

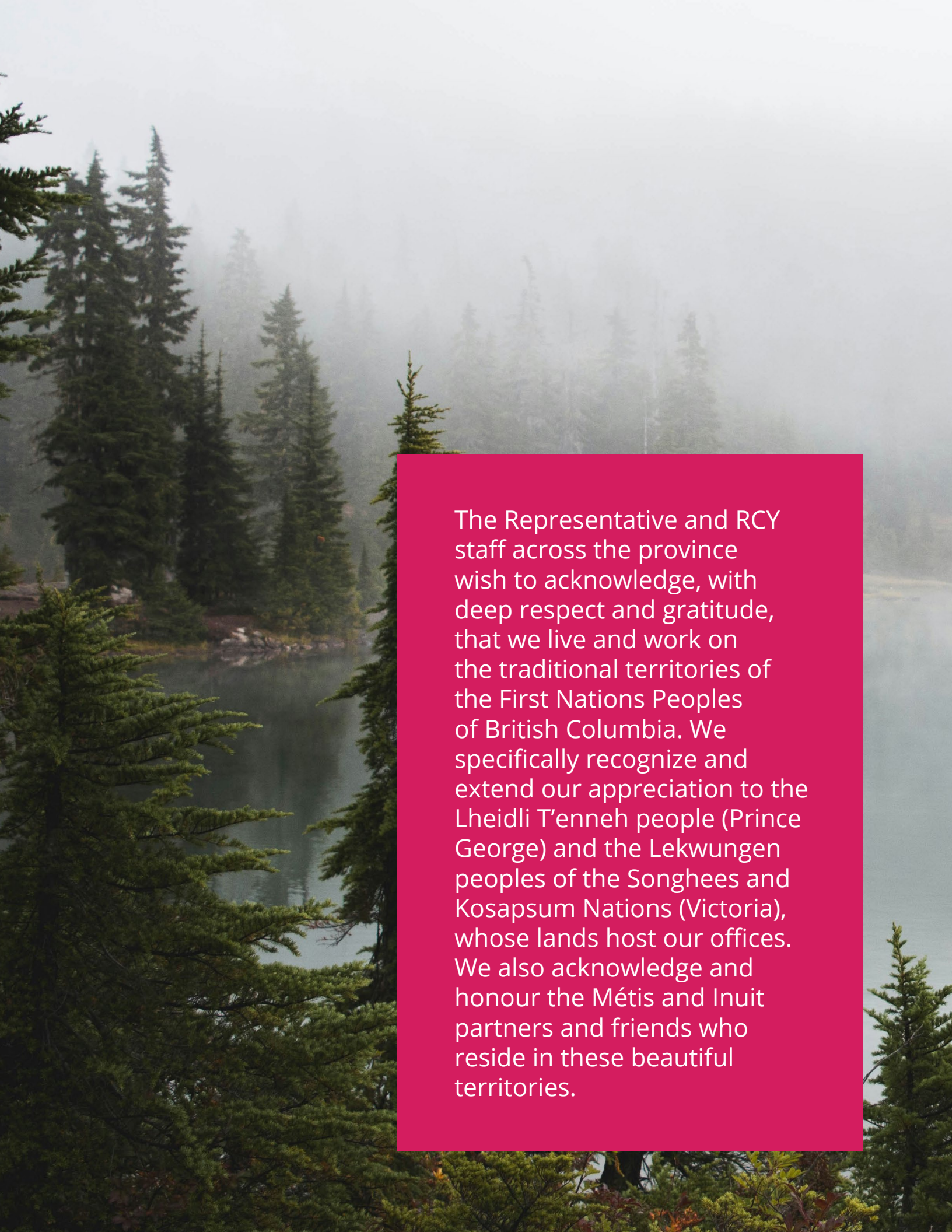


Accessibility Plan

2025-28

RC&Y

Representative
for Children & Youth



The Representative and RCY staff across the province wish to acknowledge, with deep respect and gratitude, that we live and work on the traditional territories of the First Nations Peoples of British Columbia. We specifically recognize and extend our appreciation to the Lheidli T'enneh people (Prince George) and the Lekwungen peoples of the Songhees and Kosapsum Nations (Victoria), whose lands host our offices. We also acknowledge and honour the Métis and Inuit partners and friends who reside in these beautiful territories.

