



**NUU-CHAH-NULTH
TRIBAL COUNCIL**



COMMUNITY, CONVERSATION AND CONNECTION:

PORT ALBERNI AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

Findings from the Community-Led Collaboration Project in Port Alberni and surrounding communities, British Columbia

Port Alberni is located on the traditional territories of the Hupacasath and Tseshaht First Nations. We acknowledge the Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous People who also live throughout this territory.

Image courtesy of Destinationless Travel



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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 new CYSN framework announcement 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 of age, 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 Port Alberni and surrounding communities**, one of six initial communities engaged in the first year of this project.

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 and 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
- West Coast Vancouver Island communities
- Richmond

SAFE SPACES FOR DIALOGUE

In Port Alberni, The Provincial Working Group built partnerships with local community organizations including Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council, Outreach Therapy, Port Alberni Association for Community Living (PAACL) and Port Alberni Friendship Centre. 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).
- A dedicated community website and registration page.
- Emails sent directly to service providers and families receiving supports.
- 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 Port Alberni, steps were taken to ensure cultural safety and accessibility for all participants by offering:

- 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 for all participants.
- 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 Port Alberni, the Community-Led Collaboration Project was graciously hosted by the Port Alberni Friendship Centre. We were also invited to set up a booth at the PAACL Family Fun Fair. Guided by a graphic facilitator, families provided their experiences and ideas about enhancing local services and supports.



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.

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 Port Alberni and surrounding areas?**
- 2 What gaps in services and support exist?**
- 3 What does a better network of services and supports look like in Port Alberni 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.

ABOUT PORT ALBERNI



Image courtesy of Destinationless Travel

Port Alberni is located on the traditional territories of the Hupacasath and Tseshaht First Nations. We acknowledge the Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous People who also live throughout this territory. Port Alberni has a population of nearly 33,521 people.¹ Children up to the age of 14 account for 14.8 per cent of the population of Port Alberni, and 19.3 per cent of the population are of single Indigenous ancestry, of which 79 per cent are First Nations and 21 per cent are Métis.²

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 communities to 72 per cent in others.³

Approximately 34 per cent of kindergarten children are vulnerable in Port Alberni compared to nearly 33 per cent of kindergarten children in B.C. being vulnerable.

In Port Alberni, 34.4 per cent—or 177 of 518 children—are vulnerable on one or more scales of the EDI upon entry to kindergarten.⁴ This compares to 32.9 per cent of all kindergarten children across B.C. being vulnerable on one or more scales.⁵

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. Ibidem.

4. 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.

5. Ibidem.

Early Development Instrument research in Port Alberni 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.⁶

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.⁷

6. Human Early Learning Partnership. Early Development Instrument [EDI] report. Wave 7 Community Profile, 2019. Alberni School District (SD70). Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Medicine, School of Population and Public Health; February 2020. Available from: https://earlylearning.ubc.ca/app/uploads/2022/03/edi_w7_subscale_communityprofile_sd_70.pdf

7. Ibidem.

WHAT WE HEARD IN PORT ALBERNI

Engagement in Port Alberni took place in October 2023. Working in partnership with local organizations, Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, Outreach Therapy, Port Alberni Association for Community Living (PACL) and Port Alberni Friendship Centre, the community hosted:

- A session with **14 local families** at the Port Alberni Friendship Centre on Tuesday, October 17, 2023.
- A session with **16 local community service providers** at the Port Alberni Friendship Centre on Wednesday, October 18, 2023.
- A project table at the annual PAACL Family Fun Fair on Thursday, October 19, 2023, where we gathered input from **29 attendees including families, service providers and community members**. Attendees were invited to share their experiences and ideas with the project team while being guided by a graphic facilitator, who captured their thoughts in a large, graphic facilitation that was completed and given to PAACL at the end of the Family Fun Fair.

“

“There needs to be education for parents on how to find help, so they can build a village.”

— Port Alberni parent/caregiver

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

- There is a strong network of collaborative, committed, and long-tenured professionals in the community.
- One service provider shared, “We are a resourceful community. Even when there isn’t the direct funding, we are finding what we can to make it happen. It’s exhausting but we do.”
- The therapies in the community are working well for families (when available).
- Non-governmental agencies, such as Jordan’s Principle, Bear Essentials, Variety, CKNW and the Special Olympics are providing funding and service opportunities.
- The Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council (NTC) is working well for supports linked to membership on the reserve.

- Culture and community, with an emphasis on supporting Indigenous culture are important and seen as strengths by community and family members.
- Available daycare spots are a wonderful support to the community (when available).

