



# Stollery Children's Hospital Awasisak Program 2022-2023 Annual Report

*A'cimowin, "the Process of Storytelling" in Cree.*



# Together, We Celebrate

Cover: Awasisak Ribbon Skirt Display at McMullen Art Gallery



Presented by the Stollery Awasisak Indigenous Health Program  
Editor: Shang Dong



**TRUTH**

The turtle teaches to acknowledge that racism and prejudice still exists within healthcare.



**WISDOM**

The beaver teaches to raise awareness to leadership to help Indigenous people.



**LOVE**

The eagle teaches to invest in children by providing more services and resources.



**RESPECT**

The buffalo teaches to advocate for holistic care and hostility free environments.



**HUMILITY**

The wolf teaches to promote Indigenous awareness training to avoid misconceptions.



**HONESTY**

The sage teaches to participate in Talking Circles to increase communication.



**COURAGE**

The bear teaches to build trust by encouraging collaboration and addressing trauma.

## Seven Sacred Teachings

# Stollery Children’s Hospital Awasisak Indigenous Health Program

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 Alberta 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 strong and healthy relationships with a number of Indigenous communities.



## Land Acknowledgement

The Awasisak program’s home is in Amiskwaciwâskahikan on Treaty 6 territory.

We acknowledge Treaty 6 territory; the ancestral and traditional territory of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, Nakota Sioux, as well as the Métis.

We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples whose footsteps have marked these lands for generations.

We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers, Medicine Peoples and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us.

Our recognition of this land is an act of reconciliation and an expression of our gratitude to those whose territory we reside on, or are visiting.

# FEATURES

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# IMPACT

From April 2022 to March 2023,

The Awasisak Program served **502** families, of which **398** are new families, from **97** Indigenous communities in **7** provinces and territories

*(Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Saskatchewan, and Yukon).*

The Awasisak team provided **2441** in-person visits, **1212** telephone calls, **605** visit attempts to Indigenous families, **3200** consultations to service providers, as well as checked in with various families **1234** times via text.

Awasisak kid, "Super Willie" and "Super Fan Magoo"

## OUR WORK

***We work from the heart and strive to support Indigenous children and families in their times of need.***



**Awasisak Ribbon Skirt Display at the McMullen Art Gallery**

## Together, We Celebrate

***Awasisak team delivers a series of events in celebration of National Indigenous Day.***

**F**or this year's Indigenous Day Celebration, the Awasisak team reached out to organizations and developed a series of events for people to learn about not only the significance and meaning of Indigenous Day but also Indigenous cultures in general. This year's Celebration involved a ribbon skirt display at the McMullen Art Gallery, collaboration with Indigenous Artist Market (I.A.M), a virtual Bannock workshop, and featured dishes at the University of Alberta Hospital (UAH)/Stollery Children's Hospital (STO) cafeteria.

The team believed having a ribbon skirt display in the hospital would raise the public awareness of Indigenous communities and cultures as well as foster a welcoming

and inclusive environment for patients and visitors. Ideally, work as such can increase the comfort level of Indigenous patients and families and demonstrate that the healthcare environment is changing, i.e., Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization efforts have been made by health institutions. Being a strong ally, the McMullen Art Gallery pleasantly agreed to support the initiative, displaying the team members' ribbon skirts complemented by an information sheet of the meaning and description of ribbon skirts and their significance in some Indigenous cultures and communities.

The Awasisak was delighted to partner with I.A.M, a collective of local Indigenous artists to showcase their artwork. The Awasisak

would like to thank the McMullen Art Gallery for displaying the artwork, providing visitors the opportunity to appreciate and learn about local Indigenous artwork, as well as support local artists.

In partnership with the Food Services at Stollery Children's Hospital (UAH Site), Awasisak also delivered a virtual Bannock workshop entailing the making and recipe of Bannock, its cultural meanings, as well as other Indigenous teachings, such as the role of food in some Indigenous cultures. Further, the Awasisak team also assisted the cafeteria to develop their featured Indigenous dishes, hoping people can enjoy Indigenous traditional food and appreciate Indigenous cultures.



