



Community-Led Collaboration Project

The Voice of the Saanich Peninsula



With thanks to the WSÁNEĆ people including five local communities: BO,ŔE,ĆEN (Pauquachin), MÁLEXEL (Malahat), WJOLÉLP (Tsartlip), W,SIKEM (Tseycum), and S,TAUTW (Tsawout)



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Project Background

The Community-Led Collaboration Project (CLCP) provided communities in British Columbia the opportunity to engage in meaningful and inclusive conversations about how to create a better network of services for children and youth with disabilities and/or support needs and their families. Notes from all the conversations have been compiled into this report. The results from all the conversations will be part of a report that is being submitted to Inclusion BC and the CLCP Grant Committee. This and other community reports will be shared with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) with the hopes to inform the future of services for children and youth with support needs (CYSN) in BC. All personal information in this report is confidential, and no individual names or identifying characteristics have been used.

The Community-Led Collaboration Project aims to build on the existing strengths of community-based models and explore what truly collaborative and connected networks can achieve by working together for children and youth with support needs and their families. The community conversations that are included in this report focuses on children and youth who are under the age of nineteen, have an undiagnosed or diagnosed disability, need supports, and/or have possible developmental delays.

These conversations, which were conducted in partnership with Saanich Peninsula communities, will help inform an inclusive, culturally safe, needs-based approach to providing supports and services that consider the specific circumstances of the young people in need of supports and their families who live in these communities, and, importantly, the voices of people who historically have not been represented.

About the Saanich Peninsula

The Saanich Peninsula is home to the traditional territory of the W̱SÁNEĆ people including five local communities: BO,́KE,́CEN (Pauquachin), MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat), W̱JOŁEŁP (Tsartlip), W̱SIKEM (Tseycum), and S,̱AUTW̱ (Tsawout). The Saanich School District encompasses eleven regions including Sidney Island, James Island, and Piers Island, which are accessible only by private boat.

The Saanich Peninsula stretches over 167 square kilometres and houses the Victoria International Airport, and BC Ferry terminals in Brentwood Bay and Swartz Bay—providing access to the mainland, southern Gulf Islands, and communities north of the Malahat.

The District of Saanich's population in 2021 was 117,735 making it the largest municipality in the Capital Regional District, the eighth largest in the province, and the forty-fourth largest in Canada.⁽¹⁾ In 2019, the Saanich Peninsula represented 8.34 percent of Island Health's total population.⁽²⁾ The Saanich School District (SD63) covers part of the District of Saanich, as well as the municipalities of Central Saanich, North Saanich, and the township of Sidney.

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SD63 includes eight elementary, three middle, and three secondary schools, an individual learning centre, the South Island Distance Education School (SIDES), along with the Children's Development Centre & Alternate Learning Program, to help support struggling learners, some of who are managing self-regulation and trauma-related challenges.⁽³⁾

According to the 2023-24 the diverse ability population in SD63 schools includes 1,339 kindergarten through grade 12 students (15 percent of the total number of students enrolled in SD63 schools). The number of youth predicted to age out of SD63 schools over the next three years is estimated to be 493 students.⁽⁴⁾

Resources located on the Saanich Peninsula include a hospital, a youth centre, five licenced day care facilities, medical clinics, parenting support and outreach services, an employment centre, after school care programs at SD63 schools, and Indigenous family and children supports. Access to mental health supports and psychiatry, pediatric care, youth groups, behaviour intervention support centres, and therapy centres all require travel of forty-five to ninety minutes one way by car. However, some therapists travel to the Saanich Peninsula to provide in-home supports.

The Approach to Engagement

The Community-Led Collaboration Project came together to create four guiding principles of inclusive community conversations as a benchmark for the working groups:

Reconciliation and Decolonizing: Reconciliation and decolonization guide our approach to community engagement, which is designed to be inclusive, accessible, and culturally safe, with an approach that makes space for historically excluded voices and perspectives.

Collaboration: The best engagement occurs when all members of a community actively work together to plan an engagement that will inform how they can create improved networks of support for children and youth with disabilities and/or support needs and their families. Inclusive communities are healthier communities, and building inclusive communities is a shared responsibility.

Community-Driven Change: This project presents an opportunity to build on the existing strengths of British Columbia's current system, and challenges each community to address the changes needed to best support children and youth with disabilities and/or support needs and their families.

Transparency and Timeliness: Timely summaries of engagement will be circulated to keep participants informed, which will also help ensure that this report is capturing what is most important to the community.

