



Tipi in the Enchanted Forest at the Stollery Children's Hospital, set up by the Awasisak program

*Stollery Children's Hospital*

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# ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT



Awasisak Indigenous  
Health Program  
*April 1, 2025 -  
March 31, 2026*



# Message from Leadership

This past year has been highly impactful, made possible through the generosity of our donors. Awasisak plays a critical role at the Stollery Children's Hospital by advancing equitable, culturally safe, and trauma-informed care for Indigenous, Inuit, and Métis patients and families, aligned with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action related to health. Delivered by a specialized Indigenous-led team, the program centers lived experience, cultural knowledge, and community connection to address systemic barriers and support Indigenous-led approaches to care. With sustained support from the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation and Alberta Health Services, this work continues to strengthen commitments to reconciliation, cultural safety, and health equity.

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*Manager for Child Life Program, Awasisak Indigenous Health Program,  
Patient & Family Centered Care*

**Jennifer Millsap, BSW**

*Team Lead for Awasisak Indigenous Health Program*



**Rhonda Tomlinson, RN, BScN**

*Manager for Child Life Program, Awasisak  
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Patient & Family Centered Care*



**Jennifer Millsap, BSW**

*Team Lead for Awasisak Indigenous Health  
Program*

## Awasisak Indigenous Health Program

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Setup for the staff collage-making session

## Scissors, Stories, and Shared Dreams

To help the Awasisak program grow and become stronger, the team came together for a collage-making session. It offered a chance to slow down, be creative, and share ideas about the future. This activity was used alongside the Talking Circles that were held and those planned in various Indigenous communities to help guide where the program is heading next.

The session began with some exciting questions. Staff were asked to imagine the program five years into the future, when everything is going well. What does a regular day look like? How does the program support Indigenous children and families in meaningful ways? With those questions in mind, staff began exploring. Tables were filled with magazines, newspapers, flyers, stickers, and pictures. Staff flipped through pages, letting their thoughts wander. When something stood out, either it was an image or a word, they set it aside. There was no right or wrong choice, just whatever felt meaningful and important.

Next came the hands-on part. Staff cut, ripped, folded, and shaped their materials, turning them into something personal. As pieces came together, each collage slowly began to tell a story. Some showed connections and teamwork. Others showed growth, balance, and care. Each collage reflected a vision of what the program could be.

After the collages were finished, each staff member sat down for a one-hour conversation with the Awasisak Research and Evaluation Coordinator (REC). They shared the meanings behind their collages and talked about their hopes and ideas. The information was then recorded and summarized to help guide the program's future planning.

When the team reviewed all the collage findings, several themes stood out: the value of partnership and allyship, the need for regular recreational programming, and the importance of clear structures. Staff also expressed a strong sense of pride in the program’s work. The Awasisak REC also added recommendations for program planning based on these insights.

Through this creative work, the team gained a clearer picture of where they want the Awasisak program to go. It helped bring everyone together around shared goals and dreams, and it continues to support the team in providing caring, high-quality care to Indigenous patients and families at the Stollery Children’s Hospital.



*“... found a picture of two pow wow dancers and a hoop dancer, representing interconnectedness, relationship building, community building, almost like a kinship system “Wahkohtowin”, upholding Indigenous values and cultures.”*

*– Awasisak Registered Nurse Case Manager*

*“On the bear, you will find the Aplastic Anemia ribbon Cheryl’s run uses. I put that on there to highlight the importance of community partnerships and their ongoing support.”*

*– Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator*



*“(Home represents) having a proper space for patients and families to go to. Having a larger place for them to come and engage as well as confidential space for them.”*

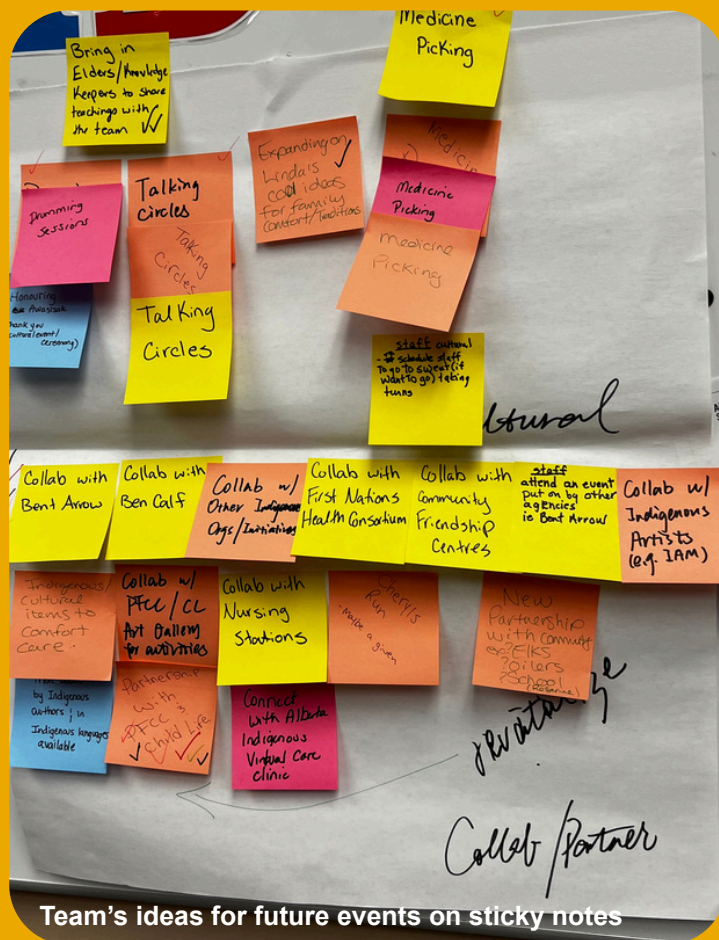
*– Awasisak Social Worker*



# Learning Together, Growing Stronger

To make sure Indigenous patients and families at the Stollery Children’s Hospital receive the best care possible, the Awasisak team reached out to the Talent Development team (TD) and the Quality and Improvement department (QI) to learn and grow together. First, the team met one-on-one with TD. Afterwards, they came together to review findings from the conversations. In tandem, the team met with QI for two meetings during which they listened carefully and learned how the program worked each day. Together, they looked at what was going well and what could be made better.

