CYSN First Nations Rights and Titleholder Engagement Summary
Session 4 – June 27, 2023

This summary includes themes from the June 27, 2023, First Nations Rights and Title Holder 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 Diana Elliott, who is Coast Salish from Cowichan Tribes in Duncan and Nuu Chah Nulth from the Hupacasath First Nation in Port Alberni for providing the opening and closing for this session. The session was supported by the following MCFD staff:

- Danielle Smith, Executive Director - Early Years and Inclusion Policy
- Shelley Atkinson – Facilitator
- Mia Yule – Notetaker

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

- Cowichan Tribes
- Hupacasath First Nation
- Lhtako Dene Child and Family Services / Nazko First Nation
- Carrier Sekani Family Services
- Alert Bay Whe-La-La-U Area Council
- Westbank First Nation
- Kettle Society
- Fraser River Indigenous Society

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?
- Building on the feedback shared so far, what would an ideal system of supports look like that meets the needs of the children and families that you work with? Tell us more.

Note: This summary is a record of comments and views shared by participants in this session and has not been subject to in-depth analysis or vetting by Ministry staff.

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Key Points of Discussion and Themes

Accessibility – rural and remote

"It is not fair to make a parent have to decide what is more important: access to CYSN services or raising their child on their traditional territory."

"Bring the services to them instead of making them go to the appointment."

- Services should be tailored to the unique needs of different regions such as northern, isolated communities.
- Most services require families to travel. This in turn requires parents to leave other children behind with family or needing childcare.
- Some families have to move to urban locations to access the services their children need, which removes them from their community and existing supports.
- Indigenous families living off reserve have less access to resources unless they are considered 'at risk'.
- Some policies are based on urban areas and create issues for rural and remote families. For example, a criteria for service that a child must be connected to an outside service, in areas with no services, this is not realistic.

Staffing

"To say we're desperate is generous."

- Staffing issues seen everywhere. We have postings that have been open for several years without being filled.
- Wage increases for staff are minimal and not realistic with the cost of living.
- Staff burning out and leaving their positions.
- Having to move staff in from out of community just to cover child protection.
- Childcare centers who have space for a high number of children, but due to staffing can only take on limited numbers.
- Need for recruitment and retention strategies.
    - Example of UVIC program that provided training in communities, led to successful staffing.
    - Example of Carrier Sekani funding a degree with commitment to work for them for a set amount of time.
    - Supporting Indigenous people to go into needed professions:
        - Mentorship, providing job experience, providing practicums.
        - Making training accessible within Indigenous communities, e.g., Program where each nation can register 6 people, partner together to create a program cohort.
        - Providing training funds.
        - Removing job posting requirements for a degree where possible.

Service gaps

"There is a huge gap between getting assessments and actually implementing the supports."

- Support only seems to be available for children with autism.
- Even with autism diagnosis, once the child is six, the funding reduces significantly.

- When assessment is available, often not implemented (no IEP or supports in place)
- Many children are falling through the cracks in schools (IEP plan not being implemented, no tutoring when falling behind, no review of a student's record to determine cause of not attending).
- A high percentage of Indigenous children with support needs are not attending school.
- Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) services have massive waitlists, requiring ongoing assessment by risk, which leaves many children waiting without services.
- Would be helpful if the CYSN social worker could ensure children on their caseload get the supports they need.
- No outreach services to ensure kids receive the supports they need.
- Support provided by CYSN social workers is limited, and they rarely connect with families.
- An ideal system would have regular check-ins/planning. Current system has families receiving occasional emails, but no active planning from CYSN social worker.

Diagnosis

"Obtaining a diagnosis is challenging."

- Intake process for diagnosis significantly backed up (903 applications in queue and only handling 76).
- Getting a pediatrician referral for an assessment is challenging when none are taking on new patients.
- Given the barriers to obtaining a diagnosis, children often not diagnosed until after 5 years old.
- Accessing supports through public schools requires a diagnosis.
- Late or no diagnosis of children leads to behavioral challenges, which prevents them from accessing programs and contributes to high rates of school drop-out.
- When these children reach adulthood, if they need to access social development funding, they will require a diagnosis.
- It is a 3 year wait for diagnosis through Sunny Hill. Funding through Jordan's Principle is available to children with status only – excluding children who self-identify as Indigenous.

Integrated services

"Without proper services we are not going to stop the cycle."

- The ideal support system has ministries working together for a seamless transition from early years to school age into adulthood.
- Need to support families holistically.
- MCFD should support families with housing, interconnected with mental health, substance use, and supports for other barriers.
- Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) in Alberta has effective system of supports for families, including coming up with tailored plans of supports.

System navigation

"This system is set up for us to fail."
"How is MCFD providing support to families when they may not be able to even fill out simple paperwork or understand their child's diagnosis".

- Connecting a child to services is so time intensive it is preventing parents from maintaining employment.

- BC requires parents to navigate these complex systems on their own.
- Different criteria for the same programs in different communities.
- Strict criteria that sends families on a complicated 'wild goose chase' that is confusing and unfair.

Supports to help families stay together

"MCFD needs to commit to children out of care as much as children in care"

- Children need to be in foster care to get the planning and supports they need.
- Systemic issues are creating unaffordable housing, lack of housing/housing options can become a child protection issue.
- Example of a parent being denied respite from MCFD due to lack of capacity, then being unable to continue caring for their child resulting in the child coming into care.
- BC is not providing integrated supports that help a family stay together.

Indigenous led services

"We need more Indigenous resources and services."
"Services are more successful when we go out to community and reach families where they are."

- Indigenous programs and services best meet the needs of Indigenous children and families.
- Experiences of racism and bias prevent families from getting what they need.
- Families need to feel safe accessing services.
- Local Child Development Centre (CDC) currently providing services does not work for Indigenous people – only 15% of people use it.

Need for change

"I don't want to be sitting here in 10 years talking about the same things."

- People working in the social service sector have been identifying these issues for the past 30 years, impacting generations of children.