
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Compassionate connections, supported communities, planning for future generations: The experience of a cross-sector early childhood summit in Northern BC to inform integration of care

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Erica Koopmans¹, Caroline Sanders, Lisa Provencher, Lauren Irving

1: University of Northern BC, Canada

Introduction

The early years (ages 0-8) is a critical stage of childhood development, supporting families during this time requires collective efforts across sectors. Siloed streams limit our ability to meet families' needs thereby missing opportunities to positively influence childhood outcomes. In northern British Columbia a small group of professionals completed training in Compassionate Systems Leadership (CSL). The CSL approach focuses on developing shared knowledge and cultural awareness to strengthen capacity to effectively progress systems change initiatives. Applying CSL with a wider community across northern BC allowed the team to examine how all partners could address silos in early years services.

Aims Objectives Theory or Methods

A first step in applying CSL is to be culturally sensitive and actively relational with professionals working within early years services. In February 2021 we hosted a summit in northern BC, bringing together professionals across child and family serving sectors. The objectives were to find common ground, celebrate local work supporting children, and build on understanding priorities in the early years. Our five day event wove together Indigenous and western pedagogies, highlighting northern First Nation voices and cultural practices. The event used a hybrid model of pre-recorded asynchronous sessions with a concluding full day virtual workshop.

Highlights or Results or Key Findings

Early years services were described as patchy and inconsistent. Critically, the burden of weaving together supports falls to primary caregivers, and across sectors it was acknowledged this created gaps in comprehensive early years services. Many communities worked hard to lessen fragmentation and participants described how relational ways of being helped co-create partnered supports. Participants acknowledged that working compassionately facilitated local initiatives which positively impacted the early years, yet gaps remained including the absence of health's engagement in work across the region. There was consensus that a holistic, culturally respectful, multidisciplinary team, which includes primary health care was needed to support the health and

development needs of young children. Discussion focused on expanding hub models of care which exist in select northern communities. A clear message from the summit was a willingness for cross-sector collaboration, and the development of an integrated approach to support families in the early years is required.

Conclusions

In facilitating a safe space that allowed for vulnerability and relational ways of engaging across sectors we discovered commitment, interest, and a willingness for those present to consider new ideas and partnerships that would allow for greater integration of early years services in northern BC's rural contexts.

Implications for applicability/transferability sustainability and limitations

Shifting from siloed work to integration across services is complex. Relational ways of being helped providers with this complexity, creating space to learn from each other, begin co-creation, and enhance partnerships. This was evident in early years services but is likely to apply in other service areas seeking integration.