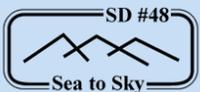


# Community-Led Collaboration in The Sea to Sky Corridor



*Image by Tara O'Grady*



Sea to Sky Community Services provides programs and services to communities on the lands of the Skwxwú7mesh Nation People and the Southern St'at'imx Nations of Lílwat, Samahquam, Skatin, Xa'xtsa and N'Quatqua. We are committed to supporting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations through intentional and meaningful partnerships and program delivery.

# TO OUR COMMUNITY: *Thank you,*

We want to express our gratitude to the children, youth, families, and service providers who generously shared their time, stories, and perspectives as part of this project. Your lived experiences and insights are the foundation of this work, and we are committed to ensuring that your voices continue to guide the transformation of services for children and youth with disabilities and support needs in the Sea to Sky Corridor.

Special thank you to the following people for providing leadership, expertise, and support throughout the project:

- Chelsie Brubacher, Director of Service Delivery, Sea to Sky Community Services
- Carmen Hartle, Manager, Ayas Lam Family Program and Early Intervention Services
- Phillip Clark, Director of Instruction: Learning Services, School District 48
- Sarah McJannet, Senior Planner, District of Squamish
- Sharada Clayton, Manager of Youth Services, Foundry
- Julie Van Eesteren, Manager of Children's Service, Sea to Sky Community Services
- Kristine Good, Manager Rural Coastal Public Health and Prevention Sea to Sky and Sunshine Coast, Vancouver Coastal Health
- Christine Burns, Manager of Recreation Services, Villiage of Pemberton
- Pam Deane, Program Supervisor Recreation, Resort Municipality of Whistler

Lastly, we would like to thank Inclusion BC, the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centers, the BC Association of Child Development and Intervention and The Federation of Community Social Services of BC for making the Community-Led Collaboration Project possible by providing funding and expertise.



**Jaye Russel**  
SSCS Executive Director

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# The Community-Led Collaboration Project

## Vision



To create an inclusive, responsive system of services that ensures all children and youth with diagnosed or undiagnosed disabilities, diverse abilities or support needs can meaningfully participate in family and community life. It aims to center the voices of families, youth, and service providers, particularly those who have been historically excluded, in shaping the future of support services in British Columbia.



## Goals

To gather diverse perspectives from children, youth, families, and service providers to identify barriers to accessing services and inform changes to the system. Through community-led feedback and conversations, the project seeks to ensure that the needs and experiences of those most affected are at the heart of service transformation, leading to better outcomes for children and youth with disabilities, diverse abilities and support needs.

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Community-Led Collaboration Project was initiated in response to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)'s announcement in 2021 of a new framework for delivering services to Children and Youth with Support Needs (CYSN) in British Columbia.

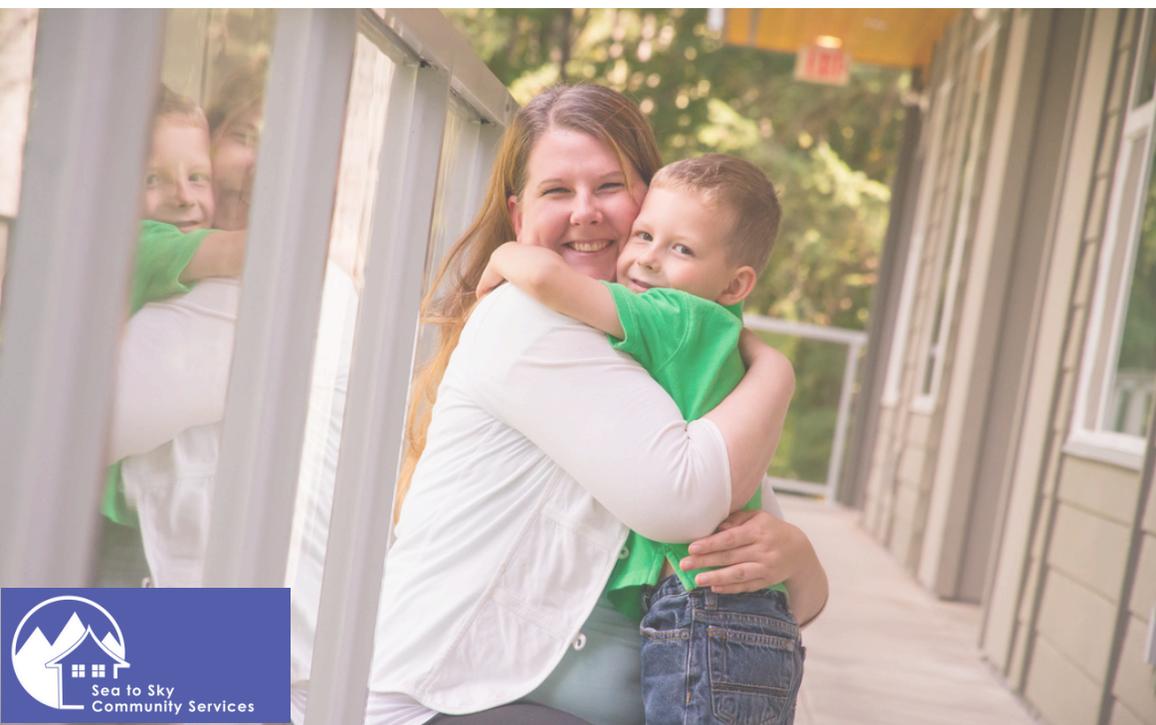
This new framework caused confusion and concern across the province, as families, service providers, and communities were not confident that the changes would adequately address the needs of children and youth with disabilities or diverse abilities.

Many called for greater consultation to ensure that these changes would reflect the real-life experiences of children, youth, and their families

In response, the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC), the BC Association of Child Development and Intervention (BCACDI), The Federation of Community Social Services, and Inclusion BC formed a Provincial Working Group to advocate for a more community-informed approach to shaping these services.

As a result MCFD provided the Provincial Working Group with funding to conduct a broad, community-based engagement process across the province.

Launched in 2022, the Community-Led Collaboration Project focuses on gathering feedback from children, youth, families, and service providers, to better understand the barriers to accessing services for children and youth aged 0-19 with disabilities, whether diagnosed or undiagnosed, who need support to participate fully in family and community life.



# Four Guiding Principles of Inclusive Community Conversations

## Reconciliation & Decolonizing

Our approach to community engagement is grounded in reconciliation and decolonization. We are dedicated to fostering engagement that is inclusive, accessible, and culturally respectful, ensuring that space is created for voices and perspectives that have been historically excluded.

## Collaboration

Our approach encourages collaboration within communities to design an engagement process that will help strengthen support networks for children and youth with disabilities or support needs and their families. Building inclusive communities fosters healthier environments, and this is a responsibility we all share.

## Community-driven Change

Our engagement offers a chance to build on the strengths of British Columbia's current system while identifying the changes necessary to better support children and youth with disabilities, diverse abilities and/or support needs, along with their families.

## Transparency and Timeliness

Timely engagement summaries will be shared to keep participants informed and ensure that the community's key perspectives are accurately reflected.

