A one day snapshot of the Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling and Empowerment (PEACE) Programs for children and youth in BC





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Background	2
In 24 Hours	3
PEACE Program Support Services	5
Standing Beside: Support & Advocacy	9
Sharing Knowledge: Violence Prevention & Public Education	11
Unmet Needs	14
Supporting PEACE Programs	20
Appendix A: Regional Comparisons Of Census Results	23



INTRODUCTION

The BC Society of Transition Houses (BCSTH) is a member-based, provincial umbrella organization that, through leadership, support and collaboration, enhances the continuum of services and strategies to respond to, prevent and end violence against women, children and youth. The Prevention, Education, Advocacy, Counselling and Empowerment (PEACE) Program for children and youth experiencing violence, (formerly the Children Who Witness Abuse Program) is a free, confidential program across BC for children and youth aged 3 to 18 who have experienced domestic violence.

BCSTH surveys PEACE Programs annually to document a snapshot of services provided in a single 24-hour survey period through an annual 24-hour census. BCSTH conducted this 24-hour census survey on November 29th & 30th 2023. This census is a snapshot count of a 24-hour period where children and youth with experiences of violence and their non-offending caregivers were served by PEACE Programs. This census provides a provincial picture of how many people were seeking services for their experiences of violence, how many were unable to be served, and the scope of the current PEACE Program support services.

While most PEACE Programs submit their data to the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General (MPSSG), that data may include duplicate information (e.g., a child or youth may have been served by two different PEACE Programs in

one quarter). The 24-hour census data aims to eliminate duplication by capturing all individuals served within the same 24-hour time frame. Regional comparisons of the results are also included in this report – please see Appendix A.

The PEACE Program is a psycho-educational program that provides age-appropriate individual and group counselling services to children and youth to:

- Label and express the feelings they have experienced in relation to the violence they have encountered;
- Understand healthy ways of dealing with anger and expressing anger;
- Understand that they are not at fault for the violent actions of others;
- Teach safety skills, strategies and develop safety plans;
- Encourage open communication;
- Acknowledge loss and separation issues;
- Facilitate understanding of abuse and myths about violence against women;
- Explore other violence issues such as violence in the media; and
- Encourage self-confidence.

For more information about BC's PEACE Programs and to find a PEACE Program in your community, visit our website at https://bcsth.ca/program/ peace/.



BACKGROUND

There are 87 PEACE Programs in BC, two of which are entirely self-funded and the remainder of which receive a minimum of 17.5 hours per week in funding from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General (MPSSG). There have been 85 PEACE Programs in BC for more than 15 years and, despite the demand and the waitlists for services that extend back just as long, the provincial government has not provided any new funding to support new PEACE Programs in BC. The two self-funded programs are BCSTH members who recognized the importance of the PEACE Program for their children, youth, and families and after their organizations were advised by MPSSG that no provincial funding was available, committed to fundraising and grant writing to self-fund a PEACE Program and they both receive training and resources from BCSTH.1 In recent years, eight other communities in BC representing Indigenous (6), Metis (1) and immigrant and refugee communities (1) have also requested PEACE Programs because of the recognized value of the more than 30-year-old PEACE Program and the need for services for the children, youth and families they support.

¹ This year, we received an additional survey response for a PEACE Program operating out of a Second Stage Housing Program. As such, PEACE Program numbers total 88 this year due to this additional response, however, the number of PEACE Programs throughout the province remains at 87.



IN 24 HOURS

Sixty-seven of the 87 PEACE Programs, plus the extended PEACE program that operates out of a Second Stage Housing Program, participated in BCSTH's 2023 24 Hour Census (referred to as 68 PEACE Programs throughout the remainder of this report). Thank you to all of the PEACE Programs who took time out of their busy days to participate in the 24 Hour Census survey.

On November 29th & 30th, 2023, over a 24-hour period, **472** children and youth who have experienced violence and their non-offending caregivers were supported by PEACE Programs across all regions in BC. Also, during this 24-hour period, PEACE Programs in BC:

Responded to 356 service-related calls, emails, and texts by providing information and support; and

Educated 576 people about the dynamics and **impacts of violence** against women through training and public presentations.

Were unable to serve an additional 454 children and youth and their non-offending caregivers . There were a total of 673 children and youth on waitlists for PEACE Program services in BC.

