



**LAICHWILTACH  
FAMILY LIFE SOCIETY**



# COMMUNITY, CONVERSATION AND CONNECTION:

## CAMPBELL RIVER, GOLD RIVER AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

Findings from the Community-Led Collaboration Project  
in Campbell River, Gold River and surrounding communities

Campbell River is located on the eastern shore of northern Vancouver Island on the unceded traditional territory of the Ligwít'da'xw people; the We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and Kwiakah First Nations. Gold River is located on the traditional territory of the Mowachaht and Muchalaht people of the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nation.

Featured image taken by Lisa Bournelis, author of the children's book *Louis and the Dictator*



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# PROJECT BACKGROUND

In fall 2021, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) announced a new framework for service delivery to Children and Youth with Support Needs (CYSN) in British Columbia. The announcement of the CYSN framework was met with confusion and fear by many across the province. It was also met with calls for greater consultation.

Across the province, individuals and organizations demanded that any framework changes be better informed by the experiences and perspectives of families and children and youth with disabilities or support needs.

**The Community-Led Collaboration Project defines children and youth with disabilities or support needs as those who are 0-19 years old, have a disability, diagnosed or undiagnosed, need support, and/or have a possible developmental delay.**

Shortly after the announcement, the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC), BC Association of Child Development and Intervention (BCACDI), the Federation of Community Social Services and Inclusion BC came together to:

- Identify the potential of the proposed framework.
- Raise concerns that the changes ahead would effectively respond to the needs of children and youth, their families, the organizations that support them and the communities where they live.
- Present a proposal to MCFD to carry out a provincial engagement—from a community development perspective—to better inform the changes coming to B.C.'s system of services and supports.

In response, MCFD gave the organizations (referred to in this report as the Provincial Working Group) a grant to conduct a provincial engagement that would inform the transformation of CYSN services in B.C. The engagement, known as the **Community-Led Collaboration Project**, launched in Fall 2022.

This report details the challenges, hopes and expectations for services and supports that families and community service providers **expressed in conversations in Campbell River, Gold River, and surrounding communities**, one of six initial communities engaged in the first year of this project.

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# THE APPROACH TO ENGAGEMENT

The Community-Led Collaboration Project's Provincial Working Group partnered with B.C. communities to design a thoughtful, inclusive, culturally safe, and accessible approach to engagement. To guide their work, the group established four project principles:

- **Collaboration.** Engagement is co-designed with community members to inform how B.C. communities can create better networks of services and support for children and youth with disabilities or support needs, and their families.
- **Community-driven change.** The project builds upon the strengths of B.C.'s current system and names the changes needed to best support children and youth with disabilities or support needs and their families.
- **Reconciliation & Decolonizing.** Reconciliation and decolonization guide the project's approach to community engagement, which is designed to be inclusive, accessible, and culturally safe, with an appropriate approach that makes space for historically excluded voices and perspectives.
- **Transparency and Timeliness.** Timely engagement summaries are circulated to keep participants informed and help ensure the perspectives most important to the community are captured.

Inclusive communities are healthier communities. Building inclusive communities is a **shared responsibility.**

The Community-Led Collaboration Project took place over two phases between September 2022 and December 2024. In the first phase, the Provincial Working Group and their community partners worked together to facilitate in-person and hybrid engagements in:

- Campbell River, Gold River, and surrounding communities
- Castlegar and surrounding communities
- Kamloops and surrounding communities
- Port Alberni and surrounding communities
- West Coast Vancouver Island communities
- Richmond

In each of the six initial communities, the Provincial Working Group and its community partners also conducted a six-step engagement (see Figure 1 below) to:

**Understand the strengths, gaps, and the changes** needed when it comes to services and supports for children and youth with disabilities or support needs in B.C.

**Explore what truly collaborative and connected networks of support can achieve** for B.C. children and youth, and their families.

**Implement engagement that considers the specific circumstances** of a community, the young people, and families in need of support, and importantly, the voices of people historically excluded.