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About the Office of the Representative for Children & Youth

The Office of the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly in British Columbia. The Representative has an oversight mandate over child and youth serving systems. The office plays a key role in providing insight to members of the Legislative Assembly on the government's performance in serving children, youth and young adults and ensuring members of the Assembly can be effective champions for the rights and well-being of all young people. The Representative's mandate under the Representative for Children and Youth Act is threefold: to provide individual advocacy for designated services to children, youth and included adults; to review, investigate and report on critical injuries and deaths of children and youth; and to monitor, review, conduct research, prepare reports and make recommendations to improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of designated government services.

As a rights-based organization, RCY is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

(UNDRIP). RCY advocates for the well-being of all children, youth and young adults, with a specific focus on those who are receiving government services, including children with disabilities.

RCY is committed to building an inclusive and culturally safe workplace: an environment where all individuals are treated with respect and dignity. RCY strives to be a place where employees can bring their best selves to our work for children and families and all staff have equitable opportunities for development and advancement. RCY is dedicated to creating a workplace culture that fosters a sense of belonging for all staff including those with disabilities and strives to identify, remove and prevent barriers that have a negative impact on meaningful employee participation.



Our journey toward
this takes commitment,
thoughtful planning
and ongoing learning.

- Jennifer Charlesworth

Representative's Message

As the Representative for Children and Youth, I have had the great privilege of spending time with many young people, their families and support circles in the province. The people I spend time with share stories of experiences that have a common theme: too many young people are not getting the services they need to thrive.

In our work at my office, we see this all too clearly for young people living with disabilities. Through our research and engagement with families and caregivers we have determined that up to 83,000 young people in this province are not receiving adequate services and supports – a statistic that is simply not acceptable and one that tells us much more needs to be done to ensure the needs of those with disabilities are being met. The Accessible BC Act, is one important step toward a system that works for children, youth and young adults with disabilities. This legislation reminds us of the importance of practical steps we all must take to ensure the people we serve and those who work in our organizations are receiving accessible services that fully meet their needs.

RCY recognizes, that in order to appropriately serve B.C.'s children and youth, particularly those with disabilities, we need to grow our

own capacity for comprehensive accessibility. Our journey toward this takes commitment, thoughtful planning and ongoing learning. This first RCY Accessibility Plan serves as an important concrete step for the office. At the same time, it is by no means the only step RCY is taking in achieving our broader accessibility for the office. As we hear ongoing feedback from the people we serve, those who support our work and our staff, the accessibility of our services and internal culture will grow and develop.

I share my deepest gratitude to all of those who have contributed and will contribute to ensuring our office's accessibility goals are met. I look forward to staying focused and fully committed to the journey ahead.

- Jennifer Charlesworth



Definitions

Accessibility means that all people can play an active role in their communities, through work, play and other daily activities, free of barriers. It implies that the structures and processes that support these things are designed in a way to facilitate the most meaningful participation possible by all.

Accommodation is any workplace-based modification or adjustment that allows a specific person with a disability, neurobiological difference, or medical need to perform the essential functions of their job and enjoy equal employment opportunities. Accommodations are essential to employment equity and fairness.

Barriers can be caused by environments, attitudes & beliefs, practices, policies, information, communications, or technologies, and are affected by intersecting forms of discrimination. They are immediate and concrete things that get in the way of people being able to participate.

Disability means an inability to participate fully and equally in society because of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier. It includes a physical, sensory, mental, intellectual or

cognitive impairment, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic in nature.

