

A critical conversation about child and youth wellbeing

February 24, 2026

Royal Canadian Legion, Langford, BC

WHAT WE HEARD



On February 24, 2026, community leaders, educators, and service providers from across the West Shore and Sooke region gathered to share insights and provide input on the wellbeing of youth in the region.

BC's Child and Youth Representative, Island Health, School District 62, and the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria were invited to share their unique insights on existing gaps, successes, and the potential for a more coordinated regional approach to supporting youth well-being.

Through a moderated panel discussion and table-top conversations, participants explored opportunities to strengthen cross-sector coordination and collaboration. Together, they identified practical ways to enhance the systems and services that impact youth and their families—particularly those facing systemic barriers across the region.

WHAT DID WE HEAR?

Four panelists shared perspectives shaped by their unique sectors and areas of practice:

Dr. Reka Gustafson, Vice President, Population & Public Health & Chief Medical Health Officer, Island Health emphasized the importance of focusing on the early years, highlighting the critical role of prevention and

early intervention. She underscored the need to intentionally include family supports in both planning and implementation efforts.

Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth, Child & Youth Representative encouraged service providers to adopt a shift in “mental models,” moving toward a strengths-based approach to community work. This perspective centers on recognizing and building on the inherent assets, resilience, and capacity of youth, families, and communities.

Paul Block, Superintendent/CEO, Sooke School District echoed the importance of prioritizing the early years and stressed the need for stronger cross-sector collaboration. He noted that individual systems are currently operating at/beyond capacity, and that improved coordination is essential to reduce pressure on educators and to better support youth and families.

Dr. Shelley Cook, Executive Director, Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, emphasized creating systems that work for everyone and making better use of existing data. She noted that many challenges are already well understood, and the priority should be acting on what is known rather than reinventing processes.

“This is about organizations supporting each other in the work.” Jennifer Charlesworth, CYR



Part 2 Participants were asked to collaborate in table groups to answer two questions:

1. Based on what was shared by the panelists, what are our priorities?
2. Where could realistic progress be made?

Q1 Themes emerging from tables

The foundations of lifelong wellbeing are laid from conception through age five. Our future collective approach should focus on:

- Invest in early childhood development
- Strengthen family support systems
- Create opportunities to develop skills and supportive relationships with peers and mentors
- Improve access to high-quality early education and care
- Rebalance digital use and real-world connection

We recognize that early intervention is the most effective point of impact.



Q2 Themes emerging from tables

Shift from isolated, reactive systems toward a connected regional ecosystem rooted in support, collaboration, courage, and shared accountability.

By changing mindsets and working as one region, we create stronger outcomes for children, families, and communities. Let's focus on:

- Shifting mindsets—from blame to support
- Rethinking the value of collaboration
- Being braver in our approach
- Contributing to a regional approach
- Using schools and community spaces more effectively
- Reducing competition for service supports
- Integrating transportation into access planning
- Leveraging Indigenous and Métis knowledge and strengths

**We succeed not as separate organizations
— but as one region working together.**