The Process of Engagement

Pre-Engagement and Engagement Planning

On April 25, 2024, a pre-engagement planning session was conducted to share information on the project and gather community input into the planning process on how to best reach communities to participate in the engagements. Valuable input was provided by British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS), Metis Nation BC, community agencies, Island Health, parent representatives from the District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) for SD64, educators and the FamilySmart and Family Support Institute. In addition, some parents and family members who work in the field and have lived experience with the challenges that children and youth with disabilities and/or who need supports, contributed invaluable feedback.

From June to October 2024, numerous community engagements took place, consisting of families, self-advocates, service providers, and educators. The Community-Led Collaboration Project created safe spaces for conversations and utilized methodologies of an in-person world café format, surveys, and both virtual and in-person discussions for those who preferred not to meet in a group.

Family Engagement

Families on the Peninsula preferred one-to-one discussions instead of meeting in a group. The Community-Led Collaboration Project conducted three in-person interviews with a self-advocating youth and with two families whose children have very complex needs. For these in-person interviews, parents and a grandmother represented the two families. Eight other families also completed online surveys in which they provided thoughtful input.

Service Providers Engagement

An in-person session on June 17, 2024, was held at the ILC (Individual Learning Centre) in Saanichton, 1649 Mount Newton Cross Road. Fifteen service providers participated. Three other service providers completed a written survey.

What We Asked

In all engagements, participants were asked the following three questions:

1. ***What services and supports for children and youth with support needs are working well in your community?***
2. ***What are the gaps in services and supports for children and youth with disabilities or support needs and their families? What is missing or hard to access in terms of services and supports in your community?***
3. ***What does a better network of services and supports look like? What changes or improvements would you like to see in your community so that children and youth with support needs and their families can thrive?***



What We Heard

The following are the overarching conversation themes that arose from the engagements on the Saanich Peninsula:

CONVERSATION THEMES	SUPPORTING DETAILS
<p>Equitable supports</p> <p><i>“Children with high support needs are living longer and requiring more support. Cost of living and supports are rising and the amount of care/ funding has not changed”</i>—Family member</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding is a barrier, and inconsistent funding allocations mean some children with a certain diagnosis get more support than others, regardless of the need. • As youth move toward aging out of MCFD services, they are expected to be able to make informed and important decisions about their lives without the supports to help them truly understand their decisions and possible consequences. Caregivers struggle to advocate for understanding within the system regarding this, which can put vulnerable youth at high risk, especially when there are mental health challenges as well. • Services/ supports need to be flexible to meet the needs of youth and should be person centred. • Insufficient funding for medical equipment and medical supplies
<p>Accessible and available supports</p> <p><i>“My grandson and I may spend over one hour on the bus each way to Victoria. If I include the wait times in the pediatric clinic, this can turn a thirty-minute checkup into a five-hour event”</i>—Family member</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lack of available supports on the Peninsula. Many families are required to travel to Victoria for counselling, BI support, therapy, social groups, and medical/mental health appointments. • There is a huge gap in available social programs for youth ages thirteen to eighteen. <i>“Youth feel a disconnect and isolated living on the Peninsula”</i>—Youth self-advocate • Complex situations often require involvement with complex systems to access supports—very difficult to navigate. • Everyone seems short staffed and there is a lack of respite workers. • Funding gets “eaten up” quickly when there is travel involved and there is an increase in cost of services = less time spent supporting children. • Lack of assessments, long wait lists result in sometimes years of no supports. <i>“Without timely assessments, kids are missing out on early intervention.”</i>—Family member • Lack of after-hours crisis and emergency response supports that understand supporting youth with diverse abilities.

<p>Coordination and Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems such as health, mental health, housing, MCFD, Community Living BC (CLBC), schools, and community agencies often do not communicate together well or share information enough to adequately support a child or youth. This negatively impacts the child/youth and families especially when there are complex medical and mental health needs to be attended to. • Often systems work in silos and do not share information. Care is poorly coordinated. • Families are not always aware of services and supports available. • Use of language for assessments and supports are often deficit based. Really what families need is to have the needs supported and a focus on building strength: “<i>‘The F-words’ framework of family, friends, fitness, function, fun, future.</i>”—Service provider
<p>Mental health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention initiatives are needed for family and children. • Often mental health concerns are not recognized in children or youth with disabilities. They get “dismissed” as autism or another label and are left untreated, potentially resulting in crisis and trauma. • There is a shortage of in-patient child and youth mental health assessment centres and supports. • There is a lack of understanding of mental health emergency services and how to support youth with diverse abilities.
<p>Support through transitions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitioning youth struggle as access to youth programs and supports are often not close to home. • Transitions in general are challenging at any age. They often include a new team, wait times for services and many people involved. “<i>Too many people involved. So confusing as to who does what.</i>”—Parent • Community and schools often wrap around youth in transition. When that transition happens, “<i>Youth on the Peninsula have no where to go. Limited employment support, day programs, mental health support or social groups unless they are willing to take the bus on their own or take Handi-Dart.</i>”—Family member