# The Approach We Took

## *At a glance*

The project was led by Sea to Sky Community Services (SSCS) and takes a collaborative approach by working directly with community members and organizations in the Sea to Sky Corridor, including Squamish, Whistler, Pemberton, and surrounding areas. Its goal is to ensure that the voices of families, youth, and service providers are heard, especially those from groups that have historically been underrepresented or excluded.

## Community Advisors

To ensure that our project was guided by the voices and needs of the community, strategic partnerships were formed with key stakeholders in the Sea to Sky Corridor (pg.06). These partnerships were essential in shaping the design, distribution, and focus of the surveys and outreach efforts. They helped facilitate community engagement, provided insights on service delivery, and ensured that diverse voices, including Indigenous and youth's perspectives were represented. Their contributions were instrumental in creating a collaborative approach that reflects the needs and strengths of the Sea to Sky Corridor.

## ACCESSIBLE SURVEYS

We developed two surveys—one for families and youth and another for service providers—to gather insights from a range of perspectives. These surveys promoted broader participation leading us to capture many voices. This approach allowed respondents to provide more detailed feedback while remaining anonymous, ultimately enhancing our understanding of the barriers and supports needed within the community.



**Understand the strengths, gaps, and the challenges**



**Understand the barriers to access and gaps in services**



**Understand what better supports look like**

## ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

Following the survey, we invited participants to join a series of engagement sessions aimed at fostering small-circle conversations. These sessions focused on discussing what is working well, identifying service gaps and barriers, and envisioning a stronger network of support. Sessions were hosted in libraries where tea and snacks were served, creating a welcoming atmosphere, and a \$20 contribution was offered to help parents with childcare costs. One youth session took place during regular drop-in hours at the Foundry Youth Center with pizza, while a virtual session was held for service providers working with Indigenous families.

# ABOUT SEA TO SKY COMMUNITY SERVICES (SSCS)

## OVERVIEW

Operating since 1978, Sea to Sky Community Services (SSCS) is the largest non-profit community service provider in the Sea to Sky Corridor. They provide 42+ programs and services that address child care, affordable housing, mental health, education, social supports, and more, to communities on the lands of the Skwxwú7mesh Nation People and the Southern Stl'at'imx Nations of Líl'wat, Samahquam, Skatin, Xa'xtsa and N'Quatqua. Their partnerships and broad expertise position them uniquely to lead this project, fostering a locally informed approach to improving supports for children and youth in their communities.

## SERVICES

Specific to this project, SSCS provides critical support for families and children with support needs through various programs:

- Childcare and Afterschool Care Services
- Youth and Young Adult Services
- Child Development Programs
- Children's Programs
- Adult and Family Services

## SERVING THE REGIONS

### Squamish

In 2023, SSCS served 3,661 people in Squamish and surrounding areas such as Britannia Beach<sup>1</sup>

### Whistler

In 2023, SSCS served 590 people in Whistler<sup>1</sup>

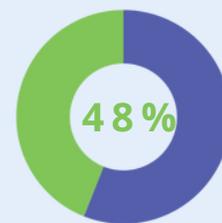
### Pemberton

In 2023 SSCS served 1,661 people in Pemberton and surrounding areas such as D'Arcy and Lil'wat Nation<sup>1</sup>

## AT A GLANCE

# 2,616

children received help in developing language, physical, cognitive, social and emotional skills annually<sup>2</sup>



of SSCS program participants are between the ages of 0-18<sup>2</sup>

# 251

youth participate in Foundry Sea to Sky services annually<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Sea to Sky Community Services. (2023). 2023 Annual Report . SSCS. [https://www.sscs.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022\\_23-annual-report.pdf](https://www.sscs.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022_23-annual-report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Sea to Sky Community Services. (2024). 2024 Annual Report . SSCS. [https://www.sscs.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024\\_SSCS\\_Annual-Report.pdf-1-1.pdf](https://www.sscs.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024_SSCS_Annual-Report.pdf-1-1.pdf)

# Strategic Partnerships

Sea to Sky Community Services (SSCS) has a well-established partnership with the partnered organizations involved in this project. The collaboration between these partners dates back to 2002 when they came together under the "Putting Children First" initiative. This initiative aimed to coordinate service delivery and identify gaps in services for children and families within the Sea to Sky Corridor. Although the funding to support this initiative eventually ended, the strong connections between the organizations led to the formation of the "Sea to Sky Collaborate for Kids Table" to continue the work of coordinating services for children and addressing service gaps.

This collaborative platform allows key community service providers and stakeholders to share insights, align resources, and develop comprehensive strategies for supporting children with support needs. The Table includes representatives from SSCS, School District 48, Squamish Nation, municipal governments, and other local service providers.

The overall vision is a safe, inclusive community, empowering children and families to be whole—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Their mission is the collaboration of stakeholders from the Sea to Sky Corridor, dedicated to supporting families and meeting the comprehensive needs of children from birth to age 12.

Currently, the Table meets four times a year and is co-facilitated by SSCS and School District 48, fostering continued collaboration to ensure that the vision of creating a safe and inclusive community for all children and families is realized. This partnership continues to guide the engagement process for the current project, with a focus on empowering children aged 0-19 and their families throughout the region.





## Safety

We designed the survey and engagement activities to ensure privacy and confidentiality, fostering open sharing. Partner feedback helped make the survey culturally safe and accessible, creating a secure environment for participants to share their experiences.



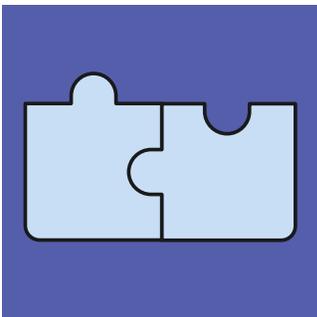
## Connection

We focused on creating a sense of belonging by hosting multiple engagement sessions targeted for different communities, and encouraging peer support. These sessions encouraged open dialogue fostering inclusivity and promoting the representation of many voices ensuring everyone felt heard and supported. Through this approach, we aimed to build a stronger, more connected community.



## Conversation

We prioritized open communication by offering multiple formats for engagement, including surveys, email, phone, social media, in-person, and virtual community-led conversations. Open-ended options for all questions allowed participants to express their experiences and suggestions freely, promoting a respectful and inclusive dialogue throughout the process.



## Collaboration

Collaboration was central to the success of this project. We co-created the survey and engagement strategy with our community advisors. Community feedback was continuously integrated ensuring the conversations and engagement process were community-led. This collective approach ensured the project was deeply rooted in the community's diverse needs and perspectives, creating a truly inclusive and reflective initiative.



## Community

Our approach centered on empowering families and service providers by ensuring their voices shaped the project. Through follow-up meetings and updates, we reinforced that this project was about more than gathering data—it was about fostering a stronger, more connected community that supports everyone.



