

# Conversations in South Vancouver:

Findings from the Community-Led Collaboration project in Marpole-Oakridge and South Vancouver Neighbourhoods

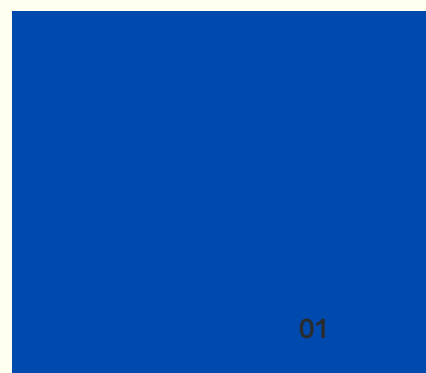
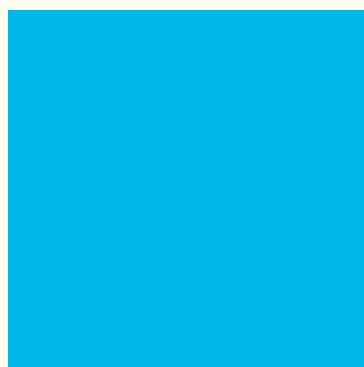
Community discussions exploring ways to help children and youth thrive

Image courtesy of Wesgroup

# Land Acknowledgement

The city of Vancouver is situated on the unceded traditional territories of xʷməθkʷə́yəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and sə́lilwə́təʔ (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

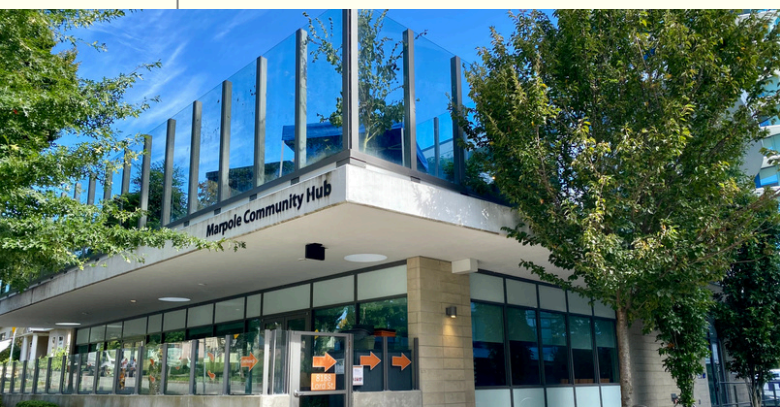
The Marpole-Oakridge and South Vancouver Family Places serve neighbourhoods of South Vancouver and would like to acknowledge our First Nations hosts for the privilege of working and playing on this land and are grateful for the opportunity to conduct this important community-led collaboration project work in this territory.