For the third year in a row, program waitlists were identified as the most relevant barrier to providing PEACE Program services during the 24-hour reporting period. Waitlists have been identified as a key barrier to PEACE Program services in the 24 Hour Census survey every single year since 2018. The next most relevant barriers to service identified were that the needs of children and youth who want to access the PEACE Program are often outside of the program's mandate, insufficient staffing, and that the financial needs of the program are not being met by government funding.

BCSTH sincerely thanks the PEACE Programs for the difference they are making every day in the lives of children and youth experiencing violence.

"[There are] Limited to no services available for children and youth here...! was told that I am a 'God-sent-asset for the community'.

The gap is that I only work 18.5 hours per week, the waitlist is too long and people give up."



PEACE PROGRAM SUPPORT SERVICES

"This	program	has	been	a	game-changer
for m	ne."				

- Program Participant, Caregiver

Over a 24-hour period, **472** children and youth with experiences of violence and their non-offending caregivers were provided support services through 56 of the 68 PEACE Programs that participated in the census. Twelve of the responding PEACE Programs noted that their program was closed during some or all of the 24 hour period, largely due to staff being on leave due to sickness or vacation (6), the part-time hours on which most PEACE Programs are funded by MPSSG to operate (4) the program operating seasonally (1) or positions being vacant (1). During the 24-hour period, **338** children and youth and **134** adults were supported to respond to the impacts of violence (Table 1).

"I always look forward to our Wednesday sessions, they feel like they go by so fast, I wish they could be longer."

- Program Participant, Youth



Table 1: Number of children, youth and non-offending caregivers served by PEACE programs in-person and remotely during the census period

Age Range	Number
Female Older Adults (50+)	7
Female Adults (25-49)	108
Male Adults (25-49)	8
Female Young Adults (19-24)	10
Transgender² Young Adults (19-24)	1
Female Youth (16-18)	27
Male Youth (16-18)	10
Transgender Youth (16-18)	2
Female Children/Youth (11-15)	60
Male Children/Youth (11-15)	44
Transgender Children/Youth (11-15)	5
Female Children (6-10)	91
Male Children (6-10)	71
Transgender Children (6-10)	1
Female Children (0-5)	15
Male Children (0-5)	12
Total	472

² Transgender is an "umbrella term for those who gender does not align wth the sex they were assigned at birth. The term 'transgender' i.e., trans may include those with a binary (man or woman), non-binary, or other non-static/fluid gender identity." (Alex Vanderveen, Counselling Clients With 2SLGBTQIA+ Identities in Canada)

"It's nice to have a place I can share things that I can't talk about at home or to friends."

- Program Participant

In the 24 hour period, PEACE programs responded to 356 service related calls, emails and text messages: an average of 14-15 calls, emails and texts every hour.



Many children, youth and non-offending caregivers served by PEACE Programs during the 24 hour period were known to belong to marginalized communities, as displayed in table ².

Table 2: People from margnalized communities supported by PEACE programs during the 24 hour period

	Number
Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, or Inuit) people	102
Black people	7
Racialized people (visible minorities other than black or Indigenous)	51
2SLGBTQI+ people	19
Refugee, immigrant, newcomer or non-status people	23
Living with disabilities	22
Sex workers	2

180 children, youth and non-offending caregivers served (38.1%) were known to be experiencing challenges related to mental wellness or substance use as follows:

- 117 people supported (24.8%) were facing challenges related to their mental wellness.
- 36 people supported (7.6%) were facing challenges related to substance use.
- 27 people supported (5.7%) were facing challenges related to both mental wellness and substance use.

 $^{^{\}rm 2}$ People belonging to more than one marginalized group were counted more than once



STANDING BESIDE: SUPPORT & ADVOCACY

As in previous years, Individual Support services was by far the activity that PEACE Programs most frequently reported engaging in during the 24-hour period, at 83.8%. For the fourth year in a row, support related to mental wellness was the second most common activity reported by PEACE Program counsellors at 44.1%. This was followed by parent/caregiver skills programs (26.5%), support related to MCFD (16.2%) and group support and delivering the Violence is Preventable (VIP) and BELIEVE programs (each at 14.7%) (table 3).

"This support group has helped me immensely and I am going to recommend it to other people in the community. I am so grateful for the service your agency provides."

- Program Participant

"Grateful that after five years of looking for help for myself and my children, we were finally able to rest after getting the PEACE Program support."

