



Stollery Children's Hospital

Annual Impact *Report*

**Awasisak
Indigenous
Health Program**

April 1 2023 - March 31, 2024

Cover: Tipi at kihcihkaw aski (Sacred Land), which Awasisak Cultural Advisor, Kyle Campiou, assisted in setting up




Message from

Alberta Health Services Leadership

“It warms my heart to witness the kindness, generosity, and compassion of our community. Through your heartfelt charity and the Stollery Children’s Hospital Foundation, we have been able to sustain essential support for our Indigenous patients, families, and communities. While there is still progress to be made, I can confidently affirm that your contributions have truly and significantly impacted the way our families are cared for at the Stollery Children’s Hospital. With my deepest gratitude, the Awasisak program will continue our much-needed work, honouring those who have helped improve Indigenous pediatric healthcare within our Canadian borders.”

*Mike Sutherland
Awasisak Indigenous Health Program Team Lead*



The Awasisak Indigenous Health Program (Awasisak program), the first and only Indigenous pediatric in-hospital program in Canada, was introduced by the Stollery Children’s Hospital in 2016. Named after the Cree word “children”, the Awasisak program aims to provide targeted support to Indigenous children and their families, especially those who live in rural and remote communities (e.g., 220-982 kilometers away from Edmonton). To align with the program’s belief that “Indigenous voices provide Indigenous solutions” it was developed from community voices gathered via talking circles hosted in various Albertan communities from 2017 to 2019. Over the past seven years, the Awasisak team served and supported thousands of Indigenous families and has developed and maintained tight-knit relationships with a number of Indigenous communities.

Drumming Ceremony Hosted by The Awasisak Program

Table of Contents

04
Map the
Roadmap

05
Change: One
Step at a
Time



06
When All The
*Stars Have
Aligned*



07
Speak with
Arts



08
A Piece of
Home

09
Awasisak Member
Nominated as
Stollery
“Outstanding
Woman”



09
Patient
Testimonial



10
Bring The
*(Beaded)
Orange Shirt*
with You,
Whenever,
Wherever



11
Awasisak
Impact
Highlights

12
Awasisak
Teachings
Highlights

13
Dream for The
Future

15
Our Team

16
Acknowledgement
and Thank You to
Donors



Learning

East/Spiritual/Spirit/New Born

The new beginning — we believe we need to learn from our culture, heritage, communities, and past to guide our program.



Awasisak Research and Evaluation Advisor, Shang Dong (left) and Awasisak Administrative Assistant, Shawna Marcel (second left), making collages with Awasisak patient and families

Map the Roadmap

The Awasisak Program developed a strategy for its roadmap development.

To connect the Awasisak Program's dreams with tangible work and achieve desired outcomes, the Awasisak team believes it is essential to develop a roadmap guiding the program. After team discussions, four sources of information were identified for use in developing the roadmap: Indigenous community voices, the Awasisak team's wants and hopes, feedback and comments from the Stollery Children's Hospital (Stollery) Foundation and Stollery leadership, and existing documents (e.g., previous talking circle reports).

Indigenous voices will be collected through two main approaches: talking circles and collage. The Awasisak Program was born from community voices gathered via talking circles in various Albertan communities from 2017 to 2019. Now is the time to return to these communities, seeking further wisdom and guidance. The team will also share

all the program's achievements, emphasizing its reciprocal nature. Ideally, the wants and hopes of community members can be revealed through the talking circles. All collected information will be used to help the team develop the roadmap. Further, information gathered from collage activities can complement what might be missing in the talking circles. These two approaches target different audiences; while only existing and past Awasisak patients and families can participate in collage activities, the participants in talking circles are mostly people who have not been admitted into the hospital.

Arts-based methods, such as collage and photo elicitation, can also be used to collect comments and feedback from Awasisak staff, Stollery leadership, and the Stollery Foundation. As individuals working in the program, the Awasisak staff are some of the people who know the program best. It is crucial to identify

their wants and hopes for the program and incorporate them into the roadmap. Opinions and thoughts from both leadership and the Foundation are equally as valuable. Not only can they provide a unique perspective, but they can also share their own learnings and experiences with Awasisak staff.