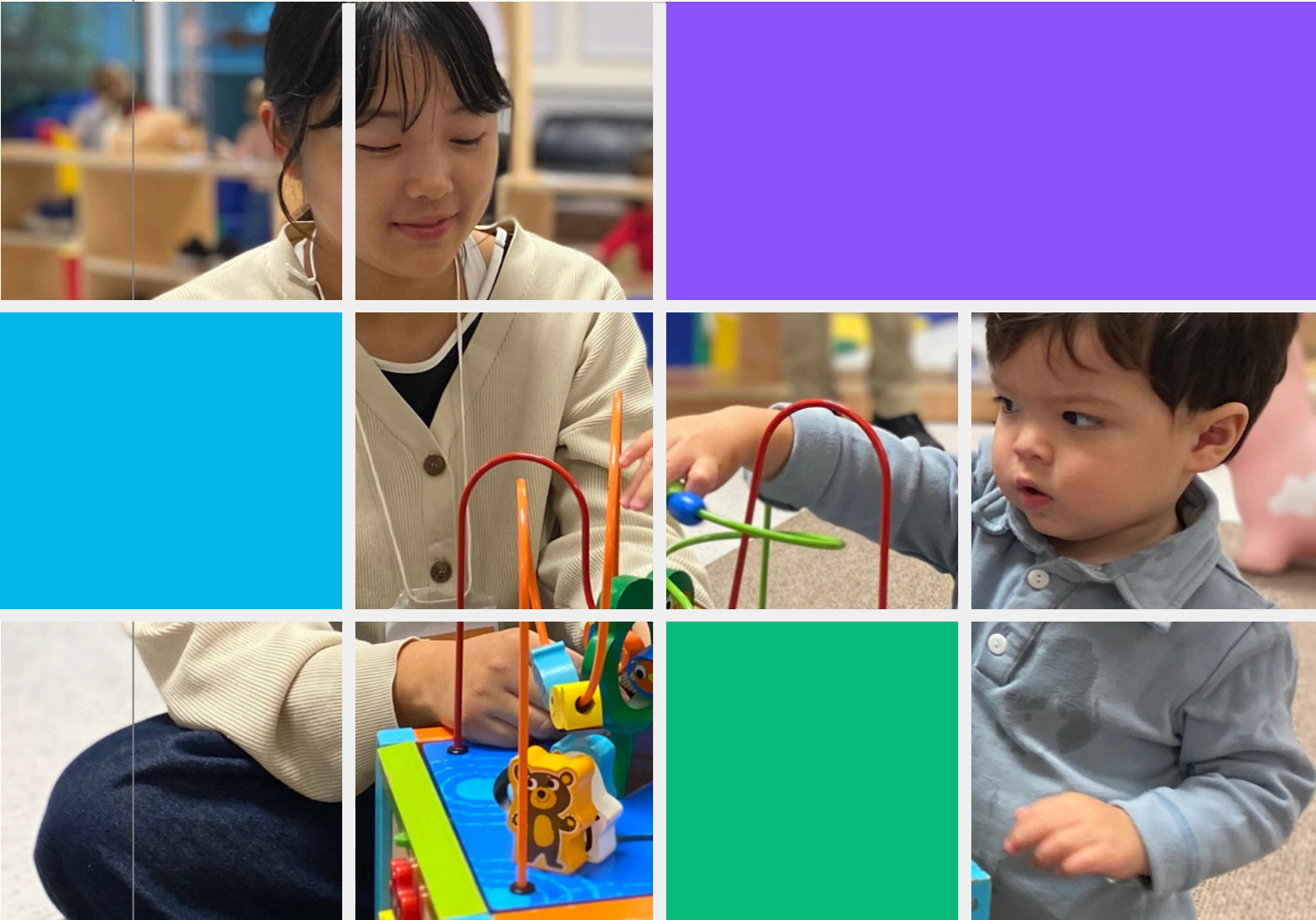
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# Project Background

Marpole Oakridge Family Place (MOFP) and South Vancouver Family Place (SVFP) were the recipients of a grant from Inclusion BC to conduct a community-led collaboration project to explore how services and supports for children and youth with a disability or support needs in South Vancouver can be improved and strengthened. The Marpole-Oakridge Family Place (MOFP) and South Vancouver Family Place (SVFP) partnered together to engage in deeper conversation with the families and service providers in the neighbourhoods they serve to better understand and engage various stakeholders in the community about how to improve service and support networks for children and youth with a disability or support need. This project was conducted with the overarching goal of sharing, learning and discussing current successes, gaps and challenges, and possible solutions to strengthen support services with the communities in South Vancouver to identify potential opportunities to help children and youth with a disability or support need thrive.





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# Approach to Engagement

This work was driven by 3 principles:

## **Inclusivity and accessibility**

Everyone was welcome to join our conversation sessions.

- Multiple dates and times were selected to meet the anticipated schedules of families and service providers.
- Conversation sessions were available for in-person and virtual attendance. Service providers and families were welcome to join any of the sessions.
- Childminding services and travel assistance were available for any attendee and widely advertised.
- \$25 grocery store giftcards were available to session attendees.
- For those that were unable to attend any of the dates, an anonymous survey was also made available to receive feedback.
- Conversation sessions were designed to be a safe space to everyone with an approach that welcomed all ideas and feedback, with an emphasis on recognizing historically marginalized perspectives and voices.

## **Collaboration**

Each session and the survey were intentionally designed to include service providers and families together to promote greater discussion and understanding between the two groups. The sessions and survey asked questions that recognize what is working well and gaps in services and supports that exist. We also asked participants questions that explore areas for improvement and how to strengthen the network of existing supports and services for children and youth with a support need or disability.

