

16th BC Justice Summit

Family and Youth Justice

Report of Proceedings

JANUARY 15, 2026

BC Justice and Public Safety Council

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Executive Summary

The sixteenth Justice Summit was held online on Thursday, January 15, 2026, from 9:00AM – 4:00PM PST and involved 180 attendees from across the justice and public safety sector. The Summit's theme was Family and Youth Justice, and discussed the interconnected legal, social, relational, and financial challenges faced by families and young people navigating BC's justice systems. The Summit's seven sessions presented by ten organizations showcased some of the important work being done by justice, social services, and community sector partners.

The Summit sessions were:

- 1) A video introduction to the theme Family and Youth Justice featuring the Summit presenting organizations
- 2) A presentation about the Ministry of Children and Family Development's new Child and Youth Well-being Action Plan and Outcomes Framework
- 3) An overview of the services available within BC's family justice sector provided by the Ministry of the Attorney General's Family Justice Services Division
- 4) Information on the continuum of legal aid services offered by Legal Aid BC available to people navigating family law issues
- 5) Eight recommendations to continue cross-sector coordination by Rise Women's Legal Centre family justice system.
- 6) Presentations by the BC First Nations Justice Council, the Métis Nation BC, and the new Youth Justice Services Division within the Ministry of Children and Family Development, that address the need for Indigenous partnership and youth engagement to reduce overrepresentation.
- 7) Three presentations that demonstrate the importance of hearing from children and youth in family justice system matters, involving the Family Policy Legislation and Transformation Division from the Ministry of Attorney General, the Youth Advisory Council within the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and the Society for Children and Youth of BC.

The eleven presentations across seven Sessions illuminated some of the ongoing challenges and offered some solutions for families and youths who are navigating BC's justice systems. In doing so, they reflected the sector-wide goal of making family and

youth justice systems more accessible, user-friendly, and responsive to the needs of those the systems exist to serve.

Three key themes have emerged from the Summit's discussions:

- 1) **Shift to more collaborative and integrated systems that focus on prevention:** We must continue moving from siloed, fragmented, and crisis-driven services toward coordinated, relational, and holistic supports that meet children, youth, and families where they are. There remains more work to be done to develop individualized, client-centred programs that focus on stabilization and prevention.
- 2) **Center children's and youths' voices:** Meaningful participation of children and youth should be a standard practice in shaping policies, programs, services, and decisions—particularly those that impact them. Doing so can lead to earlier resolution, better outcomes, and youth empowerment.
- 3) **Advance cultural safety and Indigenous-led approaches:** Continued justice system transformation should engage with and foster Indigenous leadership, cultural traditions, and distinctions-based design.

Introduction

Background to the Summit

The 2013 *Justice Reform and Transparency Act* (the Act) requires that British Columbia convene a Justice Summit at least once a year to encourage cross-sector innovation and collaboration. Since 2013, Justice Summits have brought together a diverse range of sector partners and have been a forum for non-partisan, frank problem-solving discussions on priority issues within BC's justice and public safety systems. More recently, and having moved online, they have become a vehicle for learning and sharing innovative ideas and programs across the sector. Past Justice Summit Reports of Proceedings are available on the [BC Justice Reform website](#).

The Justice Summit maintains the principles of non-partisanship, non-attribution, and respect for organizational and statutory independence. Therefore, participant contributions are not attributed to specific individuals or organizations. Because of the courts' independent role, judges and judicial staff who participate in the Summit do so as observers and do not comment on, endorse, or suggest policy choices, recommendations, or other substantive matters.

The Sixteenth Justice Summit: Family and Youth Justice

Family and Youth Justice as a theme invites reflection on the interconnected legal, social, relational, and financial challenges faced by families and young people navigating the justice system. Justice and legal systems can be complicated for those needing services and, for some, they can be made more challenging by overlapping social, financial, and relationship pressures. Addressing these realities requires comprehensive, systematic, and collaborative approaches.

The sixteenth Justice Summit was designed to foster collaboration and innovation by showcasing and celebrating some of the important work underway by justice, social services, and community sector partners. The Summit's presentations and discussions highlighted multiple efforts to tackle the multifaceted challenges listed above. In doing so, they reflected the sector-wide goal of making family and youth justice systems more accessible, user-friendly, and responsive to the needs of those the systems exist to serve.

Sixteenth Justice Summit Event Information

- The sixteenth Justice Summit was held virtually on Thursday, January 15, 2026, from 9:00AM – 4:00PM PST.
- The Summit was Emceed by Marnie Mayhew, Assistant Deputy Minister of Youth Justice Services in the Ministry of Children and Family Development
- An opening Territorial Acknowledgement and lesson on locating ourselves within specific territories was provided by Rhonda Ducharme, Director of Indigenous Priorities, Indigenous Child Welfare Division in the Ministry of Children and Family Development.
- Opening remarks were delivered by Attorney General and Deputy Premier Niki Sharma, K.C., and closing remarks were given by Deputy Attorney General Barbara Carmichael, K.C.
- The sixteenth Summit involved eleven presentations across seven sessions, with twenty-five total presenters/speakers (not including those listed above) representing ten different organizations.
- 180 unique participants attended parts of the Summit throughout the day: 95 participants coming from within government and 85 external to government, including representatives from the province’s Judiciary.

Summit Agenda

Time	Session	Session Title	Presenter
9:00-9:30		Welcome Opening Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emcee – Marnie Mayhew, ADM Youth Justice, Ministry of Children and Family Development • Land Acknowledgement – Rhonda Ducharme, Ministry of Children and Family Development • Niki Sharma, K.C., Deputy Premier and Attorney General of BC
9:30-9:45	1	Introduction to Family and Youth Justice (Video)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summit Presenters
9:50-10:10	2	Child and Youth Well-Being Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Years and Children and Youth with Support Needs Policy, Ministry of Children and Family Development.
10:15-10:30	Break (15mins)		
10:30-10:50	3	Overview of Services in Family Justice Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Justice Services Division, Justice Services Branch, Ministry of the Attorney General
10:50-11:20	4	Legal Aid BC - Family Law Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal Aid BC
11:25-11:55	5	Using Cross-Sector Collaboration to Build Accessible Family Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise Women's Legal Centre
12:00-1:00	Lunch (1hr)		
1:00-2:00	6	Indigenous Partnership & Youth Justice Services Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BC First Nations Justice Council • Métis Nation BC's Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs • Youth Justice Services Division, Ministry of Children and Family Development
2:00-2:20	Break (20mins)		
2:20-3:35	7	Hearing from Children and Youth in the Family Justice System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Family Policy Legislation and Transformation Division, Ministry of Attorney General • The Youth Advisory Council, Provincial Director of Child Welfare, Ministry of Children and Family Development • Society for Children and Youth BC
3:35-4:00		Closing Remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barbara Carmichael, K.C., Deputy Attorney General

Session 1: Introduction to Family and Youth Justice (video)

Presenters

- **Pam Welsh**, Senior Regional Director, Operations, Family Justice Services Division, Justice Services Branch, Ministry of the Attorney General
- **Katrina Harry**, Manager, Family Law Services, Legal Aid BC
- **Michael Zimmerman**, Managing Lawyer (Roster), Society for Children and Youth of BC
- **Stephanie Melnyk**, Community Engagement & Research, RISE Women's Legal Centre
- **Marnie Mayhew**, Assistant Deputy Minister, Youth Justice Services, Ministry of Children and Family Development
- **Shannan Knutson**, Legal Counsel, Family Policy Legislation and Transformation Division, Justice Services Branch, Ministry of Attorney General
- **Katisha Paul**, Policy Analyst, BC First Nations Justice Council

Session Description

The Summit started with a video featuring representatives from the Summit's presenting organizations sharing some important context on the unique challenges faced by youth and families navigating justice systems. Each representative responded to three of the following questions:

- Can you share what your organization does and what drives your work on access to justice for families and youths?
- At what stage do you see youth and families coming into the justice system? What needs or problems are they presenting with?
- What are some unique challenges that families and youths face in relation to accessing justice and how does your organization respond to these challenges?
- What are the hallmarks of a justice system that would support families and youth in a positive way?
- What is one systemic barrier that you have faced in your work with families and youth and what initiatives/policies/programs has your organization implemented to address it?

