



**NUU-CHAH-NULTH
TRIBAL COUNCIL**



COMMUNITY, CONVERSATION AND CONNECTION

AHOUSAHT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

**Findings from the Community-Led Collaboration Project in the
West Coast Communities, British Columbia.**

Ahousaht is located on the West Coast of Vancouver Island on the traditional territory of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations.

West Coast of Vancouver Island, (iStock)



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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 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 Ahousht, British Columbia** – one of five communities that participated in the engagement of various West Coast of Vancouver Island Communities.

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 and surrounding communities
- West Coast of Vancouver Island communities
- Richmond

ENGAGEMENT WITH WEST COAST COMMUNITIES

Between August and November 2023, in-person engagements took place with families, youth, Elders and community service providers in several communities along the West Coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia. The West Coast communities have a total population of 7,626 people.¹ The median age of people living in the West Coast communities is 39 years compared to 48 years in British Columbia as a whole.² Thirty percent of people living in the West Coast communities are Indigenous.³

To ensure a culturally safe process of engagement, the Community-Led Collaboration Project partnered with a local facilitator with strong community relationships. The facilitator engaged nearly 200 people in conversations about their experiences, ideas, and hopes for a future where all children with disabilities or support needs can thrive.

Engagement took place with the following communities/community groupings:

- Ahousaht (50 people engaged)
- Hitacu (Five people engaged)
- Opitsaht (33 people engaged)
- Tofino and Ucluelet (47 people engaged)
- Ty-Histanis and Esowista (49 people engaged)



Image Courtesy of Tofino Trails

1. Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Region's Vital Signs® (2023), Clayoquot Biosphere, online: https://clayoquotbiosphere.org/files/file/6541460ea68cf/CBT_Vital_Signs_2023.pdf
2. Ibidem.
3. Ibidem.

ABOUT AHOUSAHT



Image courtesy of Victoria Times Colonist

Ahousaht is located on the West Coast of Vancouver Island on the traditional territory of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations. The community is only accessible by boat or plane and is about a 40-minute boat ride from Tofino. As one of the largest Indigenous communities on Vancouver Island, Ahousaht has a population of 2,241 people.⁴ According to the latest Statistics Canada Census data from 2016 (updated in October 2019), children under the age of 15 make up 32 percent of the population of Ahousaht. The median age is 26 years old. Forty-seven percent of couples in Ahousaht have children, while 25% of all parents are single parenting.⁵

The community of Ahousaht is only accessible by boat or plane and is about a 40-minute boat ride from Tofino.

4. Government of British Columbia (2024), Ahousaht First Nation, online: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing/ahousaht-first-nation>

5. Statistics Canada (2021), Aboriginal Population Profile, 2016 Census, Ahousaht [First Nation/Indian band or Tribal Council area], British Columbia, online: https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/abpopprof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=AB&Code1=2016C1005597&Data=Count&SearchText=Ahousaht&SearchType=Begin&BI=All&GeoLevel=PR&GeoCode=2016C1005597&SEX_ID=1&AGE_ID=1&RESGEO_ID=1

WHAT WE HEARD IN AHOUSAHT

From August to October 2023, over 50 people from Ahousaht shared their thoughts, ideas and experiences with a facilitator. In partnership with the Aboriginal Infant Development Program (AIDP) and Aboriginal Supported Child Development Program (ASCD), a community event was held at the Chah Chum Hii Yup Tiic Mis Health Centre on October 5, 2023, with 30 local families. In addition, various conversations via email and phone were held with an additional:

- Five family members
- Ten community service providers
- Three youth
- Four Elders

In response to the question “What is working well in Ahousaht and surrounding areas?”, participants shared:

- Available therapies and supports in the community work well for families, including community health nurses, a speech and language pathologist (SLP) who visits the local school several times a week, audiology support, and a dental hygienist who also visits the community.

The following table details participants’ thoughts on opportunities for improvement and ideas for meaningful change in Ahousaht:

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.”</p> <p>-Family member/caregiver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are insufficient services available to meet the needs of Ahousaht families - several people talked about having to stop working to support their child (because the supports they need aren’t available to them).• When one family was asked about what services are missing for their child with support needs the answer was “Everything under the sun”. There is a severe lack of therapy services, medical care, early intervention, mental health supports, family supports and recreational activities.• Several people talked about their children only being able to attend preschool or kindergarten for an hour a day because the other hours don’t have Educational Assistant support for their child.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some families have had to move outside the community to get support for their children due to a lack of local services. • Families say there is a lack of local recreational activities and accessible and inclusive playgrounds in Ahousaht. • Families mentioned there is a lack of physiotherapists (PTs) and occupational therapists (OTs) coming into community and that many children in the community who need these services are forced to go without them. • According to families, there are not enough community nurses, no paediatrician and no grief and loss counsellors in the community. • Several people shared that local services are not just scarce but, when they are available, they're often inconsistent. • There are no respite services, and it is hard for families with children and youth with support needs to get any respite as they must rely on friends and family to help.
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<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?”</p> <p>-Family member/caregiver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families are keen for someone to help them navigate the medical system and the supports available. • For many families, the amount of paperwork to access services and financial supports (like disability tax credits) can be overwhelming and a barrier to getting the supports their children need. • Families want greater support to connect them to (and coordinate) the services they need to ensure their child thrives. • 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 and transportation to multi-service support.”
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<p>CULTURAL SAFETY</p> <p>“Education on early childhood trauma and multi-generational trauma is needed.”</p> <p>-Community Service Provider</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families want culturally safe respite and more choice when it comes to choosing respite supports. • Several participants want the government to speak directly to Indigenous people to find out what they want and need. • One family member said, “Services and supports are needed for all Indigenous people in all places in and around Ahousaht.”
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STAFFING AND RECRUITMENT

“My daughter was referred to the physiotherapist (PT) at Outreach therapy by the Early Years Outreach Worker. I waited a long time for a phone call, and nothing happened. When we followed up, we were told that there was no PT at the moment but that we could see the PT at the hospital in Tofino.”

