



Reflecting Back, Propelling Forward:

A Report on the Child & Youth Family Justice Conference

September 23rd, 2023



ACCESS to JUSTICE BC



BC Family Justice
Innovation Lab



REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

SOCIETY FOR
children
and youth
OF BC

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Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge with gratitude that we are living and doing this work on the traditional territories of the First Nations peoples of British Columbia. We specifically acknowledge and express our gratitude to the keepers of the lands on the traditional territories of the of the Coast Salish peoples, the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətaʔt (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, on which the Conference was held. We would also like to acknowledge our Métis and Inuit partners and friends living in these beautiful territories.



Gratitude



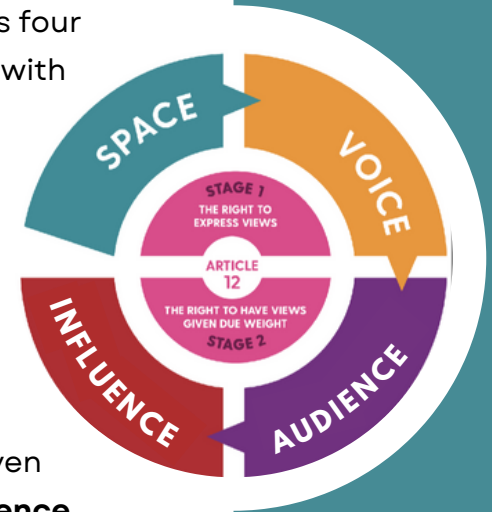
We are very grateful to the Representative for Children and Youth, Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth, for her personal and financial support for the Conference, including youth honoraria and culturally relevant supports at the conference. Without Jennifer's generous support, the Conference would not have happened and been the success that it was.

We are also grateful to the Conference Design Team - Kari Boyle, Jennifer Charlesworth, Emma Conlon, Dulcie Fernandes, Jared Hydamaka, Lauren Irvine, CJ Lutke, Jan Lutke, Jane Morley KC, Suzette Narbonne and Jade Ryan - for their continued dedication to designing, preparing for, and playing various roles at the Conference. A big thank you to Amanda Fenton whose ability to turn the group's ideas into a design that works is nothing short of amazing, and Miranda Maslany, our graphic illustrator, who so wonderfully captured the essence of the day. Thanks also to Access to Justice BC's Strategic Coordinator, Tina Parbhakar, who played an important organizing role on the day of the conference, and joined the Design Team in reflecting on what worked and what did not, and next steps. Tina was ably supported by her volunteer assistant Emily Kim.

About The Report

The Lundy Model, depicted on the cover of this report, depicts four aspects of effective child and youth participation, consistent with Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child:

1. Space
2. Voice
3. Audience
4. Influence



The Conference provided a **space**, and young people were given **voice** and used it to express their views to the attending **audience**. We have no doubt that the expression of youth voices had **influence** on those who attended the conference in a multitude of ways, and those people in turn will influence others. This report seeks to expand the audience and influence of the Conference.

Reflecting back: This report is also intended as a gift to those who participated in the conference by reflecting back to them what was heard and highlighting how the expression of their views contributed, and will continue to contribute, to promoting meaningful participation of children and youth in family justice decisions that impact them.

Reflection: The report is also a demonstration of walking the talk of engaging in periodic reflection - “learning as we go”. This reflective practice is a crucial practice in transformative system change.

A record: The report will serve as a record of an important event. A resource: We hope this report will be a useful resource for those seeking to organize youth-led events, support children and youth meaningful participation and improve family justice in BC.

A hope: We hope that the report will help mobilize those who read it to act and to use their influence to bring about the change that the report promotes.

An Overview

This Report has five sections to explore:

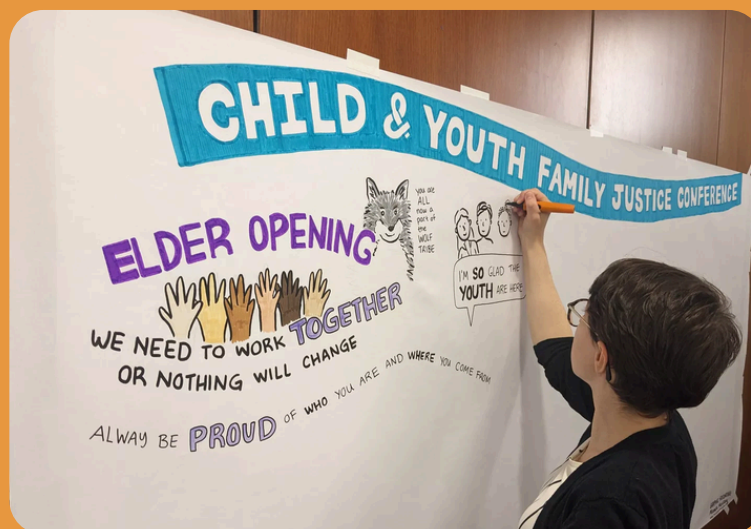
What we did: The design story and description of the day

How we did: Reflection on what worked, what didn't and lessons learned

What we heard: The themes and calls for action that emerged from the conference

What will propel us forward: Some follow up actions and ideas for the future

What you can do: How you can make a difference



What We Did

Conference Design & Prep

From the beginning, we wanted to make child and youth meaningful participation not only the subject matter of the Conference, but also the way in which the conference was designed and implemented.

The **conference concept** was generated at an “ideas for action” session of the Transform the Family Justice System Collaborative Child & Youth Meaningful Participation Community of Action in March 2022:

A child and youth-led Transform Family Justice System hybrid conference in which chairs, planning committee and panelists would all be children and youth; supported by “youth friendly” adults; intersectoral and diverse; children and youth seen as the experts.

