

# Comox Valley Early Years Collaborative 25 x 25 Project

Final Report – January 2019



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# 1. Introduction & Context

In September 2017, the Comox Valley Early Years Collaborative initiated a strategic planning process in support of a recently developed initiative called 25x25. This initiative seeks to reduce early years vulnerability – as measured by the Early Development Instrument (EDI) – to 25% or lower by the year 2025. The strategic plan relies on the Collaborative’s strong history of working together, as both individuals and organizations, to improve the life chances of children in the Comox Valley.

To further support the 25x25 initiative, the Collaborative issued an RFP for a Consultant to lead research efforts that result in an enhanced understanding of the Comox Valley early years landscape, and to develop concrete action recommendations to reduce vulnerability. The results of this work comprise much of the following report.

Two groups were essential in the development of this report. The Comox Valley Early Years Collaborative graciously provided information, including program and service information and indicator data. This input was especially helpful in understanding the local early years landscape. The project steering committee, comprised of Allan Douglas, Betty Tate, Charlene Grey, Cheryl Jordan, Colleen Nelson, Curtis Cameron, and Joanne Schroeder, provided guidance and input throughout the development of this report. The steering committee members also provided program and service information and indicator data.

We acknowledge the K’ómoks First Nation and thank them for welcoming us to live, work and learn within their ancestral lands.

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## 2. Early Years Indicators

Grounding this report in relevant local data allows for a deeper understanding of both EDI results and of the realities of raising a young family in the Comox Valley. The EDI measures the number of vulnerable children overall, and on each of the instrument's five scales: Physical Health & Well-being, Social Competence, Emotional Maturity, Language & Cognitive Development, and Communication Skills & General Knowledge. Without additional support, vulnerable children are more likely to experience challenges in school and beyond. Knowing vulnerability rates and understanding trends informs community and neighbourhood-level interventions.

School District #71 – Comox Valley has participated in every wave of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) since its inception in 2000. School district and community-level data became available in Wave 2 (2004-2007) and continues to present. The most recent data is from Wave 6 (2013-2016). (Note: School District #71 participates in only one year of each Wave.)

*The overall vulnerability rate for the Comox Valley has risen gradually with each wave, from 34% in Wave 2 to 40% in Wave 6.*

At the same time, neighbourhood-level trends have been observed across the domains. In EDI reporting, the Comox Valley is divided into four neighbourhoods: Comox-Valley View, Cumberland-South Courtenay, North Courtenay, and West Courtenay.

### Comox-Valley View

This neighbourhood has seen a meaningful increase in vulnerability between Waves 2 and 6, from 28% to 39%. Long-term, this neighbourhood has seen an increase in all domains except language, which has decreased to only 6% in Wave 6.

Among the domains that have increased, Physical, Social, and Emotional have all seen significant jumps.

### Cumberland-South Courtenay

This neighbourhood has almost always experienced high rates of vulnerability and this is reflected in the current vulnerability rate of 41%. All domains currently have double-digit vulnerability rates, from Language at 12% to Physical at 21%.

### North Courtenay

With only 55 children, North Courtenay had the smallest population of Kindergarten children in Wave 6. This neighbourhood has seen a meaningful increase in vulnerability over both the short- and long-term. At Wave 6, 45% of children were vulnerable in one or more domains. Following provincial patterns, Language is the least concerning of the domains, at 5%, while both Social and Emotional are worrisome, at 27% and 29% respectively.

## West Courtenay

Vulnerability rates have held in the high 30% to low 40% range since Wave 2. The Wave 6 overall vulnerability rate is 38%. Troublingly, all domains experience relatively high vulnerability rates, compared to the other neighbourhoods in the Comox Valley: Emotional is at 28%, followed by Social at 22%, with Physical and Communication tied at 20% and Language at 17%.

With an understanding of EDI results at both the community and neighbourhood levels, other data and indicators can be harnessed to better understand the experiences of local children and families.

## Population & Child Poverty

In the Comox Valley, the proportion of children 0-4 has remained static over the last decade.

*In the 2016 census, there were 2800 residents of the Comox Valley who are in the 0-4 years age bracket, with nearly half living in Courtenay.*

The only census community that saw growth in the number of young children between 2006 and 2016 is Comox Valley Regional District Area A (Baynes Sound-Denman/Hornby Islands), where the number of young children increased from 210 to 250 children – a 19% increase.