Team’s ideas for program development on flipcharts



Team’s ideas for future events on sticky notes

The team also began working on growing and shaping their roles. Some of these roles were one-of-a-kind at the Stollery, such as the Child and Family Engagement Coordinator and the Cultural Advisor. To help everyone understand these roles better, the Awasisak Research and Evaluation Coordinator created role development plans and one-page guides. The team is hoping that these one-pagers could help other teams at the Stollery learn what each role does and how they support Indigenous patients and families.

With the help and support from different departments, the program continues to move forward with hope. The team is committed to providing strong, caring, and high-quality support that Indigenous patients and families deserve while at the Stollery.

# More Than a Meal

## Tea and Bannock at Awasisak

For over three years, the Awasisak program has shared something special at the hospital: Tea and Bannock. Every other week, the Awasisak team offered 200 pieces of bannock catered by Tee Pee Treats, a local Indigenous eatery and a long-time friend of the program.

After reflecting on the event and considering how to better support Awasisak patients and families, the team decided to change Tea and Bannock from a bi-weekly event to a monthly one and introduce a monthly Indigenous lunch (e.g., soup and bannock, bannock burger, and taco salad) specifically for Awasisak patients and families.

This change helped the program to focus on its priority of happy patients and families. While staff could still learn about Indigenous culture and food, Awasisak families could enjoy a warm, filling meal while staying in the hospital. Bringing Indigenous food into a western healthcare setting helped make the hospital feel more welcoming and familiar for them.

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***“Thank you very much for providing this much loved service to the Hospital. I personally wanted to thank you as I appreciate this act of kindness from the Awasisak Indigenous Health Program.”***

***– University of Alberta Hospital Staff***

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The impact of Tea and Bannock was felt in many meaningful ways. Staff shared how thankful they were for the event, and one hospital staff member dropped off a Christmas card with thoughtful notes. Families also shared that the bannock tasted just like home, bringing comfort during a difficult time.

Tea and Bannock became more than just food. It has been a way to share culture, offer comfort, and show care, helping Indigenous patients and families feel welcomed and supported during their time at the Stollery Children’s Hospital.

**“Life is Brew-tea-ful with a Side of Bannock”  
EVERYONE WELCOME!**

<b>DATES</b>	<b>2026</b>
<b>FEB 13</b>	<p>HOSTED BY: <b>STOLLERY AWASISAK INDIGENOUS HEALTH PROGRAM</b></p>
<b>MAR 13</b>	
<b>APR 10</b>	
<b>MAY 15</b>	
<b>JUNE 12</b>	<p>JOIN US AT THE NORTH ELEVATORS ON THE 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR FOR TEA AND BANNOCK</p>
<b>JULY 10</b>	<p>TIME: 12:00 PM TO 1:00 PM UNTIL SUPPLIES LAST</p>
	<p>CATERING PROVIDED BY: TEEPEE TREATS</p>
	<p>SPONSORED BY: THE STOLLERY FOUNDATION</p>

**Tea and Bannock Poster**



Elders with an Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator (middle)

# Teachings, Songs, and the Arrival of Spring



Awasisak Team Lead (left) giving a speech with Awasisak Manager (right)

*"It is a true privilege and honour to be up here today especially considering the historical context where Indigenous people were excluded from opportunities and ceremonies like this, let alone working in healthcare to support our people and communities."*

– Awasisak Team Lead

On March 20, 2026, the Awasisak team hosted a Spring Equinox ceremony at the Bernard Snell Hall. Beginning at noon, the ceremony was led by an Indigenous Elder and opened with a pipe ceremony involving 26 participants, including hospital staff, patients and their families, and the general public. The Elder shared a range of Indigenous teachings, such as Tipi Teachings and the Seven Natural Ways of Healing. He then offered prayers and more teachings before gently closing the ceremony.



An Indigenous traditional singer singing a traditional song

After the ceremony, everyone was invited to stay for a feast catered by Tee Pee Treats. Juice and tea were served, along with Three Sisters soup, bison soup, baked and fried bannock, and bannock dessert with Saskatoon berry and cream. About 300 people joined the Awasisak team for lunch. While people were eating and visiting together, the Awasisak Manager and the Awasisak Team Lead shared teachings about the meaning and importance of Spring Equinox. Two Indigenous traditional female singers also shared their songs and teachings.

Ceremonies like this help raise awareness of Indigenous traditions and cultures. They also increase Indigenous presence in the hospital and help create a welcoming, respectful space where Indigenous people can feel a strong sense of community and belonging.



Stollery staff serving soup and bannock



Awasisak staff at the serving station



An Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator showing bannock desserts

*“Spring invites us to recognize the interconnectedness of wellness. These teachings have been carried by Indigenous communities long before hospitals exist, and they remind us that healing is not only clinical, but relational.”*

