Safe Kids & Youth
Coordinated Response

Evaluation Report 2021-2022

BACKGROUND

West Kootenay Boundary SKY Coordinated Response is a collaboration between professionals involved in responding to child maltreatment. In 2021-2022, SKY had coordinator positions 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

In 2021-2022, SKY continued the coordinator model that had been in place for several years. The seven agencies who hold the victim services contracts within each community were contracted to provide SKY Coordination by providing their victim service workers with an additional 4 to 6 hours per week (depending on community case load). This model had strengths, but also brought challenges to SKY work. Like many other fallouts from the COVID-19 pandemic, new challenges associated with the pandemic made balancing the two contracts challenging for many victim services workers. In addition, there were continuing challenges in retaining SKY coordinators, with only 4 of 7 SKY coordinator positions filled at some points during the year.

The challenges associated with consistency in the SKY coordinator positions did not emerge for the first time in 2021-2022. These challenges were noticed and monitored for several years, but the pandemic forced a re-examination of the model and presented an opportunity for assessing the current approach. SKY stakeholders across the region met at two strategic planning sessions in the fall of 2021 to take a critical look at its service provision and created a new model that will more consistently apply SKY's invaluable services across the member communities.

New Model for 2022-2023. In 2022-2023 SKY will introduce a new model for coordinators in which two 21-hour coordinator positions will be employed by SKY (Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-operative (KBCSC), reporting directly to the SKY Regional Manager and each will work with and support multiple communities. SKY coordinators will work with the non-offending family and multi-disciplinary teams up to the stage of the forensic interview (e.g., case review meeting,

coordination of interview, communicate with family), at which point SKY coordinators will hand the file over to the local victim services to allow for a clear delineation of complementary services. This new approach will help to close gaps in service that were noted with the prior model and also allow for greater expertise to develop with a larger number of files per coordinator. This new model is an exciting step for SKY and this year will provide important pilot data for SKY's services moving forward.

Though this year's evaluation will focus on data collection prior to this important change, there are still lessons to be learned from the prior model that can be applied to the new model as it develops.

To complete this evaluation, the following information was reviewed:

- Case data collected for 2021-2022 fiscal year
- CYAC feedback
- Qualitative coordinator responses from 4 of 7 coordinators

EVALUATION DATA: APRIL 1, 2021-MARCH 31, 2022

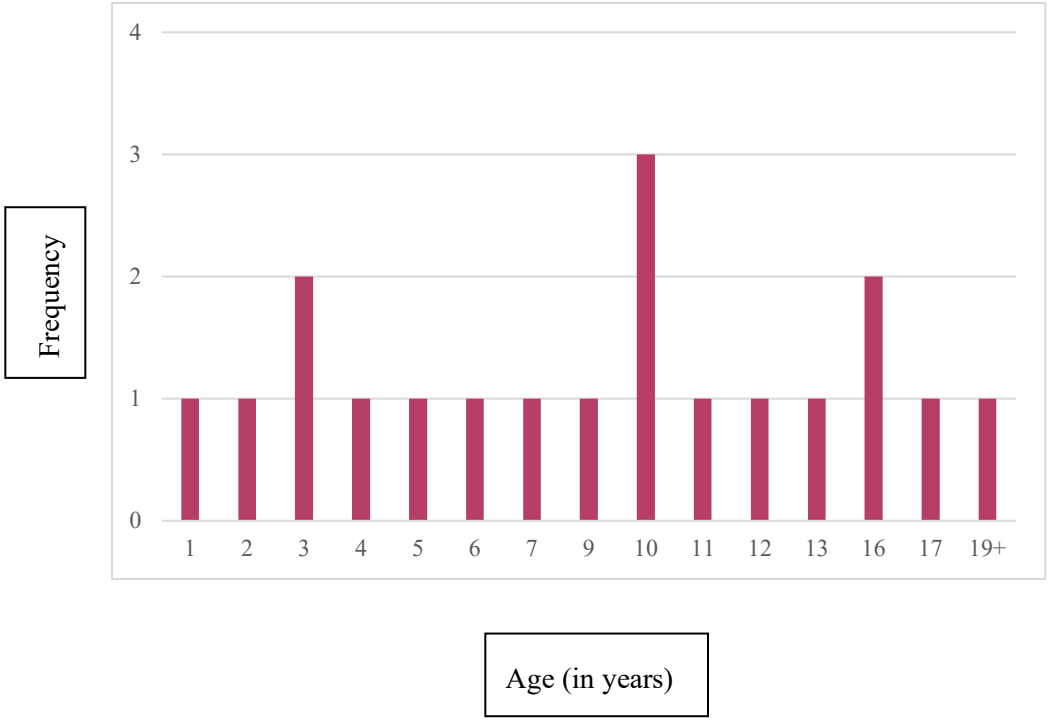
A total of **34** children were served by SKY from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022.

