



A message from Paige Thombs, TFJS Collaborative Lead

Happy new year, everyone! I hope you were all able to find some rest and rejuvenation before the calendars flipped over to January, whether that was with family and friends, on a beach somewhere sunny, or just buried under blankets binging your favourite new show (has anyone watched Pluribus?!)

If you're anything like me, you might be sitting around and wondering "How is it already 2026?! Where did 2025 go?!" You might also be thinking about the year ahead and how you can make it a great one, both personally and professionally, but also for the world in which we live. Turning on the news or flipping through the newspaper can make one weary these days and makes is tempting to crawl back into bed until next year!

But there is brightness out there. Over the past few months, I have had the opportunity, via all of you, to be reminded that there are people whose passions are making the world (or at least our corner of it) a better place, for young persons and families. In November, I had the opportunity to attend the Rocky Mountain Collaborative Conference--200+ people (including lawyers, judges, social workers, policy makers, mental health professionals and more), all devoted to "sparking a culture of change in the ways that families, their communities, government, the legal profession, and our courts address family conflict" (Justice Mary T. Moreau, SCC, opening remarks for the conference). The end goal is for the collaborative system to replace our current adversarial justice system, where family justice is concerned.

My colleague, Tina Parbhakar, Strategic Coordinator for Access to Justice BC, along with the amazing Diana Lowe, KC, and I had the opportunity to run a World Café, with a group of about 20 very enthusiastic participants. It's amazing to see how excited people become when we have an opportunity to come together. Despite talking about collaborative practice throughout the three-day conference, our participants did not run out of either things to say or tidbits of wisdom to share (see photos on next page). As well, the conference was in Banff, so beauty was all around, both in the form of togetherness, and in the form of snowy mountaintops!

Another bright light was the Representative for Children and Youth BC's (RCYBC) follow up to their Don't Look Away report. In a gathering called "We're Not Looking Away," almost 400 attendees participated in thoughtful and meaningful conversations regarding the important work that needs to be done to address the silence on violence, and to find ways to respond in intersectoral, interdisciplinary, and compassionate ways. I found it profoundly moving to see so many in one room all seeking connection and support in the work we do with families and young people. Despite all the challenging things going on in the world these days, please know that the work you do goes towards positivity in this complicated world in which we find ourselves.

Much peace and joy to you all in 2026,

Paige



What are the benefits of a collaborative practice? - How might it lead to better outcomes for families?

Benefits

- Finding common interests
- 'Safe container' to move through difficulty
- Don't inflame conflict which harms families
- Trained professionals w. skills to de-escalate conflict
- Boundaries give safety + certainty of process
- Empowers people, retain agency + control
- Better chance to co-parent in healthy way w. focus on best interests
- People feel heard + understood
- Less trauma, less polarization

Challenges

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Welcome to the ReForming Family Justice

WORLD GAFÉ!

dialogue exploration discover collective gathering Thoughts Inspiration

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1. What are the benefits of a collaborative practice? - How might it lead to better outcomes for families?

- Less expensive
- Faster
- Child Focus -> Dynamic
- Respectful of people
- Self Determination
- Creativity -> Outcomes
- Screening

2. What lessons have you learned from other sectors that could strengthen collaborative practice and transformation in family justice?

- Indigenous models - decisions made in community, not so much 'bad news' to us in family restructuring
- Brain science - parties need to be in right frame of mind for decision making
- Litigative model - what not to do
- Experts are owned, knowledge in silos, defend your self, be closed + non-transparent

Financial planners - can be creative

- map out many different options
- scenarios without sticking to one
- financial (family property) model

Health - get the right expert or resource to solve the problem, don't limit to those present.

World Café Board

What are the benefits of a collaborative practice? - How might it lead to better outcomes for families?

- Allows focus on wellbeing of all family members
- Opportunity for skill-building + educational for clients
- Facilitates insight + empathy
- Clients get room + skills to manage emotions, address fears

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Education tells us how collaboration (or not) is helping children

Stress impacts learning!

Deeper Sense of Shared Humanity

Healthy Multiple Jobs

Wellness + Physical Health

Emotional + Social Health

Each other

Each other

Survive + Thrive

Family Systems

Insight on Family Systems

Insight on Family Systems

Insight on Family Systems

2. What lessons have you learned from other sectors that could strengthen collaborative practice and transformation in family justice?

- Everyone needs to collaborate
- Collaboration should be standard
- Together we achieve better results
- Mental Health is critical
- Health must be involved
- "Wrap around" "affordability"
- "ACEs"
- Forward Thinking
- recognizing individual need
- building "skills"
- Mental health professionals w/ police
- CONST
- ex. housing need or supports
- ex. financial services

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Featuring: Youth Voices

Hi Marko. Tell us a bit about yourself.