“Super Parents” of “Super Willie” at 2022 Cheryl’s Run

The Awasisak program partnered with Cheryl’s Run, a fundraising organization to honour Cheryl, a past Stollery pediatric oncology nurse. Cheryl’s Run donates all their proceeds to the Stollery Children’s Hospital Foundation, to continue Cheryl’s giving legacy and to save more lives. To honour Willie, who had been a patient with the Awasisak program for years, the Awasisak team reached out to Cheryl’s Run, discussing possibilities to better support Stollery Indigenous families. The Cheryl’s Run members were touched and expressed that supporting families is why they organize the runs. They also decided they would dedicate the entire year’s runs to “Super Willie” and the Awasisak program. For more information, please click [here](#) to watch a video regarding the last Cheryl’s Run.

# Run for Our Heroes

*Awasisak program partners with Cheryl’s Run to honour “Super Willie” and fundraise for the program.*

# and to Our Future

*“We would like to dedicate this year’s run to Willie, to his love of the Edmonton Oilers, to his love of everything Halloween which I know his family is setting up in memory of their sweet little boy in the next couple of weeks. Willie, this is for you! Love and prayers little angel.*

— Cheryl’s Run Staff



2 October 19, 2022

And the total is.....\$5756.23 which will go to The Stollery Awasisak Indigenous Health Program!!! Thank you to all our participants, our sponsors, and supporters! We are so grateful for the support of our community for coming together to make Cheryl's Run a great success!

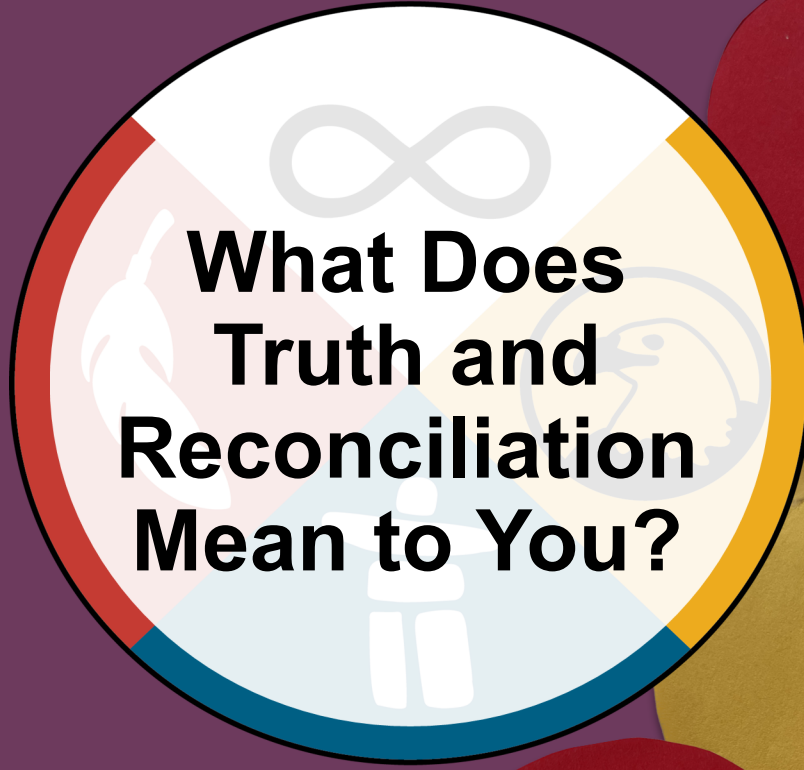
Pictured is Super Willie who was a Stollery kid from Fox Lake, Alberta, a remote community in Northern Alberta, 11 hours from Edmonton. Willie was a patient at the Stollery but sadly he lost his battle with cancer at the end of June. His family traveled to Edmonton to participate in our run in Willies memory💜 It's for kids like Willie why we do what we do, why we support [Stollery Children's Hospital](#) 💜

We would like to dedicate this years run to Willie, to his love of the [Edmonton Oilers](#), to his love of everything Halloween which I know his family is setting up in memory of their sweet little boy in the next couple of weeks 💜 Willie, this is for you! Love and prayers little angel💜

“The Awasisak team are wonderful people and they help us a lot with both my babies and they always do whatever to make us/my babies feel better anyway they can. ❤️❤️ I love how supportive they are and that’s why we went for this event (Cheryl's Run) because they do everything for us too. So we went and supported them too. ❤️”

— *Parents of “Super Willie”*

**Picture 1:** Former Awasisak Staff Holding the Cheque of Raised Fund with the Cheryl’s Run team  
**Picture 2:** Facebook Updates from the 2022 Cheryl's Run  
**Picture 3:** Awasisak Program Page on Cheryl's Run Website



# What Does Truth and Reconciliation Mean to You?



We are still here, and deserve to be recognized! ♡

Remembering

One step on the road to reconciliation...  
one step closer to the world I want my children to grow up in...  
every child matters

Peace in a troubled world.

it's my culture. im keeping it alive.  
Rachael b ♡

Actions speak louder than words!  
CHOOSE KINDNESS ALWAYS!

