



GROWING UP HEALTHY IN NORTHERN BC

REPORT ON NORTHERN HEALTH'S
COMMUNITY CONSULTATION 2016



northern health
the northern way of caring

FROM NORTHERN HEALTH'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2016 - 2021

Vision

Northern Health leads the way in promoting health and providing health services for Northern and rural populations.

Mission Statement

Through the efforts of dedicated staff and physicians, in partnership with communities and organizations, we provide exceptional health services for Northerners.

Values

Value statements guide decisions and actions.

We will succeed in our work through:

- Empathy - Seeking to understand each individual's experience.
- Respect - Accepting each person as a unique individual.
- Collaboration - Working together to build partnerships.
- Innovation - Seeking creative and practical solutions.

Priority 1: Healthy people in healthy communities

Northern Health will partner with communities to support people to live well and to prevent disease and injury.

OBJECTIVE 6 (OF 7)

We will partner with communities and organizations to improve the health and well-being of Northern children and families.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About the report

Northern Health's Board of Directors is committed to engaging Northern BC residents through region-wide consultations on important health topics.

These topics have ranged widely over the years; in 2016, the topic was "Growing Up Healthy in Northern BC".

This is an important topic which also addresses one of the objectives in Northern Health's current [strategic plan](http://bit.ly/nh-stratplan) (bit.ly/nh-stratplan). As well, it aligns with Northern Health's [Chief Medical Health Officer's Status Report on Child Health](http://bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport) (bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport).

(Both the strategic plan and the report on child health are available at northernhealth.ca.)

In May and June 2016, 275 people attended meetings on child and youth health in 18 Northern BC communities. These included open public sessions, stakeholder focus groups and meetings with youth 13 to 18 years old.

There was also an online [ThoughtExchange](http://bit.ly/nh-ThoughtExchange) (bit.ly/nh-ThoughtExchange) option for people to provide and rank ideas, in which 599 people participated (with some possible overlap with meeting attendees)

The questions posed in every setting, including online, were:

1. What does growing up healthy mean to you?
2. What is working in your community to support children and youth to grow up healthy?
3. What could be improved in your community to support children and youth to grow up healthy (what are the challenges)?



This report summarizes the ideas contributed across Northern BC and also looks at implications for Northern Health, based on what was learned. It also provides meeting summaries, community by community, in Appendix 1.

Key findings

Commonly heard themes for each of the consultation questions are noted below.

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

FEELING LOVED, SAFE, VALUED AND WORTHY: A child should be secure in their existence in the world. This means having a healthy attachment to one or more adults, feeling significant, being celebrated, experiencing love and acceptance (unconditionally), and being safe, physically and emotionally.

HAVING THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE: Without the basic necessities, it's difficult for children and youth to experience the world as a secure place, one that invites them to engage and develop into healthy adults. Those necessities include safe and decent housing, enough nutritious food, access to quality health care, a good education, appropriate childcare when needed, and the ability to participate in activities at school and in the community.

ACCESS TO NATURE AND FREE PLAY: Children and youth benefit intellectually, emotionally and physically from experiencing the natural world and through unstructured, imaginative play.

PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES: Enjoying opportunities to learn, celebrate, socialize, be active and have fun are all important to growing up healthy. This means access to organized recreation and sports and participation in cultural activities (music, dance, theatre, the visual arts, etc.).

BECOMING INDEPENDENT AND RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE: A healthy young adult is a responsible person who can function independently and is physically and emotionally healthy. Health care, a good education, adult mentors and being trusted and given responsibility are all elements of fostering this.

Executive Summary

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Outdoor recreation and access to nature: The ability to experience fields, forests, rivers, lakes, the ocean, mountains and the abundant wildlife of Northern BC is clearly understood and appreciated.

Health care and community services: There is general appreciation for access to primary care (led by physicians and nurse practitioners), local and regional hospital services, and more specialized services, such as pediatrics. There is also clear recognition of the value of an array of services for early childhood and a range of useful community-based programs, with Strong Start considered important in almost every location.

Sports, recreation and cultural opportunities: The benefits of participating in sports include physical exercise, team-building and social inclusion. Not every community has all the amenities (a pool, for example), yet each has recreation options, and all have local governments, recreation staff, schools, and volunteers behind the scenes, making sports and recreation viable. Recreation facilities (fields, pools, rinks, trails, gyms, etc.) are appreciated when present and missed when not available.

Cultural activities differ from place to place, with music, dance, the visual arts, theatre, film and festivals/ events all being noted. A growing number of communities have access to Aboriginal cultural learning and experiences.

Caring collaborative communities: Participants felt there was something unique about living in mostly rural and remote communities, in sometimes-demanding yet wonderful natural settings. This related to resiliency and adaptation to change and challenge, coming together “to do what needs to be done,” and people knowing and caring for their neighbours.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY (WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES)?

Increase supports for mental health and substance use issues: There seems to be an increase in the need for mental health supports for youth and children, while at the same time, there's a chronic shortage of access to mental health assessments and treatment. Counselling and treatment for substance use problems (often related to mental health issues) are also difficult to access in a timely appropriate manner (or at all).

There seems to be an acute need for increasing timely access to mental health services, addictions services, and social workers. Participants also saw a need for improved coordination at the institutional and local levels, and access to specialized services. The above needs apply for the entire age range, for young children through to young adults.

Address poverty: Children who live in poverty, as many children in Northern BC do, are at a disadvantage when it comes to growing up healthy. Their families struggle and the children experience the consequences. These can include:

- Inadequate housing
- Insufficient (and sometimes poor quality) food
- Being unable to afford to participate in sports and cultural activities
- Poorer involvement in education
- A lack of adequate transportation
- The inability to access some family and child supports
- Living with the stigma of being seen as different from other children

Improve health services: Health services are an integral part of growing up healthy, from basic services for illness and injury, to those specifically for pregnancy, childhood and youth. Many suggestions were raised for potential improvements:

- Early childhood services, including support for screening at 18 months and greater support for women who must travel to give birth
- Primary care improvements to help with a range of child and family needs
- Improved dental assessments and treatment
- Timely and useful learning around sexuality and health, and being able to access services in a confidential and appropriate way (this suggestion was raised by youth participants)

Implications

The report provides a summary and analysis of what Northern BC residents said about growing up healthy in Northern BC. It will be used by Northern Health's Board of Directors and management to inform planning and decisions. While it does not contain direct recommendations, some implications of what was learned are noted below.

INCREASE COLLABORATION

Many elements that help children grow up healthy are not actual health services, but activities requiring collaboration between sectors and organizations.

Collaboration means encouraging those who have a stake in something to come together to find innovative, sustainable ways to improve things or make change. This can range from simply sharing information and understanding each other's roles to working together with money, people and other resources to create something -- a service, a program, an event or a building.

Executive Summary

Implications/considerations:

- What else can Northern Health bring to local community efforts to improve the health of children and youth?
- How can Northern Health enhance the community health partnerships it already has?
- What roles do Northern Health staff play at community tables? Could these roles be enhanced?
- What evidence-supported information on health status and successful programs can Northern Health share widely?
- What are the highest value collaborations for child and youth health with other institutions in Northern BC?

NORTHERN HEALTH'S ROLE IN ADDRESSING POVERTY

To grow up healthy, children must have their basic needs met: adequate housing, enough healthy food, quality childcare, transportation, dental care, access to recreation and cultural activities, and full participation in school.

Northern Health cannot address poverty in terms of increasing incomes for families or mitigating all the problems noted above. However, there are opportunities to play a role in addressing this, or to enhance existing work to support families.

Implications/considerations:

- Can Northern Health services be reviewed with a “poverty lens”? Access to medical services, outreach to families, social supports at discharge, transportation options, and links to First Nations communities are examples of work that could be examined.
- Can the primary care teams being created across the North look at their patient rosters and consider the diagnosis of “poverty” when looking at the supports and health care patients may need?
- Can Northern Health use its mandate to gather population health information and to advocate for good health to more explicitly raise issues related to the impacts of poverty on children and families?
- What else can Northern Health do to work with communities to improve food security, especially where there are collaborative efforts already underway?

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS SUPPORTS FOR YOUTH

Support to help young people address issues around mental health and substance use is a high priority in many communities. This topic was also raised in youth-only meetings. This would range from acute high-need supports in time of crisis or healing, to basics like inclusion in the community, better transportation, and opportunities for recreation.

Implications/considerations:

- Can Northern Health look more deeply into its mental health services, including how to improve its capacity for counselling and specialized support?
- Will better coordination with local and regional partners improve supports to youth? For example, between the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), social services, the RCMP, and First Nations?
- How can the primary care home* be a strong resource for youth with mental health or substance use problems?
- Does Northern Health have information or resources to support communities around improving recreation and transportation services for youth?

FOCUS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

While there were many comments acknowledging the excellent supports in place for the early years, there were also many suggestions for improvement. It's clear that strong families are at the root of much childhood success, and that the inability to meet children's basic needs is a major stressor for some.

Implications/considerations:

- How can the recommendations in the [Chief Medical Health Officer's Status Report on Child Health](https://bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport) (bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport) be aligned with what was learned from this consultation?
- Can Northern Health instigate another phase of early childhood screening at 18 months, to identify and address developmental concerns earlier?
- Is it possible to increase resources for early childhood therapies (speech and language, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, etc.) and to better coordinate resources with schools and other agencies?
- Are there additional elements to consider when implementing primary health care teams in Northern BC that could improve coordination and support from pregnancy to six years old?

*Primary care home: A person-centred medical care setting, such as a family doctor's office, where people establish a long-term relationship with a personal physician or nurse practitioner who provides and directs their care.

1. INTRODUCTION

Northern Health continually works on how to best use public resources to support the health of people in Northern BC.

Northern Health's Board of Directors is committed to consulting with Northern residents on issues important to planning for health care. In previous years, public consultations have included the following:

- 2004: [Let's Talk About Health](http://bit.ly/talkabouthealth) (bit.ly/talkabouthealth)
- 2006: [Premier's Consultation for Improved Cancer Care in Northern BC](http://bit.ly/northerncancercare) (bit.ly/northerncancercare)
- 2007: [Let's Talk about Addictions and Mental Health](http://bit.ly/talkaboutaddictions) (bit.ly/talkaboutaddictions)
- 2009: [Let's Talk About Primary Health Care](http://bit.ly/nh-primaryhealthcar) (bit.ly/nh-primaryhealthcar)
- 2011: [Let's Talk About Men's Health](http://bit.ly/nh-menshealth) (bit.ly/nh-menshealth)
- 2013: [Let's Talk About Healthy Aging and Seniors' Wellness](http://bit.ly/nh-aging) (bit.ly/nh-aging)

Community leaders were also asked for their views when Northern Health's board developed its strategic plans in 2008 and 2015.


For each of these consultations, Northern Health developed a public report and used it to adjust its plans and operations. In many cases, the work led to new approaches with communities and other partners, as health improvement is not solely the responsibility of the health care system.

In 2016, the consultation topic was "Growing Up Healthy in Northern BC". This is an important topic which also addresses one of the objectives in Northern Health's current [strategic plan](http://bit.ly/nh-stratplan) (bit.ly/nh-stratplan). As well, it aligns with Northern Health's [Chief Medical Health Officer's Status Report on Child Health](http://bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport) (bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport). (Both the strategic plan and the report on child health are available at northernhealth.ca.)

"For me, it was a privilege to grow up in the North. There are so many different, affordable opportunities, good schools, good communities, cultural events, outdoor activities, and exposure to First Nations culture."

- Participant quoted in the [Status Report on Child Health](http://bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport) (bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport)

The 2016 consultation invited meaningful discussion on what it means for children and youth to grow up healthy in Northern BC. Through meetings across the North and an online process, participants gave their views on what it means to grow up healthy.



It is hoped that together, the [Status Report on Child Health](https://bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport) (bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport) and this consultation report will increase people's understanding of the importance of growing up healthy, and what is needed in our Northern communities to best support that.

