



**Safe Kids & Youth
Coordinated Response**

Evaluation Report 2023-2024

BACKGROUND

The SKY Coordinated Response is a collaboration between professionals involved in responding to child maltreatment in the West Kootenay region. 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.

SKY Coordinators 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 hand the file over to the local victim services. After the interview, the SKY Coordinators continue to support the MDT as they work to support the family.

INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

In 2022-2023, SKY introduced a new coordination model in which two 21-hour coordinator positions are employed by SKY (Kootenay Boundary Community Services Co-operative), reporting directly to the SKY Regional Manager. The two new part-time SKY Coordinators began serving the region (SKY North and SKY South) in late June, 2022. Thus, the 2023-2024 report represents the first full year of reporting with the new SKY coordination model.

The 2023-2024 fiscal year and completion of the shift to the new model resulted in an elimination of the previously administered quarterly coordinator surveys. The new evaluation process brings SKY fully in line with the BC Provincial CYAC Network evaluation processes.

HIGHLIGHTS

In addition to the data captured in the report below, there were several important highlights in SKY's work in 2023-2024.

FOCUS ON INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

SKY received a grant from the Department of Justice which allowed them to lead a partnership project with local Indigenous communities to provide enhanced supports to Indigenous victims and their families. Throughout the project, SKY identified service gaps and responded with the development and documentation of best practices. Policies and services designed to support Indigenous children, youth, and their families will be developed as a result of this important work.

In addition to this service work, SKY worked to make their physical spaces culturally appropriate and welcoming by commissioning artwork, and obtaining furnishings and other items that will enhance the comfort of the Indigenous children and families they serve.

INTERVIEW ROOM ENHANCEMENTS

SKY installed updated video and audio recording equipment in four child interview rooms, located in four different communities in the region. This considerable investment vastly improved the usability of the systems and contributed to more involved and engaged multi-disciplinary teamwork.

ACCREDITED FACILITY SUPPORT DOG

SKY received a Facility Support Dog (Trusty) from the Lions Foundation of Canada Dog Guides. Trusty has been a valued and active supporter of SKY's children and youth in police interviews, court appearances, counseling sessions, and other circumstances in which his services were deemed useful. Trusty has made a tremendously positive impact, as noted in the following account:

"A 12-year-old girl was to attend supreme court to testify as a victim of abuse. Shortly before trial, the victim began to have doubts about testifying. It appeared that it would not be possible to proceed. SKY was supporting with coordination services and discussed the matter with the family. SKY's Facility Support dog, Trusty, was brought in to support the victim. This had a tremendous effect on her,

and after successfully testifying, Crown Counsel reported to us that the victim stated “we owe all this to SKY and Trusty”.

LINKAGES TO MEDICAL SERVICES

SKY continues to contribute as an active participant in a Shared Care project with Interior Health Authority (IHA) to bring medical services to the SKY response. This is a complex issue, but a collaborative group of physicians, and partners (Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect Clinic, IHA leaders, CYAC leaders, and local agencies) are engaged in ongoing discussions to find the most optimal solution for serving SKY children.

REGIONAL GATHERING

In March 2024, SKY hosted a Regional Gathering that included RCMP interview coordinators and representatives from the Southeast District of BC and Kelowna, and Indigenous leaders from the Okanagan and Kootenay regions. As with the previous year, the gathering resulted in exclusively positive comments.

To complete this evaluation, the following information was reviewed:

- Case data collected for 2023-2024 fiscal year
- CYAC feedback

EVALUATION DATA: APRIL 1, 2023-MARCH 31, 2024

A total of **29** children were served by SKY from April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024.