Given the many changes that took place within SKY this year, data was not available for all 34 children on the following variables. There were 19 children for which data was available for most of the variables.

CHILD CHARACTERISTICS

- Children aged 1-to-17 years were served by SKY (in addition, 1 adult aged 19+ was served).
- Children were predominantly female, white, and all spoke English as their primary language.

Average age:
8.61 years



Gender Identity	N
Male	7
Female	10
Trans male	2

Ethnicity/Cultural Background	N
Indigenous	4
White	13
Other	1

Primary/Preferred Language	N
English	19

Role	N
Victim	14
Witness	5

- Many children had one or more reported complex characteristics, including:

Complex Characteristics	N
Trauma Symptoms	3
Developmental Delays	3
Behaviour Problems/Concerns	3
ADHD	3
Mental Health Concerns	3
Depression	3
Problematic Sexual Behaviour	2
Autism	1
Other	7

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

- Most children were served by SKY for the first time and had a known history of domestic violence within the family.

Previous contact with SKY	N
No	12
Yes	2
Unknown	5

Known domestic violence within the family	N
No	7
Yes	10
Unknown	2

NATURE OF THE ALLEGATION

- Most children served by SKY reported a single instance of sexual or physical abuse.

Type of abuse (at referral)	N
Sexual abuse	7
Physical abuse	6
Witness domestic violence	4
Neglect	1
Other	1

Abuse frequency	N
Single	11
Repeated	2
Unknown	6

ALLEGED OFFENDER

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

Gender Identity	N
Male	15
Female	3

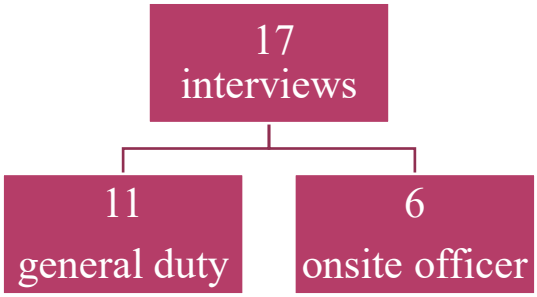
Age	N
12-17 years	3
18+ years	16

Relationship to child	N
Mother's boyfriend/ partner	6
Father	5
Family friend/acquaintance	3
Mother	1
Other	4

CYAC EXPERIENCE

INTERVIEWS

- 17 interviews were conducted, most by trained interviewers.
- 9 interviews were conducted in SKY-friendly interview rooms, 4 at police detachments.



13 interviewers were trained in child interviewing

ALL children were interviewed only once

CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

- 16 children served by SKY were connected to services, including:

Service	N
Counselling	10
PEACE	6
CVAP	5
STV	5
CBVS	4
SAIP	1
Other	15

- 3 forensic medical exams were conducted, with one additional case in which it was unknown if a medical exam was conducted.
- There were no known instances of children testifying in 2021-2022.

CYAC FEEDBACK

- The fiscal year 2021-2022, was the first full year of the new BC Provincial CYAC Network Evaluation process. This process involved a coordinated strategy for evaluation data, in addition to four surveys designed to elicit CYAC model feedback:

    1) Multidisciplinary Team Feedback: Brief

    2) Multidisciplinary Team Feedback: Long

    3) Caregiver Feedback

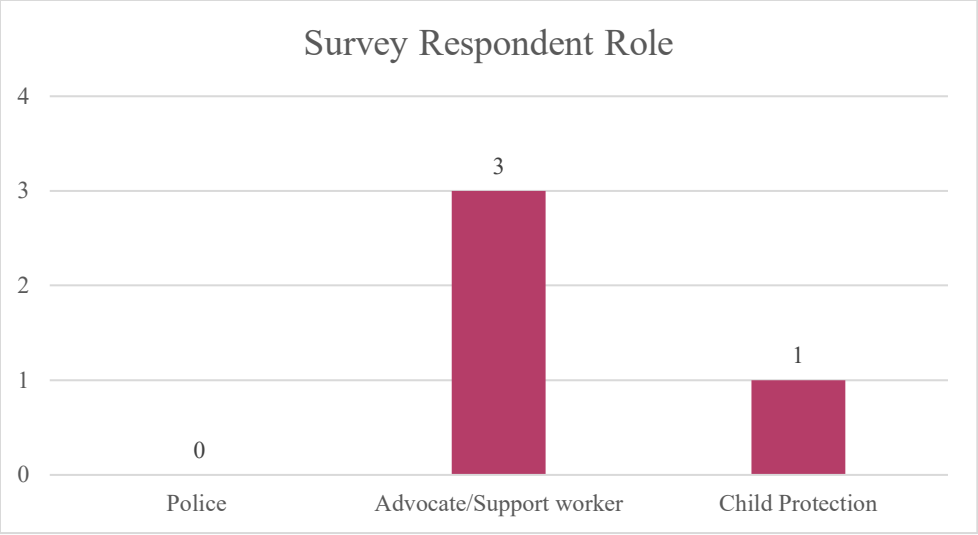
    4) Child Feedback

- Only 1 caregiver feedback response was obtained this fiscal year. Due to concerns with anonymity, caregiver responses will not be reported here.
- The Child Feedback questionnaire (and the newly developed Youth Feedback questionnaire) were developed during the past year and, as a result, many BC CYACs did not implement the Child/Youth surveys. No child responses were received from SKY child clients and, thus, no child responses are reported here.

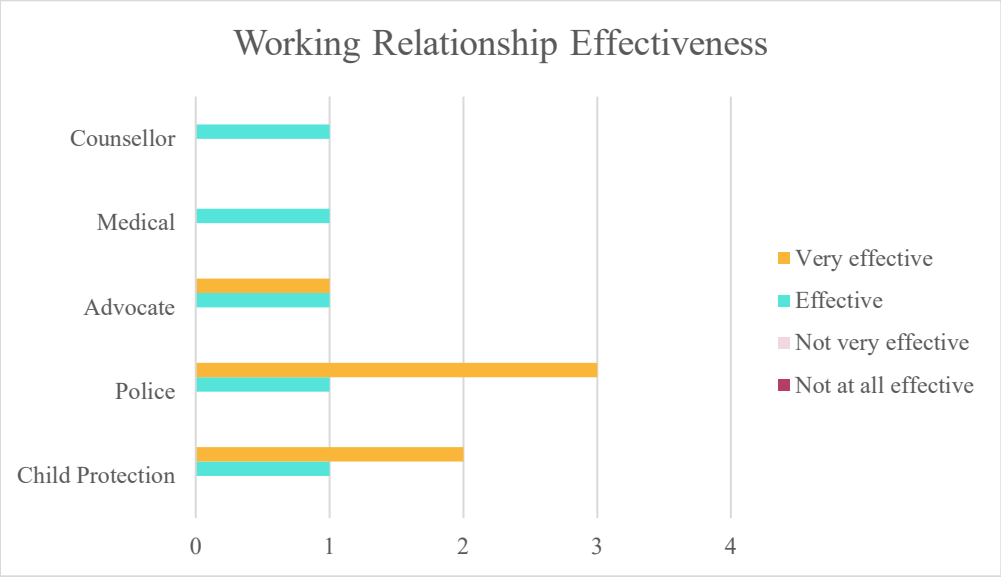
MULTDISCIPLINARY TEAM FEEDBACK: BRIEF FORM

Total responses N = 4

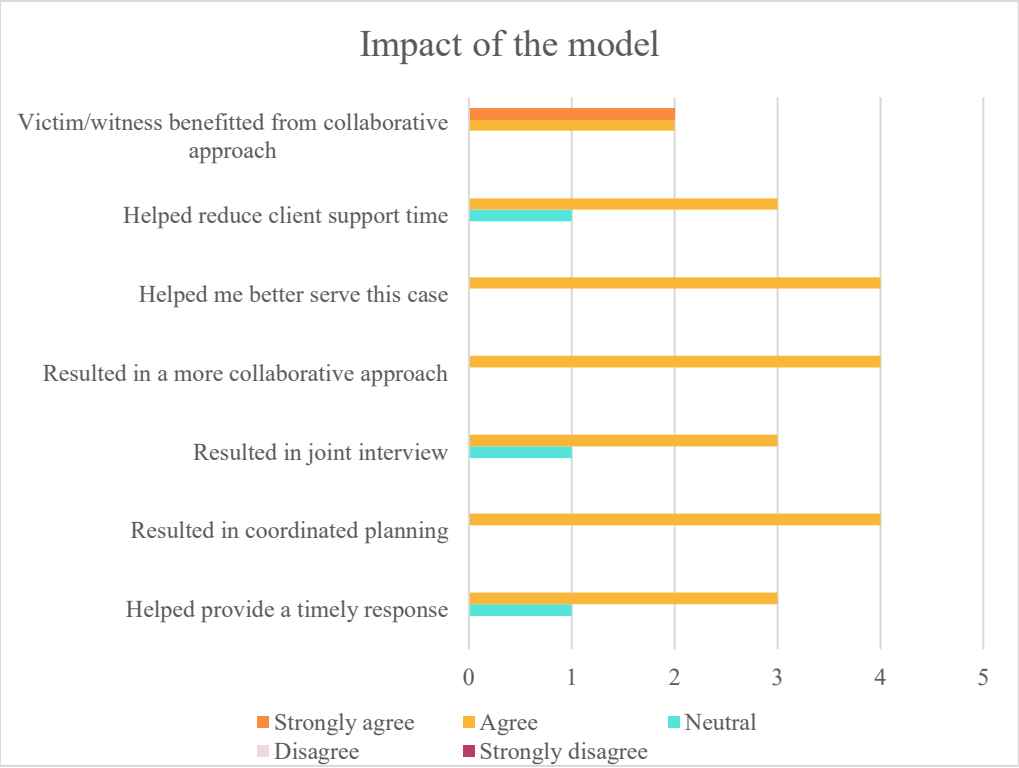
- Most respondents were advocates, with one response from a child protection worker. No police completed the survey.
- Respondents reported effective working relationships with MDT members.
- Respondents indicated that the model had a positive impact on the case.



Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of your working relationship with each of the other partners on this case?



What impact did the CYAC Model have on this case?



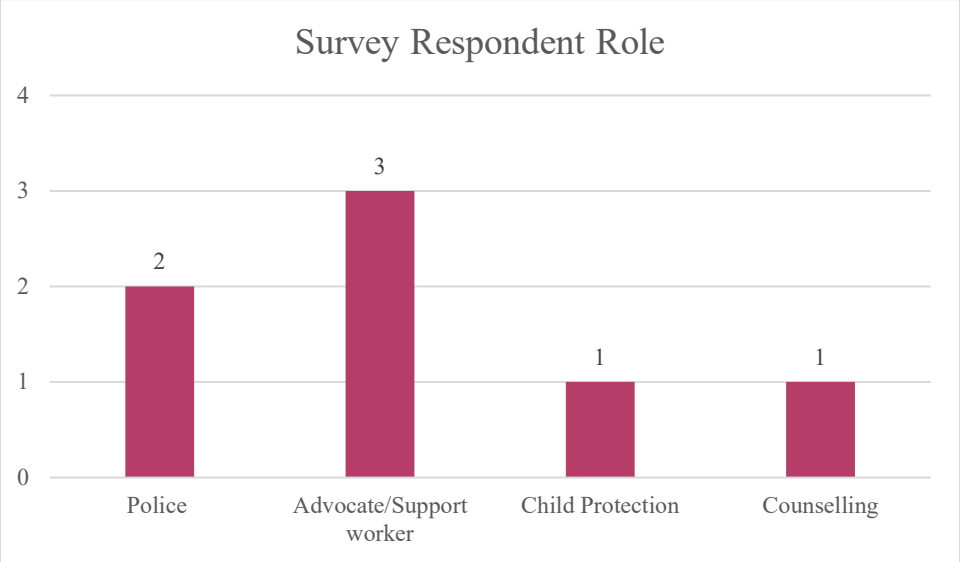
Comments about the CYAC model and/or additional comments about the working relationships. (responses are reproduced verbatim)

Great collaboration.

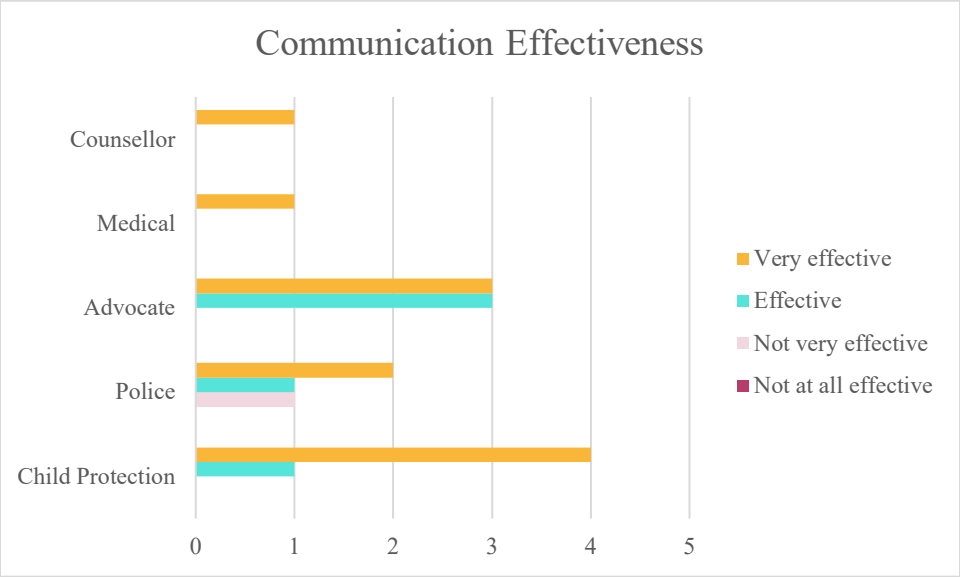
MULTDISCIPLINARY TEAM FEEDBACK: LONG FORM