The team will incorporate community voices (from talking circles and collage activities), the Awasisak team's wants and hopes (from collage activities), the Stollery leadership and Stollery Foundation's comments (from collage making and/or gathering photo), and the existing program documents into the road map development. With all four sources of information, the team hopes to capture voices from various communities and stakeholders and utilize them to build the roadmap, while keeping the Indigenous voices as the main guiding force.



OUR WORK

South/Emotional/Feeling/Youth

The process — we work from our heart, and strive to support Indigenous children and families in their times of need.

The Awasisak Program teamed up with Cheryl's Run, a fundraising organization dedicated to commemorating Cheryl, a former Stollery pediatric oncology nurse. Cheryl's Run donates all its proceeds to the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation, thereby upholding Cheryl's giving legacy and enhancing the chances of saving more lives. After hearing the story of Willie, a long-time Awasisak patient, the members of Cheryl's Run decided to dedicate the entire year's funds to the Awasisak Program. This event was posted on Global News webpage, as well as on the event page of the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation.

Change: One Step at a Time
Awasisak Program received a donation of
\$6348.24 CAD from Cheryl's Run



Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator, Jalene Boysis (middle), holding donation cheque from Cheryl's Run with Cheryl's Run Members

*"Willie was from Fox Lake Alberta and was part of the Stollery Awasisak Program. He sadly passed away last June but it didn't stop his family from driving the **11 hours** to Edmonton to be part of the event. His grandfather wore his signature hero cape and ran **10k**."*

— Excerpt from Global News Event Page

The Awasisak Program hosted a series of National Indigenous Peoples' Month events at the Stollery Children's Hospital (University of Alberta Hospital (UAH) site in June 2023. The events at UAH included a Learn How to Make Bannock Video Tutorial release ([click here](#) for the video), Stollery Awasisak Story Telling and Indigenous Teachings, a Summer Solstice Drumming Ceremony, and two Beaded Bracelet Workshops. At the Royal Alexandra Hospital site (RAH), the Awasisak team supported the Lois Hole Hospital for Women in facilitating an info booth and stand showcasing the Indigenous Empowerment Fashion Collective. With the new force of Awasisak Cultural Advisor and Stollery Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator at the RAH site, the events were better planned and organized, following cultural protocols. An Elder was invited to host a Drumming Ceremony at Stollery UAH site, and drummers were acquired to join the ceremony in celebration of the Indigenous Peoples' Day. When all the stars align, magic happens. Indeed, this is what happened during these special days. The support from the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation and the Stollery Children's Hospital leadership, the dedication of the Awasisak team, the generosity to teach from the Elder and Drummers, as well as the willingness to learn from all Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants — all these elements are like stars, and the success of the events is the magic. The Awasisak team greatly appreciates all the stars and believes that the events would not have been as successful without any of them.

When All the Stars Have Aligned



Top Left: Awasisak Team Lead, Mike Sutherland, at the drumming ceremony

Top Right: Indigenous Cultural Liaison, Helen Greene (left), and Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator, Bernard (Joey) Fickel (right), showcasing the Indigenous Empowerment Fashion Collective

Bottom: Elder, Dale Awasis, at the drumming ceremony

Right: Drummer during the drumming ceremony



A Piece of Home

For years, the Awasisak Program has been providing tea and award-winning bannock at the Stollery Children's Hospital (Stollery). The team hopes this initiative can foster a welcoming, inclusive, and culturally responsive environment, demonstrating that positive changes are occurring.

As a Stollery Children's Hospital program, the Awasisak Program strives for excellence. Therefore, the team reached out to Tee Pee Treats, a local award-winning Indigenous restaurant. After learning about the program and the reasons behind this initiative, Curtis, a talented chef and the owner of Tee Pee Treats, pleasantly agreed to partner with the Awasisak Program.

“It is not just food, it is a piece of home.”