Figure 1

In the second phase of the project, the Provincial Working Group:

- Shared outcomes and approaches from the initial community engagements and worked with communities to develop solutions to issues raised.
- Offered up to thirty grants for additional B.C. communities to conduct their own community engagements.

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# SAFE SPACES FOR DIALOGUE

In Campbell River and Gold River, the Provincial Working Group built partnerships with local community organizations including Laichwiltach Family Life Society, Rivercity Inclusion, BC Complex Kids, and Gold River's Children's Health Hub. These partnerships informed approaches to engagement that best reflected the needs of the community.

Local families, youth and service providers were invited to facilitated sessions in several ways including:

- Information posters (put up in community centres and coffee shops);
- Dedicated community website and registration page;
- Local newspaper articles and ads;
- Emails sent directly to families receiving supports and service providers;
- Community service providers sharing event details directly with organizations and families in their networks;
- Local Facebook groups.

Throughout the planning and implementation of engagements in Campbell River and Gold River, steps were taken to ensure cultural safety and accessibility. Participants were offered:

- Childcare honorariums and onsite supported childcare options.
- Support for transportation.
- Quiet space on site and follow-up support for participants.
- Food and gift cards for all participants.
- A variety of session formats and locations to enhance safety and inclusion (for example, in Gold River conversations took place at an existing annual event, the Children's Health Fair).
- Hybrid session formats for those who preferred to participate remotely via Zoom.

In each session, participants were asked three questions:

- 1 What services and supports for children and youth with disabilities or support needs are working well in Campbell River, Gold River, and surrounding areas?**
- 2 What gaps in services and support exist?**
- 3 What does a better network of services and supports look like in Campbell River, Gold River, and surrounding areas?**

In addition to exploring these questions in hybrid sessions, families and service providers were provided a survey link, phone number and email address to share further ideas. The survey invited people to answer the three questions listed above.

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# ABOUT CAMPBELL RIVER



Image: Lisa Bournelis, author of the children's book *Louis and the Dictator*

Campbell River is located on the eastern shore of northern Vancouver Island on the unceded traditional territory of the Ligwít̓da'xw people; the We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and Kwiakah First Nations. Campbell River is the third largest city on the island with a population of nearly 41,000 people. Children up to the age of 14 make up 14.5 per cent of the population of Campbell River.<sup>1</sup> 5.2 per cent of the population are of single Indigenous ancestry, of which 87 per cent are First Nations and 13 per cent are Métis.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a research tool used by the Human Early Learning Project (HELP) at the University of British Columbia (UBC) to help understand healthy child development in British Columbia, childhood vulnerability rates vary significantly across the province, ranging from 21.8 per cent in some B.C. communities to 72 per cent in others.<sup>3</sup>

In Campbell River, 35 per cent—or 412 of 1184 children—are vulnerable on one or more scales of the EDI upon entry to kindergarten.<sup>4</sup> This compares to 32.9 per cent of all kindergarten children across B.C. being vulnerable on one or more scales.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Statistics Canada. 2023. (table). Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released March 29, 2023, online: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/>

2. Ibidem.

3. This statistic is sourced from the Early Development Instrument (EDI) which is composed of five measures of vulnerability in children entering kindergarten in British Columbia. The EDI is the tool that has been used by the Human Early Learning Project (HELP) at the University of British Columbia. for over two decades to monitor children's development at school entry (<https://earlylearning.ubc.ca>). The EDI looks at five domains of child development including: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communications skills and general knowledge.

4. Early Development Instrument, online: <https://earlylearning.ubc.ca>

5. Ibidem.

Early Development Instrument research in Campbell River further indicates that **the social and emotional needs of children in kindergarten are higher** than their needs in other areas of development, such as physical health, well-being, language, cognition, communication, and general knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

**33.7% of kindergarten children** are vulnerable in Campbell River compared to **32.9% of kindergarten children** across B.C. being vulnerable.

