



KAMLOOPS ABORIGINAL FRIENDSHIP SOCIETY

# COMMUNITY, CONVERSATION AND CONNECTION:

## KAMLOOPS AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

Findings from the Community-Led Collaboration Project  
in Kamloops and surrounding communities

Kamloops is located in British Columbia's Southern Interior on the unceded traditional territory of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc territory, situated within the unceded ancestral lands of the Secwépemc Nation



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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 Kamloops 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 Kamloops, the Provincial Working Group built partnerships with local community organizations, including Children’s Therapy and Family Resource Centre, Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society, Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services, Parent Support Services Society of BC, Pivot Point Family Growth Centre, and School District No.73. 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.
- 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.



**In Kamloops, families and caregivers gathered to share in a talking circle at Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services.**

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

- Child care honorariums and onsite supported child care options.
- Support for transportation.
- A quiet space on site and follow-up support for participants.
- Food and gift cards.
- A variety of session formats and locations to enhance safety and inclusion.
- 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 Kamloops and surrounding areas?**
- 2 **What gaps in services and support exist?**
- 3 **What does a better network of services and supports look like in Kamloops 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.



Images: Community-Led Collaboration Project, Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services (left) and Henry Grube Education Centre (right).

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# ABOUT KAMLOOPS



Image: Downtown Kamloops | Tanya Goehring

Kamloops is located in British Columbia’s Southern Interior on the unceded traditional territory of the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc territory, situated within the unceded ancestral lands of the Secwépemc Nation. Kamloops has a population of 114,142. Children, ages 0–14, make up 14.9 per cent of the population of Kamloops.<sup>1</sup> Nearly four per cent (3.8%) of the population are of Single Indigenous ancestry, of which 79 per cent are First Nations, and 18.4 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 B.C., 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 Kamloops, 31 per cent—or 317 out of 1037 kindergarten 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>

**31 per cent of kindergarten children** are vulnerable in Kamloops compared to nearly **33 per cent of kindergarten children** across B.C. being vulnerable.

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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/index.cfm?Lang=E>.

2. Ibidem.

3. Sourced from the Early Development Instrument (EDI), composed of five scales of vulnerability in children entering kindergarten in British Columbia. The EDI tool 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 scales of child development including: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communications skills and general knowledge.

4. Wave 7 Community Profile, (2019). Kamloops - Thompson School District (SD73). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Medicine, School of Population and Public Health; February 2020. Available from: [http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi\\_w7\\_communityprofiles/edi\\_w7\\_communityprofile\\_sd\\_73.pdf](http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi_w7_communityprofiles/edi_w7_communityprofile_sd_73.pdf)

5. Ibidem.



Early Development Instrument (EDI) research in Kamloops further indicates **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>

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. Understanding healthy child development—and what is influencing healthy development in a community—provides a starting point for conversations and actions that are local, specific to the needs of the children in a community, and led by community champions.<sup>7</sup>

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6. Wave 7 Community Profile, (2019). Kamloops – Thompson School District (SD73). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Medicine, School of Population and Public Health; February 2020. Available from: [http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi\\_w7\\_communityprofiles/edi\\_w7\\_communityprofile\\_sd\\_73.pdf](http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi_w7_communityprofiles/edi_w7_communityprofile_sd_73.pdf)

7. Ibidem.

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# WHAT WE HEARD IN KAMLOOPS

Engagement in Kamloops took place in October 2023. Working in partnership with local organizations, Children’s Therapy and Family Resource Centre, Kamloops Aboriginal Friendship Society, Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services, Parent Support Services Society of BC, Pivot Point Family Growth Centre, and School District No.73, the community hosted:

- One session with **four local families** at the Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services on Thursday, October 12, 2023.
- One youth session with **15 local youth** at Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services on Thursday, October 12, 2023.
- One session with **22 local community service providers** at Henry Grube Education Centre on Friday, October 13, 2023.
- A second family session with **six local families** at Children’s Therapy and Family Resource Centre on Saturday, October 14, 2023.