The conference was indeed co-designed. Planning meetings started in January 2023, with a conference design group defining the purposes and the guiding principles of the Conference. The group, made up of equal numbers of youth and older adults met frequently from February to September.

Key purposes of the conference were:

- Shifting thinking about meaningful participation
- Expanding child & youth meaningful participation in systems change work
- Demonstrating the value of child and youth participation in policy making

Principles were developed in detail to guide the design work, and emphasized:

- Youth leading and participating fully in the conference, including as facilitators, panelists and presenters
- Interactive participation (no “talking heads”)
- Co-mingling of youth and non-youth participants (no “kiddie tables”)
- Continuing relationships
- Importance of reciprocity in engagement – both giving and giving back
- Use of language that is easily understood



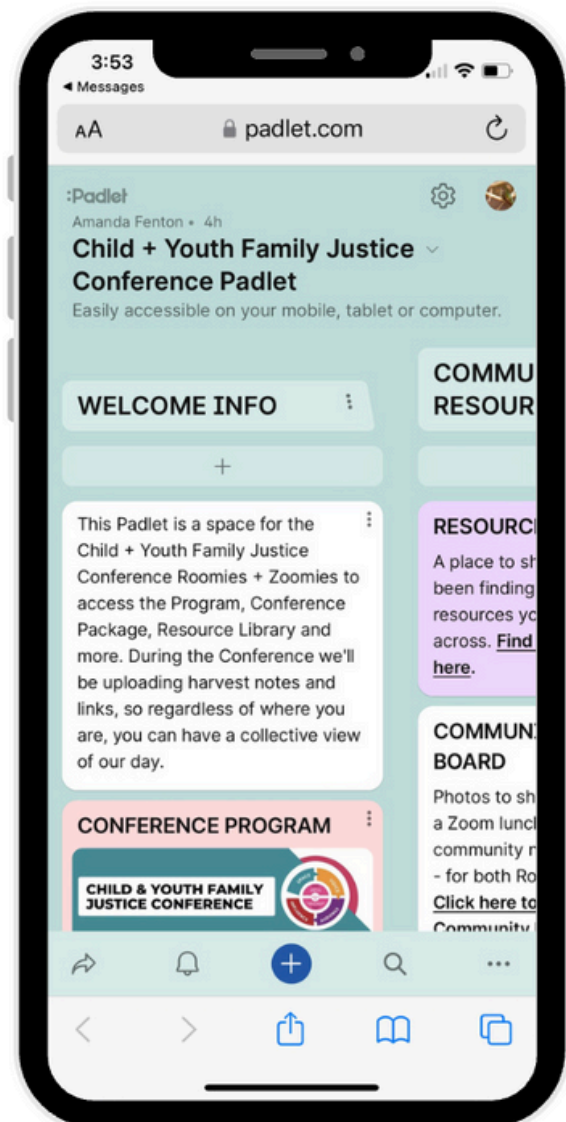
The design developed as an introduction to set the stage, a morning and an afternoon panel of youth imagining a better future and identifying actions, with each panel to be followed by small group discussions, and a conclusion to wrap-up. Two youth from the Design Group were chosen as moderators for the two panels. Preparatory meetings were held for the panel members, and one-on-one support was provided where it was wanted.

A sub-group also formed to focus on inviting youth to the Conference and make sure that adequate supports were there to create a safe space for participation. A pre-conference session was held one week before the conference, just for youth, to help with preparation, answer questions, and support meaningful participation at the conference.

The Conference

The Child + Youth Family Justice Conference was held on September 23, 2023, from 9 am to 4 pm. It was co-hosted by Access to Justice BC, the Representative for Children & Youth, Youth Voices (Family Justice Innovation Lab) and the Society for Children and Youth BC. The conference was hybrid – both in-person and online. More than 200 attended, about half in-person (Roomies) at the SFU Wosk Centre for Dialogue in Vancouver and the other half via Zoom (Zoomies). 56 young people (under the age of 26) registered and, of those, 29 attended in person and 27 via Zoom.

A virtual space was created to be easily accessed by Conference Zoomies and Roomies. It included the Program, A Conference Guide ([link here](#)), Resource Library and more. During the conference, harvest notes and links were uploaded onto it. Visit it [here](#) to get a flavour of the Conference.





The Elders Sempulyan Stewart Gonzales and Elder Liamgolth (Bruce) Robinson set the tone for the conference in a good way, and the Representative for Children & Youth and co-host Jennifer Charlesworth thanked them and Elder Maria Reid (a long-time supporter of Collaborative activities) for their presence.

What possibilities for effective action are there to increase meaningful child and youth participation in family justice decision-making?

Jade Ryan, a youth member of the Design Group, and Jane Morley, the Collaborative Lead, introduced the focus, principles and plan for the day, and outlined the available supports. Printed quotes from young people were provided to all participants, to ground the conversations in the experience of young people.

Principles for the day:

- Leave space for people to speak
- Listen with curiosity and not judgment
- Encourage young people, don't criticize
- Assume all are equal participants

The Panels

Morning:

Describing a Better Future Panel: What should meaningful child and youth participation in family justice decision-making look like?

Moderator: Jared Hydamaka

Panelists: Daniell Sunshine, Izzy LeBrun, Recla Ker, Selena Lai



Afternoon:

Moving to Action Panel: What short-term and long-term ideas, recommendations or actions would increase meaningful child and youth participation in family justice decision-making?

Moderator: Emma Conlon

Panelists: Panel members: CJ Lutke, Lauren Irvine, Layla Lebrun, Nehemias Andy



After each panel, Roomies and Zoomies broke into small group discussions. In the morning, they addressed the questions:

What are we learning about what meaningful child and youth participation in family justice decision-making should look like and could look like? What possibilities are emerging?



