COMMUNITY LIVING BRITISH COLUMBIA

COMMUNITY INCLUSION SERVICES REVIEW REPORT

Executive Summary

April 2025

Executive Summary

The Community Inclusion Services Review Project is a study of Community Living BC-funded services commonly referred to as Day Programs and Community Inclusion services for adults with developmental disabilities. The project was initiated by CLBC CEO Ross Chilton and led by Vancouver Island Regional Director Fred Ford.

The purpose of the project was to identify:
- Best Practices in Community Inclusion supports and services
- Recommendations for improving Community Inclusion supports and services

It is also intended that following the review and analysis of findings and recommendations, CLBC will propose next steps to support services that reflect best practices and provincial commitments to inclusion, partnership and Indigenous reconciliation.

The project began with conversations with selected leaders in the field from all sectors – self advocates, family members and professionals and meetings with members of provincial networks such as the Self Advocate Leadership Network, the Family Support Institute and the BC CEO network. The purpose of the project was discussed and refined. Advice was received on how individuals, services and communities should be approached. People were also asked what concerns people might have about such a project and what questions should be expected and addressed "up front".

In keeping with these preliminary discussions and CLBC's strategic priorities, it was determined that the project would begin with visits to rural, northern and Indigenous communities and would eventually include visits to all regions, rural areas, urban centers and the broad spectrum of types of Day Programs and Community Inclusion services.

In October 2023, CLBC officially announced the project with an overview of the intended purpose and process, a set of questions and answers and an invitation to contact the project leader and provide input in a variety of ways.

The project included:
- Research about historical, legal and policy foundations of CI services
- Research about previous reviews of Day Programs and CI services in BC
- Visits to Day Programs and Community Inclusion services across the province
- Conversations and interviews with individuals participating in services and with family members and service providers
- University of British Columbia (UBC) Canadian Institute for Inclusion and Citizenship literature review of Community Inclusion services

Program visits were scheduled with Community Inclusion services and typically consisted of tours of sites, informal conversations or interviews with program participants, discussions with managers and staff and sometimes meetings with family members of

program participants. Conversations and meetings were sometimes held separately with specific groups (program participants, family members or staff), sometimes all together and in other variations. Meetings with CLBC staff were held in several communities. CLBC staff were typically not involved in program visits and community meetings – a decision based on concern that some individuals might not speak as freely about issues of concern with funders present, though this was not a concern in all communities.

Conversations during program visits typically began with informal introductions and discussions about how individuals came to choose or attend the program, what activities they are involved in, enjoy or would like added, what they like about the program and improvements needed. A standard set of questions was used to guide conversations.

Group meetings and formal community conversations included discussions about what Day Program and Community Inclusion services are, the various kinds of activities in Community Inclusion programs, and discussion about what is working well and what improvements are needed. Discussions later in the project included conversations about emerging themes and practice standards. Visual recordings were completed for 13 Community Conversations and several other meetings.

The review included visits to 41 communities and more than 80 program sites, conversations with more than 250 program participants, more than 150 family members and 250 Community Inclusion service staff. Thirteen formal community meetings were attended by approximately 300 participants. Seven self-advocate group meetings including 65 participants and four community council meetings were held, as well as meetings with CLBC's Board and CLBC's Editorial Board.

Review participants described *Day Programs* as Monday to Friday, 9 to 3 services that are facility-based while *Community Inclusion services* were described as more flexible, individualized and community-based. Despite these basic differences, there is wide variation in practice within both categories with respect to individualization of services, activities, use of facilities and beliefs about social inclusion and community involvement.

Program participants who shared their feelings about satisfaction with services generally reported feeling positive about and happy with activities and support. Some reported choosing their activities based on their own preferences and goals and some shared booklets and other documents that show their goals and preferred activities. In some programs, activities and activity calendars are planned only by staff. Participants and service providers also described how individual goals and interests were incorporated into schedules where staff supported groups of individuals to participate in activities that are either facility based, community based or a combination.

Frequency of participation varies greatly, ranging from individuals attending Day Programs five days per week to individuals with a few hours per week of support. Some participants have a varied week of activities, attending more than one Day Program or Community Inclusion service, participating in jobs and spending time in community on their own.