**“I feel like I am in a dark forest, and there is nobody to help me.”**

- local family member/caregiver sharing on the struggle to navigate the system

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 their communities. In response to the question “What is working well in Kamloops and surrounding areas?” participants shared:

- There are a lot of great organizations providing support, particularly Lii Michif Otipemisiwak, the Canucks Autism Program, Children’s Therapy and Resource Centre, Insight Support Services, and Chris Rose. Staff are well trained and supportive.
- The public school system is also seen as supportive. One parent shared, “The public school embraces and supports children, (we) can depend on the Principal; they are a strong advocate.”
- Networking within Kamloops is seen as helpful. Parents find support in Facebook community groups.
- Collaboration between community service providers was highlighted as a strength. They look for creative solutions to serve the children and families in Kamloops and surrounding communities.

The following table details participants' thoughts on opportunities for improvement and ideas for meaningful change in Kamloops and surrounding communities:

Conversation themes	Supporting details
<p><b>LONG WAITLISTS</b></p> <p>"My son is four years old and undiagnosed. He needs some OT and speech therapy, but I don't know how to get him the right supports. The doctor is saying to get early intervention, but there are waitlists, so I'm not sure what to do while we wait..."</p> <p>— Family member/caregiver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and youth can be on waitlists between 1-3 years. (At the time of writing this report, one organization shared that 10-17 people were waiting for direct support to access child care in Kamloops. At the same time, 26 youth were waitlisted for a local youth program.)</li> <li>• While on waitlists, there is little to no support, and families say in order to get any action, they have to be in crisis.</li> <li>• Families want more support with free programs and supports before a diagnosis and while on waitlists.</li> <li>• Families and service providers recognize there is no time to lose when it comes to a child's development.</li> <li>• Service providers manage waitlists on a crisis basis. "We offer people a watered-down version of what we can do because of the length of the waitlist. Children deserve better."</li> </ul>
<p><b>NAVIGATING THE SYSTEM</b></p> <p>"You have to be a bulldog to get access to services or when advocating. I called the Family Centre once a week, then twice a week, then three times. I had to call until they were sick of hearing from me."</p> <p>— Family member/caregiver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families feel there should be paid roles for people who help them navigate the system and direct them to services (with more streamlined communication and support).</li> <li>• Families want step-by-step instructions on how to navigate the system and how they can reach the right people.</li> <li>• Parents express a lot of uncertainty about how to get their children the support they need.</li> <li>• Service providers would like to have a website that connects families to all services.</li> <li>• Some participants talked about the need for an online app where you can direct questions and receive guidance/answers.</li> <li>• One parent shared, "There is no central place where I can access support and learn more." Another added, "I feel like I am in a dark forest, and there is nobody to help me."</li> </ul>
<p><b>LACK OF RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH</b></p> <p>"Events like our transition fair for grade 10, 11, and 12 students was cancelled due to lack of staffing and transportation issues."</p> <p>— Local service provider</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families and youth feel there are not enough recreational activities available, both indoors and outdoors. Since COVID, a lot of sports have shut down, and the ones that are currently available are too expensive for families to access.</li> <li>• Families feel that private lessons are necessary for their children; however, they are either not available or too expensive.</li> <li>• There is no place for youth with support needs to connect and socialize, and no support workers to support them in the activity.</li> </ul>

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- Service providers also expressed concern over the lack of youth supports within the community.
- The lack of transportation has become a barrier for youth. In one session, 14 youth shared how challenges with local transportation is a huge barrier in their lives.

**RIGID POLICIES**

“There are red tape, barriers, and obstacles as we try to advocate.”  
– Family member/caregiver

- Families struggle with rigid policies that mean no supports are available until you get a diagnosis. With one- to three- year waitlists for diagnostic services, parents are left wondering, “What am I supposed to do [in the meantime]?”
- One local service provider shared, “Legislation is not keeping up to community needs; the government needs to change.”
- Participants talked about the systemic challenges, including timeframes, service locations, service delivery practices, and rigid policies that prevent people from getting the support they need.
- One family member said, “We must be in crisis to get action.” Another added it’s important to “...understand the criteria for diagnosis vs. non-diagnosis. It’s unclear.”

**MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS**

“I work as a therapist at a child development centre. Children in early intervention (0-5) and school aged programs (6-19) have inadequate access or service for mental health. Only the most severe kids with suicide attempts or child protection needs get mental health service.”  
– Local service provider

- Several people raised the need for increased mental health supports with no waitlists.
- Families also talked about the cost of mental health supports being a barrier to access.
- Families are seeing an increase in anxiety and mental health issues in general and are struggling with how to approach mental health.
- Play therapy was something that was mentioned as a need by families to provide mental health support to children/youth.
- One family member shared, “Mental health services are very limited, and there is no one-on-one counselling available.”
- There is a lack of individual grief and trauma counselling specifically geared to the personality of the child.

**CULTURAL SAFETY**

“Give Indigenous children their voices back, and [advocate for] traditional ways to support Indigenous families.”  
– Local service provider

- There is not enough support for Indigenous families.
- Mainstream systems don’t consider cultural norms and recognize their importance when providing services and supports to children, youth and their families.
- Families feel there must be an effort to decolonize the system, as the system is a barrier for Indigenous People due to a lack of Indigenous experts.
- There is a need for equal funding for Indigenous services and for more Indigenous arts and music programs.

## LACK OF SUPPORT SERVICES AND RESPITE

“Accessing quality daycare is hard. Many daycares refuse to accept children with special needs without guaranteed support.”

– Family member/caregiver

- Families feel there is a lack of support services, specifically when it comes to nursing support, paediatricians, occupational therapy, and respite.
- Child care support is a challenge. Families shared many daycares refuse to accept children with disabilities or support needs without guaranteed funding for additional staff.
- There is a great concern that supports and services are not keeping up with the growing population of Kamloops and the surrounding areas.
- Parents shared that a large turn over of providers makes it challenging to find consistency for their child.

## FUNDING

“Those making choices about funding are not sitting at the table making the change.”

– Local service provider

- Community service providers aren't receiving adequate funding or budget allocations for staff. Funding is not responsive to population growth and size of the service delivery area they have to serve. Funding needs to take into account the level of local need in a community and/or service area.
- There is a need for more funding for travel costs, as many families have to travel far distances to access therapy or support.
- Service providers feel there is a lack of funding to have enough staff.
- Service providers are being creative with the budgets they have but, in many cases, they are unable to provide services aligned with best practices or with the frequency they know a child needs.

## ACCESS

“If we don't support parents, we are not meeting children's needs in a meaningful way.”

– Local service provider

- Families observe that there is funding for autism spectrum disorders but not other diagnoses like ADHD or speech delay, for example. This limits their ability to access supports and services so their children can thrive.
- Waitlist management is on a “crisis basis.” This means many children and youth aren't receiving therapies with the frequency and intensity they need.
- Communities are seeing more service providers move from public care to private care, leading to recruitment and retention issues.
- Families want to access services and supports on time and based on what their children need (not limited by diagnosis).
- Children need access to early intervention therapies. More therapists are needed to provide adequate levels of intervention.

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# SOLUTIONS TABLE SUMMARY

During the in-person engagements in Kamloops, 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 are paid roles for people to help navigate the system in collaboration with parents.
- There are licensed respite providers with step-by-step guides on how to access respite.
- Local businesses have safe spaces and stickers on doors that say 'Sensory Friendly.'
- Resources are available after hours, outside 8:30 am - 4:30 pm.
- There are communication plans and websites for organizations that are clear, user-friendly updated regularly and culturally inclusive. Information is available in multiple languages.
- Each service or centre has a key worker who checks in with families regularly and directs them to the correct services or information.
- There are free programs before diagnosis and while families are on waitlists.

On September 25, 2024, parents, caregivers, family members, community service providers, and community members from Kamloops were invited to an online session to discuss solutions for change.

At the meeting, they had the opportunity to explore and workshop two visions of the future, based on in-person feedback gathered in their communities, including:

1. All families in Kamloops and surrounding communities can confidently navigate local supports with easy access to the services, tools, and information they need to help their children thrive.
2. Local families have access to specialized and culturally safe mental health supports for children and youth, ensuring timely access to services like one-on-one counselling, grief, and trauma therapy.

## VISION 1

All families in Kamloops and surrounding communities can confidently navigate local supports with easy access to the services, tools, and information they need to help their children thrive.