We know that much of what influences the health of children and families is outside the health care system. Health and wellness are strongly influenced by the context of people's lives:

- Their families and communities
- Resources available to them
- A sense of connectedness with peers, families and communities

Northern Health alone cannot help children and youth to grow up healthy. This also takes local, provincial, and First Nations leaders and services, schools, not-for-profit organizations, parents, and a myriad of others — and an understanding that the basic elements of living a good life must be addressed (these are often called “the determinants of health”).

This report summarizes what was heard across the North and what the implications might be for future planning. It also includes appendices featuring highlights from each area and an overview of the online [ThoughtExchange](https://bit.ly/nh-ThoughtExchange) (bit.ly/nh-ThoughtExchange) process.

The Board of Directors and senior leadership of Northern Health will use this information to guide their planning and to make ongoing improvements, both across the entire Northern region, and also community by community. This report is available at northernhealth.ca.

2. HOW WERE NORTHERNERS CONSULTED?

Northern Health's 2016 community consultation was widely promoted through media, local government, First Nations and community organizations, and posters in Northern Health's facilities and other public locations.

There were two main approaches to listening to Northern residents:

- 1) In May and June 2016, 18 community meetings were held across the North, including open public sessions, stakeholder focus groups and youth groups. These meetings were facilitated by Gary Ockenden (of Withinsight) and included a presentation by Northern Health's Chief Medical Health Officer, Dr. Sandra Allison, on the [Status Report on Child Health](http://bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport) (bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport).

Communities visited were:

- Burns Lake
- Chetwynd
- Dawson Creek
- Fort Nelson
- Fort St. John
- Hazelton
- Kitimat
- Mackenzie
- Masset
- McBride
- Prince George
- Prince Rupert
- Queen Charlotte
- Quesnel
- Smithers
- Terrace
- Valemount
- Vanderhoof



Participants brought perspectives from a wide range of roles, views and life experiences. Some examples of the diverse roles and organizations represented:

- Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR)
- Child development centres
- Child & youth mental health
- Community Living BC
- Community Services organizations
- Dietitians
- Early childhood educators
- Elizabeth Fry Society
- Family resources
- First Nations councillors
- First Nations elders
- First Nations Health Authority
- First Nations (local health)
- Friendship House
- Grandparents
- HELP BC (UBC)
- Hospice volunteers
- Hospital auxiliary
- Infant Development Program
- Librarians
- Local action teams
- Mayors and councilors
- Mental health workers
- Ministry of Children and Family Development
- NH board members
- NH local/regional leaders
- NH practice support coach
- NH primary care coordinators
- Nurses
- Parents
- Pastor
- Pediatrician
- Physicians
- Pregnancy Outreach Program
- Psychiatrist
- Public health nursing
- RCMP
- Recreation managers
- Regional directors
- Regional hospital district
- Retired teachers
- School principals
- School superintendents
- School trustees
- Shelters
- Speech-language therapy
- Success by 6
- Teachers
- Transition House
- UNBC faculty
- Victim Services
- Youth aged 13 to 18

Northern Health works with the First Nations Health Authority and regional Aboriginal Health Improvement Committees to understand together how to meet needs and improve health in the Aboriginal population. This consultation process did not travel specifically to First Nations communities, but a number of First Nations leaders, health providers and individuals participated in meetings.

- 2) Residents were also asked to contribute ideas and select priorities through an innovative [online ThoughtExchange process](https://bit.ly/nh-ThoughtExchange) (bit.ly/nh-ThoughtExchange). 1,994 individual thoughts were contributed on ThoughtExchange and participants assigned 39,574 stars to the thoughts that resonated with them, providing many clear priorities and themes.

Participation

- 275 people attended meetings (public, stakeholder and youth sessions).
- 599 people participated in the online process, which involved providing ideas, as well as reviewing other ideas and marking those that resonated most.
- Comments received directly at Northern Health offices were also reviewed in creating this report.

What were participants asked?

People were asked the questions below (slightly modified, depending on the situation):

- 1) What does growing up healthy mean to you?
- 2) What's working in your community to support children and youth to grow up healthy?
- 3) What could be improved in your community to support children and youth to grow up healthy (what are the challenges)?

Online participants were also asked, "What opportunities or initiatives should be built upon or created in order to support children or youth in your community?"

3. WHAT WERE THE KEY FINDINGS?

The views of hundreds of Northerners are presented in this report in a number of ways. While there was diversity from place to place in how the questions were answered (and discussed), some broad “across-the-North” themes also arose. Those are described below.

Question 1: What does growing up healthy mean to you?

There were many responses to this question. Those most repeated and discussed are summarized below; they tend to correspond well with what health research tells us about what children and youth need to be healthy.

1. FEELING LOVED, SAFE, VALUED AND WORTHY

While there are many ways to describe this, it essentially means that a child should be secure in their existence in the world. This means having healthy attachment to one or more adults, feeling significant, being celebrated, experiencing unconditional love and acceptance, and being safe, physically and emotionally.

It's also important to have a sense of belonging within a family, with peers, at school, and in the broader community. Connection to a culture and knowing one's place in the world is important for all, and is often especially so for Aboriginal children, as this sense of cultural belonging was disrupted for generations by colonization, residential schools and community challenges.

“Growing up healthy means having no worries.”

— Participant in youth meeting



2. THE NECESSITIES OF LIFE

Without the basic necessities, it's difficult for children and youth to experience the world as a secure place, one that invites them to engage and develop into healthy adults. These include:

- Safe and secure housing
- Adequate nutritious food
- A good education
- The ability to participate in activities in school and community (which means adequate, affordable transportation, supportive adults and no cost barriers)
- Appropriate childcare when needed
- Access to quality health care.

Some parents or caregivers don't have the means to easily provide these necessities.

“No child should be stressed about where they're going to sleep, or if there will be something to eat.”

— Participant in public meeting

3. ACCESS TO NATURE AND FREE PLAY

Children and youth benefit intellectually, emotionally and physically through experiencing the natural world and through unstructured, imaginative play. Being active outside, whether through a hike in the mountains or a fun session in the backyard or playground, helps children develop and increases their sense of place in the world.

Many people see limiting the use of technological devices as important to growing up healthy. One approach is to increase time in nature.

4. PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES

Enjoying opportunities to be active, learn, celebrate, socialize, and have fun are all important to growing up healthy. This means access to organized recreation and sports, and participation in cultural activities (music, dance, theatre, the visual arts, etc.). It also means feeling included in community gatherings and celebrations.

5. BECOMING INDEPENDENT AND RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE

A healthy adult is a responsible person who can function independently and is physically and emotionally healthy. Some things that help achieve this include:

- Health care when and as needed — from early childhood to adulthood, including mental health support.
- An effective education system, focused on young people learning needed skills and information in a holistic way, and including learning about sexual health, civic responsibility, human rights, and Aboriginal history.
- Adults (parents and others) teaching and modeling skills, such as managing money, gathering and preparing food, parenting, and recovering from failure or loss.
- Being trusted to be responsible, from helping at home at a young age, to working and volunteering in the community.

Question 2: What's working to support children and youth to grow up healthy?

Northern communities have many existing assets and supports that can be built on or sustained. The summary below discusses those that were most frequently noted.

1. OUTDOOR RECREATION AND ACCESS TO NATURE

Participants clearly valued and appreciated the ability to experience fields, forests, rivers, lakes, the ocean, mountains and the abundant wildlife of Northern BC. Whether it's visiting a wilderness cabin, seeing a bear lumber through your back yard, or simply walking a nearby trail in the woods, people recognized that these experiences are one reason Northern BC is a great place to grow up.

Children and youth enjoy playing in an outdoor setting, as well as organized activities such as skiing, sledding, hunting, fishing, hiking, boating, biking, and camping.

“It's important for the children to enjoy the outside sun and fresh air, rather than sitting at the computer.”

- Participant in online ThoughtExchange process

2. HEALTH CARE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Access to health care services varies by location. Some ways in which they could be improved are listed in the next section. Participants expressed general appreciation for access to primary care (led by physicians and nurse practitioners), local and regional hospital services, and more specialized services such as pediatrics.

Participants also recognized the value of an array of services for early childhood, including, public-health-oriented services such as:

- Immunizations
- Child health clinics
- Hearing and vision screening
- Kindergarten readiness testing
- Nurse followups after birth

Specialized medical services for children and youth are also available, though often with travel required. Participants were appreciative of services that travel out to their home communities.

A range of useful community-based programs is in place, with Strong Start considered important in almost every location. Child development centres and infant development programs are deeply valued. Early-years community tables, with Children First and Success By 6 working together to identify community goals, help identify gaps in service and work towards filling them or finding solutions.

“There are good options to support early learning, like Strong Start, Totem Preschool and the Child Development Centre.”

- Participant in online ThoughtExchange process

3. SPORTS, RECREATION AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

Some of the benefits of participating in sports include physical exercise, team-building and social inclusion. People in every community acknowledged the value of recreation and provided long lists of available options, from organized team sports like soccer, baseball, volleyball and hockey, to swimming, gymnastics, skateboarding, hiking, biking, skiing, bowling and more.

Although not every community has amenities such as a pool, each has recreation options, and all have dedicated groups working to make sports and recreation viable, including local governments, recreation staff, schools and volunteers.

Participants said they appreciated their recreation facilities (fields, pools, rinks, trails, gyms, etc.) and missed them if they weren't available.

Cultural activities varied from place to place with music, dance, the visual arts, theatre, film and festivals/ events all being mentioned. A growing number of communities (First Nations and others) also have access to Aboriginal cultural learning and experiences.

Many activities are accessible to all, and some are subsidized for those who need this. However, barriers to inclusion are still an issue.

“The All-Native Basketball Tournament is one of the things that makes this community.”

- Participant in youth meeting

4. CARING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES

Across Northern BC, people had a sense that there’s something uniquely valuable about living in our mostly rural and remote communities, set in challenging yet beautiful natural environments.

The qualities described are around resiliency to adapt to change and challenge, coming together to do what needs to be done, and knowing and caring for neighbours.

One demonstration of this community caring is the rich array of organizations and groups that strive to make community life better, including for children and youth. Another example often mentioned was the valuable contributions of volunteers.

Examples of community spirit include:

- Businesses that step up to help with funding sports or providing food for children
- Friendship Houses
- Service clubs
- Elders supporting youth
- Engaged mayors and councils
- Dedicated health and social service workers
- School staff contributing beyond the classroom
- Many community tables where groups come together around particular issues (such as early childhood or youth mental health)

“Northern communities seem more creative to support the needs to make things happen.”

- Participant in stakeholders’ meeting

Question 3: What could be improved to support children and youth to grow up healthy (what are the challenges)?

Clearly there are challenges in families and communities when it comes to supporting every child to grow up healthy. While these varied by community, there were also strong common themes across the North.

1. INCREASE SUPPORTS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE ISSUES

There seems to be an increased need for mental health supports for youth and children, yet there seems to be a chronic shortage of access to mental health assessments and treatment. Counselling and treatment support for substance use problems (often related to mental health issues) are also difficult to access in a timely, appropriate manner (or at all).

Participants also said they had a sense that the system is fragmented, and that there are issues around coordination between Northern Health, community services and the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Schools in some communities are experiencing great strain due to a lack of resources to support children of all ages with mental health issues.

“Mental health support for our kids needs to go beyond a 9-to-5 service.”

– Participant in public meeting

Trauma-informed care in the health care and community services systems is useful, but not fully understood or taught. Youth experiencing bullying and discrimination because of issues around race or sexual/gender orientation, for example, don't always have safe spaces or support.

Drug and alcohol use in families and by youth can be a serious health issue. There is a need for more effective education, and a need for more support to help those who are suffering from misuse of substances. This means community- and regional-based detox and treatment approaches.

Put simply, for young children through to young adults, there seems to be an acute need for

- Timely access to mental health services, including support for addictions
- Timely access to social workers
- Improved coordination at the institutional and local levels
- More access to specialized services

2. ADDRESS POVERTY

Children who live in poverty are at a disadvantage when it comes to growing up healthy — and many children in Northern BC live in poverty.