*– Awasisak Manager*



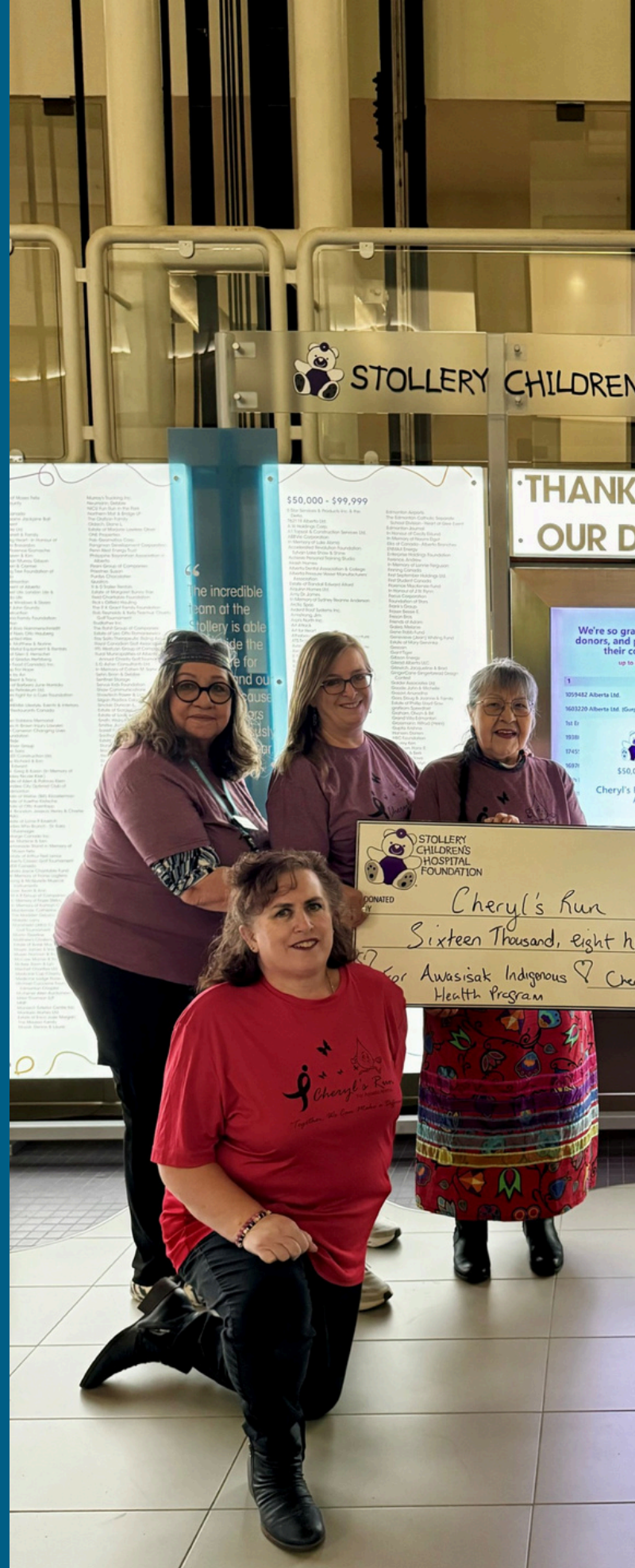
Awasisak staff at Cheryl's Run

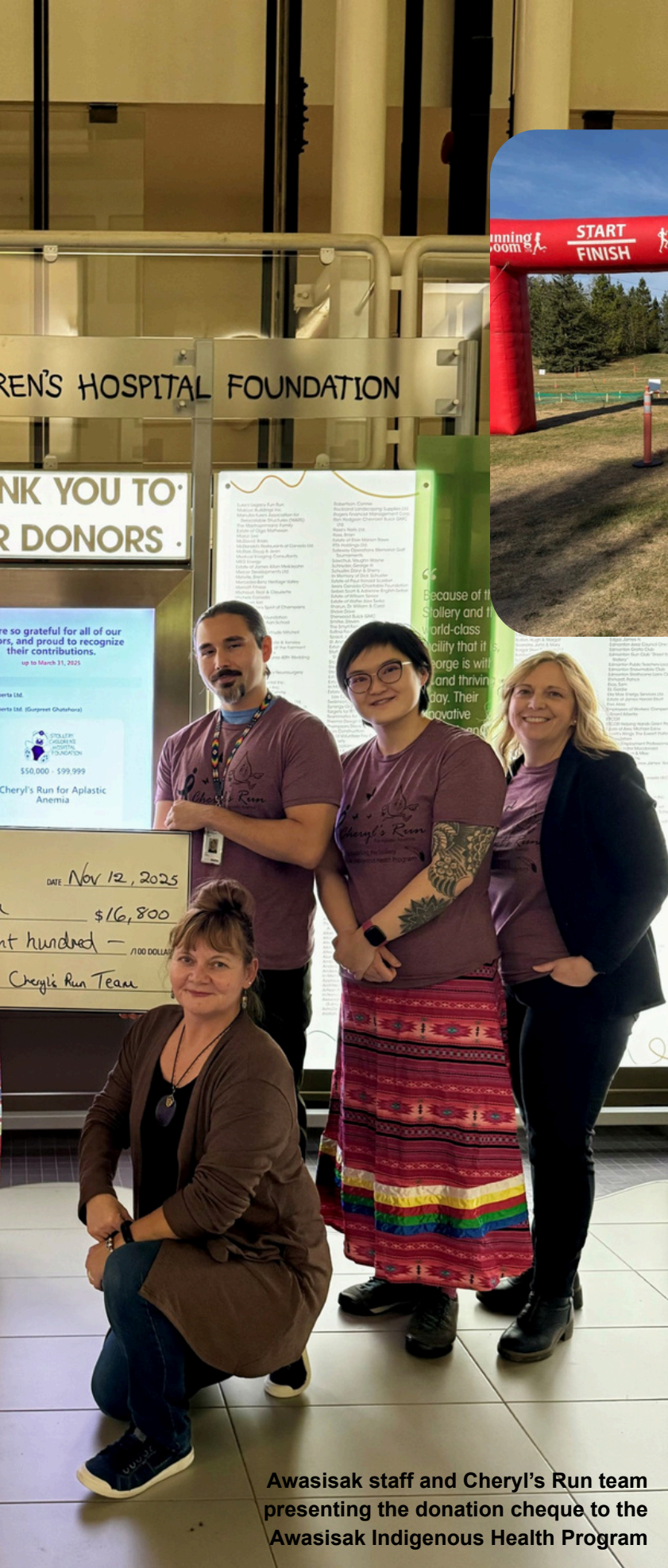


Awasisak booth at Cheryl's Run

*“The Awasisak Program provides services and support for Indigenous children and their families that are navigating the Stollery. Our team would not be able to do that without the support of the Stollery Children’s Hospital Foundation and Cheryl’s Run.”*

*– Awasisak Registered Nurse Case Manager*





Awasisak staff at Cheryl's Run

# Big Hearts Fast Feet

The Awasisak program's long-time partner and friend, Cheryl's Run, reached an exciting milestone by raising their highest amount ever for the program, an amazing \$16,800. On the day of the run, four Awasisak team members were there to support and share information about the program. The program's booth was filled with handmade mini tipis, a poster board with program information and statistics, moosehide pins, brochures, beading kits, and paper cutouts to make purple butterfly boxes.