## **Ideas for Actionable Change Driven by the Community**

When discussing what an ideal service and support network for youth with a disability or support needs, dialogue included ideal changes but also focused on areas of improvement from multiple levels of the community, ranging from local service and support groups to government support needs and identifying where local community groups and services could create more collaboration of support to prevent children and their families from “falling through the cracks”.

# Creating a Safe Space for Dialogue

The MOFP and SVFP conducted the community-led collaboration project between June - September 2024. Eight hybrid sessions were scheduled across multiple dates of the week and times to accommodate a variety of schedules in July and September 2024. Transportation assistance and childminding services were available for all sessions. Food and refreshments were available at the in-person sessions and each participant was offered a \$25 grocery store giftcard for their participation. An anonymous online survey was also available and advertised for those unable to attend the sessions.

The project was advertised through a variety of channels:

- Social media posts
- Mailing lists
- Monthly newsletters
- Personal emails to service providers and stakeholders in the community
- Flyers posted in and around the Family Places
- Street event the Marpole-Oakridge Family Place participated in

Despite initial success with participant registration, there was an unexpected level of cancellations and no-shows such that only 6 in-person participants (1 family and 5 community service providers) attended the sessions. The online survey received 40 responses (28 family respondents and 12 service providers). Interestingly, other allied local agencies with MOFP and SVFP have experienced similar low turnout rates for this type of involvement.

In each session and the survey, participants were asked 3 primary questions:

1. What is working well in the existing supports and services available to children and youth with a disability or support need?
2. Are there any gaps in the current system or network or services and supports for these youth?
3. What are some areas that can be improved in the existing service and support network available to children and youth with a disability or support need?





# About Vancouver

Vancouver is a popular tourist destination with a year-round temperate climate and its geography close to a variety of incredible natural views, landscapes, attractions and activities involving ocean, lake, rivers, and mountains. It also BC's largest and among Canada's most ethnically diverse cities, with the 2021 census reporting that immigrants (people born outside of Canada) make up 42.2% of its total population.<sup>1</sup>

With such diversity, it comes as no surprise that Vancouver has been described as a city of neighbourhoods distinct from each other by a number of factors including geography, culture and socioeconomic status.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, Vancouver has experienced a particularly sharp rise in housing prices, which has put more financial pressure on the population.

Our organizations service the South Vancouver and Marpole-Oakridge neighbourhoods, and are part of the South Vancouver community health area. South Vancouver is considered a family-oriented community with a high proportion of immigrants.<sup>3</sup> These neighbourhoods have, and continue to experience rapid growth in housing development, which has historically revealed vulnerabilities such as a lack of community resources and underserved public transportation options, that are especially problematic for the pockets of low income and single parent households in this area.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population". Statistics Canada. October 26, 2022. Archived from the original on June 10, 2023. Retrieved November 9, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Berger, Thomas R. (June 8, 2004). "A City of Neighbourhoods: Report of the 2004 Vancouver Electoral Reform Commission" (PDF). vancouver.ca. City of Vancouver. Archived from the original (PDF) on November 25, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Vancouver South Community Health & Social Profile (Community Health Area 6), Fall 2013. <https://www.vch.ca/en/community-health-profiles>

# Children & Youth in South Vancouver

Children are particularly vulnerable to environmental, social and socioeconomic hardships as a number of these risk factors are known to negatively impact health child development. The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at UBC has been collecting data via the Early Development Instrument (EDI) in school aged children to highlight how children in BC are doing and areas that require action to better promote healthy development. For the past 20 years, HELP has collected information on children across 5 scales that reflect a child’s level of developmental health, identifying whether children are on track, at risk or vulnerable in a specific area of development: Social, emotional, physical, language and communication skills.

Preliminary results of Wave 8 (i.e. most recent cohort) on the EDI indicate that there is a general increase in measures of vulnerability in BC children; approximately 1 in 3 children are vulnerable to one or more scales of the EDI that include physical health & well-being, social and emotional competence. Another significant finding is that the complexity of vulnerability appeared to increase, where the percentage of children vulnerable on two or more areas of development has increased between wave 2 and 8.

In the most recent report of the Vancouver school district (wave 7), a higher vulnerability rate of 35% compared to the provincial average of 33.4% was observed. A deeper dive into the vulnerability rates by neighbourhoods of Vancouver indicate that the South Vancouver area have higher numbers with 46% vulnerability on one or more scales in the Marpole area.