While every child and family has their own stories, the disadvantages of poverty can include:

- Inadequate housing
- Inadequate food (and also sometimes poor-quality food)
- An inability to participate in sports and cultural activities
- Poorer involvement in education
- A lack of adequate transportation
- Inability to access some family child supports
- Living with the stigma of being seen as different

Many issues were also identified that specifically related to poverty and inclusion. Some of these include:

- **Food:** Some children are missing meals and many are not eating healthy food (fresh fruit, fresh vegetables and healthy proteins). The cost of food affects most families (and was mentioned often), with families who have the least money being most affected. Community gardens, farm-to-table school projects, food cupboards and school food programs are all part of mitigating this problem. There are no easy solutions, and it's understood by many that charity is not a long-term or dignified solution to food security.
- **Recreation and culture:** As noted earlier, growing up healthy includes access to organized sports and cultural activities, as well as being able to enjoy free play in a natural setting. These activities support children to have fun, learn, experience a connection to nature, spend time with adult mentors and leaders, and be part of their communities. Many Northern children don't have the access or support to experience these things.

***“I may have been born here and grown up by the ocean,
but I’ve never been fishing.”***

- Participant in youth meeting

- **Transportation:** Accessing the community assets noted above in this report requires transportation. Bus service varies across the North and does not address out-of-town destinations or after-hours activities. Many children grow up in homes outside towns and First Nations communities, in rural areas. The lack of adequate transportation prevents many children from accessing organized activities, after-school sports and clubs, social engagement and what many would call a full life in the community.

“There is no hope of establishing healthy eating if families are struggling just to get enough calories into their children. I believe this has reached a crisis point.”

- Participant in online ThoughtExchange process

- ***Supports for parents and families:*** Children grow up in families (of many sorts) and this is the foundation for their development into healthy, secure, resilient adults. Additional stresses on families today include the increasing presence of digital devices (cutting into human-to-human time), and the need for most parents and caregivers to be employed. Proposed supports to address these issues include:
 - Increased funding and support for pregnancy outreach programs
 - Providing additional resources and support to those identified as at risk or marginalized in the community
 - Investing in programs that prevent and address domestic violence, which can occur in any community and can be exacerbated during times of economic distress
 - Removing cost and travel barriers to families who want to participate in community activities.

Overall, participants recognized that some changes that would alleviate poverty are policy-based and can't be addressed locally or regionally. Those policy issues are related to a minimum or living wage, affordable childcare, increased affordable housing, adequate social assistance rates, and subsidized or affordable transportation options.

One suggested improvement was for local government, First Nations, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, education, and the health sector to work together to address poverty locally. This might help expand programs and services that do the following:

- Provide nutritious food at lower or no cost to those who need it, with a particular focus on schoolchildren
- Subsidize and enhance transportation for those who need it
- Train more early childhood educators and increase childcare spaces
- Remove financial and transportation barriers to participation in sports and other events (in a way that reduces stigma)
- Engage children with adult mentors, including First Nations elders
- Support affordable, safe housing
- Increase community events that meet the needs of all families, children and youth

As well, while provincial and federal policies around taxation, wages, childcare, housing and social assistance cannot be addressed locally, information-gathering and advocacy are possible.

3. IMPROVE HEALTH SERVICES

Health services are an integral part of growing up healthy, from basic services to address illness and injury to those specifically in place for pregnancy, childhood and youth.

Participants put forward many suggestions for improving health services. Some of the most frequently heard are described below. (Note: Mental health was addressed above as a separate priority.)

- **Early Childhood:** Participants found screening children for kindergarten readiness valuable and useful. They supported the idea of screening of children at 18 months as well. This timing would allow earlier support and intervention if developmental or physical health issues were identified. Therapies that children need are often difficult to access regionally, let alone locally. Participants stated that improving access and reducing waiting times for speech-language therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, pediatricians, and mental health specialists would be greatly appreciated.
In several communities where women must travel to another community to give birth, people expressed concerns about the lack of coordination and support for those families, particularly for families without resources. They are expected to find a place to live (often for weeks), arrange transportation, meet their day-to-day needs in a new community, and then leave hospital with a newborn and make their way home.
- **Primary Care:** The move to integrated primary care teams may not be fully recognized or understood across the North, but many improvements people spoke to relate to this shift. There is a sense that health services for children and youth are sometimes fragmented, and that families, teachers and others who support children are challenged to navigate the system, particularly with children with chronic illness or a complicated health history. Access to a primary care provider (physician or nurse practitioner) with a supporting team of professionals and a shared care plan would help.
In particular, integrated primary care may help with access to timely support for mental health issues and substance use.
- **Oral Health:** Many children suffer from inadequate dental assessments and lack of treatment. A healthy mouth lets a child eat, speak and socialize without pain, discomfort or embarrassment. The impact of poor oral health on a child's everyday life can be pervasive, influencing eating (and therefore nutrition), sleep, school and social interaction.
- **Sexual health:** Youth participants in particular raised concerns about receiving timely and useful education around sexuality and health, and being able to access services in a confidential and appropriate way when needed.

“The way sex education is taught is like practicing a fire drill during a fire.”

- Participant in youth meeting



4. WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF WHAT WE LEARNED?

This report provides a summary and analysis of what Northern BC residents had to say about growing up healthy in Northern BC. It will be used by Northern Health's Board of Directors and management to inform planning and decisions. While it does not contain direct recommendations, some implications of what was learned are noted below.

1. Increase collaboration

Clearly, health care services support healthy children and youth, right from the birthing process, to access to primary care, to a range of acute and specialized services.

However, many elements that help children grow up healthy are not directly health services themselves, or are activities or services that require collaboration between sectors and organizations.

For example, some of the supports participants valued most included:

- Access to free play and the outdoors
- Enough to eat (good quality food)
- Feeling a part of family, school, and the community
- Participation in organized recreation and culture

Issues that participants felt should be addressed included:

- Youth mental health and wellness
- Barriers to participation in sports and culture activities
- Problems related to poverty

Collaboration means getting those who have a stake in something to come together and find innovative, sustainable ways to improve things or make change.

Collaboration can range from simply sharing information and understanding each other's roles to working together with money, people and other resources to build something, whether it's a service, a program, an event, or a building.

Who could work together (more) to improve the lives of children and youth in the North?

- At the community level, this might include local government, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, First Nations, social sector organizations, non-profits and clubs, Northern Health, the RCMP, BC Ambulance, education, religious groups, physicians or nurse practitioners, recreation, and businesses. Often the best results are achieved when it's not just "the regulars" at the table. For example, if schools and social service organizations are looking at food programs, why not involve the Chamber of Commerce, church leaders, or local service clubs?
- Depending on the issue or improvement desired, cross-sector or regional collaboration might include Northern Health, First Nations Health Authority, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Divisions of Family Practice, the Ministry of Transportation, local and regional businesses, the RCMP, BC Ambulance, the University of Northern BC, local colleges, school boards, etc.

Implications/considerations:

- What else can Northern Health bring to local community efforts to improve the health of children and youth?
- How can Northern Health enhance the community health partnerships it already has?
- What roles do Northern Health staff play at community tables? Could they be enhanced?
- What information on health status and successful evidence-supported programs can Northern Health share widely?
- What are the highest-value collaborations (for child and youth health) with other institutions in Northern BC?

2. Northern Health's role in addressing poverty

It's self-evident that in order to grow up healthy, children need to have their basic needs met, including:

- Adequate housing
- Enough healthy food
- Access to recreation and cultural activities
- Quality childcare
- Full participation in school
- Dental care
- Transportation

These basic needs were mentioned frequently during this consultation.

Northern Health cannot address poverty in terms of increasing incomes for families or mitigating all the problems noted above. However, there are opportunities for it to play a role in addressing these issues, or to enhance existing work to support families.

Implications/considerations:

- Can Northern Health services be reviewed with a "poverty lens"? Access to medical services, outreach to families, social supports at discharge, transportation options, and links to First Nations communities are examples of work that could be rethought.
- Can the primary care teams being created across the North look at their patient rosters and consider the diagnosis of "poverty" when looking at supports and health care patients may need?
- Can Northern Health use its mandate to gather population health information and to advocate for good health to more explicitly raise issues related to the impacts of poverty on children and families?
- What else can Northern Health do to work with communities to improve food security, especially where there are collaborative efforts already underway?

3. Mental health and wellness supports for youth

As noted in some detail in the section on improvements needed, supports for young people for mental health and substance use are a high priority in many communities. This issue was also raised in youth-only meetings. It's recognized that this topic ranges from acute high-need supports in time of crisis or healing to more basic items, such as opportunities for recreation, inclusion in the community and better transportation.

Implications/considerations:

- Can Northern Health look more deeply into its mental health services, and how to improve its capacity for counselling and specialized support?
- Will better coordination with local and regional partners improve supports to youth (the Ministry of Children and Family Development, social services, the RCMP, First Nations)?
- How can the primary care home be a strong resource for youth with mental health or substance use problems?
- Does Northern Health have information or resources to support communities around improving recreation and transportation services for youth?

4. Focus on early childhood

While there were many comments acknowledging the excellent supports in place for the early years, there were also many suggestions for improvement. It's clear that strong families are at the root of much childhood success, and that the inability to meet children's basic needs is a major stressor for some.

Implications/considerations:

- How can the recommendations in the [Chief Medical Health Officer's Status Report on Child Health](http://bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport) (bit.ly/NHchildhealthreport) be aligned with what was learned from this consultation?
- Can Northern Health instigate another phase of early childhood screening at 18 months, to identify and address developmental concerns earlier?
- Is it possible to increase resources for early childhood therapies (speech and language, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, etc.) and to better coordinate resources with schools and other agencies?
- Are there additional elements to consider when implementing primary health care teams in Northern BC that could improve coordination and support from pregnancy to six years old?

APPENDIX 1 – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Northwest Health Service Delivery Area

HAZELTON – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: May 31, 2016

Participants: 21

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

Participants in Hazelton believe it means being loved unconditionally and feeling safe and valued. This is supported by strong adult relationships, often with the mother and included extended family and others. It was noted that lots of interaction with infants helps with their brain development.


To feel safe, a child also needs to not feel hardship, to experience the basic needs of life as something that just exist. That includes healthy food and access to needed health care. Free play and experiencing nature will also nourish a child, and go hand-in-hand with reducing exposure to electronics.

To be a healthy child means having healthy parents (or caregivers), which in turn means these adults may need support from the community.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

This area is rich in Aboriginal culture and terrific access to nature. Hunting, fishing, food gathering, hiking (and walking trails) all contribute to this richness, as do efforts to revitalize the culture, such as Gitksan language classes, smokehouses and the Rediscovery program.

It's a community with lots of volunteers and a sense of community spirit, taking things on that need doing. For a rural and dispersed population,



there are lots of opportunities to play soccer, basketball, hockey, boxing and other sports, and to join social activities, from Brownies to dance to the local cinema. Schools and volunteer coaches and leaders keep these activities vibrant.

Many groups support children in Hazelton and area, including mental health services, Youth on Water, Storytellers, the Kispiox drop-in centre, Smart Start, Little Flowers and the Gitanmaax Market, which provides employment for youth. Food programs such as the food bank, good food box, Senden Agriculture and school lunches help meet the need for adequate healthy food.

Finally, there are lots of supports for learning, from the book bus and library system to local schools and the Northwest Community College.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

There are many ways to improve supports in the area. Many suggestions in the meeting related to

supporting parents. There could be more intensive (non-judgmental) support for parents, including home visits for some (a nursing partnership program was recommended at the meeting). Parent education programs, including reproductive health and smoking cessation, are needed, and there could be more family-friendly community activities.

Health care services that would help would be more preventive education, services around oral health, more mental health and addiction services (including detox), and much better collaboration and community help to support youth when being discharged from local or regional facilities.

Youth would benefit from improved recreation facilities, such as the one being fundraised for currently. They also need better transportation options, because without those, recreation and other activities are just not accessible.

KITIMAT – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: May 30, 2016

Participants: 14

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

Kitimat participants think growing up healthy means having a good foundation, being resilient, and having a chance to live life to its fullest potential. This requires love and acceptance, connectedness to others and a feeling of hope. It also requires good nutrition and having basic needs met, including health and other services from time to time.