Children are considered vulnerable on the EDI if, without additional support and care, they are more likely to experience challenges in their school years and beyond. Why is this important? Understanding healthy child development—and what is influencing healthy development in your community—provides a starting point for conversations and actions that are local, specific to the needs of the children in your community, and led by community champions.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Ibidem.

7. Human Early Learning Partnership. Early Development Instrument [EDI] report. Wave 7 Community Profile, 2019. Campbell River School District (SD72). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Medicine, School of Population and Public Health; February 2020, online: [http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi\\_w7\\_communityprofiles/edi\\_w7\\_communityprofile\\_sd\\_72.pdf](http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi_w7_communityprofiles/edi_w7_communityprofile_sd_72.pdf)



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# WHAT WE HEARD IN CAMPBELL RIVER

Engagement in Campbell River took place in May 2023. Working in partnership with local organizations, Laichwiltach Family Life Society, Rivercity Inclusion, and BC Complex Kids, the community hosted:

- A session with **37 local community service providers** at the Laichwiltach Family Life Society on Friday, May 26, 2023.
- A session with **seven local families** at the Laichwiltach Family Life Society on Saturday, May 27, 2023.
- In total, **six people** submitted surveys sharing their thoughts and experiences about services and supports for children and youth with disabilities or support needs in Campbell River and surrounding areas.

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“I need a support system. A buddy support. There’s nothing like that in Campbell River right now.”

- Campbell River parent.

In all sessions, participants shared what is working well, opportunities for improvement and the ideal vision of what support should look like for families in Campbell River and surrounding communities. In response to the question “What is working well in Campbell River and surrounding areas?” participants shared:

- Local organizations are doing good work and there is a strong inter-agency community.
- Campbell River Family Services - offers drop-in play groups, infant groups, and an in-home behaviour consultant.
- Children’s Place offers wrap-around services for families with children from birth to 19 years old.
- Virtual service allows families to receive support remotely in places like Tahsis.
- There are good early interventions in place.
- The childcare network in Comox Valley is good.
- Supports are evolving—one parent said, “Our local paediatrician is being educated and has grown to better support us.”
- There is increased access to private practice.
- Parents are becoming more aware of local supports.

The following table details participants' thoughts on opportunities for improvement and ideas for meaningful change in Campbell River and surrounding communities.

Conversation themes	Supporting details
<p><b>CONNECTION</b></p> <p>"It's hard to make connections with other service providers at times, especially in finding out all the services available to families in the Campbell River area."</p> <p>— Local service provider</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families want more community connection and support. They often feel alone and excluded as the expert in their child/ren's lives.</li> <li>• Families want more local support groups in Campbell River and surrounding areas.</li> <li>• Service providers and families want tools to connect. Several people mentioned the need for a centralized and current database and/or an app where they could easily access information about local supports, services, and family groups.</li> <li>• Community service providers want more opportunities to connect and collaborate with each other – specifically inter-agency meet and greets, training/workshops and social opportunities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ACCESSIBILITY</b></p> <p>"There's a challenge in bringing people through the door - the stigma of accessing our services at our site [exists] and there is an erroneous community perception of our service."</p> <p>— Local service provider</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to supports including pediatricians, occupational therapy, childcare and daycare is challenging for families as they face long waitlists. One service provider said, "Here in Campbell River the waitlists are so long that many children may not have active services until their pre-kindergarten year."</li> <li>• Another participant said, "There should be a centre where all children can go to with supported needs that is safe and inclusive."</li> <li>• Families want more access to respite and after school programs.</li> <li>• Parents/caregivers are looking for more local mental health supports for younger children.</li> <li>• Campbell River does not have enough access to childcare for all children, especially those with support needs. The community is struggling to find support workers to put into programs.</li> <li>• There is a lack of affordable housing options for low-income families in Campbell River.</li> <li>• There is a lack of accessible transportation options for people with disabilities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>RESPITE</b></p> <p>"I don't have anyone I can trust with my child. I need rest time."</p> <p>— Family member/caregiver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents want more local, respite support. One Campbell River parent said, "I need time to recharge. It's hard to parent a neurodiverse child when you are one yourself."</li> </ul>

## SCHOOL YEARS ARE CHALLENGING

"There's a [lack] of services for children from age 6-12."

