



Safe Kids & Youth  
Coordinated Response

# Evaluation Report 2020-2021



## BACKGROUND

West Kootenay Boundary SKY Coordinated Response is a collaboration between professionals involved in responding to child maltreatment. SKY has coordinators in seven areas of the region: Salmo, Trail, Kaslo, Nakusp, Nelson, Castlegar, and the Boundary (Midway and Grand Forks). The service seeks to improve the experience of children and families with suspected child maltreatment and reduce system trauma induced as a function of participating in the investigative process.

## INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

The 2020-2021 year has brought considerable challenges to the investigation of suspected child abuse and neglect. In-person interactions have been limited and/or required adaptation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has influenced how child abuse investigations can be conducted. Further, there have been concerns with high rates of child maltreatment and low disclosure of child maltreatment with children spending more time at home with families experiencing unusually high levels of stress and less time with extrafamilial adults.

The 2020-2021 year also represented a difficult year for consistency in the SKY coordinator role. Though both Salmo and Kaslo retained their SKY coordinators, all other positions experienced some degree of instability, including two that are currently vacant (Nakusp, Nelson), one in which an individual is filling in for a departed coordinator (Castlegar), and two others that do not have contractors that can complete the full contract hours (Grand Forks, Trail).

Further, 2020-2021 brought a change in how SKY's data are collected, with the mid-year transition to the BC Provincial CYAC Network's Evaluation Strategy. As a result, SKY followed their previously established data collection procedures for the full 2020-2021 fiscal year, but also collected data for the transition to the new process in the final quarter.

Due to the data available for the evaluation, and the provision of recent feedback from coordinators in the 2019-2020 Evaluation Report, the focus of the 2020-2021 evaluation will be on data collection and evaluation processes, including how such processes can influence the development and success of the model at large.

To complete this evaluation, the following information was reviewed:

- SKY 2019-2020 Evaluation Report (Dechief, 2020)
- Case data collected in the 2020-2021 fiscal year
- Qualitative coordinator responses
- Multi-disciplinary team (MDT) feedback

## CASE DATA

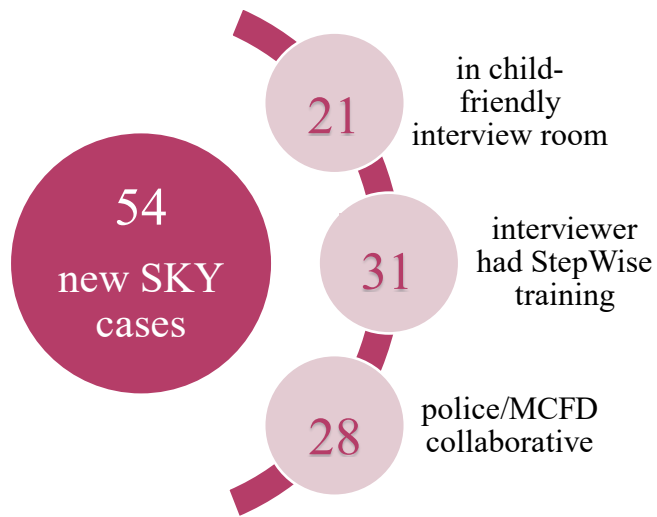
- In the fiscal year 2020-2021, two different data collection processes were undertaken:
  - First, SKY's ongoing data collection processes were followed for the full 2020-2021 fiscal year.
  - Second, in the final quarter (beginning January, 2021), SKY began aligning data collection with the new BC Provincial CYAC Network Evaluation Process.

Results from both data collection processes are detailed below.

## ONGOING SKY DATA RECORDING (FULL FISCAL YEAR)

- Despite the many challenges faced in 2020-2021, SKY saw a similar number of new cases (N = 54) to recent years (N = 60 in 2019-2020; N = 56 in 2018-2019). The relatively steady number, in combination with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, indicates that SKY likely would have seen a growth year in 2020-2021. SKY coordinators and teams were very active during this difficult year:
  - Local SKY coordinators worked 1245 hours and attended a total of 53 meetings;
  - 11 local MDT meetings were held;
  - 45 local service providers were actively involved in SKY;
  - 99 local service providers were made aware of SKY through coordinator outreach.
- Below is a summary of data from SKY's previously established evaluation process, which represents the full 2020-2021 fiscal year.