It's also important to be connected to one's culture and to explore the outdoors, enhanced by safe places for free play and less "management" of children's time.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Children, youth and their caregivers benefit from community programs like Strong Start, prenatal and parenting education for teens, breakfast and lunch programs, after-school activities, C'IMO'CA Stay and Play, and a mental health program. Children feel supported when villages work together by sharing resources and integrating programs. Good neighbourhood design gives children access to nature and free play in parks.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Parenting education, full-day childcare, trained early childhood educators and healthy role models would all help children feel well cared for. A higher minimum wage and income assistance would help address poverty, drop-in breakfast and lunch programs would help feed young people in need, and better transportation options would open up access to activities that don't involve time on social media.

Services are needed for youth on the cusp of adulthood. The community needs safety initiatives and medical clinics with workable opening hours and easy access to information.



MASSET – STAKEHOLDERS’ MEETING

Date: June 23, 2016

Participants: 16

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

For Masset stakeholders, healthy living means feeling safe, with healthy boundaries and without the stress of poverty, being loved and included in adult lives, feeling a part of a community and knowing their place in it. It’s important to have someone safe to talk to so that despair doesn’t lead to drug and alcohol abuse. Children need nutritious food, to feel connected to food sources and know how to prepare meals.

Doctors and dentists should be available for regular appointments and should be willing to form steady relationships with patients. Time outside and unscripted play time are important. Young people want to understand the world around them, learn skills so they can do well without adult supervision, and nurture mind, spirit and body.

WHAT’S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Many programs are helping Masset youth, including those that foster a connection to nature. These include healthy physical activities, outdoor education, traditional food-gathering and other cultural activities. Specifics listed were Rediscovery Camp (strengthens cultural traditions, helps people discover the wisdom of the elders and a philosophy of respect for nature and others); Salmon in the Classroom (DFO Program); Coast Days @ High School (cultural, outdoor alternative studies); Farm to Schools (healthy local food program); Haida Gwaii Rec Committee; after-school programs; Masset Roller Girls; Youth Assembly; and surfing and other sports (basketball, soccer).

Many health care and community services support young people, such as sexual health outreach in high schools, Maternal Child Health, Prenatal Group Clinic, Pregnancy Outreach Program, midwife services, an infant development program, Doctor Child Youth Clinic, Success By 6, Strong Start, Early Years Table, Little Doves Daycare, Kindergarten Fair, Language Nest, a school counsellor, mental health class, Child and Youth Mental Health Substance Use Collaborative, the “Ask Auntie” group for girls, the food bank, Transition House, and child and youth psychiatric rounds.

Haida Gwaii’s caring, collaborative community is reflected in the Gwaii Trust Youth Committee, “Nights Alive” peer to peer mentoring and outreach, and the Community Collaboration Group (monthly meetings of care providers).

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Masset stakeholders felt the need for more support for mental health and to combat drug and alcohol abuse (including understanding historical issues such as residential schools), and more crisis intervention and prevention services.

Poverty alleviation measures could encompass creating jobs through economic diversification; low income housing; more social assistance funds to families for every child; low-cost or free child care and secure daycare spaces; and dealing with transportation barriers, including help with travel off-island.

Health services could be improved by adding more child youth counsellors (without a specific mandate); 24-hour youth shelters; support for families such as parenting groups and help for

trauma victims; help for foster parents; a respite care house (youth-specific with trained attendees) and respite for families (not crisis-driven); social workers in the north end; gender/sexuality support for LGBTQ children; sex education to help caregivers support youth; special needs workers; encouraging physicians to stay in the area; child and youth mental health and addictions clinicians within Northern Health rather than the Ministry of Children and Family Development; consistent funding for all programs; and improved communication between care providers and family members.

Traditional healing alternatives should be welcomed. Elders should be brought together with youth in schools and for recreation. Haida Gwaii needs more foster parents, Big Brother and Sister programs, and more recreational activities such as a skate park, skating rink, swimming pool and access to fishing and gardens.

PRINCE RUPERT – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: June 22, 2016

Participants: 17

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

For Prince Rupert residents, it's essential that youth feel understood, secure, supported and have a positive environment to help them learn to make good decisions and become independent. A safe environment free from family crisis, with secure food and other resources helps children develop well, as do access to local trails and recreation equipment. Literacy training and interaction with adults as a community help children prepare to take their place in the world.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Exposure to nature builds healthy children. Young people are attended to by their own doctors, have good care for vision, hearing and dental, and have access to counselling and occupational therapy. Mothers are supported by prenatal classes and the North Coast Community Services and Maternity Clinic.

Many sports, recreational and cultural programs are cited as helpful, including Guides and Scouts, youth groups, sports (curling, karate, Tae Kwon Do, swimming, skating, dance, gymnastics, hockey, and basketball), arts programs including music, Street Spirit, Power Puff for girls, the Everyone Can Play program, youth mentoring such as Rising Stars, and opportunities to be better educated.

Community collaboration gives youth a sense of being cared for, as reflected in such programs as Success By 6, community organizations that celebrate differences, the Friendship House, North Coast Literacy Now, the local Act Team (CYMHSU), and the interest taken by the mayor and council of Prince Rupert in social issues.

In a small town, the sense of connection, of being known, helps give children a feeling of being safe, cared for, and of belonging.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Support for mental health and addictions would be fostered by raising awareness of what resources exist and making them more available, helping with transportation to care, getting counselling for traumatized youth similar to the Hawaiian HIPPY program, offering parenting classes to teach attachment and communication skills, engaging professionals who are trained to work with children, finding more funds for extracurricular activities, and strengthening cultural attachments. Young people need safe, well-lit places to gather.

Poverty could be ameliorated by addressing barriers to parents enlisting their children in activities, offering free bus passes to students in need, funding recreation equipment, providing free preschool with nourishing food, and offering food programs in all schools. Healthy food should be less expensive

than junk food. Safe, affordable housing is needed, as are subsidies for recreational activities where the cost of equipment is prohibitive for low-income families. Empathy needs to be encouraged about the fact that poverty is not chosen. Children in remote communities need funds for education, and impoverished youth need help getting ID and other important documents.

With health services, youth suffer from long wait times to see specialists; they need a patient advocate and stable funding for health care. Patients need to be educated about what services exist and how to get access to them (e.g., physician referrals). Children must have a safe, healthy environment, and that means removing toxic lead from drinking water. A local psychologist, speech pathologist, psychiatrist, occupational therapist, autism support and doula are needed, as are youth health clinics. Alternative medicine must be supported.



PRINCE RUPERT – YOUTH MEETING

Date: June 22, 2016

Participants: 5

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

Prince Rupert youth feel that growing up healthy means eating well (no sugar, having a balanced diet); getting enough sleep; engaging in activities in and out of school (sports that teach teamwork and fitness); taking courses outside of school (e.g. babysitting at rec centre); and having healthy relationships: talking and working together, decompressing and building trust.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Children appreciate time in nature (such as parks) to hike, be in the forest and learn different fishing methods. Young people benefit from community services such as daycare; Strong Start; the Aboriginal preschool; the Friendship House with its parenting classes, tutoring, girls club and summer camps; school counsellors; supportive school staff; an Aboriginal support worker who makes sure children are fed, clothed and taken where they need to go; health education; the Civic Centre; and alternative schools.

Youth take pride in their community, culture and sports: for instance, the All-Native Tournament, Seafest, parades, dance studios, martial arts and band trips. Young people are proud of their culture with its focus on family connections and learning

from elders, and some appreciate the link to First Nations families. Children are challenged by the Gym Rat program. The small community means everyone knows each other.

What could be improved in your community to support children and youth to grow up healthy?

Drugs and alcohol are far too easily had, even for young students in the lower grades. Some parks are unsafe because of drugs and dangerous older people. Violence and bullying are a problem in middle school. Poverty makes fees and costumes for some activities too costly. Funds are needed to fix damaged bus shelters and roads. Children could use help with career planning, choosing courses they'll need for university and finding bursaries for higher education.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD TO BUILD ON EXISTING SUPPORTS, OR DEVELOP NEW INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH?

Poverty, safety and health care are priorities. Jobs are needed, and education to prepare for better-paying jobs. Daycare costs need to go down. Streets and trails need to be made safe by dealing with drugs and with wolves coming into town. Hospital wait times must be reduced, more beds are needed, organization could be better, and doctors should be more thorough; people with serious conditions are not willing to be treated locally.

QUEEN CHARLOTTE – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: June 23, 2016

Participants: 9

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

For Queen Charlotte residents, safety and stability are vital to a healthy childhood, and that means healthy parents who give a sense of security; no dangerous substances at home; a stable adult to rely on in the community; and measures such as coping skills, emotional support, having a belief in your parents, and having safe places to go. Young people want their parents to be involved in their lives, and they want to have strong family connections.

Children can't feel secure if their basic needs aren't met — for example, the need for a healthy diet with fresh food, exercise, sleep, and some structure. Parents or caregivers need enough income to meet basic needs. Affordable, accessible childcare and good schools help build healthy children.

Young people need a connection to animals and access to recreational activities. If services are not available, alternatives should be.

WHAT DOES GROWING UP IN THE NORTH MEAN TO YOU?

A Northern life is one grounded in nature, with fresh air, good water, and spirituality that includes land, people, spirit and earth. With this foundation, young people can become healthy adults in good physical health and with emotional and spiritual resilience. Supports are needed to help people achieve these goals and reach their full life potential.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Young people have access to hiking trails, opportunities for risky play, the Discovery Camp, the Swan Bay Rediscovery program, school outdoor programs and a farm to school program, all of which connect children with nature.

A fairly solid health care system includes maternal child health teams that deal with issues before, during and after birth; collaboration among early years professionals, especially Public Health; Universal Development Screening Program for preschoolers; the Southern HG Healthy Community Grant — Focus on Youth; visiting specialists (pediatrician, psychiatrist, orthopedic surgeon); good dental care; a school food program; child care; and counselling. You can walk from one end of the village to the other in 20 minutes, which is conducive to getting some exercise.

Consistently available sports like drop-in soccer and basketball, organized sports and after school sports programs help keep children occupied and physically fit. Other recreational supports include teen centres in Queen Charlotte and Skidegate, and Youth Feast. The Gwaii Trust Education Programs and Travel Programs help feed the mind, as does the library.

Shared cultural values and the involvement of elders in programs help children feel part of a community. People generally care about children, and this is reflected in everything from after-school tutoring to

multitalented mentors opening up opportunities for children. Young families connect through play groups and shared meals. There's a sense of inclusivity with regard to gender, race, age and language. Parents are invested in their children, wanting them to be better than they were. Even young women can walk around the community late at night and still feel safe.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

It is very important to stop the normalization of drugs and alcohol. Young people need a drug and alcohol counsellor.

More sports programs would help engage children, as would better transportation to get children to activities. Schools could use dependable support for healthy food programs. Youth workers need to

be well looked after, and that includes better pay. Programs should be inclusive.

Communication must be improved between Northern Health and other professionals. Communities could share best practices. It's tough to build relationships with staff if they don't stay long, so work needs to be done on retention. Queen Charlotte needs paediatric rounds, maternal and child health care similar to those in Skidegate, free dental care, an orthodontist, and a return of the Grade 6/7 Health Fair. Spiritual health should also be a focus.

Businesses and non-profits could help young people get a started in the working world by letting children spend time at workplaces. More intergenerational activities would help, and more voluntary services for hard-to-reach families. Support is lacking for children aged six to 12 years. A better relationship should be cultivated with the RCMP.

SMITHERS – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: June 1, 2016

Participants: 11

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

In Smithers, growing up healthy means freedom within a safe framework; feeling valued, loved and supported; and experiencing healthy attachment, connection and a sense of belonging. Small-town life is conducive to people looking out for one another's children.

Basic needs must be met, including clean air and water, and enough income to provide decent housing and food. Some frustration was expressed about the lack of understanding of how desperate parents can feel when they don't have money to provide for their children. Young people need access to health care and other services.