- Local service provider

"A lot of people feel disconnected."

- Family member/caregiver

- Families are struggling to navigate the school system and find meaningful supports and connections after their children turn six. One parent said, "The libraries used to have Mom-and-Tot groups every single week, but as soon as your kid gets into school, there's nothing. I don't know how to make parent friends."
- Families want an enhanced sense of connection in schools. They said connections are hard to make in the school years and family support is lacking.
- Parents don't feel welcomed into and supported in their schools.
- One parent said, "I haven't used any resources in Campbell River since my child became school-aged. I'm not sure what they even have."

## COLLABORATION

"I need a support system. There's nothing like that in Campbell River right now."

- Family member/caregiver

- Service providers and families want greater collaboration and coordination between MCFD, healthcare, education, and community agencies. Families are challenged to repeatedly tell their stories to providers that aren't collaborating or connecting.
- Community service providers would like to see more families attend special classes/training opportunities available to them.

## SAFETY AND STIGMA

"(We need) culturally sensitive/culturally specific support delivered by an in-person Indigenous knowledge keeper."

- Family member/caregiver

- There is a lack of cultural safety in some organizations that makes it hard for families to seek out support.
- Families talk of experiencing stigma when seeking out support.
- There is a lack of employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

## FUNDING

"It's so complicated to get the right funding. If you aren't connected to the Facebook pages, you wouldn't know the ins and outs."

- Family member/caregiver

- Parents want more funding for undiagnosed kids.
- Parents face cost barriers to get the help their kids need - "it's expensive to get the supports you need."
- There are also barriers to securing funding, including the need for a diagnosis, complex funding processes, and lack of access to funding information.
- There is a lack of affordable childcare options for families.
- There is a lack of accessible and affordable recreation and leisure activities.

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# ABOUT GOLD RIVER



Yuquot, Gold River & South End of Nootka Trail. Photo: Province of B.C.

Gold River is located on Vancouver Island, British Columbia about 90 km west of Campbell River. It is on the traditional territory of the Mowachaht and Muchalaht people of the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nation. It is home to a total population of 1,246, a 2.8 per cent increase since the 2016 census.<sup>8</sup> Children up to the age of 14 make up 12 per cent of the population.<sup>9</sup> A total of 5.6 per cent of the population are of Indigenous ancestry, of which 93 per cent are First Nations and seven per cent are Métis and non-Indigenous ancestry combined.<sup>10</sup>

Nearly 50 per cent or 23 of 47 kindergarten children are vulnerable in Gold River.<sup>11</sup> This compares to 32.9 per cent of all kindergarten children across B.C. being vulnerable on one or more areas critical to their healthy development.<sup>12</sup>

**49% of kindergarten children** are vulnerable in Gold River **compared to 32.9% of kindergarten children** across B.C. being vulnerable.

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8. Gold River, [www.goldriver.ca](http://www.goldriver.ca).

9. Statistics Canada. 2023. (table). Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released March 29, 2023, online: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

10. Ibidem.

11. Ibidem.

12. Early Development Instrument for School District 84, which includes Gold River, online: <https://earlylearning.ubc.ca>.

In Gold River, the numbers indicate that **the language and cognitive development needs of children in kindergarten are higher than their needs in other areas of development** such as social competence, emotional maturity, and physical health and well-being.<sup>13</sup> The numbers also point to the increased vulnerability of children and youth living in rural and remote areas of the province where access to local services and supports is more challenging for children, youth and families.

Children are considered vulnerable on the EDI if, without additional support and care, they are more likely to experience challenges in their school years and beyond. Why is this important? Understanding healthy child development—and what is influencing healthy development in your community—provides a starting point for conversations and actions that are local, specific to the needs of the children in your community, and led by community champions.

