

Child and Youth Friendly Communities

Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia
CANADA

<http://www.scyofbc.org>

Short description of the programme

The Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia (SCY) is a provincial advocacy organization dedicated to improving the well-being of children and youth. SCY provides a forum for multi-disciplinary exchange and action for organizations and individuals working with and for young people. The SCY has developed two booklets. 1. Making Your Community More Child and Youth Friendly - Getting Started: this booklet is designed to illustrate what child and youth friendliness means for different aspects of the community and to start people thinking about what needs to be done in their community by examining key aspects of the community that affect young people's lives. 2. Making Your Community More Child and Youth Friendly - Planning for Action: this second booklet is designed to help clarify the process of identifying a community's strengths and weaknesses, and to develop an action plan for making the community more child and youth friendly. They have tried to cover these key aspects of the community within 17 "domains". For each domain, they have provided some ideas to illustrate what child and youth friendliness means. When going through the domains, bear in mind that:

- they are interconnected – there is overlap among some of the domains so they should not be considered in total isolation from each other;
- they are not exhaustive – there are other aspects of the community that affect young people's lives;
- the ideas for child and youth friendliness within each domain are also not exhaustive – there are many more ways to make communities child and youth friendly.

PARAMETERS

HOUSING

The key design factors change with age. For example, younger children require materials and design on a child friendly scale, while older children and youth have a greater need for separate space.

CLOSE TO HOME

From a relatively early age, children begin to explore areas around their homes, such as common areas of apartments and townhomes, and local streets. Making these areas child friendly is vital as young children are particularly vulnerable and impressionable.

PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

Parks include natural areas, settings with play and fitness equipment, and playing fields. Open space includes areas such as beaches, creeks, forests and empty lots. Parks and open space are key settings for informal play and recreation.

FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Family support services include pre visiting, well-baby clinics, infant development programs, family resource programs, community kitchens, toy libraries, parent education and support programs (e.g., "Nobody's Perfect"), life & family programs, and a variety of early intervention programs preschool and school-age children.

CHILDCARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Childcare and early childhood education services include pre-schools and early childhood education centres, full-day care for infants and young children, and before- and after-school care for school-age children, as well as emergency, vacation and respite care for children of various age.

SCHOOLS

All children and youth need to be safe while at school and to have the best possible opportunities for learning. Elements of child and youth friendly school grounds include natural play spaces and school gardens, as well as safety from traffic, bullying and other dangers.

NEIGHBOURHOOD SECURITY AND POLICING

Feeling safe in the community is essential for all children and youth. It brings the freedom to walk and cycle along neighbourhood streets, and to enjoy local parks, playgrounds and open space.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is an important issue for children and youth and, of course, for their parents. Apart from walking or cycling to areas relatively close to home, or taking the school bus, younger children are generally taken places by their parents. As children approach the teenage years, they tend to travel more independently and farther from home, using various modes of transportation: walking, rollerblading, cycling, using skateboards or scooters, and taking buses and other public transit. When they reach the age of 16, many will begin to learn to drive.

RECREATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

After school, homework and household responsibilities, and maybe a job for older youth, much of young people's waking time is spent on recreation. Recreation services are provided by most municipalities as well as by a variety of community organisations (e.g., the Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides).

ORGANIZED SPORT AND PHYSICAL RECREATION

For many children and youth, physical recreation is a big part of their recreation activities, with sport often being a major focus. Organized sport and physical recreation takes place in many venues within the community: inside at the recreation or other facilities, and outside on the playfields. It involves participating in local leagues and teams, travelling to other communities and meeting other young people.

THE ARTS AND CULTURE

The arts, in all their forms - music, drama, and the written and visual arts - are essential to all cultures, and play a social-recreational role in our communities. Many groups in the community provide arts and crafts programs or activities for children and youth: recreation departments, public and private arts groups, libraries, museums and arts centres.

HEALTH SERVICES

Children and youth interact with the health system in a variety of ways, such as getting immunizations from community health nurses, having regular check-ups with doctors and dentists, going to appointments with specialists, and going to the Emergency Room or staying in the hospital. Children are usually with their parents when they see a doctor or dentist, whereas teens may access health services independently.

SOCIAL AND JUSTICE SERVICES

Children and youth may come into contact with a variety of community-based social and justice services, such as child protection services, foster care, support services for youth living independently, services for victims, and youth justice services. Young people need to be treated with respect and in a culturally appropriate manner. Services need to be available to support children, youth and families in difficulty, to heal young victims, and to help young offenders turn their lives around.

LOCAL BUSINESS

Children and youth visit many different types of local businesses, such as corner stores, department stores, malls, restaurants and banks, both with their parents and on their own. When young people go to local businesses unaccompanied by their parents, they may come into conflict with managers or employees who are concerned about shoplifting or the perceptions of adult customers. Child and youth friendly businesses mean that parents find it easy to shop with young children, that facilities and services are designed to meet the needs of children and youth, and that young people are treated with respect when on their own.

WORKPLACES

While workplaces are generally adult environments, they affect children of parents who work outside the home as well as youth who have entered the workforce. Parents have concerns about the availability and quality of childcare services. Many also have concerns about balancing and integrating their work and family lives. It is important for parents to be available for their children at key times (e.g., for school events or when children are sick), and for children to understand and feel connected to their parents' work lives.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

It is our local governments, rather than provincial or federal governments, that most directly influence the daily lives of children, youth and families. Local government structures vary across the country; they include city, regional or other municipal

governments, local school boards and parks boards, well as the many other boards and commissions that manage specific services.

Many of these local government agencies manage services related to domains that we have already covered (e.g., schools, parks, and health services), but local government has an impact many other aspects of young people's lives, in particular through community planning.

THE MEDIA

Whether through newspapers, radio, television or the Internet, the media have a significant impact on the lives of children and youth. The media can be very effective in increasing public awareness of important issues affecting young people. The media can also have a great impact on how young people feel out themselves and how others perceive them. But the impact is not always positive. For example, the media reinforce ideals of appearance and behaviour that are often unrealistic and unhealthy, such as excessive thinness as an ideal for female beauty, and macho and violent role models for males. Further, the media routinely cover stories about violent youth, but seldom pay the same attention to positive stories about youth.