Children benefit from free play in safe places outdoors so they can learn about nature and what it provides. Living off the land is important, so children should feel skilled at gardening and hunting. Healthy lives include athletics, music, art, and for young children, not too much exposure to technology. Good transportation is needed for children to take part in after-school activities.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Young people benefit from easy access to a beautiful, clean natural environment—rivers, mountains, trails, and a farmers' market for healthy food. Health care programs are appreciated, including the optometrist clinic, strong maternity and perinatal partners, Positive Living North and Healthy Start.

Good infrastructure such as a pool, ice rinks, playgrounds, arena, track, ski hill, bike trails and gymnastics equipment help young people participate in many activities. Youth are engaged by activities such as the museum's scavenger hunt, the midsummer festival, the arts, camps, the bike rodeo, and cultural connections with the Wet'suwet'en Nation. Free or low-cost activities make it possible to include many youth.

Strong social service organizations are important contributors to young people feeling cared for and valued: the Smithers Community Services Association, the Bulkley Valley the Child Development Centre, the Northern Society for Domestic Peace, the Social Planning Society, Strong Start, Early Years Table, and the faith community. The Homeless Prevention Program and shelter help children at risk. A paradigm shift in education is helping children via self-directed learning, collaboration, teaching self-regulation, and more.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

The root causes of drug use among young children need to be addressed, along with the question of how children are getting drugs. Children need services when they return from provincial centres. Collaboration is needed, and integration of medical and mental health services in a school-based model. Services in the Hazeltons, for instance, are fragmented or absent (for example, no Strong Start). Low-cost housing, food security and low- or no-cost programs for children would help address health problems caused by poverty. Internet access would make a substantial difference. Transportation is also needed between communities.

Parents would be helped by support for perinatal care and registry, ongoing parent information sessions and a support position similar to FORCE to help them negotiate the system. The stigma around family counselling is an impediment to children getting help. Services are needed for special needs children and respite for their caregivers. School staff could use training and help to cope with children who have behavioural problems. Awareness needs to be raised about domestic violence. Social workers should be in hospitals and schools. Off-hours medical services would relieve the pressure on the emergency room. More access is needed to specialized medical services, such as pediatric care. A food store in Houston could provide healthy, affordable food. It may help to adopt a wellness model based on Wet'suwet'en cultural strengths.

TERRACE – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: May 30, 2016

Participants: 40

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

Terrace residents think children and youth should be safe, secure and protected, and should experience that they belong, through positive connections to other kids, feeling welcome in the community, and feeling secure in a family that loves and supports them.

Their parents, grandparents and other caregivers should have adequate income, and should be able to provide safe housing, good food and the means to be involved in school and community activities. Adults should be a positive influence on children and youth, and should watch out for them.

Access to indoor and outdoor organized recreation, including access to trails and parks that connect children to nature, are seen as important for good health.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

There are many strong programs and services in Terrace. They range from those that support early childhood, like Strong Start, Children First, the Pregnancy Outreach Program, Kindergarten Roundup, the Child Development Centre, Family Place, and the prenatal clinic, to supports for older youth, such as youth mental health programs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, school food programs and the Youth Advisory Committee.

Physicians and other health care providers support health for people at all ages. Collaboration between local government and community organizations serves young people well, as indicated by the Terrace Youth Engagement Strategy.

Terrace is a diverse community and offers a wide range of activities around sports, recreation, and culture. These include the Pacific Northwest Music Festival, Concerts in the Park, and valuable recreation options, including organized team sports such as soccer, and less structured opportunities like Teen Swim, local playgrounds, and the Millennium Trail. Dedicated volunteers make these activities possible, and transportation and the layout of Terrace make most things accessible.

Education is valued in Terrace, from daycare to college/university programs, with specialized options like the alternative school also available. For the size of the city, there are many resources to support children and youth.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Poverty is a concern for many – the divide between “haves” and “have-nots” seems to be growing, and some families have to sacrifice good nutrition to provide other necessities for their children. It would help many families if there were improvements such as higher wages, more affordable housing options, and a smaller affordability gap for childcare.

Transportation could be improved by ensuring sidewalks are safe (and plowed), adding a Saturday bus service to Kitimat, improving the HandyDART service (it doesn’t go to Kitsumkalum, for example), and providing a bus to Lakelse Lake. Participants thought smaller buses and increased promotion of bus transportation and schedules might also help.

Mental health support for children and youth is inadequate. There is a need for increased access to

child psychiatry and for greater support in schools for assessments and addressing anxiety and OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder).

Older youth need better access to counselling, treatment for addictions, and support for the transition into adulthood (particularly for children in care). The foster care program needs to recruit and support more caregivers, for all ages of children in care. Residents also pointed out the harm caused to young people by bullying and harassment, and noted that racism is something the community could look at addressing more openly.

Other gaps to be addressed include more rigorous environmental testing, a lactation consultant for breastfeeding support, more winter recreation options, a drop-in centre for youth, and making government and other services more accessible and less stigmatized for parents to access.





Northern Interior Health Service Delivery Area

BURNS LAKE – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: May 19, 2016

Participants: 5

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

Children need to feel loved, needed, wanted, safe and secure, and know where they fit in. Enough needs should be met from Maslow's hierarchy of needs:

Physiological: food, water, warmth, rest

Safety: security, safety;

Belonging and love: intimate relationships, friends;

Esteem: prestige and feeling of accomplishment;

Self-actualization: achieving full potential, including creative activities

Children need opportunities to become their best selves, including having a sense of purpose and taking on responsibilities. Parents must be available to children.

Raising animals (4-H) and growing flowers gives some children a sense of pride. It's important to play independently outside and have unstructured time to play, without so many toys and without the negative influence of TV. Activities that involve the whole community are welcome.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Children benefit from access to nature, including outdoor play spaces, and from programs that support young children, such as Early Childhood Development services, preschool programming, Strong Start and Mother Goose, with their dedicated teachers and support staff.

Affordable housing and activities allow all children to be nurtured. Access to health services such as occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and speech-language therapy is important. Healthy local food, including game and fish, helps build healthy children.

Young people enjoy a range of organized sports (baseball, soccer, biking, skiing, hockey, curling etc.) and affordable summer recreation programs. Free access to books, the literacy program and the Words on Wheels (WOW) bus help children learn about the world through reading. Recreational activities that aren't competitive help children feel free.

Children are supported by community events such as Aboriginal Days, Canada Day, the Winter Parade, the Rotary auction and cultural activities, as well as by cultural integration in schools, introduction to the Carrier language and potlatches. Children feel the effects of empowered community leaders who respond to community needs.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Children need to be allowed to be children, with unstructured play outside and access to informal sports and equipment. Less screen time for children and parents would improve overall health. More adult volunteers would be helpful.

Public transit is needed, including transportation to services. Stable employment would counter poverty-related issues. Access to good quality fresh food is needed, especially in winter. Food security is not helped by the closing of the grocery store in Fraser Lake. Programs are needed for low-income families, including food, shelter, clothing, activities, and subsidies or bursaries for rec centre memberships and sports.

Young people need access to higher levels of care and assessments of health, including early screening for developmental problems (18 months

to 2 years old). Developmental assessments for complex developmental behavioural conditions (CDBC) should be available within people's home communities (Burns Lake, Southside, Granisle, Fraser Lake, etc.), including intake, family support and follow-up.

Programs are needed to support healthy pregnancies and help prevent fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). Sexual health nights for teens and more health education in schools would help prevent teen pregnancies, while parenting support groups and classes could prevent harm being done to children by ill-informed caregivers. If there were better collaboration with all agencies working with children, locals would make the most of the wonderful resources they have.

MACKENZIE – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: June 3, 2016

Participants: 15

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

For Mackenzie residents, to grow up healthy you must feel safe, supported, and not have to carry adult worries like financial and marital problems. Young people should be free of stress at mealtimes and bedtime. Children need secure food and housing, and lots of time outside in the fresh air, with limits on the use of electronics. They need physical activity in nature and chances to try new things, and even to engage in somewhat risky play. They should be exposed to a lot of activities, recreational facilities, arts and culture, and costs should be lowered. Scouts, Brownies and Guides can be useful.

Children need free time to entertain themselves rather than have activities forced on them by helicopter parents. Young people learn to become independent by taking on responsibilities like chores, developing a work ethic, and learning leadership skills.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Quick, easy access to nature is supported by adults who are willing to take children to outdoor activities. The farmers' market offers good quality, locally produced food. Team sports are affordable, the recreation complex is top-notch, and excellent recreational programs are offered by exuberant providers (Mackenzie Rec, Special Olympics, Scouts). Library staff and volunteers offer excellent free programs, and the library creates programs based on needs (for example, the Lego club). Arts and cultural offerings are first-rate (such as the Dancing Tree, the Art Centre, and Mackenzie Performing Arts).

A caring, tight-knit community where everyone knows one another gives children the feeling that "I have a parent on every corner." Many supports are available, such as mental health services, public health, occupational therapy and physiotherapy, Mackenzie Counselling Services and addiction prevention, the rec centre, the library, schools and college.

There's quick access to health care including short emergency room wait times, a physiotherapist, chiropractor, dentist and dietician. Teachers and health care providers are very engaged, and community members are committed (e.g., crossing guards, a doctor in the school). There's a good deal of networking among groups, such as Mackenzie Gets Healthy, accessibility groups, the community bus, Bike to Work and schools.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Bureaucracy impedes access to mental health care for children and youth, and the process of getting support is made more difficult when parents have mental health problems themselves.

More licensed childcare is needed. Costs need to be lowered for access to the Arts & Rec Centre. Teens need more activities. Rural schools would benefit from equitable funding.

The difficulty in getting access to GPs and other health services might be addressed if medical schools focused more on the benefits of practicing in remote rural communities. Given that many health services are in Prince George, some people choose

not to go out of town to get the help they need, thus foregoing that help.

When women have to leave the community to deliver their babies, they need help with childcare, housing and living expenses; some are advised to be in Prince George three weeks before delivery, which leads to unsupportable expenses. A birth concierge would be useful for home births. Parent support services should be promoted and destigmatized. Children need access to occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, and social/emotional and developmental help.

Adding bike lanes and sidewalks either side of the highway that cuts through town would make it safer, as would reducing the speed limit.

MCBRIDE – STAKEHOLDER/PUBLIC MEETING

Date: June 9, 2016

Participants: 9

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

For McBride residents, it means self-awareness, resilience, making the best of things and working for what you have. Young people need to feel safe to express their emotions, to have their mental and physical needs acknowledged and met. To that end, they ideally should be raised by loving, supportive, mature parents who create a stable home, offer guidance and nurture resiliency. Children need to know how to get help, for instance when they're bullied.

Young people need healthy food, exercise, year-round recreation and to unplug from technology. Keeping minds and bodies active helps keep them out of trouble. Children need to understand the consequences of their actions, and be accountable.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Children learn about healthy food from the village's heritage seed program, its farmers' markets, the Open Gate community garden, and the library's use of farmland to teach them about growing food. The school's outdoor education program teaches older children about nature, while easy access to outdoor activities like hiking and the outdoor camp give children healthy time in nature.

Prenatal programs, Strong Start and Success By 6 give children a fine start in life, while Children First initiatives and sex education in schools offer

guidance for older children. The preventive and protection programs offered by the town's social worker give emotional support. RCMP officers show children that police can be approachable allies by reading to kindergarten children, being visible in schools and having an open-door policy. The community is grateful for local access to IDP and other specialists. The McBride Healthier Communities group looks out for long-term community health needs.

Sports leagues (soccer, subsidized hockey) and activities beyond sports are enjoyed by children, from bike trails to the skate park, playgrounds, swim program, rinks, arenas, gyms, fitness centres, the RV Rec Centre, the Fit Pit, the YMCA Exchange, Live Different, drama residency, drumming/mamba residency, and library programs such as yoga for children and story time.

In a small community, children can feel loved and protected, and that sense is nurtured by active community collaboration on such projects as the youth group; the RVSS Girls Club; the RVSS Respectful Relationships Program; community use agreements like RD, FFG, and SD57; the Vital Connections course (Neufeld) with service providers and parents; intergenerational activities such as adult/child after-school and seniors/children programs; youth planning family activities; the Northern Health Connections bus to get children to activities; and the elementary school safeguarding the health of youngsters by not allowing technological devices. Young people have

their eyes opened about community service in the fire department for youth program and the Derricks Mexico program, where the high school principal takes Grade 10 to 12 children to Mexico to build a house for a needy family.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

It does not work for Northern Health to contract out mental health care for young people; qualified professionals are needed, particularly for addiction services, and more collaboration is also needed between schools, RVSS, Northern Health and counsellors. To get children to turn off technology and get outside to play, it would help to have gate gardens at schools, a pool or water/spray park. The area could be promoted for rock climbing, with a high-level champion as a role model.