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13. Human Early Learning Partnership. Early Development Instrument [EDI] report. Wave 7 Community Profile, 2019. Vancouver Island West School District (SD84). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Medicine, School of Population and Public Health; February 2020, online: [http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi\\_w7\\_communityprofiles/edi\\_w7\\_communityprofile\\_sd\\_84.pdf](http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi_w7_communityprofiles/edi_w7_communityprofile_sd_84.pdf)

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# WHAT WE HEARD IN GOLD RIVER

Engagement in Gold River took place in early June 2023. Working in partnership with Gold River's Children's Health Hub, the following engagements took place:

- A session with **nine local families** at Ray Watkins Elementary School on the evening of Thursday, June 1, 2023.
- A project table at the annual Gold River Health Fair on Friday, June 2, 2023, attracted input from **35 attendees**, including local families, service providers and community members, who were invited to share their experiences and ideas.



Gold River Health Fair, Community-Led Collaboration Project

In all sessions, participants shared what is working well, opportunities for improvement and an ideal vision of what support should look like for families in Gold River and surrounding communities. In response to the question "What is working well in Gold River and surrounding areas?" participants shared:

- The Laichwiltach Family Centre offers great supports, specifically speech and language therapies.
- Housing is affordable.
- In-home nursing support.
- Nuu Chah Nulth Tribal Council offers a variety of supports including doula, Aboriginal Infant Development Program, Aboriginal Supported Child Development Program and occupational therapy supports.
- Supports come to Gold River (so many families don't have to travel).
- Qwalayu House is an important support for lower income families.

The following table details participants' thoughts on opportunities for improvement and their ideas for meaningful change in Gold River and surrounding communities.

Conversation themes	Supporting details
<p><b>CONNECTION AND AWARENESS</b></p> <p>"[It would be great to] be embraced by community, school."</p> <p>– Family member/caregiver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Families need more support, connection, and access to local, family support groups in Gold River. Many parents and caregivers feel lonely and isolated as they advocate for their children each day. One parent in Gold River said, "Appreciate being here [at this session]. [You can have a] better understanding of challenges faced in a small community. [It] can be a very isolating experience."</li> <li>Parents also expressed a lack understanding and awareness of services and supports available to them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ACCESS</b></p> <p>"Therapists that come to the community rather than [me having] to travel to Campbell River."</p> <p>– Community member</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Families want increased access to supported childcare and more daycare spots with trained staff in Gold River.</li> <li>Families in Gold River would like to see increased capacity of the Children's Health Hub so they can access all services and supports (Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Audiologist, Infant Development Program consultants).</li> <li>There are long waitlists for assessments/counsellors/Speech Language Pathologists, and you need a diagnosis to get supports. "[You] need a diagnosis to access services," said one Gold River parent.</li> <li>Gold River families want more local services and supports vs travelling to Campbell River.</li> </ul>
<p><b>SCHOOL YEARS ARE CHALLENGING</b></p> <p>"Inclusion for all. Kids need to feel proud of their neurodiversity. Inclusion of all children. There needs to be a better understanding of what it means to be autistic."</p> <p>– Family member/caregiver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supports drop off when kids enter school.</li> <li>Many parents talked of the need for more support in school – parents want to see more Educational Assistants in schools, more training for staff to support children with disabilities or support needs, and more support for teachers to support children.</li> <li>Measures in place to ensure school is a safe place for their children.</li> </ul>

## RESPITE

“Respite is non-existent in Gold River.”

– Family member/caregiver

- Parents are challenged by the lack of local respite.

## CULTURAL SAFETY

“There isn’t a true understanding of what services are available for Indigenous people.”

– Community member at Health Fair session

- Indigenous families want more support in their community for their children with disabilities or support needs.