Cases	N
New cases	54
Current open cases	26



## Court experience

6 Cases with court preparation/support provided by SKY

14 Cases went to court

Services	N
Victim services called to assist	32
Victim services referral after initial interview	3
Referrals to counseling/ support services	32
Cases with forensic medical exams conducted	6

JAN. 1 – MARCH 31, 2021: NEW PROVINCIAL EVALUATION DATA

A total of 13 children were seen from January 1, 2021 to March 31, 2021.

CHILD CHARACTERISTICS

- SKY served all English-speaking female victims who were primarily white and ranged in age from 2 to 15 years.

Average age:  
**9.23** years

Age	N
2	3
7	2
8	1
10	1
11	1
12	1
14	1
15	3

Gender Identity	N
Male	0
Female	13

Role	N
Victim	13
Witness	0

Primary/Preferred Language	N
English	13

Ethnicity/Cultural Background	N
Indigenous	1
White	10
Other	2

- All but one child had one or more reported complex characteristic(s), including:

Complex Characteristics	N
Trauma symptoms	7
Anxiety	9
Depression	2
Behaviour problems	4

### FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

- Several children had prior contact with SKY and had a history of domestic violence within the family.

Previous contact with SKY	N
No	5
Yes	5
Unknown	3

Known domestic violence within the family	N
No	1
Yes	7
Unknown	5

### NATURE OF THE ALLEGATION

- Most children reported sexual abuse.

Type of abuse (at referral)	N
Sexual abuse	9
Physical abuse	3
Neglect	1

Abuse frequency	N
Single	4
Repeated	6
Unknown	3

### ALLEGED OFFENDER

- Most allegations involved a male adult (18+ years) offender. Relationships between the alleged offender and the child were varied.

