



**NUU-CHAH-NULTH  
TRIBAL COUNCIL**



# COMMUNITY, CONVERSATION AND CONNECTION

# TY-HISTANIS AND ESOWISTA, BRITISH COLUMBIA

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

Ty-Histanis and Esowista are on the unceded and traditional territory of the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation of the Nuu-chah-nulth Peoples.

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 Ty-Histanis and Esowista, British Columbia** - one of five communities that participated in the engagement of various West Coast of Vancouver Island Communities.

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# THE APPROACH TO ENGAGEMENT

The Community-Led Collaboration Project's Provincial Working Group partnered with B.C. communities to design a thoughtful, inclusive, culturally safe, and accessible approach to engagement. To guide their work, the group established four project principles:

- **Collaboration.** Engagement is co-designed with community members to inform how B.C. communities can create better networks of services and support for children and youth with disabilities or support needs, and their families.
- **Community-driven change.** The project builds upon the strengths of B.C.'s current system and names the changes needed to best support children and youth with disabilities or support needs and their families.
- **Reconciliation 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 collaborated 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

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# 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.<sup>1</sup> The median age of people living in the West Coast communities is 39 years compared to 48 years in British Columbia as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Thirty percent of people living in the West Coast communities are Indigenous.<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> Clayoquot Sound Biosphere Region's Vital Signs@ (2023), Clayoquot Biosphere, online: [https://clayoquotbiosphere.org/files/file/6541460ea68cf/CBT\\_Vital\\_Signs\\_2023.pdf](https://clayoquotbiosphere.org/files/file/6541460ea68cf/CBT_Vital_Signs_2023.pdf)  
<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.  
<sup>3</sup> Ibidem.



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# ABOUT TY-HISTANIS AND ESOWISTA



Image courtesy of West Coast Nest

The communities of Ty-Histanis and Esowista are adjacent to each other. Located about 15 km from Tofino on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, the two communities are on the unceded and traditional territory of the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation of the Nuu-chah-nulth Peoples. Together, these communities are home to approximately 375 people <sup>4</sup> The communities have a fully licensed daycare facility and a new Health Centre - both located in Ty-Histanis. There is no grocery store in either community and people often commute to Tofino or Ucluelet for work. Children in both communities take the bus to attend elementary school in Tofino and high school in Ucluelet.

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4. Ty-Histanis West Coast N.E.S.T, West Coast Nest, online, <https://www.westcoastnest.org/communities/Ty-Histanis>

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# WHAT WE HEARD IN TY-HISTANIS AND ESOWISTA

To engage community members, the facilitator attended the Tla-o-qui-aht Days (known as TFN days). TFN days consist of a full week of fun activities for three communities: Ty-Histanis, Esowista and Opitsaht. The facilitator held a session on September 27, 2024 during TFN days, inviting people to enjoy dinner and participate in a discussion about local services and supports for children with disabilities or support needs in their communities. Community members from Ty-Histanis and Esowista attended the session. People from Opitsaht did not attend this session

The following people provided feedback at the session:

- 32 family members
- 13 community service providers
- Two youth
- Two Elders

In response to the question “What is working well in Ty-Histanis and Esowista?” community members and service providers shared:

- There is a community nurse available most days and a doctor comes to the community every other week.
- There is a full-time Aboriginal Infant Development Program/Aboriginal Supported Child Development worker that services the community through the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council. This worker is great at supporting parents/caregivers who have children and youth with support needs with visits, developmental screening, resources, strategies, emotional support, and referrals. The worker can also work closely with the daycare to support a child with support needs when needed.
- The daycare and preschool located in Ty-Histanis is very supportive of all children and families.
- There is great partnership and collaboration between many service providers and community members trying to fill the gaps in support needs.
- The Strong Start program in Tofino provides local families with important events and supports.
- A local bus transports children and staff to and from the Wickannish Elementary School.