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**“(We need) consistency of services in the community.  
Flexibility of days, more days in Gold River.”**

– Gold River Health Hub attendee



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# SOLUTIONS TABLE SUMMARY

During the in-person engagements in Campbell River and Gold River, attendees explored what is working well in their communities and what are the opportunities for change. They also spent time discussing their hopes for the future and what an ideal network of services and supports for children and youth with disabilities or support needs in their communities could look like for them.

In the sessions, participants shared the following visions for the future of their communities:

- There is a physical space where all information about services and supports in the area is up to date, accessible and available.
- There is an online service or app where families can access local information on services and supports.
- There are hiring incentives for people to study and work in Campbell River and Gold River.
- More education for nurses and doctors on support needs and disabilities is provided.
- Regular respite is provided for families throughout the year.
- There is a lending library of equipment supports for items that have long waitlists to access or that families could try before buying them.
- "There are mental health supports for children (including siblings) so that we have fewer adults with mental health support needs." - Family member/caregiver.

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On May 22, 2024, a year after the in-person engagements, parents, caregivers, family members and community service providers and community members from Campbell River and Gold River were invited to an online session to discuss solutions for change.

At the meeting, they explored two visions of the future, based on the in-person feedback:

- All families in Campbell River, Gold River and surrounding communities feel connected and supported. They have easy access to the systems, tools, and centralized information they need to help their children thrive.
- All children/youth in Campbell River, Gold River and surrounding communities have the supports they need during the school years to feel included, safe, and able to learn in ways that are positive, meaningful, and impactful to their lives.

## VISION 1

All families in Campbell River, Gold River and surrounding communities feel connected and supported. They have easy access to the systems, tools, and centralized information they need to help their children thrive.

WHAT BOLD STEPS OR SOLUTIONS ARE REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE THIS VISION?	WHO MUST BE INVOLVED TO BRING THESE SOLUTIONS TO LIFE?
<p>There is a secure, centralized system of information where families, service providers, and other public bodies can add or access information about a child that documents the child's support needs and facilitates their access to supports and services. Instead of having to prove every time that the child has a disability or support needs.</p>	<p>The collaboration of multiple provincial ministries including Health, Finance, Children and Family Development, Education and Child Care, Social Development, and Poverty Reduction.</p>
<p>There is an online database where families and service providers can easily access information about local supports, services, and family groups.</p> <p>This database is updated and managed by a Community Facilitator/Navigator who is in a dedicated paid position.</p>	<p>The collaboration of multiple provincial ministries including Health, Finance, Children and Family Development, and Education and Child Care.</p>
<p>Local businesses are trained and educated on inclusivity and support needs within the community so that they can open opportunities and are more welcoming of children and youth with disabilities and their families.</p>	<p>This would be a proactive effort led by Campbell River and District Chamber of Commerce.</p>
<p>Incentives that allow people to study and work in support roles in rural communities, especially nurse practitioners and social workers who are trained in cultural safety.</p>	<p>The collaboration of post-secondary institutions and multiple provincial ministries, including Advanced Education, Education and Childcare, and Children and Family Development.</p>

<p>Mental health supports are funded for the entire families of children and youth with disabilities or support needs.</p>	<p>The collaboration of multiple provincial ministries including Children and Family Development, Mental Health and Addictions, and Education and Childcare.</p>
<p>Strengthen the role and capacity of the child development centre where children's needs can be assessed, and families can receive information and be connected to local services and supports. There is collaborative planning with the family and services needed.</p>	<p>The collaboration of multiple provincial ministries including Health, Children and Family Development, and Education and Childcare.</p>

## VISION 2

All children/youth in Campbell River, Gold River and surrounding communities have the supports they need during the school years to feel included, safe, and able to learn in ways that are positive, meaningful, and impactful to their lives.