- Program Participant, Caregiver

Table 3: Percentage of PEACE programs who reported providing each activity and mode of service delivery during the census period

Individual Support 83.82%

Support related to Mental Health 44.12%

Parenting/Caregiver Skills Programs 26.47%

Support related to Child Protection (MCFD) 16.18%

Group Support 14.71%

Violence Is Preventable and/or BELIEVE Project 14.71%



During the **24-hour period**, PEACE Program counsellors delivered **386 support sessions**, including::

- **261 individual** counselling sessions to children and youth
- 42 group counselling sessions to children and youth
- 83 sessions to parents or caregivers.

"You helped me. I could just see me trying to do this all on my own and I would be like, what do I do?"

- Program Participant



SHARING KNOWLEDGE: VIOLENCE PREVENTION & PUBLIC EDUCATION

"[I] Love the flexibility of VIP to be responsive to what the schools need – and how best to integrate services into the schools to reduce barriers."

- PEACE Program Counsellor

Violence prevention education that PEACE Programs provide includes reaching out to children and youth in schools through the <u>Violence is Preventable (VIP) Program</u>. Through VIP, PEACE Program counsellors educate young people and school staff about healthy relationships and the resources that are available regarding domestic violence.

"Thankful you are able to attend the school to see students."

- Vice Principal

During the pandemic, access to schools was severely restricted and this was reflected in the number of VIP presentations and public education sessions that PEACE Programs were able to deliver, as well as the number of children and youth attending them. 2023 was the first year that the number of attendees at violence prevention and public education sessions surpassed pre-

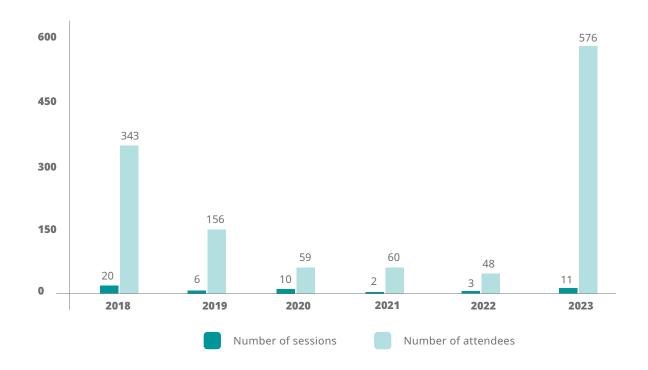
pandemic levels (table 4). The increased number of attendees per session likely reflects the removal of social distancing measures, with some sessions reported to have as many as 200 attendees. While numbers of both sessions and attendees were lowest in 2022, the pandemic was not reported to have impacted service delivery that year, suggesting that low numbers may instead be indicative of a lack of funding for the PEACE Program making it harder for counsellors to offer VIP presentations in addition to core services. The substantially higher number of attendees reported this year, without an equally sharp rise in the number of sessions, may also reflect an attempt to maximize reach with a lack of resources by increasing session sizes.

"It would be helpful if there was funding for a secondary PEACE staff whose main job is to organize and take charge of educational groups and programs within the schools as well as the community."

PEACE programs educated 576 people about the dynamics and impacts of violence against women through training and public presentations during the 24 hour census period.



Table 4: Comparison of number of public education sessions delivered during the 24 hour census period and number of people attending between 2018-2023



"The teachers in the school thank us for running our program and share that it really helps with encouraging positive socialization for children who struggle with peer interactions."



UNMET NEEDS

"[l] wish I could do more to reduce the waitlist."

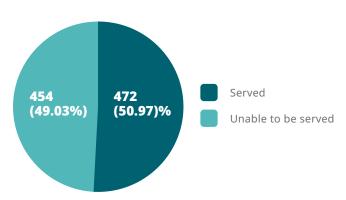
- PEACE Program Counsellor

Over the 24-hour period, **454** BC children, youth and their non-offending parents or caregivers could not be served by PEACE Program services. Almost as many individuals were unable to be served as there were served (table 5).

Furthermore, more than half of the PEACE Programs who responded to this survey reported that their program was carrying a waitlist during the 24 hour period (55.8%). Between them, there were 673 children and youth on waitlists for PEACE Program services, almost one and a half times the number of children, youth and non-offending caregivers served (454 vs 673) (table 6).

"Women have expressed some disappointment in the program waitlist as resources for children in our area is minimal."