Another indicator that has remained relatively static for the Valley but differs by community is child poverty. Between 2011 and 2016 the child poverty rate for children 0-17 years old dropped slightly from 19.1% to 18.5% across British Columbia, while the Comox Valley's rate saw a slight increase in that same time frame, from 21.0% to 21.3%. Communities in the Valley have experienced child poverty differently, though. Cumberland's child poverty rate decreased by nearly fifteen percentage points, from 34.9% to 20.5%. CVRD Area B (Lazo North) also saw a significant decrease, from 23.2% to 13.5%, while CVRD Area A (Baynes Sound-Denman/Hornby Islands) saw an increase, from 18.5% to 29.0%.

Similar trends are noted when examining child poverty rates specifically for children 0-5. The province and the Valley haven't seen much change. Across the province, the 0-5 child poverty rate increased slightly from 18.0% in 2011 to 18.5% in 2016, while the Comox Valley's rose from 23.4% in 2011 to 25.2% in 2016. Again, in Cumberland, there has been a



### Child poverty rate for children 0-17, 2011 - 2016

	2011	2016	
British Columbia	19.1%	18.5%	↓ -0.6%
Comox Valley	21.0%	21.3%	↑ +0.3%
Courtenay	26.5%	26.8%	↑ +0.3%
Comox	10.1%	14.8%	↑ +4.7%
Cumberland	34.9%	20.5%	↓ -14.4%
CVRD Area B	23.2%	13.5%	↓ -9.7%
CVRD Area A	18.5%	29.0%	↑ +10.5%
CVRD Area C	14.5%	17.7%	↑ +3.2%



### Child poverty rate for children 0-5, 2011 - 2016

	2011	2016	
British Columbia	18.0%	18.5%	↑ -0.5%
Comox Valley	23.4%	25.2%	↑ +1.8%
Courtenay	32.4%	30.2%	↓ -2.2%
Comox	9.0%	15.8%	↑ +6.8%
Cumberland	36.8%	15.8%	↓ -21%
CVRD Area B	28.0%	17.3%	↓ -10.7%
CVRD Area A	22.6%	32.2%	↑ +9.6%
CVRD Area C	20.3%	16.7%	↓ -3.6%

marked decrease: from 36.8% in 2011 to 15.8% in 2016. CVRD Area B reports the same, with a decline from 28.0% to 17.3%. CVRD Area A again saw an increase, from 22.6% to 32.2%. Finally, Comox's 0-5 child poverty rate increased from 9.0% in 2011 to 15.8% in 2016. (This information utilizes the low-income measure, a measure used internationally to identify the proportion of low-income households in a given geography).

Child poverty information provides helpful socioeconomic data that is useful when examining the EDI by community. Child poverty information also allows us to better understand the proportion of families that have difficulty meeting their children's needs. In the Comox Valley, the 2018 living wage was \$16.59. Families with two parents both earning this amount or less will face difficulty in providing the essentials, including housing, transportation, and childcare. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to be undernourished, to suffer ongoing health problems, and to lack the opportunities and supports they need to thrive.

This is not to suggest that only children who live in low-income homes experience vulnerability. In fact, research finds that children who grow up in high-income homes may have families that are financially rich but time poor. One or both parents might work a demanding job, and there may be fewer opportunities to eat, play, or do other activities together.

In addition to EDI and income indicators, other data and indicators were collected to align with the five pillars that the Ministry of Child and Family Development has introduced in its 2018 Early Years Service Framework.

The first pillar is **Family Navigation**. In the Comox Valley, there is no designated family navigation service, although there are five service providers that identify as offering family navigating services in addition to other family services. For example, Mamacentric in Cumberland identifies as offering Family Navigation services, but the primary reason parents attend the program is for formal and informal parenting support.

The most popular Valley-wide resource is likely the Valley Child website. It sees strong use: in September 2018, there were 1400 unique visitors to the Valley Child website. Prior to that, it saw nearly 1000 unique visitors per month. It is the only complete source of early years program and service education for families in the Comox Valley.

Early years supports and services can be difficult to identify and navigate. Parents may not be aware of the full range of programs and services available to support them, which is why the Framework notes that "This is not simply an information service. The provider has a deep understanding of common family needs and vulnerabilities and helps make effective direct connections." Further in the report, Recommendation Two advocates for the use of a Social Lab approach, where solutions to neighbourhood issues are generated by local stakeholders. This includes an emphasis on family engagement.