Our children matter  
Be kind to others  
No one deserves what happens to them

Happiness and good

We are still here ♡  
HIY-HIY

love

Let's each do our part  
Learn, grow  
make a lasting impact

Since 2021, the Awasisak program has been handing out orange ribbons to staff members who want to show their support towards the Indigenous communities on Truth and Reconciliation Day. The team hopes this initiative can increase public awareness of Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) and can encourage future learning. Further, this year, the team would like to better understand people's opinions and thoughts on TRC. With that goal in mind, the team put up a large sheet of paper with the question, "what does TRC mean to you?" at the Stollery Children's Hospital (University of Alberta Hospital site). People were encouraged to share their responses and post their ideas, some of the responses are shown on this page.





## The Magic of Indigenous Arts

### *Awasisak team delivers a beading activity at the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation Snowflake Gala*

The Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation Snowflake Gala strives to provide a night of magic and wonder for Stollery supporters. The Awasisak program had the honour to be featured at the Gala and to be a part of the magic. The team valued and cherished this opportunity. It allowed them to showcase the work they have done for the Stollery Indigenous patients and families, a direct result of the Stollery Foundation's support. Additionally, the team also believed their presence at the Gala could raise its attendees' awareness in Indigenous communities and cultures. Knowing the Gala was a family-friendly event, the team was hoping to present activities that could allow family members in different age groups to work together. As a result, the team devised and arranged a beading activity with two kinds of beading kits provided. One was a lanyard kit with smaller beads and a tutorial to follow; the other was crow beads without pre-made patterns, which the younger children could use to turn their imagination into reality. An information sheet of the history and significance of beading among Indigenous people was also provided in all beading kits. If the participants would like to learn more about Indigenous arts and beading, a QR code directing to more teachings was also available for scanning. Colouring sheets of Indigenous arts and images were offered as another option for the participants to learn about Indigenous arts. Many participants expressed their interest in further learning Indigenous arts as well as their appreciation of being introduced to beading and Indigenous arts. Most participants, if not all, said they had a great time; for example, many families worked in groups to finish a beading project, and some even had a friendly "competition" between the siblings. Due to the overwhelmingly positive feedback and comments from the Snowflake Gala's beading activity, the Awasisak team decided to start a beading initiative within the hospital for not only patients and families, but also anyone who is interested in learning about Indigenous beading arts. To this day, the beading initiative logistics has been developed and will be delivered in the near future. Ideally, this initiative will be captured in next year's annual report.



***"We are so honoured to support our Indigenous families while providing safety and compassion in their time of need. The Awasisak cherishes these moments and the relationships we have forged along the way. It takes a community to raise a child, we will be your community when you come to the Stollery Children's Hospital. You are loved, and never alone."***

— Mike Sutherland  
Awasisak Indigenous Health Program Team Lead

**Top Right:** Awasisak Team Lead, Mike Sutherland, and Awasisak Research and Evaluation Advisor, Shang Dong, beading lanyards

**Top Left:** Awasisak Research and Evaluation Advisor, Shang Dong, beading with a Snowflake Gala attendee

**Right:** Awasisak Team Lead, Mike Sutherland with Elder Emil Durocher

# Let's Bannock!

*The Awasisak program now resumes Tea and Bannock, hoping to raise the awareness of Indigenous history and cultures.*

Every second Friday afternoon of the month, the Awasisak program offers free Bannock with an aim to increase Indigenous presentation in the Stollery, foster a culturally responsive environment, and increase non-Indigenous populations' better understanding of Indigenous cultures. The team is grateful for the overwhelming amount of positive feedback and comments they have received.