Diversity is the amount of difference within a group in a given setting. This may include the unique and varied backgrounds and characteristics of individuals, including race, ethnicity, Indigeneity, age, sex, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, neurodivergence, class, education and lived experience. Embracing diversity acknowledges how these characteristics inform individual experiences and that diversity brings with it valuable perspectives, experiences, beliefs and values.

Equity is the intentional balancing of power dynamics to result in the fair treatment of all employees regarding the accessibility of information, opportunities, and resources. Pursuing equity means detecting and eliminating barriers in an organization's policies, practices and procedures that prevent individuals from reaching their full potential. Equity in the workplace is not about treating everyone the same but rather recognizing and addressing the differences and potential disadvantages that some employees may experience.

Inclusion describes a healthy work environment and workplace atmosphere where each individual feels a sense of belonging, safety, and feeling of being respected, valued, heard, and engaged on their own terms. Staff experience a feeling of belonging within their organization, yet they are very much themselves and their uniqueness is valued.

Intersectionality describes how systems of inequity based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, sex, gender/gender identity, disability, class, education, and other identities “intersect” to create unique dynamics and effects. In various social settings, these overlapping identities can give certain people power and privilege, or disadvantage and marginalize them.

Understanding, intersectionality can ensure our workplace is promoting equity, not just equality. B.C.’s Human Rights Code provides protections for people who experience inequity based on indigenous identity, race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or age of that person or class of persons.

Neurodiversity describes the reality that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one “right” way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits.



Accessible British Columbia Act

The [Accessible British Columbia Act \(2021\)](#) requires that provincial government organizations create and implement an Accessibility Plan to realize comprehensive social accessibility.

Accessibility plans outline how organizations identify, remove, and prevent barriers for their employees and the public. Plans must be reviewed and updated at least once every three years.

The Act requires organizations to:

1. Establish a committee to assist in identifying barriers to interacting with the organization and advise on the removal and prevention of barriers. To the extent possible, half of the committee membership must include:
 - a. people with disabilities or individuals who support persons with disabilities;
 - b. a reflection of the diversity of persons with disabilities in B.C.; and
 - c. at least one Indigenous person.
2. Create an accessibility plan:
 - a. with strategies to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization;
 - b. with a process to review and update the plan at least once every three years;
 - c. which considers the guiding principles;
 - d. with a process to consult and collaborate with the accessibility committee; and
 - e. with a process to consider comments received from public feedback.
3. Create a mechanism for receiving comments from the public related to the organization's accessibility plan and barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization.

A Commitment to Accessibility at RCY

RCY's Accessibility Plan has been drafted to act as a guide in catalyzing shifts in organizational culture, to enable full and effective participation for all staff and clients, and ensure inclusion and belonging so that we can do our best work for children, youth, young adults, and families.

RCY intends to remove barriers and create an equitable environment for all who interact with the organization, including all young people, cultural groups and communities, service providers, partners, parents and caregivers, and RCY staff.

Gathering Our Circle

Toward this vision, RCY has two primary structures through which the office ensures that our commitment to accessibility remains strong and that we continue to develop, grow and innovate. These structures will ensure that RCY's Accessibility Plan will grow and change as the organization continues to learn and evolve. As we know and learn more, we are committed to do more and do better. This document will reflect that growth over time.

The Independent Offices of the Legislative Assembly (IOLA) Joint Accessibility Committee

RCY is a member of the Joint Accessibility Committee (the Committee) of independent Offices of the Legislature. The Committee was established pursuant to section 9 of the Accessible British Columbia Act (the Act). The purpose of the Committee is to advise the

Offices in their efforts to identify, remove, and prevent accessibility barriers to any individuals in or interacting with the Offices, and to assist the Offices with meeting their obligations under the Act. In accordance with the Act, the Committee's advisory work is informed and guided by principles of inclusion, respect, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination and universal design.