Total responses N = 7

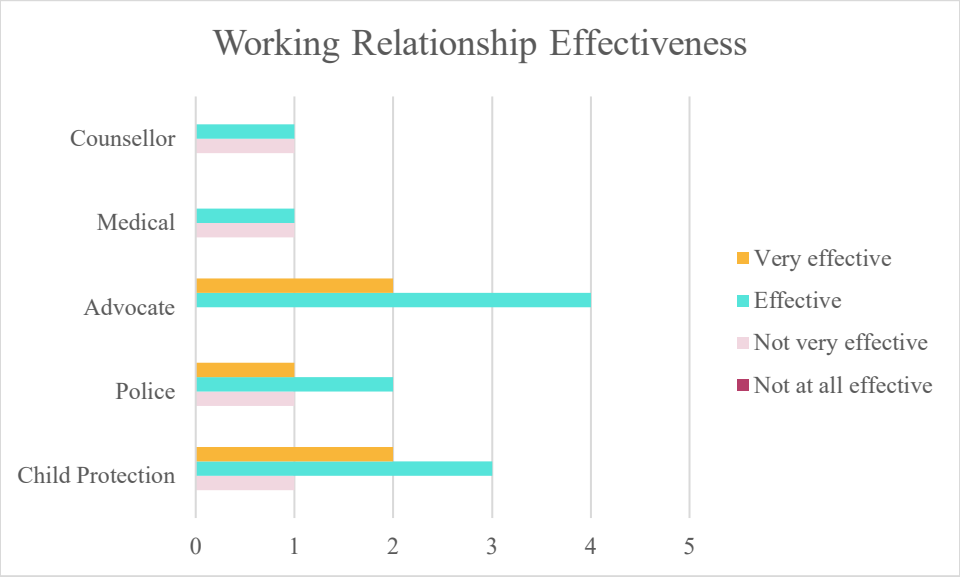
- Most responses were from the Advocate, with other responses from police, child protection, and counselling.
- Communication and working relationships among the MDT were rated as generally effective by MDT members.
- The impact of the CYAC model on the case was consistently positively rated by MDT members, as was the value of case review meetings.



How effective was the communication among the MDT partners in this case?



Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of your working relationship with each of the other partners on this case?



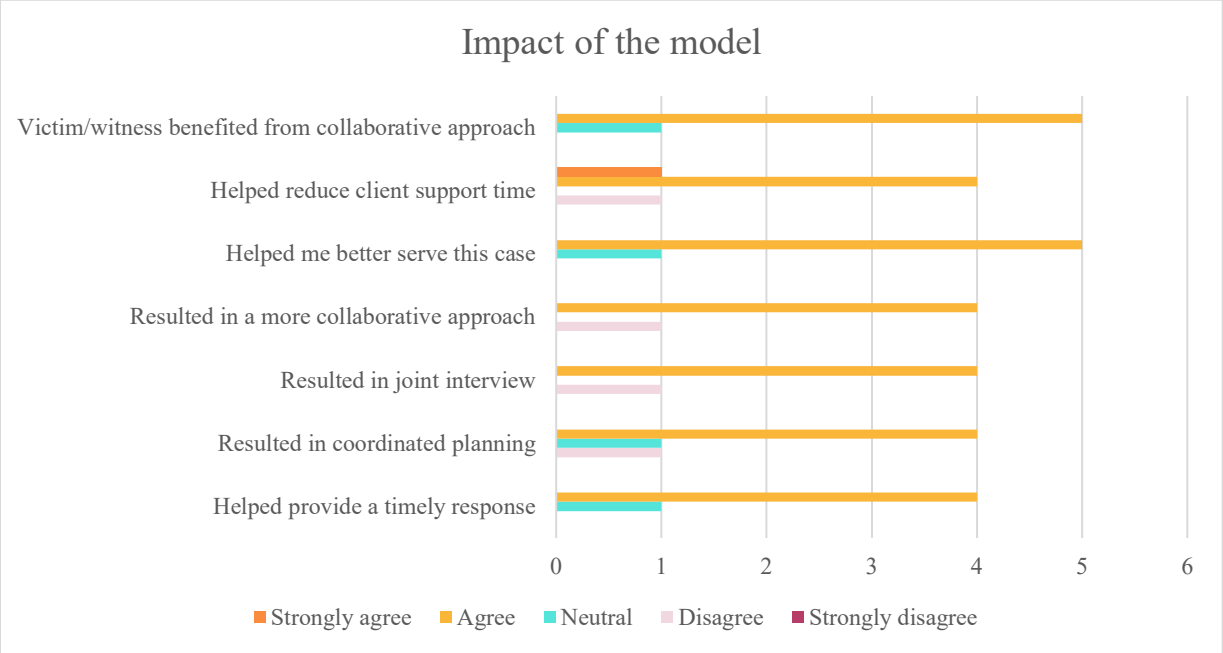
Comments about the impact of the CYAC model and/or comments about the working relationships. (responses are reproduced verbatim)

