

Needed mental health care for Wood Buffalo youth closer to reality

CASA House Fort McMurray sod-turning marks important construction milestone

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Fort McMurray, AB – “We know people who haven’t been as lucky as we were ... to find that type of service when they needed it.”

That service is CASA House, and Jill Oliver is a parent of a former CASA House patient, Faer. Both Jill and Faer are passionate mental health care advocates and want to see more supports for more youth, closer to where they live and learn.

Today, the future CASA House in Fort McMurray marked an important milestone with a ceremonial sod-turning event. Construction has already started on the new facility, so more Wood Buffalo youth can receive the same life-changing mental health care that Faer received.

CASA Mental Health is an accredited non-profit organization that provides mental health care for kids and youth under age 18, bridging the gap between community-based services and hospital care – which isn’t always the best place for a young person.

CASA House will bring more intensive, specialized mental health care closer to home – where it’s most needed – while significantly reducing travel and wait times for families in the Wood Buffalo region who have historically had to travel to Edmonton. This voluntary, live-in program is for youth in Grades 7 to 12 who have significant mental health challenges, and have not responded to previous therapy.

Youth stay at CASA House for an average of four months, and receive education and treatment from a team of professionals, including school teachers, mental health therapists, psychiatrists, nurses and transition support staff. CASA House patients may also have addiction issues, complex learning needs, family problems or social issues. They receive treatment that includes individual, group and family therapy, social and life skills training and on-site schooling, as well as transition support after they leave CASA House.

CASA already offers its school-based mental health program – CASA Mental Health Classrooms – for Grades 6 to 8 patients at St. Gabriel School, in collaboration with Fort McMurray Public School Division and Fort McMurray Catholic Schools.

Wood Buffalo youth who need more intensive treatment and support than a CASA Mental Health Classroom – but don’t need CASA House – will be able to access CASA’s Adolescent Day Program (ADP), co-located at CASA House Fort McMurray. ADP is a unique semester-based program, designed for youth with significant mental health challenges who can still safely live at home. Youth attend ADP daily as they would school, and receive group, family and individual therapy, social and life skills training while continuing their education.



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CASA Mental Health

“Jill and Faer represent our neighbours, our friends, our coworkers, and – sometimes – our own families struggling with mental health,” says CASA CEO Bonnie Blakley, who is herself a parent with living experience supporting a child with mental health struggles. CASA House, she says, “creates better students, better families, better citizens, and ultimately, better societies.”

“Some of the successes that we see for kids at CASA House ... are kids who might be so anxious that they can’t even go to school for months, or years,” says Tanya Kendall, Director, Clinical, CASA House and Day Programs. “After spending time in our program they are able to get back to school, have repaired relationships with their friends and peers, as well as their families.”

At the end of the day though, the last word goes to Faer themselves: “I am so much farther than I ever thought I was going to get. I distinctly remember having thoughts when I was younger ... well, no, I’m not someone who graduates high school ... I’m not someone who gets a big job ... and I was able to graduate with honours and outstanding achievement in the arts. And now I have a job, which is something that, at one point in my life, I never thought I would get.”

CASA House Fort McMurray and the Adolescent Day Program will serve up to 81 patients each year and will begin taking referrals in late 2027. The new facility will be located in the south end of Fort McMurray, between Quarry Ridge Road and Highway 63.

For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact:

Darby Semeniuk, Director, Corporate and Community Relations, CASA Mental Health
780-619-5332 (cell) or info@casaservices.org.

About CASA Mental Health

CASA Mental Health is a non-profit, accredited provider that combines medical and therapeutic treatment of mental illness for Alberta children and youth under age 18 and their families. Our services are **always free of charge for families**.

Visit casamentalhealth.org to learn more about CASA Mental Health and how we’re expanding mental health care services across Alberta.

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