And in the afternoon:

What is something that the people in this room can do to increase meaningful child and youth participation in family justice decision-making? What short term and long-term ideas, recommendations or actions need our energy and attention?

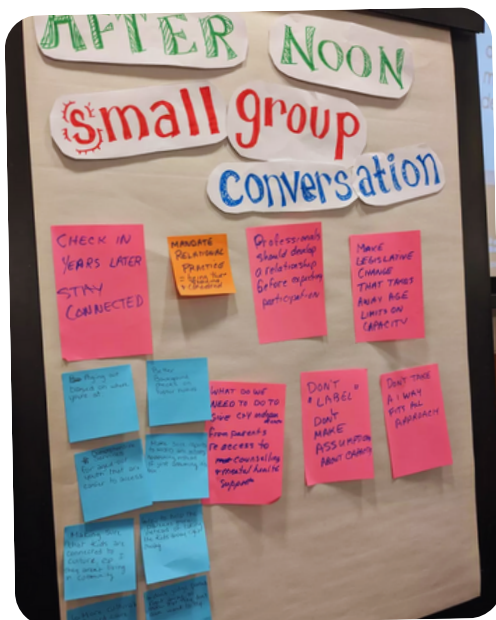
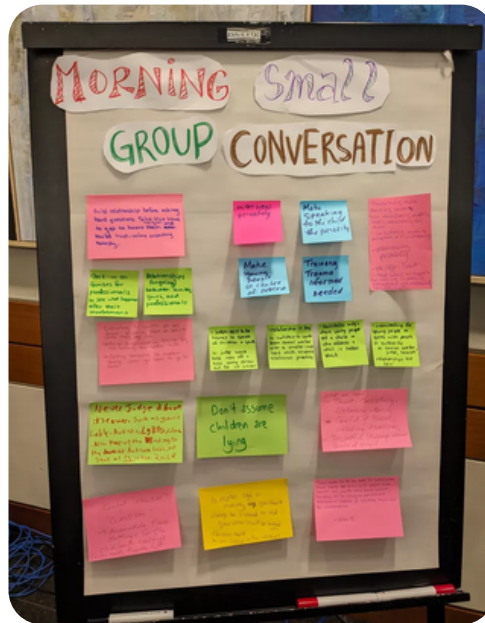


Group discussions

After each small group session, Representative for Children and Youth Jennifer Charlesworth led a large group harvesting of the wisdom that emerged from the small groups, and participants were encouraged to capture their insights on actual and virtual sticky notes.

Sandwiched between the morning and afternoon panels was a fulsome lunch for the Roomies, with opportunities for mingling.

At the end of the day, Chief Justice Bauman, who attended the full day, reflected back, with humility, what he had heard during the day and how it had shifted his thinking. He concluded, looking back over his career as a judge, that, if he were doing it again, he would have listened a lot more to children and youth.



Throughout the day of the Conference, we had a graphic artist Miranda Maslany capturing what the group was hearing. Participants were fascinated, and in breaks people studied it. At the end of the day, Miranda went over her piece of art for the group. The full graphic is at page 22, and parts of it have been reproduced throughout the report.

Supports

To create a safe space for youth to participate at the Conference, participants were encouraged to take breaks as necessary and a 'Chill Space' (or youth quiet room) was offered to in-person participants. Fidget toys & colouring pages were available at each table, with youth and adults taking advantage of these. Youth online were encouraged to have their pets with them.



Several support resources were offered:

- **Cultural Support** from Elders and cultural support workers, to provide brushing and cultural support for anyone. A virtual option was available for the Zoomies.
- **Emotional Support Resource People:** Several qualified individuals were identified as Emotional Support Resources, both in-person and on Zoom, with a promise of confidentiality.
- **Youth Support Resource People:** Other individuals were identified with badges as Youth Support Resources, to be supportive allies for young people in the conversations and available if any young people have questions.

How We Did

How did we do in terms of our objectives?

- Did we shift thinking about meaningful participation of children and youth?
- Did we expand child & youth meaningful participation in systems change work?
- Did we demonstrate the value of child and youth participation in policy making?

How did we do in terms of our principles?

- Did youth lead and participate fully in the conference?
- Was the conference interactive and participatory
- Did we focus on relationships?
- Was there reciprocity in our engagement with youth?
- Did we use language that was easily understood
- What worked? What didn't work? What lessons did we learn?

To answer these questions, we conducted a post-conference survey and the design group had a reflection session.

The Survey

Responses

43% of the young people and 22% of the older attendees responded. Of those who responded, there were a few more young Roomies (14) than Zoomies (10), and in a few more older Zoomies (19) than Roomies (14).



Ratings

In general, the ratings of the conference were high and there were no significant differences between Roomies and Zoomies, despite the technical difficulties that reportedly interfered somewhat with the Zoom experience.

For young people, the overall conference experiences (on a scale of 1 to 5) was 4.5, with a rating of 4.5 or more for feeling safe and supported in giving their opinion; feeling listened to and that their opinions will be taken seriously; having a say in how they wanted to participate; and the usefulness of supports provided.

For attendees over 25, the overall conference rating averaged 4.3, with the highest ratings being given for the conference being co-led and participated in by young people (4.8) and young people's views being listened to (4.7). An average rating of 4.6 was given for providing safe, inclusive opportunities for young people to express their views; for young people having a say in how they wanted to participate, and being supported in their views. The lowest average rating was 4.2 for young people's views being acted on.

Comments relating to stated purposes of the conference included:

1. Shifting thinking: Almost half of the older attendees reported that their thinking about child and youth participation had either been changed or positively reinforced as a result of the conference.

"I was particularly struck by some of the constructive ways the youth participants said they could have been more meaningfully engaged in the justice system"

"The conference helped me understand that unless children feel heard, they will continue to suffer and solutions will be imposed on them that they will spend too long having to learn to overcome"

2. Expanding meaningful participation: The diversity of young people was appreciated.

"I appreciated the diversity of the youth on the panels."

