



2022

**Direct Service Provider Feedback on Assets
and Barriers/Gaps for Children and Youth**



**Out of School Time
Collaborative**

Introduction

The following is a summary of 12 one-on-one conversations held with a variety of settlement and non-settlement services providers in late 2021. Some service providers are funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), some serve newcomer children and youth through other funding sources, and some didn't serve newcomers at all. Funding for these agencies and their programs come from a wide array of funders and donors. There are three main sections in this document, 1. Assets; 2. Barriers/Gaps Children and Youth Experience; and 3. Barriers/Gaps in Service Delivery. To help sort the feedback, under each section the assets and barriers are grouped under topics that I felt were the most important given the context. However, an argument could be made that a particular issue would be more appropriately be place somewhere else.

This information has been collected by REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities for the purposes of improving child and youth programs in Edmonton. REACH is grateful to IRCC for providing funding for this research.

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1. Assets



Child and Youth Programs

- Youth programs and youth serving organizations with a mandate to serve youth are assets because they offer programs tailored to the specific needs of youth.
- Free activities funded by IRCC are important. Many child and youth programs in the city require a membership fee or other prohibitive costs for families i.e., music lessons, team sport.
- Daily programming is an asset where kids have routine and can develop a wide range of new skills in a safe environment i.e., sport, nutrition, leadership, social norms.
- Programs that include crisis intervention and have trauma informed staff are an asset. This is important for all child and youth programs, but is especially important for children and youth at higher risk of experiencing family conflict, mental health concerns, and behavioral issues.
- The RAJO model is an asset in Edmonton that could be an opportunity to develop further.
- Tutoring and homework support is in place through many organizations. This makes it easy for children and youth to find the right support for them.
- Mentorship and leadership programs are assets for children and youth, however these terms sometimes are conflated.
- The ESWIS program is supporting newcomer children, youth, and families who experience challenges beyond their basic settlement needs, especially children and youth with underlying health and academic conditions such as functioning challenges, physical, mental, cognitive, and learning disabilities.



Diversity

- Diverse people, programs, and services are assets including but not limited to settlement and non-settlement afterschool programs, community social workers, Civida (housing), the C5 Hub, AHC, CSS, EMCN, and the Green Shack program run by the City of Edmonton.
- Ethnocultural youth programming helps youth develop sense of belonging. Ethnocultural communities have maintained support for one another by finding ways to connect through barbeques and community events.
- Newcomer families are an asset to communities and the economy. A newcomer's will to be successful is an asset.



Family and Natural Supports

- Friends, families, peers, religious groups, libraries, community leagues, schools are all assets. Parents are especially a significant asset to service providers.
- Schools that allow experts in the community (non-profits) to intervene in difficult situations with vulnerable children and youth. Allowing this intervention also helps to build trust and improve relationships between the school and service providers.
 - Having a non-profit come in the school can help to surface and identify underlying issues. The non-profit can also assist with identifying appropriate supports for the client.
 - Helpful to have open dialogue with the school and to point out the progress the child is making.
- Complex cases team and EWSIS both out of EMCN are important because they can work together to support the family as a whole.
- There is incredible work happening around social connection at community centers, mosques, temples, and places of faith. Social connection generally doesn't have supportive infrastructure, but this is a preventative aid that reduces the load for mental health professionals.
- Reconnecting people and connecting back to culture creates a sense of community. When people are disconnected it leads to other issues like mental and physical health.

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Access

- Recreation centers are a great resource for service providers and families, but access is not always optimal—more could be done.
- Online programs help to remove transportation barriers for programs and professional development, and allow for broader reach to other provinces, territories, and countries.
- The collective efforts made at the beginning of the pandemic to shift programs online has developed the internal infrastructure for agencies to switch from in-person to online easier for service providers and families.



Training

- The annual Out of School Time (OST) Conference is valuable for non-profits, especially for those who hire additional staff in for summer programs.



