

COMMUNITY BELONGING:

A SYSTEM-LEVEL APPROACH FOR MUNICIPALITIES TO ADDRESS ABLEISM AND ADVANCE PARTICIPATION AND BELONGING FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES

By: Morgan Skinner, Janet Newbury,
Alison Gerlach, & Meriko Kubota
with Tabatha Berggren, Chianne
Benckhuysen & Frankie McWade

15 JULY 2025





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge with respect and gratitude that this work took place on the traditional and treaty territory of the Tla'amin People, who are a self-governing Nation and who demonstrate leadership in this region when it comes to participation and belonging.

We are also grateful to Vancouver Coastal Health and the University of Victoria for funding that supported this project, and to the City Council and CAO of Powell River for their endorsement. Also, this work would not have been possible without the meaningful input and deep engagement of City staff, and the expertise and commitment of the Project Advisors.

We are grateful for everyone who is engaged in the collective effort to shift away from ableism and towards participation and belonging in this region, and to meaningfully consider children with disabilities when planning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 Acknowledgements		page 1
02 Table of contents		page 2
03 Introduction		page 3
04 Methods		page 6
05 Context	Legislative commitments Upholding these commitments Disability and intersectionality Effecting systems change	page 7
06 Recommendations	1: Start with values 2: Be deliberate about language 3: Make disability visible 4: Plan for equitable community engagement 5: Train staff and shift the culture 6: Make explicit changes: Built environment Services and programs Information and communications Customer service Employment and staff engagement Governance, policies, and bylaws 7: Support ongoing learning	page 15
07 Conclusion		page 31
08 Appendices	A: Project participants B: Environmental scan - resources reviewed C: Equity site visit prompts D: Policy Impact Forum agenda E: System change framework handout	page 32
09 References		page 42

INTRODUCTION

“I’m looking forward to what we can do to make this a place where every resident, no matter their age, gender, or ability, can thrive.” - Lisa Bhopalsingh, City of Powell River CAO, 7 April, 2025



In 2021, the Accessible BC Act[1] was passed as law, and came into force in 2022. In 2022, two of the project team members published a report called “I just want to see my child thrive”: Parents pushing for equity and inclusion in the child care system in BC. [2] One of the findings of that study was that children who were being excluded from childcare on the basis of their disabilities were often excluded from other opportunities in their home communities. A subsequent literature review which found that **addressing systemic ableism** requires community-based approaches was the catalyst for this project.

The ‘Community Belonging Project Team’ (see Appendix A) approached the Tla’amin Nation, the Powell River Public Library, and the City of Powell River to gauge interest in further exploring possibilities for a **community-based approach** to addressing the exclusion of young children with disabilities from fully participating in their community. The Library and Tla’amin Nation were embarking on their own related initiatives. However, the City [3] expressed interest in a partnership and in November of 2023, the City signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Community Belonging Team to conduct an environmental scan of City-run programs, services, and related resources with the goal of informing evidence-based recommendations about increasing opportunities for participation and belonging, specifically for children with visible and invisible disabilities and their families in the qathet region. While this project is based in the qathet region, all municipalities in BC are currently exploring ways to uphold the commitments outlined in the Accessible BC Act. [4]

[1] Province of BC (2021)

[2] Newbury, J. & Gerlach, A. (2022)

[3] We acknowledge the harmful legacy of Israel Wood Powell, after whom the City is named. Where possible in this report, we refer to “the City” or – when speaking more generally about the region – “the qathet region.” The name qathet was gifted to the Regional District by the Tla’amin Nation and adopted in 2018. It means ‘working together’.

[4] Province of BC (2021)

This summary report outlines recommendations that can be taken up by governments or other organizations seeking to take a system-level approach to addressing ableism and **improving participation and belonging**. This means taking into account not only individual practices or behaviours, but the creation of processes and other mechanisms that facilitate coordinated approaches to this work. The seven recommendations are presented as a cycle, because this is a process that requires ongoing adaptation based on new learning.

After providing some context, including the conceptual framework that grounded the team’s analysis of findings from the environmental scan, the recommendations are outlined in detail. These start with identifying and being clear about **values**, which enables deliberate use of **language**, and practices that **make disability visible** in all areas of work. From there, it is recommended to develop **equitable community engagement** strategies to ensure diverse and under-represented voices inform approaches and decision-making. This provides a good foundation for shifting the **organizational culture** towards inclusion, in part through training. This will equip people throughout departments to **make explicit changes** in their various realms of work, in relation to: built environments, services & programs, information & communications, customer service, employee & staff engagement, and governance, policies, & bylaws. Tracking progress and fostering a practice of **continuous reflection**, learning & growth, the final step is to return to the beginning by re-engaging with values and moving forward from them.

Figure 1: Community Belonging



In addition to the findings of the environmental scan, the voices of Project Advisors^[5] and participants of a Policy Impact Forum hosted in April 2025^[6] are featured through this report. These are people who live in the qathet region, care about accessibility, and understand the barriers and opportunities related to collective forward movement. Hyperlinks and references are also provided throughout for additional context and information.

Table 1: Definitions (introduction)

Term	Meaning
Ableism	Ableism is “a system of prejudice and discrimination that devalues and excludes people with disabilities,” ^[7] It is “manifested in places, practices, policies, and perspectives that assert a preference for nondisabled people.” ^[8]
Accessibility	Accessibility means that all people can take part in their communities through work, play, and other daily activities. Accessibility is important for everyone, especially people with disabilities. Accessibility is about removing attitudinal, social, cultural, and physical barriers to create inclusive environments and communities for everyone. ^[9]
Disability	Disability is an evolving social construct that can be understood and experienced differently by members of a community. It is often understood as resulting from the interaction between persons with (visible or non-visible) impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society similar to persons without impairments. ^[10]
Neurodivergent	A neurodivergent person is one whose neurological functioning or behavioural traits differ from what is considered (neuro)typical. ^[11]
Neurodiversity	Neurodiversity refers to variations in neurological functioning and behavioural traits and is a normal phenomenon in the human population. ^[12]

[5] Adults who have children with disabilities, and who may or may not also live with disabilities

[6] City staff and staff of entities affiliated with the City

[7] Albert, S.M. & Powell, R. M. (2022)

[8] Eirikson, E. (2021)

[9] City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library, & qathet Regional District (2024)

[10] United Nations (2007)

[11] Government of Canada (2025)

[12] Government of Canada (2025)

METHODS

After signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the City in November 2023, the Community Belonging Project Team proceeded to secure funding (from University of Victoria and Vancouver Coastal Health), undergo Human Research Ethics Board review and approval from the University of Victoria, and convene a group of Project Advisors (see Appendix A).

With this foundation in place, an **environmental scan** was commenced in the Fall of 2024 guided by the following research questions: How do City programs and services currently support access, participation, inclusion and belonging of young children with visible and nonvisible disabilities and their families? And what opportunities exist to further support this? The scan included a review of sources internal to the City and relevant sources external to the City, such as provincial reports and legislation (see Appendix B). The scan also included 'equity site visits' to various community facilities conducted by the Project Advisors (see Appendix C). Relevant information was recorded and organized using a co-developed code book. Coded data was then interpreted by the Project Team using thematic analysis to identify preliminary themes and findings. At the same time, **Key Informant Interviews** (see Appendix A) were conducted with City staff, in order to better understand their work environment and how this topic is or is not currently informing their work.

Updates were regularly shared with **Project Advisors** who provided input throughout all stages of the process. The Project Team also met regularly with members of the City's Planning Department. Preliminary findings were shared and workshopped with City staff through a **Policy Impact Forum** in April of 2025 (see Appendix D), to further refine the findings and inform recommendations.

To support meaningful engagement with the findings of this project, this report serves as one of two deliverables for this project, alongside an Accessible and Inclusive Client Services Handbook (<https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/items/962fb7b4-c6ec-4ab9-9a8d-8eaae80ca1bd>). Additionally, this project catalyzed the production of a short film by the Diversa Collective that showcases key findings in a more condensed and accessible format (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w34I90Lnw08>).

CONTEXT

LEGISLATIVE COMMITMENTS

Local efforts to advance participation and belonging for children and youth with visible and non-visible disabilities (and their families) in the qathet region occurs within an **international, national, and provincial legislative context** that influences this work.

In 2010, Canada signed the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).[13] By doing so, the following commitments were made:

Article 7 (1): All necessary measures shall be taken to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others

Article 9 (1): Appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to information and communications, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas.

In 2019, BC brought into force the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. [14] While this Act needs to be interpreted as a whole, the following commitment directly relates to the current project:

Article 21 (2): States shall take effective measures and, where appropriate, special measures to ensure continuing improvement of their economic and social conditions. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of Indigenous Elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities.

In 2021, BC brought into force the Accessible BC Act. [15] This Act states that:

S. 11: Organizations must develop plans to identify, remove and prevent barriers, must consider following principles: inclusion, adaptability, diversity, collaboration, self-determination, universal design;

S. 12: Organizations must have a process for receiving comments from the public on their accessibility plan or existing barriers.