Events like Cheryl's Run help more people learn about the Awasisak program and the care and support it provides. The program is able to offer strong, high-quality care because of the generosity of donors and the continued support of partners like Cheryl's Run.

Awasisak staff and Cheryl's Run team presenting the donation cheque to the Awasisak Indigenous Health Program



Kyle Campiou (left) and an Indigenous community member at the tipi raising ceremony

## Tipi on the Beach

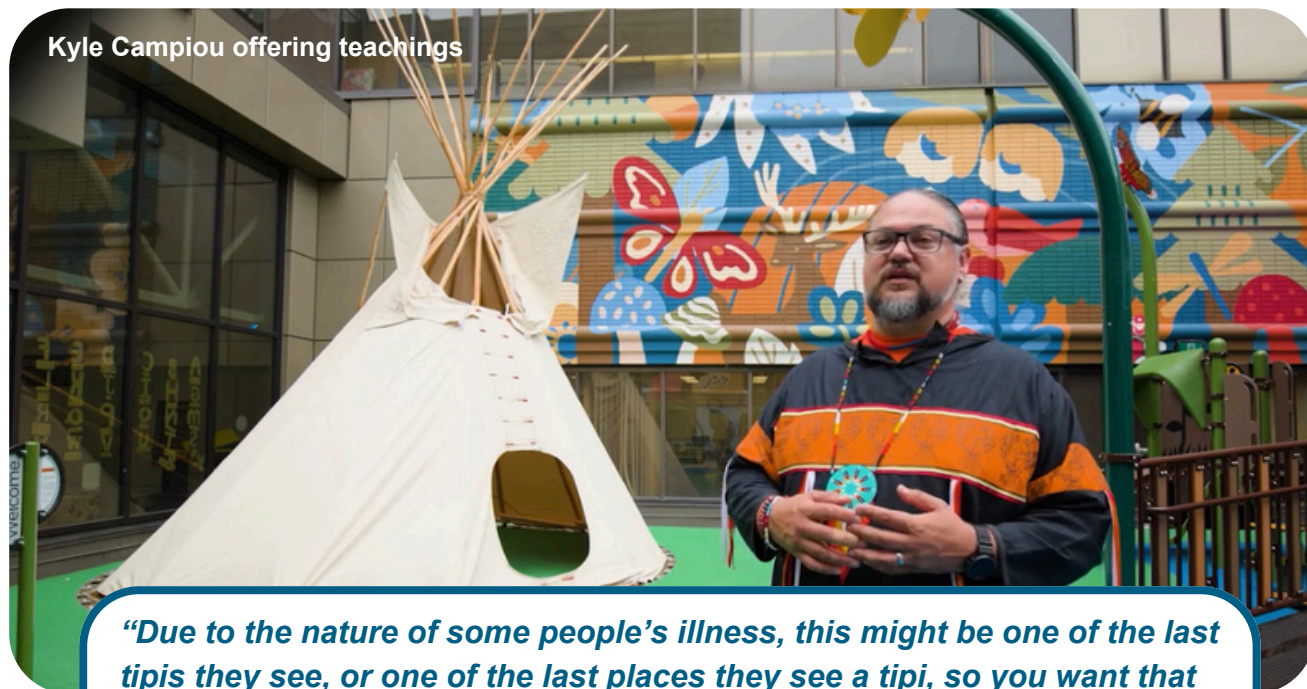
With the support of the former Awasisak Cultural Advisor, Kyle Campiou, and the Child Life team, the Awasisak program was able to bring a special tipi to life in the Enchanted Forest, outside the Beach on the fourth floor of the Stollery Children’s Hospital (Stollery).

With Kyle’s knowledge and care, the tipi was set up in a traditional way with a touch of Stollery flair. Inside the tipi, a liner covers the lower section, which is filled with handprints and even footprints from patients, families, staff, and visitors. Each print represented a story and showed that many people had passed through the hospital with hope, love, and care.

Once the tipi was ready, a tipi raising ceremony was held, with bannock and tea being shared. Kyle said, “When you put up a tipi in an unconventional place, you want it to still have a traditional connection. It’s a soft space; it’s inviting; and for a lot of people, it’s healing. The space connected to the Indigenous culture needs a blessing in order for the people to receive in the way that was intended.”

Kyle also shared why it was important to set up the tipi with care and respect, “Due to the nature of some people’s illness, this might be one of the last tipis they see, or one of the last places they see a tipi, so you want that to be received in the best possible way, you want to give them the fullest experience they can. There’s a lot of people who may’ve travelled a lot of lands, may not speak the same language, so we have this opportunity to help each one of these people as they pass through here.”

In the end, the tipi became more than just a space inside the hospital. It became a place of comfort, culture, and connection. For many, it offers a sense of home during a difficult time and reminds them that they are welcomed, respected, and cared for at the Stollery.



Kyle Campiou offering teachings

*“Due to the nature of some people’s illness, this might be one of the last tipis they see, or one of the last places they see a tipi, so you want that to be received in the best possible way, you want to give them the fullest experience they can.”*

– Kyle Campiou, Former Awasisak Cultural Advisor



Footprints of an Awasisak patient being added to the tipi canvas by their family



Awasisak Manager (left) giving a speech at the tipi raising ceremony

*“When our families come here, this is a new space for them, some of them have never been to Edmonton, they don’t speak English. So, when they can come out here and see a tipi, it’s almost like being at home. That’s ultimately what we want, we want them to feel safe here.”*

– Awasisak Social Worker

# Honouring Truth, Sharing Stories

The Awasisak program hosted several meaningful events for the National Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Day, in partnership with Child Life (CL) and Patient and Family-Centered Care (PFCC) at the Stollery Children’s Hospital. With food catered by local Indigenous business, Tee Pee Treats, the Awasisak program brought the taste of Indigenous food into the hospital for everyone to enjoy. With the support from PFCC and the Youth Advisory Council, 150 servings of hamburger soup, 50 servings of Three Sisters soup, and 200 pieces of bannock were shared.