The Committee's membership is comprised of representatives employed at each of the independent offices, including staff with lived experience and reflects the diversity of persons in British Columbia.

The Committee operates in an exclusively advisory capacity and does not have independent decision-making power with respect to each office.

Each office is independently responsible for its obligations under the Act. The IOLA Committee's responsibilities include:

- Consulting on each offices' accessibility plan;
- Assisting each office to identify barriers to individuals or organization-wide;
- Advising the organization on how to remove and prevent barriers to individuals in or interacting with the office; and
- Collating the advice and recommendations of its members into notes for review by the office seeking advice, which shall be considered for reviewing or updating the respective offices' accessibility plans

RCY Internal Accessibility Working Committee

RCY also has an internal RCY Accessibility Committee responsible for developing accessibility strategies and plans that are specific to the unique culture of this office. This Committee, constituted in Spring 2023, is grounded in the values that guide our office - Relationship, Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility and Repair - as well as principles that ensure the Office is trauma-informed, culturally safe, and that anti-racist practice and policies are upheld. The Committee is also informed by the guiding principles of the Convention on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities including non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion, equality of opportunity and respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities.

The Committee aims to centre the voices of persons with disabilities and leads with the lived experience of staff who self-identify as having disabilities, and allies, committed to supporting their peers to advance the priorities of the Committee. The Committee's responsibilities include:

- Gathering or providing expertise on disabilities, accessibility needs, and information services that are easy for people with disabilities to use;
- Advising the RCY on accessible services, tools and resources for public reports;
- Identifying a new public feedback mechanism as required by the Act;
- Acting as a liaison with the Independent Offices of the Legislative Assembly Accessibility Committee and ensuring clear and open communication on progress; and
- Ensuring that RCY accessibility is consistent with best practice guidelines set out by the B.C. Public Service.



Our Journey Toward Improved Accessibility

RCY's accessibility work has been evolving in stages with a recognition that our journey will continue to evolve with many future iterations and improvements. Progress to date is outlined below.

Stage One: Pre-Planning

(2022)

- Review and consideration of the Act and its implications for the office; and
- Liaison with other Independent Offices to assess the potential for a collaborative approach.

Stage Two: Gathering the Circle

(Spring-Summer 2023)

- Creation of an overarching accessibility vision and approach to guide the development of detailed plans;
- Establishment of an internal RCY working committee to guide on-going internal collaboration and co-design; and
- Development of relationships with external advisors (Disability Alliance, HR West, BC Aboriginal Network on Disability) to guide RCY thinking according to best practice.

Stage Three: Listening, Assessing & Finding Solutions

(Fall 2023)

- Survey engagement with RCY staff to better understand the level of awareness of disability and accessibility, and to assess the barriers experienced by staff; and
- Development of an Action Plan building from survey feedback including identifying initial priorities.

Stage Four: Creating a Foundation of Understanding & Inclusion

(Winter 2023 - Spring 2024)

- Ongoing work to raise awareness of the importance of collective responsibility for accessibility continued through program area accessibility dialogues. These dialogues aimed to harvest program area priorities;
- Detailed documentation of the barriers experienced by RCY staff and external clients; and
- Initial action on immediate accessibility needs.

Stage Five: Planning Toward Improved Accessibility Structure & Process

(Summer 2024 – Winter 2024)

- On-going action on immediate accessibility needs;
- Assessment, training and strategy development with external consultant, [Untapped Accessibility](#); and
- Completion of a three-year RCY Accessibility Plan.

Identifying & Addressing Barriers

A Foundation for Planning

In our journey to-date, RCY has sought to comprehensively understand the experiences of those with disabilities and the nuanced nature of the barriers they experience across all areas of our office outlined below. RCY has also taken time to understand the breadth of broad social accessibility and the implications for this for our organizational culture.

