

CYSN First Nations Rights and Titleholder Engagement Summary

Session 2 – May 25, 2023

This summary includes themes from the May 25, 2023, First Nations Rights and Titleholder engagement session on the development of a system of supports for children and youth with support needs. This session occurred before the implementation of a new service model in 4 pilot areas (pilot family connections centre services), therefore all feedback from this engagement is assumed to be referring to status quo CYSN programs.

We gratefully acknowledge Reanna Erasmus, a member of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation with roots in the Hupacasath First Nation in Port Alberni for providing the opening and closing for this session. This session was supported by the following MCFD staff:

- Danielle Smith, Executive Director - Early Years and Inclusion Policy
- Wendy Norris - Facilitator
- Shelley Atkinson - Notetaker

Six participants attended this session from the following communities and organizations:

- Alert Bay
- AIDP | ASCD Provincial Office
- Hupacasath First Nation in Port Alberni
- Prince George Friendship Centre
- Yellowknives Dene First Nation
- YWCA Metro Vancouver

The summary comprises of the views expressed by these participants during this session. These views have been anonymized and organized into high-level key themes.

Questions to Guide the Discussion

This engagement series used the following questions to guide discussion, sessions are intended to build from the previous ones, questions may shift or change as a result.

- In thinking about the diverse range of programs available to children and youth with support needs, what programs have made a positive impact for you, your family, your community? Tell us more.
- What CYSN services are important to you, your family, your community? Tell us more about why these are important for you.
- If there were no barriers or obstacles, what services would you want provided to you, your family, your community? What gets in the way of accessing these? How do these services support you, your family, your community?
- What services have you wanted to access for your child or youth but have not been able to?
- What are areas where services are supporting, and where there are challenges?

Key Points of Discussion and Themes

- The same issues persist that have existed for 25 years.
- Government engagement with Indigenous communities can be/feels extractive.

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- Need to ensure that information gathered is communicated back, including final reports to support inclusion in process.

Accessibility – rural and remote

“85% are isolated and remote communities, if we’re having issues in larger communities the problems in remote areas are that much worse.”

- No internet or unreliable internet in many areas of the province, particularly in the North.
- Many things have moved online during pandemic, fewer home visits/meeting families in person.
- Online services and information are inaccessible to communities or families without internet.
- Fewer services available compared to urban areas. Service providers are often only willing to provide virtual services to remote communities.
- Lack of services prevents inclusion and opportunity for children with support needs.
- Money is not invested equitably throughout communities.
- North of Campbell River treated like ‘second class citizens’, hospitals closed, communities are suffering.
- Because we're on an island we only get offers for virtual services. People don't want to travel and get stuck - this is our home!
- Bus services are limited in some communities and are challenging to use with a stroller/multiple children.

Indigenous led services

“In a perfect world we wouldn't need these services, we would be working from our traditional ways. We need to figure out how to decolonize”.

- Children need to socialize within community, to learn their language.
- Services need to feel culturally safe, have aspects meaningful to Indigenous people.
- Aboriginal Infant Development Program (AIDP) and Aboriginal Supported Child Development (ASCD) work really well.
- ‘Recreating the Village’ program developed in partnership between AIDP and MCFD, builds attachments, and layers in culture with Elders/knowledge keepers.
- Sto:lo group driving advocacy, removing silos, addressing range of social issues.
- The Foundry in Sto:lo territory has Elders, culturally relevant art, land acknowledgements, meals/food provided to create a welcoming space that meets the needs of those using the service.
- We've done well with the programs where we've been able to manipulate the system.

Service gaps

“Parents need to be able to say what their children need vs having the system tell them what they need, services are imposed on families.”

- No support staff in schools, teachers’ capacity is not enough to support all the children.
- The system is unbalanced, creating barriers for students.
- No mental health services for children aged 0-3.
- Helpful when drop-in appointments are available, but many places do not offer this.

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- Looking for resources and don't know where to turn, we don't know where to go to get help with our young children. Increasing rates of young children with mental health challenges which need to be considered along with CYSN services.
- In person groups/services work well and create opportunities to connect with other parents.

Racism and bias

“Systemic racism starts at the top...what at the top is changing? Several of us here are working at the river’s edge, we need those on the mountain tops to hear us.”

- Why are we just continually meeting and where are our voices landing?
- Historical impacts lead us to still feel like we’re being watched.
- Residential school survivors, generational experience, that loss of how to parent, the majority have lost that loving and nurturing parent.
- Not represented properly, our voice isn't loud enough for government to actually deal with our communities that are suffering.

Staffing

“The turn over is very high, it doesn’t create trust when people don't stay”

- Staff are burnt out.
- Programming is impacted by lack of staff.
- Need appropriate wages, recruitment, and retention planning.
- Need direct funding from MCFD to ensure continuity of supports.
- MCFD staff need to have mandatory orientation to the territory that they are 'respectfully' living on

System navigation

“We need to change it - our children, youth and families, our families need help”

- Parents experiencing employment challenges due to the demands of navigating the system, appointments etc. creating financial stress.
- Many families do not know what is available to them or their children.
- Would be helpful to have information about what services/resources are available.
- Care Committees is a positive program, gives a voice to children, youth, families, and communities. Helps advocate, makes appointments, and ensures transportation is in place.

Diagnosis

- Waitlists are huge and there are more children with a diagnosis.
- Often a diagnosis is not received early enough to see a difference.
- Waitlists are long, even for assessment, we have 5 children just in one daycare waiting for an assessment.
- Told to go to Kamloops or Vancouver for assessments, but many families don’t have the ability to travel and support families at home.

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Youth

“Children are born with a gift, they have something to give to each person in their community”

- Need more opportunities available to them.
- Hard to find a place they feel safe and welcome. Service should be welcoming with Elders, staff who will chat, snacks, comfy chairs, etc.
- Increasing numbers of youth are living in tents or are joining gangs because they find a sense of community there.