"I appreciated how you included children impacted by the foster care system."

There were positive comments, particularly from the youth, about the supports that were available at the conference.

"That there were supports available if we needed them and how the people hosting the event understood how it could be triggering."

"It's not often, I see steps taken [to provide cultural supports]. It made me feel safe and like I had the support needed."

3. Demonstrating the value of child & youth participation:

The most positive comments, particularly from the older attendees, were directed at the panels of youth - the opportunity to hear directly the opinions of young people based on their experience; their willingness to share their experiences and views; and the complexity and thoughtfulness of their presentations.

“The panels were excellent!” – adult attendee

“I am grateful for the opportunity to hear directly from youth – we don’t get those opportunities in our society much” – adult attendee

“Bringing in the youth perspective added so very much” – adult attendee

“Hearing from more young people themselves, talking about their own lived experience, was really powerful.” - adult attendee

Constructive ideas for the future

Suggestions for what might be done differently at future conferences focused mostly on the space and technology. These included:

- A clearly marked, designated area for supports so participants can find them better
- Youth support person should stay with the assigned youth
- Longer small group sessions to give everyone time to speak
- More physical space for the table discussions and for moving from table to table
- More youth participation in Zoom small group chats
(Note: several young people chose not to participate in the small groups)
- More intentional sharing with the larger group of highlights from small group discussions
- Having the conference take place in October or November instead of September would help with the price of the hotels.

Design Group Reflections

On October 19, 2023, the conference design team plus Access to Justice BC Strategic Coordinator met to reflect on the conference. Here is summary of the reflections:

Overall assessment: The experience was very positive!

Big challenge: How do we create change that actually incorporates the views of the young people who participated?

Did we achieve the purposes we set out to achieve?

“We weren’t wheeling them on the stage to share their trauma stories, and then not asking them to participate at all. This is in contrast to other such events where young people are being invited to speak and then not invited to participate in anything else.” – young person

1. Shifting minds

- It was transformational for some – both young people participating and adults listening to what the young people had to say.
- For those working in the system, it gave them the opportunity to consider the bigger picture



2. Expanding child & youth participation

- Young people were not tokenized, but given an enhanced sense of agency.
- The number of youth participants was impressive.
- Many of the young people participating were really engaged.
- We brought in different intersections under the family justice system – children in care and children of parental separation.
- Diverse perspectives were represented - including cultural and neuro-diverse.



“We avoided what young people have described as; ‘bearing witness to trauma porn’, with no place to process. This was because the conference was co-designed with young people, and supports were in place. It felt respectful.”

3. Demonstrating the value of child & youth participation in policy

- The conference brought home how really important child and youth meaningful participation is for so many young people.
- The panels were the highlight. This was because the moderator and panel members were all young people. The extensive preparatory work for the panels was an important element contributing to their success.
- It was also empowering for young people to see their own leadership potential.

What Worked & What Didn't



What worked in terms of the design and implementation?

- The Guide - those who looked at it got a lot out of it.
- The presence of the Elders.
- Supports - somewhere to go to, if a young person was triggered.
- Fidget toys - being used the whole time.
- Food - the young people were into the food, and there was lots available.
- The graphic artist - a great addition.
- Amanda's handling of the tech issues - excellent.

What didn't work so well?

- The room was too cramped.
- The separate rooms were not used a lot.
- The onsite tech support was disappointing.
- It was hard for the Roomies to see the Zoomies.
- Healthier food earlier would have been good.
- Online older attendees did not get to interact as much with young people because of low young person participation in online small groups.
- Communication with young people in advance of the event was challenging.
- Some of the older attendees could have done with some preparation.

"We successfully balanced not forcing young people to share their stories and yet not suppressing the stories if young people wanted to tell them. We were prepared to take some risks."

Lessons Learned:

1. You need to take some risks

- Yes, be cautious and provide supports, but at the same time, take some risks. It is important for young people to say what they want to say and for other young people (and adults) to hear them. You cannot and should not avoid the hard truths.

“Both the small things and the big things are important and there is a synergy between them. So, work on the systemic level – education, shifting belief systems – but don’t dismiss the small things like relationship building experiences.”

2. Co-designing with young people and having them lead the event works!

- There is a real difference in the experience of young people attending when it is a collaborative event that is co-designed with and led by young people.
- The experience of co-designing and leading is empowering for young people.
- For older people, working with young people on an event like this can be a very rewarding.
- It doesn’t have to be perfect and polished.

3. Key role for the older co-designers

- As we model how to do this well, we need to remember that it is not about adults abandoning our role as coaches, mentors and supporters.
- The role for the older co-designers can be time consuming, and involves relationship building.
- Doing preparatory work with the young people leading the event is very important, and will vary according to the needs of the young person.

4. The “How” is crucial

- It is about relationship building and that happens over time. It is important to be intentional about that, and take the time.
- It is important to make it clear that young people only need to share what they want to say. It should not be all about hearing what they went through, but rather about engaging them as actors in moving to a future that could be better.
- Communicating a lot in advance with the young people attending makes a difference. It prepares them for the possibility of hearing some things that might be triggering for them.
- Communicating effectively involves some creativity.

5. Older attendees need prep-work too

- Get them to reflect on what assumptions/ways of thinking they are bringing with them to the conference.
- Give them a sense of their responsibility to support young people who may be triggered or are having a difficult time and give them some tools to support the young people.

What would we change?

While protecting privacy, have a videographer to capture the conference or, at least, to record the panels so they could be seen others.

More thought about how to communicate before the event with young people

Provide more space in the room, between participants, and ways for young people to easily exit if they need to.

