

Policy Dialogue Summary

BUILDING INCLUSIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA



Friday, December 8th, 2017
UBC Robson Room

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The BC Policy Dialogue in Childhood Disabilities occurred on December 8th, 2017 in Vancouver, BC. The objectives of the meeting were: 1) Disseminating research-based information on leisure participation for children with disabilities to decision-makers. 2) Helping researchers understand how to work better with policy makers and 3) Gathering stakeholders' strengths and knowledge to discuss strategies to promote participation for children with disabilities in BC.

Participants from non-profit, provincial and municipal governments were represented, and individuals across the health and education sector.

Figure 1: sectors represented at the dialogue

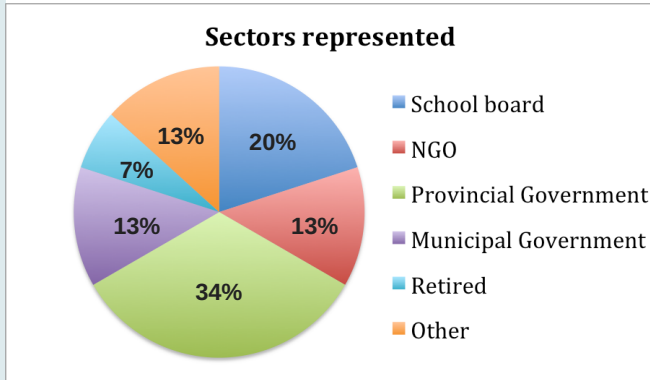


Figure 5: Gender of participants

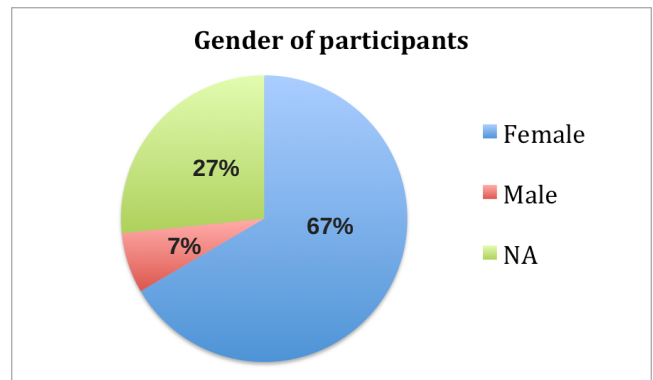


Figure 2: Year of birth of participants

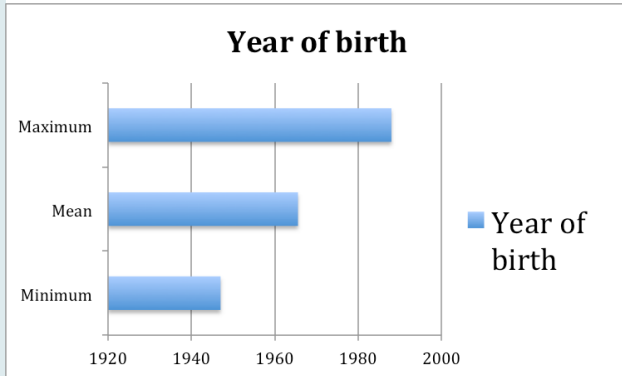


Figure 3: Education status of participants

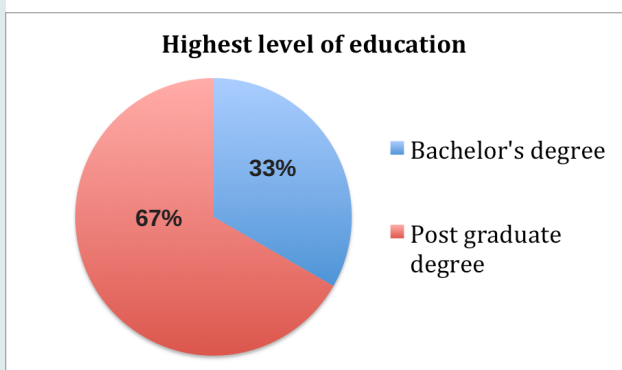
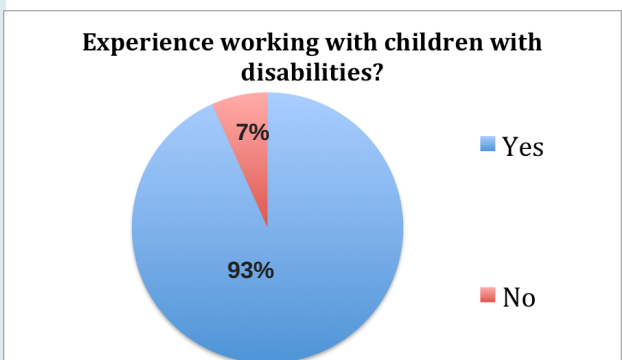


Figure 4: Participants' experience with children with disabilities



The McGill team presented the current research on children with disabilities and participation, including the dissemination efforts that led to the creation of Child Leisure NET and the current Policy Dialogue in BC – as one of the priorities chosen by stakeholders as something that could impact participation for children with disabilities in the province. The research team also presented other solutions chosen by stakeholders in those previous forums. These priorities included the creation of the Jooy App – a mobile and web App listing adaptive and inclusive leisure activities in the areas of Arts, Sports, Camps and others across Canada. The research team also emphasized the process through which the policy dialogue had been convened: meeting with community organizations, understanding their priorities and reviewing the academic research on these priorities. The information that led to the content of the research briefs received by participants prior to the dialogue (https://www.childhooddisability.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/researchbrief_dec20.pdf) were summarized based on the National Recreation Framework chosen by these organizations.

After reviewing the evidence, participants had the opportunity to reflect and to discuss the challenges faced in this area. Many participants stressed the need for real rather than tokenistic integration of children with disabilities in all leisure opportunities. A lot of emphasis was given to the need and challenges associated with qualifying frontline staff on truly integrating children with disabilities. Staff training is something seen as crucial to created positive experiences. On the contrary, poorly trained staff may serve as a barrier that causes many children and families to give up on their first exposure to leisure opportunities. This would require that staff be adequately, and sustainably trained. Such services should draw from the experiences of “experts” on the child such as their parents and therapist to create successful programs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY continued