Great collaboration among service providers.

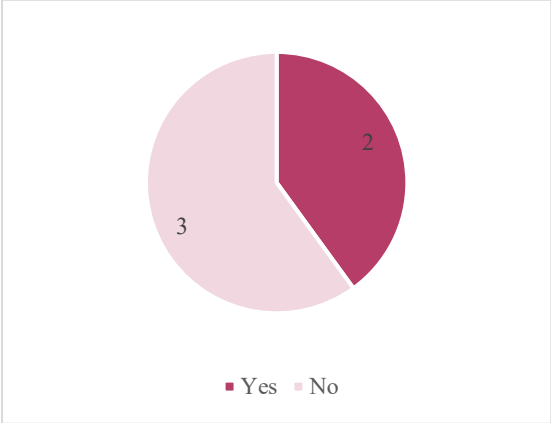
The model remains effective and beneficial but communication or case review between team members is very limited.

Love the collaboration model!

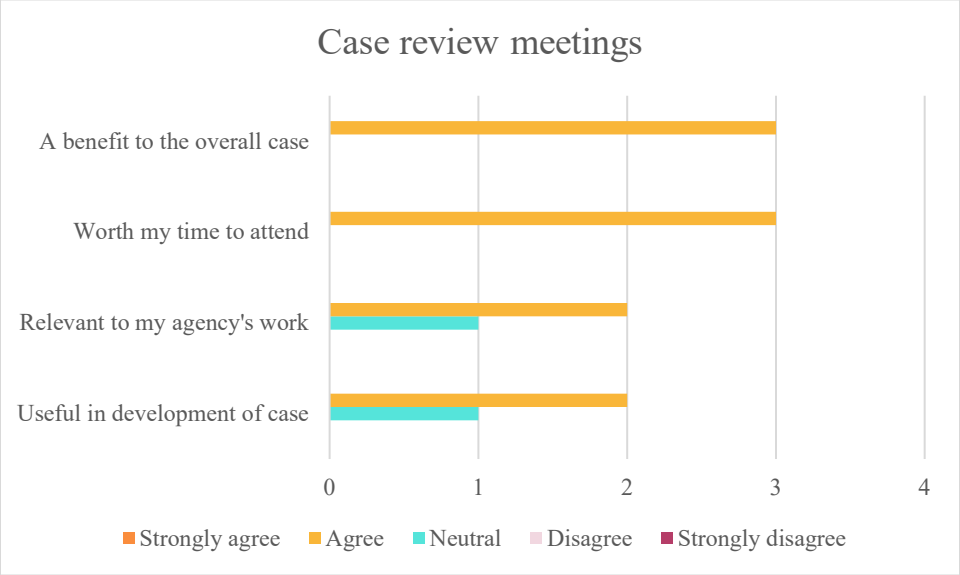
What impact did the CYAC Model have on this case?



Did you participate in a case review meeting(s)?



Your view about the case review meetings is they were:



How many investigative interviews were conducted?

Investigative interviews	1 interview	2 interviews
Victim	2	1
Non-Offending Caregiver 1	1	0
Child/Youth witness	1	0

How many hours did you spend in communication/support with the child and family/caregivers?

Hours spent	N
1 to < 2 hours	1
2 to < 3 hours	2
> 3 hours	1

COORDINATOR QUALITATIVE REPORTS

Coordinators were asked to describe successes and struggles after each quarter of the fiscal year. Below, common themes are highlighted, with sample supporting quotations.