The second pillar is **Promoting Community Belonging**. MCFD defines this as "providing structured or unstructured opportunities for parents to share experiences, expertise, guidance and emotional supports with other parents, with the intent of reducing social isolation and increasing community belonging." It notes that parents that experience community belonging are more likely to participate actively in the community. Additionally, community belonging is a social determinant of health, and is reflective of the attachment people feel to their community and the extent to which people are active participants in community life. A stronger sense of community is associated with better physical and mental health.

Northern Vancouver Island (which includes the Comox Valley) always reports a higher sense of community belonging than provincial or national counterparts.

***Sense of community belonging reached a historical high in 2015-2016, with 77.7% of adults rating their sense of belonging as strong or somewhat strong.***

(Note: There is no community belonging data specific to parents. A family engagement process, as noted in Recommendation 2, could be used to learn more about parent and family social isolation and community belonging.)

The third pillar identified in the ***Early Years Service Framework is Supporting Indigenous Culture, Language Revitalization, and Cultural Competency***. This pillar is focused on “supporting Indigenous families in a culturally appropriate manner, and connecting families to their Indigenous culture and language wherever possible.”

*In the province, the proportion of the population with an Aboriginal identity is increasing slowly, from 5.4% in 2011 to 5.9% in 2016. The increase is more significant in the Comox Valley, from 4.7% in 2011 to 5.9% in 2016.*

The most notable increases are in Courtenay, where the proportion of the population identifying as Aboriginal increased from 5.1% to 7.1% and in Comox, where it increased from 3.4% to 5.7%.

Although this increase can be partially attributed to a cultural shift towards reconciliation, cultural competency, and resultant pride in identifying as Indigenous, the growth in population can also be ascribed to increased numbers of Indigenous children. Although the Indigenous population is growing, the number of Aboriginal language speakers in the Comox Valley remains low. In 2016, 75 people identified as Aboriginal language speakers, compared to 65 in 2011.

In the Comox Valley, twenty-three services exist specifically to support Indigenous children, and this is a primary function for each. Some of these services are specific to Indigenous children, while others are developed for Indigenous children but available to all children/families.

There are two primary reasons to be proactively planning for an increased number of Indigenous children in early years programs and services. The first is ensuring cultural safety/cultural competency. All families accessing early years services desire safe and comfortable opportunities to do so. Recent history, including residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the continued over-representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system demonstrates that Indigenous families have had services offered to or forced upon them in ways that have been threatening and have resulted in trauma, which may be experienced generationally. To meet the needs of Indigenous families, programs and services must act in humility and must not repeat past mistakes.

An outcome of colonization and generational trauma is that Indigenous children in Canada are statistically more likely to experience adverse life experiences. Indigenous children in Canada face an increased likelihood of living in poverty, of experiencing adverse opportunities, and of being in the child welfare system. Again, a strong connection to culture, including language, and the delivery of culturally appropriate services are integral in supporting the healthy development of Indigenous children and families.

The fourth pillar identified is ***Supporting Families***. This pillar’s purpose is to “address the expected or unexpected challenges that a family may face.” Family challenges range from the need for parenting education or parenting support to larger issues like food security, affordable and appropriate housing, and adequate work opportunities.

The economic needs of families cannot be ignored, especially given that in the Comox Valley – much like provincially and nationally – wages that have not met inflation and the increased cost of living can hinder a family in meeting basic needs.

***In the Comox Valley, 14% of families are led by a lone-parent. Of these, 77% are led by a female parent and 23% are led by a male parent.***

Lone-parent families earn less than two-parent families, and children raised in lone-parent families are more likely to live in poverty.

Basic needs like food and housing can be difficult to meet when money is tight. In North Vancouver Island, which includes the Comox Valley, the average monthly cost of a nutritious food basket for a family of four people was \$1,036, slightly more expensive than the provincial average of \$1,019. This figure has risen each year that the Provincial Health Services Authority has produced food costing reports. The Comox Valley Food Bank reports that children make up one-third of its clientele, on an annual basis. Housing is an issue across the Comox Valley, and barriers to families include high housing costs, limited rental availability, and, in some communities, very little total housing stock.

***Across the Comox Valley, the benchmark housing price has risen by an astounding \$200,000, from \$307,900 in 2014 to \$501,400 in 2018.***

Young families purchasing a home have to spend proportionately more than previous generations, and the increase is felt not only by homeowners, but by renters, who have watched prices rise dramatically and can find themselves being evicted because the homeowner wants to take advantage of high sales prices. Precarious rental situations are especially prevalent on Denman and Hornby Islands, where some homeowners have opted to list their properties as short-term vacation rentals rather than long-term housing for local residents.