[13] United Nations (2007)

[14] Province of BC (2019)

[15] Province of BC (2021)



In addition, the 2024 BC Building Code[16] has an entire section highlighting accessibility requirements, including entrance dimensions and paths of travel. While this code only applies to new builds and renovations, it **establishes a standard** for physical accessibility that can be considered in all public spaces.

Locally, the City has taken strides to uphold these commitments in several ways. In the current Official Community Plan (OCP),[17] commitments were discussed in relation to: accessible outdoor play spaces (4.4.2), affordable and accessible housing (4.9.1), recognizing the value of children and youth and ensuring them access to opportunities to foster development (6.3.1), promoting inclusion of all individuals in local planning and **an enriched accessibility policy** (6.3.2), working towards a 100% accessible bus service (7.4.2), and moving towards expanded childcare services and support services for youth (8.1.2). This plan was developed before the Accessible BC Act, and is scheduled for an update.

In 2024, as mandated by the Accessible BC Act,[18] the City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library, and the qathet Regional District developed an Accessibility Plan[19] for 2024-2026 to help local organizations **identify, remove, and prevent barriers** over the next three years. Within this accessibility plan, priority actions are identified with the intent to: improve physical and digital accessibility for more equitable access to services and programs, engage staff in creating accessible, inclusive environments, apply an accessibility lens to all policies, plans and strategies to ensure accessibility is considered in the decision-making process, and to create accountability. Within the plan, these priority actions are organized into six areas of focus: built environments, services and programs, information and communications, customer service, employment and staff engagement, and governance, policies and bylaws.[20]

This summary report intends to build upon these priority actions and illuminate evidence-based ways disabled children and youth and their families in the qathet region can experience increased belonging and participation.

“Our organizations are committed to working together to create a community where people of all ages and abilities can fully participate in daily life and experience a sense of belonging” - Accessibility Plan 2024-2026, pg. 5

[16] Province of BC, Ministry of Housing (2024)

[17] City of Powell River (2014)

[18] Province of BC (2021)

[19] City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library, qathet Regional District (2024)

[20] City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library, qathet Regional District (2024)

UPHOLDING THESE COMMITMENTS

The City has taken actions to uphold a commitment to increasing opportunities for participation and belonging in the region, including: installing automatic doors at the recreation complex, initiating a full accessibility review of the City website, and moving Council Chambers to a physically accessible location.[21]

At the Policy Impact Forum, participants highlighted other **recent successes** internal to the City, including: a garbage pick-up service where staff will collect and return bins directly from/to a resident's door, and sensory-friendly swim lessons that cater to the needs of neurodiverse and/or disabled children and youth. At the library, where there is currently an Accessibility Coordinator on staff, an enhancement grant supported the implementation of accessibility features including a quiet pod, and accessible programming such as ASL story hour.



Beyond this, **non-profits and other local organizations** have also taken it upon themselves to prioritize participation of disabled children and youth. For instance, the Patricia Theatre has been hosting sensory-friendly movies, demonstrating that there is a shift happening across the region for organizations to respond to the diversity of all community members.

	<p>FREE FAMILY MOVIE: MY NEIGHBOUR, TOTORO</p> <p> MAY 2024</p> <p>If your child or someone in your family finds it difficult to attend movie theaters, this event is for you! We will keep the volume down and lights dim. You are welcome to move around, make sounds, and bring anything that makes you comfortable such as: ear muffs, comfort objects, cushions or blankets for your seat, or food from home.</p> <p>www.patriciathatre.com  604-483-9345</p>	<p>DOORS AT 12:30 MOVIE AT 1:30</p> <p>Rated G - 1 hr 26 min. Animation, Comedy, @ Family Free popcorn and juice boxes provided English dubbed and subtitled</p> <p>For more information, call 604-483-9345</p> <p>admit one</p>
---	---	---

[21] City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library, qathet Regional District (2024)



However, despite the increase in provincial and federal legislation pertaining to accessibility in the last five years and the various local commitments made, there is evidence that disabled children and their families in the qathet region continue to face **barriers and discrimination**.

In the 2022-2023 qathet Region's Vital Signs Report, 41% of the youth survey respondents identified as neurodivergent and 40% identified as a person with a disability.[22] In the community survey, 27% of Vital Signs respondents identified as "disabled or a person with a disability, autistic or as a person with autism, neurodivergent, Deaf or deaf, mad, and/or having a disability, mental illness, or chronic/long-term condition." Of these respondents with disabilities, 65% reported regularly or occasionally experiencing ableism in the community. In the youth survey, 100% of respondents reported **witnessing or experiencing ableism** at school, 46% with friends, 46% at home, and 39% at work.[23]

The Representative for Children and Youth estimates as many as 80,000 B.C. children and youth with disabilities are currently **not receiving any support**. [24] Basic community supports that are intended to be available to everyone are often inaccessible or unavailable for families of children with disabilities. [25]

[22] Powell River Community Foundation (2023)

[23] Powell River Community Foundation (2023)

[24] Representative for Children and Youth (2023)

[25] Representative for Children and Youth (2023)

DISABILITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

The environmental scan revealed that there is **no clear reference to disabled children** in some of the central sources reviewed. In cases where children are mentioned, they are often considered only as “children” and not in relation to other dimensions of their experiences or identities. Similarly, when disability is mentioned, it is often considered as an isolated factor.

Table 2: Invisibility of disabled children

Source	Mentions disability	Mentions children	Mentions disabled children
Accessible BC Act	✓	✗	✗
Local Accessibility Plan	✓	✗	✗
Active Living Guide	✗	✓	✗
City Website	✓	✓	✗
Official Community Plan	✗	✓	✗

Consideration of other aspects of identity and experiences beyond disability (such as age, gender, socioeconomic realities, and ethnicity) were frequently absent in the sources reviewed in the environmental scan. However, the intersections of human experience are important when addressing systemic barriers and taking actions toward a more **just and equitable** society.[26] [27]

[26] Comox Valley Regional District (2023)

[27] Wijeyesinghe, C.L. & Jones, S.R. (2014)

Families raising children with disabilities[28] are more likely to be **financially/economically challenged** due to significant out-of-pocket costs such as: equipment, medication, lost work due to being the unpaid primary caregiver of their child, requirements for an accessible home and vehicle, and travel related costs for their child’s medical care, therapies and assessments.[29]BC’s housing crisis has also affected families of children with disabilities harder than most,[30] and many of the housing options available in the qathet region are not accessible.[31]

The UNCRPD also recognizes the intersection of **sexism and ableism**. It states that “women and girls with disabilities are often at greater risk both within and outside the home, of violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation.”[32] Additionally, the historic and ongoing legacy of **colonialism** perpetuates health, social, and economic inequities against First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and individuals.[33]

Together, systemic ableism and colonialism normalize intrusive and harmful interventions under the guise of “best interests of the child.”[34] An intersectional lens encourages critically reflecting on interventions within the broader context of colonial histories and relations and the impacts of social and Indigenous determinants of health. This includes reflecting on the unintended consequences of potentially well-intended approaches.

Awareness of intersectionality and historical patterns of inequity can contribute to an **informed and strategic approach** to advancing participation and belonging that responds to the realities experienced by community members. Ableism, sexism, and colonialism intersect, and are deeply embedded within the systems we have inherited and participate in every day. By drawing on evidence, the remainder of this report focuses on how we might engage differently with/in these systems, in an effort to contribute to system-level change.

[28] This report deliberately uses both person-first and identity-first language to acknowledge and respect different preferences.

[29] Representative for Children and Youth (2023)

[30] Representative for Children and Youth (2023)

[31] qathet Regional District, City of Powell River, Tla’amin Nation (2021)

[32] United Nations (2007)

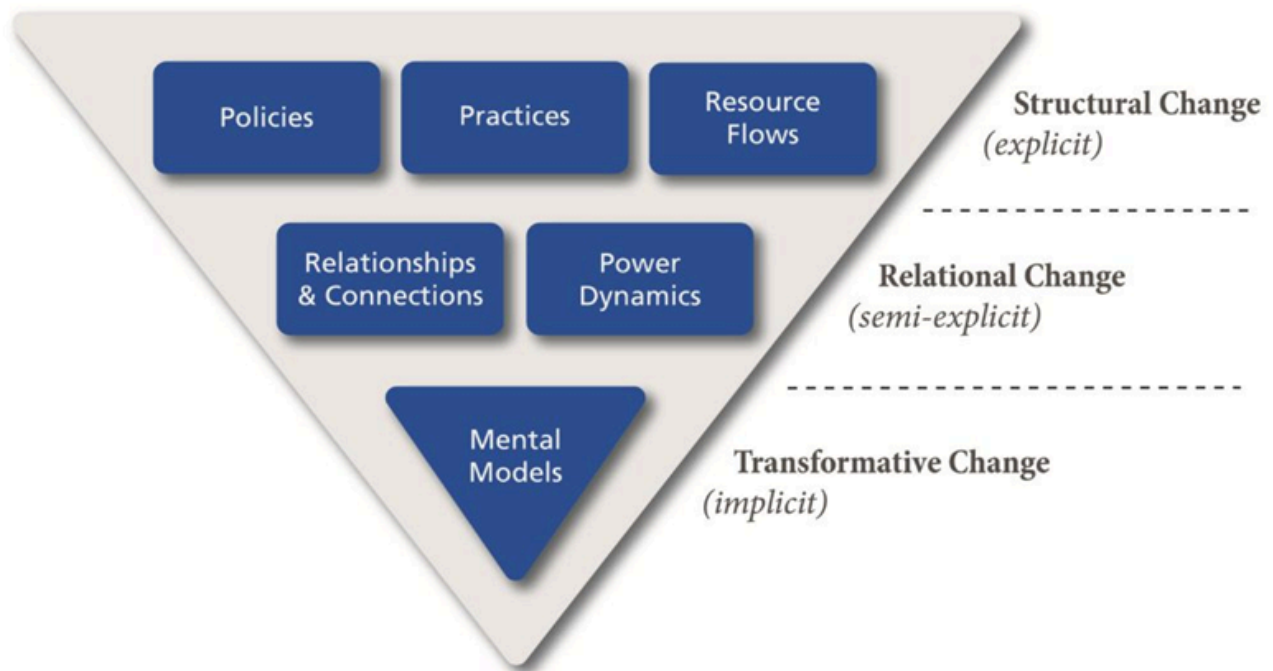
[33] Public Health Agency of Canada (2023)