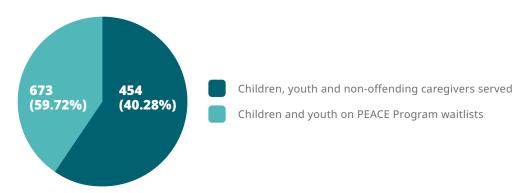
Table 5: Children, youth and non-offending caregivers served and unable to be served by PEACE programs during the 24-hour period



During the 24 hour period there were 673 children and youth on waitlists for PEACE program services: almost one and a half times the number of children, youth and non-offending caregivers served (454).



Table 6: Children, youth and non-offending caregivers served compared to children and youth on PEACE program waitlists during the 24 hour period



Waitlists for programs was the top factor identified by PEACE Programs as a barrier to providing services during the 24-hour period for the third year in a row, with almost forty per cent (39.7%) of respondents reporting that this contributed to their program being unable to meet requests for service during the 24-hour period (table 7).

PEACE Program waitlists have been identified as a key barrier to services in the 24 Hour Census every single year for the last seven years.

Increased funding remains vital to enable PEACE Programs to reduce long waitlists.

"The waitlist is the major one. It is hard to intake and then let moms know there is a three-month minimum waitlist. Harder too when there is a high need to prioritize new referrals as urgent and that there are just not enough services to refer out to in our community."



Table 7: Top 5 reasons PEACE programs were unable to serve women, children and youth during the 24-hour period

Reason	n	%
Waitlist for programs	27	39.7
Needs of child/youth out with PEACE Program mandate	12	17.65
Insufficient Staff	10	14.71
Financial needs of program not being met by government funding	10	14.71
Insufficient resources to support children/youth with varying levels of mental wellness and/or substance use needs	7	10.29

As with last year, the needs of children and youth falling outside of the PEACE Program mandate was the second most relevant barrier identified to providing services (17.6%). PEACE Program counsellors continued to emphasize the severe lack of alternative services in their communities, particularly mental health services including clinical counselling. The need for services that are free or affordable for families on a low-income was repeatedly highlighted.

"Most of the time, I have a long waitlist for counselling, usually about 1-2 months. The biggest problem I have is not having referrals to send off after completion of the PEACE program (when more support is needed) or having no one to refer children and youth to for clinical counselling that is free and easily accessible..."

- PEACE Program Counsellor

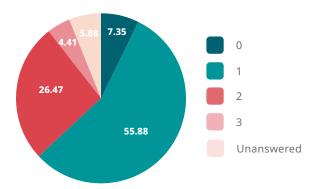
"There are massive waitlists for any and all mental health related services for children and youth in our community – everything from psychiatric services to psychological assessment to actual individual therapy itself. As a result, youth get older/move on/are less open/get interested in other things and problems get entrenched."



This was closely followed by insufficient staff and the financial needs of the program not being met by provincial funding (each at 14.7%). The lack of funding for this program means that the majority of PEACE Program counsellors are aiming to manage significant caseloads and long waitlists with only part-time hours, placing them under significant stress. The lack of alternative services in many communities, as described above, also adds to this pressure. The impacts of this are reflected in the attrition rates for the program, which sits at 32 per cent from December 2022-December 2023.

During the 24 Hour period, the number of staff working in the PEACE Programs who responded to the survey ranged from 0-3, with a median of one and an average of 1.29. More than half of the programs who responded (55.9%) were operating with just one staff member during the 24 hour period (table 8). There was a total of six volunteers (including practicum students) supporting PEACE Programs in BC during the 24 hour period.

Table 8: Percentage of PEACE programs operating with 0-3 staff members during the 24-hour period



"Lack of qualified workers, challenge to meet wage expectation as a non-unionized social service agency, part-time employment offered, worker must find other employment, as a small rural agency we cannot offer beyond the 17.5 hours."

- PEACE Program Counsellor

"Receiving voicemails from school counsellors wanting to refer a student for support. I'm not able to call back quickly due to shortage of hours in the program...The pressure to respond and rush other appointments out the door is so great some days when the phone keeps blowing up!"



Finally, and for the third year in a row, insufficient resources to support children or youth with varying levels of mental wellness and/or substance use needs was identified as a key barrier to services, with just over ten per cent (10.29%) of respondents identifying this as a barrier to services.

""It would be amazing to have two or three of me and two or three of the other child and youth mental health related support providers in our community, like CYMH, school psychologists, a local Sexual Assault Response Team, the presence of any child psychologist in person, eating disorder specialists, and of course all the others like a local dual diagnosis counselor rather than regional, etc. ..."