Hello, my name is Marko (he/him). I am a queer Albanian adoptee and a youth from care, originally from Tkarón:to (colonially called Toronto). After earning my BA in both Environmental and Indigenous Studies and minor in Human Geography from the University of Toronto, I moved to what is colonially known as Vancouver to pursue my MA in Human Development, Learning, and Culture at UBC. This journey has deeply influenced my views on advocacy within the family policing system (also known as the child welfare system) in so-called Canada, and the need for alternative forms of care for children, youth, families, and communities. I also love spending time with friends and family at local cafes and restaurants, and being at the beach or in the forest with my husband and dog.

**Your studies sound so interesting! What made you want to focus on these areas? Do they connect to your own life in any way?**

During my BA, I enrolled in an elective called Indigenous Environmental Science and Practice. This course provided a fundamental introduction to Indigenous knowledge systems and their interactions with colonial knowledge. It expanded my perspective and helped me understand how my personal story is connected to many others. This course prompted me to switch my degree from French and Spanish to Indigenous and Environmental Studies. Through that, I became increasingly interested in exploring the relationship between my experience, Indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups' experiences within the family policing system. My master's thesis is a culmination of my learning and a continuing exploration of discursive power in family policing stories.

Thank you for sharing this. What is something that you would like those in child-serving system to know? What could have made your experience better?

I would like those involved in the family policing system to understand that how we share stories about this system matters. It matters who tells these stories and who can share their experiences. It matters where, when, and why we tell these stories, as they can shape the system's reality—either reinforcing or transforming it.

If you could change one thing about the system, what would it be?

I would move from a damage-focused approach, which can involve pathologizing analysis, to a more strength-based approach that can emphasize respecting children's self-determination while engaging and supporting their well-being.

What would be your dream job?

As I navigate my career, I feel called to assist those affected by family policing, to engage in critical and efforts to envision a future beyond the current limitations of the family policing system.

A new year is upon us. Any aspirations for 2026?

I am embarrassed to admit it, but I fear the time has finally come for me to earn my driver's license.


Thanks for sharing this, Marko. Good luck with all your ambitions!


(Note: This interview has been edited for length and clarity.)


*Know a young person that should be highlighted here?
Let us know at contact@accesstojusticebc.ca*

**Good listens, good reads.**

Once again, here's list of podcasts to to keep you company on the treadmill, or your commute to work. There is also a couple of book suggestions to promote inspiration (or as an alternative to Zoom Scrolling!)

 Check out **Rise Women's Legal Centre's** podcast--"**You Can't Say That In Court!**--A bi-weekly conversation about survivors of violence navigating the BC family law system! Hosted by Vicky L. ED at Rise, and Stephanie Community Engagement Coordinator at Rise, this podcast features sometimes difficult topics such as gender-based and intimate partner violence.

 The **Canadian Institute for the Administration of Justice** has a great podcast called "**In All Fairness.**" This podcast features topics such as homelessness, access to justice, democracy, family law, and more. With over 110 episodes to choose from, this podcast is a justice fanatic's paradise!

 Adam Kahane's ***Collaborating with the Enemy: How to Work with People You Don't Like, Agree with or Trust.*** This book has been sitting on my desk for almost two months. This description from Audible, has nudged me into finally picking it up: [Adam Kahane] has come to understand that everything we think we know about collaboration - that it requires a harmonious team that agrees on where it's going and how it's going to get there - is wrong. On the contrary, the only way to get things done with diverse others is to abandon harmony, agreement, and control and to learn to work with discord, experimentation, and genuine cocreation. This book is available in all the usual places.

What's on your reading/listening list? Do you know of a helpful resource?

Email us your recommendations at contact@accesstojusticebc.ca
and we'll feature it in our next newsletter!

Music for Inspiration (or just dancing in your living room)

Get up, stand up. Stand up for your rights.

Get up, stand up. Don't give up the fight.

~Bob Marley and the Wailers





Happenings

Check out FamilySmart for online and in-person events for parents & caregivers:

[FamilySmart monthly events](#)

February 2-6, 2026: Access to Justice Week BC, with free webinars & events. Check out our event [here](#), and for information on all the events happening, click [here](#).

February 12, 2026: Support Finder Community of Action meeting at 12:00pm



A Better Way to Get Your Newsletter!

After this newsletter, we will be moving to MailerLite to distribute TFJS newsletters. For your part, all you have to do is go to: [TFJS Newsletters – Transform the Family Justice System Collaborative](#) and hit “Subscribe.” From there, fill in your email address, and our seasonal newsletter will come straight to your inbox. Need to take a break on your reading list?

Unsubscribe anytime. You’ll still be able to find our newsletters on our website!

[Subscribe here](#) 



Did You Know?

The Collaborative has three Communities of Action: The Intersectoral CoA, the Support Finder CoA, and the Child & Youth Meaningful Participation CoA.

Interested in getting involved or just want to know more?

Connect with Paige Thombs, the Collaborative Lead, at paige.tfjs@outlook.com



We acknowledge the ancestral & unceded territories of many Indigenous Peoples that our participants gather on. We are committed to engaging with Indigenous Peoples and applying Indigenous legal principles in our work.

www.tfjcollaborative.com

Express your support, [here](#).
Reach out at contact@accesstojusticebc.ca