[34] Gerlach, A.J.; Sinha, V.; Lach, L.; Balfour, M.; Flett, M.E. (2024)

EFFECTING SYSTEMS CHANGE

“Real and equitable progress requires exceptional attention to the detailed and often mundane work of noticing what is invisible to many.” – Kania, Kramer, and Senge[35]

Figure 2: Six conditions of systems change



This framework, by Kania, Kramer, and Senge (2018) is a reminder of the **systemic nature of ableism** (see Appendix E). Advancing participation and belonging for children with visible and non-visible disabilities and their families in a meaningful and lasting way requires system-level change. Kania and colleagues state that systems change:

- Intentionally shifts the conditions that hold a problem in place.
- Requires that individuals at all levels of an organization reflect on how their ways of thinking and doing may be keeping a problem in place, and could evolve.
- Is not a one-time endeavour but a continuous process involving reflection, adaptation, and collaboration to drive lasting, transformative change.[36]

[35] Kania, J.; Kramer, M.; & Senge, P. (2018)

[36] Kania, J.; Kramer, M.; & Senge, P. (2018)

When attempting to make change, there is a tendency to focus efforts on the top row of the model, which outlines explicit changes. This includes:

- **Policies:** Government, institutional and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the entity's own and others' actions.
- **Practices:** Espoused activities of institutions, coalitions, networks, and other entities targeted to improving social and environmental progress. Also, within the entity, the procedures, guidelines, or informal shared habits that comprise their work.
- **Resource Flows:** How money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed. [37]

This model, however, reminds us that without attention to semi-explicit and implicit change, a problem (in this case, ableism and exclusion) may remain in place regardless of attention being paid to explicit change. This is why the bottom two rows of the model are so important. The middle row of the model draws our attention to semi-explicit change, specifically:

- **Relationships & Connections:** Quality of connections and communication occurring among actors in the system, especially among those with differing histories and viewpoints.
- **Power Dynamics:** The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations.[38]

The bottom row of the model has just one component – mental models – and it is the foundation upon which all of the rest occurs: implicit change:

- **Mental Models:** Habits of thought— deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk. [39]

This conceptual framework forms the foundation for the recommendations that follow.



[37] Kania, J.; Kramer, M.; & Senge, P. (2018)

[38] Kania, J.; Kramer, M.; & Senge, P. (2018)

[39] Kania, J.; Kramer, M.; & Senge, P. (2018)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhancing participation and belonging for children with visible and invisible disabilities and their families at a systems level requires addressing the six conditions of systems change outlined above. System-level transformation is multi-faceted in that it involves strategic attention to implicit, semi-explicit, and explicit conditions, and the relationships among these conditions. **The recommendations in this report map directly onto this model.** They begin with values (which are implicit), move up through semi-explicit conditions for systems change, and then finally address explicit change based on that foundation.

1: START WITH VALUES

Values are evident in everyday thoughts, behaviours, actions and are reflective of the worldviews and experiences that we hold. As the systems change framework indicates, these 'mental models' and habits of thought can unwittingly contribute to keeping problems in place, rather than evolving.[40] To sustain progress towards meeting the needs of disabled children, youth, and their families, it is recommended to **identify and make explicit the values** that guide such efforts. Commitment to a coordinated approach rooted in shared values can also yield many benefits when it comes to policy implementation, such as instilling collective ownership, encouraging shared accountability, ensuring transparency, and tracking progress towards desired outcomes.[41] Being clear about values can help to be accountable to them in decision-making, as well as enabling people to say "yes" to changes along the way that align.

Belonging was identified in this research as an important foundational value for accessible planning and service delivery. The Representative for Children and Youth suggests that a true sense of belonging includes connection to family, friends/others, culture, community, positive sense of self, and physical place.[42] Consequences of not having these are experiences of much pain, sadness, distress, risk and poorer life outcomes. Many colonial interventions have worked actively to fracture connection and interfere with a sense of belonging. Thus, concerted efforts to rebuild connections can contribute to experiences of belonging.[43]

[40] Kania, J.; Kramer, M.; & Senge, P. (2018)

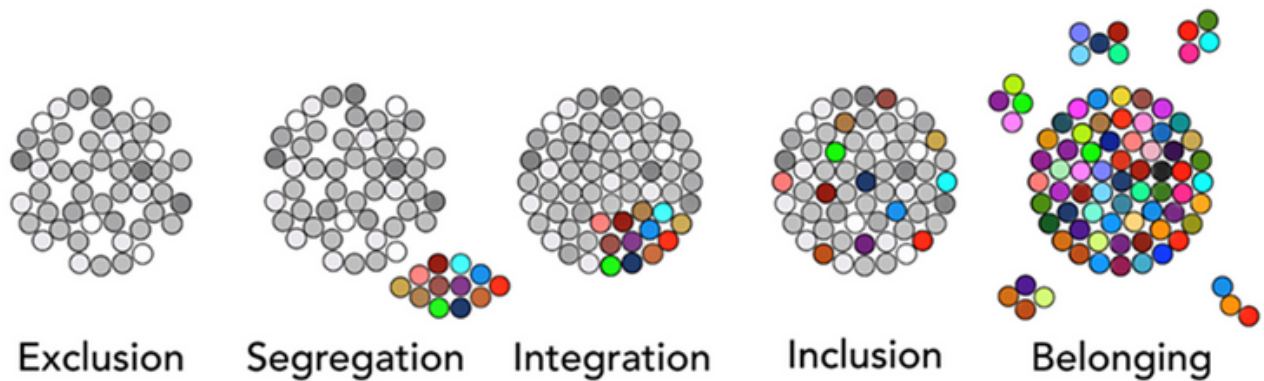
[41] City of Powell River (2024)

[42] Representative for Children and Youth (2021)

[43] Representative for Children and Youth (2021)

The visual below by Carter[44] highlights important distinctions between integration, inclusion, and belonging for children with disabilities in normative environments such as children’s community programs. Inclusion typically involves children with disabilities being included in programs and environments that are designed for ‘typical’ children (usually meaning those who do not have disabilities). Often inclusion requires children with disabilities to adapt to the environment rather than the environment being designed and adapted for a diversity of abilities. Experiencing a sense of belonging for children with disabilities involves having opportunities to feel welcomed and comfortable to participate in programs designed for all children and in programs specifically tailored for children with disabilities. This is because belonging can be experienced by people **both within and outside of the mainstream**. Services need to adapt to allow for and facilitate this.

Figure 3: Belonging



Centering belonging as a core value can improve the quality of children’s experiences and environments, which influences their lifelong health and wellbeing. [45] Findings suggest that equity, inclusion and participation are also important values to promote wellbeing of children and youth:

The Policy Impact Forum provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on how their pre-existing assumptions, beliefs, and views on disability shaped their everyday work. Participants also identified ways they were fostering or could foster belonging in their various working roles and programs, including accepting people for who they were without question, not requiring explanations, avoiding embarrassment (such as if a passenger is low on bus fare), and otherwise making efforts for all people to feel comfortable and welcome. Participants also expressed feeling re-energized with a sense of purpose by having an opportunity to explore these issues and possible next steps together as colleagues.

[44] Carter, E.W. (2021)

[45] Human Early Learning Partnership (2020)

Table 3: Definitions (values)

Term	Meaning	Consideration
Belonging	Feeling like you are an important member of a group	Can only be determined by the person themselves
Equity	Treating everyone fairly and justly, but not (necessarily) the same	Recognizes that different resources and opportunities may be needed for each of us to reach an equal outcome
Inclusion	Being included in a group or structure	Does not necessarily question the nature of the structure itself
Participation	Taking part or becoming involved in something	Requires a sense of belonging

2: BE DELIBERATE ABOUT LANGUAGE

“A desire to belong is not a special need.” – Carter, E.W.[46]

When values are made explicit, it can influence word choice and facilitate communication that advance the values that have been identified as important (in this case: belonging, equity, inclusion, and participation). **Being deliberate about word choice** when talking and writing about disability can influence semi-explicit conditions of change (relationships, connections, and power dynamics). In short: language matters.