The Awasisak team also hosted a table on the Beach with the support from CL. The team brought beading kits to make orange shirt pins for adults and older children, as well as bracelet kits for younger children. Paper cutouts and stickers were also available so people could create their own orange shirt boxes. Many Stollery patients joined in, smiling, laughing, and chatting as they made their own creations. While crafting, they also learned about the meaning of orange shirts, beading, and why this day is important.

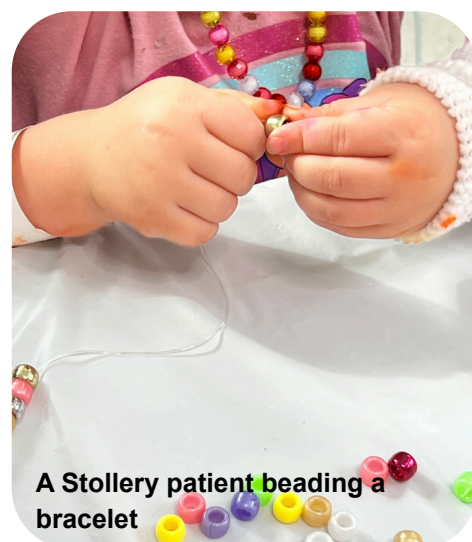
Events like this show how strong partnership and allyship make it possible to share Indigenous culture in a western healthcare setting. By coming together, the program helped create a space of learning, respect, and connection, while honouring the importance and beauty of Indigenous traditions.

***“By serving Indigenous foods, we support cultural identity and create space for reflection and learning.”***

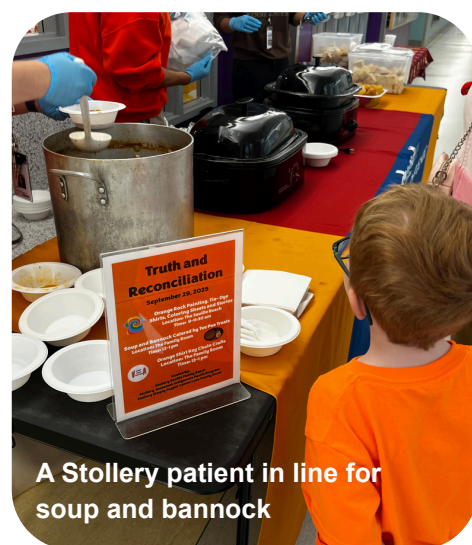
***– Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator***



Beaded orange shirts



A Stollery patient beading a bracelet



A Stollery patient in line for soup and bannock

*“The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (Orange Shirt Day), held each year on September 30, honours Survivors, their families, and communities impacted by the residential school system. As an Indigenous program, it is important that we recognize this day and bring awareness to the ongoing impacts of colonialism and injustice Indigenous communities continue to face.*

*On September 29, 2026, we offered soup and bannock, as it allowed us to share traditional Indigenous food, create connection, and provide comfort to families. Food is an important part of culture and community. By serving Indigenous foods, we support cultural identity and create space for reflection and learning.*

*In addition to this, we did orange rock painting, Tie-dye shirts, colouring sheets and stories at the beach, while incorporating orange shirt themes to engage with patients, families, and staff at the Stollery Children's hospital.*

*We also wear orange on this day to remember the children who never made it home and to stand in support of Survivors and their families.”*

*– Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator*



Stollery staff wearing orange shirts on the TRC day

# Sweet as Can Be: A Treat-Filled Day

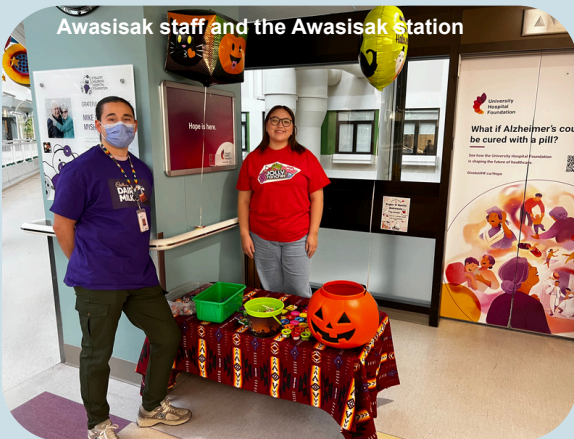
Awasisak team members dressed up on Halloween as fun Awasisak sweets, including Reese’s Cups, M&M Minis, Caramilk, and Dairy Milk. With sweet treats and small toys provided by Child Life, patients and families stopped by the Awasisak table as part of their Stollery trick-or-treat walk. Laughter and smiles filled the space as families enjoyed the festive celebration together.



Awasisak staff handing out treats to Stollery patients



Awasisak staff handing out treats to a Stollery patient



Awasisak staff and the Awasisak station



Awasisak display at the Heritage Week

From October 21 to 23, 2025, Stollery Awasisak staff shared their program, as well as Indigenous cultures and traditions, during Heritage Week at the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre, reflecting our shared site and the theme, “One Team, Many Roots, Shared Purpose.”

The Awasisak team created a colourful poster board that shared program statistics, services, and supports, along with Indigenous teachings such as Alberta Indigenous facts. They also showed coloured examples of colouring sheets with Indigenous arts that visitors could take home.

This display gave the public a chance to learn more about Indigenous cultures in Alberta and Canada, as well as the important services and support Awasisak provides and the positive impacts it has on people’s lives.