# About The Sea to Sky Corridor

The Sea to Sky Corridor is a region on the coastal mainland of British Columbia, north of Vancouver, encompassing the municipalities of Squamish, Whistler, and Pemberton. This region is located on the unceded ancestral territories of the Coast Salish and Interior Salish Peoples and includes communities on the lands of the Skwxwú7mesh Nation People and the Southern Stl'at'imx Nations of Lílwat, Samahquam, Skatin, Xa'xtsa and N'Quatqua.

Squamish, Whistler, and Pemberton are among the fastest-growing communities in the province. Compared to the provincial growth rate of 7.6% from 2016-2021, the Sea to Sky Corridor is increasing 24% on average<sup>3</sup>. At the same time, the cost of living such as housing continues to rise significantly. In Squamish, the percentage of households spending over 30% of their income on housing increased from 21.9% to 23.2% between 2016 and 2021<sup>4</sup>.

This economic strain, combined with rapid growth necessitates us, as a community, to understand how the needs of children and families with diverse abilities and support needs are changing and growing and how collectively we can better meet those needs.

<sup>3</sup>Statistics Canada. 2023. (table). Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released November 15, 2023

<sup>4</sup>CitySpaces Consulting. (2023, April). Housing Needs Report District of Squamish. <https://squamish.ca/assets/Affordable-Housing-General/230418SquamishHNRFINAL.pdf>

# The Populations

## Squamish

From 2016 to 2021, the population of Squamish grew by 22% reaching 23,819<sup>3</sup>. By 2046, the population is expected to grow another 53%, 10% more than the provincial average<sup>5</sup>. In Squamish, there are 4,450 children aged 0-14 and 1,055 youth aged 15-19, in total making up 22.1% of the population which is considerably higher than the provincial average of 19.4% for this age group<sup>3</sup>.

## Whistler

From 2016 to 2021 the population of Whistler grew 19%<sup>3</sup>. As of 2021, Whistler has a population of 13,982, with 1,555 children aged 0-14 and 640 youth aged 15-19, making up a total 15.7% of the population<sup>3</sup>. By 2046 the total population is estimated to grow by 66% to 23,147<sup>5</sup>.

## Pemberton

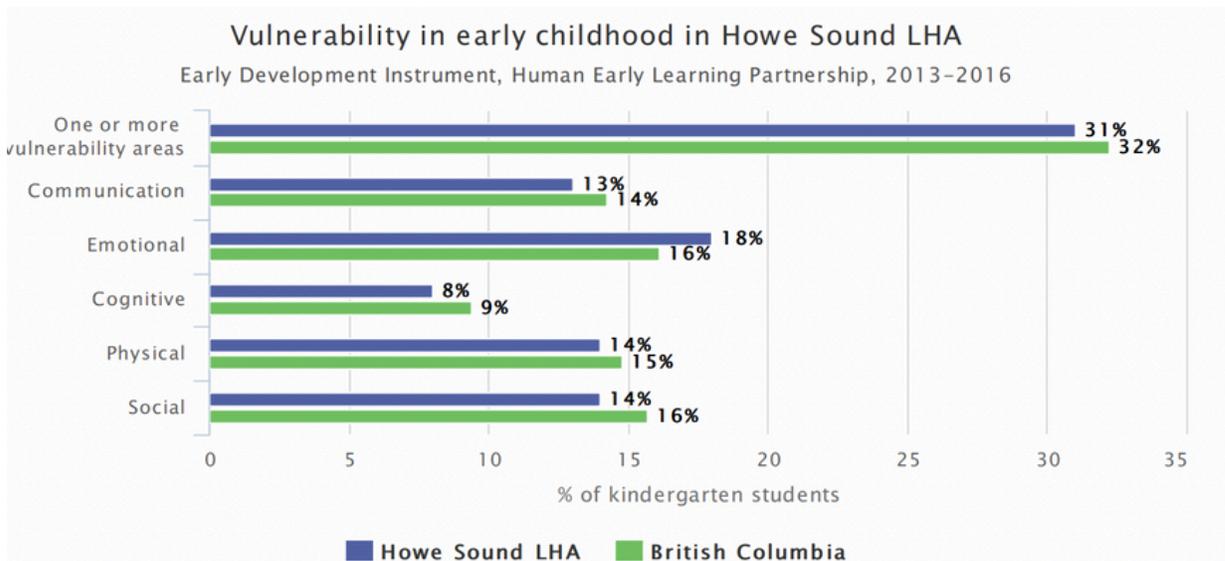
From 2016 to 2021 the population of Pemberton grew by 32% to a population of 3,407 and is projected to grow to 5,407 by 2046<sup>5</sup>. Currently, children and youth represent 22.5% of the population with 665 children aged 0-14 and 140 youth aged 15-19<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>Statistics Canada. 2023. (table). Census Profile. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released November 15, 2023

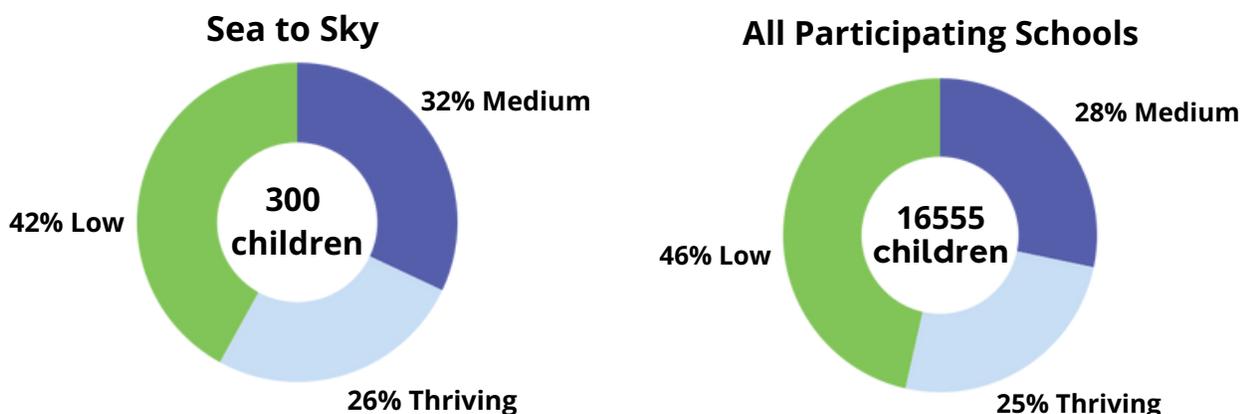
<sup>5</sup>Government of British Columbia. (n.d.). Population Estimates & Projections for British Columbia. BC Population Estimates & Projections. <https://bcstats.shinyapps.io/popApp/>

# Child Development

The **Early Development Instrument (EDI)** measures kindergarten children's vulnerability in five areas—social, physical, cognitive, emotional, and communication—providing insights into where support is needed. In the Sea to Sky Corridor, 31% of children are vulnerable on at least one area of development<sup>6</sup>. The graph below illustrates the percentage of children vulnerable in each domain, offering a clearer picture of where targeted support may be needed<sup>6</sup>.