Note Left on the Awasisak Office Door

One patient's family member told the Awasisak staff that they felt welcomed and "back home" even from seeing the event poster in the elevator. Some hospital staff expressed their appreciation, saying this activity made them aware of the Awasisak program and thanked the Awasisak team for sharing the Indigenous food and culture with them.



## Grab-n-Go Bannock! Everyone welcome

Every second Friday afternoon  
Starting Friday, December 2, 2022  
11 a.m. - 2 p.m. at the Awasisak Office  
Located near the north glass elevators room 4H2.36

December 2, 16, 30, January 13, 27  
February 10, 24, March 10, 24

Hosted by the Stollery Awasisak Indigenous Health Program



### Tea and Bannock Poster

## Awasisak Member Morilynn McRann-McLean Nominated as Stollery "Outstanding Woman"

Nomination Statement: "Morilynn is a Social Worker and is the heart of our small team. She always goes above and beyond to assist the families she works with to navigate the healthcare system and advocate for their needs. Our Stollery families place so much trust in her, and rightfully so. She works tirelessly to serve on a daily basis, and is often one of the first people to offer a helping hand, or a word of encouragement, or a shoulder to cry on. Our team and our families would not be the same without her!"

Thank you, Morilynn, for everything you do to support the Stollery community.



Morilynn McRann-McLean holding the "Outstanding Woman" gift basket

## Words from Awasisak's

“As a Stollery social worker for the last 11 years I have had the privilege to watch the Awasisak Indigenous Health Program grow from its infancy into what it is today. All members of this team do invaluable work to support Indigenous patients and families using a culturally sensitive lens and a collaborative, team-based approach. In particular, I feel that the Awasisak team is able to do very special work with our families from northern and remote locations who may have minimal experience outside of their community. The Awasisak program is able to uniquely offer them something that feels more comfortable and more like home within the very medical-based hospital system, all while keeping the Indigenous perspective at the forefront of their work. From offering smudging, to tea and Bannock, to a unique perspective into the way of life & family systems within many Indigenous communities, their contribution to the Stollery is tangible and has direct benefits to the patient population they serve. Within their program they have created a safe and inclusive space where non-Indigenous professionals are always welcome to ask questions and learn--I have always appreciated the openness of all members of the team to work collaboratively and share their viewpoints and expertise. Together we are stronger.”

— Megan Boyd, Social Worker, Stollery Children's Hospital

# and Friend

## “Cousin”

“My name is Noella Cardinal and I am from Frog Lake. I have been an Indigenous Coordinator with the Indigenous wellness core for just over 10 years. I was a part of the circles that were done with leadership in Stollery at the beginning of what would now be the Awasisak Program. I had the opportunity to sit in the ceremony that was done to name the program. ... My experience working with the program has been a good one. I have always sat with the program if they were following a family and needed support or in planning sessions for their drumming ceremony that happens during the solstices. My hope for the program is that it will continue to grow, with possible physicians (and) to having Elder representatives(,) both male and female. I believe that there needs to be more space given to the program. I believe that the communities have benefited in big ways. Like anything we do in life there are always opportunities to grow and do better.”

— Noella Cardinal, Indigenous Cultural Helper

The Awasisak team appreciates and is grateful for all its allies; without their support, Awasisak would not be able to accomplish what it has. The team believes that, in order to better Indigenous patients and families' well-being, it is crucial to effectively and efficiently collaborate with service providers in various fields. To this day, the program has built and maintained positive relationships with numerous service providers.

# LEARNING

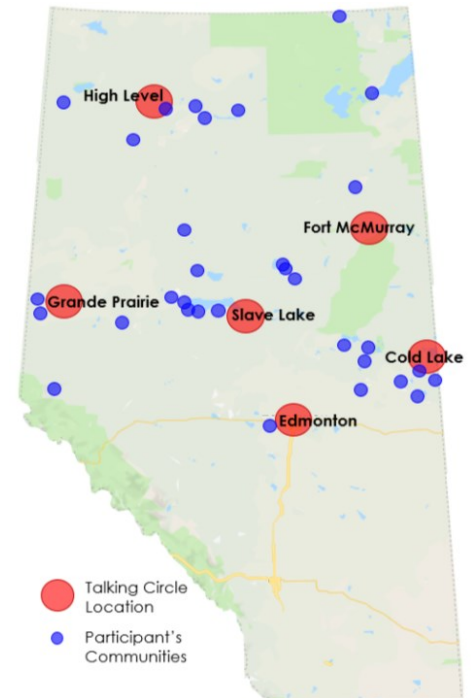
**The Awasisak team learns from people with different backgrounds. The first of its kind, the Awasisak Program also strives to build the evidence base for others to learn.**