During the entire dialogue, participants shared several initiatives happening in BC and in other provinces, and identified aggregating resources and best practices at the local and provincial levels as a concrete action to be taken after the dialogue. Building collaborative networks across sectors was one of the key strategies discussed as a solution to help decision-makers understand the needs of the population are, and to share best practices and existing resources. A collaborative network would also be a good solution to build capacity and train staff and to help families navigate the system without duplicating efforts.

A list of resources shared can be found in this summary, as well as other action points and details of the discussions that were held.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Through their filled surveys, participants indicated that the information they gained from the briefs and through the dialogue would support their ongoing work projects and fuel discussions with their staff and colleagues. Additionally, several participants found the dialogue useful in helping them to learn about resources they could tap into and to broaden their network.

Overall, most participants were satisfied with the dialogue and their ability to contribute to it. Most participants also indicated that the dialogue was a good use of their time and that they thought that the dialogue would make a difference in developing strategies to promote participation in leisure for children with disabilities in BC.

One key area for improvement based on participant input was the need to bring more diverse voices to the table to represent various groups and organizations. Interest in seeing the summary from this dialogue and possible next steps emanating from the dialogue was indicated.

Note, the dialogue was carried under the the Chatham house rule, which states participants' right to use and share the information from the dialogue as long as individual participants and organizations are not identified. This report follows the same rule to describe the discussions and interactions that occurred without identifying participants.

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

The research evidence that was presented at the dialogue can be found on the pre-dialogue research brief that all Dialogue participants received prior to the meeting and at the meeting. This brief can also be found here: https://www.childhooddisability.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/researchbrief_dec20.pdf.