Built Environment

RCY has two locations open to the public. Our main space is situated on the corner of Fort and Wharf streets in downtown Victoria. We now occupy two spaces in this 19th century building. The 4th floor is open for reception and includes most of our individual office spaces whereas the 1st floor - acquired in 2023 - has been designed as a welcoming and accessible collaborative workspace for our staff and those we serve. Our second location is in Prince George, and we recently re-located our office to a more accessible space that offers increased safety for staff and those we serve as our previous location was in an area of the downtown core that has been deteriorating over time and was becoming increasingly more unsafe/inaccessible for staff, partners and those we serve.

All of these spaces require further work to ensure that our built environments are fully accessible. This will require the efforts of both the RCY and the building owners and will be included in the next phase of our journey. In the meantime, the Office currently has several accessibility features in our office environments including:

- Curb-free doorways;
- A scent-free environment;
- Quiet rooms;
- Height-adjustable chairs and desks;
- A range of comfortable meeting spaces;
- Diverse lighting options;
- Opening windows that allow for fresh air;
- Accessible washrooms; and
- Flexible work-from-home options.

Online and Remote Working Environment

Through the COVID pandemic and the push for staff to work from home, RCY understood the amazing opportunity that working in a hybrid work environment could offer. During this time, the office also moved to a more decentralized staffing approach which broadened our recruitment and increased staff diversity as we were able to employ people across the province

rather than only locations with easy access to our offices.

With many employees working from home and in communities beyond Victoria or Prince George, technology has become the backbone of our remote work. It also supports accessibility and inclusivity by ensuring that all staff can fully participate in meetings and workshops. RCY's work-from-home approach enhances equity and inclusion as it recognizes the importance of balancing work and personal/familial commitments allowing more flexibility to staff.

While RCY has made progress on immediate adaptations to improve accessibility for those working remotely – such as standards for materials being sent in advance, accessible presentations and names spoken in at meetings – ensuring comprehensive accessibility in a virtual environment will require ongoing focus to ensure consistency and adherence to accessibility best practices. RCY will be continuing to ensure consistent practices are developed and upheld.

Information Technology

While we know information technology will continue to evolve and accessibility functions will shift and change, we currently have a variety of options to help staff perform their roles as detailed below:

- Different-sized monitors to meet individual needs (for visual or mobility impairments);
- Laptop computer, keyboard and mouse options (for mobility and ergonomic needs); and
- Software with various accessibility features (text-to-speech, magnification tools, adaptive screen readers, customizable interfaces) for fulfilling job duties.

Improving the Accessibility of our Hiring Processes

Diverse perspectives are fundamental to our mission and the work we do. They reflect the province we serve and the diversity of young people in the province who access RCY services. This is essential to ensuring our services are attuned and appropriate. For this reason, RCY has committed to looking for innovative and accessible ways to ensure that our staff continue to reflect the multiple perspectives of people in B.C. through improved hiring practices, on-boarding, and retention strategies.

Currently RCY has a Human Rights Code exception to hiring that allows us to offer Indigenous only competitions to increase our Indigenous employee representation.

This is critical as child and youth serving systems are over-involved in the lives of Indigenous children and youth resulting in significant harm. We have also incorporated expanded criteria for preference when hiring to ensure that we are consistently increasing the diversity of our staff over time to better reflect those we serve, including staff with disabilities. Work is continuing on how to improve the accessibility of our hiring.

Accessibility and our Written Materials

RCY has been adapting written report standards to ensure that our reports are accessible, clear and easy to use. Some examples of areas where we have made real progress include:

- Providing a “report at a glance” summaries where needed;
- Creating plain language versions of reports;
- Adapting our style guide to ensure that accessibility best practices including font type and size, alt text, hierarchy standards, and concise language are used across formats including letters, internal emails, power point presentations, web and social media content and our public reports; and
- Increased use of alternative formats including videos and one-pagers.

Moving forward, RCY will continue to keep up to date and embed accessibility standards in all of its written work across all platforms.