The consequences of living with poverty should be addressed. More local jobs would lead to enough

children to sustain sports and give teens more to do. Low-cost birth control and pregnancy counselling are needed. Parents need to be more involved; using facilities as babysitters leads to problems for children.

Confidential health care is needed for sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing and treatment, Pap tests and sexual health counselling. Daycare and early childhood education, early screening for hearing problems, and support for youth with chronic diseases are also needed. The Thirty Million Words Initiative would help develop children's brains. Services should be available during or near lunch time. Northern Health should recognize the difficulties of travelling long distances for health care, such as finding support for babies born outside the community (e.g., Ronald McDonald House). Videoconferencing between doctors and youth is one solution.

PRINCE GEORGE – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: June 2, 2016

Participants: 17

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

Prince George residents know that children need love, attachment, safety and good communication to support emotional wellbeing. It does take a supportive village to raise a healthy child, and that includes connection to culture. Healthy attachment early on builds healthy families generation after generation. Children need to feel it's okay to ask for help.

Teenage mothers need to be fed healthy food and supported throughout their pregnancies. Children need good food, clean air and water, and time in nature—away from technology—to camp, fish and ride bikes. Children need a balance between safety, electronics and time outdoors, and they need transportation to activities that keep them busy and out of trouble.

Adults need to help young people become resilient so that children can thrive and move past difficulties. All forms of literacy should be fostered: literal, financial, and so on.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Lots of playgrounds, community gardens, trails, parks and nearby lakes give children easy access to healthy, free outdoor playtime to hike, fish, ski, and more. The community gardens and the fruit and vegetable program in schoolyards and gardens teach children about healthy eating.

Prince George has good access to health care, including child health clinics, obstetricians, pediatricians, NICU, child and youth mental health programs, the early years health fair, breastfeeding initiatives, telehealth consultants, regional specialty clinics for children, and short wait times for specialists.

The partnership between Northern Health, the Ministry for Children and Families, and School District 57 benefits children. The Nak'azdli Health Centre is a hub for community health nurses, a nurse practitioner, a prenatal worker, maternal child health home visitors, and home and community care.

There are lots of organized sports and activities, some with subsidies. Children have fun at the skateboard park, special parks (Duchess), sports groups, youth camps, swimming pools and ice rinks. Nak'azdli Recreation brings native youth to Prince George for swimming, sports camps and tryouts.

People with a passion for working with children and youth are making a difference in children's lives. This caring for youth is reflected in interagency collaboration, ready access to information about raising children, the school district's investment in early childhood development, and very engaged teachers and administrative staff at the school district and independent schools.

Among the supports for children are the Child and Youth Family Network, links with the university, parental support at The Village, CYFN, NANA, many professionals engaged with youth (e.g., PGCYFN), CTMHSU, help finding licensed daycare

from CCRR, good quality childcare programs (e.g., at the YMCA), youth advisory councils, transport help from HandyDART and CINHS, library programs that engage teens, community events for families, the Youth Works employment program, the Head Start and Strong Start programs, including the Prince George Native Friendship Centre's Head Start program, YAP (Youth Around Prince Resource Centre), CASEY (Communities Against Sexual Exploitation of Youth), the Child Development Centre and Infant Development programs, a teen mom program, Project Parent North (teen/parent mediation), the Family Resource Centre, YMCA programs (some free programs, child care resources, camps, workshops, training, childcare subsidies), the Elizabeth Fry Society, free programs (IDP, PPN, AIFDP, CSFS Programs, TMAP, CDC), CCRR toy lending, and multicultural societies (PGNFC, IMSS, Carrier Sekani, Chinese Benevolent Society, Franco-Nord).

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Poverty reduction is foundational to good health, and to that end these ideas were suggested: a basic annual income; affordable childcare; healthy food and food security; free, family-friendly events; transportation assistance for those who live out of town; and a Words on Wheels bus (like the one in Burns Lake) to bring free books to outlying areas. Small communities need help to provide licensed child care.

Many health care needs were listed, including Healthy Beginnings Workshops for child care

providers; ongoing education for parents about child development and child care including workshops such as Positive Discipline, KHST, attachment, safe spaces for parents, and injury prevention; giving families ASQs (Ages and Stages Questionnaires); shorter waitlists; better access to family doctors; increased mental health services; involvement of the Ministry of Children and Family Development beyond protection; free health services for children; more publicly funded breastfeeding support services (IBCLC); a focus on prevention; returning the Roots of Empathy program to schools; having one place for parents to get help for children; and education about dental hygiene (too many children are having dental surgery for rotten teeth).

Duplication of services could be avoided by networking among service providers so that everyone knows what's on offer and for whom. Partnerships could be instigated with foster parent organizations to offer workshops such as Play it Fair, Safe Spaces, Handle with Care, Little Warriors or similar abuse-prevention training.

Collaboration is needed to work out a strategy between the Ministry of Children and Family Development, health and education. Children need more time outside, so providing parks in every neighbourhood, bike and ski trails would help. A Boys and Girls club might work. Court teams are needed for infants and toddlers. Connections with local government and business could be strengthened.

PRINCE GEORGE – STAKEHOLDERS’ MEETING

Date: June 10, 2016

Participants: 27

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

Children need to feel safe and secure, which means not being exposed to adult problems. Children need a sense of belonging, connection and being loved. They need healthy attachments, good food, and time outside for free play, to feel connected to the land and to animals. Music can give a sense of wellbeing.

WHAT’S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

There’s good access to nature trails, parks, green belts, clean water and playgrounds for camping, fishing, hiking, biking, and more.

Prince George has lots of health and community services with caring people, including parent services at FRC; access to specialized medical support from pediatricians and midwives; parent education; free Strong Start; early childhood programs; free family programs (for example, at the YMCA and the library); IDE and AIDP infant development program; a pediatric ward; the NICU; maternity facilities; Project Parent North and the Parent Mediation program; child health clinics; and mental health programs like Rainbows. Some 50% of pregnant women are on the prenatal registry.

The city and environs have excellent parks and rec facilities, such as skate parks, pools, indoor soccer, the Rotary fields, baseball, the Hart Ski Hill, and the cross-country ski facility at Otway. Children can nurture their creativity at such places as the Two Rivers Art Gallery’s makers program and the culture camp.

The community collaborates on childcare (partnering between schools and parenting groups) and among agencies serving youth. It also has a supported preschool, Early Years fairs, affordable housing, and free public transportation on days with bad air quality. The Native Friendship Centre’s community garden, community kitchen and cooking classes teach good nutrition.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Supportive housing is needed for pregnant women struggling with substance abuse. Caregivers of children with FASD (fetal alcohol spectrum disorder) need support. Children from isolated, impoverished families need more safe places to go, and more education to counter domestic violence is called for. Abused children need better care: the SCAN (Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect) clinic sees some children repeatedly. Longer assessment and therapy is preferable to reacting to crises. Neighbourhoods should be safe and supportive so children feel free to play outside.

The social determinants of health should be addressed: poverty, food insecurity and affordable housing. Federal and provincial policy changes are needed to lift families out of poverty, including more social and disability assistance. Less expensive daycare is needed. Sports and other activities should be affordable. Free public transit for youth would help them use the many services and get rural youth into the city.

Health services could be improved by taking stock to determine whether there's duplication of services, whether the system is easy to navigate, and whether there are gaps. Better access to Prince George's fair share of provincial funding would help, as would stability in funding programs; they change every couple of years, budget cuts have caused many programs to close, and professionals are less likely to stay in the community if their jobs are not secure.

Wait times for assessments and services should be shorter, and access to medical care should be improved: many people can't find a family doctor and residents of remote First Nations communities may have to travel four hours to see a doctor.

More focus on prevention of infant mental health problems is needed, such as encouraging breastfeeding and emotional attachment. Parents should be encouraged to get their children's health

checked more often when their children are between 18 months and 3 to 5 years old. Mental health assessments should be done on children, and services made available to them, particularly for children aged three to five in remote First Nations communities. Schools need more support; for instance, with smaller class sizes teachers can connect better with children and notice problems more easily. Programs to counter racism are needed. Connections with elders could help support children.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD TO BUILD ON EXISTING SUPPORTS, OR DEVELOP NEW INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH?

Participants asked why the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the RCMP and school reps weren't at the meeting.

PRINCE GEORGE – YOUTH MEETING

Date: June 13, 2016

Participants: 5

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

Children recognize the need to play outside.

Young people at this meeting suggested having mandatory gym class until Grade 10 and replacing spares with gym, noting that a fit body helps you feel good about yourself, perform better in school, and makes you less susceptible to mental health issues. Year-round physical education combined with music would let children exercise their minds with music one day and bodies with exercise the next. Children recommended having a place at school to play sports for fun rather than competition. After-school clubs for sports, music, trail running, etc., are open to everyone.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

The fruit and vegetable program comes into schools every couple of weeks or once a month. The school breakfast program should be reinstated. The school cafeteria helps children who can't afford lunch.

Children welcome non-competitive activities like dancing and appreciate access to the UNBC Sports Centre.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Children at the meeting recognized that if you surround yourself with unhealthy people who do drugs you're more susceptible to doing the same.

Many children are taking drugs by age 13 so there's a real need to educate them about the effects of alcohol and drugs.

Some sports and activities are too expensive. The Steve Nash program stops at Grade 7 and school programs after that are more costly. Many children don't eat breakfast so aren't able to function well in school, so the breakfast program should be reinstated. The school cafeteria should offer healthier food and encourage children to make better choices.

It's tough to find a teacher motivated to help with after-school clubs and to motivate young people, so parents should start children in sports early on. Non-competitive activities take the pressure off and let children just have fun.

Young people have to understand it's important to have a well-rounded life; scholarships also depend on involvement with recreation and the community. Children are sometimes too busy to do healthy activities because of school work, jobs and volunteering, so they need help with time management.

Children are sometimes saddled with adult responsibilities but are still treated as children. Young people should be accountable, so they don't always rely on teachers and parents to know what they have to do and when. They need to learn critical thinking skills.

Sexual health should be taught when children are younger, and parents should be educated about what to teach their children.



QUESNEL – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: May 20, 2016

Participants: 12

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

Children need to feel supported, connected, part of a community, emotionally and physically safe, and have a consistent routine (such as family dinners) so they have a sense of belonging to family, community, peer groups and perhaps church. Children need a stable, loving home that's free of substance abuse. People of all abilities and cultures should feel included. Healthy parents are more likely to raise healthy children. Children need to be consistently well fed. Good quality child care supports healthy children.

Young people need to have fun with unstructured and structured play. They need opportunities to test themselves by taking risks and playing outside in nature. In aid of literacy, children should have access to free books. Limits should be put on TV time; television should not be used as a babysitter. Children need age-appropriate information and creative ways to engage them.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Children stay healthy with outdoor recreation on trails and lakes: hiking, fishing, and joining walking groups.

Helpful health and community services include early parenting programs (pregnancy outreach, CDC early intervention programs), accreditation for the baby-friendly initiative at GR Baker hospital, the Strengthening Families program, the Child Development Centre, Success By 6, and the Youth in Action afterschool program for teens. The rec centre, the Special Olympics and an accessible playground help all children engage in recreation.

Quesnel has flexible, committed, adaptable, caring staff in all community programs, vibrant ECD coalitions, and collaboration in such initiatives as Children First tables.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

The level of poverty is such that school food programs are sometimes the only chance children have to eat all day. Encouraging breastfeeding frees up money that would be spent on infant formula for other family needs. Affordable, good-quality child care is essential. Costs can be prohibitive if a high-risk pregnancy means a woman has to go to another community and pay for accommodation and travel. Affordable transportation means more than bus tickets.

