a manner that is responsive to community needs – while ensuring that our programs are sound and that our finances remain secure. We have tried to develop a roadmap that, while being firmly grounded in our mission, values and vision, is practical in nature and ultimately doable within the next 3 years.