Saanich Peninsula Solutions Table

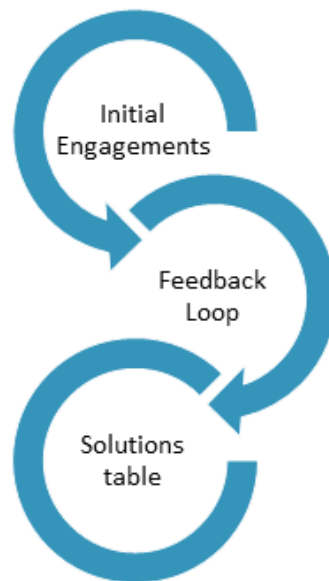
Recommendations

During the Saanich Peninsula Engagements, families, self-advocates and members of the community explored what is working well, where there is room for improvement, and what they envision for the children and youth with support needs in their community.

After the initial engagements were conducted, a follow-up loop took place to ensure that the voices of each person was heard clearly and accurately. Notes of all of the engagements were gathered, and the key findings were brought forward to a diverse and small group of community members, well-versed and knowledgeable about children and youth with disabilities and/or who have support needs. This group came together to collaborate on a Solutions Table.

The Solutions Table working group consisted of parents, a youth self-advocate, educators, and community care providers. Each member has been actively involved in the Project, and they had the opportunity to discuss recommendations to improve services and supports for children and youth with support needs on the Saanich Peninsula.

The Solutions Table identifies recommendations as important to improving supports for children and youth on the Saanich Peninsula. These recommendations align with promoting a holistic, accessible, and a collaborative system for families.



Vision #1

The Saanich Peninsula has accessible and equitable supports and services to meet the needs of all children in every aspect of their lives.

What steps/ solutions are required to achieve this Vision?	Who needs to be involved to bring these solutions to life
<p>Implement a Flexible, Person-Centered Functional Needs-Based Funding Model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a funding system based on needs rather than diagnosis or age. This model should be flexible, scalable, and sufficient to meet the needs of individual children and their families, regardless of whether they access services from the provincial programs: Children and Youth with Support Needs (CYSN), Community Living BC (CLBC), or Persons with Disabilities (PWD). The funding should continue even if the family moves to another region. • Allow families to choose between self-directed funding, public system programs, or a hybrid of both, depending on their needs at any given time. Families should be able to change their funding arrangement as their circumstances evolve, ensuring they always have the best possible support options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration of multiple provincial ministries, service providers, family and children/youth
<p>Community-Based Systems Navigation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a community-based navigator role to assist families in making informed choices about services. Navigators should be employed through local non-profit organizations and be able to collaborate with government systems to support families holistically. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-profit Peninsula Family Service (perhaps they could contract out the navigator role); MCFD; Child & Youth Mental Health (CYMH) program

<p>Strength-Based Service Models</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift service delivery to focus on the strengths of children and families rather than on deficits. Community support providers and frontline responders should adopt respectful, strength-based approaches that promote empowerment and celebrate diversity, avoiding deficit-based language in assessments and communications. • A proactive collaboration with government agencies, community supports, families, and local municipalities to educate and promote inclusion and equity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peninsula service providers, first responders; emergency room staff at local hospitals; RCMP and police officers • Health authority (Island Health Clinical Assessment teams); MCFD • Education partners
<p>Centralized Information and Communications Hub</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an inclusive, centralized resource hub where families are supported to learn and can access <i>up-to-date</i> information about available services and eligibility for programs related to the specific needs of their children/youth. This hub would be relevant to the Peninsula community and connected to a larger network, and would be funded adequately to ensure long-term relevance by regular updates and regular maintenance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health authority (Island Health); PWD; Provincial Ministry of Information Management & Technology
<p>Streamlined Consent-Based Information Sharing & Support Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a streamlined consent-based centralized database for sharing information across systems (health, education, social services) to minimize the repetition of paperwork and ensure that professionals can collaborate seamlessly on a child or youth’s care plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health authority (Island Health); CYMH; PWD; Peninsula family service providers; education partners.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a process that takes into account what is needed for individuals to adequately access the supports that they need. If the child or youth requires support, there is a trusted team of family and professionals that may assent on their behalf. 	
<p>Increase Support for Transportation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide community-based, accessible transportation options for families, especially those living on the Saanich Peninsula. This would help reduce the burden of long travel times to Victoria for medical, mental health, and social services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing transportation options such as Provincial Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure; BC Transit; Peninsula transportation services (both businesses & non-profits), volunteer driving programs

Vision #2

Saanich Peninsula family and youth are well supported during major transitions. Transitions are seamless, person-centred, and youth/children’s needs are met.