***The housing crunch is also evident in the rental vacancy rate across the Valley: there is a 0.0% rental vacancy rate for houses with 3+ bedrooms.***

The wider economic environment impacts families. The current cost of housing, food, and childcare can make it difficult for the average family to get ahead. Lone-parent families are particularly impacted by high costs.

Services specific to the early years are also an important consideration when examining family supports. Accessible, quality support of all kinds is vital in supporting families in raising healthy children.

One such support is childcare.

***Across the Valley, there are 80 childcare centres with 1365 spaces (including before and after school care).***

Qualitative evidence suggests that families receive childcare in any of the Valley's communities, rather than just the community than an individual family lives in. Childcare provider knowledge suggests that obtaining childcare can be difficult, particularly for infants and toddlers. Parents often access childcare wherever it is available, even if it's not in the family's home community. (Of course, this support is not without its obstacles, which include access and affordability. This is especially true for parents with infants and toddlers, for whom care is more limited by licensing and fees are usually highest.) (Note: a formal child care planning process may be underway shortly, which will be a much more comprehensive resource for information about child care.)



Aside from child care, another Valley-wide source of early years support is the Comox Valley Child Development Association (CVCDA). The Comox Valley Child Development Association has a steady base of users. In October 2018, there were 289 individual children under 6 years old accessing services, with nearly half of those (127 children) accessing multiple services.

Over the last five years, the most used CVCDA programs for families with children under 6 years old are Supported Child Development (SCD), Infant Development Program (IDP), Speech and Language Program (SLP), Occupational Therapy (OT), Physical Therapy (PT), and the Aboriginal Speech and Language Program Assistant. Programs with the most persistent waitlists over the last 5 years are OT (which has had a waitlist of up to 5 months), and Aboriginal SLP/A, which has had a waitlist of 3-4 months.

Finally, the last pillar of the Ministry's framework is ***Non-Child Care Early Learning***, which is defined as "services specifically focused on child development in one or more of the following areas: physical, social, emotional, language and communication, cognitive, and spiritual." Some examples of non-child care early learning include StrongStart, the suite of Aboriginal Early Years programs, public library programs and services, and some parent and tot groups and community programs.

There are StrongStart programs located throughout the Comox Valley. Some are stationary, while others are outreach programs that seek to connect with families in the Aspen neighbourhood in Comox, Puntledge neighbourhood in Courtenay, and Royston.

The Aboriginal Early Years program runs three days per week. Two days are focused on the child and family, while one day is parent-focused and supports parents in coming together to share their parenting experiences. The Aboriginal Early Years program runs out of Courtenay Elementary and includes healthy food, cultural programming and activities, and Elder participation.

The Vancouver Island Regional Library, another early learning service that supports families across the Comox Valley, has seen declining circulation of children's materials between 2015 and 2017, but increasing participation in programs including Storytime and Play Day.

Finally, another Valley-wide service is the Healthy Families program, which is CARF-accredited and utilizes a Family Resource Program model to support expectant mothers and parents of children ages 0-6.

### 3. Inventory of Non-Child Care Early Years Programs and Services in the Comox Valley

Appendix B details the current programs and services available to families with young children in the Comox Valley. Currently, there are 34 organizations offering 110+ programs and services.

Prior to this, the most recent inventory was completed in 2015. Programs and services have remained relatively static in that time, though it is worth noting that a handful of programs have been lost. These include La Leche League, the Comox Tot Stop (offered via the United Church), and an early years program for Francophone families. None of these programs were attached to an organization specifically dedicated to families. Most were grassroots and offered by volunteers or off of the side of a desk. Programs and services may have a better chance of succeeding when they're housed by an established family services organization.

Another important observation surfaced by the inventory is that there are far fewer programs and services for families living in rural areas compared to urban. Some rural communities receive outreach programs (Royston, Black Creek), but others have few programs and services based in the community aside from basic health services and Parent and Tot programs (Denman Island, Hornby Island). Given the increased child poverty rate on Denman Island, coupled with the housing and commute pressures some families living on Denman experience, the current offerings may not meet families needs.

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## 4. Scan of Promising Practices

Over the course of this project, the Steering Committee prioritized learning about promising practices, both in broad community health initiatives and in early years community development.

Brenda Poon’s research on community systems and the early years is foundational and suggests best practices for reducing health inequities in British Columbian communities. Those practices include a shared vision, a commitment to creating community capacity, and an ability to foster multi-sectoral communication.