	Marpole	Oakridge	Victoria-Fraserview	Killarney	Vancouver	Province
Vulnerable on one or more scales	46.0%	37.0%	42.0%	34.0%	35.0%	33.4%
Physical health & well-being	16.0%	9.0%	17.0%	14.0%	15.0%	15.4%
Social competence	27.0%	23.0%	15.0%	17.0%	18.0%	16.1%
Emotional maturity	26.0%	25.0%	18.0%	15.0%	17.0%	17.7%
Language & cognitive development	12.0%	7.0%	12.0%	8.0%	10.0%	10.6%

Data extracted from: Human Early Learning Partnership. Early Development Instrument [EDI] report. Wave 7 Community Profile, 2019. Vancouver School District (SD39). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, Faculty of Medicine, School of Population and Public Health; February 2020. Available from: [http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi\\_w7\\_communityprofiles/edi\\_w7\\_communityprofile\\_sd\\_39.pdf](http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi_w7_communityprofiles/edi_w7_communityprofile_sd_39.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://earlylearning.ubc.ca/edi-wave8-provincial-synthesis/>



Similarly, HELP also monitors youth in grades 4 to 8 to gain a better understanding of their emotional and social health and to support the development and implementation of programs to promote health and well-being using the Middle years Development Instrument (MDI) tool. In the 2024 overview of the data that was collected across BC school districts, measures of low well-being are relatively high, and are seen to increase as youth age (36.7% of youth in this age category had low well-being scores in grade 4 which gradually rises to 46.6% in grade 8).<sup>5</sup>

Taken together, there is a possibility that children and youth with support needs or a disability may be particularly vulnerable on several of the EDI and MDI scales. The Community-led collaboration project investigated the current state of supports and services and how to strengthen these networks with important discussion and collaboration on how we can ensure better developmental outcomes for these children and youth.



<sup>5</sup> Human Early Learning Partnership. Middle Years Development Instrument [MDI] Grade 6 report. School District & Community Results, 2022-2023. Vancouver(SD39). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, School of Population and Public Health; May 2023.

# What We Heard

The survey and conversation sessions yielded some very positive and encouraging comments about the existing services and supports for youth with disabilities or support needs in South Vancouver:

- There is a great diversity and availability of services and supports to help children and youth with a disability or support need once diagnosis is achieved.
- While there is still opportunity to grow, greater education and consideration in several community services and staff has resulted in greater accessibility and inclusion in programming and staff are able to better support families with children or youth with a disability or support need.
- “It seems that there are inclusive programs available that provide a supportive experience for children with diverse needs, fostering their emotional, cognitive, and social development.” (Family Member)





# What We Heard

In terms of gaps or opportunities to improve the existing services and supports network for children and youth with a support need or disability in South Vancouver, the following table outlines the feedback we received from participants:

Conversation Theme	Supporting Details
<p><b>Access to Services and Information</b></p> <p>“I feel there is a huge lack of services for low incidence designations and recreational opportunities for kids who need one on one support. Their families often struggle to find equal opportunities as their neurotypical peers.” (Service Provider)</p> <p>“Foster clear and consistent communication about what available services that the community provide.” (Service Provider)</p>	<p>Although there are a wide range of services and supports available in South Vancouver, gaining access to them can be a barrier in terms of the journey to getting a diagnosis, accessing funding and researching options and their availability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Despite there being a wide variety of services and supports available, researching this is very time-consuming and convoluted.” (Family member)</li> </ul> <p>Facilitating more childcare services for children with a disability or support need.</p>
<p><b>Cultural/Language Barriers</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service providers report it is common to encounter immigrant families that do not seek help that are likely due to cultural biases about mental health or disabilities.</li> <li>• Fear of not being understood or heard due to language barriers may also prevent families from accessing services.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Stigma</b></p> <p>“I think some parents are unable to accept potential issues with their children and as a result also deny them of the support they may need. Therefore, that's why it would be best to have consultants attend more often to have a better grasp of the child's development and be able to provide evidence on why a child.” (Service Provider)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is stigma attached to a diagnosis of a disability or having a support need.</li> <li>• There are some families that fear the stigma attached to their child having a disability or support need so they do not seek any assistance.</li> <li>• There are often misconceptions of some therapeutic options and who may need them.</li> <li>• “may need more support. Additionally, we should just make more effort to normalize differences and disabilities to make it easier for parents or guardians.” (Service Provider)</li> </ul>