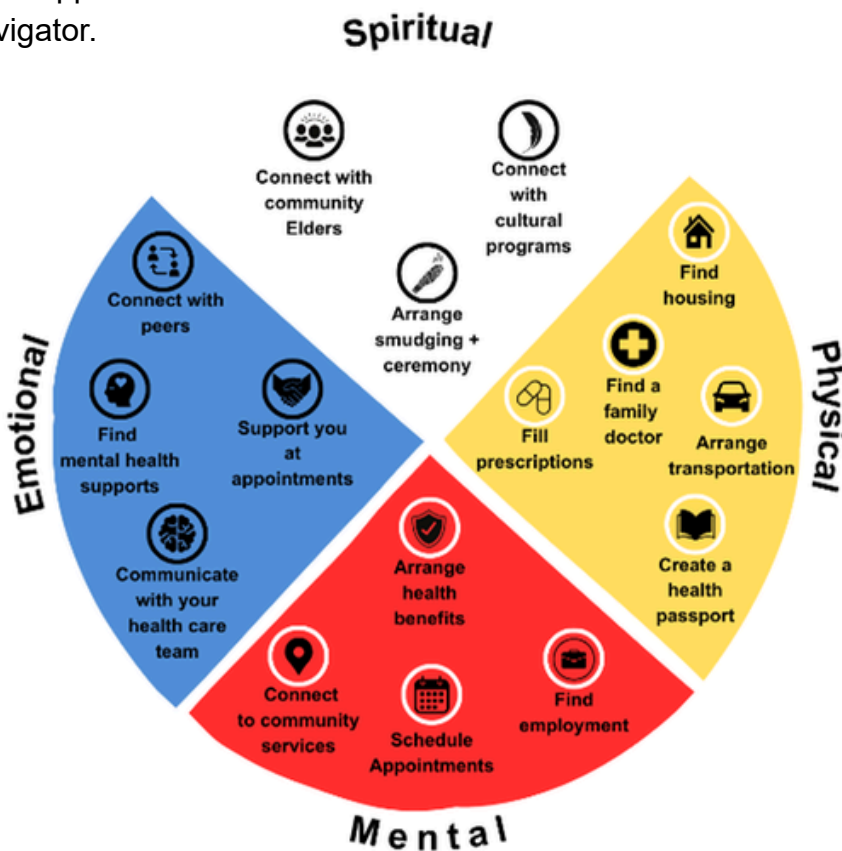
## One Team, Many Roots, Shared Purpose

# Wichitasowin: Indigenous Patient Navigator for Young Adults Study

This study is a collaboration between a Community Advisory Committee from Maskwacis and Pigeon Lake, Alberta, the Stollery Awasisak Indigenous Health Program, Maskwacis Health Services, and the University of Alberta. It is a community-led, strengths-based qualitative study to evaluate an Indigenous Patient Navigator program for pediatric to adult transitional care. The aim of this study is to help Indigenous young adults, age 16-25, (+/- their caregivers) living with long-term health conditions from the communities of Maskwacis navigate the healthcare system and manage their health through support from our Indigenous Patient Navigator.



The medicine wheel (right) displays potential supports provided by Linda Shirley, RSW, Indigenous Patient Navigator with the Awasisak Indigenous Health Program to participants in the study, encompassing a wholistic view of Plains Cree health and wellbeing.



Participants in the study receive individualized support from our Indigenous Patient Navigator, Linda Shirley, BSW, RSW, for up to 18-months to help them manage their health. Optional group sessions within the community are also held by Linda to provide an opportunity for peer connection. We currently have 19 young adult and 3 caregiver participants enrolled, who are receiving Indigenous Patient Navigator support. This study is actively recruiting and is expected to continue until 2027.

Dr. Andrew Mackie (Cardiologist at the Stollery Children’s Hospital and University of Alberta), Dr. Richard Oster (Scientific Director with the Acute Care Alberta Indigenous Wellness Core) and Dr. Stephanie Montesanti (CARE Research Lab) are co-leading this project with the Community Advisory Committee of Maskwacîs Elders, Community Knowledge Keepers, healthcare providers and lived experience members.

For more information about this study please reach out to [wichitasowin@ualberta.ca](mailto:wichitasowin@ualberta.ca).

This study has been approved by the University of Alberta Health Research Ethics Board (Pro00138085).



Lisa M. Roasting, Community Research Coordinator from the University of Alberta (left) and Linda Shirley, RSW, Indigenous Patient Navigator with the Awasisak Indigenous Health Program (right)

# Real Experiences, Real Impact

*“Hello Awasisak team,*

*On behalf of our family, we want to say thank you for the care that our nephew received while being admitted at Stollery Children's Hospital.*

*My sister-in-law and nephew made it home safely yesterday evening and are resting at home.*

*The care they received was fantastic and we want to say that we are especially grateful for (Awasisak Registered Nurse Case Manager and Social Worker's) support for our family.*

*We are wishing you all the best for the holidays and that you can enjoy some well deserved time off.”*

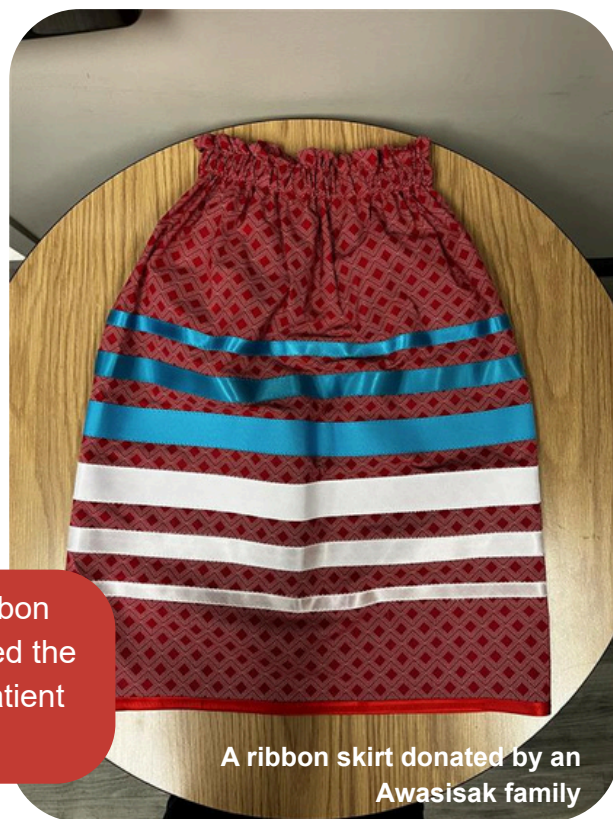
*– Awasisak family*



Thank you card from an Awasisak family

*“We thank you so much of your work on us. Your kindness, your laughter, and your smile. We will miss you most of everyday in life.”*