The following table details participants’ thoughts on opportunities for improvement and ideas for meaningful change in Port Alberni and surrounding communities:

Conversation themes	Supporting details
<p>LACK OF SERVICES</p> <p>“[My child can’t go to] preschool because they only receive one hour of support per day.” – Family member/caregiver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families feel there are insufficient services, such as physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists, available to meet the needs of Port Alberni families. • Several parents shared that they’ve had to stop working entirely in order to support their child’s needs. • Several parents talked about their children only being able to attend preschool or kindergarten for an hour a day because the other hours do not have educational assistant (EA) support for their child. • Some families have had to move outside of the community to receive support for their children due to a lack of local services. • Families feel there is a disconnect between the services they are told are available and the reality of waitlists. • Participants emphasized that child care spaces are a significant problem in the community, and some mentioned there is one child care space for every five children.
<p>NAVIGATING SYSTEM AMBIGUITY</p> <p>“Hard to find reliable, useful information in the sea of internet searches – how to find it if you don’t know what you’re looking for?” – Family member/caregiver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families want someone to help them navigate the system and the supports available. • Families want greater coordination of services to ensure their child is getting everything they need. • One service provider said, “[There needs to be a] case manager/navigator with no more than five families on their caseload to support connection with transportation to multi-service collaboration support.” • There is a confusion on the level of funding and supports compared to other communities in the province. One participant shared “I think it’s important to note that services that are funded in other communities across the province are not funded here. Why are services so different in different communities?”

LOCATION AND TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS

"[Families need] transportation supports to get to Vancouver for medical appointments."

- Local service provider

- Families expressed frustration that they have to travel (or move altogether) to receive services and supports for their child.
- One parent shared, "Nanaimo was the closest physio I could access for my child, we had an opportunity to go, but then the highway shut down."
- Service providers expressed that geographical barriers (i.e. highway closures) impact other professionals' ability to travel and support the community.
- Families want more funding for travel costs, as many have to travel far distances to access therapy or support. One parent shared, "I spend \$120 every two weeks on services that aren't available in Port Alberni and travel 30 minutes each way."

CULTURAL SAFETY

"Education on early childhood trauma and multi-generational trauma is needed."

- Local service provider

- Families want culturally safe respite and more options when it comes to choosing respite supports.
- Indigenous families shared that they experience trauma when trying to advocate for their children or grandchildren.
- Several participants said they want the government to speak to Indigenous people directly to find out what they want and need.
- One family member shared, "Services and supports are needed for all Indigenous People in all places in and around Port Alberni." Another family member added, "Truth and reconciliation is needed for people in Port Alberni."

STAFFING AND RECRUITMENT

"Fund tuition for people training in any human support role and tie it to mandatory services in resource-scarce communities such as nurses, therapists and ECEs"

- Local service provider

- Service providers and families feel more staff is needed to meet demand. One service provider said quite simply, "We have the building. We have the model. We can't get the people."
- There is a lack of qualified professionals at all levels of the system. One service provider said, "(We need to) incentivize therapists to come to Port Alberni with housing, community appeal, etc."
- The high number of caseloads is causing social workers to feel overloaded, which they feel is affecting the quality of their work.
- Service providers feel the lack of available services in the community is also affecting the recruitment rate of young professionals.

LACK OF RESPITE, ESPECIALLY CULTURALLY SAFE RESPITE

" [We need] culturally safe respite, and choices in respite support."

- Family member/caregiver

- Parents feel overwhelmed and unable to take a break for themselves due to the lack of respite support in the community.
- Family members also shared they experience fear and judgement when asking for help. Specifically, the fear of their child being taken away.

LACK OF RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

"I need a place for my child to physically exercise."

- Family member/caregiver

- Families and youth feel there are not enough recreational activities available, both indoors and outdoors.
- Several families talked about having to travel to Nanaimo to get access to services and recreational activities (like swimming) for their children.
- Families want enhancements to local recreational activities making them more inclusive. This includes more accessible and inclusive playgrounds in Port Alberni.
- Parents are needing to champion and fundraise for recreational supports. One parent shared, "In order to get attention and raise funds for an inclusive playground, my friend and I are personally holding a fundraiser." See link to article below detailing the fundraising efforts of two Port Alberni mothers who attended: <https://www.albernavalleynews.com/community/port-alberni-parents-lobby-for-new-inclusive-playground-2273269>

SCHOOL YEARS ARE CHALLENGING

"[The] school system kept making promises that the child would see specialists, but it never happened."

- Family member/caregiver

- Families feel there is limited support in schools and some even have to move to receive support.
- School support is only based on a diagnosis, not what is needed.
- Children can't go to school because there is not enough educational assistant (EA) support. If they do have support, often they can only go for one hour per day.
- One participant shared, "The school district has minimal occupational or physical therapist hours, so children who are school age who need an OT or PT basically have nothing."