Accessibility and our Front-line Services

A unique aspect of our office compared to some front-line service delivery agencies, is that young people, families and their support networks are able to access help very quickly. With multiple access points to reach us, available translation services, and information about us available in different formats, we have made significant progress in ensuring young people who need us, are able to get help when they need it.

We also know that we have opportunities to strengthen access to our broader Advocacy services. Enhanced texting functionality is being added to our contact information matrix and we are continually refreshing our information materials to ensure they are clear and fully accessible.

Creating an Accessible Culture at RCY

RCY completed work with Untapped Accessibility in late 2024-early 2025 to establish a strong baseline for future assessment and gain in-depth insights into additional accessibility standards that RCY has started to build into our on-going accessibility action.

Untapped Accessibility also completed a series of training sessions, focus groups and 1:1 conversations with RCY staff.

Their work led to several suggestions:

- Better understand the connection between heavy workloads and accessibility barriers with the potential to review work assignments and practices to better support sustainability, accessibility, and inclusiveness;
- Strengthen accessibility competence across RCY teams through on-going formal training and informal communities of practice, especially related to awareness of mental health and neurodivergence; and
- Make accessibility a collective responsibility through consistent policies and practices, and training, across all RCY functions.



RCY Accessibility Plan 2025-2028

Looking forward, our three-year plan includes specific actions to find, address and prevent barriers in three areas:

- RCY's work environment;
- For children, youth and young people who access our individual advocacy services; and
- External audiences who use our research and reports.

The current plan details key actions that are specifically intended to

address barriers faced by our staff and clients when they use our physical spaces, our written materials and our technology. The plan is also intended to guide the larger discussion at RCY about social accessibility.

Future actions will also address barriers between our online reports and their readers (i.e., the public and Members of the Legislative Assembly).

YEAR 1 (2025-26)

Policies & Practices – A Structure to Support Accessibility

- Consistent with RCY's commitment to Wellness in the workplace, continue the refresh of RCY Human Resource and Finance policies and ensure that they comply with accessibility standards and remove barriers.

Staff Training & Awareness

- Continue accessibility training for all RCY staff, covering topics such as

disability awareness, processes to request support and accommodations in the workplace, creating accessible documents, and using assistive technologies.

- Create a resource hub on an RCY SharePoint or shared drive with accessibility tools, guidelines and best practices.
- Design and implement a mechanism for staff to provide anonymous feedback on this plan including tracking to ensure a consistent reporting process and accountability for addressing concerns.

Communication Accessibility

- Update the RCY Style Guide to provide detailed guidance on accessibility standards.
- Develop templates and guidelines for reports and public information in multiple accessible formats, including plain text, MS Word, accessible PDFs and HTML.
- Confirm a review process to ensure all internal and external communications meet accessibility standards before publication.
- Complete the new RCY website, compliant with enhanced accessibility standards (WCAG AA) to ensure that RCY clients and partners have ready and timely access to resources and develop an ongoing evaluation framework to ensure evolving accessibility standards are continually met.
- Start to train staff responsible for digital content creation to ensure ongoing compliance with accessibility standards.

hiring process, ensuring confidentiality and respect for individual needs.

- Review and revise job postings to include language inviting candidates to request accommodations during the recruitment process.
- Regularly evaluate and refine hiring practices to remove barriers and promote accessibility, seeking feedback from both candidates and staff involved in the recruitment process.

Public Engagement & Front-line Service Feedback Mechanisms

- On-going engagement with youth and families to continue the process of understanding their accessibility needs across all RCY services and products.
- Design a process for partner input into the accessibility of all RCY's materials and services.

Accessibility in Hiring

- Ensure processes are in place for those we are recruiting to request accommodations during interviews, assessments and other stages of the

YEAR 2 (2026-27)

Policies & Practices – A Structure to Support Accessibility

- Continue the refresh of RCY HR and Finance policies and ensure that they comply with accessibility standards and remove barriers.
- Review internal corporate structures and processes such as internal support tickets to ensure accessibility is enhanced.