## Community Has the Answer

*How and what the Awasisak program has learned from the community and where the program is going next.*

Believing “Indigenous voices provide Indigenous solutions”, the Awasisak program was developed from community voices gathered via talking circles hosted in various Albertan communities from 2017 to 2019. The program priorities were revealed through talking circles, leading to a program uniquely created through an Indigenous lens. The current team is truly multidisciplinary; aside from the “common” positions of Team Lead and Administrative Assistant, the team also includes a Cultural Advisor, two Children and Families Engagement Coordinators, three Social Workers, two Registered Nurse Case Managers, and a Research and Evaluation Advisor. After shaping the program to meet community needs, the program now is in its next development phase. Learning from our past stories of success, the team decided to go back to engage along-

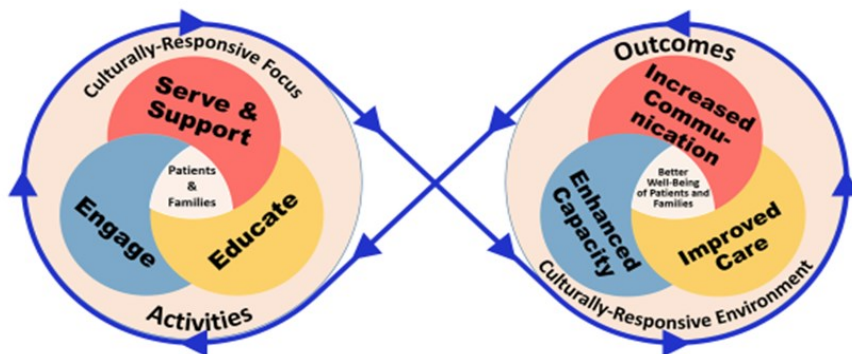
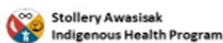
side the community, telling our stories to community members, sharing with them how their voices shaped the program, and lastly, seeking for more wisdom and guidance from them. The team has also been working on developing arts-based data collection methods to collect feedback and comments from patients and families being served and supported by the program. Unlike traditional data collection methods, such as surveys and interviews, the team believes some arts-based methods, such as collage and photo elicitation, can be better adapted to Indigenous cultures and impose less stress on the patients and families. Some Indigenous elements (e.g., beads and ribbons) will also be incorporated into the art-creating process, hoping it can help the families better express their thoughts, opinions, and emotions. As a contingency plan, a previ-



**Awasisak Talking Circle Community Map**

ously designed patients and families survey will be sent to A Project Ethics Community Consensus Initiative for feedback before its implementation.

Ideally, with the voices from the communities, the program’s effectiveness and areas for improvement could be demonstrated and identified. With their voices, the team can work more intentionally, leading to better practices and happier patients and families.



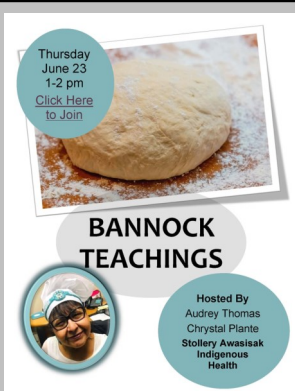
**Awasisak Program Logic Model**

# TEACHINGS

**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.**

## “Honoured to Walk Beside Our Families”

*Awasisak team members share Indigenous Women’s Teachings at a Stollery Women’s Network event*



Thursday  
June 23  
1-2 pm  
[Click Here to Join](#)

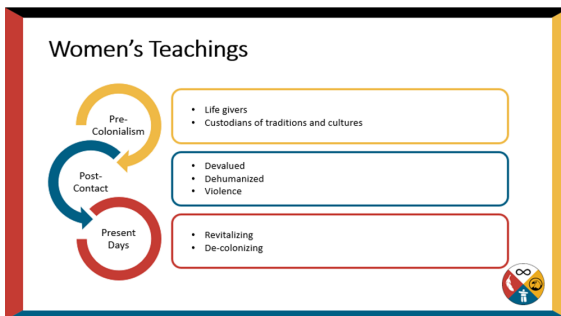
**BANNOCK TEACHINGS**

Hosted By  
Audrey Thomas  
Chrystal Plante  
Stollery Awasisak  
Indigenous Health