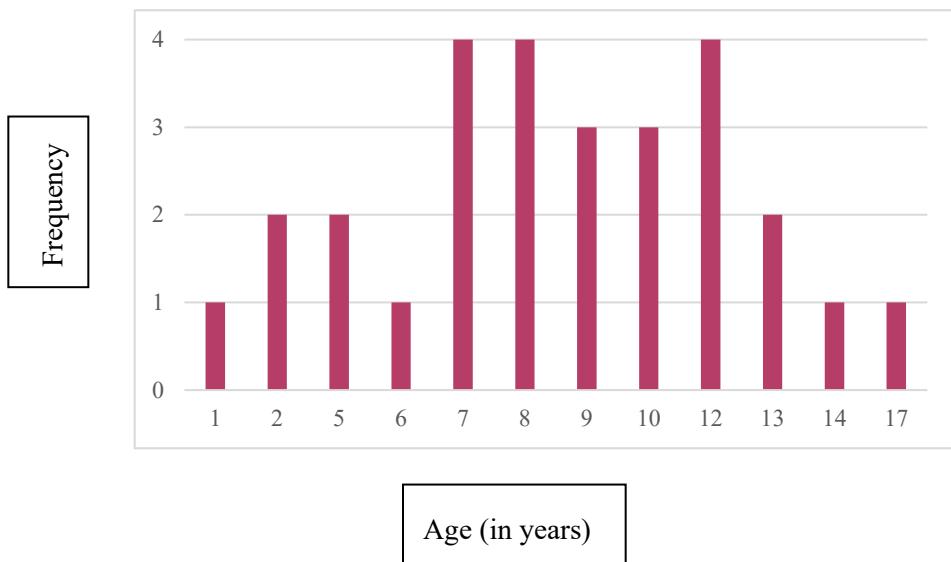
Most children were from Nelson (N = 9), Trail and area (N = 8), and Castlegar (N = 7), with 2 each from Kaslo and Nakusp, and 1 from Alberta.

Note that data are not available for all children on all variables.

CHILD CHARACTERISTICS

- Children aged 1-to-17 years were served by SKY.
- Children were predominantly female, White, and spoke English as their primary language.

Average age:
8.77 years



Gender Identity	N
Female	22
Male	7

Ethnicity/Cultural Background	N
White	17
Indigenous	2
African-Canadian	2
African	1

Role	N
Victim	29
Witness	0

Primary/Preferred Language	N
English	28
French/English	1

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

Complex Characteristics	N
Developmental Delays	2
Trauma Symptoms	1
Verbal Challenges	1

FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS

- Most children were served by SKY for the first time.

Previous contact with SKY	N
No	12
Yes	2

Known domestic violence within the family	N
No	3
Yes	3

NATURE OF THE ALLEGATION

- Most children served by SKY reported sexual abuse. The abuse was most often repeated.

Type of abuse (at referral)	N
Sexual abuse	24
Physical abuse	4
Witness domestic violence	3
Unclear	1

Abuse frequency	N
Single	4
Repeated	11

ALLEGED OFFENDER

- Most allegations involved a single (N = 26) male adult (18+ years) offender. Relationships between the alleged offender and the child were varied, but the large majority were in parental roles.

Gender Identity	N
Male	22
Female	1

Age	N
12-17 years	2
18+ years	18

Relationship to child	N
Father	11
Mother's boyfriend/ partner	4
Other relative	3
Family friend/acquaintance	2
Peer	2
Unfamiliar stranger	2

CYAC EXPERIENCE

INTERVIEWS

- 8 interviews were conducted; All interviews took place in SKY's child-friendly interview rooms.
 - 3 interviews took place at Ministry of Child and Family Development.
 - 2 interviews took place at Trail FAIR
 - 3 interviews took place at RCMP

6 interviews were conducted by trained child interviewers

ALL children were interviewed only once

Children's experiences

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

Service	N
PBVS	5
SAIP	1
CVS	2
PEACE	1

- 1 Forensic Medical Examination was conducted.