<b>WHAT BOLD STEPS OR SOLUTIONS ARE REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE THIS VISION?</b>	<b>WHO MUST BE INVOLVED TO BRING THESE SOLUTIONS TO LIFE?</b>
<p>There is an online database where families and service providers can easily access information about local supports, services, and family groups.</p>	<p>The collaboration of multiple provincial ministries including Children and Family Development, Education and Child Care, and Health to ensure this database is kept up to date by staff dedicated to this role.</p>
<p>There is a Community Facilitator/Navigator in a dedicated, paid position. This role serves children and youth from ages 0 to 19.</p>	<p>The Ministry of Children and Family Development makes this role available in every community.</p>
<p>There is a Community Facilitator/Navigator in a dedicated, paid position who works specifically with Indigenous children and youth from ages 0 to 19.</p>	<p>The provincial ministries work collaboratively with Indigenous nations and community organizations such as Secwépemc Child &amp; Family Services Agency (SCFSA).</p>
<p>Information fairs take place regularly, allowing families to connect with service providers and learn more about the services and supports offered in Kamloops. It also provides an opportunity for service providers to connect with each other.</p>	<p>Local community service providers and all organizations that offer services to children and youth in Kamloops and surrounding communities work together to develop and provide an information fair.</p>
<p>Service providers connect monthly to discuss community updates, such as funding and accessible services.</p>	<p>Local community service providers and all organizations that offer services to children and youth in Kamloops and surrounding areas organize and attend a monthly schedule of meetings.</p>

## VISION 2

Local families have access to specialized and culturally safe mental health supports for children and youth, ensuring timely access to services like one-on-one counselling, grief, and trauma therapy.

WHAT BOLD STEPS OR SOLUTIONS ARE REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE THIS VISION?	WHO MUST BE INVOLVED TO BRING THESE SOLUTIONS TO LIFE?
<p>More transportation options are available, especially for families in rural areas or without access to a vehicle. This could include a medical taxi driver or private transportation options. This could also be providing youth and families with bus passes or taxi fares.</p>	<p>The collaboration of the City of Kamloops (Transit Department), BC Transit, the Thompson-Nicola Regional District (TNRD), School District #73, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and the Ministry of Children and Family Development.</p>
<p>There is a mobile unit to serve families located in Kamloops and surrounding communities. This mobile unit would offer mental health support services and could travel directly to families, specifically those in rural areas.</p>	<p>The collaboration of the City of Kamloops, the Thompson-Nicola Regional District (TNRD), Interior Health, Ministry of Children and Family Development and Mental Health and Addictions.</p>
<p>After-hours services and programs are offered to families to support the schedules of working parents.</p>	<p>The collaboration of School District #73, community service providers and all organizations that offer services to children and youth.</p>
<p>Mental health support services and professionals for children with disabilities or support needs are provided by the school district and are accessible within school hours.</p>	<p>The collaboration of School District #73, Interior Health, Parkview Child and Adolescent Mental Health Centre, Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions.</p>
<p>Long-term funding is easily accesible and offered to all ages.</p>	<p>The collaboration of School District #73, Ministry of Children and Family Development and Mental Health and Addictions.</p>



Incentives that allow people to study and work in support roles in Kamloops and surrounding communities, especially those who are trained in cultural safety.

The collaboration of post-secondary institutions and multiple provincial ministries, including Advanced Education, Education and Child Care, and Children and Family Development.

There are safe spaces and numerous opportunities for youth to regularly connect and build relationships. Financial support is provided for transportation to these spaces, programs, or events.

The collaboration of the City of Kamloops, School District #73, community service providers and all organizations that offer services to children and youth.

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# 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 MCFD. Community contributions have been instrumental in shaping these reports.

In all cases, the outcomes of the Community-Led Collaboration Project will 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
- inform changes in community that 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 changes needed in your community. We believe it holds the potential to inspire a future where every person can thrive and to contribute to the transformation of the 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/conversations-in-kamloops/>.

# IN SUMMARY

Please find plain language summaries of Kamloops' key discoveries on the following pages.



# KAMLOOPS

Located on the unceded traditional territory of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc territory within the unceded lands of the Secwépemc Nation.

The Community-Led Collaboration Project held four in-person conversation sessions in Kamloops in October 2023. Ten families, 15 local youth, and 22 community services providers from Kamloops took part. Together, we talked about the struggles, hopes, and expectations for services and supports for kids ages 0-19 with disabilities or support needs.