<p><b>WHAT BOLD STEPS/SOLUTIONS ARE REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE THIS VISION?</b></p>	<p><b>WHO MUST BE INVOLVED TO BRING THESE SOLUTIONS TO LIFE?</b></p>
<p>Schools have enough education assistants (EAs) to provide consistency for families and children and youth.</p> <p>There is a smooth transfer of information if the EA changes.</p>	<p>School District #72, School District #84, and Ministry of Education and Childcare.</p>
<p>There is a culture of inclusion in the schools. One parent shared, "No one in my son's school knows who he is. They know he set off the fire alarm, but they don't know who he is as a person."</p>	<p>School District #72, School District #84, and Ministry of Education and Childcare.</p>

<p>The transition planning from preschool to kindergarten is started in January of the entering school year and supports are well funded and in place by September.</p>	<p>School District #72, School District #84, Ministry of Education and Childcare, and Ministry of Children and Family Development.</p>
<p>Supports in school are needs-based and well funded for all students who need them.</p>	<p>School District #72, School District #84, and Ministry of Education and Childcare.</p>
<p>There is a robust, well trained and well paid workforce across child care centres and schools that feels valued and respected. Specifically, early childhood educators and education assistants.</p>	<p>School Districts #72, School District #84, Ministry of Education and Child Care, Ministry of Children and Family Development, and Ministry of Advanced Education.</p>

# FINAL STEPS OF ENGAGEMENT

Throughout 2024, the Provincial Working Group shared preliminary results and project updates with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). In January 2025, the summary reports from the 23 community engagements, including those from community engagement grants and the six initial community engagements, will be submitted to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Community contributions have been instrumental in shaping these reports.

In all cases, the outcomes of the Community-Led Collaboration Project belong to the communities. The hope is that participants’ ideas and experiences will serve as a tool for B.C. communities as they work to build and advocate for better networks of services and supports and make changes in their community to best support children and youth with disabilities or support needs and their families.

Please share this report widely – it is not just a reflection of your community, but a catalyst for the change needed in your community. We believe it holds the potential to inspire a future where every person can thrive and to contribute to a transformation of the Children and Youth with Support Needs (CYSN) program and other programs and services that better responds to the needs of B.C. communities and, most importantly, of the young people at the centre of this work.

For more ideas and tools to share this report, please visit <https://inclusionbc.org/clcp-campbell-river/>.

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# IN SUMMARY

Please find plain language summaries of the Campbell River and Gold River key discoveries on the following pages.



# CAMPBELL RIVER

Located on the unceded territory of the Ligwitda'xw people; the We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and Kwiakah First Nations

**The Community-Led Collaboration Project held conversations in Campbell River in May 2023.** Seven families and 37 community service providers from Campbell River and the surrounding communities took part.

Together, we talked about the struggles, hopes, and expectations for services and supports for children ages 0-19 with disabilities or support needs. Six people also shared their thoughts and experiences through a survey.

## What's Working Well

- Local organizations are doing good work.
- There is a strong inter-agency community.
- Virtual service allows families to receive support remotely in places like Tahsis.
- The childcare network in Comox Valley is good.
- There is more access to private practice.
- Parents are becoming more aware of local supports.
- There are good early interventions in place, and supports are evolving.

## Opportunities For Change

### Cultural safety

Some families said they feel judged. Feeling this way makes it harder to ask for support. People said they don't feel culturally safe with some organizations.

### Collaboration

Families said it's frustrating to keep repeating the same information to the people who support their kids. Both families and service providers said they want provincial services and local agencies to work together more.

### School-year challenges

Families said they don't feel welcomed into or supported in the school system. Families said they found it hard to make connections with each other once their children start elementary school.

**"As soon as your kid gets into school, there's nothing. I don't know how to make parent friends."**

– Family member/caregiver

## Respite

Families said they need more time to recharge.

**“It’s hard to parent a neurodiverse child when you are one yourself.”**

— Parent/caregiver in Campbell River

## Connection

Families said they feel alone, and want more support groups. They talked about not being seen as the expert they are in their child’s life. Community service providers said they want a centralized list of supports, services, and family groups. They also want more opportunities to connect and work with each other. This might include events like shared training sessions.