Throughout the review of internal City resources, disability was rarely explicitly discussed. At times, the term “special needs” was used in relation to persons with disabilities, which can be stigmatizing and is not considered disability-inclusive. There is no consensus about which language to use, however there are over-arching guidelines on how to talk about disability in a respectful way, as listed below.[47] Language is a valuable tool to let people know that they are being seen and are a valued part of a conversation, process, or service. Being deliberate about language is important for internal documents, like policies and procedures, or public-facing materials, like signage and websites.

[46] Turner, E. (2025)

[47] Live Educate Transform Society (2025)

Suggestions from Live Educate Transform Society: [48]

- Don't try to soften the word "disability"
- Avoid words that make a negative judgement about living with a disability ("she suffers from arthritis", "he's a victim of polio", "they are afflicted with MS", "they are confined to a wheelchair", they succeeded in spite of their disability")
- Be conscious of your words; if you use a medical condition or disability to describe something negative, stop, correct yourself, and do the same for others. ("I was blinded to her flaws", "the economy is crippling me" "they are such a spaz", etc.)
- Be aware that terms change and evolve: If you are unsure about the most recent language, ask the disabled person you are interacting with
- Not every person with a disability prefers the same language
- Examples of current terminology: Blind, Partially Sighted, Vision Loss, Low Vision, Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, Hearing Loss, Mental Health Condition or Mental Health Issues, Person first (person before the disability) or Identity First (Autistic, Deaf, disabled)

3: MAKE DISABILITY VISIBLE

A key finding from the environmental scan was the invisibility of disabled children and youth throughout both provincial and local legislation, policy, practices and procedures. This is not uncommon, and local governments rarely ask about visible and invisible disabilities when doing surveys. [49]



Making disability visible, including in all community surveys, is a crucial aspect to improving participation and belonging. **Actively including people with disabilities** in all planning, engagements, needs assessments, decision-making, promotions, and evaluation can ensure programs and services are designed by and for everyone - and that progress is tracked along the way. Policy Impact Forum participants spoke to the value of having people with disabilities in decision-making and leadership positions. They also recommended partnering with other community organizations, and updating policies to support staff in their work in this area.

As highlighted in Table 2, disabled children are not visible in the central documents reviewed as part of the environmental scan. Table 3, below, provides recommendations on how children and youth with disabilities can be made more visible throughout City-run programs and services.

[48] Live Educate Transform Society (2025)

[49] Representative for Children and Youth (2023)

Table 4: Making disability visible

Source	Ways to increase visibility of disabled children and youth
Local Accessibility Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include considerations for disabled children and youth
Active Living Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge disability • Include accessibility information and supports available for the space and programs for children and youth • Link to organizations that provide additional supports/services
City website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge disability • Have accessibility and resources for disabled children and youth and their families • Include accessibility features • Link to partner organizations that provide additional supports or services
Recreation website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge disability • Include accessibility information for children and youth • Include accessibility features • Link to partner organizations that provide additional supports or services
Official Community Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update to accurate and respectful language about disability • Include specific policies and actions related to the needs of disabled children and youth and their families • Review <i>all</i> policies through the lens of accessibility • Ensure evaluation frameworks include inputs from people with visible and invisible disabilities, including children
City forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply accessibility lens that accounts for the needs of disabled children/youth and their families • Include questions about disability (and other intersectional aspects of experience) in surveys/data collection tools • Include accessibility considerations in recruitment, job descriptions, requests for proposals, etc



4: PLAN FOR EQUITABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is crucial to understand and account for the **wide range of voices and needs of a community**. It is also an avenue to deepen relationships, connections, and distribute decision-making power among diverse members of a system, which is an important condition of creating sustainable change.[50]

However, community engagement can often be undertaken in ways that are only comfortable and accessible for certain groups of people resulting in vital perspectives, experiences and feedback being missed. People living at one or more of the intersections of ableism, ageism, classism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, racism, and colonialism are **frequently left out** of community engagement and decision-making opportunities, resulting in processes and policies that fail to be inclusive, respectful, or create a sense of belonging for all.[51] [52]

Centering the voices of people most impacted by decisions is at the core of equitable community engagement. Extending different - and sometimes additional – resources can be required to eliminate barriers and ensure opportunities for equitable participation. Project Advisors identified that group-based engagements that require attending at a certain time and/or speaking publicly are not always accessible for many people – including people with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities. They identified specific strategies that could enable them to have their voices heard on matters that impact them, while **considering barriers** related to transportation, time, and emotional safety.

These include:

- Having QR codes in waiting rooms, on buses, or in other public spaces where they can complete a quick survey or submit input.

[50] Kania, J.; Kramer, M.; & Senge, P. (2018)

[51] National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (2013)

[52] Silva, D.S.; Smith, M.J.; Upshur, R.E.G. (2013)

- Having targeted outreach activities with existing groups or programs where families/ parents/ children already show up and are in a comfortable and trusted environment.

Decision-making throughout City services and programs can reflect the needs of residents, and also promote a sense of belonging for all when equitable community engagement is prioritized. This requires:

- Providing people with choices/options as to how to have their perspectives heard.
- Removing barriers for people with visible and invisible disabilities.
- Prioritizing emotional and cultural safety.
- Actively creating hospitable opportunities for participation to those who may have historically been excluded or marginalized.

These strategies, account for the semi-explicit conditions of system-level change by leveraging existing relationships and connections, and considering power dynamics in planning.

During the Policy Impact Forum, participants identified that developing more equitable approaches to community engagement was “within reach” – meaning, they felt that even without significant changes to funding or human resources, they have the capacity to implement this change.

The Accessible and Inclusive Client Services Handbook

(<https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/items/962fb7b4-c6ec-4ab9-9a8d-8eaae80ca1bd>) elaborates on the high-level recommendations listed below, which can be used to inform equitable approaches to community engagement.

When preparing to engage with the public:

- Seek the perspectives of those who are directly impacted, who have related lived experience, or who might benefit from this work.
- Make specific efforts to reach people whose voices are not often heard.
- Honour, invite, and uplift local First Nation people, knowledge and practices.
- Begin by learning what already works well, or has in the past.
- Develop processes for accessibility, transparency, accountability, and good relationships.
- Identify barriers at every stage and take steps to mitigate and/or remove them.

When engaging:

- Create an inclusive agenda.
- Facilitate full participation for people with different abilities, comfort levels, and ways of participating.
- Attend to comfort and safety.

After engaging:

- Keep open and accessible lines of communication.
- Provide updates and progress in accessible ways.
- Show appreciation and thank them.

5: TRAIN STAFF AND SHIFT THE CULTURE

“We were greeted by the person at the front desk, who seems impatient and unfriendly. It feels like there is no space to ask questions, you need to know why you are there and pay and move on. Engaging with kids is limited; my littles liked to ask questions, but they were ignored and not well received.” – Note from anonymized Equity Site Visit

“You’re afraid of who to open up to. You don’t know who to feel safe with. Their level of understanding makes a critical difference as well.” – Representative for Children and Youth (2023)

The environmental scan revealed that many of the barriers and opportunities families are facing when it comes to community participation for their children are relational and or attitudinal. The ways that community members are welcomed, treated, and supported by City staff greatly shapes how they feel in community spaces – such as at events, on buses, or when accessing City services or programs. This means that for better and for worse, the **attitudes and behaviours** of individual service providers can contribute to or detract from a parent’s or child’s experience of belonging.

Children with disabilities’ experiences of participation and belonging can be enhanced when they experience positive interactions, behaviour, and attitudes from

staff and service providers. This means we can learn from and expand on what is already working well to further shift mindsets and attitudes through self-reflection, education, awareness, commitment and planning. Investing in creating and maintaining a **disability-informed workforce** and **reducing staff turnover** can make a significant positive impact on everyday actions over time. Being an inclusive employer and **hiring people with disabilities** can be an important way to contribute to this organizational culture shift.[53] When this is combined with increases in **staff training** and strategies that reduce staff turnover, investment in shifting the organizational culture can be amplified.