Hybrid again? Perhaps, but only with more confidence in the onsite capacity on the tech side

Pre-work with adults as well

Expect young people to participate in small groups as a mandatory part of getting the honorarium, subject to special circumstances.

What We Heard

Graphic recording

The graphic says it all...



You can view a full-sized version of [the graphic recording here](#).

Interacting with kids

Six overriding themes of wisdom and advice emerged:

1. Respect and trust children, whatever their age

- Kids are humans not commodities
- Children and youth know
- Don't make assumptions about a child's capacity to have a view
- Listen!

2. Create safe and friendly spaces

- Offer privacy
- Allow pets
- Provide fidget toys
- Offer food and drink



3. Be transparent with children

- Explain things, and in a way that the child can understand
- Tell them about their right to be heard
- Explain why, when and how their views will be used
- Offer to share interview notes
- Tell children the outcome of sharing their views

4. Take the time and make the effort to build a relationship and develop trust

- Plan interviews with the individual child in mind
- Be culturally and developmentally aware
- Connect with kids on a soul level
- Have more and shorter sessions
- Let the child decide if they want to participate and how
- Support continuity in relationships, including with social workers and lawyers

5. Focus on the child's well-being and safety

- Don't treat it as a 'win/lose' for parents, but as what is best for the child or youth
- Consider varying options and don't make it an 'all or nothing' choice in terms of connection with parents, family and community
- Be aware of safety risks, and have a plan to protect children from their abusers
- Respect confidentiality, or if you cannot, make that clear
- Arrange for emotional supports when needed

6. Check in over time

- Things change
- Let kids change their minds
- Keep the relationship going – its important to the child



Intersectoral approach

1. Bring the education system into the effort to increase meaningful participation of children and youth.
2. Train teachers about children's rights and the impact of family justice issues, trauma and abuse.
3. Explore schools as a point of connection with children and youth.
4. Make available child and youth mental health supports to children and youth experiencing family justice issues.

Cultural and equity issues

1. Ableism and the need for accommodation
2. Systemic racism and colonial bias in the system and among service providers
3. The impacts of historical and intergenerational trauma
4. The value of Indigenous family laws, practices, traditions and rights
5. The importance of cultural connection and community belonging for Indigenous children and youth

Calls for action

The following were highlighted for action:

1. Focus on building relationships between professionals and children, especially for children-in-care
2. Increase mental health supports for parents and children
3. Educate child welfare and justice professionals (social workers, lawyers, judges, law students, all adults conducting interviews) about:
 - children's rights
 - child development
 - trauma and family violence
 - how to conduct interviews
4. Have more events like this!

Specific recommendations for changes in court-related matters:

5. Increase access to child lawyers
6. Make hearing from the child the default in court processes.
7. Train judges who hear family matters about the importance of hearing the child's voice.
8. Judges should routinely ask whether the child has been heard from, and if not, why not?
9. Let kids apply to be heard in court, give them the necessary resources to be heard.





What Will Propel Us Forward

The Conference is worthy of celebration as an end unto itself - an empowering experience for young people and an enlightening one for the older attendees. Still the challenge remains:

*How do we **propel forward** towards the better future so eloquently envisioned by the young panel members and participants at the Conference?*

Here are some answers that emerged from the Conference experience and the work done by the Collaborative's Child & Youth Meaningful Participation Community of Action:

Shift thinking by:

1. Demonstrating

Change happens when people shift their thinking, and, as indicated by the survey responses, listening to the young people and experiencing their meaningful participation resulted in a shift of thinking among the older participants. They saw it in action and were impressed. We need to keep working at that – keep demonstrating the value of involving young people in decision-making about family justice issues, at both the individual and system change levels. The Lundy Participation Model and Framework (See Appendix B) is a helpful high level guide on how to do that. Hopefully, this report provides some practical guidance as well.





2. Educating

Being confronted with new evidence that challenges entrenched assumptions helps shift thinking.

There is lots to learn about why meaningful participation increases the well-being of children and youth experiencing family justice issues.

We need to learn and to educate! educate! educate! all those who have roles to play with families experiencing family justice issues – parents, teachers, social workers, mental health care providers, lawyers, mediators, judges and more.

The Transform the Family Justice System Collaborative is based on a shift of thinking rooted in the brain science of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Resilience and Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs). (See Appendix C for a summary and some links.)

An analysis (done by the Simon Fraser University SFU Faculty of Health Sciences specifically for the Conference) of the recent Youth Development Instrument survey results tells us that of those youth who had lived through parental separation or government care, those who experienced a greater sense of autonomy (making their own life decisions) reported greater life satisfaction and mental well-being. They also had fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety. (See Appendix C)

3. Getting the word out

We need to get the word out through the various networks that we touch. We must share our positive experience with youth engagement in whatever forums offer themselves to us. This could mean speaking to the people we work with, putting on webinars, advocating within our organizations or collectively to the people who can make change happen.

Inspired by the conference, the Youth Voices Initiative (many of whose members attended the conference and were in the design group) and the Collaborative's Child & Youth Meaningful Participation Community of Action, in March 2024, made a joint submission to the Ministry of Attorney General for legislative change. Grounded in what was heard at the conference, they recommended changes to the *Family Law Act* to promote the right of all children and youth to be heard and to influence decisions in all matters affecting them.

Inspire & build relationships

It is people who make change happen. The people - the young and the not so young, who attended the conference and were impacted by it - will propel us forward. They may do that individually through their own organizations or networks, or through relationships created or strengthened as a result of the conference, and always through the leadership they take and the relationships they build.