A lactation consultant and a dietician should be attached to the primary care clinic. More funding and support for trained pregnancy outreach and early intervention would target high-risk women. Early childhood education would support youngsters.

Children should not have every difficulty pathologized. Better and faster access is needed to physicians, dentists, specialists, mental health and addiction services, primary care, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, psychologists and registered counsellors with advanced training.

It can be a hardship to travel outside the community for care. It would help to have one place to go to for services, and fewer regulations. Northern Health and organizations within Northern Health should make information sharing easier, and collaborate more with the Ministry of Children and Family Development and schools. The government should be held accountable for the consequences of funding cuts, such as school closures and loss of facilities.

Children need to be allowed to take risks, play freely, have fun and be physically active. More parks should be included as new neighbourhoods are built. Parks and playgrounds should be accessible to children with disabilities. Children should be taught the importance of volunteering to nurture community spirit.

Next steps identified included a food security strategy, community development, an environmental scan, seeking funding, and interagency meetings.

VALEMOUNT – STAKEHOLDERS’ MEETING

Date: June 9, 2016

Participants: 1

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

It means having hope, love, a safe environment, positive relationships, reliable parents and learning from parents’ mistakes so you don’t make them yourself. Basic necessities for food and shelter must be met along with medical and dental care, including proximity to a hospital. It’s important to have a variety of healthy, affordable food; to garden; to know how to preserve the food you grow (freezing, canning); to limit sugar; and to have time in nature.

WHAT’S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Among the health care and community services that support healthy children are the Northern Health Connections bus; Stop the Violence, safe shelter, outreach and Better at Home programs; prenatal classes through Northern Health; Robson Valley Support Services; Infant Development Program; and the Parenting Program.

Local action and assessment teams help reduce the stigma about mental health concerns and bring professionals into the community. The Easter Seal house in Prince George eases the burden of travelling out of town for medical appointments.

Single moms and girls use social media for peer support. A local girls’ group gives girls a voice and a space to share experiences and learn from them. A play and learn program, a school breakfast program,

and teaching parents about nutrition, cooking and literacy all support children by feeding their growing bodies and minds. Free books at the IGA and a 50-cent bag of used library books make reading accessible to all children.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Parents should be encouraged to accept help through parenting classes; to learn what normal behaviour at home is with regard to abuse and alcohol use; and to allow their children to get help.

The health effects of poverty would be addressed with a food bank that operates more than once a month and doesn’t consist largely of non-perishable, unhealthy processed food, and with more local jobs (one parent working out of town leaves children in single-parent homes).

Among the health services that need improvement or better access are mental health, dental care and a psychologist who comes more than once a year. Teachers need help supporting the many children with OCD and similar conditions. As part of the Prince George school district, Valemount children are forgotten. Parents need help getting support for children at school (for instance, some have missed application dates for funding). It is not healthy for children to indulge in violent video games. Children need help with literacy.

VANDERHOOF – STAKEHOLDERS’ MEETING

Date: May 19, 2016

Participants: 6

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

To participants from Vanderhoof, it means that children have physical, emotional and spiritual nourishment; safe places to play; and a sense of belonging, identity and pride of identity. Children must learn to consider others. Basic needs must be met. Children should have a balance between structured and unstructured time, must be physically active and be able to access activities.

The Circle of Courage and Martin Broken Leg mastery programs give a sense of belonging and teach generosity. Helicopter parents, however, prevent children from becoming independent. Children need opportunities for emotional development without protection from harsh realities.

WHAT’S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Parks and trails give children places to play in nature. Young people are supported by lots of organized sports and recreation such as theatre, music and social groups, and also are free to engage in unstructured play.

Timely access to family doctors is appreciated. Young people are supported by community collaboration on early services, excellent teachers, school activities, supportive parents and many churches. Volunteers share their time, giving a sense that the community is a family.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

The focus for health services should be on developing institutions and systems. Early identification of developmental and health issues, including mental health, would prevent long-term problems and this should be addressed by schools, the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Northern Health. Mental health treatment, including acute care, is needed for children and youth. Young children have need of speech therapy.

Children who don’t want to take part in organized sports need more activities, such as an outdoor skating rink. Children don’t play sports as often if they must deal with poverty and long travel times without good public transit. More community spaces and programs would help, such as a community centre, a pool and activities for teens. Celebration of differences would help children feel included. Difficult discussions must take place about domestic violence and racism and how they impact services. Parents need to be taught how to support children, and programs should be set up for dealing with bullying and harassment. People should be empowered to take some responsibility for their health.

Northeast Health Service Delivery Area

CHETWYND – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: May 27, 2016

Participants: 12

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

For the people of Chetwynd, it means strong relationships, interaction with parents and elders. Parents need tools.

Children need good, fresh, healthy, affordable food, and to stay away from sugar. They need to be physically and mentally active. It's important to get outside in nature (for instance, on the trail systems), and that entails unplugging from electronic toys and machines (cell phones, games, TV) so children can connect with real people and with nature.

Social activities like sports and affordable recreation help with physical and mental health by encouraging children to hang out with a healthy crowd. Travel costs should be low enough to allow all children to take part.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Outdoor activity is encouraged by the skate/bike park. High-school activities like the RCMP's Code Blue fitness and team-building program, Me to We, and the Sukunka Group are positive influences, as are free library programs like Imagination Library, Success By 6, public and private schools in SD 59, and school nutrition and exercise programs.

Good health is supported by safe drinking water, the Community and Healing Garden, Farm Bound and the farmers' market, school gardens and greenhouses (Don Titus, Little Prairie, Moberly Lake). Chetwynd residents appreciate having a hospital, a new primary care clinic, enthusiastic and knowledgeable public health staff, 4 doctors, a nurse practitioner, and child and youth mental health services and a prenatal registry.

Among Chetwynd's community-building activities are family events like Harvest Fest and the community yard sale, a community radio station, an arts council, circus camp, KidSport, and the rec centre's pool, a climbing wall, a track, and a gym and rinks for curling, hockey and rollerblading. Early exposure to sports can help with social and emotional development before children enter school. Some organizations collaborate on programs for children, and volunteers help keep it all running.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

There's a need for education on divorce, on not engaging with children, on what constitutes good health in children, and about the long-term effects of substance abuse. Adults can be too busy to spend time with children.

More financial help, jobs and affordable housing, and free programs for children and parents would help address limitations imposed by poverty. The food bank needs work.

Health care in small centres like Chetwynd is not what it should be. Assessment is needed for CBDC (complex developmental behavioural conditions). There's a need for more doctors and counsellors for children and couples. Success By 6 and other early years programs are out of town and have waitlists. There is virtually no support for LGBT children. Communication and collaboration could be better among ministries, across sectors (for a continuum of

support from prenatal to early years, kindergarten through to end of school and into next generation), and around issues with First Nations. Word needs to get out about available programs. A one-stop shop would help get better access to services. Too much screen and social media time impinges on time children could be engaging with people and playing outside, and exposure to relentless advertising leads to an unhealthy self-image.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD TO BUILD ON EXISTING SUPPORTS, OR DEVELOP NEW INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH?

More services would help, such as a prenatal program; Baby's Best Chance; low-cost or free parenting education, daycare and preschool; support for teens and young adults including problem children; support for single dads; and positive role models. Schools could focus more on healthy lifestyles (mind, body and environment).

DAWSON CREEK – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: May 26, 2016

Participants: 11

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

Children need a nurturing, supportive environment with caring relationships; attachment to family, neighbours and teachers; to feel safe; to be around stable people; to have a sense of community and be involved in the community. Dawson Creek is small enough that there's a sense of everyone knowing who you are and caring about you; children are raised by the community. Adults need to model what it is to be healthy. Children must not be exposed to criminal activities and unhealthy relationships.

Clear water and air, a good diet, time in nature and freedom to play are basic to good health. When children are embraced by a caregiver they feel safe to explore. Young people grow by being responsible for someone other than themselves and their families. They learn to be independent by developing their own community when away from family.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Parks, trails, green space and an outdoor gym encourage play in nature. The farming culture promotes healthy eating.

Health care and community services that support children include church activities; assessments for children with complex behaviours/FASD (fetal alcohol spectrum disorder); an ID program; lunch programs in some schools; programs for teen moms; reasonable access to doctors; South Peace Community Resources; and early childhood programs like Success By 6, Strong Start, Children First, Axis, Planning 10 Early Learning; the child development centre; and the Early Years Fair in Tumbler Ridge, Chetwynd and Dawson Creek.

There are great facilities and programs such as a pool, soccer pitches, skating rinks, tennis courts, the Lakota equine centre, a bowling alley, KidSport, JumpStart, a library, and the arts and culture centre.

Children are nurtured by caring teachers, TAs and administrators at good schools with innovative programs, daycare, trades program, and more. Agencies work together to support families in need. A free store helps low-income families.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Treatment of mental health and substance abuse in children and teens shouldn't be separated.

Poverty leads to health problems. Teens could use a free gathering place, affordable activities, clubs, and more funding for sports and fine arts. Some areas need basic infrastructure like sidewalks and streetlights for safety. Children must have affordable food. Teens need free access to birth control, and families would benefit from free parenting programs in all communities.

Northern Health's policies and processes should be made clear so residents understand what's available

through Alberta Health Services (rather than Prince George) and the division of services between the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Ministry of Education. It would help to have more services in remote communities (Tumbler Ridge, Chetwynd), local diagnosis, travel assistance to medical and mental health care (including Alberta), access to tertiary care, counselling for young children, and shorter waitlists for therapy. Adding complementary medicine would make the health care system more holistic. Discreet locations for services would help sidestep the stigma of the whole town knowing what help people are seeking. A support group (such as a boys' and girls' club) could address the needs of tweens and teens.

DAWSON CREEK – YOUTH MEETING

Date: May 27, 2016

Participants: 12

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

For Dawson Creek youth, it means love, guidance and support from parents, happiness, exploring within boundaries, and freedom from worries. They need adults they can trust, an outlet and a sense of purpose. If they have something to look forward to it can keep them out of trouble. Children need acceptance at home, at school and in the community particularly if they have learning disabilities, interests outside the mainstream, or are LGBTQ. Bullying must be addressed.

Young people need to be given good information about mental and sexual health including education about STIs. The local culture is that you get married young and have children at age 20 rather than explore the world. Children with mental illness need support so they don't fall prey to drugs or alcohol.

Children should be outside a few hours each day, with freedom to just be children. They should have less exposure to electronics so there's a balance with physical activity. Living in the country helps children understand food systems. Young people need freedom to explore, learn to stand up for themselves and gain independence.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Youth, church and volunteer groups offer good programs. The school has supportive teachers and helps teen moms with daycare. There are many free, confidential mental health services. The health unit offers counselling and birth control. A food program supports those in need.

Parks and trails give children a place to enjoy time in nature. The arts, including music and dance, offer children ways to express themselves and get them away from the streets. Recreational facilities let children take part in everything from speed skating to swimming, bowling, soccer, baseball and rugby. At the Ark group, children can play games and basketball by donation. Everyone is included, adults are there and it's accessible. Children gather at the skate park and now that it's drug- and alcohol-free it's safe even for little ones. Children appreciate great coaches and affordable soccer.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

There's a culture of shame around mental health problems. Some parents tend to pathologize issues and need help seeing the positive and being more open-minded. Children need to learn empathy, problem-solving and critical thinking skills. In the cause of gaining independence and freedom from overbearing parents, youth need jobs.

Community events should be free and open to all ages (such as ice sculpting in Fort St. John) rather than turned into businesses as is the case now. The cost of events goes up each year, making it difficult for some to afford them. Registration fees for activities should be reduced. Children need access to affordable, good food; more activities; and free transportation, especially in winter.

Teen moms need support such as parenting classes and groups, help to stay in school, and information about how to get help. Support is needed for sexual assault victims, including information about where to go and who to talk to. Students need empowerment around preventing sexual assault. Boys must be taught about consent and respect, that no means no.

Children need access to mental and public health clinics, and information about mental and sexual health needs to be made available online, on posters outside of school, on TVs around school and on social media (like Facebook). Young people know what they're looking for, so they should be hired to do social media and create resources for a website. In Tumbler Ridge, nurses went from class to class to review information and give out website addresses and phone numbers.