These three practices were evident in each of the community-based early years tables we engaged. Phone interviews were conducted with early years community developers in the Strathcona neighbourhood in Vancouver and in Revelstoke. An in-person interview was conducted with the early years community developer and the Council of Partners in Campbell River, and in Oceanside (Parksville/Qualicum). These communities were chosen because of their geographic proximity (Oceanside), strong EDI results (Revelstoke and Strathcona), and relatively strong EDI results, given the community’s socioeconomic conditions (Strathcona and Campbell River).

Each of the community-based coalitions reported the following valued practices: professional development/training for coalition members, employing a social lab practice (prototyping and evaluating new interventions), emphasizing coordinated and collaborative action, and employing a holistic, whole child lens when working with and for families. Additionally, three of the four coalitions reported a place-based approach, a commitment to data monitoring and evidence-informed action, and engaging/involving families. Family engagement differs by community, but methods include parent surveys and conversations initiated by EDI results.

***Each of the four communities also demonstrated unique approaches to early childhood development:***

***In Oceanside,*** a strong, interdependent relationship with the school district is credited as the key to providing the structure and flexibility to be responsive to families. Monitoring programs also allows the coalition to recognize when an intervention has run its course or a need has evolved.

***In the Strathcona neighbourhood in Vancouver,*** weekly kitchen table meetings are utilized to problem solve and garner support for grassroots action with a number of stakeholder groups, including neighbourhood residents and academic researchers, who all work together with a place-based, systems approach.

***In Revelstoke,*** there is an emphasis on parent voice. Because Revelstoke is a small, isolated community, the coalition employs a “rogue” mentality to work within the established system but to ensure that family’s needs are met.

***In Campbell River,*** a strong focus on policy and participation in local civic life has resulted in positive relationships with local governments (City and First Nations) and SD72. There is a strong emphasis on including children and families in local decisions.

In contrast to some of the formal community development projects to be discussed shortly, none of the communities listed above had an articulated theory of change. None had participated in any developmental or impact evaluation of its work. Finally, none were as well funded as the other projects that comprised the best practice review. Community coalitions relied on core Success by 6/Make Children First funding, bolstered by one-off grant funding, donations, and community funding.

In addition to community coalitions, eight formal community health initiatives were also reviewed.



**Winnipeg Boldness** seeks to focus on one vulnerable neighbourhood at a time, so that efforts can be evaluated and successful interventions can be scaled. Interventions are focused on children and families, who are viewed as central to the work. A formal approach called a Social Lab is used to test community-generated ideas and get feedback. Promising practices from the Winnipeg Boldness initiative include community engagement, peer-to-peer learning, and using data to tell a story. Elements necessary to make this model a success includes enlisting a champion (in this case, a deputy minister) and having adequate funding (in this case, seven years of operating funding furnished by the McConnell Family Foundation and the Province of Manitoba).



Like Winnipeg Boldness, **Communities that Care (CTC)** has long-term funding, which is provided by the University of Washington and participating communities. Also like Winnipeg Boldness, CTC harnesses data – in this case, as diagnostic information to guide interventions. CTCs interventions are systems-focused with the purpose of preventing common youth problems. CTC relies on community coalitions to carry out interventions, and supports coalitions through ongoing training, technical assistance, and data monitoring. This program has undergone an evaluation and is deemed to be successful: community-wide improvements in youth development have been realized.

## Prosper Communities

**Prosper Communities** is built on a school-community-university partnership, and is designed to foster local ownership and financial support with the goal of high-quality implementation and evidence-based interventions by community coalitions. Coalitions choose one intervention from a menu of options and implement it with the support of academic, specialists, evaluators, and Prosper coaches. Evaluation has proven this model to be successful, with the success of interventions sustained for up to 6 years after implementation. Evaluators believe that success can be credited to the controlled program, which allows for community voice but also includes infrastructure and technical assistance to keep the program on track.



**Better Beginnings, Better Futures (BBBF)** is another model that utilizes community participation and ownership to strengthen local communities. Piloted in Ontario and funded by the Province, Wilfred Laurier University, and other partner funders, BBBF seeks to reduce children's problems, promote healthy child development, and enhance family and community environments. A thorough evaluation of this model revealed few significant differences, although there is some evidence that parents engaged in fewer risk behaviours.