The goal of the video was to introduce participants to key concepts related to family and youth justice and demonstrate the diverse ways in which families and young people might interact with or navigate family and youth justice systems.

Session 2: Child and Youth Well-Being

Action Plan

Presenters

- **Danielle Smith**, Executive Director, Early Years, Children and Youth with Support Needs, and Adoptions Policy Branch, Ministry of Children and Family Development
- **Jan White**, Director, Director, Early Years Policy and Programs, Early Years, Children and Youth with Support Needs, and Adoptions Policy Branch, Ministry of Children and Family Development

Session description

This presentation provides a high-level overview on the development of a Child and Youth Well-being Action Plan and Outcomes Framework, which intends to shift government towards a new way of prioritizing and acting, and to support the strong, stable foundation children and youth need to enjoy a secure childhood and grow into healthy and thriving adults. The commitment to a new approach follows the release of [“Don't Look Away - How one boy's story has the power to shift a system of care for children and youth”](#) investigation and systemic review conducted by the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) in 2024.

The goals of the Action Plan are:

- To provide an all-of government approach for prioritizing policies, programs, and services designed to support child and youth well-being; and
- To outline actions government will be taking to address priorities improving the well-being of children, youth and families in the province.

What We Heard

The presentation emphasized that child and youth well-being is a shared, cross-ministry responsibility that requires coordinated action and collective accountability.

Presenters highlighted how various challenges—such as poverty, health concerns, substance use, housing instability, intimate partner violence, and involvement with the justice system—compound to overwhelm families when systems respond in isolation. These pressures create cumulative barriers, rather than reflecting a single failure point.

Appropriate supports are needed to address vulnerabilities and overcome the barriers that prevent families from thriving:

- When families have access to sufficient resources that support their health, happiness and stability, it can serve as a protective factor that helps mitigate other challenges, leaving a lasting imprint on future resilience and overall well-being.

The presenters used the story of Rebecca and Cole to illustrate how current system features can interact in ways that unintentionally compound risks for families.

- Rebecca, a single mother, seeks help for her 8-year-old son Cole, but a developmental assessment waitlist is 96 weeks long. Meanwhile, Cole's issues with school cause additional stresses at home, reducing Rebecca's work hours to care for Cole.
- The pressures of school instability, long waitlists, unpredictable work, and rent/bill payments stack, slowly overwhelming Rebecca.

The plan seeks to build a “one family, one system” approach with shared accountability, integrated planning, and coordinated supports. This system focuses on prevention, simplicity, and early, proportionate responses that reduce the likelihood of compounding a family's hardships.

A Vision for our Future

Present System

Fragmented services, shaped by siloed governance models, are delivered by multiple ministries, each with its own mandates, criteria, and waitlists.

Families must escalate to crisis to access help; the system is reactive.

Systems that inadvertently create barriers (eligibility differences, siloed funding, contradictory policies)

Government-led, program-by-program improvements.

The Future We Want

One-family, one-system orientation: shared accountability, integrated planning, coordinated supports across government.

Prevention-forward: early, seamless help before crises escalate.

Systems redesigned around user experience: simple, connected pathways with fewer barriers.

All-of-government transformation guided by shared outcomes and evidence.

Figure 1: A slide from the Child & Youth Well-being Action Plan & Outcomes Framework presentation that models a desired shift in services.

Returning to the Rebecca and Cole example, the presentation offers a glimpse of how future services can offer an integrated, early-intervention approach that stabilizes families before a crisis escalates.

- Instead of a long wait, Rebecca is able to access a local child development centre and is provided with ongoing integrated care so stabilize her and Cole's lives.
- Cole receives an individualized plan to assist with school, as well as ongoing behaviour supports.

Session 3: Overview of Services in the Family Justice Sector

Presenters

- **Stephanie Melvin**, Executive Director, Family Justice Services Division, Justice Services Branch, Ministry of the Attorney General

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- **Pam Welsh**, Senior Regional Director, Operations, Family Justice Services Division, Justice Services Branch, Ministry of the Attorney General
 - **Oriole Courcy**, Director of Program Policy/Strategic Initiatives, Family Justice Services Division, Justice Services Branch, Ministry of the Attorney General

Session Description

This session offers an overview of the services available within British Columbia's family justice sector, highlighting how families can access legal and practical supports as they navigate separation, divorce, and related challenges. It will introduce the range of publicly available programs and resources designed to promote family well-being, focus on the best interests of children and youth, and support access to justice.

The presentation will describe key service areas – such as legal information and advice, dispute resolution, parenting education, and court-related supports – and situate the Family Justice Services Division (FJSD) within this broader landscape. By exploring how various services complement one another, the session will emphasize the value of coordinated, child- and family-centred approaches to justice across the province.

What We Heard

There is a division in the Ministry of Attorney General where British Columbians can receive the following services in person in 24 locations and virtually by video conference or phone across the province:

- free family mediation services by nationally accredited family law mediators
- legal information
- assistance with court forms
- referrals for legal advice and to community service providers

The Family Justice Services Division exists to help people access family justice services in their communities.