There are many reasons why the Awasisak Program decided to start this Tea and Bannock initiative, one being an interaction the team had with an Indigenous Stollery patient. It was like any other day; the Awasisak team was contacted by some Stollery unit staff because they were concerned about an Indigenous patient. They informed the Awasisak team that the patient was not eating, and despite trying various methods, nothing had worked. There were concerns about the patient's health if they continued to refuse food. One of the Awasisak team members had an idea, and a few pieces of bannock were brought to the patient. The patient ate it all, leaving the unit staff in absolute awe!

Imagine being a child from a rural and remote Indigenous community, sick and exhausted after days of transportation to the Stollery. Everything you see in the hospital and all the exams you undergo are foreign to you. Finally, you get put in a room, and some food is offered to you. None of it resembles what you are used to, or perhaps it simply is not your “comfort food”. You are homesick, hungry, and desperately craving something from home. Then a few pieces of bannock are presented to you. How would that make you feel? The emotions you might experience after having the bannock were one of the main reasons why the Awasisak Program offers tea and bannock to everyone in the hospital. Not only does it contribute to a more culturally responsive environment in a healthcare setting and help non-Indigenous people learn about Indigenous food and culture, but it also brings pieces of home to Indigenous people. It is not just food; it is a piece of home.



**“Often overlooked,
Shawna is the silent
force driving the
program's success. ...
Truly, she is the
unsung hero whose
absence would leave a
palpable void within
our team.”**

— Nomination Statement

Shawna Marcel nominated as Stollery
Women's Network “Outstanding
Woman”, holding the gift basket