Another model that saw little evidence of success is the **United Way's Avenues of Change**. This place-based approach sought to tackle neighbourhood-specific factors contributing to childhood vulnerability. In its first iteration, the program focused on the Coquitlam River neighbourhood (in the Tri-Cities) and Guildford West (in Surrey), neighbourhoods with equally high vulnerability rates but different socioeconomic statuses. Community input was received to shape strategies called “neighbourhood business plans” that were reflective of the most important issues to individual neighbourhoods. Some place-based initiatives were thought to be successful but the overall model has not proven to be effective.



**Changing Results for Young Readers (CR4YR)** is another provincial initiative. Funded by the Ministry of Education, this model sees participating teachers choose one vulnerable student to focus on throughout the school year, with the goal of increasing the student's literacy abilities. Promising practices include putting joy and engagement at the centre of literacy, offering students choices, and fostering a sense of belonging and identity in the most vulnerable children. Evaluation demonstrates that this model is effective, with 92% of participating students seeing static or improved literacy skills. This model has been spun-off to a pilot program called Changing Results for Young Children, which utilizes an inquiry model to improve teacher practice and student outcome.



Like CR4YR, **Triple P** is a program that has taken place in many communities across the province. Triple P originated in Australia and offers a suite of parenting interventions for children birth to 16 years old, and it aims to destigmatize parenting support and offer evidence based parenting practices. It is a branded and consistent program that can be customized to suit the audience. The program can be delivered one to one or via small or large groups, and the intensity of the parenting interventions available differs based on the group. It is flexible, cost-effective, and can be scaled up to deliver at the population level. Studies indicate that Triple P is directly connected to lower child abuse and child apprehension rates. The United Nations has endorsed Triple P as a top parenting program due to its focus on evidence-based learning.



Finally, the **SureStart** program was reviewed for promising practices. SureStart is a UK program that offers centre-based support for families with children 0-3 years old. Centres offer early learning, health and social services, training and employment services, and family resource information. Promising practices include a clear vision and cogent means of communicating that vision, empowering staff and participants, and allowing time for initiatives to reach capacity. Evaluations have been mixed, with some noting modest linkages between program participation and child outcomes, while others demonstrate no change in child outcomes. This program is funded by the British government.

# 5. Action Recommendations

Wave 6 Early Development Instrument (EDI) results show that the overall vulnerability rate in the children in the Comox Valley is 40%; which is significantly higher than the provincial average. There is more disparity between neighbourhoods in the Comox Valley than in most communities in the province and the percentage of low income families here is greater than the provincial level. In 2017, 18% of children under age 6 in the Comox Valley were living in poverty.

## Comox Valley Early Years Collaborative

In order to turn the tides on childhood vulnerability, The CVEYC is committed to concrete action to begin reducing early development vulnerability. Beginning with the vision that early development vulnerability will be reduced to 25% by the year 2025, the committee introduced a strategic plan - “**25x25**” - to improve success rates for young children.

Using child development indicators as guideposts and promising practices as inspiration, the following recommendations reflect tangible ways that the CVEYC can continue to participate in social change.

Considering the loss of funding for a committee coordinator, the recommendations also fill a need for a structure and process in which people and organizations can continue to connect, get excited, and contribute. The committee is committed to building on successes and strengths and staying flexible, open, and ready for funding opportunities that will increase the community’s momentum and capacity for change.

### Summary of Recommendations

1. Focus Efforts in North Courtenay
2. A Social Lab Approach: A Process & Project
3. Apply an Indigenous Lens
4. Formalize Connections with Relationship and Data

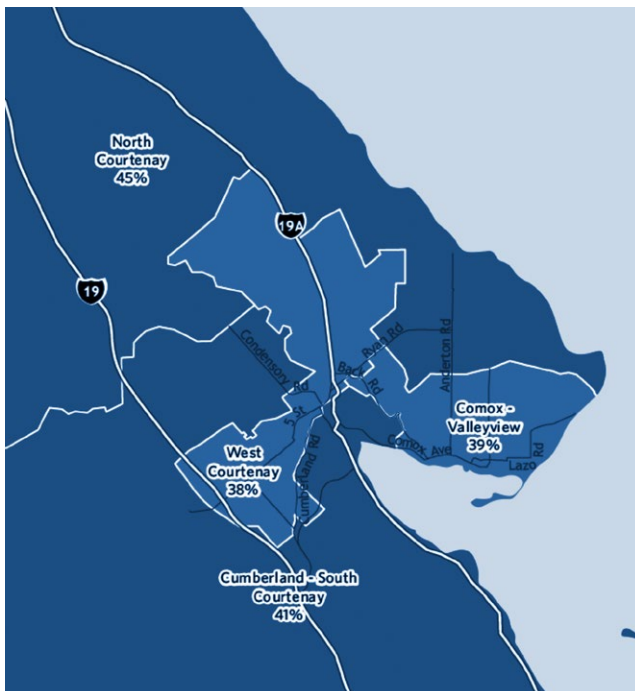
## Recommendation One

### FOCUS Efforts in North Courtenay

Based on data, the EDI neighbourhood of North Courtenay offers the CVEYC a defined area for a Social Lab Project for 2019/2020. Positive changes to vulnerability in this neighbourhood will have the biggest impact on overall EDI results in the Comox Valley because there are large opportunities for change.