Gender Identity	N
Male	9
Female	4

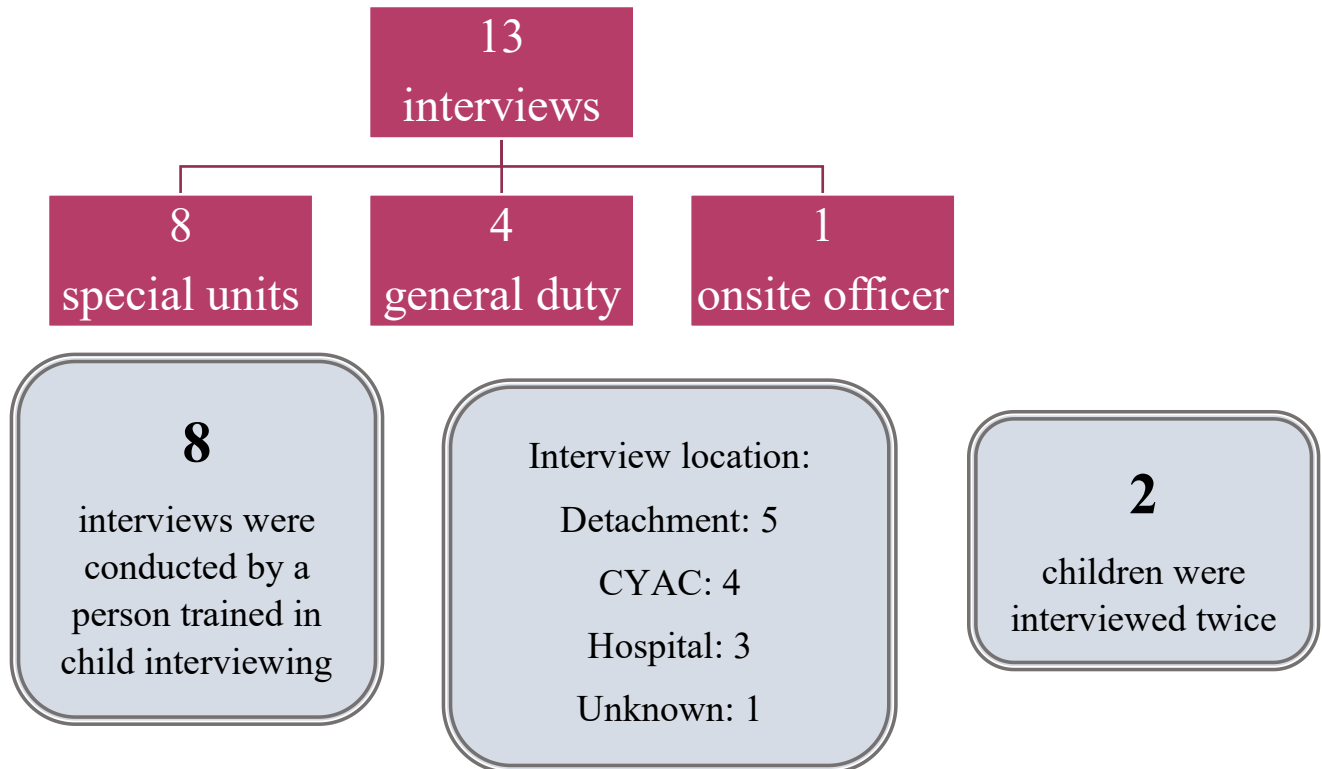
Age	N
12-17 years	1
18+ years	12

Relationship to child	N
Mother	2
Family friend/acquaintance	3
Father	5
Unfamiliar stranger	2
Mother's boyfriend/partner	1

## SKY EXPERIENCE

### Interviews

- 13 interviews were conducted, most by trained interviewers.



### Children's experiences

- Many children were connected to services, including:

Service	Connected (N)	Declined (N)
CVAP	1	1
SAIP	4	2
Private counselling	9	0
CYMH	1	0
PEACE	1	0
STV	1	0
Victim services	1	0
Strong start	1	0

- One child received a forensic medical examination. For one child the presence of a forensic medical exam was unknown, and for the remaining 11 children, no exam was conducted.

## COORDINATOR QUALITATIVE REPORTS

Coordinators' perspectives are critical to understanding challenges and opportunities for SKY. Coordinators were asked to provide narrative responses to questions about their activities, challenges, and successes each quarter. Below, common themes are described across coordinator responses.

### ACTIVITIES

Most coordinators noted a reduced rate of referrals to SKY during the pandemic than would be typical in other years.

*“This [Q1] was an unusually slow reporting period. We saw a dramatic decrease in referrals, most likely due to COVID-19 disruptions to services.”*

As a result of the reduction in referrals, many coordinators described adaptations to service including workarounds to connect with families, efforts to bring the MDT together virtually, and engaging in professional development opportunities (e.g., webinars).

*“[I have been] keeping in contact with families. Helping them understand how the CJS is working under Covid regulations even though the court system is at a standstill.”*

*“I posted a video about this drop in referrals/disclosures... in an attempt to get the word out there about this concerning drop in files. We also advertised our program on the ...radio station, and put up posters in town, hopefully to spread the word that our agency was still open and providing remote services.”*

*“I attended several webinars during this period as well on child sexual abuse, domestic violence and COVID-19 related issues for victims of violent crime/sexual assault/domestic violence.”*

Coordinators also discussed updating informational and procedural documents and engaging in other project work during slower referral periods.



*“I designed an infographic that may be used when first connecting with children and their families to build rapport and learn about the child's needs.”*

*“Looking into new interview protocols to interview non-verbal special needs.”*

---

## CHALLENGES

Given the many difficulties posed by the pandemic, and the concordant challenges inherent in efforts to coordinate so many professionals and agencies, coordinators reported both new and familiar challenges. Coordinators expressed concern about the low number of referrals, difficulties in conducting this work remotely, and the loss of momentum in working with MDT members.

*“It is concerning how quiet it has been in the last few months during Covid 19.”*

*“Working remotely continues to pose challenges in maintaining active relationships amongst the SKY team.”*

Given the many changes in staffing, difficulties in communicating during the pandemic, and challenges in connecting, coordinators also expressed concern with maintaining and increasing awareness of SKY protocols and adherence to SKY protocols.