More information about some of the projects that derived from the CHILD LeisureNET initiative can be found here:

www.yooay.com

www.childhooddisability.ca/leisure

GROUP DISCUSSION - ROUND 1:

APPLYING RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

The discussion began with questions around the Jooy App and its role in making information available to families about local leisure resources. Concerns and suggestions about the App were raised, including issues such as the possibility for people to post undesired comments about activities in the App, to which the McGill team presented the moderation function of the App which filters out comments that are not constructive. Another related question was that programs available through the Jooy App were mostly in urban environments, and therefore would not be available for rural dwellers and Indigenous communities - a topic that grants further discussion as solutions to the actual lack of activities in these areas need to be developed. This led to a discussion from the about ongoing research priorities using the App information. Future research includes understanding the disparities in the offer of services in the rural versus urban areas and making recommendations to address this gap.

Participants were then invited to reflect on the research information presented and to take notes on how this information might lead to improved decision making. Following this, they were invited to discuss the information in relation to their own future organizational and individual goals related t to improving participation of children with disabilities.

The use of "train the trainer" modules for recreation staff across British Columbia was brought up. This was followed by several issues around staff training and building capacity for inclusive leisure systems. The main issues addressed whether the challenge was in training staff to enable children to access the system, sustaining qualified staff in specific programs when most leisure staff is transitory, obtaining the adequate and necessary funds to provide proper "disability training" for staff, or the actual absence of enough and adequate programs to meet the individual needs of children with disabilities as part of collective actions. While agreeing with the challenge in hiring, training, and keeping specialized staff, another participant stated that the problem is not only financial but also about staff's attitude towards "difference", as illustrated on the quote from a dialogue participant: "so as not to offend, we quietly exclude". Another identified challenged was finding how to train staff without the training being too complex. Also important is the power dynamic, with most parents wanting staff to see their child as a friend rather than as a vulnerable child.

Another participant raised the issue of "research evidence" to support the "train the trainer" approach. Given the scarcity of resources it would be helpful to know if training the staff is actually an effective intervention in improving access for children with disabilities to leisure. The challenge of training was not only about hiring the right people, given that in this settings there is often a high turnover and consistent human resource challenge. Balancing this human resource shortage with the needs of parents who often need one on one support for their children is a challenge. Not only are staff life cycles often short, the recreation sector often provides services through various separate contractors which also contributes to a lack of continuity and consistency in the offer.

A parent of a child with a disability provided their experience on working to improve active living for her child. This highlighted challenges such as funding and the poor level of satisfaction that children experience in such programs due to how they are treated. Another participant from a community organization identified barriers such as language and education which may prevent the most marginalized from accessing existing resources. Other barriers identified included training, accessing the inactive population, and reaching out to people from different cultures to engage in recreation.

GROUP DISCUSSION - ROUND 2:

THINKING OF CONCRETE POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

Participants were then asked to apply a design thinking lens by reflecting on how to create solutions to the identified challenges. Solutions should be related to actions that they could develop or were interested in working in within their given portfolios and roles. First, participants indicated their preferences from evidence-based topics across the subjects of inclusion, access and capacity building.

