This month, two social service agencies are putting their heads, finances and people together to form one: Carizon Family and Community Services.

Carizon is the amalgamation of Mosaic Counselling and Family Services and kidsLINK. Even though the merger officially took place in April, all the finishing touches, including a re-branding and a staff celebratory launch are happening now, during National Family Week.

With programs ranging from counselling to prenatal nutrition to school-based mental health to credit counselling to abuse-related issues, the idea behind Carizon is to give people one place to go in a time of need, and to fill the mental health service gaps in our community.

“One of the benefits of the amalgamation is that our services nicely complement each other,” said Sue Gillespie, CEO of Carizon. Gillespie’s former title was Executive Director of Mosaic Counselling and Family Services. While both organizations have had a strong commitment to working with children and youth, they have had different approaches in doing so: Mosaic typically supported families through prevention and early intervention programs, such as parenting techniques and dealing with anxiety in children, whereas kidsLINK often dealt with issues that required more of a treatment-focused approach.

“So the two really marry and allow us to provide that continuum of care, from education and early intervention, to critical intervention when families are facing more challenging and immediate circumstances,” said Gillespie.

The cooperation of the two agencies is nothing new. While Mosaic Counselling and Family Services works closely with many local agencies, their ties with kidsLINK have always been strong. As far back as 1952, when kidsLINK was still known as the Notre Dame St. Agatha Orphanage, a nurse at The Catholic Welfare Bureau was responsible for arranging temporary placement of children at the orphanage. A few name changes and many years later, The Catholic Welfare Bureau is now known as Mosaic. And in more recent years, the two agencies have often shared referrals and services and worked together on committees and projects in the community.

Recognizing that the two organizations would fit well together, the board of directors of each organization saw that the merger would help the community: by putting their finances together, they were more sustainable; by putting their staff together, they could reach out to help more people; and by putting their mandates together, they could provide a greater breadth of service. Gillespie said that Waterloo Region is a community whose needs are becoming more complex: families may be struggling with parenting challenges, employment struggles, or adjusting to new life situations, each having unique circumstances and needs. Any number of factors can cause sleepless nights, family conflict and a sense of hopelessness for the future.

“It’s really important as a service provider in this community that we’re able to respond to those needs and we can do that by providing a full comprehensive set of services to that family. We can address the children’s needs, we can address the parent’s needs, we can address the family needs. And in doing so, Carizon is able to create a community of wellness,” she said.

Other than the seamless care provided by Carizon, it's likely that the average person using the services won't notice too much of a difference: Mosaic and kidsLINK will continue to operate under their program names, with the Carizon logo representing the umbrella agency.

The name is a combination of two words: care and horizon.

“It’s really about taking care of the people with a look to the future, to the horizon, and helping people to achieve their potential,” Gillespie said. The idea is that as they continue to grow, the Carizon name will include other ventures. They have a new website, too: www.carizon.ca, where you can find everything this organization has to offer.

With four locations across Waterloo Region, the two agencies have a combined history of over 200 years and directly service to our community. As you amalgamate to form Carizon Family and Community Services.