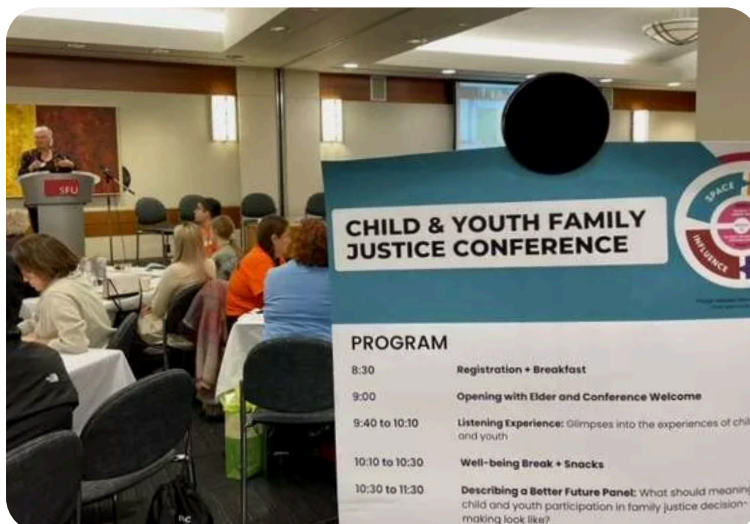
Within days of the Conference, one of the young participants raised child and youth meaningful participation at the Our Children Our Way conference on Indigenous child welfare put on by the Representative for Children and Youth. She co-led a workshop on child rights and participation that was well received.

Expand youth engagement in system change work

In their reflection session, the Conference design group highlighted the need to build on the conference's success in attracting young people to participate. They advocated for following up particularly on the relationships developed through the Conference with those experiencing neuro-diversity.

Thanks to a grant from the Representative for Children and Youth, a project is underway to expand (in terms of both numbers and diversity) the involvement of young people in the ongoing work of the Transform the Family Justice System Collaborative, and in justice sector policy work generally.

Also to that end, Youth Voices and the Collaborative formally agreed to work together to strengthen the engagement of young people in making change happen. Youth Voices will have a representative on the Collaborative's Strategy Committee and will be joined by an Indigenous young person with lived experience as a child-in-care.



What You Can Do

You can contribute to propelling us forward. You will know best how you might do that, yet here are some suggestions:

- You can become more educated in why meaningful participation is so important to the well-being of children and youth.
- You can read and learn more about the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).
- You can get trained in how to effectively support children and youth to meaningfully participate in decisions that affect them.
- You can meet with young people and find opportunities to give them voice.
- You can be involved in the [Transform the Family Justice System Collaborative](#), and in particular, the Child & Youth Meaningful Participation Community of Action. [Sign up](#) on the support page and indicate your particular interest in the Child & Youth Meaningful Participation Community of Action.
- You can advocate for increased child and youth meaningful participation, whenever you have the opportunity to do so.
- You can help get the word out among your networks, including by forwarding the link to this report:
<https://transformfamilyjusticebc.ca/news/child-youth-family-justice-conference-report/>

Whatever your age, you can make a difference for children and youth experiencing family justice issues.

Appendices

Appendix A. *Terminology*

Appendix B. *The Lundy Model*

Appendix C. *Adverse and Positive Childhood Experiences*

Appendix D. *NAWENDIWIN: The Art of Being Related, Anishinaabeg Kinship-Centered Governance and Family Law*

Appendix E. *SFU Data Analysis of protective and promotive factors for youth mental health and well-being*

A. Terminology

What do various words mean, in the context of this conference?

The below explanations come from the work of the Transform the Family Justice System Collaborative's Child and Youth Meaningful Participation Community of Action.

Family Justice System:

- Covers all children, youth and families who are experiencing or have experienced “family justice issues”, including
 - child abuse or neglect,
 - violence or abuse between adults in the home,
 - parental separation and divorce, or
 - separation of children from parents and children being in the care of the state.
- Includes all services and processes related to family justice issues - not just court processes (Note: many families involved in family justice issues never go to court).
- Includes services related to the prevention, management and resolution of family justice issues.

Family includes:

- Children and youth,
- Parents,
- Extended family, and
- Any adults with whom the child or youth has a bond of affection.

Terminology Continued

Participation is a right of children and youth:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) asserts that participation is a fundamental right of children and youth – a right they carry with them from birth and across all parts of their lives.
- Participation promotes healthy development, respects human dignity and empowers the exercise of agency.
- What meaningful participation looks like will depend on the stage of development of the child or youth and their circumstances.
- Participation must be implemented considering the safety of the child, and with a presumption of their capacity to participate.

Meaningful Participation:

- Children and youth are provided opportunities to form their views about issues that matter to them. This means being informed so that they can understand the issues to the best of their capacity.
- Children and youth are provided opportunities to express their views, in a space that is safe for them.
- These opportunities are provided at various points when decisions are being made by others that will impact the child or youth.
- The views of children and youth are listened to by the adults making decisions that affect them. These adults includes: parents and other family members, social workers, psychologists, family doctors, pediatricians, service providers, lawyers, mediators, judges and possibly others.

Terminology Continued

Meaningful Participation continued:

- The views expressed by children and youth are taken into account, and acted upon as appropriate when decisions are being made.
- Children and youth have a say in whether and how they participate in all participation processes made available to them.

The Transform the Family Justice System (TFJS) Collaborative:

- Is a group of individuals and organizations that have come together to transform the family justice system so that it achieves family well-being.
- Puts children, youth and families - not courts - at the centre.
- Includes people and organizations across sectors - justice, health, child welfare, education and others.
- Is led by Access to Justice BC, a voluntary network of justice sector leaders and those with lived experience of the family and civil justice systems, chaired by the Chief Justice of BC, and has partners, including the Representative for Children and Youth.

The TFJS Collaborative's Meaningful Participation of Children and Youth Objective:

- That children and youth of all ages meaningfully participate (before, throughout and after their families are engaged in the family justice system) in decision-making that affects them.