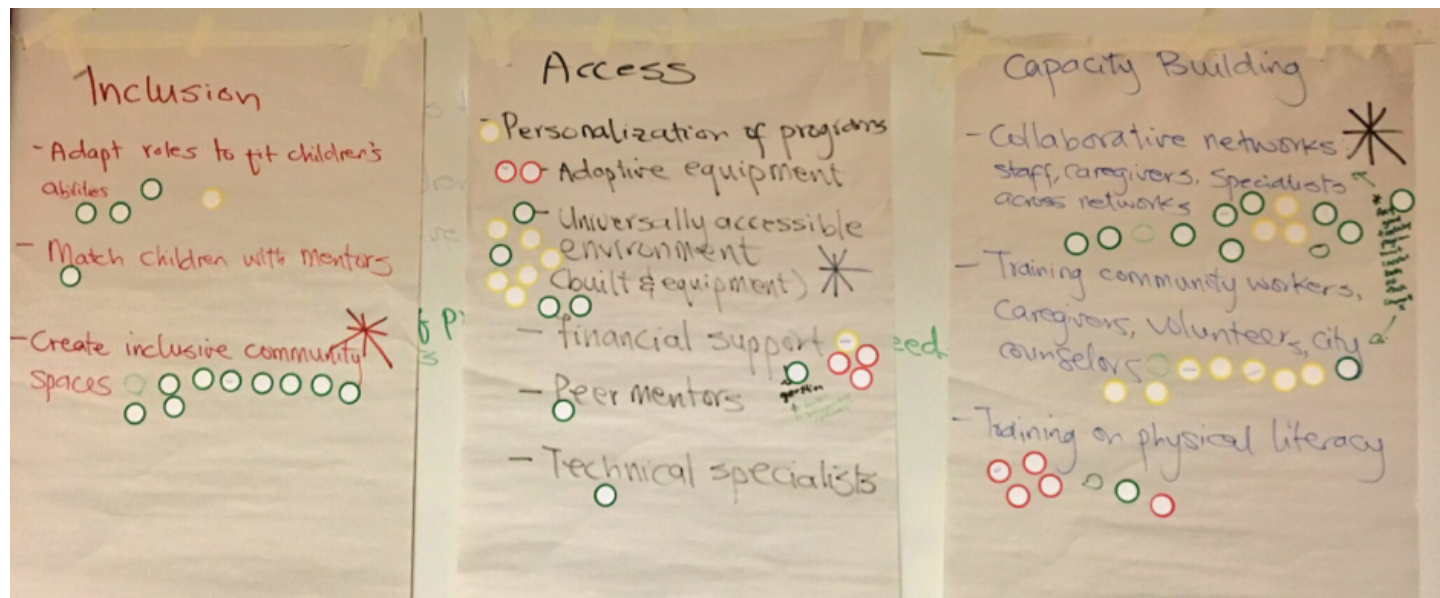


Figure 1. Participants' preference for action

Figure one above shows participants' preferences, as indicated by the highest count of "green dots". Participants placed a green circle around their most preferred activity, a yellow circle around their second most preferred activity, and a red circle around their least preferred activity. On inclusion, participants' preferred topic was "creating inclusive community spaces". Similarly, on the topic of access, participants' modal preference was "investing in universally accessible environments". On the topic of capacity building, participants' top preference was the "creation of collaborative networks involving staff, caregivers, and specialists".

Discussions on solutions centered around supporting parents and children with disabilities to navigate resources. Accessibility and the creation of inclusive community spaces didn't mean only physical accessibility (which is a huge concern), but often meant first being aware of existing resources, and then teaching families how to take advantage of them. This would require that staff are aware about services and supports and can take advantage of existing policies around participation. While most participants were in agreement on this point, they also raised a concern about overburdening staff with information on all opportunities in the community. Therefore participants stated that a regularly updated database could be useful. In line with this, participants stated that it would be useful to have a network for staff to learn from each other and share resources at both the community and provincial level.

The McGill team discussed Jooy as a potential database and upcoming resources through Jooy such as respite services and income services. A participant raised a concern of Jooy replicating the function of HealthLink BC (www.healthlinkbc.ca), a structure which is supported by the government and aggregates information and services related to health and physical activities for all children, including children with disabilities. This participant stressed the need for one central point to get information, and to build up on existing resources, to avoid duplication.

GROUP DISCUSSION - ROUND 2:

THINKING OF CONCRETE POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS (cont'ed)

Participants were then asked to reflect on an "utopic" image of participation in leisure for children with disabilities, if anything was possible. The following ideal scenarios were offered by participants:

Not having any work to do in relation to inclusion, or to the creation of "adapted" sports or leisure opportunities such as wheelchair basketball, because any child could just go to any activity and be able to participate.



Accommodations for all customers with various needs such as disabilities, allergies and sensitivities, rather than having "normal" customers and "different" customers.