- PEACE Program Counsellor

While BCSTH and the PEACE Programs are sincerely grateful for the funding commitment in 2018 provided by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to provide at a minimum 17.5 hours per week of PEACE Program counselling services to 85 of the 87 PEACE Programs across BC, it is clear that the demand for services continues to outweigh the funding commitment, with the overwhelming majority of respondents continuing to stress that full-time hours and secondary staff are vital if PEACE Programs are to be able to meet the needs of the children, youth and families in their communities in BC.

"I think the main service gap is lack of hours. My program is only funded for 18.5 hours per week so I find it difficult to serve clients, participate in community engagement, training, and offer VIP all within this limited time frame. My focus at this point in time is serving the clients and ensuring there is not a waitlist. I don't want to be out in the community promoting the PEACE Program if I don't have the availability to serve more clients."

- PEACE Program Counsellor

"The biggest issue is that there is only one PEACE counsellor here. When I am sick (which happens a lot when working with kids, regardless of how many precautions I take!), the whole program gets put on hold. Client appointments get pushed back which means my waitlist clients have to wait longer. It's really frustrating for it to all have to come to a complete halt just because I am unwell or want to go on holidays."



SUPPORTING PEACE PROGRAMS

Key service gaps reported by survey respondents aligned with the top reasons that programs were unable to meet requests for services during the 24 Hour Census period. Gaps in services that were reported to be impacting PEACE Programs' work with women, youth and children in BC predominantly related again to long waitlists for both PEACE Program services and also for alternative services like clinical counselling and mental health, with almost half of respondents citing this issue (48.5%). Waitlists for alternative services were reported to be as long as one year or more where these services existed at all.

"Long waitlists [and] limitations in services to refer out [to]. Most service providers, including myself, are quite stretched with need for supports and hours...many, many kiddos just get bounced back to my program and on waitlists and end up needing services for longer periods of time where they are untreated and often this leads to destructive, risky behaviors..."

- PEACE Program Counsellor

This was again followed by a lack of alternative services, with more than one third of respondents citing this as a key service gap (38.2%). The shortage of mental health services and clinical counselling, particularly that are free or accessible for families on a low income, was most commonly raised here. Other service needs that were reported included grief and loss counselling, family counselling, Sexual Abuse Intervention Programs (SAIP), more school counsellors, support for children with special needs or developmental challenges, services for younger children, counselling for teens who have left abusive relationships and community resources more generally, including extra-curricular activities.

"Child/youth clinical counselling is so imperative in smaller, rural communities and we have such little of it. A PEACE counsellor like myself can only do so much!"

- PEACE Program Counsellor

"There is no support for kids between the ages of 3-12 that do not fit into the PEACE mandate."



Closely related to the issue of long waitlists for PEACE Programs, a lack of funded hours for the program was reported as a key service gap by one quarter of survey respondents (25%). This included issues with low pay, which results in high turnover rates, staff shortages and recruitment challenges, all of which further prolong existing waitlists. Some respondents shared that they are unable to meet all requirements of the program, such as going into schools while also reducing their PEACE Program waitlists.

"We are currently trying to hire additional staff but the wages we can provide through our government contracts just cannot compete with other agencies in town and nearby..."

- PEACE Program Counsellor

The next most common service gaps reported related to legal supports and housing (each at 14.7%). Issues relating to legal supports included a lack of legal aid and family law advocates, long waitlists for family law services that are hard to navigate, slow and hard to access court systems, insufficient resources to access safety measures such as protection orders in a timely fashion, and challenges around children and younger youth who do not wish to go on court-mandated visits with their abusive caregiver, but moms feeling that they have to send them to avoid being accused of parental alienation and not abiding by court orders. Other reported challenges included a lack of education about domestic violence and its impacts on women and children within the family

law and criminal justice system as well as a lack of appropriate supports.

Issues related to housing included a lack of affordable housing for women fleeing violence with their children in BC, particularly for those on a low income. A lack of temporary housing including Transition and Second Stage Housing options were also mentioned. A lack of group homes for youth or safe housing options for youth i.e., youth with family issues such as experiencing violence at home was also raised.

As noted earlier in this report, BCSTH and the PEACE Programs appreciate the funding commitment from MPSSG for a minimum of 17.5 hours/week of PEACE Program services to 85 of the 87 PEACE Programs in BC. While BCSTH is thrilled by the recent announcement of one time federal funds for the VIP program under BC's GBV Action Plan, the need for increased and sustained funding for core PEACE Program services, for both existing and new programs, remains crucial to meet the demand for services in all corners of BC. Every child and youth in BC who is experiencing violence, along with their non-offending caregiver, deserves timely access to appropriate supports to live safely and build PEACEful relationships.