*“...due to no outreach activities or community engagements there is less opportunity to raise awareness about SKY.”*

*“RCMP members not aware of SKY protocol (lots of new members).”*

Despite the challenges, SKY coordinators often remained optimistic about the future:

*“It's reasonable to believe once we are able to resume in person meetings, this positive momentum will return.”*

## SUCSESSES

Coordinators reported many SKY successes, primarily focused on the effectiveness of the model for helping children and families. To make the model work well, coordinators often noted the importance of particular individuals who were committed to helping children and families through the SKY model and whose professional commitment to the model enhanced the ability to provide this critical service. It is clear that the engagement of particular key players is essential for SKY to effectively operate.

*“Connection made with X; he has been excellent about communicating with us regarding SKY related files.”*

*“SKY is promoted within the detachment to new members by the Staff Sgt.”*

The many references to awareness of the SKY program indicate that when key players are maintained in their relevant professional positions, the SKY model works efficiently and effectively for all of those involved in child maltreatment investigations.

*“Throughout this process, each team member has built trust and familiarity with each other and the organizations we represent... These relationships are paramount to the community-based work we all do. We are all more likely to pick up the phone and reach out with questions or concerns.”*

*“As a team we were all able to be very open and transparent with any potential issues we could foresee with COVID related changes to our services. I think having such good communication on this topic helped us prepare for a potential spike in referrals.”*

Finally, coordinators expressed confidence in the model when it was implemented as intended to help children and families during challenging times.

*“I believe SKY is providing a well-supported process for families/children/youth whose lives have come into contact with the criminal justice system. SKY offers the opportunity for families to be versed on their rights, understand the process better when they come into contact with the RCMP and/or MCFD. SKY provides the agencies involved with a*

*way to connect and support families/children/youth in a holistic way and provides support from agencies right from the beginning.”*

## MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM FEEDBACK

As part of the BC Provincial Evaluation strategy, four feedback tools were developed:

1. Multidisciplinary team (MDT) member feedback – full version
2. Multidisciplinary team (MDT) member feedback – brief version
3. Caregiver feedback
4. Child feedback

These feedback tools were available for dissemination in early 2021, thus the 2020-2021 year does not represent a full year of data collection.

Because of the restricted time to obtain feedback using these tools, only 2 child and 3 caregiver feedback responses were obtained. Due to the small number of responses and concerns with anonymity, the child and caregiver responses will not be reported here.

The MDT member feedback included 2 full version and 9 brief versions completed. However, all of the MDT brief feedback surveys were completed from a single location within the SKY region and by only two roles (police, advocate/support worker). As a result of the lack of variability in respondents, and the potential for anonymity to be compromised, these data are not discussed here.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As SKY continues to work to firmly establish its model within the communities it serves and as a top-of-mind resource for children and families involved in child maltreatment investigations, there are several recommendations that can be considered to enhance the service.

### INCREASE SKY AWARENESS

**Increase awareness of SKY.** It was clear in the coordinator qualitative responses that awareness of SKY and SKY protocols was an ongoing challenge. It was also clear in both the previous year evaluation (Dechief, 2020) and in coordinator narratives this year, that extensive efforts are currently, and have previously

been, made to increase awareness of SKY services (e.g., advertisements, training, information sessions, videos). Such efforts must continue and be repeated as professionals and community members constantly turnover. The Regional Coordinator's creation of 'Welcome Kits' is an excellent example of efforts to this end. Though likely frustrating at times, continued promotion of the model and its services will contribute to understanding how SKY best fits in response to child maltreatment.

## UNDERSTAND HOW IT'S WORKING

**Evaluate.** Key to enhancing awareness of, and commitment to, the model is to understand how well (or not well) it is working for professionals engaged with the model. The recently developed BC Provincial CYAC Network Evaluation process was created to assist CYACs in understanding and reporting CYAC practices and challenges. Providing feedback on these tools during implementation will be critical to ensuring SKY obtains the data needed for continued growth. Feedback from the MDT members, in particular, is essential as SKY works to establish itself firmly in the relevant professional communities. This process will allow for early identification of burgeoning problems and barriers to effective model implementation. The feedback tools developed for children and caregivers will provide a critical perspective on their experience as the model continues to grow.

- Note that the MDT feedback tools were available for 3 months prior to the preparation of this evaluation, but only one of the SKY regions had completed any feedback tools (Trail). Promotion of these tools as the new fiscal year begins is needed.