Financial resources offered at the program level and/or families to pay for the ideal leisure activities of their choosing.

Participants elaborated further on structural accessibility challenges and a participant suggested that stakeholders such as architects should be invited to future deliberations to provide an ample expertise. Participants also used this opportunity to share about successful programs such as ONE Ability and CAN Assist . These programs have successfully paired organizations with facilities, and equipment providers to meet the needs of children in Victoria, BC.

Participants were then asked to think of a concrete action or big goal, partners needed to achieve and the potential costs, benefits and risks associated with achieving this goal. They were guided using some examples such as the school board collaborating with a rehabilitation center so that educators would training therapist on adapting the environment to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Another example provided was a train the trainer model which developed a coaches' corner for people to share their experiences and learn from each other.


Participants shared about potential ways to improve existing programs or to expand their current offer. This included the success story of an online hub for training on physical literacy for children with disabilities as well as an e-learning module focused on physical activity and health eating which could then be expanded to ensure inclusiveness. The need to include Indigenous communities was reemphasized. Participants stressed the need to improve existing services rather than reinventing the wheel. A participant also shared on the potential to make funding requirements attached to accessibility and inclusion rules for all publicly funded programs.

Several windows of opportunity to apply this information and create more opportunities for children with disabilities in BC include the other provinces that have passed disability and accessibility acts, the momentum being built around the federal accessibility legislation that should pass in 2018, the BC Accessibility 2024 and Healthy Living initiatives – all of which are projects underway, have financial incentives attached, and include one way or another the instruments, tools, and possible resources that can promote the participation of children with disabilities in leisure. These opportunities, when allied with the unique expertise of stakeholders participating in this dialogue, the research evidence and collaborative networks can place BC in vantage position in creating truly inclusive communities.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In wrapping up the dialogue, the themes observed during the discussion were reiterated: one being the need for collective impact and sharing knowledge within the province and across provinces. The need for inclusion that accommodates physical, sensory and cultural differences was evident, and the related need to overcome structural impediments to accommodating diverse disabilities. A structured, collaborative approach to include children with disabilities and their families in leisure activities is needed, and this dialogue aimed at providing insights and sparking possible collaborations linking community, decision-makers, researchers and families.

Useful links shared
during the dialogue.
See below.



<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/>
<https://oneability.ca/>
www.childhooddisability.ca
www.jooay.com

This Dialogue Summary was prepared collaboratively by:

Ebele Mogo, DrPH Postdoctoral Researcher,
School of Physical and Occupational Therapy, McGill University

Keiko Shikako-Thomas, PhD, OT, Canada Research Chair in Childhood Disability: Participation and Knowledge Translation
Assistant Professor, School of Physical and Occupational Therapy, McGill University,
Associate Member McGill Institute of Health and Social Policy

Annette Majnemer, PhD, OT, Professor, Vice-Dean of Education, Faculty of Medicine, School of Physical and Occupational Therapy McGill University

Jonathan Lai, PhD, CIHR Health Systems Impact Fellow Faculty of Medicine McGill

The Policy Dialogue in Childhood Disability Group is composed by:

Sheila Kennedy, RT, Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children

Kellie Duckworth, RT, Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children

Andrea Carey, Director of Operations & Special Projects Sport for Life

Vivien Symington, B.A/B.P.H.E Founder, Empowering Steps Movement Therapy President and Owner, Club Aviva Recreation Ltd.

Jennifer Scarr, RN, MSN Provincial Director, Primary Care & Preventive Health Child Health BC

Supporting materials prepared by:

Maja Kalaba, MPH, Research Coordinator, and Icoquih Badillo, Research Assistant
School of Physical and Occupational Therapy, McGill University

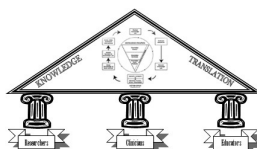


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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no professional or commercial interests relevant to the dialogue summary.



For more information, questions and suggestions please contact keiko.thomas@mcgill.ca