What steps/ solutions are required to achieve this vision?	Who needs to be involved to bring these solutions to life?
<p>Seamless Transitions Across Systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that funding and services remain uninterrupted during transitions due to age, geography, or systems, and that transition support follows through to see that children’s needs are met. This includes having early and ongoing adequate supports in planning during the transition process, allowing for seamless service continuity, reducing stress on families, and following through to see the transition to completion. • Transitions should be coordinated by someone who is supporting the transition from start to successful completion, ensuring that no gaps in service or funding occur during these critical periods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MCFD, Health authority (Island Health); CYMH; education partners; Peninsula Family Service, ideally involved in a “navigator” role, as mentioned in Vision 1); adult community living programs
<p>Collaborative “Circle of Care” Approach</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a collaborative, wrap-around, circle-of-care approach during transitions. This includes bringing together all services to ensure that children’s support systems are unified and all professionals and key persons are working toward person- and family-centred common goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peninsula Family Service; Health authority (Island Health clinicians and experts, including CYMH); education partners (including school case managers and other support staff); MCFD; adult community living programs
<p>Expanded Flexible Referral Options for Assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create functional needs-based assessments that are free and accessible, with mobile assessment teams to reduce wait times. These assessments should be available within the community and should 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peninsula Family Service; child, youth & family counsellors, both private and non-profit; CYMH; MCFD; education partners; family doctors

<p>incorporate input from various environments (e.g., school, childcare), and be used to develop individualized care plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broaden the list of professionals who can refer children for assessments, including counselors, mental health professionals, and childcare providers. This ensures that children with support needs are identified early and receive timely interventions. 	
<p>Develop a Reliable Historian for Data and Documentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that a reliable historian is in place to document each child’s journey and retain accurate data across their life. This would ensure consistent information transfer during transitions and reduce the need for repeated assessments. The historian role may be filled by the family or caregiver of each child or youth served; but could also be a contracted role to a Peninsula non-profit organization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family or caregiver of child or youth served; Peninsula Family Service organizations
<p>Eliminate Labels that Stigmatize</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work toward eliminating the stigma associated with certain diagnoses, such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), by using assessment frameworks that focus on the child’s strengths and functional needs rather than solely on labels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health authority (Island Health Clinical Assessment teams); Peninsula disability and family service providers

In Summary – What We Heard on the Saanich Peninsula

What Is Working Well

- Flexibility with autism funding provides opportunities for families to choose the supports that are best suited to individual children/youth.
- Flexibility with school programs are person centred.
- Community Services work well with families.
- *“Group homes on the Peninsula are children and family focused and caring.” –Parent*
- *“Relationships with the RCMP and Emergency Services is good on the Peninsula and they work hard with families to support and understand the needs of our children” –Parent*

Opportunities for Change

More Local Resources Needed Especially for Youth Thirteen to Eighteen Years Old:

- Areas that are especially wanting are youth activities and employment support.
- Local mental health resources are desperately needed for children, youth, and families.

Communication Across Systems:

- Systems focusing on health, mental health, housing, MCFD, CLBC, schools and community agencies are siloed and often do not communicate well together or share information enough to adequately support children and youth.

Coordination and Supports:

- Complex care and transitions can be overwhelming for families. *“Too many people involved. So confusing as to who does what” –Parent*
- Families want additional navigation supports to help understand what services are available and how to access them.

Visions and Solutions- Summary

Vision 1: The Saanich Peninsula has accessible and equitable supports and services to meet the needs of all children in every aspect of their lives.

Solutions:

- Implement a flexible, person-centred, functional, needs-based funding model.
- Create community-based systems navigation.
- Build strength-based service models.
- Develop centralized information and communications hub.
- Develop process for streamlined, consent-based, information sharing, and support access.

Vision 2: Saanich Peninsula family and youth are well supported during major transitions. Transitions are seamless, person-centred, and youth/children's needs are met.

Solutions:

- Develop processes for seamless transitions across systems.
- Integrate a collaborative "Circle of Care" approach.
- Expand flexible referral options for assessments.
- Develop a reliable historian for data and documentation.
- Eliminate labels that stigmatize.

References

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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 the Saanich Peninsula looks for ways to best support children and youth with disabilities or support needs so they can thrive now and into the future.

Photos: Thanks to Mike Symons