### Bannock Workshop

On National Indigenous Day, Audrey Thomas delivered a virtual Bannock workshop as a part of the Awasisak Indigenous Day Celebration initiative. Approximately 60 people attended the workshop to learn about Indigenous food, cultures, as well as Audrey’s secret Bannock

**A**t a Stollery Women’s Network event, Audrey Thomas and Morilynn McRann-McLean delivered a presentation on Indigenous women’s teachings, specifically their experience of being Indigenous women as healthcare providers working in an in-hospital pediatric health program targeting Indigenous children and families.



**Indigenous Women’s Teachings Slide**



**Audrey Thomas Honoured with “PFCC Champion”**

*Most importantly, it is an honour and privilege to walk beside our families during their healing journey. Every day we are in awe of our families’ strength, resilience and commitment to overcoming unimaginable barriers to ensure their families are well.*

*Morilynn McRann-McLean  
Awasisak Pediatric Social Worker*

The presenters shared their own work and life experience as well as positives and challenges they have encountered when working with Indigenous children and families in a healthcare setting. Our families have repeatedly shown strength and resilience throughout the many systemic challenges they face. These challenges include precarious living conditions (e.g., underdeveloped housing, inadequate clean drinking water, and food insecurity), lack of public awareness and understanding of the barriers they encounter, including discrimination and prejudice. Instead of seeing our families as vulnerable people, we see them as strong people in a vulnerable environment; therefore, the Awasisak team has been striving to empower them to have a voice of their own that historically has been minimized or even taken in the healthcare system.

# 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.***



Left to Right: Jackie Mitchell (*Registered Nurse Case Manager*), Shawna Marcel (*Administrative Assistant*), Audrey Thomas (*Social Worker*), Shang Dong (*Research and Evaluation Advisor*), Meredith McKenzie (*Social Worker*), Bernard Fickel (*Family and Child Engagement Coordinator*), Morilynn McRann-McLean (*Social Worker*), Kyle Campiou (*Cultural Advisor*), Jalene Boysis (*Family and Child Engagement Coordinator*), and Mike Sutherland (*Team Lead*)

***“Witnessing the strength, dedication and love our families embody when faced with unimaginably difficult situations is incredibly humbling and inspiring. The Awasisak program fosters relationships that uphold the dignity and power Indigenous peoples and communities inherently possess. Walking beside these families is my greatest honour.”***

**— Meredith McKenzie**  
*Awasisak Pediatric Social Worker*

***“Our patients and families are extremely strong and resilient people who are in vulnerable situations. I am so very proud to be able to witness a part of their journey.”***

**— Shang Dong**  
*Awasisak Research and Evaluation Advisor*

***“My last three years working here has been challenging yet rewarding, sad about some of our families’ situations but in awe of their strength and resilience. I love every bit of my work at the Awasisak!”***

**— Shawna Marcel**, *Awasisak Administrative Assistant*

***“My role as an engagement coordinator is to help our families feel supported while away from community. I am so honoured to work so closely with our program’s children and families while they are here in the hospital.”***

**Jalene Boysis**  
*Awasisak Indigenous Child and Family Engagement Coordinator*



Administrative Assistant, Shawna Marcel (left) and Family and Child Engagement Coordinator, Bernard Fickel (right)

***“To me, the Awasisak program means honouring our culture, providing compassionate care, and empowering Indigenous families. It’s a privilege to be part of a movement that reclaims our agency in healthcare, breaking down barriers and fostering connections. I feel it is a tribute to our ancestors and a promise to future generations, contributing not only to pediatric health but also to the revitalization of our Indigenous identity and wellbeing — with a committed team that feels like family, dedicated to helping other families.***

**— Bernard Fickel**, *Awasisak Indigenous Child and Family Engagement Coordinator*



**On behalf of the Stollery Children's Hospital, we want to extend our gratitude to the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation and to the numerous donors for all their support in helping us achieve world class care!**

**Hai Hai (Cree)**  
**Marsi Chok (Dene)**  
**Nitsiniyi'taki (Blackfoot)**  
**Isniyes (Nakota)**  
**Thank You (English)**



### Contact Information

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