Children in both communities take the bus to attend elementary school in Tofino and high school in Ucluelet.

The following table details participants' thoughts on opportunities for improvement and ideas for meaningful change in Ty-Histanis and Esowista:

Conversation themes	Supporting details
<p><b>LACK OF SERVICES</b></p> <p>“It doesn’t help anyone when the services that are so needed only come every 3–6 months (...) the child does not benefit from that at all (...) and then to expect that the family can just go to Port Alberni to get the service is not OK.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">-Family member/caregiver</p> <p>“Since most services are not available to the community there is a tendency to ‘just figure it out ourselves, with what we have.’”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">-Community Service Provider</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no occupational therapist (OT), physiotherapist (PT) or speech and language pathologist (SLP) coming to the community to support children and youth.</li> <li>• Families are on waitlists but have never seen a SLP.</li> <li>• Families have been offered opportunities to go to Port Alberni for services, which is not doable for many families. One parent said, “I cannot afford to take a whole day off work to go see a therapist in Port Alberni for one hour, when it should be done here (...) there are enough children on the West Coast that need these services so there is no reason for them not to come and deliver those services here (...) and what about the families who do not have a car? And there are no buses or medical travel to take them (...) once again our children are the ones who are left without services and it makes me mad (...).”</li> <li>• There is no paediatrician that comes to the community.</li> <li>• There are supports missing for children and youth with disabilities or support needs when their families need to get treatment for substance use. Often, children are left behind because treatment centres are unable to offer any support, further creating trauma and stress on family units.</li> </ul>
<p><b>AFFORDABLE HOUSING</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affordable housing is a big barrier to attracting and keeping service providers on the West Coast.</li> <li>• Accessible housing for families in the community is a big barrier as well and some families are left in unsafe or crowded housing situations that make it a challenge for service providers to do home visits.</li> <li>• The West Coast needs to prioritize housing for essential workers such as teachers and EAs, support workers, PTs, OTs, SLPs, mental health workers, counsellors, doctors and hospital staff.</li> </ul>



## EDUCATION

“My child needs speech services but is not receiving any as the school cannot provide it to them. They did get a bit of speech before they entered school, but it wasn’t much, and I didn’t see it helping a whole lot. I was hoping it would be better once they entered school as I thought they would get the support that was needed but I was wrong (...) it makes me so sad to see how my child is struggling and it has a big impact on their self-confidence. I am worried they are being bullied and just won’t tell me (...) Why are there no speech services at the school?”

-Family member/caregiver

- There is a large gap in school support and not enough EAs to support the most vulnerable students and high demand for their service.
- There are no replacements when a valuable staff retires or leaves their position for any reason.
- Community members who want to pursue the role of supporting children and youth with support needs require more education and support.

## NEED FOR SERVICE HUB

“Having a service hub out here on the West Coast is so needed. A place where OT, PT, SLP, mental health, respite workers, social worker, paediatrician, and pediatric nurses all are connected somehow and have therapy rooms etc. (...) it is then expected for them to come to Ty-Histanis and Esowista on set days and offer the same services either here at the center or at the clients’ home.”

-Community Service Provider

- Many people shared that they would like a hub on the West Coast that service providers work from to support their communities.

## MENTAL HEALTH

“Don’t bother sending in a referral because children on the West Coast will not be seen.”

–a voicemail message received by a service provider on the West Coast calling to enquire about mental health supports

- Mental health services for children under six are missing. It was reported that there is no play therapy or counselling for children on the West Coast.
- A service provider shared that they, on numerous occasions, have sent in a referral to the Early Childhood Mental Health Program in Port Alberni with no response.

## RESPIRE

“I am not surprised the divorce rate is high among couples who care for a child with disabilities (...). I have often thought about how much easier it would be if we were not together and split [our child’s] time in between us (...). That way I would have a break. Now, I do not get any (...) I know that is an awful thing to say, but I am tired.”