Please visit the BCSTH <u>Directory of Member Programs & Services</u> or the <u>Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General site</u> to find more information about a PEACE Program in your community.

"The work that we are doing continues to evolve and match the rise in demand for support with mental health challenges, substance use, suicidality, and so on. As the needs of children, youth, and non-offending caregivers increase, our compensation should align with this. We are being called to continuously seek professional development to ethically do the work, as well as practice more self-care to sustain. As the professional and personal demand for PEACE Counsellors to be ethically qualified to meet complex needs, it is crucial that we are compensated accordingly."



APPENDIX A: REGIONAL COMPARISONS OF CENSUS RESULTS

Response Rates³

Region	Programs in region	Programs who responded	Programs who responded (%)
Region 1: Vancouver Island and Powell River	13	9	69.2
Region 2: Lower Mainland	10	9	90
Region 3: Fraser Valley	13	9	69.2
Region 4: Kootenays	13	13	100
Region 5: Okanagan	14	11	78.6
Region 6: Cariboo	11	7	63.6
Region 7: Northern BC	14	10	71.4
Total	88	68	77.3

A total of twelve respondents reported that their program was closed on one or both days during the 24-hour census period, as shown below:

Region	Programs Closed
Region 1: Vancouver Island and Powell River	2
Region 2: Lower Mainland	1
Region 3: Fraser Valley	1
Region 4: Kootenays	2
Region 5: Okanagan	3
Region 6: Cariboo	1
Region 7: Northern BC	2
Total	12

³ PEACE Program numbers total to 88 this year due to one additional response from a recently extended PEACE Programming service operating out of a Second Stage Housing Program.



People Served

Region	No. Supported
Region 1: Vancouver Island and Powell River	55
Region 2: Lower Mainland	113
Region 3: Fraser Valley	87
Region 4: Kootenays	60
Region 5: Okanagan	68
Region 6: Cariboo	37
Region 7: Northern BC	52
Total	472

Demographic Information

Region	Indigenous	Black	Other racialized minorities	2SLGBTQI+	Refugee, immigrant, newcomer or non- status	Living with disabilities	Sex workers
Region 1: Vancouver Island and Powell River	8	0	0	2	0	1	0
Region 2: Lower Mainland	10	1	30	6	20	1	0
Region 3: Fraser Valley	27	3	16	1	3	1	2
Region 4: Kootenays	10	3	1	1	0	2	0
Region 5: Okanagan	16	0	2	4	0	10	0
Region 6: Cariboo	9	0	0	3	0	2	0
Region 7: Northern BC	22	0	2	2	0	5	0
Total	102	7	51	19	23	22	2



Support Sessions Provided

Region	Individual Sessions	Group Sessions	Caregiver Sessions	TOTAL
Region 1: Vancouver Island and Powell River	36	1	18	55
Region 2: Lower Mainland	30	4	13	47
Region 3: Fraser Valley	57	31	11	99
Region 4: Kootenays	41	1	17	59
Region 5: Okanagan	48	2	6	56
Region 6: Cariboo	25	1	7	33
Region 7: Northern BC	24	2	11	37
Total	261	42	83	386

Service-related calls, emails or texts received

Region	# of service-related calls, emails or text messages received
Region 1: Vancouver Island and Powell River	60
Region 2: Lower Mainland	52
Region 3: Fraser Valley	95
Region 4: Kootenays	48
Region 5: Okanagan	45
Region 6: Cariboo	12
Region 7: Northern BC	44
Total	356



People unable to be served

Region	# of people unable to serve
Region 1: Vancouver Island and Powell River	38
Region 2: Lower Mainland	101
Region 3: Fraser Valley	200
Region 4: Kootenays	14
Region 5: Okanagan	22
Region 6: Cariboo	3
Region 7: Northern BC	76
Total	454

Programs with a waitlist

Region	# of programs with a waitlist	# of children and youth on waitlist
Region 1: Vancouver Island and Powell River	8	175
Region 2: Lower Mainland	7	85
Region 3: Fraser Valley	4	150
Region 4: Kootenays	6	44
Region 5: Okanagan	6	118
Region 6: Cariboo	3	9
Region 7: Northern BC	4	92
Total	38	673