**Coordinator check-ins.** Given SKY's uniqueness as a model, SKY should consider adding to the Provincial Network Evaluation tools. In particular, consider development of a survey to be completed by coordinators that allows for data/responses that are easily condensed and understood with little compilation required (e.g., ratings, checkboxes). Such a survey should be distributed on a regular schedule (e.g., quarterly, annually) and specifically address emerging barriers and opportunities for growth. This survey can be very brief, but would serve the important function of identifying and documenting needs as they arise. Issues addressed could include:

- Communication with all partners
- Trust amongst partners
- Awareness of SKY model within partner agencies
- Desired training content and format
- Optimal frequency/format of meetings
- Opportunities for collaboration across SKY regions

**Connect with similar models.** The uniqueness of the SKY model and region served can both increase agility of individual partners, but also reduce access to relevant resources. SKY can consider reaching widely to consult with other CYAC/CACs who serve similarly diverse geographical regions (e.g., Yukon’s LYNX) to discuss common challenges and learn from the others’ experiences.

#### INCREASE MODEL “BUY-IN”

**Increase commitment to the model.** As was clear in the SKY coordinator qualitative responses, when SKY MDT members shared established, trusting relationships, the model worked extremely well. Thus, increasing commitment to the model from all partners is critical. It is also clear that a continuing challenge to this commitment is the frequent turnover in professionals in a given role. To balance resource allocation with the critical need for team-building, consider small-scale, but more frequent shared professional development opportunities. Such training could begin virtually to work on early development of relationships.

#### CONDENSE RESOURCES

**Establish a regional interviewing team.** The development of a team of skilled interviewers who can work together and travel throughout the SKY region would substantially enhance children’s experience and the quality of the information they are able to provide. A skilled team aligns with the international CYAC goal to ensure children are interviewed by a professional who is trained in interviewing children. From January to April 2021, only 8 of 13 (62%) interviews were conducted by a trained child interviewer. This number can – and should – be higher. Interviewers on the team would also benefit from opportunities for peer-review, monitoring and feedback that will maintain and enhance their skills over time. These benefits align with the BC Provincial CYAC Interviewing Team recommendations to engage in regular peer review of investigative interviewers.

**Encourage virtual training.** A direct benefit to professionals involved in CYAC/CAC models is access to training. Identification and dissemination of information about relevant webinars and other training opportunities increases the value of the model to professionals. Consider also encouraging the BC Provincial Network of CYACs to create virtual training opportunities specifically for MDT members at BC CYACs. This will allow for not only targeted training content, but also potential collaboration among MDT members across the province.

**Access regional/provincial/national resources.** In addition to virtual training opportunities that have blossomed during the pandemic, there are other efforts to establish resources that will benefit rural and remote communities. For example, the BC Provincial CYAC Interview Work Team is working to establish a network of skilled interviewers who can be used as a resource for new interviewers or those who encounter particularly challenging cases. At least one SKY interviewer has already connected with a remote skilled interviewer on a challenging case (i.e., a non-verbal child). There are also discussions about the potential for conducting tele-interviews under particular circumstances. Engagement and enthusiasm for such discussions encourages further growth of these opportunities throughout BC.

## MONITOR DIVERSITY

**Monitor the diversity of the children and families served.** The Kootenays is home to a highly diverse population. However, the January to March 2021 sample of children served by SKY does not reflect that diversity. Most children were white, English-speaking, females. Consider including additional measures (e.g., family composition) that will either reflect the diversity of children and families served or evaluating why the children served appear to come from a relatively homogenous background.

## CONCLUSION

The SKY teams have adapted well to the challenges during the pandemic and have continued to make gains in awareness of the SKY model and in facilitating the collaboration of relevant agencies and professionals. Continued monitoring and evaluation of community and professional awareness will be critical to the sustainability and growth of the model. Working to establish and develop expertise that can be shared throughout the region will ensure that professionals are allowed to grow and children can benefit from this growth. In the coming year, fully implementing the BC Provincial Network of CYAC Evaluation process, and continuing to adapt these processes – and others – to SKY’s unique model will allow for continued growth and early identification of barriers to serving this crucial community function.