*– Thank you note from an Awasisak family*



A ribbon skirt donated by an Awasisak family

One Awasisak family donated a child-sized ribbon skirt as a thank-you to the program. They asked the team to pass the skirt along to an Awasisak patient whom they felt would be the right fit.

From April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025 to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026, the Awasisak program supported

**359**

*families*

**247**

*new patients*

**131**

*communities*

**6**

*provinces and territories*

Awasisak provided Indigenous patients and/or their families

**1887**

*In-person visits*

**1434**

*phone calls*

**245**

*visit attempts*

**1450**

*daily text check-ins*

Awasisak also had **2879** *interactions (e.g., consultation)* with service providers.

# The Numbers Behind the Magic

An Awasisak family playing games with the Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator (middle)

From April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025 to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026, the Awasisak program provided Indigenous patients and/or their families

**246**

*meal vouchers*

**120**

*taxi vouchers*

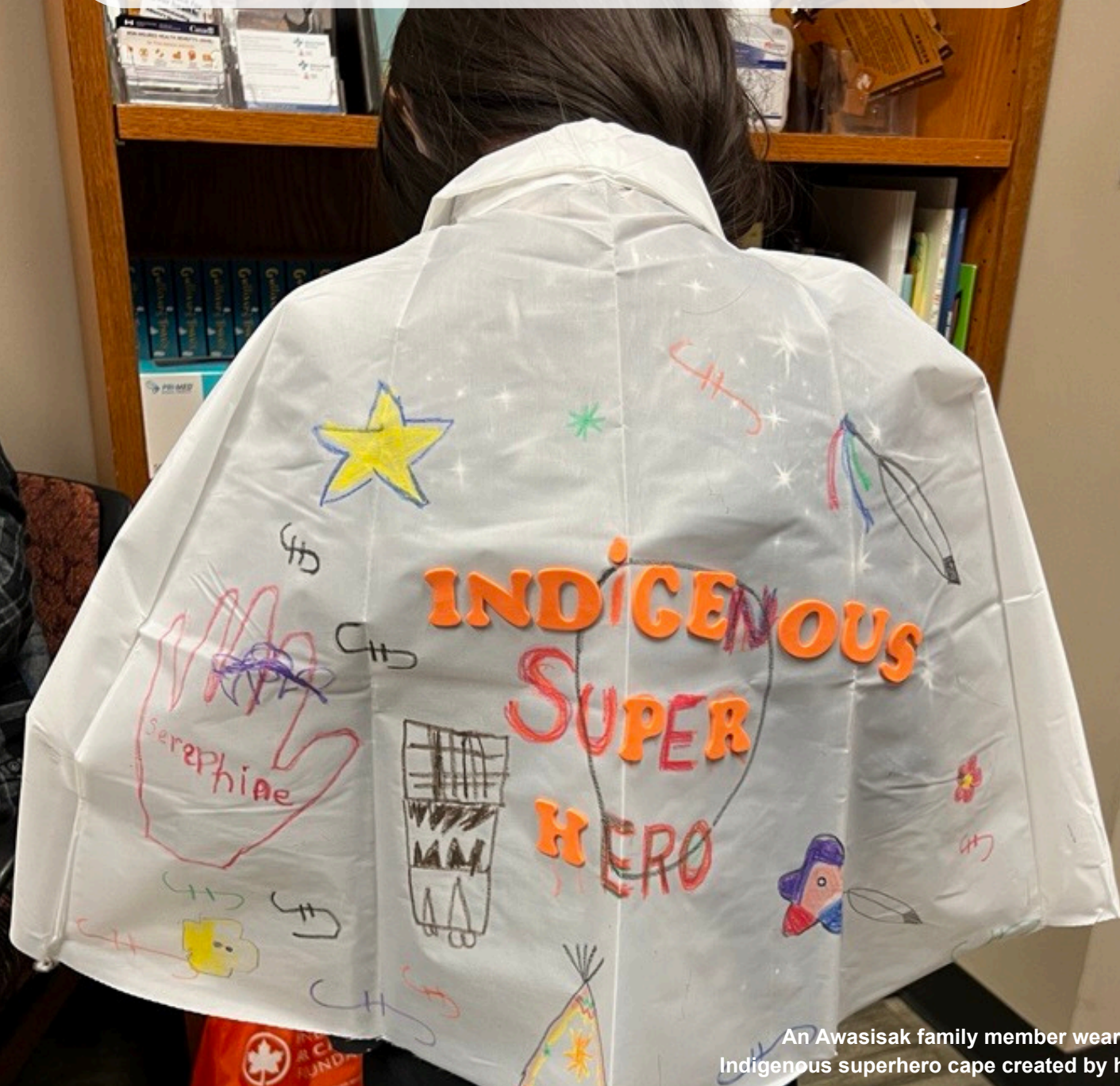
**1320**

*days of parking*

From January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025 to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026,

**343**

people and/or families visited the Awasisak program room.



An Awasisak family member wearing an Indigenous superhero cape created by herself

Awasisak staff shared their knowledge and experiences at the Health Equity Conference (HEC). HEC was hosted by the University of Alberta Medical Students' Association, a one-day interdisciplinary event that empowered the next generation of healthcare professionals with knowledge and tools to advance equity in healthcare. Attendees learned about support opportunities and actions and how to gain cultural competence for their future careers in medicine. During their presentation, Awasisak staff spoke about Indigenous social determinants of health, the impact of colonialism on health, and the experiences of Indigenous children and families accessing specialized pediatric care. They also shared the story of how the Awasisak program began, where it is today, and where it hopes to go in the future.