Partnerships

- Collaboration with other service providers to support clients and the ability to provide a warm hand off of clients to one another is important to ensuring a client remains connected to services.
- Edmonton Police Services and Children Services are helpful to work with.
- The schools and other service providers. Everyone is there to make things better. How organizations make use of the assets is important.
- Justice system navigator refers people in crisis to other resources for crisis. Resources flow by word of mouth.
- City of Edmonton has good newsletters with good information.
- Edmonton Public Library is an excellent resource.



Persons Living with Disabilities

- Alberta Ability Network has services for youth 16 and over.
- EmployAbilities, YES, YMCA, BGCBigs, EMCN ESWIS, and Centre High caters to youth with disabilities.
- Norquest has a transitions program for people with disabilities.
- Transitions and assistance programs in schools for people with living with disabilities where children and youth can receive more support.
- Gateway Association, ICE, Family Support Solutions, Chrysalis, Elves, Adaptabilities are all great resources for parents and youth.

2. Barriers/Gaps Children and Youth Experience



Meeting kids where they are at

- Need mentors to support youth employment and opportunities where youth can meet with individuals whom they might not have otherwise had the opportunity.
- Need to meet children and youth in their situations and address problems in families early on.



Sustainability, Cost, and Access

- Youth need better access to programming opportunities.
- Need sustainability for children and youth programming. Sometimes funding only lasts a few years and then the program is gone.
- Weekend activities often have a prohibitive cost.
- Transportation is often a barrier even with afterschool programs. Parents have concerns with afterschool programs because of transportation. Factors that contribute to transportation issues include vehicle costs for the parents, time off of work to drive children, safety concerns on public transit and long travel times without direct routes for children.
- Canadian parents are very busy. Immigrants often have more children than Canadian born people. The more children, the more difficult and costly transport is.
- Parents want their children to be successful and lots of academic support is needed. Extra academic programs are needed. Most newcomers want to be involved but need support by people who are already in Canada.

- Children and youth need more access to safe spaces with mentorship and support that is targeted and focused.
- Most high-risk youth and intensive support programs are in downtown or in the north where it can be difficult to access.
- Some kids don't have devices or adequate devices (i.e., using an iPhone) to access online programs. Other factors that inhibit participation are low internet speeds, no printer to print worksheets, and having to share devices with siblings.
- DATS and other forms of transportation is a gap for people living with a disability.
- Recreation centers are great but can be difficult for families and services providers to access.
- Resources and programs are concentrated in central Edmonton, which is difficult for families and youth to access if they don't live close to central Edmonton.
- Families do not understand systems and often need a significant amount of help with accessing government supports or understanding school systems.
- If Canadian language barriers are present for the child or youth and there are no provisions to accommodate the child, then English and French proficiency is a barrier for newcomers to participate in programs.



Collaboration

- While schools are valuable for community originations to support children, youth, and their families, some schools do not know they can, or don't feel the need to access community organizations for help. When schools allow experts in the community (non-profits) to intervene in difficult situations with vulnerable children and youth., conflict can be delt with in a way that all members of the family and the school staff feel safe and respected. This also helps to build trust and improve relationships between the school and service providers.
 - Having a non-profit come in the school can help to surface and identify underlying issues. The non-profit can also assist with identifying appropriate supports for the client.
 - Helpful to have open dialogue with the school and to point out the progress the child is making.

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Community, culture, and connectivity

- Connection to culture is important for all children and youth. Culture is especially important for Indigenous children and youth and more opportunities to connect to and that integrate culture are needed.
- Systems do not consider culturally rooted kinship care for maintain cultural connections for children who leave their families.
- Youth have family responsibilities that often prevent them from participating in programs. Responsibilities include taking care of the house, siblings, or getting part-time jobs to contribute financially to the household.
- Mental wellbeing needs to be prioritized: are children and youth happy, satisfied, and comfortable? Do they feel like they fit in?
 - Isolation needs to be addressed.
- Programs that are too targeted or specific can lead to youth feeling that they don't belong.
- Intergenerational conflict between parents and youth can be a challenge. Parents need to be educated about what a successful Canadian youth looks like versus a successful youth from the culture they're coming from.
- Apprehensiveness from newcomers to be involved in social events because of language barriers. Families have a cultural richness that can be shared but they are hesitant to share because of the language barriers.