**“(The Awasisak team)
made me feel safe. ...
It means a lot to me,
because they make
me feel like I’m not
alone.”**

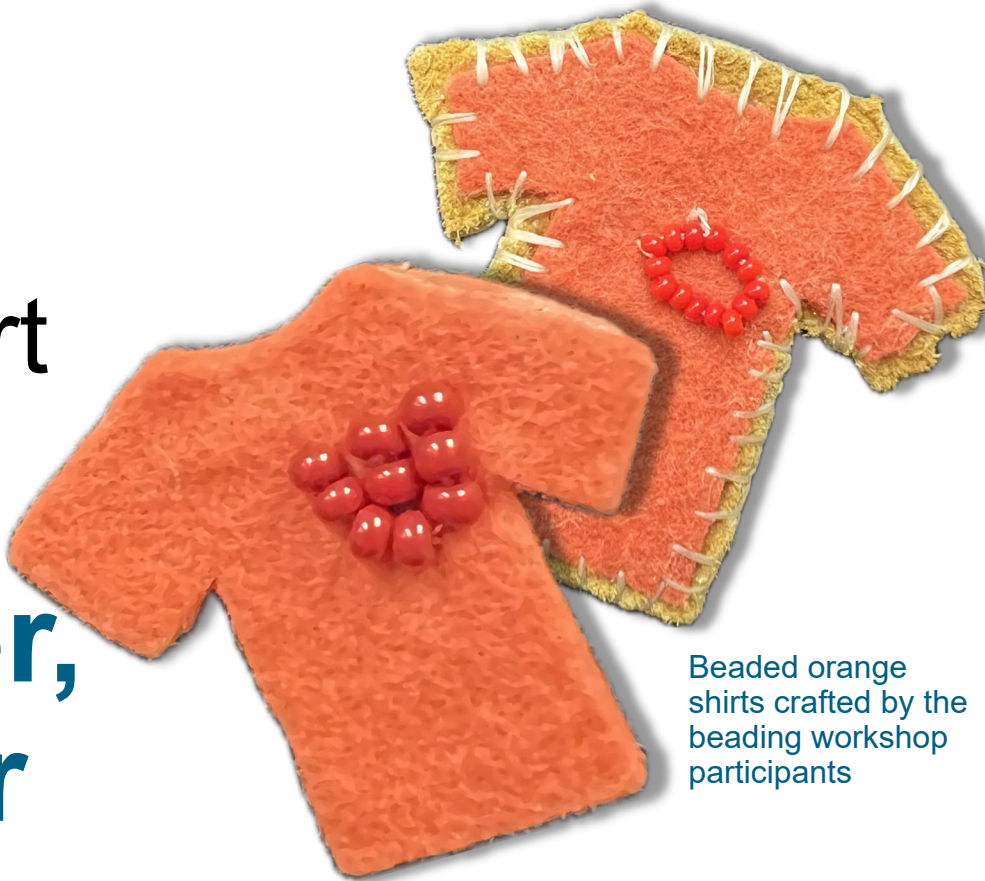
— Awasisak Mom



Awasisak mom

Bring The (*Beaded*) Orange Shirt with You

Whenever, Wherever



Beaded orange shirts crafted by the beading workshop participants

Collaborating with our dear friend and long-time partner at the McMullen Art Gallery, the Awasisak Program offered an orange shirt pin beading workshop at the Gallery in response to National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator led the beading workshop with the support of the Awasisak Research and Evaluation Advisor, as well as the McMullen Art Gallery staff and volunteers. There were approximately 10 participants with a variety of backgrounds, including students from the Stollery School, hospital staff and volunteers, and the general public.

During the workshop, some participants asked questions regarding the significance of beading in Indigenous cultures. Others expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to try the beading activity and, more importantly, to learn more about the Indigenous arts and cultures. During the workshop, all the participants beaded their very own orange shirt pin, allowing them to wear their orange shirt whenever and wherever they choose.



Awasisak Research and Evaluation Advisor, Shang Dong (left) and Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator, Jalene Boysis (right) with beading workshop participants



IMPACT

West/Physical/Body/Adult

The impact — we implemented changes to change historical Indigenous hospital experience and improved Indigenous children and families' well-being.

From April 2023 to March 2024, The Awasisak Program served **507** families, of which **412** are new families, from **152** communities in **7** provinces and territories (Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Ontario, and Saskatchewan). The Awasisak team provided **1994** in-person visits, **844** telephone calls, **131** visit attempts to Indigenous families, **2225** consultations to service providers, as well as checked in with various families **359** times via text.



TEACHINGS

North/Mental/Mind/Elder

The Awasisak Program provides cultural teachings to healthcare professionals, non-clinical staff and the general public, as well as teachings to Indigenous children and families for their well-being.



Awasisak Team Lead, Mike Sutherland, being interviewed on Global News

Awasisak Team Lead, Mike Sutherland, sat down with Global News to share this one-of-a-kind Awasisak Program and how donor support is helping Stollery Indigenous families

"The response (from the patients and families), honestly, is overwhelming. We hear the gratitude and appreciation every day. It's not just what we hear. It's what we see. Our patients and families will come into our program area, just to say hi, ... and share their experiences and their stories and their gratitude. We've had parents say to us, like, 'you always have been there for us, so we'll always be there for you.' It's emotional at times. ... I can't really explain how powerful that is."

— Mike Sutherland

Awasisak Program hosted Indigenous Beading Workshops, contributing to a culturally responsive healthcare environment

Due to the tremendous success of the beading event at last year's Snowflake Gala, the Awasisak Program was determined to bring similar activities to the Stollery Children's Hospital. As a result, the team designed and hosted two Indigenous Beading Workshops at the Stollery Children's Hospital. With these workshops, the team aimed to provide opportunities for those interested in Indigenous arts and cultures. Both workshops went smoothly, and all participants left with their very own handmade bracelets. Hopefully, whenever they wear the bracelet, it can remind them of the teachings they received during the workshop.



Poster for Indigenous Beading Workshops



Stollery Social Worker, Audrey Thomas (middle), Awasisak Registered Nurse Case Manager, Jackie Mitchell (left), and Awasisak Research and Evaluation Advisor, Shang Dong (right) at the conference venue