## What's Working Well

- There are several great organizations providing excellent support in Kamloops, including Lii Michif Otipemisiwak, the Canucks Autism Program, Children's Therapy and Resource Centre, Insight Support Services, and Chris Rose.
  - Staff at these organizations are well-trained and supportive.
- The public school system is also seen as supportive and helpful.
- Networking within Kamloops is helpful. Parents connect on Facebook community groups and there is strong collaboration between service providers.

## Opportunities for Change

### Cultural safety

Families said they experience barriers to services and supports because there aren't enough Indigenous experts. They said there isn't enough support for Indigenous families and youth, and they want equal funding for Indigenous services, arts, and music programs. Families explained most mainstream services don't consider Indigenous culture, history and traditions in their services.

### Long waitlists

**"My son is four years old and undiagnosed. The doctor is saying to get early intervention, but there are waitlists so I'm not sure what to do while we wait ..."**

— Parent/caregiver in Kamloops

Right now, families can be on waitlists for up to three years. They said they need to be in a crisis situation to get any support. If they aren't in acute crisis, they said there is little to no support available while they wait for services and supports. Families want more access to free programs before a diagnosis, and while on waitlists.

## Mental health supports

People said they need access to more mental health supports, without waitlists. They also said counselling is often too expensive for many families. People also said there's an increase in anxiety and other mental health challenges in children and youth in their community, but there isn't very much one-on-one counselling available. They also said there isn't enough grief and trauma counselling services that are geared towards children in particular, like play therapy.

## Figuring out the system

Families said they aren't sure who to reach out to, or how to reach out to them when their children need support. Families suggested:

- An online app where you can ask questions and get guidance
- A clearer website
- Family Navigators who help families connect with resources, supports, and services

**"You have to be a bulldog to get access to services. I called the Family Centre once a week, then twice a week, then three times. I had to call until they were sick of hearing from me."**

– Family member/caregiver

## Rigid policies

People said waitlists, limited service locations, and inflexible policies around how services are delivered are all barriers to access services and supports people need.

**"Legislation is not keeping up [with] community needs; the government needs to change."**

– Community service provider

## Not enough recreational activities and supports for youth

Families said they lost a lot of indoor and outdoor activities since COVID. The ones that are still running are often too expensive for many families.

Without these activities, families said their kids don't have the opportunity to connect with other kids. Service providers said they were also concerned about not having enough recreational activities. Older youth also said there isn't enough local transportation options, making it hard to get to the activities that are actually running.

## Lack of support and respite

Families said it's hard to find services they can afford. When they do, there is high turn-over of providers which means inconsistency of care and support. They said Kamloops is growing so fast that supports and services aren't keeping up with the need.

They said this is especially true for nursing support, paediatricians, occupational therapists, and respite.

## Access

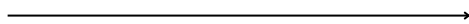
Families said they're seeing a lot of service providers move out of the public system and into private care. This shift only increases waitlists. Families also said finding affordable child care is hard because many daycares don't accept children with support needs without guaranteed funding for extra staff.

## Funding

Service providers are being creative with the budgets they have but, in many cases, they are unable to provide services aligned with best practices. Service providers said funding and budgets have to be allocated based on the growing level of need in the Kamloops community and the large area they have to serve. People said they need more funding for travel costs, since families often have to travel long distances to access therapy or support.

# Visions and solutions

## Vision 1



**All families in Kamloops and surrounding communities can confidently navigate local supports with easy access to the services, tools, and information they need to help their children thrive.**

## This needs:

- An online database for families and service providers to access information about local supports, services, and family groups.
- A Community Facilitator/Navigator in a dedicated, paid position.
- Monthly meetings for community service providers to connect.
- Regular information fairs in community for families.

## Vision 2

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**Local families have access to specialized and culturally safe mental health supports for children and youth, ensuring timely access to services like one-on-one counselling, grief, and trauma therapy.**

## **This needs:**

- A mobile unit to serve families and offer mental health supports.
- A medical taxi driver or private transportation options.
- Mental health supports in the school district.
- Incentives to attract specialized workers.
- Safe spaces for youth to connect.



# 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 Kamloops and surrounding areas look to best support children and youth with disabilities or support needs so they can thrive now and into the future.

Image: Community-Led Collaboration Project. Lii Michif Otipemisiwak Family and Community Services