A CONSTELLATION OF POST SEPARATION ISSUES

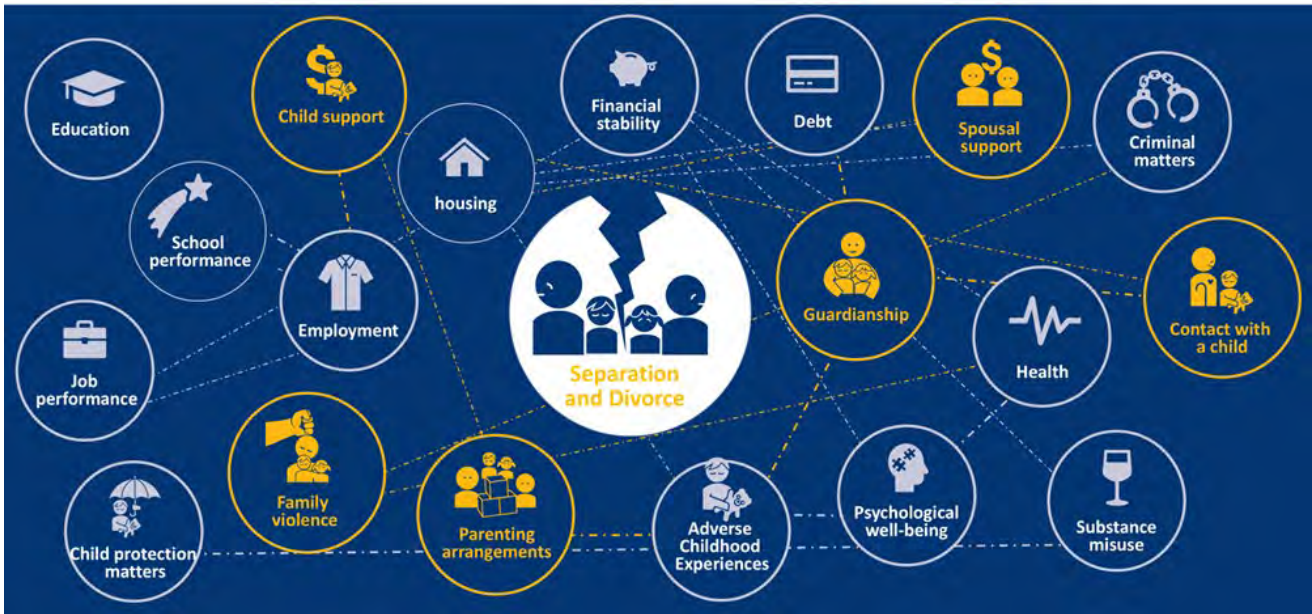


Figure 2: A slide from the Family Justice Services presentation that outlines a constellation of post separation issues for families facing separation and divorce. It is imperative to mete clients where they are at as they navigate these issues.

The Family Justice Services Division offers the following Services and Programs to families navigating post separation issues:

1) Information and Assessment

- FJSD works to facilitate early intervention and support to clients by determining initial needs through interviews that can provide information or refer client to partner agencies or community agencies based on their individualized needs.

2) Mediation

- The mediation process involves joint or separate pre-mediation assessment interviews and sessions with trained Family Justice Counsellors (FJs) certified through Family Mediation Canada.
- This process screens for family violence/power imbalances throughout entire service.
- FJs can draft legal documents to formalize agreements in most circumstances.

3) Support for Children and Youth

- FJSD Supports best interests of the child through the mediation process → children (typically over 8) can participate and speak with an FJC → FJCs can share views with child's consent.

4) Family Justice Report Services

- Views of the Child Reports (sharing the child's perspectives).
- Full Reports (assessment of the whole family, including the views of the child/ren).
- Service is Free and offered throughout the Province.

5) Parenting After Separation Courses

- [Parenting After Separation Courses](#) are mandatory if going to Provincial Court. These are online courses that are targeted to different groups, including a version for Indigenous families, and offered in multiple languages.

6) Provincial Court Early Resolution

- Provides support and assists in resolving matters for families facing issues such as parenting arrangements, child and spousal support, and guardianship and contact. Also prepares clients for court process if needed.
- Increases understanding of family justice processes, provides appropriate early responses to family needs, prepares families for next steps, helps parties narrow or resolve issues, and improves the effective and efficient use of court.
- These services are offered in Provincial Court family registries in Victoria, the Lower Mainland, Fraser Valley, and the Sea-to-Sky corridor.
- Feedback on the program has been positive with strong endorsement from clients who have used the services.
 - Evaluation of the early resolution process has helped families settle some or all separation issues before advancing to court, positively impacting court timeliness.

A Collaborative Family Justice System: We're Better Together

Collaboration between providers supports a client-centred and trauma informed approach

Each family engages with their constellation of needs differently, and requires different supports at different times

Collaboration between organizations and service providers means everyone knows who to work with, and how to connect

Figure 3: An image from a slide presented during the session that outlines the importance of sector-wide collaboration in the Family Justice System.

Family Justice Service Division Online Resources

- [Family Justice Services Division](#)
- [Directory of Family Justice Centres and Justice Access Centres](#)
- [Family Justice Registries](#)
- [Early Resolution Registries](#)
- [Justice Access Centres](#)
- [Parenting After Separation Courses](#)

Session 4: Legal Aid BC – Family Law Services

Presenters

- **Wendy Jackson**, CEO, Legal Aid BC
- **Katrina Harry**, Manager Family Law Services, Legal Aid BC

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- **Ram Sidhu**, Manager of Clinic Operations, Legal Aid BC

Session Description

This session explores the continuum of legal aid services available to people navigating family law issues. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Legal Aid BC supports clients throughout their legal journeys, emphasizing our commitment to accessible, equitable, and trauma-informed care. Legal Aid BC's services are designed to meet the diverse needs of families, promote healing, and foster meaningful stabilization through coordinated, trauma-informed care.

First, the presentation provides a high-level overview of the various services offered, including legal advice, representation, and how duty counsel support the early resolution process. Secondly, it discusses the innovative, multidisciplinary approach of our trauma-informed Family Law Centres. These Centres were specially designed to serve survivors of family violence, addressing both their legal needs and essential non-legal support to promote overall well-being. This holistic approach ensures that clients receive not only legal assistance but also the comprehensive supports necessary to rebuild their lives in a safe and sustainable way.

What we Heard

1) Overview of Legal Aid Services: Legal Aid BC provides legal aid services to low-income people living in British Columbia who are facing serious legal problems. Legal aid services work closely with community partners to connect clients to the right supports at the right time. Staff provide applicants with appropriate legal information and referrals to community agencies or alternative services if they are not eligible for a Legal Aid representation contract.

- **Family law services** are delivered mainly through two contract types: Family Standard and Family Limited Representation.
 - Family Standard Contracts are available for clients who have an eligible serious family law issues under the *Family Law Act* or the *Divorce Act*.
 - Family Limited Representation Contracts are intended to provide the client with the assistance necessary to support mediation, negotiate a settlement, or represent themselves when dealing with family legal issues

(except divorce alone), including support, property division, and parenting issues.

- **Family LawLINE:** Telephone service connecting clients with the same family lawyer over several phone calls to receive advice about options for parenting, support, child protection, as well as help with court documents and referrals to other services and resources/
- **Family duty counsel services:** lawyers at courthouses who provide advice and help clients that are representing themselves.
- **Parents Legal Centres** assist with child protection matters by providing legal representation and wrap-around support to parents (or people standing in the place of parents), who experience involvement with the Ministry of Children and Family Development or a delegated Aboriginal agency.

What legal problems are eligible for a representation contract?



Figure 4: Slide from the session on Legal Aid BC services outlining the legal problems that are eligible for a Legal Aid BC representation contract.

2) Trauma-Informed Family Law Clinics

- The trauma-informed Family Law Centres are a new service that provide legal and non-legal supports to survivors of family and intimate partner violence.
- Clients work with a lawyer and an advocate, who help clients stabilize both their legal and non-legal issues.
- Clients that are seeking help from Family Law Clinics are facing the following issues:

Issue	% of clients
Protection order	90
Child support	68
Parenting issues	65
Spousal support	31
Denial of parenting time	45
Removal of child	30
Property division	20
Divorce	19

Note: This chart is accurate and represents data up to Jan 15, 2026

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- Currently, the majority of Family Law Clinic clients are cisgendered women.
 - Family Law Clinic clients will continue to benefit from assistance until their legal situation has reached meaningful stabilization.