The 2024 Accessibility Plan[54] states a desire to increase staff training, making this a great opportunity to further that work. This recommendation is aligned with semi-explicit and implicit conditions in the systems transformation framework, which suggests that shifting power dynamics, utilizing relationships and connections, and consciously fostering shared mental models are essential to enacting lasting systems change.[55]

Participants at the Policy Impact Forum highlighted that they see an opportunity for a culture shift in service delivery through a willingness to listen and by understanding that every interaction with the public matters. They identified ways of **contributing to a culture shift** that centers belonging by:

- Being advocates and champions for changes and following it through
- Taking initiative in our roles and saying “yes” to the smaller things that can make a difference right away
- Being conscious of the way we show up nonverbally, the “vibe” we create, and the cumulative impact of both positive and negative experiences
- Welcoming children and modelling positive interactions and leadership
- Actively working to be part of the solution
- Being able to “unlock” your brain to see things differently and/or change the ways things are done
- Being able to walk in someone else’s shoes and imagine navigating spaces differently
- Being conscious of power and bureaucratic blocks, shifting towards “bureaucratic enabling”
- Being provided opportunities to learn why these changes are important to make

[53] Kania, J.; Kramer, M.; & Senge, P. (2018)

[54] National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (2013)

[55] Silva, D.S.; Smith, M.J.; Upshur, R.E.G. (2013)

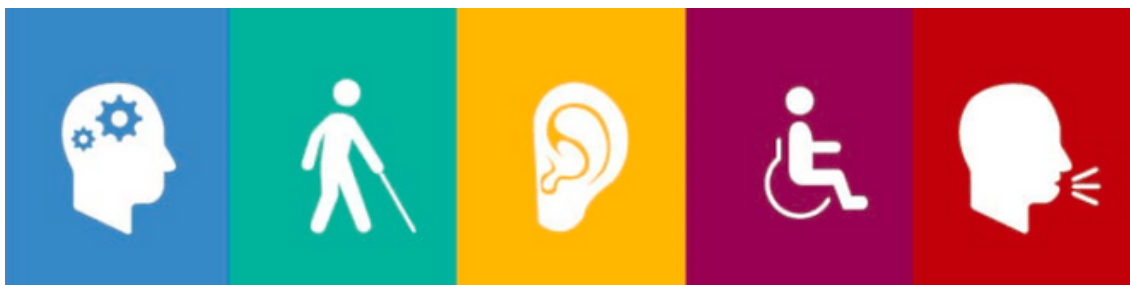
6: MAKE EXPLICIT CHANGES

“Design programs and services with and for the people facing the most barriers, and everyone benefits.” – Project Advisor

The environmental scan revealed that there are many concrete changes that could make a difference for children with visible and invisible disabilities and their families in this community. The five previous recommendations have focused on the implicit and semi-explicit portions of the conceptual framework. Taking these seriously can contribute to the cultivation of an organizational culture in which explicit changes – to **policy, practices, and resource flows** – can be implemented successfully and with greater ownership from the entire ecosystem of people involved.[56]

This section outlines detailed potential actions – generated through the environmental scan, Key Informant Interviews, Project Advisors, and Policy Impact Forum - that are organized in alignment with the priorities identified in the local Accessibility Plan. [57] They are:

- Built Environment,
- Services and Programs,
- Information and Communications,
- Customer Service,
- Employment and Staff Engagement, and
- Governance, Policies and Bylaws.



The potential actions below are further categorized into **short-term and long-term actions**, based on research inputs. **Barriers** are also identified so that they can be realistically taken into account when planning and resourcing actions. Recognizing that planning work must be done by and with those most impacted and those responsible for implementation, what follows are preliminary inputs that can be used as a starting place for future operational planning.

[56] Kania J, Kramer M, Senge P. (2018)

[57] City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library, qathet Regional District (2024)

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

SHORT TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

Parks and outdoor spaces:

- Install visual cues to contain children in an area
- Add brail signage
- Ensure wheelchair access to outdoor swimming and other activities

Indoor spaces:

- Increase signage
- Add brail signage and tags
- Install working lift in washrooms and pool
- Ensure current power operated doors work

Barriers:

- **Difficulty anticipating long-term needs**
- **Limited resources**

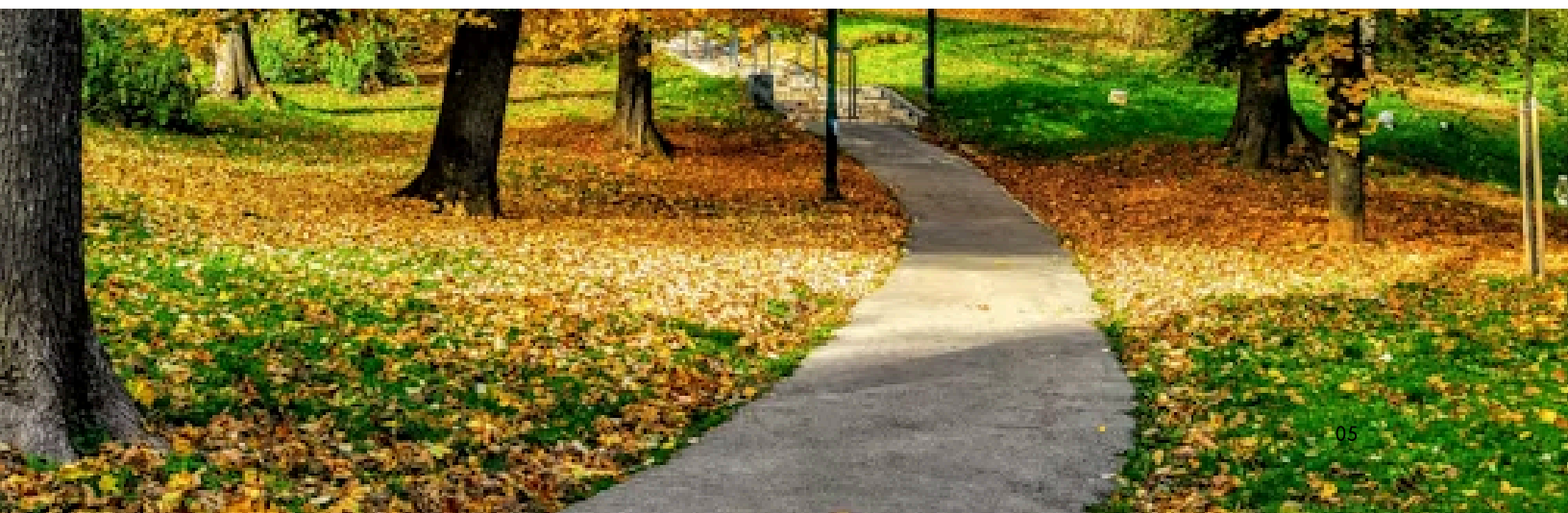
LONG TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

Parks and outdoor spaces:

- Cross walks with lights and beeps
- Playground communication books
- Fenced playgrounds
- Paved forest paths and walkways
- Benches in parks
- Low barrier playground equipment
- More sidewalks and crosswalks

Indoor spaces:

- Sensory-friendly lighting and sound, and less reflective surfaces
- Increased accessible vehicle access
- Accessible washrooms
- Service counters at accessible height
- Elevators
- Invest in infrastructure to meet needs through comprehensive asset management



SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

SHORT TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Increase communications/awareness about current programs
- Continue to be responsive to needs of children/youth with disabilities and their families and adapt services and programs to better support them

Barriers:

- **Under-staffed**
- **Reactionary decision-making**
- **Lack of programs/choice**
- **Labels/stigma**
- **Lack of partnerships**

LONG TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Implement Access 2 Card and Sunflower Lanyard[58]
- Offer dedicated space and services for children and youth with varied programming
- Accessible transportation throughout the region
- Inclusively design programs as well as processes
- Design programs with neurodiverse people in mind: consistency and predictability accommodate more people

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

SHORT TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Simplify wording in forms
- Simplify access to forms
- Formalize equitable community engagement, creating diverse opportunities for residents to give feedback on services and policies in more accessible ways

(cont'd)

LONG TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Enhance interdepartmental communications, including information-sharing, and strategizing (through, for example, staff meetings, intranet)
- Provide ongoing inter-organizational training, sharing, and learning about how to better support disabled children and their families

(cont'd)

[58] Both of these are system-wide initiatives that can lead to free access, calm entry, gentle treatment, no judgement, and connection with service providers or other families.

SHORT TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

Websites:

- Decrease visual stimulus
- Create a page for families with events and resources
- Include easy to find accessibility information for City-run spaces
- Acknowledge current accessibility barriers explicitly
- Make it easier to find the search feature, and easier to navigate overall
- Provide disability-friendly information about what to do in an emergency
- Have an accessibility page with a resource directory

LONG TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Provide accessible information about how to access the programs and services people need, including those offered by outside agencies
- Centralize information to reduce repeated bureaucratic burden (enhance “bureaucratic enabling”)
- Formalize opportunities for evaluation and adjustment of plans, based on new learning

Barriers:

- **Lack of information to staff/public**
- **Polarization/ division**
- **Few accessible pathways to provide input**
- **Lack of internal communications between departments and with leaderships**

CUSTOMER SERVICE

SHORT TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Seek feedback on services
- Conduct Equity Site Visits (see Appendix C)
- Learn from other organizations (such as Rick Hansen Foundation, Learn Educate Transform Society, Inclusion Powell River, etc)
- Be explicit about the accessibility opportunities and barriers are within existing programs/services

LONG TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Train staff to center respect and dignity in interactions
- Train staff in emotional regulation
- Act on feedback

Barriers:

- **Current primary focus on physical disabilities**
- **Lack of inter-service coordination**
- **Lack of training**

EMPLOYMENT AND STAFF ENGAGEMENT

SHORT TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Hire people with disabilities
- Provide ongoing training to equip staff with knowledge of visible and non-visible disabilities
- Provide up-to-date training to staff about relevant legislative commitments, including the Accessible BC Act and the Guide Dog and Service Dog Act, so clients/residents do not have to educate them