ACTIVITIES

To increase awareness of SKY among community partners, coordinators described engaging in outreach to community organizations, including local schools.

> *"SKY Coordinator created a presentation to provide local schools regarding SKY and reporting abuse to authorities. SKY Coordinator, MCFD and RCMP attended two schools and provided the presentation. Feedback was positive from school staff regarding the information provided. "*

> *"Provided a presentation to [local] School in [X]. Discussed a plan with School District about presenting to individual schools in person in the fall. Connected with police and MCFD to collaborate on the presentation. "*

> *"Began 5 minute educational pieces to RCMP members, provided a laminated sheet of "how to" steps for SKY file."*

> *"Creating a resources spreadsheet to be able to easily find appropriate websites, created an inventory spreadsheet and completed an inventory of the MCFD interview room, found indigenous coloring books and diversity books for kids, trying to source out a local indigenous artist to complete paintings/murals for interview rooms…"*

> *"I have been speaking to the STV workers, Child and Youth Mental Health clinician about how best to handle situations and referrals."*

Coordinators were engaged in professional development opportunities, with many new opportunities available online due to the pandemic.

> *"Completed a Legal Aid Webinar: Family Law/Family Protection."*

> *"I was able to attend a 4-day training on Child Forensic Interviewing. This was an interesting, valuable, and at time uncomfortable training that I would highly recommend to all."*

> *"I am watching webinars and many videos from the CYAC website, and have read over the SKY booklets."*

> *"I have completed the Canadian Child Abuse Association Court Prep Trainings online. I am awaiting their child-friendly court prep booklets and information packages."*

Coordinators also made additional efforts to connect the MDT. There was recognition that the pandemic had made in-person connections more difficult, and that alternative methods were required to maintain connection to SKY and to SKY partners.

> *"Ways I maintain connection is by sharing training opportunities, relevant resources and sharing updates about SKY locally or CYAC's provincially/nationally."*

> *"I keep in contact with the detachment administrator and that relationship is a good source of information on upcoming changes in the detachment."*

CHALLENGES

Coordinators expressed frustration about challenges in arranging MDT meetings. Struggles were associated with the pandemic, a lack of cases, and difficulty in scheduling.

> *"While I continue to maintain connection with the MDT members via e-mail, we still haven't had any team meetings. Team members shared that they would prefer to wait until we can meet in person instead of meeting online."*

"I have not hosted a MDT meeting in some time so communication amongst the team is lacking. I will host a meeting for the 3rd quarter to get everyone together and up to speed."

"I struggled to get MDT members together for a meeting."

New coordinators described difficulties in orienting to the new position and cited work load as a challenge.

"Struggles were work load. As a new coordinator (P/T victim services worker) I have been participating in training that is a lot of information."

"The biggest challenge was coming into this position and having to create the relationships from scratch due to the position being vacant for over a year, and the added complexities of navigating all of the constantly changing COVID restrictions."

Coordinators also discussed challenges with connecting with team members and inconsistency with personnel and in partner expertise.

"Struggles continuing are: not having any local Stepwise trained officers, cross jurisdictional cases, and Covid restrictions."

"I have struggled with communications with our local MCFD office. Calls were often not returned and struggled to connect with the new Team Lead there."

"Struggles continuing are: the [location] MCFD office continues to have high turnover, particularly with the Team Lead position."

SUCCESSES

Coordinators described continued success with multi-disciplinary team members and personnel involved in SKY.

"Coordinated interviews continue to go well. RCMP have now trained an additional Stepwise interviewer as our primary interviewer went on leave. SKY continues to work closely with RCMP/MCFD to ensure the SKY response is being utilized appropriately and effectively."

"Coordinator continues to have positive working relationships with stakeholders."

"I have been successful at maintaining a strong working relationship with our local RCMP SKY member."

"Two successful collaborative interviews done - went smoothly."

Model success was also evident in the impact the model had on families and children.

"Feedback from families are that they are very appreciative of the support they receive throughout. Police find this program highly valuable as they find they do not have as much follow up with families/parents as SKY provides them with the information and answers they are seeking."

"Being in the SKY and Victim Services role I had the space to be able to get creative on how I could help my clients navigate their situation… Although their journey has just begun, I can currently say that they are safe from their abuser and have moved to a new city where they are safe. Them being safe is a success for me."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The past year has been an important year for SKY to assess and evaluate current practices. The COVID-19 pandemic and its many challenges provided an impetus for SKY to re-assess how to best provide service to children and families in the SKY region. It became clear that the model of seven coordinators who shared their roles with victim services posed challenges that were difficult to overcome. The transition to two dedicated SKY coordinators will ensure that SKY services are the top priority for coordinators and that the services are implemented consistently across SKY communities.