Session 5: Using Cross-Sector Collaboration to Build Accessible Family Justice

Presenters

- **Vicky Law**, Executive Director, Rise Women’s Legal Centre
- **Stephanie Melnyk**, Community Engagement & Research, Rise Women’s Legal Centre

Session Description

Rise Women’s Legal Centre’s Vicky Law and Stephanie Melnyk co-authored a report in October 2024, entitled [*Building Inclusive and Accessible Family Justice*](#), outlining their research into family law challenges in rural and remote communities of BC. Forty non-profit organizations engaged in meaningful discussions resulting in the development of nine practical recommendations for improving accessibility to family justice in BC. This presentation outlines these nine recommendations, which focus on cross-sector collaboration as well as the continued use of technological solutions as approaches to create positive changes in the family justice system.

Recommendations:

- 1) **Strengthen collaboration** between government, the Law Society of BC, Legal Aid BC, and the courts to improve coordination across the family justice system.
- 2) **Increase cooperation between family lawyers and support workers** to ensure lawyers can focus on legal work while support workers assist clients with related needs.
- 3) **Develop a single online platform** for filing court documents and accessing records, building on the success of tools like the Access to Court Materials platform.

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- 4) **Give court users choice in how they appear**—virtual, in-person, or hybrid—to reduce barriers, maintain safety, and avoid a one-size-fits-all approach.
 - 5) **Embed support workers in community programs** to address shortages and ensure consistent, recognized support for self-represented litigants across BC. Support workers can play an important role in the court process.
 - Through the course of their research, the presenters heard that support workers across BC do not have a consistent role in court support
 - They recommend embedding a support worker in community programs and that judges can be aware of the option to have a support worker attend court with self-represented clients.
 - 6) **Expand the number of commissioners for taking affidavits** to reduce cost and access barriers, especially for self-represented litigants.
 - 7) **Reduce turnover among family law advocates and support workers** by improving job stability, funding consistency, compensation, and training retention.
 - There is a loss of training, knowledge, and relationships when people in these positions leave their roles.
 - These roles are sometimes connected to funding streams and longer funding cycles can create more stability for these positions.
 - 8) **Increase funding for family law advocacy services** to strengthen client support and expand services into smaller communities.
 - This recommendation inspired a good discussion in the Summit chat about increasing access to family justice services and practices in rural and remote communities. Participants noted the need to increase family law training during law school and the importance for lawyers to be located in the communities that they serve.
 - 9) **Invest in reliable cellular and internet connectivity** to improve safety and ensure clients can access court processes and support services.

What is a Support Worker?

Support workers are people who work in direct client support, typically with a nonprofit organization. To name a few, this term includes transition house workers, victim service workers, family law advocates, poverty law advocates, women’s outreach workers, and counsellors. The legal knowledge of support workers will vary widely depending on the scope of their work, but the term is intended to encompass all workers who support (in this case family law) clients.

Figure 5: An important distinction to emerge from the presentation is that Support Workers often appear in court with the clients they serve: Native Courtworker Family Advocates and Multicultural Outreach Support Workers were two examples provided in the Summit Chat. Additionally, this summary, outlined in the Executive Summary of Rise’s report, [*Building Inclusive and Accessible Family Justice*](#) (pp. 10-11), is a good high-level overview of a Support Worker.

Session 6: Indigenous Partnership and Youth Justice Services Framework

Indigenous people, including youth, are overrepresented in British Columbia’s justice system. The Province has committed to reducing this overrepresentation in several ways, including endorsing the BC First Nations Justice Council’s (BCFNJC) First Nations Justice Strategy, the Métis Nations BC’s Métis Justice Strategy, and the new Youth Justice Service Framework created by the Ministry of Children and Family Development’s Youth Justice Services Division.

Presentation 1: BCFNJC’s *Witnessing Through Story* Report

Strategy 10 of the BC First Nations Justice Strategy calls for the development of an Indigenous Youth Justice Plan to ensure proactive, preventing programming can keep Indigenous youth out of the criminal justice system. The BC First Nations Justice Council (BCFNJC) conducted 17 community engagements in Fall 2023 with Indigenous youth, caregivers, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and service providers. Building on what was heard during those engagements, and with the support of the Youth Justice Services Division, a further 5 regional engagements were held in Summer 2024. Both engagement series were conducted in circle and focused on centering the voices and experiences of Indigenous youth. The engagement resulted in the development of

BCFNJC's Witnessing Through Story: Indigenous Youth Voices on Justice, Safety and Wellbeing Report.

Presenter

- **Kory Wilson**, Chair, BC First Nations Justice Council

What We Heard

- The BC First Nations Justice Council outlined the *BC First Nations Justice Strategy*, which advances 25 strategies and 43 actions along 2 interrelated tracks:
 - Track 1: reform the existing justice system, and
 - Track 2: restore First Nations legal traditions.
- The strategy aims to reduce First Nations involvement in the criminal justice system, improve the experiences of those who do become involved, increase the number of First Nations people working in the system, and restore First Nations justice systems and structures.
- Indigenous Justice Centres (IJC) demonstrate the continued importance of building strong relationships and deepening collaboration with partners across the territories they serve.
- Strategy 10 in the BC First Nations Justice Strategy focuses specifically on youth and prevention. The presentation stressed the need to foster relational connections with young people, acknowledge their lived experiences and pain, and honour their inherent wisdom.

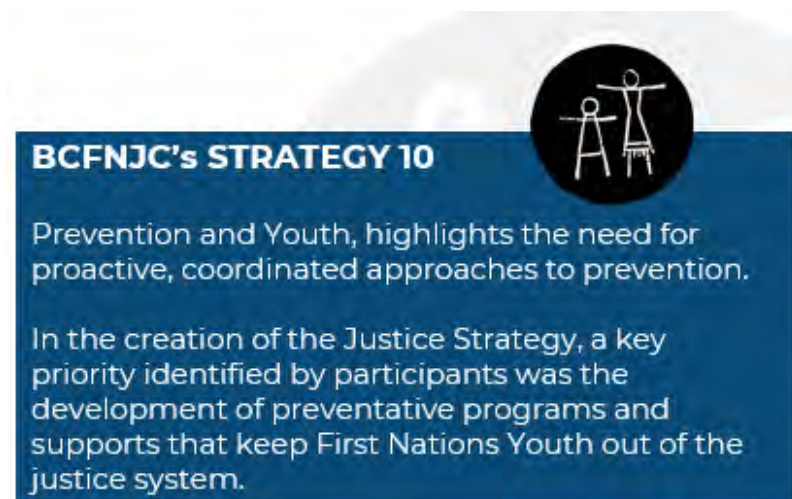


Figure 6: A graphic from the BCFNJC's presentation outlining Strategy 10 in the *BC First Nations Justice Strategy*, which is focused on programs that prevent First Nations Youth from justice system involvement.

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- Throughout 2023–2024, BCFNJC’s Youth Team sat in circle with over 220 Indigenous Youth and community members from territories across British Columbia to inform the Ministry of Children and Family Development’s Youth Justice Services Framework ([See Presentation 3 below](#)) and BCFNJC’s Youth justice plan.

What We Heard

Youth Voices on Justice, Safety & Wellbeing

“Safety is within families, within culture, having the ability to do more cultural activities, mutual trust, being able to trust yourself, being able/willing to listen to your children and trust your children to tell you stuff, talking to kids and grandkids about drugs and stuff, being rich in culture, rich in family, preserving culture and language, growing that traditional life, lack of fear, support, attention, friends, an ability to speak up and set boundaries, being loved and nurtured – security, being worriless, secure in where you live, secure in yourself and your money, a lack of danger, having somewhere to be, somewhere to go, community trust.”

Figure 7: How a Youth Circle Work Participant described safety during one of BCFNJC’s story circle engagements.