[Learn about the Transform the Family Justice System Collaborative here](#)

Terminology continued

Three key strategies of the TFJS Collaborative to achieve meaningful participation:

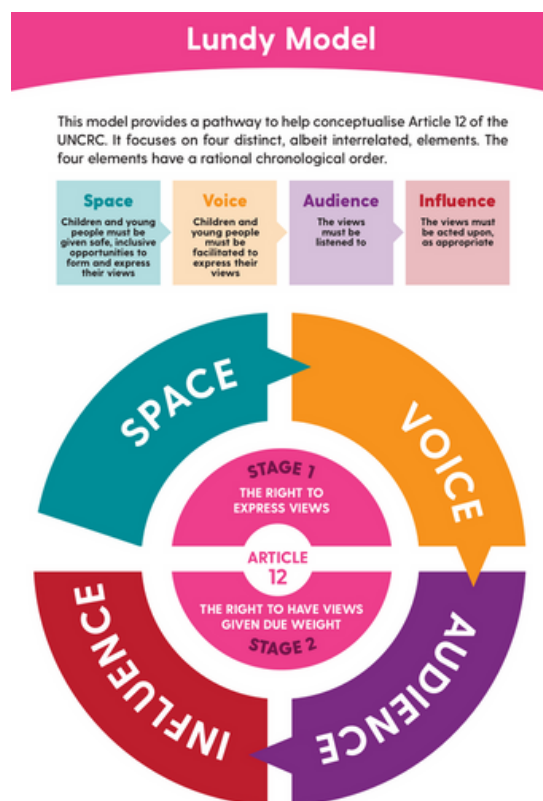


B. The Lundy Model

The Lundy Model and the checklist provides guidance for decision-makers on the steps to take in giving children and young people a meaningful voice in indecision-making and is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006).

Links:

- [A short overview of the model](#)
- [The full Irish National Strategy document](#)
- [The three checklists and feedback forms accompany the model](#)
- [The Participation Framework from the government of Ireland \(where the checklists and feedback form are from\).](#)



- **Some examples of application of the Lundy Model:**
 - [Our Hearings, Our Voices](#) (Scotland)
 - [Children's Participation in Barnahus](#) (Iceland)
 - [Hub na nÓg](#) (Ireland)

C. Adverse Childhood Experiences & Positive Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences

The research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) identifies ten childhood experiences that potentially create toxic stress and risk negative immediate, long-term, and intergenerational impacts. The presence of adverse social conditions and historical trauma also increases risks. **Helpful links:**

- ACEs and the Family Justice System video that links ACEs as a public health issue to the family justice system. [Scroll down on this page](#) to watch the video on the bottom left-hand side.
- Information on brain science, ACEs and resilience research and the family justice system. [Scroll down on this page](#) to find that segment.
- Three types of ACEs and their impact found [on this page](#).

Positive Childhood Experiences

Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) make a difference in supporting the development of resilience, which is a successful development in the face of adversity. It is both the human capacity to adapt despite challenges and threatening circumstances, and the outcome of successful adaptation. Resilience can be enhanced by: reducing negative experiences, supporting families, and increasing skills to manage stress. **Helpful links:**

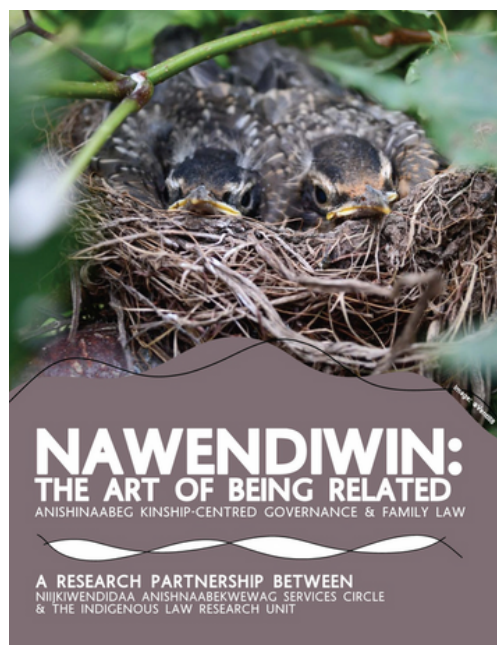
- Research says positive childhood experiences increase resilience and reduce the risk of negative outcomes. [View the 7 Positive Childhood Experiences.](#)
- 7 Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) that Shape Adult Health and Resiliency – [Illustrated.](#)
- From Risk to Resilience: Taking an Intersectoral Approach to Promoting Well-being in Children and Families, [a presentation from Dr. Kimberly A.Schonert-Reichl.](#)
- [Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Mental and Relational Health in a Statewide Sample](#); Associations Across Adverse Childhood Experiences Level.
- [The Alberta Wellness Centre video on Resilience.](#)

D. NAWENDIWIN: The Art of Being Related, Anishinaabeg Kinship-Centered Governance and Family Law

The Nijkiwendidaa Anishnaabekwewag Services Circle released a report that shines light on Anishinaabeg kinship-centred governance and family law. The report aims to help Anishinaabeg and other Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members and service providers have a greater understanding of how to work with and empower families and children in a way that honours and respects Anishinaabeg laws.

The report, called NAWENDIWIN: The art of being related – Anishinaabeg Kinship-centred Governance and Family law, is the result of two years of research undertaken in partnership with the Indigenous Law Research Unit at the University of Victoria.

[Learn more here](#), and [access the full report here](#).



E. Protective and Promotive Factors for Mental Health and Well-being Among Adolescents with Experiences in the Family Justice System

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Background: Youth whose parents/guardians have gone through divorce or separation and those who have been in government care are more likely to experience mental health challenges (e.g., Auersperg et al., 2019; Sawyer et al., 2007; Størksen et al., 2015; Tebaka et al., 2016). Thus, understanding which factors contribute to mental health and well-being in these populations may help support their resilience.