## Conversation Theme

## Supporting Details

### Funding

“Sustainable funding rather than one time funding is key for improving services and supports in the community.” (Service Provider)

“Trained professionals needed. Invest in training for services providers to ensure they are equipped to meet diverse community needs.” (Service Provider)

Families and service providers call for more funding for:

- diagnostic assessments, services and supports that can be prohibitively expensive for many families.
- more research to enhance our understanding of developmental disorders, such as identifying important differences in diagnosing females vs males.
- Prioritizing accessibility by providing more education and staff for community service programs and spaces.
- Increasing supports and inclusion in the classroom and school.

### Absence of Connection

- Children or youth with a disability or support need often access multiple therapeutic options or supports. However, there is no formal central connection point that keeps everyone informed. The onus is on the parent/family to coordinate and communicate when they are not experts on the system.
- This may compromise the efficacy of the supports or services being accessed when one service provider is unaware of other therapeutic or support plans.

### School

“there should be more consultants available to help teachers and support workers better understand the needs of children and youth with disabilities, every child is different and we overall need more resources.” (Family member)

- Although schools have access to funding to support students with a disability or support need, only certain designations are funded. As a result, the supports/staff do not adequately meet the needs of all students.
- Parents and their children have minimal participation in how this is managed.





# Solutions Table Summary

The conversation sessions and survey also explored thoughts and ideas about opportunities to change to build a more ideal support and service network for children with a disability or support need and their families. The feedback that was received contributed to 2 core visions:

1. Inclusion and access are key to ensuring all South Vancouver children and youth (and their families) feel included, secure, and have access to the supports and tools they need to thrive.
2. An ideal service and support network for South Vancouver children and youth with a disability or support need, and their families, involves more than providing a specific service; this network must also prioritize connection and mental health.



## Vision 1:

Inclusion and access are key to ensuring all children and youth (and their families) feel included, secure, and have access to the supports and tools they need to thrive.

**What steps or solutions are required to achieve this vision?**

**A centralized record keeping system that is secure, updatable, and able to be accessed by service providers, families and healthcare practitioners. This would alleviate the need to continually repeat information and reduce the need for redundant documentation for families to access a given service or support.**

**A central, comprehensive resource that families and service providers can easily access that provides information about local services or supports that are available for children and their families.**

**Funding and support services are provided for children and youth based on need, not just based on a specific diagnosis, particularly in school settings.**

**Increasing the availability of publicly-funded diagnostic and assessment services, therapeutic services and supports for children and families.**

**More general public education in schools and businesses to address stigma associated with having a disability or support need and ideally, businesses will feel more empowered to create more inclusive spaces. Ultimately, this will contribute to establishing a more robust culture of inclusion in all spaces.**

**Who must be involved to make these solutions a reality?**

This is a monumental task that would require substantial collaboration across multiple levels of government, perhaps even federal government involvement if the centralized record system is adopted across the country.

- Provincially, the Ministries of Children and Family Development, Education and Childcare, Health, and Finance would need to be involved.

Ministries of Child and Family Development and/or Health or an organization with the funding to have staff develop the database and maintain it.

Ministry of Children and Family Development, Education and Childcare, Health, and Finance

Ministry of Children and Family Development, Education and Childcare, Health, and Finance

- Ministry of Education, BC Chamber of Commerce, Small Business BC, School District 39 (Vancouver). Businesses and community organizations must be willing to participate and implement what they learn.

## Vision 2:

An ideal service and support network for children and youth with a disability or support need, and their families, involves more than providing a specific service; this network must also prioritize connection and mental health.

**What steps or solutions are required to achieve this vision?**

**Implementation of Navigators in the existing network of services and supports. A Navigator’s role would be to support, guide and assist families at any point in their journey, from diagnosis, accessing funding, services and supports, building a therapeutic team, and act as a general connection point between services and/or schools. This may be especially helpful for immigrant families that have a language barrier.**

**“It is hard to know what to ask when navigating a system that is not familiar” (Family member)**

**Who must be involved to make these solutions a reality?**

- This solution requires collaboration across the provincial Ministries of Health, Education and Childcare, Children and Family Development, and Finance.
- Schools and service providers must also be willing to recognize and collaborate with Navigators.