- The “Witnessing Through Story” initiative translates youth-shared stories into actionable recommendations and **fourteen core priorities** for structural change within the justice system (see figure 8).
- The presentation ended by underscoring the importance of continued collaboration and encouraging ongoing connection and partnership while centering the voices of youth and recognizing the value of their insights.

[You can read the Witnessing Through Story Report here.](#)



Figure 8: A graphic from the presentation that outlines the core priorities for change identified in the BCFNJC's Witnessing Through Story Report,

Presentation 2: Métis Justice Strategy

Staff from Métis Nation BC's (MNBC) Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs will present on key findings and recommendations arising from their engagement in community on Youth Justice and how the Youth Justice work plays a pivotal role to addressing the recommendations in the Métis Justice Strategy and overrepresentation of Métis people in the Justice System more generally. The Ministry of Children and Family Development has committed to integrating Métis Nation BC MNBC's recommendations in its new Youth Justice Service Framework and working with MNBC to identify opportunities to develop Restorative Justice processes for youth.

Presenters

- **Carly Teillet**, Executive Legal Counsel, Métis Nation BC
- **Catharine Schlenker**, Interim Director, Justice & Legal Affairs, Métis Nation BC

What We Heard

- MNBC is the democratically elected Métis government in BC and advocates on behalf of over 30,000 registered Métis Citizens, 113,000 self-identified Métis in British Columbia and 39 Métis Chartered Communities who hold collective Métis rights recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution Act. Métis

Nation British Columbia is formally recognized as the representative organization for Métis in the province by the Government of Canada and the Government of British Columbia

- MNBC developed its Métis Justice Strategy through citizen consultations beginning in 2018. The strategy was released in spring 2024 and is now being implemented in partnership with the Province. This work was supported through grassroots engagement, and it was also guided by its Justice Council and its Youth, Women’s, and 2-Spirit Councils.
- The Strategy includes twelve distinctions-based, trauma-informed recommendations aimed at addressing Métis overrepresentation in the justice system. Recommendation 12 is dedicated to Métis Youth Justice, although Youth Justice also overlaps across all the recommendations.

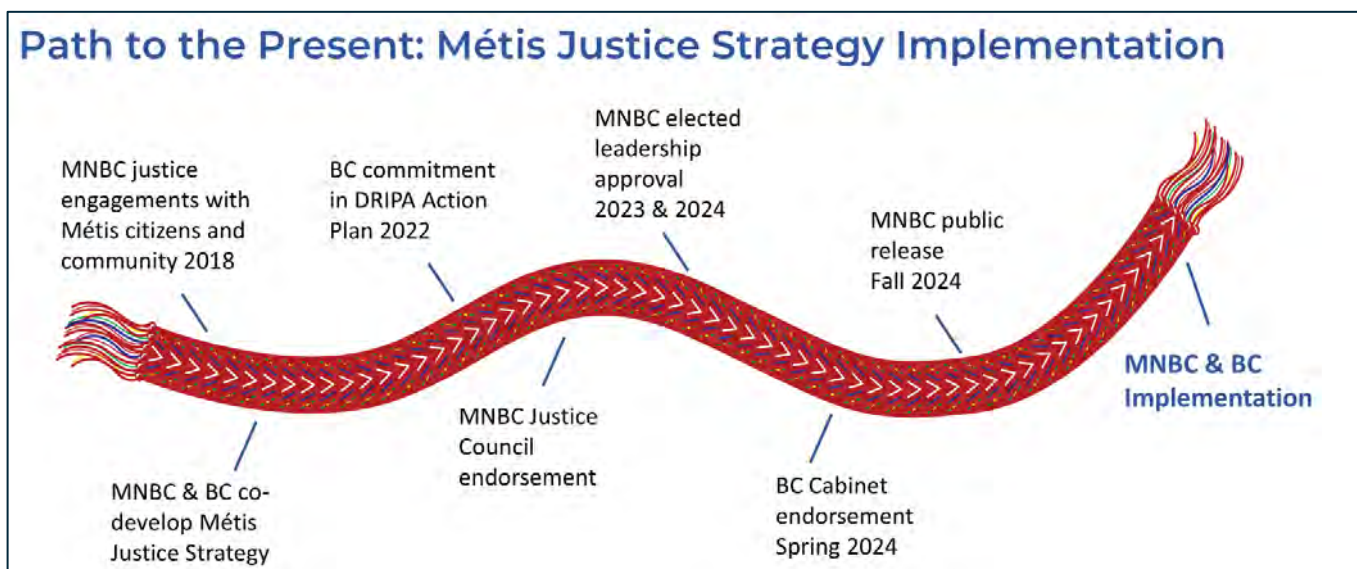


Figure 9: An Image from the Métis Justice Strategy presentation outlining the Strategy's development, from initial public engagement to the start of its implementation.

- Implementation of the Métis Justice Strategy will be incremental and iterative, considering the province’s priorities and fiscal climate. Current priorities include improving justice-related data, mapping Métis services, expanding involvement in restorative justice, strengthening community safety, supporting Elders, and advancing youth justice.
- Work to implement the strategy is deeply intersectional, requiring collaboration across ministries and governments to dismantle silos. Opportunities for improvement include culturally grounded programming and training, enhanced Métis-specific mental health supports, and better data collection.

Implementing Métis Youth Justice Priorities in partnership with MCFD



- MNBC Engagement on Youth Justice Service Framework development
- MNBC as a key partner in development of Outcomes Framework
- Member of Working group reviewing youth restorative justice practices and development of new training and services
- Shared pursuit of Métis-specific training
- Increased MNBC capacity to deliver Programs and Services directly to Métis Youth.

Figure 10: A graphic from the presentation outlining how the MNBC is working in partnership with MCFD to address Métis youth justice priorities.

- A major theme was the need for better data: there is insufficient Métis-specific data to understand the full landscape of Métis incarceration. Presenters emphasized significant unmet needs for Métis youth with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, autism, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, anxiety, and other barriers, noting that lack of cultural connection and supports increases vulnerability to ongoing justice involvement.
- Presenters stressed that pan-Indigenous approaches are insufficient and that MNBC must have a meaningful voice in decision-making and be supported with appropriate investment.
- Presenters emphasized that organizations must recognize that true cultural safety for Métis youth also depends on Métis-specific programming and services, rather than broad pan-Indigenous approaches. They also noted that MNBC's Justice and Legal Affairs team is eager to partner with BC and youth-serving organizations in strengthening programming increasing cultural safety and building community connection for Métis youth.
- MNBC is partnering with MCFD on the outcomes framework and will take part in working groups on youth restorative justice programs. The Métis Justice Strategy is already being put into action.

[The Full Métis Nation BC Justice Strategy can be found here.](#)

Presentation 3: New Youth Justice Services Division and Youth Justice Service Framework

The Ministry of Children and Family Development recently consolidated areas of its ministry that provide youth justice services into a new Youth Justice Services Division. Under the new division, Youth Justice Policy, Practice, Performance and Partnership have been developing a new Youth Justice Service Framework to guide the Province's youth justice services. This new Service Framework has been directly informed by extensive engagement with Indigenous peoples, youth justice service providers and youth with lived experience.

