

Research Brief – Inclusive Child Care in Northern BC



Produced in partnership between the
**Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents with
Special Needs: UNBC Task Force on Substance Abuse**
and the
**Caledonia Branch of the Early Childhood Educators of
British Columbia**



Background

Inclusive child care seeks to include children with special needs with their typically developing peers in child care settings. Inclusive Child Care is known as Supported Child Care in the province of British Columbia. Supported Child Care replaced the Special Needs Day Care program (SNDC). The decision to make the transition away from SNDC to inclusive child care started in the early 1990's. The Supported Child Care program was phased in over a four year period (1995-1999).

Supported Child Care Program

SCC has three main philosophies:

- All families should have the same child care choices,
- Some children need extra supports,
- Child care settings must be supported to ensure inclusion.

Extra supports for child care settings can include training, consultation, and intermittent or ongoing additional staffing. Supports available to child care programs through SCC depend on levels determined by the Ministry, and are based on the requirements of the child.

Research findings

Data was collected through surveys at child care centres throughout northern British Columbia, and through three focus groups held centrally in Prince George, BC. From these surveys and focus groups we found a number of commonalities regarding what were considered the successes and challenges of Support Child Care in BC's north.

Teamwork: SCC is a multidisciplinary program, it involves early childhood educators, therapists and specialists, SCC support workers and coordinators, and parents. The key to SCC success is collaboration and information sharing between all the different parties involved.

Education: Educated staff is critical to the success of delivering inclusive child care. Therefore, educational opportunities should be considered integral to the SCC program. Currently, education is delivered separately though colleges and local or regional professional development opportunities, and is often difficult to obtain in northern and rural communities.

Workload: Adding a child with special needs to a child care setting adds a lot more work to a setting with an already demanding workload. However, child care staff are committed to the concept of inclusive child care.

Information for this brief was garnered from *Inclusive Child Care in Northern British Columbia: An Inquiry into the Successes and Challenges*. Please contact the UNBC Task Force for a copy of the full report and references.

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Parents: It is important to recognize and work with parent's goals for their children and ensure parents are not left out of the interdisciplinary team.

Environmental factors: It is essential to look at the spectrum of child's needs (play, interaction, equipment, and storage) for environmental factors – not just accessible bathrooms, ramps, and entranceways.

Setting dynamics: A child with special needs should not feel separated from the group, whether it be for therapy time, lunchtime, play time, outdoor play, or other special requirements that the child may have.

Northern and Rural: Northern communities are often challenged due to lack of funds, distance and isolation, and a lack of specialists – however these smaller communities have strengths in being able to adapt quickly and work together as a community.

Principles for positive inclusion

Through the surveys and focus groups, project participants had many excellent ways of making Supported Child Care successful. Some of these practices include:

Building effective teams

When a supported child care worker comes into a child care setting, the first day was mentioned as key:

- Allow them to feel welcome and part of the team.
- Give them a tour of the centre, show them their locker or a place to put their things.
- Talk about roles and expectations while the Supported Child Care worker is in the centre:
 - Will the SCC worker lead group activities and be involved with all the children or is it expected that they will focus on the child with special needs?
 - Will they attend centre staff meetings?

Environmental adjustments

Consider environmental adjustments that account for the spectrum of a child's needs - play spaces, storage for equipment, and the ability to move freely and interact with peers.

Ensuring teaching opportunities within program structure

Within "free play", "circle time," or other schedules, ensure that there are specific teaching opportunities for children with special needs. For example, introduce the child with special needs to different art, play or socialization activities that they have not tried before and are inhibited from trying on their own.

Interaction with peers

The literature and our research suggest that interaction between a child with special needs and their typically developing peers works, but doesn't happen on its own. Some things centre and support staff can do include:

- Encourage peers to join play or special therapy activities with the child with special needs.
- Ensure there are **many** and a **variety** of activities and opportunities for interaction.
- Stand back at least four feet from the child with special needs to allow interaction.
- When needed, encourage the use of specific social tools and communication skills to assist interaction between children (for example, "look at your friend when you talk to them so they can hear you better").



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Production of this document has been made possible through a financial contribution from the Public Health Agency of Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

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