The northernmost boundary for the North Courtenay neighbourhood is the Oyster River, and the southernmost extends to Ryan Road and Anderton Road in Courtenay (bordering the West Courtenay and Comox-Valley View neighbourhoods). The eastern border of this neighbourhood includes Black Creek and Miracle Beach.

North Courtenay has very high vulnerability in emotional maturity, social development and physical health and well-being. Interestingly, vulnerability for language and cognitive development in this neighbourhood is very low. This provides an opportunity to reflect on and investigate what has worked for this neighbourhood and if any successful language/literacy interventions might be leveraged.



Source: [http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi\\_w6\\_communityprofiles/edi\\_w6\\_communityprofile\\_sd\\_71.pdf](http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/edi_w6_communityprofiles/edi_w6_communityprofile_sd_71.pdf), page 21

#### North Courtenay demographic snapshot:

- Total population: 12,765
- Number of families: 4,145
- Aboriginal population: 505
- 0-5 population: 576
- Lone-parent families: 340
- Median family income: \$86,311
- Total number of low-income children under 6 years old: 55
- 82% homeowners, 18% renters

#### North Courtenay EDI vulnerability by domain, Wave 6:

- Emotional: 29%
- Social: 27%
- Physical: 20%
- Communication: 16%
- Language: 5%

## **Recommendation Two**

### **A SOCIAL LAB APPROACH: A Process & Project**

A Social Lab is a methodology in which groups initiate social experiments in an effort to address complex social challenges on a systemic level. It is an approach that is a good fit with Early Years Community Development because the issues underlying childhood vulnerability:

- are difficult to address and are constantly shifting,
- involve many stakeholders who all hold different values and priorities,
- are complex with multiple causes and interdependent drivers, and
- do not have one “right” solution.<sup>1</sup>

For the CVEYC, the Social Lab concept can be translated or customized into an approach that offers an opportunity to structure how the committee will both work together (process) as well as a framework to design an intervention (project).

<sup>1</sup> Camillus, J.C. (2008) Strategy as a Wicked Problem. Harvard Business Review.

#### **As a Process**

As a process, the CVEYC can structure timelines, milestones and interactions to support the committee during the transition away from a staff supported initiative. A Social Lab approach has distinct phases and activities that can be adapted into committee work and activities throughout the year. Using a simplified version of the strategies described in the Social Innovation Lab Guide<sup>2</sup>, the following is one approach for the CVEYC context.

- **Research & Preparation (3 months)** Use the data in this report to action a second level of inquiry by engaging directly with families. Consider an electronic survey in one EDI neighbourhood (North Courtenay) and ask specifically about family experiences of support and barriers to service.
- **Engagement to Co-Design & Prototype (1-2 months)** Design opportunities to interact with stakeholders (families, caregivers and service providers) in the EDI neighbourhood. Explore responses to barriers and challenges, make sense of key themes and generate change ideas. In this phase, new ideas may surface and/or ways to scale existing ideas and interventions may be identified. Consider workshops, drop-in spaces, or pop-ups to engage participants.
- **Field Testing and Follow-up (4 months)** Implement ideas in an experimental way. Build in ways to test theories and assumptions about what creates positive change. Acknowledge that some interventions may require longer-term shifts.
- **Scaling Success<sup>3</sup> (integrated into ongoing work)** As a committee, learn from the lab experience and consider three ways to scale any identified successes. Scaling up means to use successes to influence and impact policies. Scaling out means to take the intervention and find ways to reach more people (eg. in different neighbourhoods). Scaling deep means to intensify successful efforts in order to impact social beliefs.
- **Repeat Cycle**

<sup>2</sup> Westley, R. et. al (2015) Social Innovation Lab Guide. Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience. [Downloaded Dec 2018.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Riddell, D., Moore, M. (2015) Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Advancing Systemic Social Innovation and the Learning Processes to Support it. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.