Presenters

- **Micheal Larocque**, A/Executive Director, Youth Justice Policy, Practice, Performance and Partnership
- **Diane Bruce**, Provincial Director, Youth Justice and Executive Director, Youth Justice and Youth Forensic Psychiatric Services

What We Heard

- The Youth Justice Services Division was established in 2025 to better provide community youth justice services, youth custody services, and both inpatient and outpatient youth forensic psychiatric supports. Its new Youth Justice Services Framework was developed with input from over 80 community service providers, First Nations partners, youth with lived experience, academic research, policy reviews, and jurisdictional scans.
- The framework IS:
 - Visionary and enduring
 - Purpose driven
 - Evidence informed
 - A long-Term guide
 - A statement of mandate
 - A shared language and structure
- The framework, however, is NOT an implementation plan or strategy, a funding plan, a policy manual, an evaluation report, fixed-in-time, nor is it duplicative.
- A goal of the strategy is to build a clear and consistent shared provincial approach.
- Engagement identified **several key needs for future Youth Justice Services:**
 - improving consistency in service delivery,

- addressing overrepresentation,
- strengthening sector coordination,
- responding to complex needs,
- reducing barriers to access, and
- establishing measurable outcomes with clear accountability.
- Outcomes are organized into two categories:
 - **Youth Outcomes** – accountability, prevention and rehabilitation, family engagement, reintegration, proportional involvement, and reduced reoffending.
 - **System Outcomes** – crime prevention and safety, proportional accountability, addressing root causes, evidence-based and transparent practice, timely responsiveness, equity and reconciliation, and collaboration.
- The overall goal of the Youth Justice Service Framework is to ensure the right intervention, at the right time, at the right intensity.

Youth Justice Service Framework

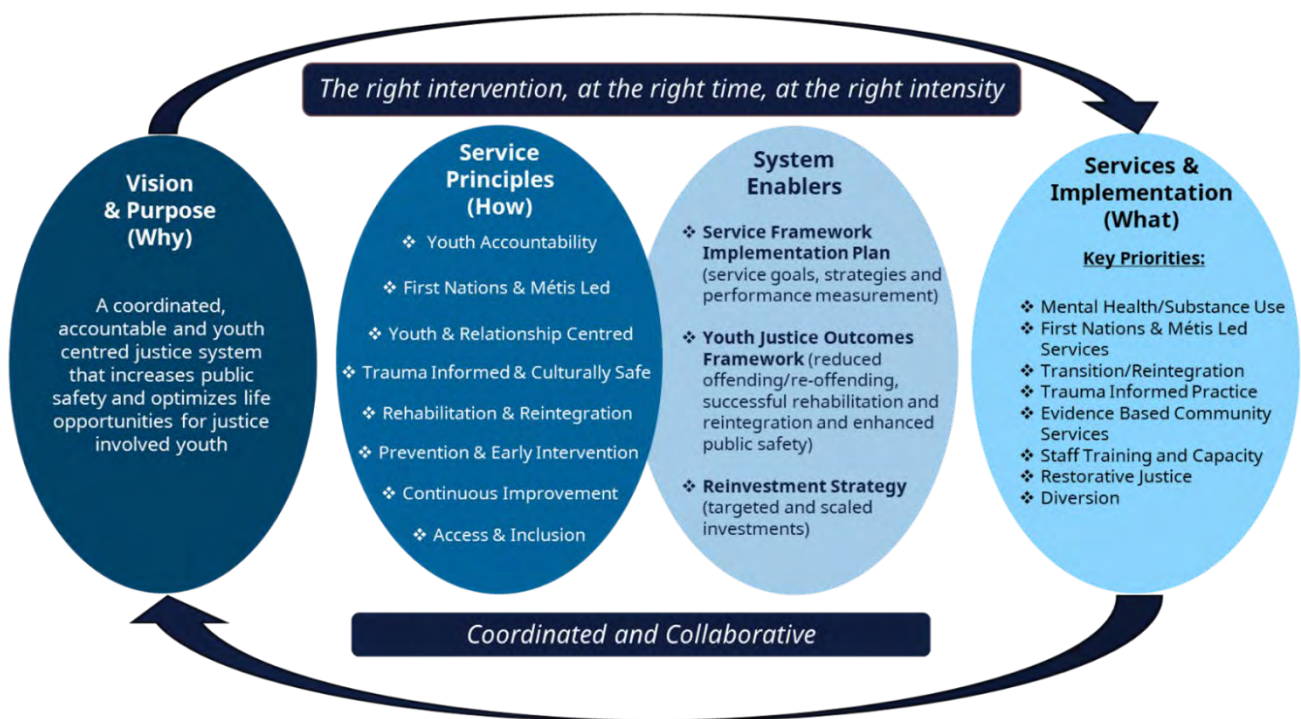


Figure 11: A graphic from the Youth Justice Services Division presentation that outlines the core components of the new Youth Justice Services Framework.

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- [The Framework was released publicly in January 2026](#) and a draft implementation plan will be released in February 2026. A full Implementation Action Plan will be released in spring 2026 and will be developed in alignment with MNBC and BCFNJC.

Session 7: Hearing from Children and Youth in the Family Justice System

Children and youth are impacted by the family justice system in many ways – legislation establishes what types of orders or decisions may be made about children and what processes are used to obtain them; government policies and programs impact the services and supports that are available to youth and their families; and family court orders or agreements dictate how children and youth experience their day to day lives and relationships with their family members. There is increasing recognition that decisions about children and youth should not be made without first hearing their views and perspectives. The three presentations that make up session 7 all demonstrate the importance of hearing from children and youth in family justice system matters.

Presentation 1: The Family Policy Legislation and Transformation Division

The Family Policy Legislation and Transformation Division, Ministry of Attorney General, will talk about how they are changing the way they do law reform, sharing what they learned by engaging with youth on a project to modernize BC's Family Law Act.

Presenters

- **Shannan Knutson**, Legal Counsel, Family Policy, Legislation and Transformation Division, Justice Services Branch, Ministry of Attorney General
- **Aurora Beraldin**, Legal Counsel, Legal Counsel, Family Policy, Legislation and Transformation Division, Justice Services Branch, Ministry of Attorney General

What We Heard

- The Family Law Act Modernization Project includes a dedicated focus on youth engagement to ensure the updated legislation reflects societal changes and

better meets the needs of all BC families. The goal is to make the law clearer, easier to use, and more responsive to children’s rights and lived experiences.

- The Ministry of Attorney General is conducting the Family Law Act Modernization Project in three phases, with Phase 2 involving engagement with children and youth who had experience with the family justice system.
- Specifically, the team wanted to hear directly from young people on the following issues:
 - What factors are important when determining the best interests of a child?
 - Are youth given meaningful opportunities to share their views in family law decision-making?
 - In what ways do children participate in family law decision-making (e.g., views of the child reports, Section 211 reports, judicial interviews, etc.)?
 - What role does a children’s lawyer play in a child’s family law matters?
 - Do youth find that parenting arrangement agreements or decisions kept them safe?