The **Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI)** measures children's well-being in grades 4 to 8 across key areas—social, emotional, physical health, and connectedness—helping identify where additional support may be needed for their healthy development. In the Sea to Sky Corridor, 31% of grade 5s and 42% of grade 8s report low levels of well-being<sup>7, 8</sup>. The figure below compares the well-being of grade 8 students in the Sea to Sky Corridor with the average results from all participating schools in British Columbia<sup>8</sup>.



<sup>6</sup>Human Early Learning Partnership. Early Development Instrument [EDI] report. Wave 7 Community Profile, 2019. Sea to Sky School District (SD48). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Medicine, School of Population and Public Health; February 2020.

<sup>7</sup>Human Early Learning Partnership. Middle Years Development Instrument [MDI] Grade 5 report. School District Results, 2023-2024. Sea to Sky (SD48). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, School of Population and Public Health; May 2024.

<sup>8</sup>D48). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, School of Population and Public Health; May 2024

# Engagement & Reach

## Squamish

**77**  
families/  
youth

## Whistler

**13**  
families

## Pemberton & surrounding areas

**36**  
families

## Marketing

We utilized a range of approaches to ensure broad outreach:

- Contacted over 100 relevant businesses and organizations asking them to share with their communities.
- Ran 3 paid advertisements on Facebook and Instagram over 7 weeks and reposted on local pages. These efforts resulted in 76% of our survey respondents.
- Strategic partners shared the survey through their networks.
- Posters were distributed throughout the communities.

**112** Families + **45** Service Providers  
**completed online surveys**

## Engagement Sessions

- **2 families** attended in **Squamish**
- **5 families** attended in **Pemberton**
- **11 youth participated** at the **Foundry Sea to Sky Youth Hub**
- **9 service providers** working closely with **Indigenous families** attended a virtual session

# What We Heard

## Overview

Across the Sea to Sky area, we gathered insights from approximately 185 participants, including 116 families, 14 youth and 54 service providers. We heard from 63 families in Squamish, 13 in Whistler, 30 in Pemberton, and 10 Indigenous families from communities such as Squamish Nation, Lil'wat Nation, D'Arcy, and Samahquam (Q'aLaTKu7eM).

Through both surveys and small circle discussions, we focused on three core questions:

- 1. What services and supports for children and youth with disabilities, diverse abilities or support needs are working well in our community?**
- 2. What are the gaps in services or barriers to accessing supports in the community?**
- 3. What does a better network of services and supports look like in our community?**



# Key Insights from Families in *Squamish*

## What is Working Well

**61%**

of respondents who utilized children services at SSCS reported being satisfied with the programs

Many felt supported as new parents and during their child's early years

"Staff are great everywhere"

**78%**

of respondents who utilized child and family services reported staff as respectful & courteous

## Opportunities for Improvement

### Availability to Meet Demand

- **61%** reported being waitlisted for services.
- "There are very few practitioners in town so we again face waitlists and having to pull my child out of school in order to receive care."
- "By the time we got a spot it was not possible to attend."
- "Insufficient services for size of population, especially daycare and after school care."
- "Waitlisted my child's entire life for childcare, now in school and still waitlisted for before and after school care. So I've had to take part-time work instead."

### Service Navigation

- "Its hard to find out unless you are digging!"
- "Its hard to find out about what programming is available."
- "[They] are hard to find out about where/when they are happening."
- "I didn't find out about [programs] for a long time."

### Safety and Stigma

- "The language and intake form made me feel bad so I stopped going."
- "I attended a ... support group, which I found to be offensive and unsafe."
- "People don't understand our needs and perceive us as difficult when we try to front load so our kids can be successful."
- "[My children] were not welcomed or supported in a way that makes their participation successful."

## Education and Training for Service Providers

- “Public services aren’t educated on how to work with special needs children.”
- “Daycares we have previously attending were highly not trained in special needs, could use some assistance in trauma informed care and appropriately educated to learn about how to professionally discipline children with neurodivergence.”
- “Hard to find recreational services that have staff that are trained in engaging/supporting kids with neurodiversities.”

## Consistent Service Availability Across Age Groups

- “Lots of support in the infant development stages, great support with child care services, but now that my child is school age, we feel less supported.”
- “These [programs] are all for younger kids. Once kids reach school age we are pretty much on our own.”
- “They age out and you’re dropped and now they are problem young adults with bigger mental issues.”
- “There are less opportunity and programming for school aged children from 5-12.”
- “We had more supports when my son was younger (pre-school age), less now that we're in the school system.”

# Youth Feedback

## What’s Working Well

- Walk-in and free mental health and physical services make support accessible.
- The Youth Hub at Foundry Sea to Sky providing food, showers and laundry amenities.
- “I feel supported by school and Foundry.”
- “The youth hub being open 3 days a week for us to hang out at.”

## Opportunities for Improvement

- Better advertising and information about what services are available and how to access them.
- Better transportation options for youth.
- More recreational spaces (ex. bowling alley) and programs to connect with peers and make new friends.
- More inclusivity, equity and equality.



# What We Heard in *Squamish*

Through our engagement, we heard a mix of appreciation and frustration from families in the community. Some programs and services were highlighted for their dedication and impact, while systemic barriers like difficult service navigation, long waitlists, insufficient service availability and difficult transitional periods were consistent challenges.

When asked, “what is working well” several service providers were highlighted for their compassionate, dedicated and attentive care. A parent said, “I was really impressed with how attentive and responsive [Staff Member] has been... with our daughter’s caseload. She’s been a true partner, putting her needs at the forefront, and we’ve seen the remarkable differences it has made for her.” Another praised the dedication of the local Occupational Therapy (OT) and Physical Therapy (PT) team: “We LOVE the OT/PT team—they are amazing people who go above and beyond to support children and families in Squamish.”

Families expressed gratitude for several programs that provide meaningful support. Programs like Mother Goose, Strong Start, Infant Development Program (IDP) and Healthy Pregnancy Outreach Program (HPOP) were frequently mentioned as being helpful for parents and young children. One participant shared, “HPOP, Mother Goose, and IDP are excellent programs. Very community-oriented and welcoming.” Overall, services supporting families through early interventions were praised: “When my child was before Kindergarten, free child development support programs like physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language helped us a lot.”

Another positive experience expressed was the value of community and peer networks in navigating the system. One family shared, “Being in a community with other home learners facing similar challenges has been invaluable. Together, we can advocate for most of the things our children need.” Programs that foster community among parents, such as HPOP and Child Care Resource and Referral Program (CCRR) playgroups, were valued, especially for families who lack other forms of social support.

However, many families face significant challenges accessing services, particularly due to lengthy waitlists and limited program availability. Families expressed frustrations with the lack of accessible services, especially for neurodiverse children. One parent expressed, “While I’ve done extensive research, there are no programs that suit the needs of my child or our family in the corridor. When I called... years ago, there was nothing in place to support families like ours.” Additionally, several parents shared concerns about the absence of after-school and recreational programs that could adequately support their child. Some parents reported waiting years to access services like before- and after-school care or specialized services such as occupational therapy and Speech language pathology, with some ultimately giving up due to the overwhelming demand it takes to advocate for care. Others felt there are a lack of appropriate recreational activities for their children, with access to sports programs and especially, swimming lessons being a concern. Overall, 67% would like to see additional recreational programs in their community.