It takes guidance and critical thinking to break out of unhealthy patterns. Rather than preaching or telling children not to do something, educate them before they engage in dangerous practices about the long-term effects of smoking, drugs and alcohol, and about sexual health (for example, what's in a cigarette, what it does to the body), and help them quit smoking if they do get into it.

Children need help to break the cycle of racism taught by their parents, so they need agents of change and to learn critical thinking. Racism against First Nations, Asians and East Indians could perhaps be addressed by hosting events with different cultures and having language classes.

FORT NELSON – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: May 24, 2016

Participants: 3

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

It means love, having safe places to play and sleep in a family home, and being safe walking home or downtown. Children shouldn't have to worry about food or having a place to sleep. They need healthy food, time outside, and ready access to services like health care.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Closeness to nature helps nourish healthy children. The community has lots of recreational services for nearly every interest, including teen programming at the library, the water park and rec centre.

The community works well together to support children. Nearby communities alert locals when someone is returning who needs help. There's support from Elks and Rotary. A community calendar helps. There's screening for children 18 months to six years old, and the early years table is well represented by Success By 6, Children First, Family Development, literacy, the school district, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Aboriginal societies, Early Years and Northern Health. Relationships have formed with non-traditional partners.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Bored teens are at high risk of taking drugs and alcohol. Treatment and follow-up care are needed for addiction and mental health problems. There's a rapidly growing need for mental health care for young people who don't meet the mandate and are falling through the cracks, and there are ever more victims of violence. Who is responsible for youth in isolation rooms when drugs and alcohol are involved: the RCMP or Northern Health?

Low income is a barrier to children having access to recreation.

Health services could be bolstered. The community needs formalized prenatal care, and help coping with the large increase in autistic children. Teens need support dealing with sexual orientation issues. Travel and accommodation support is needed for youth who are sent for care out of town and for mothers who must leave town to deliver their babies. Communication could be better between health care providers, both site-to-site and between health authorities. There's a high turnover in First Nations representatives at community tables, so it's difficult to get useful input. Patients are failing to show up for appointments with specialists who travel to town, so children need reminder calls.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD TO BUILD ON EXISTING SUPPORTS, OR DEVELOP NEW INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH?

Collaboration must be improved. Those who care about raising healthy children need to be at the table to discuss solutions to problems. Some patients are dumped on the street with no clothes other than a hospital gown, no shoes and no wallet. Service clubs might help find places for people to stay. Transportation should be coordinated.

A community health advocate could help people navigate the system and a case manager could oversee primary care and cancer treatment.

Someone needs to talk to parents about all available options for treating their children, and about what's available through telehealth. A network could be developed to access services. Non-traditional partners need to be sought out. People want to truly have a voice, to have their individual views represented in reports.

More services are needed for cancer care, surgery and childbirth. A primary care nurse could provide prenatal education and a lactation consultant could help new moms. New parents need help when they're forced to drive three to five hours back home within a day or two of giving birth.

FORT ST. JOHN – PUBLIC MEETING

Date: May 25, 2016

Participants: 10

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

It means safety, having a secure caregiver, stability, emotional attachment, a sense of belonging, an open and accepting environment, social connections, and an environment that fosters good mental and emotional health. Children need to develop self-esteem. They need someone at home or in school to turn to. Pregnant moms must be healthy if they're to deliver healthy babies.

Children's basic needs must be met, including good food, education and health care. They need access to nature, including water, and time for unstructured play. Public programs are needed for children of all ages. Children have to learn about self-regulation and to develop skills through play. Teens need to learn to spread their wings, for instance by taking on part-time jobs.

WHAT'S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Children are supported by the dental program, the prenatal clinic, the birthing centre, free access to developmental services (occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech-language pathology, etc.), the Child Development Centre, the audiology clinic at the health unit, Success By 6, Mother Goose, Strong Start, Nobody's Perfect, library groups and other children's programs. Children learn responsibility, leadership and other skills through Girl Guides, Boys Scouts, 4-H and life on family farms.

There are many sports, dance, music and arts programs if families have the funds for them. Families in Motion gets children exercising early. Children can get out into natural settings on trails. There are excellent church youth groups.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

More help is needed for those dealing with addiction and mental health issues, including education about the risks of substance use during pregnancy (especially marijuana). Mentoring of younger children is also needed, and more support in preschool and daycare for children with special needs or behavioural issues.

More resources are needed for those in need, including emergency shelters for victims of violence and other supports for single moms, free or low-cost indoor play areas in winter, and daycare.

Health services that could use a boost include sex education to reduce the high rate of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases; free prenatal education, especially for high-risk pregnancies; breastfeeding support; educational assistance for children with medical issues; access to special medical resources and primary care; shorter waits at walk-in clinics; dental care; and better access to doctors and medical supplies. Doctors must stop over-prescribing medications to children.

Physical and emotional health are supported by arts and recreation. More programs, including music, are needed for teens, and college arts programs should be reinstated. Closure of First Nations schools has led to children missing out on sports because they must catch the bus home after school.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS TO MOVE FORWARD TO BUILD ON EXISTING SUPPORTS, OR DEVELOP NEW INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH?

- Figure out what makes people attend events, such as trade shows and health fairs.
- Find ways to give everyone equal access to programming. Funding should be found to support newly graduated local health care professionals when they return to the community after school, and jobs should be found for them.
- One proposal was to live on farms and get rid of technology.
- Give new moms breastfeeding support.



FORT ST. JOHN – STAKEHOLDERS’ MEETING

Date: May 26, 2016

Participants: 5

WHAT DOES GROWING UP HEALTHY MEAN TO YOU?

It means a safe place to live, parents with jobs so they can afford to provide for children, skilled parenting, family support, and freedom from strife and violence. Negative cycles in families must be broken. Children need access to help when they need it. Moms should have enough working hours to qualify for 12-month maternity leave.

The basic necessities are regularly available fresh, healthy food; clothing; and shelter, including reliable heat and electricity. Children need to get moving outside and they need affordable activities outside school and work hours.

WHAT’S WORKING IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Health and community services include free programs and counselling at the Community Bridge Centre; a pregnancy care centre (help with high-risk pregnancies, providing clothing and furniture); the child development centre; Strong Start; the preschool program at the Friendship Centre; a school gardening program; library programs; Aboriginal support workers in schools; church groups for children and youth; an in-town pediatrician; the Healthy Smiles program; telehealth; and the BC Schizophrenic Society’s pilot program for First Nations.

Among the recreational activities are after-school and summer programs at the Friendship Centre, hockey, soccer, and a children’s summer art camp.

Groups like Canadian Tire Jump Start help children from families who can’t afford to register for sports and recreation. Recreational activities provide a sense of purpose, responsibility and belonging so they support good mental health.

Service clubs support children. The new school’s gym is large enough to hold community gatherings.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO GROW UP HEALTHY?

Mental health and addiction services could be improved; for instance, by helping with transportation costs for children and youth who need mental health care. Fort St. John needs more community gatherings, and more volunteers for programs.

Health care could be improved with better access to dental care, easy access to family doctors who stay in the community, and education through schools and service organizations. More collaboration among groups would get the word out about all the programs and resources in the community, which would lead to proper referrals and better networking. When transferring patients to other places, there must be a plan for returning them home. Youth health fairs could offer screening, oral care and information about mental and sexual health. The Early Years Fair is at an inconvenient time for working parents; it should be evenings or weekends rather than in the middle of the weekday.

APPENDIX 2 – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THOUGHTEXCHANGE PROCESS

WHAT IS THOUGHTEXCHANGE?

The ThoughtExchange method of collecting input from Northern BC residents offered anyone who was interested the chance to participate in a three-step online process. Every idea submitted was themed and expressed in an [online report](https://bit.ly/nh-ThoughtExchange) (bit.ly/nh-ThoughtExchange).



(1) Answer 2 or 3 open-ended questions

- 599 people participated
- 1,994 thoughts were contributed



(2) Consider ideas from others and put stars next to the ones you like the best

- 39,574 stars were assigned to ideas



(3) Learn what was ranked as important

- Ideas were grouped by theme and ordered by the amount of support they received
- Participants will receive a link to the results



DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS PARTICIPATING

Areas	#
Interior (Mackenzie, Prince George, Quesnel)	367
Northwest Coast (Kitimat, Prince Rupert, Terrace)	144
North Peace (Fort Nelson, Fort St. John, Hudson Hope, Taylor)	80
Bulkley Valley (Hazelton, Houston, Smithers)	72
Nechako Valley (Burns Lake, Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, Fraser Lake)	58
South Peace (Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Tumbler Ridge)	52
Haida Gwaii (Masset, Queen Charlotte)	22
Robson Valley (McBride, Valemount)	15
Stikine (Atlin, Dease Lake, Nass Valley, Stewart)	7
Other	4

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE THEMES WE FOUND?

Question 1: What's working well to support children and youth growing up healthy in your community?

Outdoor Opportunities	Early Childhood	Sports
"There are skateboard parks, fields, hiking trails within walking distance, organized sports — soccer, hockey, basketball, volleyball."	"Early detection/screening for vision, hearing and dental can prevent long-term challenges and costs for the health care systems and families. Early years health fairs provide families with a 'one-stop shop' in accessing services."	"Having a range of sporting activities, from gymnastics to hockey, is important for children. Learning to work as a team, or strive for success individually, is an important process in the growing years. They can learn that not everyone wins; and what it feels like to be a champ or even be unsuccessful."

Question 2: What are some challenges children and youth face in growing up healthy in your community?

Mental Health and Counselling	Poverty and Cost of Living	Food and Nutrition	Drugs and Abuse
“Extreme shortage of mental health care support. For all levels of need. Lack of care and help with mental wellbeing will have lifelong impact for the child and the family. It affects the child’s ability to learn, grow, play, have fun, interact and thrive. Children with mental health concerns are not born with the coping techniques.”	“We have seen a huge jump in the cost of living in the past 3 years — cost of housing almost doubled, many families are struggling to pay rent, fear of being evicted, too much stress.”	“The price of healthy fresh food is substantially higher than boxed processed food — it should be the other way around.”	“Drugs, poverty and bullying. These issues face our youth. We need to stand strong as a community to help support the youth get past these problems and become healthy, productive members of our community.”

Question 3: What opportunities or initiatives should be built upon or created in order to support children and youth in your community?

Participants who were concerned about these themes also proposed initiatives. Some examples are noted below.

Mental Health and Drugs and Abuse			
Communication “Healthier families, healthier kids, healthier communities” app. Make it fun and easy to go to site with things for kids and adults of all ages — games, recipes, tips, family-healthy fun times things to do, health access education & tips, advertise it everywhere there are kids and families — schools, stores, restaurants, online; collaborate with other regions to realize.”	Cultural Awareness “Have indigenous elders involved with encouraging healthy new moms and babies. Try an elder to youth approach on living healthy. Set up a curriculum targeting indigenous people to make them accountable for how they see health in their communities. It might be different than what others require in the same city.”	Mental Health and Counselling “There needs to be a mental health worker/psychiatrist specifically for our youth. When they need help they need it now, not a month or two down the road. This would deal with mental health and addictions.”	Education and School Programs “Gardens in school: Fosters understanding of where food comes from, what kinds of food are good, and promotes activities outside.”

Food & Nutrition and Poverty & Cost of Living			
<p>Child Care</p> <p>“Create an affordable child care system. Build a system of safe, affordable child care with enough spaces for the children who need them.”</p>	<p>Youth and Teen Programs</p> <p>“Healthy youth/teen programs. There seem to be a lot of programs for younger children but not as much for older kids.”</p>	<p>School Meal Programs</p> <p>“Breakfast program — the kids were given a healthy start to the day. Often this was the only meal they would get. I think the town of Houston could benefit from this with the increase in poverty and low-income families, and the closure of that grocery store.”</p>	<p>Early Childhood</p> <p>“A standardized screening of all kids at 3.5. Screen all kids at 3/3.5 years or so to detect problems that can be worked upon/fixed prior to kindergarten.”</p>

Prepared by Gary Ockenden

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