Barriers:

- **Staff turnover**
- **Lack of training specific to accessibility/ disability**
- **Lack of disabled employees**

LONG TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Hire an Accessibility Coordinator to work systemically and interdepartmentally
- Create a succession plan to support staff retention and reduce service disruption when trained staff leave
- Work towards hiring more staff where possible in busy settings, so there is time and space to work relationally with the public
- Be proactive in becoming an accessible employer; ie. Hire people with disabilities

GOVERNANCE, POLICIES, AND BYLAWS

SHORT TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Undergo policy and bylaw reviews with a focus on disability inclusion and belonging, including removal of physical and other barriers to participation and considering intersectionality

LONG TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Develop policies to fill any gaps in relation to community belonging, in order to provide clear and consistent policy guidance for all staff
- Develop clear goals and related actions, to support movement towards policy direction

(cont'd)

LONG TERM POTENTIAL ACTIONS

Barriers:

- **Expectations not embedded in policy**
- **OCP is not binding**
- **Lack of social policy**
- **Cost-recovery model**
- **Decision-making jurisdiction**
- **Lack of evaluation framework to support ongoing improvement**

- Create an accessibility checklist for all staff in each department to follow
- Embed accessibility lens into new OCP as a baseline
- Build accessibility standards
- Dedicate funding to accessibility improvements
- Increase access to stable and accessible housing by reviewing zoning bylaws to increase opportunities
- Prioritize the needs of those who are most disproportionately impacted during an emergency

7: SUPPORT ONGOING LEARNING

Addressing systemic ableism means fostering a **learning orientation** to support continuous growth and improvement. Regularly revisiting values and processes and hearing from people about their related lived experiences can help inform changes based on new input and learning. Building this practice into **annual operations** can strengthen what is going well, and address ongoing or new challenges.

Treating these recommendations as a **cycle** means returning to beginning on a routine basis. Having important conversations about values and making commitments to community belonging explicit can serve to advance the commitments expressed in the local Accessibility Plan.

Figure 4: Community Belonging



Research by the Representative for Children and Youth[59] says:

"Families want:

- Their children to grow up with the right supports to help them realize their potential,
- to stop having to portray their children in the worst possible light in order to be eligible for services,
- to know that services are there when they need them and that they won't have to fill out even more forms, sit on waitlists to get them, and roll out that "squeaky wheel" to try to be heard,
- mental health support for the child, siblings, and themselves,
- an end to having to compete with other families for scarce services,
- to know what they're eligible for without having to poll other families to find out what they get,
- an end to feeling guilty for advocating for their child,
- their children to grow into young adults with a future to look forward to, not left without supports at 19,
- government systems that appreciate and welcome the immense expertise that families bring, and policy makers that truly want to partner with families in building a system that works for them."

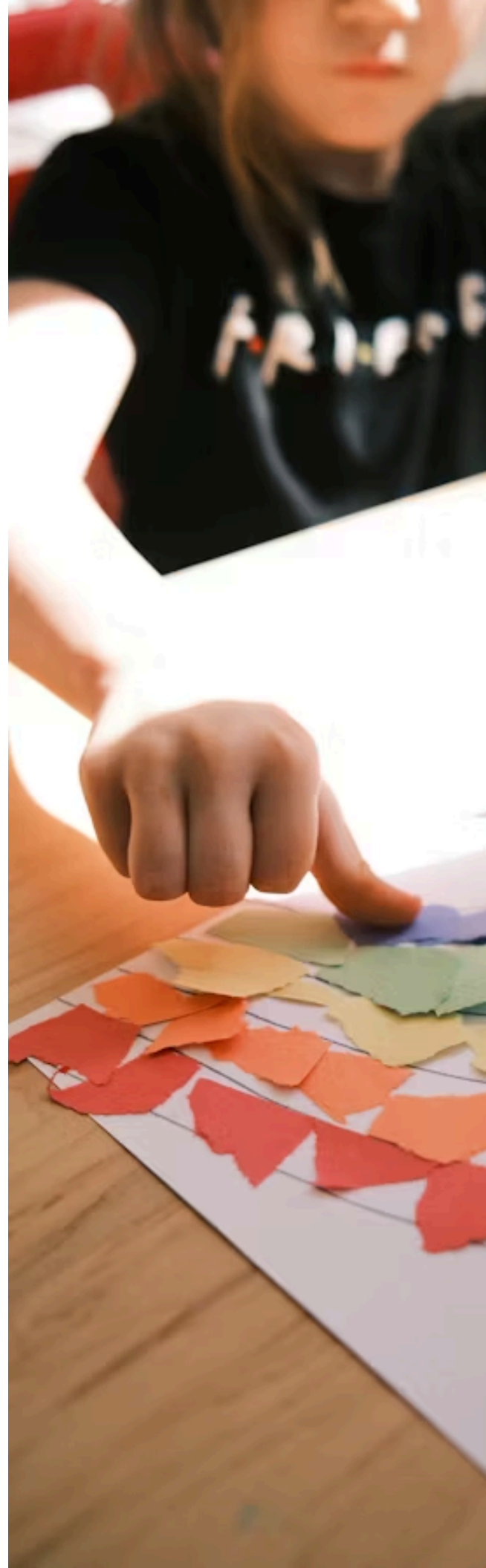
[59]Representative for Children and Youth (2023)

CONCLUSION

The qathet region has a **long and rich history of caring** about and taking action towards accessibility and inclusion. People with disabilities have been strong advocates for change, and have contributed to social, economic, and cultural opportunities in this region. Within programs and services, individual champions support participation and belonging for children with visible and invisible disabilities and their families.

Nonetheless, statistics show that there are many people living here and throughout the province who continue to be excluded based on their disability. Taking a whole-community approach makes a significant difference in people's lives, and fortunately, there is enthusiasm across City departments to work together. Addressing underlying (implicit) conditions can support the good work many individuals are already doing, by contributing to and formalizing strategic and **sustainable system-level change**.

With the Accessible BC Act and related local Accessibility Plan in place, now is an opportune time to address the systemic barriers that consistently get in the way of community belonging. Additionally, the City will soon be: renewing the Official Community Plan, developing a Community Engagement Strategy, and undergoing a comprehensive policy review. All of these efforts – if done through the lens of community belonging - could create structural support for the system-level change needed to **address ableism and advance participation and belonging** for children and others with disabilities in this region.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

The Community Belonging Team:

Janet Newbury, School of Child & Youth Care, University of Victoria
Alison Gerlach, School of Child & Youth Care, University of Victoria
Meriko Kubota, Healthy Public Policy Unit, Vancouver Coastal Health
Morgan Skinner, School of Child & Youth Care, University of Victoria
Tabatha Berggren, Project Advisor
Chianne Benckhuysen, Project Advisor
Frankie McWade, Project Advisor

Key informants and Policy Impact Forum participants:

Representatives from the following City departments:

- Administration
- Planning
- Transportation
- Communications
- Infrastructure
- Parks, Recreation, and Culture

As well as the following entities:

- Library
- Fire Rescue and Bylaw Enforcement
- RCMP

APPENDIX B: ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN - RESOURCES REVIEWED

External:

Accessible BC Act (2021)

BC Building Code (2024)

BC Transit Accessibility Plan

BC Transit Training Manual (2023)

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)

Creating the Conditions for Resilient Communities: A Public Health Approach to Emergencies – Public Health Agency of Canada (2023)

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (2019)

Early Learning and Child Care Act (2021)

EDI Wave 7 Community Profile Powell River School District – Human Early Learning Partnership (2020)

Health Equity Framework – Government of Nova Scotia (2023)

qathet Region Vital Signs Report - Powell River Community Foundation (2023)

Reframing Health Disparities in Rural America: A Communications Toolkit – The FrameWorks Institute & National Network of Public Health Institutes (2024)

Skye’s Legacy: A Focus on Belonging – Representative for Children and Youth (2021)

Still Left Out: Children and youth with disabilities in B.C. – Representative for Children and Youth (2023)

The Consequences of “Benevolent” Colonial Powers and Structural Inequities in the Implementation of Jordan’s Principle in Manitoba, Canada – Gerlach et al. (2024)

UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007)

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

Where All Children Belong: B.C. Inclusive Child Care Strategy B.C. – Ministry of Education and Child Care (2024)

Internal

Accessibility Gap Analysis Powell River Public Library – Rick Hansen Foundation (2023)

Accessibility Plan 2024-2026 – City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library & qathet Regional District

City of Powell River Website

Fall 2024 Active Living Guide – Powell River Parks, Recreation & Culture

Housing Implementation Plan – City of Powell River (2022)

Official Community Plan 2370 – City of Powell River (2014)

Official Community Plan Jurisdictional Scan and Gap Analysis (2024)

Official Community Plan Requirements

Powell River City Council's Strategic Priorities 2024-2026

Powell River Parks, Recreation & Culture Website

qathet Regional Housing Needs Report – qathet Regional District, City of Powell River & Tla'amin Nation (2021)

Recreation Complex Rating Feedback – Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification

Special Event Application Form – City of Powell River

Street Vending License Application Form – City of Powell River (2018)



APPENDIX C: EQUITY SITE VISIT PROMPTS

*Adapted from: <https://equiphealthcare.ca/files/2019/12/Equity-Walk-Through-Exercise-March-23-2018.pdf>

This exercise will prompt us to consider the extent to which physical, social, cultural, and virtual environments feel welcoming, culturally, physically, and emotionally safe, create a sense of belonging, and reduce inadvertent harms for children with disabilities and their family members. Put yourself in a community member's position and imagine what it might be like for them to be in this space. Consider intersectionality and pay particular attention to things in this environment that might create feelings of discomfort, stigma or feeling unsafe.