**Mental health funding/services are made available to all children AND their families**

Provincial Ministry of Health and Children and Family Development

**Increase availability of inclusive community and recreational programming, which will involve increasing funding for additional staff support and education on how to make a space or program more accessible.**

**“100%. [There is a] Lack of wraparound services and funding for equal participation as peers” (Family member)**

- Provincial Ministry of Health and Children and Family Development.
- Post-secondary programs for early childhood educators and similar should include more education on inclusivity and accessibility in their curricula.
- Leaders of community organizations/programs (such as MOFP and SVFP) are needed to implement greater education and creating more inclusive programs.



**What steps or solutions are required to achieve this vision?**

**Increase the availability and quality of respite care and childcare for families. These services are vital to not only the child or youth with a support need, but also to support families.**

**More general public education in schools and businesses to address stigma associated with having a disability or support need and ideally, businesses will feel more empowered to create more inclusive spaces. Ultimately, this will contribute to establishing a more robust culture of inclusion in all spaces.**

**Who must be involved to make these solutions a reality?**

- Post-secondary programs for early childhood educators and childcare workers should include more education on inclusivity, accessibility and support needs care in their curricula.
- Schools and the Ministries of Children and Family Development, Education and Childcare, and Health.

Ministry of Education, BC Chamber of Commerce, Small Business BC, School District 39 (Vancouver). Businesses and community organizations must be willing to participate and implement what they learn.





# In Summary

The findings of this community-led collaboration project revealed significant insights and hope regarding the existing network of services and supports for children and youth with a disability or support need. That said, there was also considerable opportunity for change to improve and strengthen it. Consultation with families and service providers in South Vancouver led to some potentially very powerful and meaningful suggestions about building an ideal network of services and supports.

Please find a plain language summary of the findings of our South Vancouver community-led collaboration project on the following page.





# What We Heard In South Vancouver



This community-led collaboration project was conducted in July to October 2024.

29 families and 17 service providers (sessions and survey respondents were combined) provided input on the successes, hopes and opportunities for change for the current services and supports for children and youth (0-19 years) with a disability or support needs, as well as their families.

## What's Working Well:

- The existing services and supports are helpful and effective when accessed
- Local community organizations and businesses are increasing education among staff and expanding programming to become more inclusive and accessible.

## Opportunities for Change:

- **Funding** - There is an overall lack of funding to sufficiently provide: all the necessary supports and services for children and youth that need it, research, inclusive programming and education of service providers, and school supports.
- **Stigma** - There is still a lot of general stigma attached to having a disability or support need. Cultural and language barriers likely play a role in some families not seeking diagnosis and services or supports.
- **Accessibility and Inclusion** - Navigating the current system for diagnostic and intervention services is an intimidating process, from knowing how to access them, to managing communication/information between services and supports. It is difficult for families when they are not familiar with the system.. Comprehensive information about local services and supports is also difficult to access.
- **School** - Lack of educational awareness about inclusivity and accessibility, staffing shortages and funding system in schools for children and youth with support needs or a disability makes it difficult to ensure everyone gets the appropriate level of support in schools.

## Visions and Solutions for the Future:

**Vision 1: Inclusion and access are key to ensuring all children and youth (and their families) feel included, secure, and have access to the supports and tools they need to thrive.**

This needs:

- A centralized record-keeping system to share important information
- A central online resource that provides information about local services and supports.
- Funding for supports and services is provided on a needs basis, particularly in supporting children in school.
- More education on inclusivity and accessibility to the public, schools, local businesses and community services.

**Vision 2: An ideal service and support network for children and youth with a disability or support need, and their families, involves more than providing a specific service; this network must also prioritize connection and mental health.**

This needs:

- Navigator roles will support families in seeking a diagnosis, next steps, liaise, and support children in their educational journey.
- More mental health supports and services for children and youth as well as their families.
- Create more inclusive and accessible spaces and programming for children and their families.
- Provide more respite care and childcare opportunities for children and their families.



# With Thanks

We thank all the service providers and families/caretakers for taking the time to provide us with their valuable feedback!

We also thank Dr. Tiffany Lee, the community-led collaboration project in South Vancouver facilitator, for her work on this project.