-Family member/caregiver

- More staff are needed to meet demand. One service provider said, quite simply, “More, more, more staff!”
- There is a lack of qualified professionals at all levels of the system. One service provider said, “Incentivize therapists to come to Ahousaht with housing, community appeal etc.”
- Social workers are overloaded.

A VISION FOR SUPPORT IN AHOUSAHT

As part of the conversations in Ahousaht, parents, caregivers, and community service providers were invited to envision an improved network of services and supports for children and youth with disabilities and support needs.

In response, people shared their visions for the future of the community including:

More services and supports - OTs, PTs, medical professionals, mental health workers and counsellors.

Consistent supports so the community can access the help they need on a regular and ongoing basis.

Integrated and wrap-around supports are essential so no family or person "is left behind".

Relationship building is essential for the people of Ahousaht. People providing support take the time to listen, understand and meaningfully connect with the people in the community they are supporting. One person said: "I like it when new people that come into our community to help us, show interest in us. Want to learn about our culture and know about all the things we have been through. We are strong. We are still standing. But you must be gentle, kind, and show respect for our culture."

A culturally safe hub in Ahousaht where all services are under one roof where service providers work together, collaborate and offer coordinated, trauma-informed services to local families.

A navigator who helps local families connect to necessary resources, advocates for their children, and supports in the management of paperwork. Many families have expressed that this role is essential, as they feel "exhausted from advocating for their children."

Consistent respite support in the community.

As one parent said, "Having respite services in Ahousaht would be a game changer for many families who have a child [and/or] youth with a disability. We want to keep all our children in Ahousaht, but it can be hard without the right support.

An early intervention team

that works with families and connects them to the necessary supports and developmental assessments.

Connecting children and youth with culture and recreational programs that help establish a healthy lifestyle and better mental health.

A recreational hall that offers an inclusive space for all is also high on the wish list for the people of Ahousaht.

Opportunity for community members **to receive training needed to become a therapy aid.**

Support groups for local families, children and youth to connect with each other.

More EAs in local schools to ensure all children receive classroom support, along with increased training and opportunities for local people to become EAs.

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 www.inclusionbc.org/what-we-do/community-partnerships-engagement/community-led-collaboration-project/.

An aerial photograph of a coastal village. The village features numerous small houses with various roof colors (blue, green, brown) and a large, light-colored oval arena. The village is situated on a peninsula or near a large body of water, with a dense forest of evergreen trees surrounding the area. A sandy beach is visible in the foreground, and a large body of water is to the right. A dark teal semi-transparent box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

IN SUMMARY

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

WHAT WE HEARD IN

Ahousaht

Ahousaht is located on the West Coast of Vancouver Island on the traditional territory of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations.

As one of the largest Indigenous communities on Vancouver Island, Ahousaht has a population of 2,241 people. From August to October 2023, over 50 people from Ahousaht shared their thoughts, ideas and experiences with a local facilitator. In partnership with the Aboriginal Infant Development Program (AIDP) and Aboriginal Supported Child Development Program (ASCD), a community event was held at the Chah Chum Hii Yup Tiic Mis Health Centre attended by 30 local families. The facilitator also held conversations with community members by email and phone.

What's working well in Ahousaht

There are several available supports in the community for local families including:

- community health nurses
- a speech and language pathologist (SLP) who visits the local school
- an audiologist
- a dental hygienist who visits the community

Opportunities for change

Lack of local supports and services

Families feel there aren't enough services to meet the needs of families, and those services that do exist are inconsistent.

Some parents have had to quit work, or moved outside the community to get the supports and services their child needs. There are a lack of physiotherapists (PTs), occupational therapists (OTs), and community nurses and there is no paediatrician or grief and loss counsellor in the community.

Connecting to services is challenging

Families said it's hard to find what they need and navigate the medical system and available supports.

For many families, the paperwork needed to get supports is overwhelming. Families want a case manager who can help them navigate the system and connect them to the services their child needs to thrive

"I know there are probably [funds] out there for [my child]...but I just don't know how to access them."

— Family member/caregiver

Culturally safe respite

Families are struggling to find culturally safe respite.

Families want culturally safe respite and more choice when it comes to choosing respite supports. Several participants shared that they want the Government to speak directly to Indigenous people to find out what they want and need when it comes to respite and other supports.

More staff needed

More staff are needed to meet the needs of the community.

More staff are needed to meet demands in the community. There is a lack of qualified professionals and social workers are overloaded. One family member said, "Services and supports are needed for all Indigenous People in all places in and around Ahousaht."

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

— Community Service Provider

Visions and Solutions

During the conversations in Ahousaht, family members, youth, Elders and community service providers were asked what a better network of services and supports for children and youth with disabilities and support needs could look like in their community. They shared many ideas and solutions.

Culturally safe hub

Families want access to culturally safe services in one place.

Families talked about the need to have all supports under one roof where service providers work together, collaborate and offer coordinated, trauma-informed services to local families.

More EAs and training

Families want more Education Assistants (EAs) in the classroom so their children can get the supports they need, when they need them.

Families also want more training for EAs and more opportunities for local people to get the training needed to become EAs.

Connection to culture and recreational programs

Families want more opportunity to connect children and youth with local culture and recreational programs.

Families want programs that help establish a healthy lifestyle and better mental health. They also want a recreational space where all children and families can play and 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 Ahousaht looks to best support children and youth with disabilities or support needs so they can thrive now and into the future.



Image courtesy of Nora O'Malley