–Family member/caregiver

- Respite availability is a huge gap and is not available to residents of Ty-Histanis and Esowista, which means families often rely on other family members for support. Some people shared, unfortunately, not all families are healthy, which can expose children to potential danger or risk.
- One person shared, “Families are exhausted, and they cannot catch their breath (...) how are they supposed to do all the stuff that regular parents do when they are with their child 24/7 because there is no support (...) these families need a break more than anyone else and they are the ones not getting it.”
- One family member/caregiver shared, “I hope it gets better when they enter school, but I am worried about that too (...) talking to other family members in the city they tell me to get a respite worker but there are none out here. There is no one to help (...) I never get a break. I cannot just send my kid to play somewhere else like most other parents. I have to always be there.”

## **COMMUNICATION, RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND CULTURAL SAFETY**

“There is this rush, rush mentality from the people who come into our community from Port Alberni and elsewhere. They just want their job done and there is no time for relationship building...they just come in for the day and then leave again without any considerations of how life is on the West Coast. I much prefer having a service provider who supports my family who lives and breathes the West Coast (...) They are the ones that get it. They know the challenges better than someone from Port Alberni or Nanaimo.”

-Family member/caregiver

- Parents and caregivers are facing a communication gap between schools and families. Families feel excluded from their child’s school journey and are not updated or shown the tools available to help their child.
- The West Coast operates differently than Port Alberni, and service providers are lacking knowledge of the Nuu-chah-nulth culture and values, but also general knowledge of life on the West Coast.
- If service providers were to work out of a hub, there would be better collaboration and communication making it easier for families to connect with the services they need.
- Services need to be culturally informed and work outside of the box to involve families in care plans that happen in schools and the community.

## TRANSPORTATION/ LOCATION

"I do not know how many times we have experienced cancellations from the PT, SLP and other service providers for the families out there. The road from Port Alberni to here gets very treacherous in the winter and if you do not travel it often enough it can be scary (...) Many service providers cancel as soon as it snows a little or if it is windy and really raining, which is pretty much from November to April (...) Then families are told to come to Port Alberni for services but if the road is no good that doesn't work (...) we really need those service providers living out here."

-Family member/caregiver

- Some families do not have a vehicle and rely on others to take them to important appointments.
- There is no public transportation connecting the West Coast communities to one another, and no public transportation regularly connecting the West Coast to the rest of the Island.
- Families miss their appointments due to the lack of transportation.
- One person said, "Families have been known to stand on the highway hitchhiking to appointments and sometimes without a car seat."
- Transportation is a huge barrier to getting the support and services needed for children and youth with support needs.

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# A VISION FOR SUPPORT IN TY-HISTANIS AND ESOWISTA

As part of the conversations in Ty-Histanis and Esowista, 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:

**A hub where all essential service providers work** and is accessible to all communities on the West Coast.

**Respite workers who support both communities and their families.**

**Consistent service provider visits to the West Coast and less appointment cancellations** (due to road closures and conditions).

**An education system** where therapies and services are offered to students in ways that are **culturally safe and strongly communicated to families.**

**A liaison who works at the schools** in Tofino and Ucluelet (where children from Ty-Histanis and Esowista attend school) **to help families/caregivers** advocate, attend Individual Education Plan meetings and secure funding **for supports.**

**Education and support for community members** who want to pursue careers supporting children and youth with disabilities or support needs (eg. Early Childhood Education certification).

**Greater collaboration and connection amongst service providers.**

**More housing and affordable housing on the West Coast** to attract service providers to live and work in the area.

**A public transit system** to connect communities on the West Coast to each other and the rest of Vancouver Island.



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# FINAL STEPS OF ENGAGEMENT

Throughout 2024, the Provincial Working Group shared preliminary results and project updates with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). In January 2025, the summary reports from the 23 community engagements, including those from community engagement grants and the six initial community engagements, will be submitted to the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Community contributions have been instrumental in shaping these reports.