Safety and Wellbeing

- Environments in programs and schools should be safe and inclusive.
- Pandemic restrictions have caused an increase of behavioral issues because kids are not used interacting in person with one another. With increases in behavioral issues, more staff are needed to accommodate to provide the same quality. Most agencies do not have the funding for more staff.

- Many youth are struggling with mental health, especially in long stretches of isolation caused by Covid-19.
 - Increases in disclosures, including sexual and physical abuse, has been noted by many and some are noticing the gaps in how long youth/families need to wait for services.
- Many families with unresolved trauma were confronted by their trauma during pandemic restrictions without access to needed mental health support.
- When youth are reporting to police, there is some sensitivity issues around topic and culture.
- Discrimination and marginalization (within schools, administration, teachers etc. amplified in positions of power) have a negative impact on the wellbeing of the client which affects their behavior and sense of identity.
- Youth who are not in a good home life or environment (i.e., foster care) can have challenges graduating. This impacts their future earnings and quality of life.
- Mental health issues are difficult to detect especially because they are invisible. It takes a long time for people to get support they need. Wait time to access affordable counselling is a barrier.
- Can be difficult to find a match for a client for mental health supports. With limited outlets for affordable mental health, it can be difficult for a client to find a match. Add on long wait times for first visit a clinician, exacerbates the problem, and takes even longer for a client to get the help they need.
- Mental health and anxiety in youth is more prevalent, youth don't have coping skills. Some kids are in bad situations, dealing with death. Dealing with loss and chaos.
- In the Indigenous population, if they aren't Treaty, they don't have mental health coverage. If a child has status, every Band has their own benefits. Metis status also doesn't have the same benefits. Youth can go through their band and be referred to someone who is familiar with the needs. People who don't have Treaty status can apply but barriers exist to getting documents.
- Children and youth experience a lack of sexual health leading to high rates of STI's, pregnancy, which can also lead to dropping out of school.

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- Substance abuse issues are prevalent. Children, youth, and families need more education.
- Drunk driving awareness is needed. Youth don't understand the long-term consequences. Sometimes this behavior is normalized from their family.
- LGBTQ+ children and youth need identity resources, general and mental health support.
- LGBTQ+ children and youth need to be connected into community support and safety supports. When a child or youth comes out, they often don't have established networks to rely on and they are often not emotionally equipped to deal with situations. Coping mechanisms are needed for these youth especially.
- For many LGBTQ+ youth who come out later in their youth, they often later describe feeling like they are experiencing puberty all over again. Despite this, youth often age out of the services they especially need during this time. To aid LGBTQ+ youth, the age of youth needs to be extended.
- Children or youth who identify as LGBTQ+ can have difficulty accessing LGBTQ+ specific programming because they might not be out yet to their parents, or they feel it is otherwise unsafe for them. To mitigate this risk, all programs should include education and resources for LGBTQ+ children and youth. In addition, healthy relationships programming should have a LGBTQ+ component to normalize the topic and by making it part of the conversation.



Income Insecurity and Employment

- Income insecurity has implication for many things including accessing opportunities, food security, housing.
- Employment is difficult for older youth (post-secondary and up). It is difficult to find jobs that pay well.
- Youth often seek part time employment to support the family which takes away from their time to participate in programs.
- Amount of income to sustain a large family is not do-able on a one-person income.