DIAGNOSIS AND EARLY INTERVENTION CHALLENGES

"I have worked with a family that has gone through the diagnosis process three times before getting a diagnosis."

- Local service provider

- Families feel they are in an "intense competition" with one another to receive an early diagnosis.
- Service providers feel there are gaps in the diagnosis process. One said, "The child is getting older and older. We all learn early intervention is key, but then it's not happening."

LEVEL OF FUNDING IS LOW

"Due to limited funding, my child receives only one hour of support in Kindergarten, and can't attend the rest of the day."

- Family member/caregiver

- Participants expressed the level of funding for support in schools and other services is low.
- One community service provider shared, "Even when a child gets funding for supports in child care or school, it is never enough."
- Community service providers believe there is also a lack of funding for children to get an assessment and diagnosis, and when there is no diagnosis with funding attached, families struggle to receive support.

SOLUTIONS TABLE SUMMARY

During the in-person engagements in Port Alberni, 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:

- Systemic racism is acknowledged and actively addressed.
- Inclusive childcare is available to support all children who need it.
- Accessible counselling services are readily available for children and their families.
- Culturally safe respite options are offered, ensuring parents feel comfortable seeking help.
- An up-to-date online directory of local services is available and user-friendly.
- Family support networks exist to assist families with needs such as after-school care, childminding, house cleaning, grocery delivery, and meal preparation.
- There are people that advocate for families and help them navigate the system. A “case manager or navigator” is assigned no more than five families to support. This role facilitates connections and transportation and involves collaboration across multiple services.
- One participant shared, “Fund tuition for people training in any human support role and tie it to mandatory service in resource-scarce communities. Nurses, therapists, early childhood educators.”
- Another participant suggested, “Providing housing or Airbnbs for out-of-town therapists to share when working in Port Alberni or surrounding communities.”
- One building with all the necessary amenities in one place, including child care, therapies, and support services, creating a welcoming environment for connection and receiving support.
- Having a robust workforce with enough therapists to serve across all ages, this includes Occupational Therapists (OTs), Physiotherapists (PTs) and Speech and Language Pathologists (SLPs).

On September 24th, 2024, parents, caregivers, family members, community service providers, and community members from Port Alberni 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:

1. There are an abundance of services, supports, service providers and specialists available to families in Port Alberni and surrounding communities and all families have the resources and information they need to access them.
2. All children/youth in Port Alberni 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

There are an abundance of services, supports, service providers and specialists available to families in Port Alberni and surrounding communities and all families have the resources and information they need to access them.

WHAT BOLD STEPS OR SOLUTIONS ARE REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE THIS VISION?	WHO MUST BE INVOLVED TO BRING THESE SOLUTIONS TO LIFE?
<p>There is an online database where families and service providers can easily access information about local supports, services, and family groups. This database can be filtered by a child's needs, community, and age and is also updated and managed.</p>	<p>The collaboration of multiple provincial ministries including Health, Children and Family Development, and Education and Child Care.</p>
<p>In every community, there is a paid navigator who helps connect families to resources, supports, and assists with writing funding applications.</p>	<p>The collaboration of multiple provincial ministries including Health, Children and Family Development, and Education and Child Care.</p>
<p>There is reliable respite available for families. The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) issues a request for proposal (RFP) for respite workers who can work at any time of the day. This role offers competitive wages and benefits. The support workers are then dispatched based on the needs of the families.</p>	<p>Ministry of Children and Family Development.</p>
<p>There are opportunities for families to connect, fostering more face-to-face interaction within the community.</p>	<p>A collaboration of local community service providers and all organizations that offer services to children and youth.</p>
<p>Parents, caregivers, community service providers and community members are included in the decisions of policy and funding.</p>	<p>The collaboration of ministries of Children and Family Development, Education and Child Care, and Health.</p>

VISION 2

All children/youth in Port Alberni 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.

WHAT BOLD STEPS OR SOLUTIONS ARE REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE THIS VISION?	WHO MUST BE INVOLVED TO BRING THESE SOLUTIONS TO LIFE?
The transition planning for the upcoming school year starts in January of the preceding school year, and the necessary supports are well funded and in place in advance of September.	School District #70 and the Ministry of Education and Child Care.
Parents are supported when children need to be held back in Kindergarten. If children are held back, their services, such as daycare are not affected.	A collaboration between School District #70, the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Ministry of Education and Child Care.
Education Assistants (EAs) return to work a week earlier in September to have time to review files, familiarize themselves with the child they will be supporting, and potentially connect with families before the first day of school.	School District #70.
EAs and Administration across the district are connected to the needs of each student.	School District #70.
Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are reviewed yearly and changes are reflected and acted upon.	School District #70 and the Ministry of Education and Child Care.
There is a dedicated short-term housing option for professionals who travel into Port Alberni.	A collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Child Care, Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Ministry of Health.