Awasisak staff at HEC

# SHARING KNOWLEDGE, SHAPING THE FUTURE

***“It is important to have a place and environment for others to feel safe to learn more about the Indigenous cultures, so they can better support Indigenous people.”***

**– Awasisak Social Worker**

Awasisak staff also presented at the Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Subspecialty (CAPS) Resident Summer Curriculum. They shared Indigenous perspectives on mental health and introduced cultural resources that help support inclusive and respectful care. In addition, Awasisak Social Workers were invited to be guest lecturers for Social Work courses at the University of Calgary and Grant MacEwan University three times over the last year. They spoke about information and experience in supporting Indigenous clients at the Stollery Children’s Hospital, specifically the services and support the Awasisak program provides, the positive impacts it has on Indigenous communities, and the importance of building strong allies. They also shared their own experiences as Indigenous Social Workers working within a western healthcare setting.

# Hopes and Dreams

As the team looked ahead to the future, they shared their hopes and dreams for the Awasisak program.

A bigger program space would allow patients and families to gather, share their life stories, the good, the hard, and everything in between. It would also make it possible for the program to host more events and offer more activities in the space. Families also shared how important it would be to have a quiet, private space where they could rest, take a breath, or have personal conversations with Awasisak staff when needed.

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*“Ideally, there is a bigger space to accommodate the patients and families to socialize. To have space for ceremony and other things to help bring people together like food and meals. Play space for kids in the program and their siblings. A smudging room.”*

– Awasisak Registered Nurse Case Manager

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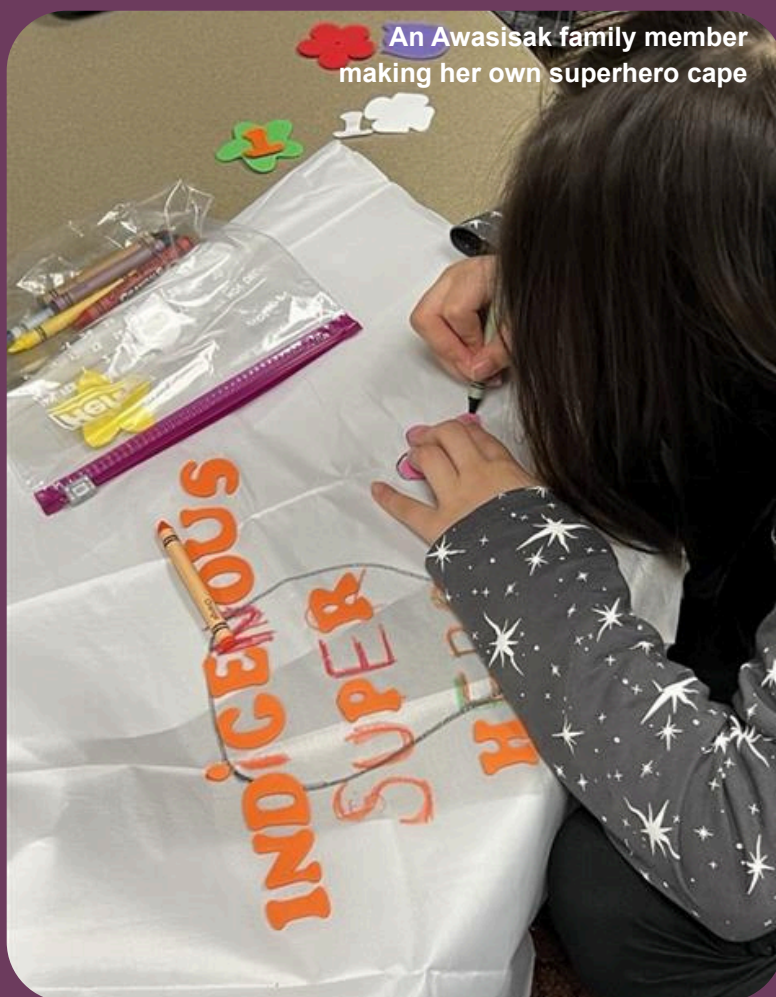
The team shared a need for weekend and evening support so families could receive care outside of regular hours. Having roles like a Mental Health Therapist and a Clinical Nurse Educator would also help strengthen the team and better support Indigenous patients and families during their time at the Stollery Children’s Hospital.

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*“For example, patients who need the staff to better understand their situations can benefit from a Clinical Nurse Educator giving the staff trauma-informed care (teachings) from an Indigenous perspective.”*

– Awasisak Social Worker

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# Our Team

*“Working with the Awasisak Indigenous Health Program has been a meaningful and enriching experience. Through collaboration grounded in respect, relationship-building, and cultural humility, I have supported children and families in ways that honour Indigenous knowledge, strengths, and community priorities. This work has deepened my understanding of holistic health and reinforced the importance of partnership, trust, and culturally responsive practice in supporting the wellbeing of Indigenous children and families.”*

– Awasisak Child and Family Engagement Coordinator



*“As a Registered Nurse joining the Awasisak Indigenous Health Program, I have been inspired by how the team holds space and builds trusting, lasting relationships with, and supports families as they navigate the hospital and care system. Being part of this work is deeply meaningful.”*

*– Awasisak Registered Nurse Case Manager*



*“Seeing the positive changes the Awasisak brings to our patients and families is such an honour, and it reminds me every day why this work matters.”*

*– Awasisak Social Worker*

*“I have seen firsthand how we build bridges for families, holding space for them during difficult hospital journeys. Being part of a program that prioritizes relationality and trust makes this work truly significant.”*

*– Awasisak Registered Nurse Case Manager*





An Awasisak patient in a moss bag  
made by the Awasisak Cultural Advisor

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

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

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