CYAC FEEDBACK

- The fiscal year 2023-2024, was the third full year of the new BC Provincial CYAC Network Evaluation process. This process involved a coordinated strategy for evaluation data, in addition to five surveys designed to elicit CYAC model feedback:
 - 1) Multidisciplinary Team Feedback (MDT): Brief
 - 2) Multidisciplinary Team Feedback (MDT): Long
 - 3) Caregiver Feedback
 - 4) Child Feedback
 - 5) Youth Feedback
- This year 2 *MDT: Brief*, 1 *MDT: Long*, 1 *Caregiver*, and 1 *Child survey* were received. Because this is a small number of responses that might provide identifying information, a short summary of responses is provided rather than a detailed report of all responses.
- The 2 responses to the **MDT: Brief** survey:
 - Rated all working relationships as very effective;
 - Reported only positive effects of the CYAC model on the case.
 - One response indicated that the CYAC model did not help to reduce the amount of time usually spent on an investigation.
- The **MDT: Long** survey response rated all working relationships as effective and strongly agreed that the CYAC model had beneficial effects on the case.
- The **Caregiver** survey response was extremely positive, with exclusively positive feedback. The caregiver provided one suggestion: *“More cuddle time with puppy, time in a place with less distractions.”*
- The **Child** survey response was very positive, and included only favourable ratings. When asked for comments about SKY, the child indicated that, *“I love Trusty.”*

RECOMMENDATIONS

SKY continues to evolve and make substantive and meaningful enhancements to their services provided to children. Important conversations and collaborations have led to critical new services for children, including the addition of Facility Support Dog Trusty, collaborative projects with local Indigenous communities that contributed to culturally appropriate services and spaces that welcome Indigenous children and families, and progress in the accessibility of medical services for SKY families.

As SKY continues to grow the comprehensiveness of the model and its impact in the community, SKY must continue to listen to families and community service providers to evaluate its services. SKY has done an excellent job in implementing data tracking to better understand who is served by SKY and continues to put great efforts towards evaluation processes. As provincial CYAC evaluation processes evolve, SKY should continue to engage actively in these processes. Some of the evaluation processes are challenging (e.g., obtaining feedback from children) and the BC CYAC Network is actively working to address these challenges.

Recommendation 1:

SKY should continue to engage with the BC CYAC Network and be deliberate in the effort to evaluate SKY services with all users (caregivers, children, youth, MDT members). SKY should actively contribute to ongoing discussions that help the evaluation process to evolve and better fit all CYACs in BC.

SKY continues to have one of the most unique CYAC models in BC (and perhaps, Canada). SKY should consider how to gather some of the data that are not captured by provincially-developed processes, to best represent the complex work of SKY. For example, SKY engages with the multi-disciplinary teams in the region on many files that do not become official SKY files. SKY meets with police, counselors, and social workers to assist with referrals and to engage in discussions about how to address particular clients. All of these interactions are not currently captured by provincial data tracking processes.

Recommendation 2:

SKY should develop custom data tracking processes to complement the provincial data tracking template. This tracking will allow SKY to fully understand the scope of activities and allow for greater representation of SKY's critical work.

The inclusion of medical services continues to pose a challenge for all CYACs. There are many partners, players, and policies that must be navigated. Thus, it is not a surprise that SKY has not yet “solved” the challenge of how to integrate medical services. Nonetheless, given its critical importance to the SKY region, SKY must continue to push for an appropriate service model.

Recommendation 3:

SKY should continue to press for appropriate medical services for SKY children. Though a considerable challenge, how to best include medical services in the SKY model should continue to be a top priority for SKY.

CONCLUSION

SKY provides a crucial service to West Kootenay children and families. SKY has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to development of the service model and engages in continual critical evaluation of its services. This self-reflection and willingness to change is a central strength of SKY. These efforts are time-consuming, but SKY's evolution will best serve the community. As SKY develops and adapts over time, the entire community served by SKY will see more positive social and health outcomes.

TABLE OF ACRONYMS

Acronym	Definition
CVS	Community-Based Victim Services
PBVS	Police-Based Victim Services
CYAC	Child and Youth Advocacy Centre
MCFD	Ministry of Children and Family Development
MDT	Multi-Disciplinary Team
PEACE	Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling, and Empowerment
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Trail FAIR	Trail Family and Individual Resource Society
SAIP	Sexual Abuse Intervention Program