A recurring theme was the perceived shortage of trained staff, the lack of appropriate training among staff, and specialized programs to support children with diverse needs. Some families noted that daycares, child services and recreational programs often lack training in support needs, particularly trauma-informed care and strategies for supporting neurodivergent children. Parents emphasized the need for staff education in professional discipline, de-escalation techniques, and inclusivity to create supportive environments. One parent shared, "We were asked to withdraw our child with support needs from a former daycare due to lack of support staff," while another highlighted the lack of training in areas like Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), stating, "There's a lack of support staff to help neurodiverse children, and many practitioners are not specifically educated about FASD." Parents noted the absence of trained respite options and the unrealistic expectation for neurodiverse youth to engage in services without sufficient support. Many families also struggled to find recreational services with adequately trained staff to engage and support children with neurodiversity, reflecting a broader gap in training and understanding for working with children who benefit from extra support to participate in programming.

Concerns were raised about the limited information and lack of awareness regarding available programs and services. Several families expressed frustration that they had to rely on self-research to find out about programs, often missing out on opportunities due to insufficient communication. Some respondents noted that it was difficult to know what services existed even after actively looking and felt they could not learn about certain supports unless they had internal or community connections. In some instances, families felt that they discovered support after they were needed or not at all. For example, some families learnt about Positive Discipline and youth services when completing this survey. This lack of visibility has left many families feeling unsupported and unsure of how to access the services they need.

Parents also shared that the advocacy required to secure support for their children is exhausting, often involving substantial frontloaded effort. This process can leave parents feeling overwhelmed and undervalued, as many feel unheard when communicating their child's needs to service providers. They expressed a strong desire for greater respect and validation of their expertise as parents, emphasizing that they know what would benefit their child. Additionally, a lack of clear and consistent communication between service providers and families further compounds these challenges, leaving parents feeling disconnected and unsupported. For example, parents would like to be informed when a substitute service provider will be filling in so that they can prepare their child for the change in routine.

As children age, families report a decrease in available support, particularly for school-aged children. While many feel there is strong support in early childhood, the transition to the school-aged years often leaves families feeling unsupported. One parent shared that there was "lots of support in the infant development stages, great support with child care services, but now that my child is school age, we feel less supported." For some families, the uncertainty of continued services as their children grow older is a significant concern: "I worry that my child will lose every opportunity once they become a youth." Parents expressed concerns about the future, particularly when their child transitions from youth to adulthood or has already aged out yet continues to require additional support to fully engage in family and community life.

Lastly, some emphasized the importance of inclusive designs when creating physical spaces to ensure that children with physical disabilities can participate fully alongside their peers. One family highlighted the need to make all playgrounds accessible for wheelchair users, highlighting that materials like wood chips are not wheelchair-friendly. They suggested incorporating elements that can be enjoyed by children with disabilities, wheelchair users, and able-bodied children alike, fostering a sense of community where all children can play together.

# Key Insights from Families in *Whistler*

## What is Working Well

**89%**

of respondents who utilized child and family services reported **staff as respectful & courteous**

- **Playgroups** are valued.
- **Small gestures**, like offering hot teas, make a positive impact.
- **Community events**, such as the end-of-summer BBQ, bring families together.

**"I felt like I had good support for helping me and my children deal with every day"**

## Opportunities for Improvement

### Accessibility of Services

- **67%** reported that services were unavailable and/or location and transportation were barriers.
- "My child can not do virtual meetings, but would greatly benefit from more support."
- "Very little offered in Whistler."
- "We need to travel to Squamish for most services, which can take time, and additional costs (gas, time off work) to accommodate."

### Service Navigation

- "I found that piecing everything together was a bit time consuming and I ended up finding my needs met through many word of mouth recommendations/and a lot of time spent online emailing and following up."
- "Schools [should be] more upfront about IEP's and how one must advocate for them."
- "It has been a battle to learn about different programs... a lot of supports (esp in schools) are not told to families, so we missed out on things."

### Consistent Service Availability Across Age Groups

- "There's a gap for toddlers who are too old for infant programs...who are also not old enough for camp and no spots for daycare. The 18mo to 3yo or maybe beyond are missing out on all sorts of educational opportunities."
- "We aged out of applicable programs."
- "More in-person supports in Whistler for struggling pre-teens and teens would be great."



# What We Heard in *Whistler*

Whistler, in particular, was reported as lacking essential resources, with families expressing a need for more in-person local services. Sixty seven percent of respondents reported that either services were unavailable and/or location and transportation were primary barriers in accessing services for their family, as many services are only available in Squamish or Pemberton. Play therapists, for example, were unavailable when some families needed them, and others felt there was a gap in behavioural interventionists and friendship groups. Parents suggested that currently, there are no local programs offered specifically for neurodiverse students and children in Whistler, with many feeling the current services do not fit their family's unique needs. Additionally, parents would appreciate more support for children dealing with severe childhood trauma.

Families are asking schools to be more transparent about Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and how parents need to advocate for them. Limited financial support for private psychological assessments is a concern, as many children are left out or experience long waitlists for school-provided assessments, especially those who are not disruptive in class. The cost of private assessments and behaviour therapy is a significant financial burden for many families, with more affordable options needed.

Parents with young children voiced frustrations with the gaps in services for toddlers. Once children are too old for infant programs but not yet old enough for camps, parents find themselves without support, leaving children missing out on educational opportunities. Specifically, more accessible childcare support is requested, as current options are limited and often come with significant financial barriers for single and/or low-income households.

Specifically, in-person support for pre-teens and teens is highly requested, along with better access to psychiatry services for this age group, as follow-up appointments are difficult to secure. There is a clear desire for more mental health support for teens beyond what Child and Youth Mental Health (CYMH) offers, such as local Foundry Outreach Workers. There is also a desire for the Foundry app to be fully functional for making in-person appointments across Whistler, Squamish, and Pemberton easier once these services are expanded.

Families emphasized the importance of staff working with children receiving inclusivity training to ensure that children with neurodiversities, physical disabilities, or other support needs feel truly included. This training would help staff create environments where all children are welcomed and valued, fostering a sense of belonging rather than leaving some children feeling excluded. As one parent shared, "It's about making sure every child is part of the circle, not left outside of it." Parents feel inclusivity training could equip service providers with the skills and understanding needed to adapt activities and interactions, ensuring that all children can participate meaningfully.

# Key Insights from Families in *Pemberton*

## What is Working Well

**67%**

of respondents who utilized children services at SSCS **reported being satisfied with the programs**

**“Supported Child Development was a blessing when my child was in an early years program.”**

**70%**

of respondents who utilized child and family services reported **staff as respectful & courteous**

## Opportunities for Improvement

### Childcare Availability

- “I have been on the waitlist for over 3 years for daycare.”
- “There are 270 children waitlisted for care in Pemberton, ours being one of them”
- “We are a family with two working parents. I need childcare so that I can go to work.”