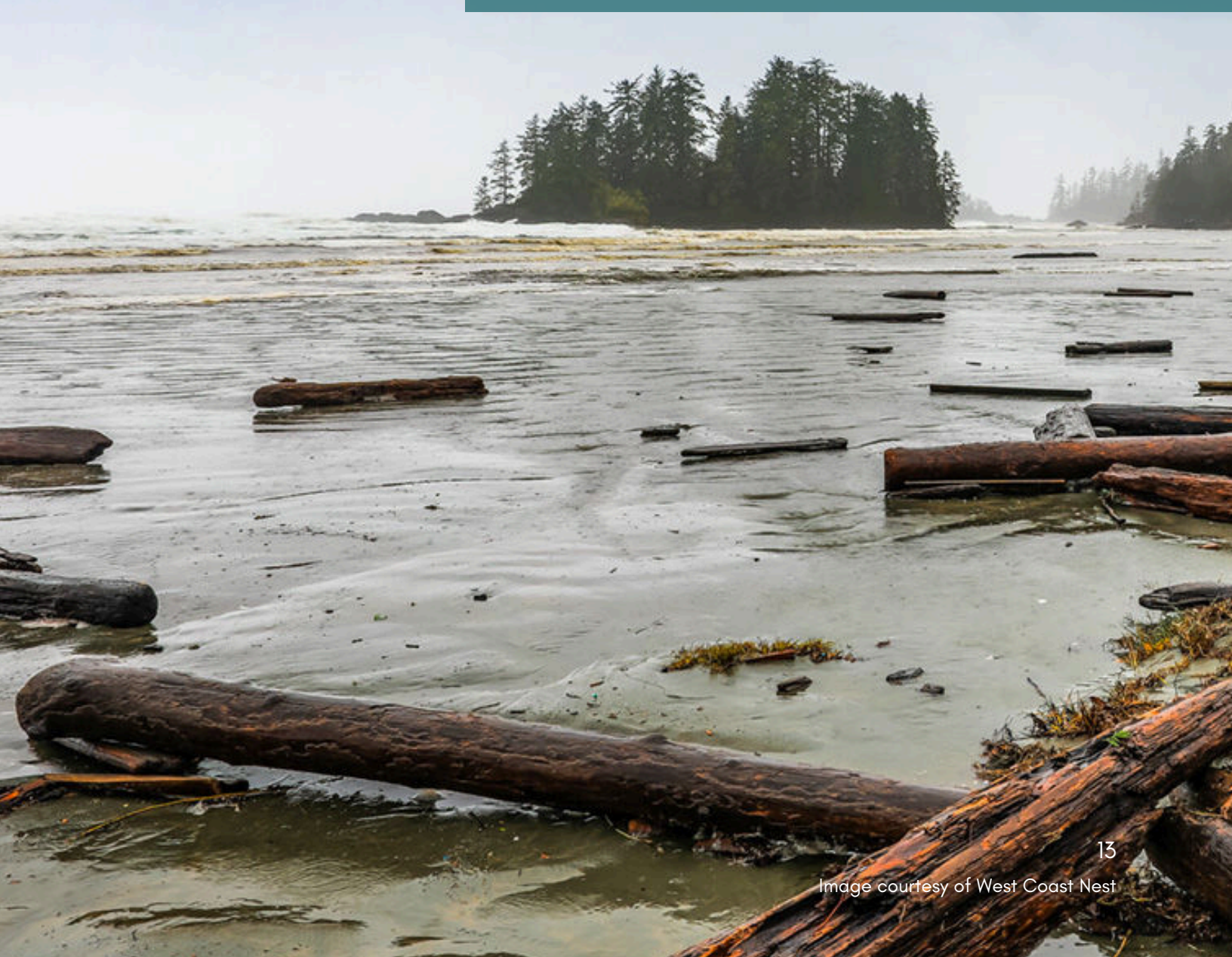
In all cases, the outcomes of the Community-Led Collaboration Project belong to the communities. The hope is that participants' ideas and experiences will serve as a tool for B.C. communities as they work to build and advocate for better networks of services and supports and make changes in their community 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/](http://www.inclusionbc.org/what-we-do/community-partnerships-engagement/community-led-collaboration-project/).