There is more after-school care and summer care available for children, especially for those aged 13 and older.

The collaboration of School District #70, community service providers and all organizations that offer services to children and youth in and around Port Alberni.

The funding model reflects the needs of the child and is not diagnosis based.

The Ministry of Children and Education and Child Care.

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 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 participants' feedback, 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
- contribute to a transformation of the CYSN program, and other programs and services that better respond to the needs of B.C. communities and, most importantly, to the young people at the centre of this work.

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



IN SUMMARY

Please find a plain language summary of the Port Alberni key discoveries on the following pages.

WHAT WE HEARD IN

PORT ALBERNI

Located on the traditional territories of the Hupacasath and Tseshaht First Nations.

Over three days in October 2023, 59 Port Alberni families, service providers, and community members shared their experiences and input with the Community-Led Collaboration Project. 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 in Port Alberni

- There's a strong network of collaborative, committed professionals in the community.
- Service providers are resourceful, and said they find creative ways to work with what they have.
- Therapies are working well for families, when they are available.
- There are some good non-governmental agencies and charities that provide funding and services.
- The Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council has good supports linked to membership on the reserve.
- Culture, community, and supporting Indigenous culture are important community strengths.
- Daycare spots are a wonderful community support, when they are available.

Opportunities for change

Lack of local supports and services

Families feel there aren't enough specialists to meet the community's needs. They said they need more professionals like physiotherapists, speech and language pathologists, and occupational therapists. Some parents have had to quit work or move outside the community to get the supports and services their child needs. Families said they're told services are available, but then find out how long the waitlists are.

Trouble figuring out how to use the system

Families said it's hard to find reliable information. They asked, "how do I find something I don't know I'm looking for?" Families said they want a case manager to help them find their way around the local and provincial systems. They suggested case managers should have a maximum of five families on their caseload at a time. They said they want all the support systems and services to be more connected and coordinated.

"[My child can't go to preschool because they only receive one hour of support per day.]"

- Parent/caregiver

Not enough respite

Families said they are struggling to find culturally safe respite. Parents/caregivers said they felt overwhelmed and can't take the breaks for themselves that they truly need. Some shared they felt judged when they asked for help. For some, this judgement made them feel scared their child might get taken away from them.

More cultural safety

Indigenous families shared that they experience trauma when they try to advocate for their children or grandchildren. Several families said they want the government to speak to Indigenous people directly to find out what they need.

Better transportation

Families said they want more funding for travel expenses, since they can't access the services they need in their own community. Highway closures are huge barriers for families, who have to travel 30 minutes or more outside of Port Alberni for services, or rely on specialists to travel into Port Alberni.

"I have worked with a family that has gone through the diagnosis process three times before getting a diagnosis."

— Community service provider

Early diagnosis challenges

Families said they feel "intense competition" with each other to get an early diagnosis. Service providers said they feel there are gaps in the diagnosis process, saying "we all know early intervention is key, but then it's not happening."

More therapists needed

People said there just aren't enough professionals to keep up with demand. Service providers are feeling overwhelmed by high caseloads. They suggested finding incentives, like housing, to attract more therapists to Port Alberni.

School years are hard

Families said they feel the schools make promises about services that never happen. Some families said they had to move to get supports. Some children can't attend all-day school because there aren't enough education assistants (EAs).

Not enough recreational activities

Families said they have to travel to Nanaimo for basic activities like swimming lessons. They also shared the playgrounds in Port Alberni aren't very accessible or inclusive. Families also said they have to push for more inclusive recreational spaces. Some families have even started their own fundraisers to build these spaces.

Visions and solutions

Vision 1 →

There are an abundance of services, supports, service providers and specialists available to families in Port Alberni and surrounding communities and all families have the resources and information they need to access them.

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.
- Reliable respite for families.
- More opportunities for families to connect in-person.
- Families, service providers and community members to be included in policy and funding decisions.

Vision 2 →

All children/youth in Port Alberni 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.

This needs:

- Transition planning to start in January for the following school year.
- Education Assistants (EAs) to return to work a week earlier in September.
- Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to be reviewed every school year.
- Short-term housing to attract therapists to work in Port Alberni.
- More after-school and summer child care options for children ages 13 and older.
- A funding model that is needs based, not diagnosis based.

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