Physical spaces: These may be City-operated buildings such as the recreation complex or City Hall, outdoor spaces such as the playground at Willingdon Beach, or infrastructure like parking lots, buses, bus stops, sidewalks, crosswalks, and roads.

Social spaces: These may be City-operated functions or events that take place in a range of physical environments (which may or may not be run by the City). Municipal elections, Canada Day celebrations, Blackberry Festival, or City-funded neighbourhood block parties are examples of social spaces.

Virtual spaces: These may be City-operated websites, virtual events, or social media engagements that take place online. Examples include the City of Powell River website, or registration platforms for programs and services.

Equity Site Visit questionnaire

Approaching and entering a public space (physical, social and/or virtual)

As you approach and enter the site, imagine it's your first visit:

- How easy is it to get here and to find? How much effort have you had to make to get here?
- How do you enter? Is it clear how you are supposed to enter? Is it accessible to people with varying mobility needs?
- What do you notice as you approach the site? Enter the site? What does this look and feel like?
- Who is present? Speaking? What do you observe about people?
- What do you notice about people's facial expressions, their posture? What stands out for you?

- Who is communicating with who? How are people communicating? What is their tone of voice?
- Are people making eye contact? And if so, who is making eye contact with whom?
- What or who is missing?

Think about it:

- What is welcoming or unwelcoming as you enter?
- What tone does the signage convey? Who do you imagine decides the signage? What influences those decisions?
- Who would feel welcome or unwelcome here? Do you feel welcome here? Why or why not?
- What things or people in the space might deter people from engaging with who they encounter here?

First Contact at the site

Now imagine/observe/experience what the first contact is like with a staff member:

- Is there a reception/welcome/landing area? Where is it located? How do you know where it is and how you are supposed to go there? If contact is made by phone, is the telephone system easy to use? How often is the line busy? Are there other physical barriers between you and the staff member (eg. glass wall)?
- How are you greeted and by whom? Do you know the role of the person who greets you?
- What (explicit or implicit) messages do staff convey? Consider usual facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, words.
- What makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable in this first contact? Who would feel most comfortable? Are different people treated differently and if so in what way and by whom? Based on what?
- What questions are you asked and in what order? [Examine the questions on the intake form if there is one]. What does it draw attention to? From what does it detract attention?
- What or who is missing?

Think about it:

- When staff engage with you, do you think that they consider what is affecting people's ability to participate or access the service? What steps are taken to reduce potential barriers?
- What options exist for people who do not speak English as a first language? How are they communicated with?

- What considerations are given to age or physical ability? For example, how do staff speak with elderly community members or young children? Are people able to sit at reception or are they standing? Are people often put 'on hold'?
- How do staff engage with people who seem to have trouble focusing on questions being asked?

Waiting/public seating area (if applicable):

- If you had to describe the space to someone in two words, what would you say?
- What is the strongest feeling you have as you enter the waiting area?
- What does it look like? What is there for people to occupy waiting time?
- Are snacks, water and washrooms available and accessible? Are the waiting areas and washrooms clean?
- What kinds of chairs are available for people? Do they seem comfortable?
- What do you notice about the other people waiting here? Do they seem comfortable to you? Are they talking to one another? Notice who is helping people in the waiting area. Who is talking to them? Who is helping if someone appears distressed or uncomfortable? Do some people seem uncomfortable? Why?
- What do you see that is relevant to people's privacy, their identity and/or their needs?
- What or who is missing?

Think about it:

- Who would feel comfortable in this space? Who wouldn't? Why?
- How is privacy and confidentiality protected in this space?

Program or service space:

Once participating in the program or accessing the service:

- What is the layout of this site? How would you describe the feel? Warm, cold, cozy, sterile?
- How do you get to the site? Who goes with you? Who is allowed to be with you?
- Is a staff person always present? If so, what role do they play?
- Do you understand how decisions are made regarding who can participate? Is this based on order of arrival/registration or some other priority rating?
- What do you notice about when and how staff talk with community members? How does the encounter begin? End?
- What happens prior to and during any direct provision of service? What are staff doing and saying? What actions do staff take to ensure your privacy and comfort?

- Do you feel comfortable in this space? What might make you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?
- How does a program or service end? Do the staff check in with you? Do they provide opportunity for questions or feedback?
- What or who is missing?

Think about it:

- Is the site set-up to best serve community members or staff?
- Who would feel respected in this site? Who would not? Why?
- What small thing could be changed to make the site more welcoming?

Other considerations:

Bathrooms

- Are they available, accessible, well-signed and cleaned/provisioned regularly?
- Is a key needed?
- Is there a safe space to dispose of sharps? Is there a non-gendered bathroom?
- A baby-changing/nursing area?

Forms and documentation

- What language/terminology is used to describe community members?
- What does it draw attention to? What does it overlook?
- How does the form position you in relation to the service or service provider?
- How does it shape your perspective of power/authority?
- What do the forms guide you to say? Whose interests/concerns are prioritized?
- What does the form tell you about the program or service?
- Is the form available in multiple languages?
- What is missing?



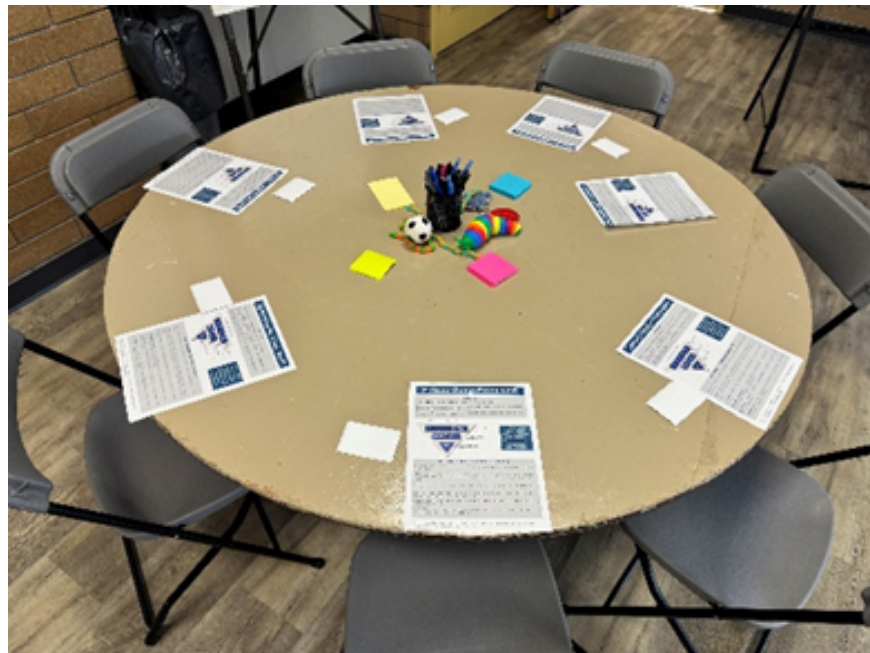
APPENDIX D: POLICY IMPACT FORUM AGENDA

10:00: Welcome and opening

- Coffee/refreshments
- Land acknowledgement
- Agenda
- Opening Circle/Introductions

10:30: Setting the stage

- Opening remarks by Lisa Bhopalsingh & Tabatha Berggren
- Conversation Agreements
- Overview of central research findings and questions (previously shared on pre-session webinar)



10:50: Small groups, question #1

- What do you think is already working well (successes)? Why was it needed? What was changed? How did it go?

11:25: Small groups, question #2

- What do you think is possible/within reach (low-hanging fruit)?