We investigated protective factors for depression and generalized anxiety and promotive factors for mental well-being and life satisfaction for youth with experience in the family justice system, focusing on two specific populations: 1) youth who reported that their parents/guardians are separated or divorced, and 2) youth who reported experiences in government care. The protective and promotive factors examined included a sense of autonomy; supportive adults in the home; positive family communication; and positive childhood experiences, such as supportive peers, school belonging, supportive families, community belonging, and caring adults other than parents/guardians.

SFU Data Analysis Continued

Data were collected on the 2022-2023 [Youth Development Instrument \(YDI\)](#). The YDI is a self-report questionnaire that examines adolescent health and well-being and individual and contextual factors that contribute there to that is administered annually in schools across BC to students in Grades 10-12.

Participants included 14,596 youth (46% girls, 48% boys, 6% non-binary/gender diverse) from 28 school districts and 28 independent schools across BC (147 schools total). Regarding racial identity, 45% of the population described themselves as White, 42% as Black, Indigenous, or people of colour (BIPOC), and 13% as other. High family affluence was reported by 37% of participants, medium family affluence by 43%, and low family affluence was reported by 21% of participants.

Seventeen percent of youth (n = 2541) reported having separated or divorced parents and 2% reported experiences in government care, such as living in foster care or a group home.

Results: After taking into account the contributions of family influence and racial identity to mental health and well-being outcomes, we found that autonomy, supportive adults at home, positive family communication, and positive childhood experiences were associated with fewer symptoms of depression and generalized anxiety and higher mental well-being and life satisfaction in youth with divorced or separated parents and in youth who reported experiences in government care.

Positive childhood experiences had the strongest association with mental health and well-being outcomes. Fostering these protective and promotive factors may enable and equip youth with experiences in the family justice system with the necessary tools and resources to enhance their mental well-being and support their long-term mental health.

To learn more about the YDI and access [reports](#) and other [infographics](#) created using YDI data, please visit chartlab.ca.

SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUTH WITH EXPERIENCES IN THE FAMILY JUSTICE SYSTEM



The 2022/2023 YDI asked >14,000 youth across British Columbia about their mental health and well-being



2541 (17%) had separated or divorced parents

295 (2%) reported experiences in government care

What **protective factors** are associated with greater life satisfaction and mental well-being and fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety for each group of youth after taking family affluence and racial identity into account?



Largest impact

POSITIVE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

- Having a supportive adult other than parents/guardians
- Supportive peers
- Connection to community
- Supportive school environment

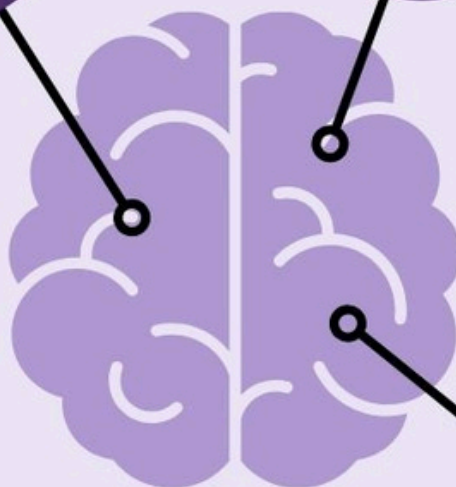


SUPPORTIVE ADULT AT HOME

“My family stands by me during difficult times.”

FAMILY COMMUNICATION

“I talk to my parent/guardian about how I feel.”



$p \leq .05$

For more information about the YDI, visit: chartlab.ca

YDI Youth Development Instrument

SUPPORTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUTH WITH EXPERIENCES IN THE FAMILY JUSTICE SYSTEM



The 2022/2023 YDI asked >14,000 youth across British Columbia about their mental health and well-being



2541 (17%) had separated or divorced parents

295 (2%) reported experiences in government care

We examined the associations between **autonomy** and mental health and well-being outcomes for each group after taking into account family affluence and racial identity.

For each group of youth, a greater sense of **autonomy** was associated with...

"I decide most of my life decisions"

greater life satisfaction and mental well-being



fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety



$p \leq .05$

For more information about the YDI, visit: chartlab.ca

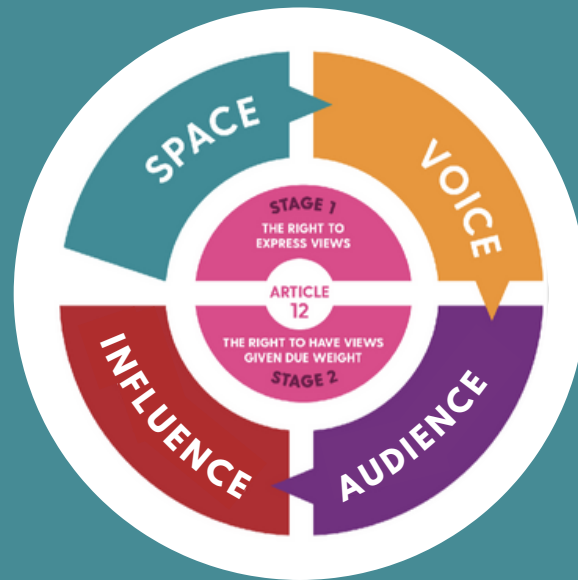
YDi Youth Development Instrument

Written by: Jane Morley

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June 10th, 2024

Reference as: Morley, J. (2024). *Reflecting Back, Propelling Forward: A Report on the Child & Youth Family Justice Conference*. Access to Justice BC. <https://transformfamilyjusticebc.ca/news/child-youth-family-justice-conference-report/>.



Reflecting Back, Propelling Forward:

A Report on the Child & Youth Family Justice Conference