## As a Project

The social lab will enable the CVEYC to integrate several relevant promising practices into an action project.

### Neighbourhood Based Focus

- Use the EDI neighbourhood boundaries to focus social lab interventions. This will allow consistent, ongoing metrics tracking changes in vulnerability through the EDI.
- Build on place-based (neighbourhood) approaches that currently exist in the Comox Valley.
- Aligns with CVEYC 2017 Strategic Plan: “To provide neighbourhood-based, comprehensive services, which are designed to meet the needs of children and families in their neighbourhoods.”

Promising Practices that include place-based elements:

- Winnipeg Boldness
- Better Beginnings, Better Futures
- Revelstoke
- Strathcona
- Campbell River
- Avenues of Change

### Engage & Involve Families

- Build on past successes from “Pop Ups” for family engagement.
- Include Parent Voice in a deeper understanding of support and barriers.
- Aligns with CVEYC 2017 Strategic Plan: “To improve the access to, and sustainability of Early Years Services and Programs.”

Promising Practices that include family engagement:

- Winnipeg Boldness
- Better Beginnings, Better Futures
- Revelstoke
- Strathcona
- SureStart
- Avenues of Change

### Cross Agency Training

- Leverage current training focus (e.g. Touchpoints) that has resulted in a significant investment for local organizations and service providers.
- As a Touchpoints Site, connect the aligned values with working alongside families.
- Aligns with CVEYC 2017 Strategic Plan: “Enhance local professional development opportunities including mentorships and networks. To facilitate opportunities for shared professional development between early years programs, service and licensed daycare providers.”

Promising Practices that involve training across agencies:

- Communities that Care
- Prosper Communities
- Revelstoke
- Strathcona
- Changing Results for Young Children

## Recommendation Three

### Apply an Indigenous Lens

Indigenous children are a large and growing group in the Comox Valley. Regarding Recommendation One: Focus Efforts in North Courtenay, the demographic data points to an increased importance in working in a culturally safe manner. In North Courtenay, the total Indigenous population has increased from 450 to 505 between 2011 and 2016.

Using a lens of equity and inclusion ensure actions promote inclusiveness, foster opportunities to work in partnership with Indigenous people, agencies and communities and, in general, support and respect universal human rights. The following are reflective questions<sup>4</sup> to help embed this recommendation into how CVEYC works and any future projects:

Promising Practices that include intentional Indigenous learning:

- Winnipeg Boldness
- Campbell River

- What steps have been taken to include community based research, practice and Indigenous knowledge?
- How will culturally specific practices and diverse perspectives be reflected?
- What steps will be taken to ensure action is implemented in a way that reduces barriers and improves access?
- What steps have been taken to ensure Aboriginal people are meaningfully engaged throughout?
- What steps have been taken to develop a monitoring and evaluative process in partnership with Aboriginal people to achieve the desired outcome?
- What steps have been taken to ensure that participants have acquired the cultural knowledge, awareness and skills to ensure cultural safety?

Additionally, the CVEYC 2017 Strategic Plan includes action to work in partnership with the Council for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (CAECD) to identify opportunities to more effectively link the work of the Collaborative with Indigenous-focused initiatives and organizations.

<sup>4</sup> MCFD. (March 2014). Indigenous Policy Lens Presentation from the Moving Forward: Building Culturally Safe Organizations Conference.

## **Recommendation Four**

### **Formalize CONNECTIONS with relationships and data**

The members of the CVEYC already hold meaningful connections and relationships with social change agents in different areas of influence within the Comox Valley. The CVEYC has the ability to share data and to bring the voice of the early years to wider conversations.

An intentional focus on leveraging established connections and strengthening relationships (and potential partnerships) works to enhance collaborative actions. In addition, it provides avenues for advocacy efforts.

Use Collaborative members who are already (or could be) on exiting committees and formalize these relationships by requesting members to become representatives of the CVEYC and hold the responsibility of sharing relevant communication.

- Council for Aboriginal Early Childhood Development (CAECD)
- Child Care Planning Committee
- Comox Valley Social Planning Council
- Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness
- Comox Valley Community Health Network
- Connection to Indigenous Organizations
- Relevant local government committees/opportunities for input

Promising Practices that include formalized connections with external committees:

- Winnipeg Boldness
- Campbell River

Foundationally, this strategy provides continuity with the goal outlined in the CVEYC 2017 Strategic Plan to build mechanisms that link the work of the Early Years Collaborative with other members in the community.