12:00: Lunch

12:45: Key concepts/orienting ourselves to the work

- Review systems-change visual (previously shared on webinar)
- Key concepts discussion

1:00: Small groups, question #3

- What would you like the work towards in the future? What do you think is needed in order to do that? (ongoing growth/change)

1:30: Share back

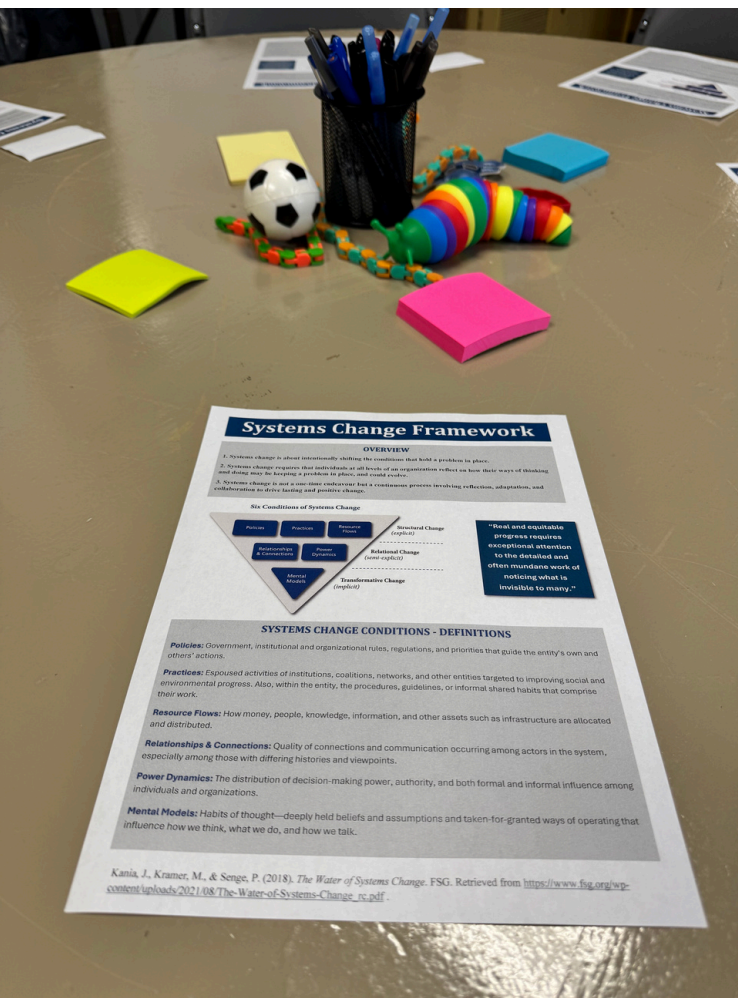
- Barriers and opportunities

1:50: Next steps

- What we heard in terms of recommendations
- Anticipated deliverables

2:00: Closing circle

- What are you taking forward with you into your work from today's conversation?
- What questions/ concerns/ comments remain?



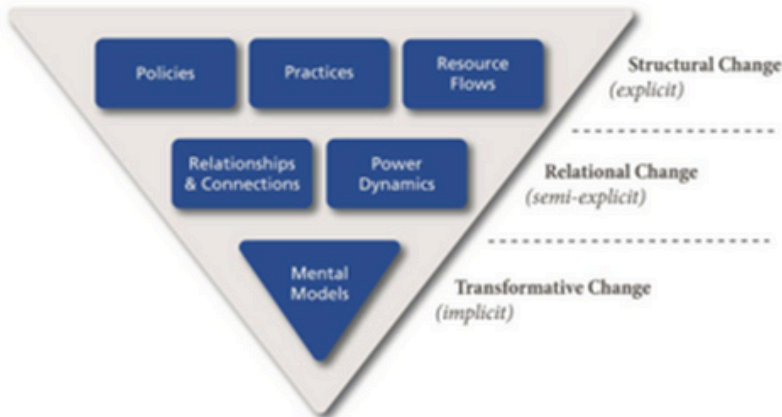
APPENDIX E: SYSTEMS CHANGE FRAMEWORK HANDOUT

Systems Change Framework

OVERVIEW

1. Systems change is about intentionally shifting the conditions that hold a problem in place.
2. Systems change requires that individuals at all levels of an organization reflect on how their ways of thinking and doing may be keeping a problem in place, and could evolve.
3. Systems change is not a one-time endeavour but a continuous process involving reflection, adaptation, and collaboration to drive lasting and positive change.

Six Conditions of Systems Change



“Real and equitable progress requires exceptional attention to the detailed and often mundane work of noticing what is invisible to many.”

SYSTEMS CHANGE CONDITIONS - DEFINITIONS

Policies: Government, institutional and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the entity’s own and others’ actions.

Practices: Espoused activities of institutions, coalitions, networks, and other entities targeted to improving social and environmental progress. Also, within the entity, the procedures, guidelines, or informal shared habits that comprise their work.

Resource Flows: How money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed.

Relationships & Connections: Quality of connections and communication occurring among actors in the system, especially among those with differing histories and viewpoints.

Power Dynamics: The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations.

Mental Models: Habits of thought—deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk.

Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018). *The Water of Systems Change*. FSG. Retrieved from https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Water-of-Systems-Change_rc.pdf.

REFERENCES

Albert, S.M. & Powell, R. M. (2022). Ableism in the child welfare system: Findings from a qualitative study. *Social Work Research*, 46(2), 141-152. doi:10.1093/swr/svac005

Carter, E. W. (2021). Dimensions of Belonging for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. In: Jones, J.L.; & Gallus, K.L. (eds.) *Belonging and Resilience in Individuals with Developmental Disabilities: Community and Family Engagement*. Issues in Family and Individual Resilience. Springer, Cham.

City of Powell River. (2014). Powell River Sustainable Official Community Plan Bylaw 2370. Retrieved 16 June 2025 from <https://powellriver.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/15308/?preview=72422>

City of Powell River. (2024). J-Scan and Gap Analysis Summary Report. Unpublished document.

City of Powell River, Powell River Public Library, qathet Regional District. (2024). Accessibility Plan 2024-2026. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from <https://www.qathet.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Accessibility-Plan-2024-2026.pdf>

Comox Valley Regional District. (2023). Comox Valley Local Government Accessibility Framework. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from <https://www.comoxvalleyrd.ca/media/15160>

Human Early Learning Partnership. (2020). EDI Wave 7 Community Profile Powell River School District. University of British Columbia, Faculty of Medicine, School of Population and Public Health. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from https://earlylearning.ubc.ca/app/uploads/2022/03/edi_w7_communityprofile_sd_47.pdf

Eirikson, E. (2021). The role of child and youth care practitioners in promoting belonging for youth with disabilities. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*, 34(3), 40-50.

Gerlach, A.J.; Sinha, V.; Lach, L.; Balfour, M.; & Flett, M.E. (2024). The consequences of "benevolent" colonial powers and structural inequities in the implementation of Jordan's Principle in Manitoba, Canada. *Sage J*.20(3):494-504. doi:10.1177/11771801241255144

Government of Canada (2025). Guide on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Terminology. Retrieved May 29, 2025 from <https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/publications/equite-diversite-inclusion-equity-diversity-inclusion-eng>

Kania, J.; Kramer, M.; & Senge, P. (2018). *The Water of Systems Change*. FSG. Published online. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from https://www.fsg.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Water-of-Systems-Change_rc.pdf

Live Educate Transform Society. (2025). Disability Awareness Tip Sheet. Unpublished Document. <https://www.connectwithlets.org/>

National Collaborating Center for Determinants of Health. (2013). A guide to community engagement frameworks for action on the social determinants of health and health equity. Published online. Retrieved 16, 2025 from <https://nccdh.ca/resources/entry/a-guide-to-community-engagement-frameworks>

Newbury, J. & Gerlach, A. (2022). "I just want to see my child thrive": Parents pushing for equity and inclusion in the child care system in BC. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from <https://inclusionbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/InclusiveChildcare2.pdf>

Prince, M. (2016). Inclusive employment for Canadians with disabilities: Toward a new policy framework and agenda. IRPP Study. (60):1-28. <https://irpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/study-no60.pdf>

Powell River Community Foundation. (2023). Qathet Region's Vital Signs. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from <https://prcommunityfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2022-2023-PRCF-Vital-Signs-Report-Final-compressed.pdf>

Province of BC. (2019). Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. Retrieved 10 October, 2024 from <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/19044>

Province of BC. (2021). Accessible British Columbia Act. Retrieved October 10, 2024 from <https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/21019>

Province of BC, Ministry of Housing. (2024). British Columbia Building Code.

Public Health Agency of Canada. (2023). Creating the Conditions for Resilient Communities: A Public Health Approach to Emergencies. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/corporate/publications/chief-public-health-officer-reports-state-public-health-canada/state-public-health-canada-2023/report/report.pdf>

qathet Regional District, City of Powell River, Tla'amin Nation. (2021). qathet Regional Housing Needs Report. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from https://www.tlaaminnation.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Housing-Needs-Report-Final_April-26-2021.pdf

Representative for Children and Youth. (2021). Skye's Legacy: A Focus on Belonging. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/RCY_Skyes-Legacy_REVISSED-FINAL_21-June-2021.pdf

Representative for Children and Youth. (2023). Still Left Out: Children and Youth with Disabilities in B.C. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from https://rcybc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/RCY_Still-Left-Out_Nov2023_Final_10-Nov-2023.pdf

Silva, D.S.; Smith, M.J.; Upshur, R.E.G.(2013). Disadvantaging the Disadvantaged: When Public Health Policies and Practices Negatively Affect Marginalized Populations. *Can J Public Health Rev Can Santé Publique*. 104(5):e410-e412. Retrieved May 29, 2025 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/canajpublhealth.104.5.e410>

Turner, E. (2025). Carter explores what it means to be a community of belonging for people with disabilities. Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from <https://notables.vkcsites.org/2019/05/carter-explores-facets-of-true-belonging-inclusion-of-people-with-disabilities-in-our-communities/>

United Nations (2007). United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Retrieved 16 June, 2025 from https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Ch_IV_15.pdf