## Access

Families said they face long waitlists for help like occupational therapy, daycare, childcare, and paediatricians.

They said they need more respite, after-school programs, and local mental health supports and services for younger children.

Community service providers said long waitlists mean children don’t get the support services they need soon enough. Some children don’t get any support until the year before they start kindergarten.

## Visions and solutions

### Vision 1 →

**Families feel connected and supported. They have easy access to the systems, tools, and centralized information they need to help their children thrive.**

### This needs:

- A protected, centralized database to access and share helpful and important information about a child's needs.
- Local education on inclusivity.
- Incentives to attract specialized workers.
- Mental health supports for the whole family.

### Vision 2 →

**Families have the supports they need during the school years to feel included, safe, and able to learn in ways that are positive, meaningful, and impactful to their lives.**

### This needs:

- A culture of inclusion in schools.
- More education assistants, and smoother transitions when EAs are changed.
- Needs-based supports in schools.
- Proper planning and funding for Kindergarten entry.

# GOLD RIVER

Located on the traditional territory of the Mowachaht and Muchalaht people of the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nation

## **The Community-Led Collaboration Project held two conversation sessions in Gold River in June 2023.**

The first session took place at Ray Watkins Elementary School with nine local families.

The second session took place at the annual Gold River Health Fair. The project table at the fair attracted 35 attendees, including local families, community members, and service providers. Together, we talked about the struggles, hopes, and expectations for services and supports for children ages 0-19 with disabilities and/or support needs.

## What's Working Well

- The Laichwiltach Family Centre offers great supports, especially with speech and language therapies.
- Housing is affordable.
- There is good in-home nursing support.
- Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council has a lot of supports, including a doula, the Aboriginal Infant Development Program, the Aboriginal Supported Child Development Program, and occupational therapy.
- Some supports come to Gold River, so people don't have to travel.
- Q<sup>w</sup>alayu House is a huge support for lower income families.

## Opportunities For Change

### Cultural safety

Indigenous families said they want more support in their community for their children with disabilities or support needs.

### Connection

Families said they need more access to local family support groups. They also talked about not understanding or being aware of the kinds of services and supports that are available.

### School-year challenges

Parents talked about need for more support in school. This means more educational assistants (EAs), and more staff training to support children with disabilities or support needs. It also means more support for teachers so they can support their students.

Families also said they want supports at the start of the school day, and they want schools to do more to make sure school is a safe place.



## Access

Families said they want more access to supported childcare and more daycare spots with trained staff. They said if the Health Hub was bigger and able to help more local families, fewer families would have to travel to Campbell River for 'local' supports and services. Families also talked about long waitlists for assessments, counsellors, and speech and language pathologists. They said part of the problem is that you need a diagnosis to access these services.

**“(We need) consistency of services in the community. Flexibility of days, more days in Gold River.”**

– Gold River Health Hub attendee

## Respite

Parents said they feel challenged by the lack of local respite.

## Visions and solutions

### Vision 1 →

**Families feel connected and supported. They have easy access to the systems, tools, and centralized information they need to help their children thrive.**

### This needs:

- A protected, centralized database to access and share helpful and important information about a child's needs.
- Local education on inclusivity.
- Incentives to attract specialized workers.
- Mental health supports for the whole family.

### Vision 2 →

**Families have the supports they need during the school years to feel included, safe, and able to learn in ways that are positive, meaningful, and impactful to their lives.**

### This needs:

- A culture of inclusion in schools.
- More education assistants, and smoother transitions when EAs are changed.
- Needs-based supports in schools.
- Proper planning and funding for Kindergarten entry.



# WITH THANKS

The Community-Led Collaboration Project would like to deeply thank everyone who shared their time, ideas, experiences, concerns and hopes with us.

Their words have made all the difference as Campbell River, Gold River and surrounding areas look to best support children and youth with disabilities or support needs so they can thrive now and into the future.

Mural at Laichwiltach Family Life Society.