# IN SUMMARY

Please find a plain language summary of the key discoveries of Ty-Histanis and Esowista on the following pages.



## WHAT WE HEARD IN

# Ty-Histanis and Esowista

Ty-Histanis and Esowista are located on the unceded and traditional territory of the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation of the Nuu-chah-nulth Peoples.

The communities of Ty-Histanis and Esowista are adjacent to each other. Located about 15 km from Tofino on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, these communities are, together, home to approximately 375 people. To engage local families, community service providers, youth and Elders, the facilitator attended the Tla-o-qui-aht Days (known as TFN days) in September 2023.

## What's working well in Ty-Histanis and Esowista

- There is a community nurse available most days and a doctor comes to the community every other week.
- There is a full-time Aboriginal Infant Development Program/Aboriginal Supported Child Development worker that services the community through the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council.
- The daycare in Ty-Histanis is supportive of all children and their families.
- The Strong Start program in Tofino provides local families with important events and supports.
- A local bus transports children and staff to and from the Wickannish Elementary School.

## Opportunities for change

### Lack of services

**Families are on waitlists and need to travel to get supports.**

There are no physiotherapists (PTs), speech and language pathologists (SLPs), doctors or community nurses that come to Ty-Histanis and Esowista. Supports are offered to families in Port Alberni but many cannot make the trip. There are no supports for children and youth with disabilities or support needs when parents seek treatment for substance use.

### Gap in school supports

**There are not enough Education Assistants (EAs) in schools to support vulnerable students.**

There are no replacements when staff retire or leave their positions. Community members also want education opportunities for themselves, to learn how to best support students with disabilities or support needs.

**"There is this rush, rush mentality from the people who come into our community ...there is no time for relationship building..."**

— Community Service Provider

## Communication and cultural safety

**Service providers need to communicate more often and in culturally safe ways.**

Parents and caregivers want more communication from schools. Families don't feel included and/or updated on their child's educational journey. Service providers lack knowledge of Nuu-chah-nulth culture and values and, therefore, aren't communicating or offering services in ways that are rooted in local culture and values.

### Affordable housing

**There is a lack of affordable housing in the community for service providers.**

Community members feel that affordable housing is a big barrier to attracting and keeping service providers on the West Coast. The communities want to see affordable housing prioritized for essential workers so they can live in and build relationships with the local community.

### Transportation challenges

**There is no public transportation connecting the West Coast communities to each other or to the rest of Vancouver Island.**

Families talk of missing appointments due to the lack of transportation. One person said, "Families have been known to stand on the highway hitchhiking to appointments and sometimes without a car seat."

## Visions and Solutions

During the conversations in Ty-Histanis and Esowista, parents/caregivers, community service providers and an Elder 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.

### A local service hub

**A service hub accessible to all West Coast communities.**

Families want a service hub that offers a variety of services and supports and is accessible to all West Coast families.

### Respite

**Families want respite workers who support both communities.**

Families want respite that is local, safe and reliable.

### A public transit system for the West Coast of Vancouver Island

**Families want a transportation system to connect them to other communities.**

Families, specifically, want a reliable, well-connected public transit system that connects them to other communities and the rest of Vancouver Island. Such a service would provide them a safe and accessible way to get to appointments with their children.



# WITH THANKS

The Community-Led Collaboration Project would like to thank everyone who shared their time, ideas, experiences, concerns, and hopes with us.

Their words have made all the difference as Ty-Histanis and Esowista look to best support children and youth with disabilities or support needs so they can thrive now and into the future.



Image courtesy of West Coast Nest