As SKY continues to evolve in its service provision, there are two primary areas in which efforts are most likely to bear fruit:

1) Continued attention to ongoing work on increasing awareness, building relationships, commitment, and expertise;
2) Thoughtfully evaluating implementation of the new model.

CONTINUE WORK ON AWARENESS, COMMITMENT, & EXPERTISE

SKY has considered recommendations from prior evaluations and has made efforts to begin work on implementation. Continuing such work will be key to establishing SKY as a central resource in the region. These recommendations, discussed in detail in the 2020-2021 Evaluation Report (and in prior evaluations), include:

- Increase awareness of SKY and partner commitment to SKY;
- Increase expertise;
- Fully implement the BC Provincial CYAC Network Evaluation tools.

Promote SKY. Coordinator feedback indicated that progress was made in educational attempts. Coordinators reported efforts to educate community members and organizations about SKY and its services (e.g., presentations at schools). Yet, fewer children were served by SKY this year than in recent past years. Given the context of this year's challenges (i.e., COVID-19 pandemic, unexpected turnover and vacancies in coordinator positions), this pattern is not surprising. However, it is likely that there are many more children and families within the SKY region who could have made great use of SKY resources and services, but who were unable to access the services or unaware of the services. Stability in SKY's service provision is critical to ensuring that SKY reaches the many children who need this service. The new model of two coordinators with broader regions of service is a strong, positive step and should help SKY move towards greater stability.

Increase expertise. Coordinators reported engaging with a wide array of training opportunities, including attending webinars and online training, and reviewing resources. Such ongoing training is critical – SKY has an outstanding opportunity to develop two highly skilled coordinators who will see a larger number of cases and develop commensurate expertise. This enhanced expertise will benefit the children and families served and enhance the professional experience of those collaborating with SKY. Making time for coordinator education and training should be a primary priority as the new SKY coordinators move into their new roles.

A similar approach can be taken with child forensic interviewers. As suggested in the 2020-2021 Evaluation, a mobile team of skilled interviewers in the Kootenays who could travel to conduct sensitive interviews would provide a degree of expertise and experience that would serve children well and that could enhance the training and skills of other professionals in the region.

Evaluation. Some of the SKY locations implemented the BC Provincial CYAC Network Evaluation tools (MDT feedback, caregiver feedback, child/youth feedback). However, the implementation of these tools was inconsistent throughout the region and within SKY communities. As SKY makes changes to service delivery and continues to grow, monitoring the effectiveness of the service, and reviewing the feedback provided by partners and clients will be critical to ensure that challenges are identified early, and solutions can be reached that promote future success of the model. Consistent guidelines for when and to whom these feedback surveys are delivered are important components of a reliable evaluation process.

EVALUATE NEW MODEL

SKY has had a unique service model since its development, owing to the wide geographic region it serves. The new model of two coordinators in some ways brings the SKY model more in-line with other CYACs in the province due to the smaller number of coordinators. However, the scope of the geographic region, the large number of partner police and child protection organizations, and the many service providers within each of the communities increases the complexity of the work. Close monitoring will be required for:

- Relationship and trust development (with all partner agencies)
- Coordinator challenges in serving a large region
- Benefits of increasing expertise among coordinators
- Logistics of coordinating in multiple communities
- Connections to key players in each community served
- Noting gaps in service communities (e.g., communities from which few referrals are received)

- Need for additional coordinated expertise to serve larger region (e.g., experienced forensic interviewer)
- Re-education of community partners on new SKY model
- Desired opportunities for collaborative training
- General observations of opportunities and challenges presented by the new model

To monitor the implementation of the new model, consider development of a brief survey to complete each month about coordinator activities and impressions of progress. These surveys could be accompanied by conversations with the coordinators' supervisor to discuss strategies and opportunities for further engagement. Key points from these conversations can be documented to contribute to a narrative of the development of the multi-community coordinator role. Regular meetings between the two coordinators to discuss observations, challenges, and opportunities will be critical to share learnings and enhance collaboration and consistency within the larger SKY region.

CONCLUSION

SKY is entering an exciting new phase of service delivery, with a move towards concentrated expertise and coordination. With careful monitoring and evaluation of the new service plan, the many observed benefits from the initial years of SKY's services will be carried forward for further growth. As awareness of SKY and SKY's expert team grow, so too will the benefits to children and families within the SKY region.