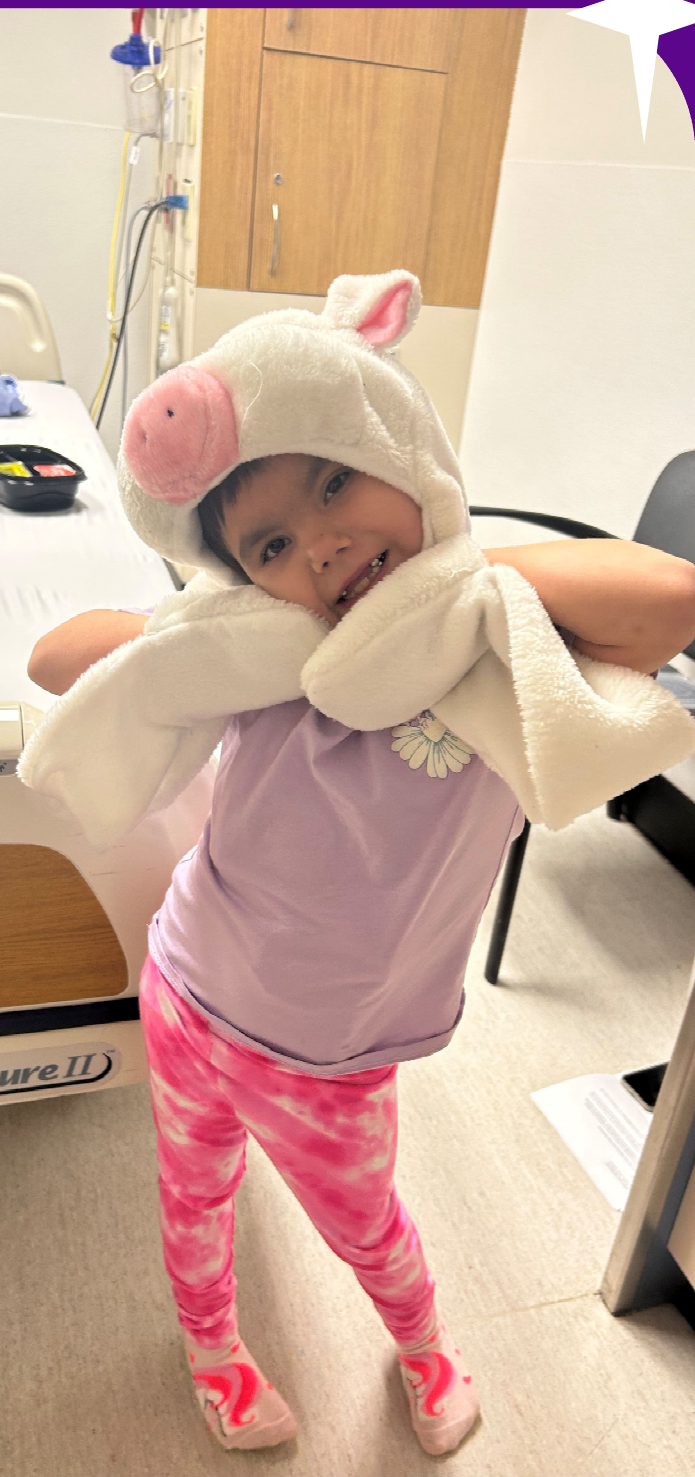
Awasisak staff presented at the Canadian Evaluation Society British Columbia Chapter (CESBC) Annual Conference, sharing their learnings and experience with the Awasisak Program

Stollery Social Worker, Audrey Thomas, Awasisak Registered Nurse Case Manager, Jackie Mitchell, and Awasisak Research and Evaluation Advisor, Shang Dong presented at the CESBC Annual Conference. The titles of the presentations are: "Indigenous Voices Provide Indigenous Solutions: Learnings from stories of the Awasisak Indigenous Health Program", and "All the buzzwords: The story of a non-binary evaluator of Chinese descent evaluating an Indigenous pediatric in-hospital program." The presenters received many valuable comments from other conference participants, and some connections with evaluators were established.

Dreams For THE FUTURE

To better serve and support Stollery Indigenous patients and families, the Awasisak team recognizes the importance of expanding its roster. Two key priorities have been identified:

- Adding two Registered Nurses, one to strengthen case management support and another to pioneer the role of Registered Nursing Transition Coordinator, will enhance assistance in Stollery's ambulatory services and emergency department. This expansion addresses significant caseloads and complexity, ensuring seamless transitions from hospital to community settings for Indigenous patients, preventing readmission to hospital and ensuring the entirety of the family is cared for.
- In addition, recruiting an Indigenous Mental Health Therapist is crucial. Indigenous youth face unique mental health challenges for various reasons. Despite the increased pediatric mental health cases at the Stollery, there are currently no positions dedicated to Indigenous-specific therapeutic services. With an Indigenous Mental Health Therapist, assessments, treatments, crisis interventions, clinical consultations, case management, and educational efforts can be conducted in a culturally responsive manner. Serving as a holistic support, the therapist would also act as a liaison within the multidisciplinary team, facilitating referrals to appropriate Indigenous agencies and services.