### Services Specialized for Neurodiverse Children

- “[There is a] huge gap in services and activities for [Neurodiverse] kids and families.”
- “Even if we travel for services there are waitlists for OT everywhere”
- “I don’t even know what programs are available for age 7 neurodiverse children.”

### Transportation & Accessing Services

- **55%** reported location and transportation as a barrier to accessing services
- “The services that are available are wonderful and the staff do a most fantastic job, but sometimes it feels like winning a golden ticket if you can access them”.
- “Going to Squamish or Vancouver regularly isn't realistic for our family”



# What we Heard in *Pemberton*

Many families suggested that when they could access services they were very satisfied with them. For example, there are positive experiences with programs like Supporting Parents Along the Road to Kindergarten (SPARK), Strong Start, Supported Child Development, Out of School Care and Whistler Adaptive Sports Program. Families value the efforts of the staff and the quality of care provided, but many feel that there are not enough spaces to meet the demand.

Families in the community report experiencing significant challenges in accessing services for children and youth with disabilities or support needs. There is a lack of available programs locally, with many families reporting a need for play therapy, childcare, child psychologists, social workers, pediatricians, and especially an occupational therapist for neurodiverse children. Families in Pemberton often struggle with the burden of travelling long distances to Squamish or Vancouver, which is both time-consuming and expensive. Even then, the waitlists for services like occupational therapy remain long.

Others noted that when programs are offered locally, it can be a challenge to attend due to a lack of transportation options. Overall, 55% of respondents reported location and transportation as a barrier to accessing services. Additionally, program scheduling conflicts—such as offerings during the workday or at inconvenient times, like near a child’s bedtime—make it challenging for working parents to access these services. Parents also expressed a need for more information about available programs, particularly for neurodiverse children, as many families remain unaware of what options exist in their community that fit their family’s unique needs.

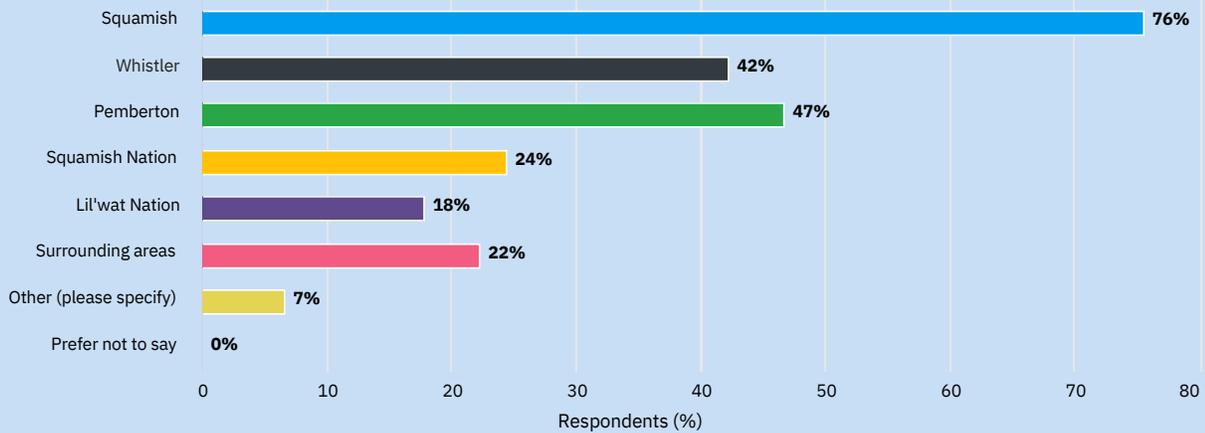
Similar to families in Whistler and Squamish, there was a concern regarding the availability and affordability of assessments for their children. This issue is particularly concerning for families as many programs or funding options require a formal diagnosis, leaving families to wait years for an assessment or, in some cases, never receive one. Many feel this limited access to assessments results in their child often missing out on critical services during their developmental years, a time when support could be preventative and have a lasting positive impact on their growth and well-being.

Many families also face gaps in support as their children grow, such as when funding ends after daycare, leaving them without critical ongoing support. Some parents find support inconsistent—for example when their child was under six, they had access to more funding, but fewer services were available to meet their child’s needs. Now that their child is older, they face reduced funding while services have become more expensive. Additionally, some parents expressed concerns over the loss of educational assistant (EA) support for children with neurodiversities as they progress through school, not knowing if it's due to funding or staffing issues.

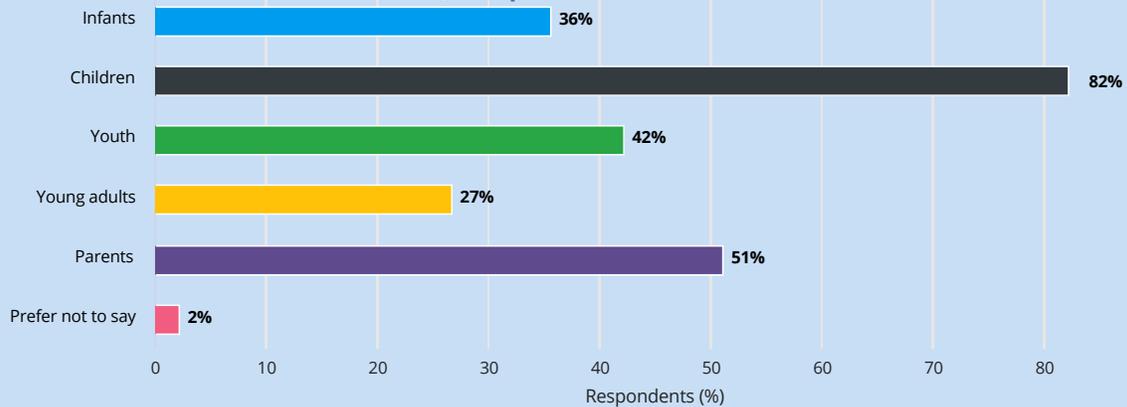
Childcare availability emerged as one of the most critical barriers for families, with 52% of respondents reporting that being on waitlists is a primary obstacle to accessing services like daycare, camps and before-and-after school care. Families expressed deep frustration with the long wait times, with some waiting over three years for a spot in daycare. Families stressed the need for more affordable childcare options, particularly for younger children. Families face additional challenges with the lack of childcare options during school breaks and the limited availability of before- and after-school care. One parent emphasized this struggle, stating, “We are a family with two working parents. I need childcare so that I can go to work.” Lastly, some parents had a desire for more diverse curriculums at school, especially in the arts, with limited music, drama, or language options.

# Key Insights from *Service Providers*

**Percentage of Service Providers Working in Each Community**  
(Multiple Selections Allowed)



**Percentage of Service Providers Working with Each Population**  
(Multiple Selections Allowed)



## What is Working Well

**71%**

of service providers felt that organizations in the Sea to Sky area collaborate at least somewhat well to support families

**"Compassionate skilled staff, working towards the common goal of providing family centered supports."**

**64%**

reported collaborating with Indigenous communities and/or service providers

# Opportunities for Improvement

## Funding to Support Families & Staff

- **63%** of service providers cited funding constraints as a main barrier to families accessing care.
- “Funding for many programs is limited and has not been increased in several years. Service providers are constantly trying to do more with less.”
- “The cost of attending specialized programs in addition to the high cost of caring for a person with a disability [is a barrier].”
- “Not enough funding for all the people who need extra support to receive it.”