Persons Living with Disabilities

- Need more supports/resources for children and families where there is someone living with a disability. Specifically with navigating systems, especially in the pre-diagnosis phase. Siblings don't have appropriate support.
- Transportation and access to services is an issue for families where a child or youth has a disability. It would be beneficial for families if there were centers where someone with a disability could go for everything they might need and receive support in accessing.
- Diagnosis can be difficult to receive. Diagnostic programs have long wait lists, some spanning years, which slows down how fast someone can begin to receive help.
- Supports don't always exist in schools to be able to offer support. There are specific schools that have funding for those children. A child who needs this support can end up spending a long time on a yellow bus (an hour one way) to get to the school with the program. It can be difficult for a child or youth to get into a school with specialized support if they don't live in the school's catchment area.
- Schools don't always know what to do with a child who has a disability or what to recommend to a family.
- Many cultures don't know how to advocate for their child if they have a disability or if some behaviour problem is happening at school.
- Daycare providers are not equipped either to identify, flag, or support kids who might have a disability.
- There are no centralized services for children and youth who needs support.
- Services should be in simple language and translated.
- Families need education about what disability means in Canada, what to look for, and where to go for help.

3. Barriers/Gaps in Service Delivery



Sustainability

- Additional resources are needed including money, people, incentives to be able to increase capacity in organizations offering programs. Community centers, mosques, and temples are all doing great work with families, but programs offered through religious sites have difficulty obtaining funding. For example, a homework club offered through a mosque might not be eligible for funding, but the same program offered through a non-profit usually is.
- Measuring impact is often needed to prove a program is effective and therefore worthy of continued funding but measuring impact can be difficult. It takes time and funding, and only covers a certain period in the child or youth's life. Evaluation doesn't usually get followed up on later in youth's life.
 - Don't know if programs are truly effective because of the inability to follow a group of children throughout their life, and the ethical restrictions of not having a control group.
- Finding and retaining qualified staff can be difficult. Investment hasn't been made into why people serving children and youth are valuable.
- Taking care of the people who do the work is hard. Not enough, pay, benefits, etc. Not having enough funding for admin dollars to fund staff positions.



Holistic Approach

- There is a siloed approach to care. Supports follow to a particular age, but don't follow families. The needs of the child need to be considered with the needs of the family. What is affecting the child is also affecting the parent.
- Need early investment in children and youth to prevent future issues.

- There is need for high-intensity holistic interventions. Invest in youth in their community, with an anti-racist perspective to meet equity seeking groups where they are.
- Educational programs (i.e., certificate or ticket) are needed that do not require a high education level.
- Need to work with more than just the children and youth. Organizations need to work with parents, teachers, social workers, and others in their life.
- Parents can be distrustful of sharing information (not only a newcomer issue), so they might not share their child's information that could be in the best interest of the child. This can happen from negative experiences with other governments (Canadian or otherwise), or non-profits. Trauma will also exacerbate this distrust. If the trust of a parent is damaged, it takes a long time to recover.



Partnerships and Collaboration

- Free counselling, intervention, sexual and physical abuse, mental health services are all very busy and overworked. With not enough investment in these services, agencies and families turn to police instead of crisis support.
- With the pandemic restrictions, organizations were not able to work in schools which impacts attendance.
- Pandemic has impacted ability to support to capacity. Every program and building has their own guidelines for Covid-19 restrictions. Schools to school is different.
- Lack of shared, agreed upon, and standardized metrics and data to measure the impact of programs makes it difficult for service providers to show their value, collaborative value, and determine how the child and youth sector as a whole can improve.

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Training

- Need professional development opportunities for service providers working with youth who have disabilities.
- Staffing is an issue, not enough qualified staff to hire, high vacancy rates. Employees can keep trading up. Organizations spend ample time and resources spent training staff.
- Understanding the background of the client, especially pre and post migration experiences. If left unknown, it could send the client down the wrong path with school barriers.
- Understanding culture is important.
- Schools need to understand and accommodate for needs of vulnerable newcomer children and youth. Needing a system in place. Can otherwise lead to discrimination and marginalization. Teachers come with best intentions and try to help, but they can't help if they don't understand the history, culture, or identities of the child or youth.