Staff Training & Awareness

- Continue to use staff surveys to measure progress and identify barriers.
- Provide training for hiring managers and interviewers on unconscious bias and the importance of an inclusive hiring environment.
- On-going training and awareness development of all RCY staff as a component of RCY's larger strategy that supports our organizational culture and the principles of cultural safety, anti-racism, being trauma informed and restorative practice.

Communication Accessibility

- Continue to build an ongoing process to evaluate and potentially enhance website accessibility as necessary.
- Continue to provide training sessions for staff responsible for written communications and digital content across multiple platforms to ensure ongoing compliance with accessibility standards.
- Refine standards for internal communication including meeting protocols and practices and internal communication.

Physical Accessibility Enhancements

- Complete an accessibility audit of the RCY physical office spaces to identify areas for improvement.
- Ensure that all office policies and practices support accessibility, including enabling the provision of accommodations for staff where possible.
- Working with the building managers in Victoria and Prince George, conduct an accessibility audit of the physical space of the common areas.

- Develop a plan to implement any physical accessibility enhancements such as additional automatic door openers, signage improvements, and accessibility features in common areas.

Public Engagement & Front-line Service Feedback Mechanisms

- Continue to explore enhanced options for young people to connect with our services – for example, enhanced texting capability and digital assistant option.
- Implement improved feedback mechanisms across multiple channels, including social media platforms, to gather input from a diverse range of partners.

YEAR 3 (2027-28)

Continued Monitoring, Evaluation & Planning

- On-going development of policy and practice to encourage a strong culture of accessibility.
- Conduct regular accessibility assessments to monitor progress and identify areas for further improvement.
- Engage with management, staff and the public to evaluate the effectiveness of accessibility initiatives and make necessary adjustments.
- Include an annual accessibility update in our Annual Report that details achievements, challenges and future actions to promote transparency and accountability.

On-going Community Engagement

- As part of our larger engagement strategy and approach, strengthen partnerships with disability advocacy groups, community organizations, and other interested parties to foster collaboration on accessibility initiatives.
- Host accessibility awareness events and workshops with other Independent Offices of the Legislative Assembly (IOLA) to promote inclusivity and share best practices.
- Explore opportunities for joint projects and initiatives to advance accessibility in the IOLA community.

Monitoring & Evaluation

The RCY Accessibility working committee will receive feedback on progress toward the office's accessibility commitments, and deliver annual progress reports to the RCY executive team. These reports will ensure transparency and accountability in our accessibility initiatives. The reports will also provide a comprehensive overview of our efforts and achievements.

The RCY is also committed to ensure a thorough review and assessment of its Accessibility Plan every three years. The outcomes of these reviews will be accessible on our website, fostering transparency and inviting community feedback.



Conclusion

Accessibility at RCY is evolving with the generosity of our staff including those with lived experience and through training opportunities with external experts

We will continue to look for, address and prevent barriers to accessibility. We will constantly improve our feedback mechanisms and we will strive to address barriers in physical spaces, information technology and access to our work.

Our Accessibility Plan is fundamental to ensuring that we foster and nurture an inclusive culture and community in an environment where everyone – our staff and the people we serve – thrive and can participate fully and equally in the mandate of the RCY.

Offering Feedback on the Plan & RCY Progress

As required by the Accessible British Columbia Act, the RCY will endeavour to consistently consider the feedback of staff and the public to improve accessibility.

The RCY encourages public feedback, including anonymous feedback about this plan, particularly from persons with disabilities. We are committed to reviewing all feedback and addressing barriers.

Contact us

Here's how to reach us about our Accessibility Plan:

Email: rcy@rcybc.ca

Internally, staff are encouraged to provide regular feedback through their team and supervisor or through an anonymous process.





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