## Service Navigation for Families

- “Families raising children with [support needs] often have difficulty navigating service.”
- “Families can have a difficult time navigating services as each family is basically starting from scratch -- having to learn about services as they go.”
- “The parents are often overwhelmed themselves, learning about/navigating/accessing programs and funding isn't always doable.”

## Respite

- **42%** of service providers identified an need for more respite options.
- “Respite is very challenged - parents/caregivers are often the best solution to caring for children with more complex needs, however they need more options for respite so that they can re-fuel in order to implement treatment plans that may support challenging needs.”
- “[There is a] lack of respite care support for full time caregivers of adult children with severe disabilities.”

## Consistent and Adequate Staffing

- **53%** of service providers cited staffing shortage and **40%** reported a lack of specialized training among staff as a barrier for families accessing services.
- “We need more staff/people with experience to support children with disabilities/diverse abilities.”
- “Children and youth with support needs are often excluded from rec programming as their needs outpace the staff ratios or skill sets.”
- “Most significant barriers... are a lack of education from recreation providers and adult to youth ratios.”

## Access and Availability of Services

90

- **49%** of service providers identified long wait times as a main challenge faced by families.
- “There are long waitlists with limited spaces in programs for children with diverse abilities. Programs that support children with diverse abilities are limited which doesn't offer much choice for families.”
- “There is a long wait time for much-needed child assessments with specialists and pediatrician appointments.”

# Service Providers Working with *Indigenous Families*

## What is Working Well

### Collaboration

- Liasoning between early years staff for or with the families to advocate for support.
- Renewed collaboration among service providers post-COVID, which has improved relationships and teamwork to support families.
- There has been improved coordination with School District 48, better space access for service providers to come in, and more team meetings to support families.

### Facilitating Access

- Efforts to connect families and help them access services.
- Only one parent is required to provide consent when accessing services, previously both were required which limits barriers to access.
- Service providers are proactively identifying and mitigating barriers for families to access services.
- Occupational therapists will follow children through kindergarten to help make seamless transitions so there is overlap before the next service can be put in place.

## Opportunities for Improvement

### Physical Barriers

- Insufficient childcare spaces.
- Limited physical spaces for confidential, culturally safe programs and therapy to be offered.
- Services are mostly offered during weekdays, limiting accessibility for many families.
- There are limited transportation options, especially for families living in Lil'wat Nation and Pemberton.

### Effective Communication

- High turnover in staff can make it difficult to be up to date with the most accurate information.
- Complex jargon and use of acronyms can make it difficult for families and service providers to know what services are available.
- Some services are misunderstood, making it difficult to accurately represent a program and gain family buy-in.



# What we Heard from *Service Providers*

Overall, we had 45 service providers across the Sea to Sky Corridor complete an online survey. Respondents reported primarily supporting parents (51%), children (82%) and youth (42%) in Squamish (76%), Whistler (42%), and Pemberton (47%). When asked, “What do you feel is working well in your organization’s delivery of services for families and children with disabilities and/or diverse abilities?”, service providers emphasized that safe, inclusive, dedicated and compassionate care was being delivered within their organization. Many feel they prioritize flexibility, meeting families where they are to provide tailored support. Many also report working collaboratively with local resources to provide additional support and adapt programming to individual needs.

However, service providers echoed many parents regarding the gaps in current services highlighting the need for improvements in several areas. Service providers suggest that families raising children with neurodiversity often face difficulty in securing appropriate referrals for diagnostic assessments, especially for conditions like autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Families in the Sea to Sky area face numerous challenges in accessing services, among the most significant barriers is a lack of consistent, specialized services. The limited availability of occupational therapists, physical therapists, and other support professionals means that many children and families encounter long waitlists for essential services. These barriers can also exist within the school system where caseloads can become overwhelming. Funding limitations further contribute to these issues, as public programs and therapy options cannot meet demand, and private care is often financially out of reach for many families. The narrow criteria for service eligibility also restrict access, excluding some children who need support but do not meet the specific requirements and/or who are unable to receive a referral due to delays in accessing assessments.

It was reported that childcare programs, schools and recreational programs, in particular, struggle to provide inclusive environments due to understaffing or limited training for support workers. Early childhood educators (ECEs) and support staff may lack the education needed to work with children with diverse abilities and support needs effectively. Understaffing can also lead to inconsistent care making it more difficult for children and families. Many recreation programs also lack the staff ratios and specialized training to include children with support needs, further isolating these families from community activities. Transportation presents additional barriers, particularly for families from Pemberton and Lil'wat Nation who must travel out of town for specialized services, which can be challenging given the limited local transit options and difficult weather conditions.

They reported that many families struggle with the complexity of navigating a fragmented system of support. This situation is compounded by the significant time and effort required for parents to research, apply, and advocate for the assistance their children need. A lack of support for respite care also contributes to caregiver burnout, as parents of children with complex needs often bear the responsibility alone without adequate breaks or relief.

Furthermore, service providers echoed that there is a noticeable lack of transitional support for children moving from daycare to kindergarten, where they may lose some of the individualized support they previously had. The absence of multi-disciplinary teams that work together to create comprehensive treatment plans for complex cases is also an ongoing issue. Collaboration among mental health clinicians, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists could improve outcomes but is rarely available due to siloed service structures. The physical spaces available for service delivery are limited or often inadequate, with some organizations reporting insufficient locations to hold programs and activities.

# Building a Better Future: Community-Led Solutions

1

## Communication and Awareness

- **Centralized Information Resources:**
  - Develop a one-stop-shop website for service navigation, including information on funding, private programs, public programs, and advocacy tools.
  - Increase outreach efforts and use “in-your-face” advertising.
  - Revive annual community fairs to build awareness, provide peer support, and connect families with services.
- **Advocacy and Education for Families:**
  - Offer workshops on advocating for children in school systems (e.g., understanding IEPs, funding and private assessments).

2

## Service Accessibility and Expansion

- **Accessibility Improvements:**
  - Increase the availability of services (e.g., OT, PT, SLP) across the Sea to Sky Corridor, especially in Whistler and Pemberton.
  - Address transportation barriers (e.g., specialized transit, taxis, and buses) to allow families and youth to access services both within and across communities.
  - Offer programs during hours that work best for parents such as early evenings and weekends.
- **Increase Service Availability:**
  - Establish afterschool groups, programs and support groups specialized for neurodiverse children and youth.
- **Flexible Support:**
  - Offer extra support options for all children experiencing mental health challenges, and behavioural issues.
  - Provide bridged support and funding for children during age-related transitional periods to ensure consistent and ongoing support.
  - Trust parents who advocate that their child would benefit from extra support regardless of a diagnosis to minimize barriers

### 3

## Inclusive Programs and Training

- **Professional Development:**
  - Provide mandatory ongoing education for support staff, educators, and therapists, including training on inclusion, neurodiversity-affirming care, cultural competence and differences.
- **Promote Inclusive Practices:**
  - Develop programs that encourage inclusion in sports, recreation, and community activities.
  - Encourage all service providers including recreational staff to receive training and provide resources on Inclusivity, Equity and Diversity.
  - Ask parents what approaches work best with their child and engage in consistent communication to promote the child's successful engagement while ensuring parents feel valued and heard.
- **Collaboration Across Sectors:**
  - Utilize a secure, centralized system of information where families and service providers can communicate across organizations to minimize the frontloaded efforts currently required by parents when repeatedly advocating for their child(ren).