Types of activities offered include social and recreational activities, skill development, assistance with daily living activities, community and cultural activities and activities related to employment. The report highlights *grey areas* of work – unpaid labour, volunteer work, some social enterprises and other practices that need further review and analysis.

Indigenous agencies and non-Indigenous agencies serving Indigenous participants identified approaches involving individuals in valued Indigenous cultural activities and events. Innovations include person-centred planning through an Indigenous lens.

Relationships and friendships are highly valued and many program participants have attended Community Inclusion programs with the same people for many years. Some individuals and some families indicated they would like more meaningful activities and greater variety. Some report limited choices in service options or did not recall how they came to be participants in the program they attend. Some individuals indicated that they want to pursue work, but not all agencies explore work goals or pathways to employment.

Perceptions about the meaning of social inclusion and the degree of community participation vary greatly, with some programs being exclusively or almost exclusively community-based or conversely, facility based. Some service providers and family members felt strongly that individuals should only be in the community individually or in small groups whereas other service providers take large groups of individuals with disabilities to malls and other community venues. Facilities range from being accessible, well equipped and well located in the community to being more isolated and inaccessible.

Individuals, families and service providers expressed both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the types and levels of support provided to participants and with the ways in which funding is provided and contracts are developed and administered.

Individuals' satisfaction most often related to feelings of safety and belonging, engaging with friends and staff and having a sense of purpose - "going to work". Family and caregiver satisfaction related to feeling that individuals were safe and engaged in meaningful activity - and importantly, to having a break from caregiving to allow them opportunities to work or meet other commitments. Conversely, dissatisfaction often related to concerns about insufficient support hours, unstable or unskilled staffing and inadequate responses to individuals' activity interests or needs. Dissatisfaction with CLBC processes include concerns about timely access to service, adequate levels of funding and support, complicated contracting and reporting requirements and inadequate information sharing about the needs of prospective program participants as shared in "profile" documents.

Chaotic and sometimes traumatic transitions from youth services to adult services were frequently reported and were consistently identified as putting the well-being of individuals and families at risk. Families and others liken the transition experience to "falling off a cliff" at age 18 or 19, when supports that sustained them when their family member was in school, are not replaced by comparable supports for young adults.

Structural factors such as poverty, the lack of universal access to information, technology and infrastructure and the impacts of colonization and the legacy of residential schools

emerged as overarching influences limiting access to appropriate, needed supports for Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals with diverse abilities, especially in rural, remote and Indigenous communities.

A consultation related to the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services' *Journey to Belonging* reform framework indicates that the challenges to provide adequate Community Inclusion services in BC are mirrored in Canada's most populous province.

Fourteen themes emerged from community visits and conversations. Ultimately, these were refined as five Best Practice categories recommended as a basis for Practice Standards:

1. ***Choice and Person-Centred Supports***

2. ***Meaningful Activity and Social Inclusion***

3. ***Pathways to Employment***

4. ***Service Quality Outcomes and Monitoring***

5. ***Organizational Capacity and Leadership***

Based on community input and research conducted for this review and in consideration of provincial commitments to inclusion, partnership and Indigenous reconciliation, the following recommendations are presented for consideration, refinement and implementation:

1. **Develop and Implement Community Inclusion Service Policy and Standards**
   a. Develop and implement CLBC Community Inclusion Service Policy
   b. Develop Best Practices and Best Practice Guide for:
      i. Choice and Person-Centred Supports Standard
      ii. Meaningful Activity and Social Inclusion Standard
      iii. Pathways to Employment Standard
      iv. Service Quality Outcomes and Monitoring Standard
      v. Organizational Capacity and Leadership Standard

2. **Make the Shift to Community Inclusion Service Renewal**
   a. Involve self-advocates and all interested parties in the process to renew CI
   b. Develop and implement Regional and Provincial plans to renew CI services
   c. Support initiatives to transform services and explore new CI service models
   d. Develop and implement communities of practices for key CI Service issues

3. **Address Structural and Systemic Barriers to Inclusive Services**
   a. Identify and implement initiatives related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action in Community Inclusion Services
   b. Identify and implement CLBC practices and outcome measures that support CI policy and practice standards
   c. Support equal access to the internet and cell service