Dream Team



Dream Space

Indigenous cultures have unique beliefs, practices, and perspectives on health and wellness. The Awasisak Program provides a culturally safe space for Indigenous patients and families to gather, share, and relax. However, the space can comfortably hold only four guests, with the remaining portion shared by six Awasisak staff members.

There is no designated room for families to have private conversations with their healthcare providers, nor is there a space where they can practice cultural ceremonies such as smudging. Currently, it is challenging for the families to access the support they need when there is no available room for booking in the hospital. The team believes that a designated cultural room would improve this situation. This additional space is crucial for many reasons, including demonstrating respect for cultural diversity, building trust and rapport with patients and families, improving access to healthcare services, enhancing health outcomes, and reducing health disparities.



OUR TEAM

Our Team are the people who care, share and dream!

The Awasisak team hopes every Indigenous family who accesses the Stollery can receive excellent care; the main goal of the Awasisak Program is to have happy and healthy families.

"As the newest Awasisak team member I am really looking forward to being a part of the program. I know how scary and intimidating the healthcare system can be as an Indigenous parent. I am so glad I get to be a part of making healthcare a safe place."

— Chelsey Jeffery
Awasisak Registered Nurse Case Manager

"It's the highest honour of myself to support a program like this."

— Mike Sutherland, Awasisak Team Lead

Awasisak Team Lead, Mike Sutherland (left), and Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator, Jalene Boysis (right), at Cheryl's Run



We have been working so collaboratively together and I enjoy being able to support families through this work!

— Sarah
PFCC Team

Comment for Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator, Bernard (Joey) Fickel, from our friend, Sarah from Patient and Family Centered Care team.



Awasisak Social Workers, Meredith McKenzie (top left) and Morilynn McRann-McLean (top right), and Awasisak Registered Nurse Case Manager, Jackie Mitchell, wearing "Super Willie" shirts, with Willie's Family

"It has been my utmost honor to finish another year working with the Awasisak Indigenous Health Program. Every day I am inspired by the families we have the privilege of working with. They display such bravery and strength as they face incredible barriers to obtain health care for their children. Seeing their resilience inspires me personally and professionally. I am so proud to be part of this innovative and forward-looking program that improves the health outcomes for Indigenous children in a tangible way. My hope is for us to continue expanding into other areas of health care!"

— Meredith McKenzie
Awasisak Pediatric Social Worker

"As a Social Worker with the Awasisak Indigenous Health Program part of my role is ensuring the health care needs of Indigenous patients are met through appropriate case management, patient advocacy, and discharge planning. I find pride in building bridges with Indigenous First Nations and Métis community health centers and agencies."

— Morilynn McRann-McLean, Awasisak Social Worker

"As one of the Engagement Coordinators with Awasisak, I am grateful to have the privilege of hosting families navigating the Stollery Children's Hospital. The highlights for me have been the bi-weekly Bannock lunches and helping to facilitate and attend the meaningful cultural ceremonies we hold at the University Hospital. These events provide an opportunity for me and the staff to not only facilitate but also to participate in cultural activities that can offer a sense of comfort for our families during their hospital stay, while honoring their Indigenous identities."

Looking ahead, I am excited to see the Awasisak Program grow and evolve. The program's ability to provide culturally relevant support and resources has been invaluable, and I'm eager to see how we can continue to enhance the experience for the families we serve.

— Bernard Fickel, Awasisak Indigenous Child and Family Engagement Coordinator

Awasisak Social Worker, Meredith McKenzie (right) with an Awasisak mom (left)



We'd like to thank all of our donors
and the Stollery Children's Hospital
Foundation for their
generous support ❤️



Awasisak child

***Kinanâskomon (Cree) Marsi Chok (Dene)
Nitsiniiyi'taki (Blackfoot) Isniyes (Nakota)
Thank You (English)***

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