### 4

## Family and Peer Support

- **Parent and Caregiver Groups:**
  - Create in-person and online support groups for parents and caregivers (including fathers and single parents).
  - Provide warm meals to make parents feel valued and supported.
- **Respite Care:**
  - Increase access to respite services for families including those with children who face mental health or behavioral challenges.
- **Community Building:**
  - Encourage social connections through events that help families feel grounded and supported in their communities.
  - Offer programs that foster peer relationships for neurodiverse youth (e.g., afterschool groups, summer camps).

## 5

### Funding and Resources

- **Hire and Retain Staff:**
  - Provide incentives for people to study and work in support roles in the Sea to Sky Corridor.
  - Funding allocated to hiring ECEs and EAs to increase spaces in childcare centres and better support children with diverse needs.
  - Emphasizing efforts to retain qualified staff, acknowledging the benefit of consistent and reliable service providers for children and families.
- **Flexible Funding:**
  - Funding is available to all families that require support when they need support and not just for those who have obtained a specific diagnosis.
  - Transparency with families regarding how their child's funding is being used within the school system and including them in decisions when utilizing funding to best support their child.

## 6

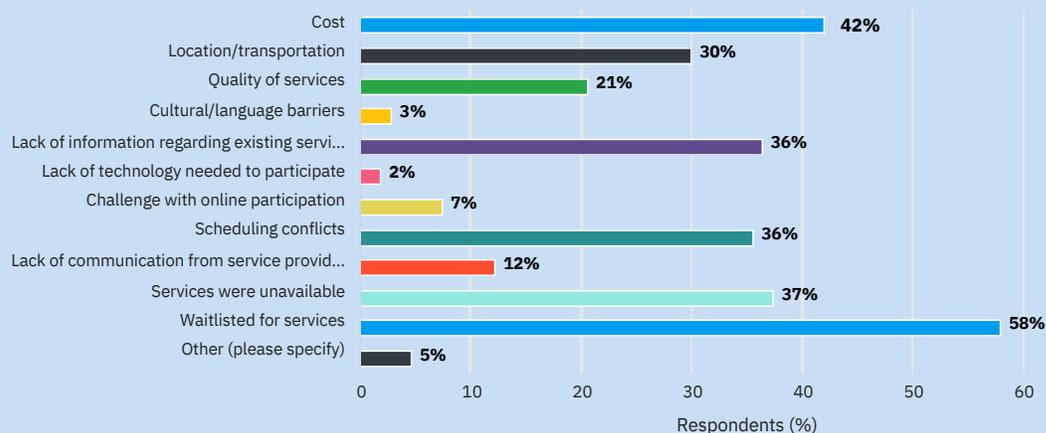
### Space and Infrastructure

- **Therapy and Program Spaces:**
  - Create more safe and confidential spaces for therapy and programming, ensuring they are designed collaboratively with service providers and families.
  - Prioritize inclusivity in design, ensuring spaces meet the needs of children with disabilities rather than forcing adaptation.
  - Make recreation spaces such as playgrounds wheelchair-accessible and inclusive for children with varying needs.
  - Create a sensory-friendly HUB where neurodiverse families can connect and receive support in navigating services.

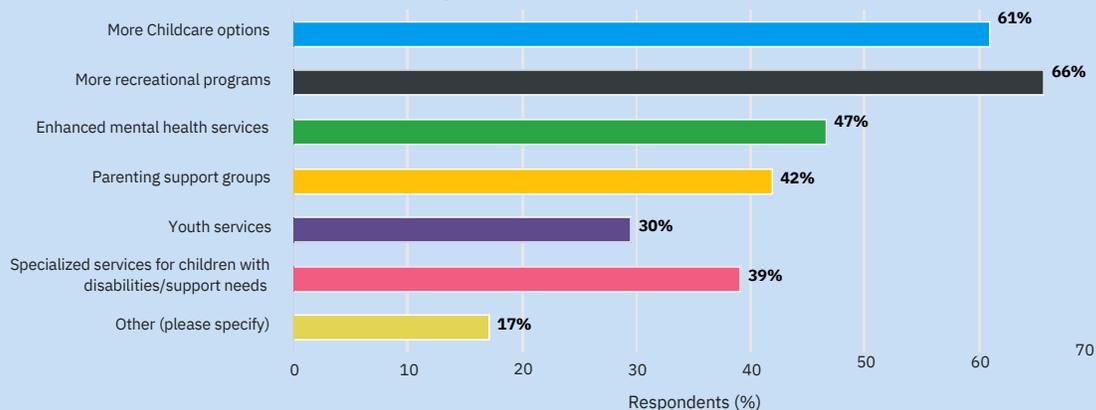
# Overall Summary of Findings

Families and service providers across the Sea to Sky Corridor highlighted significant challenges in navigating and accessing services due to a lack of centralized information, long waitlists, staffing shortages, and program gaps for school-aged children and youth. A lack of specialized training limits inclusivity and adequate support for children in recreational and educational settings, further isolating families who could benefit from these services. Additionally, transportation and location barriers exist especially for families in Whistler, Pemberton, and surrounding areas. Despite these challenges, families value the respectful and compassionate staff, early childhood support, and community initiatives that promote connectedness. The following graphs highlight the most commonly reported barriers families face when trying to access services and which additional services they would like to see available in the Sea to Sky Corridor.

## Barriers Faced by Families Accessing Services Across the Sea to Sky Corridor (Multiple Selections Allowed)



## Additional Services Families Would Like Across the Sea to Sky Corridor (Multiple Selections Allowed)



Through these community-led conversations, we heard that parents feel it is essential to be valued and heard as they advocate for their children, recognizing their vital role in shaping effective supports and services. Overall, there is a shared community voice that calls for improved communication, expanded services, and inclusive, age-spanning programming to better meet the diverse needs of children, youth, and families in the Sea to Sky Corridor.

# SEA TO SKY COMMUNITY SERVICES

## TOGETHER WE ARE BUILDING COMMUNITY

### Squamish

38024 Fourth Ave.  
PO Box 949  
Squamish, BC V8B 0A7  
Phone: 604-892-5796

### Whistler

1519 Spring Creek Drive  
Whistler, BC V0N 1B1

### Pemberton

1357 Aster Street  
PO Box 656  
Pemberton, BC V0N 2L0  
Phone: 604-894-6101

[www.sscs.ca](http://www.sscs.ca)  
[community@sscs.ca](mailto:community@sscs.ca)



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