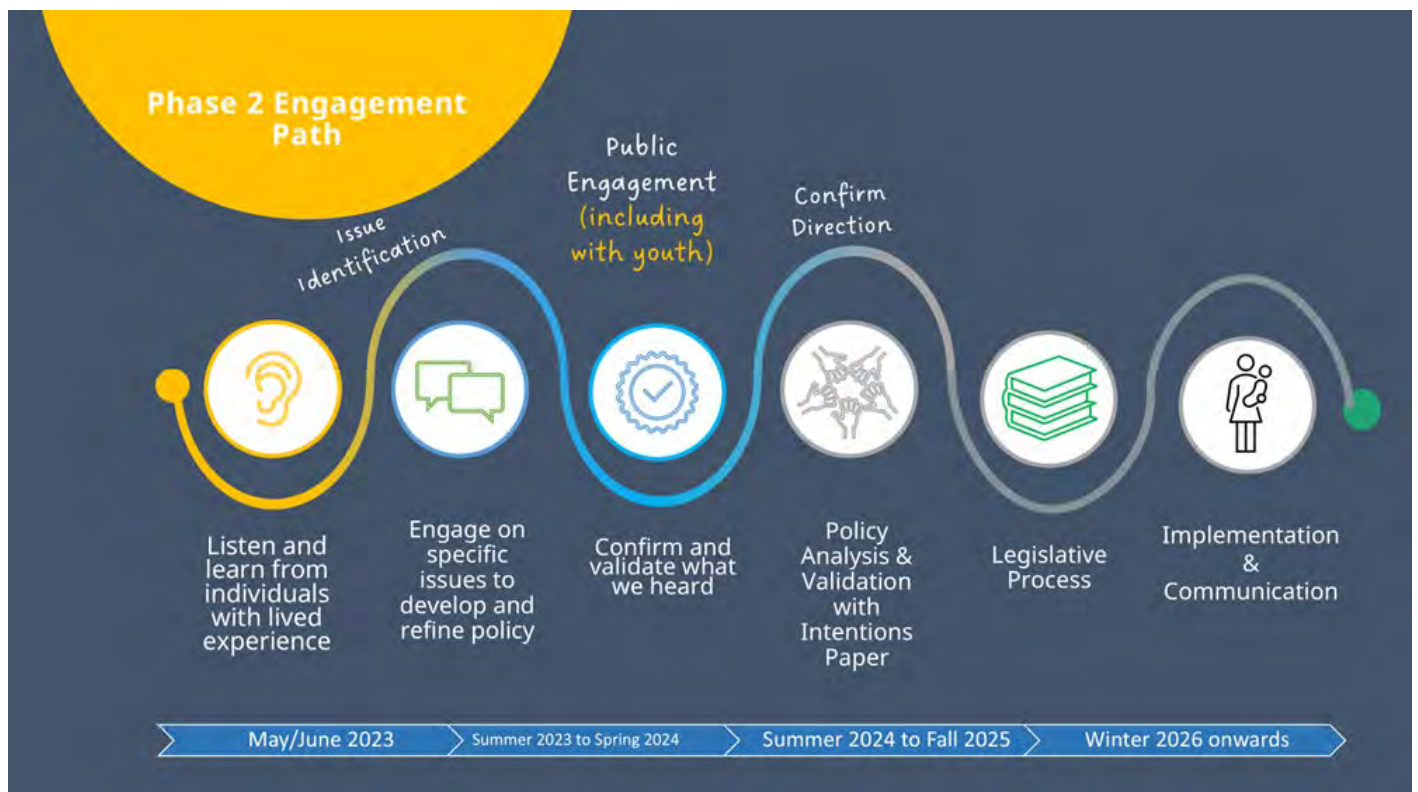


Figure 12: A slide from the Family Policy Legislation and Transformation Division’s presentation outlining the engagement process for phase 2 of the Family Justice Act modernization process.

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- From January to April 2024, youth were able to provide input through in-person and virtual sessions, topic-specific surveys, and virtual listening circles. Their feedback informed a summary report and has shaped proposed legislative and regulatory changes.
 - Examples of intended policy shifts developed from youth feedback include:
 - Considering diverse backgrounds when determining what is in a child's best interests
 - Focusing on the best interests of the child when deciding to appoint a children's lawyer
 - Giving a child an opportunity to share their views whenever decisions/agreements are made that affect them
 - Emphasizing safety for all family members when making parenting plans

Presentation 2: The Youth Advisory Council

The Youth Advisory Council (YAC), under the Provincial Director of Child Welfare at the Ministry of Children and Family Development, will showcase how youth voices are actively incorporated into government policy and program decisions. Council members will speak about their roles and highlight specific ways their input has shaped policy and practice.

Presenters

- **Alana Reeve**, Mental Health Clinician, Youth Advisory Council, Ministry of Children and Family Development
- **Connie Epp**, Director of Adoption Services, Adoption and Advisory Services, Ministry of Children and Family Development

What We Heard

- The Provincial Director of Child Welfare's Youth Advisory Council (YAC) ensures that young people with lived experience in government care have a meaningful voice in shaping policy and services. Each year, 15 to 25 members aged 17 to 29—all current or former youth in care—are selected to sit on the Council. The council reflects diverse gender identities, cultures, sexual orientations, and regions across the province, and members are non-government employees.

What is the Youth Advisory Council?

A group of empowered youth who use their lived experience with the government care system to improve the quality of care for B.C. children and youth.

It is a chance to
experience a deep
feeling of belonging

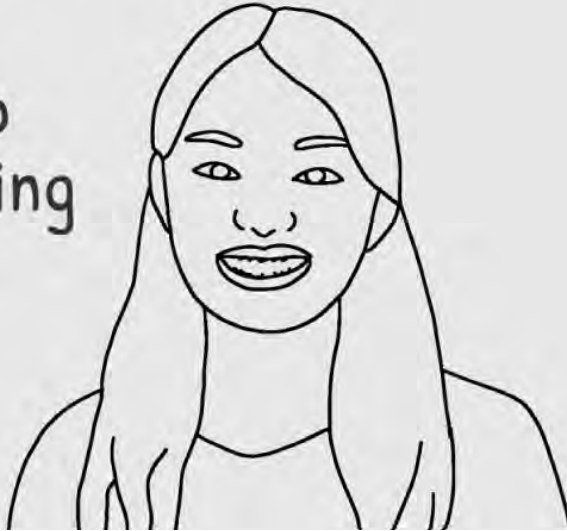


Figure 13: A still image taken from a Video shown during the session that describes the Youth Advisory Council. The text from this section of the video states, "The Youth Advisory Council is a group of adults that have experience growing up in British Columbia's foster care system. The Council is part of the Ministry, and it brings to light ways to improve care for youth across British Columbia. It is a chance to experience a deep feeling of belonging which is often missing for former youth in care. There are few opportunities to be in a room with those of a similar background and it is both comforting from a personal perspective but also empowering from a political perspective."

- The YAC connects with policy makers and provides recommendations on services and policies affecting children, youth, and families. In 2024, YAC members contributed 416 hours of consultation across topics such as youth justice, youth emergency shelters, care planning, mental health policies, and adolescent treatment centre programming.
- The Council is supported by three Indigenous Elders, a mental health clinician, and administrative staff to ensure a trauma-informed, youth-centered process.
- Members are paid for their work and serve one-year terms (for up to three years). They benefit from career development, peer connection, and leadership opportunities.

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- Two YAC members shared with the Summit that participation has been empowering and confidence-building, offering connection with others who share similar lived experiences and an opportunity to advocate for systemic improvement. They highlighted involvement in consultations on the SAJE (Strengthening Abilities and Journeys of Empowerment) program, youth justice reforms, and LGBTQIA+ strategies and training for MCFD staff.

Presentation 3: The Society for Children and Youth of BC

The Society for Children and Youth of BC provides free legal representation for young people whose families are navigating often high conflict separation and divorce. In this session, you will hear about the magic that happens when we truly “hear the child”. A young person and their parent will share their experience of working with a children’s lawyer through their family law case.

Presenters

- **Suzette Narbonne, KC**, Managing Child and Youth Lawyer, Society for Children and Youth of BC
- **A.S. and E.S.** - a mother and young person who worked with a children’s lawyer

“Just knowing that there is someone in their corner to help them understand more about what is going on in their life and that they can be heard is such a relief to them. One child described it as having a backpack of heavy books being lifted off of their shoulders.”

Figure 14: A quotation from Michael Zimmerman, Managing Lawyer (Roster) for the Society for Children and Youth of BC, given during the Summit’s introductory video.

What We Heard

- While judges must consider a child’s views when determining their best interests, BC’s legal test for appointing a lawyer is so high that many children are unable to access direct representation. As a result, their perspectives are often filtered through parents or other third parties.
- Section 211 reports can help but they take time and only capture a snapshot during what can be lengthy proceedings.

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- Judicial attitudes have been evolving, and more judges have recognized the value of youth having their own lawyer, noting it provides an unbiased, clearer narrative and reduces pressure on parents and courts.
 - Direct representation reduces conflict, stress, and court time, and it centers children’s needs rather than parental disputes.
 - However, because the current threshold for providing children with direct representation requires a situation so severe that neither parent can act in the child’s best interests, children often endure years of conflict before gaining access to a lawyer.
 - Independent counsel gives children solicitor-client privilege, space to safely share their views, and reassurance that they can participate at their own comfort level. Children reported that having a lawyer allowed them to feel heard, supported, and relieved—one child describing it as like having “heavy backpack lifted” from their backs.
 - Testimony from E.S., a youth who engaged their own lawyer during their parents’ legal proceedings, highlighted how empowering it was to have someone answer their questions, provide information about what was happening, and who talked to them like a human, not a child.
 - They shared that representation helped both them and their younger sister navigate a complex family law process and that it was a major relief to know that someone was advocating for what they wanted.

Emergent Themes

The following themes have been identified by the Summit Coordination team and have been assembled from notes taken during the Summit. This section is intended to summarize concepts that were prominently and/or frequently expressed throughout the day’s discussions.

Moving from siloed responses to collaborative and integrated systems that focus on prevention

Families and youth who are navigating our justice systems can often encounter a cumulative burden of challenges—poverty, health issues, family violence, neurodiversity, housing instability, and justice involvement are some examples. Unaligned or even contradictory processes can further compound these challenges and even create crisis. Services often intervene too late. There was a shared acknowledgment that we are working to move from these siloed responses to a more

coordinated and integrated system that is preventative, relational, coordinated, and that meets families and youth where they are. There is more work to be done, and collaboration is necessary to break down barriers, improve access to human-centered services, and develop a system that provides families and youth with appropriate supports until they are stabilized.

Meaningfully centering the voices/perspectives of children and youth

Children and youth want to be heard, and systems perform better when their perspectives shape the legislation, policy, programs and services, and individual family law case outcomes that affect them. Across many sessions, we heard the importance of embedding children’s participation as a core standard or practice—not as an exception reserved for times of extreme conflict or as an afterthought in policy development. Listening meaningfully to children and youth leads to better opportunities for early resolution, to better outcomes, and to better tailored programs and services.

The need for cultural safety, Indigenous-led approaches, and distinctions-based services

We heard that justice transformation – and the strategies and frameworks that underpin it – must be grounded in meaningful engagement with Indigenous leadership, trauma-informed practices, cultural safety, and distinctions-based design. Youth justice reforms must reflect Indigenous lived experience, legal traditions, relational accountability, and community structure. It must also be informed by Indigenous youth perspectives. Métis Nation BC emphasized that Distinctions-based planning, data, programs, and partnership structures are necessary to implement Justice strategies that address unmet needs for Métis youth. Culturally grounded services are foundational to justice system transformation.

Appendices

Appendix A: Summit Participation

- **180 unique participants** attended some portion of the Summit
 - **3 Hours, 47 minutes:** the average time of attendance across all participants
 - **143:** the highest number of attendees at any one time during the Summit
 - **117:** The average number of Summit attendees across all sessions
- **95 participants** were from government ministries
- **85 attendees** were from external organizations (including from the Judiciary)
 - 35 external organizations represented
 - There were several independently affiliated attendees as well.

Organizations represented at the Summit include:

- **Government Ministries:** Attorney General, Public Safety and Solicitor General, Children and Family Development, Health
- **Community and umbrella organizations and service providers:** PLEA Community Services, Ending Violence Association of BC, BC Society of Transition Houses; John Howard Society
- **Legal practitioners and access to justice organizations:** Legal Aid BC, Rise Women’s Legal Centre, Law Society of British Columbia, BC Law Institute, Native Courtworkers & Counselling Association BC, Canadian Bar Association BC Branch, Courthouse Libraries BC, Access to Justice BC
- **Indigenous partners:** Métis Nation BC and BC First Nations Justice Council
- **Child and family support organizations:** Society for Children and Youth of BC, Child and Youth Advocacy Centers, Encompass Support Services, Doctors of BC, Victoria Child Abuse Prevention and Counselling Centre
- **Judiciary:** All three levels of the Court were represented at the Summit
 - The Summit is grateful that members of the judiciary were able to attend the day’s proceedings.
 - Note: because of the courts’ independent role, the judges and representatives of their offices participated in the Summit as observers and, as such, did not comment on policy issues or suggest policy changes.

Appendix B: Justice Summit Coordination Team

(By Lastname)

- **Erin Anderson**, Director, Partnerships and Planning, Corporate Management Services Branch, Ministry of the Attorney General
- **Brian Batchelor**, Business Planning Specialist, Planning and Partnerships, Corporate Management Services Branch, Ministry of the Attorney General
- **Shelley Eisler**, Director, Planning and Partnerships, Corporate Management Services Branch, Ministry of the Attorney General
- **Thom Dennett**, Senior Manager of Strategic Projects and Business Priorities, Corporate Management Services Branch, Ministry of the Attorney General
- **Whitney Fondja**, Program and Research Analyst, Planning and Partnerships, Corporate Management Services Branch, Ministry of the Attorney General

Appendix C: Justice and Public Safety Council

Chair: Barbara Carmichael, K.C., Deputy Attorney General, Ministry of Attorney General

Vice-Chair: Tara Richards, Deputy Solicitor General, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

Current Representatives:

- **Nicole Bresser**, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Indigenous Justice Secretariat, Ministry of Attorney General
- **Diana Clarke**, Associate Deputy Minister Reconciliation, Mental Health & Population Wellness, Ministry of Health
- **Paul Craven**, Assistant Deputy Minister, Justice Services Branch, Ministry of Attorney General
- **Erin Gunnarson**, Assistant Deputy Minister, BC Corrections, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
- **Keith Godin**, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children and Family Development
- **Megan Harris**, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Strategic Initiatives and Office of the Fire Commissioner, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
- **Glen Lewis**, Assistant Deputy Minister and Director of Policing and Law Enforcement Services, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General
- **Jessica Prince**, Assistant Deputy Minister, Court Services Branch, Ministry of Attorney General
- **Trevor Shaw**, Head of BC Prosecution Service and Assistant Deputy Attorney General, BC Prosecution Service, Ministry of Attorney General
- **Taryn Walsh**, Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Safety and Victim Services Branch, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General