

WOOD BUFFALO WELLNESS SOCIETY



ANNUAL REPORT
2022-2023



ABOUT US

VISION

A community of safety, health and hope.

MISSION

We are a non-profit organization providing residential therapeutic treatment and Housing First Case Management solutions to individuals and families facing addiction and homelessness.



MANDATE

Recovery honouring the individual, respecting tradition and blessed with the heart and soul of harm reduction.

CORE VALUES

The Seven Sacred Teachings, these teachings provide a holistic framework for personal and communal well-being, promoting balance, harmony, and interconnectedness with the natural world. They are foundational to Indigenous cultures and are passed down through generations as essential guides for living a good and meaningful life



Respect



Humility



Courage



Love



Truth



Wisdom



Honesty



SOCIETY HIGHLIGHTS



22 SWEAT LODGES

promoting physical, mental, and emotional well-being, fostering community bonding, and facilitating a deeper connection with ancestral traditions and teachings.



147 APPLIED FOR TREATMENT

Applying for treatment is a crucial step toward recovery, signaling a proactive commitment to seeking professional help and embarking on a journey of healing and positive life transformation.



105 ACCEPTED INTO TREATMENT

Being accepted into treatment is a significant milestone, as it represents a positive step forward on the path to recovery, providing individuals with the opportunity for healing, support, and personal growth.



54 INDIVIDUALS GRADUATED

This accomplishment reflects the individual's resilience and commitment to building a healthier and more secure future.



175 INDIVIDUALS ATTENDED OUR OVERDOSE AWARENESS WALK

When individuals come together to support a common cause, whether it's a cultural gathering, awareness event, or fundraiser, the community becomes a source of strength and encouragement.



A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Jo Anne Potham

As we reflect on the past year, it brings me immense pride to present the Annual Report of the Wood Buffalo Wellness Society. As the Executive Director, I am honored to share the strides we have taken in advancing our mission to foster holistic well-being for all of our relatives within the Wood Buffalo community.

Over the past year, our dedicated team has worked tirelessly to develop and launch new programming. The largest and most apparent being the Tawâw program but we have successfully started another huge Initiative, Sâkihitowin. a range of initiatives aimed at addressing the diverse needs of some of our community's most vulnerable members. In February of 2022 we purchased and took possession of a long standing hotel.

For the fourth year in a row we have been able to transition much of our Treatment Centre programming onto the land for the summer months and we have sought to create a comprehensive approach to wellness that recognizes the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit in all of our many and diverse programs.

One of our key achievements this year has certainly been the launch of our Sâkihitowin, recovery home program, which has significantly opened options for community members in need of a safe, stable and supported sober living environment. This program was the successful joining of the well established Ross Residence for men

“Best Treatment Centre by far for healing and understanding emotions. And you guys actually care. I’ve never felt so safe and acknowledged. Thank you! So much Love!”

–MATC Client

and our timely opening of the communities' first Women's specific home. We had an outpouring of community support to furnish the homes and get things rolling with lawn maintenance equipment, and furniture. A welcome by product of this program is family reunification and we have seen four families reunited to date.

As we navigate the ongoing challenges posed by external factors, we remain steadfast in our dedication to the well-being of the Wood Buffalo community. The resilience demonstrated by our team and the individuals we serve inspires us to continue pushing the boundaries of what is possible in the realm of community wellness for the houseless and those struggling with addiction.

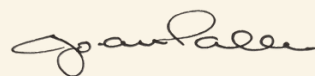
Looking ahead, we have ambitious plans to introduce new programs, enhance existing services, and further integrate technology to better meet the evolving needs of our community. We are committed to staying at the forefront

of innovative approaches to working with the houseless and those striving for a life of sobriety, ensuring that our programs remain relevant and effective.

None of our achievements would be possible without the unwavering support of our staff, volunteers, partners, and the entire Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo community. Together, we are building a foundation of well-being that will have a lasting positive impact on the lives of generations to come.

Thank you for your continued support, and I invite you to explore the pages of this Annual Report to gain a deeper insight into the remarkable journey of the Wood Buffalo Wellness Society over the past year.

In wellness and gratitude,



Jo-Anne Packham





MARK AMY TREATMENT CENTRE

The Mark Amy Treatment Centre stands as a beacon of hope and healing in our community, dedicated to supporting individuals on their journey towards recovery from addiction. With a holistic approach to wellness, the center provides a safe and nurturing environment where participants can access comprehensive treatment programs tailored to their unique needs. From culturally sensitive interventions to on-the-land camps, the Mark Amy Treatment Centre embraces diverse strategies to address the multifaceted aspects of addiction. The center not only focuses on recovery but also emphasizes the importance of cultural connections, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose. Through its unwavering commitment to individualized care and community support, the Mark Amy Treatment Centre plays a vital role in promoting lasting recovery and empowering individuals to rebuild their lives.

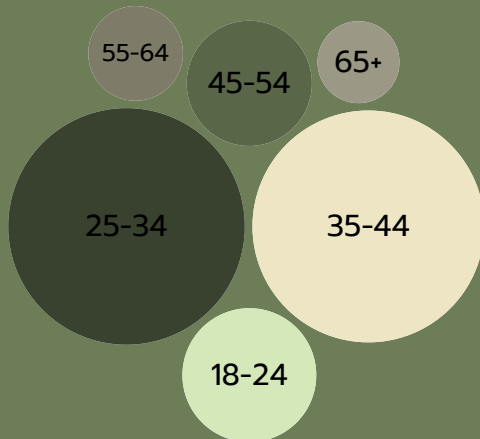


By Numbers

 62
Males

43 
Females

40 
Graduated



"I really enjoyed the program and thought it was over and beyond my expectations. It would be my first referral to anyone looking for recovery. Hats off to the cook and staff, phenomenal job!"
-MATC Client



Community Services

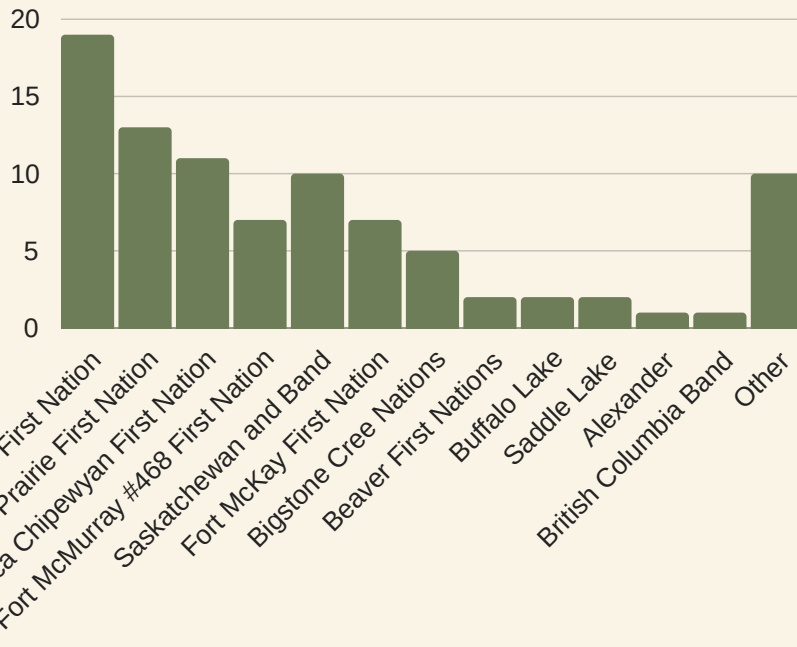
Everyone has a right to a place to call home. Housing First and Rapid Re-housing is an approach that centers on providing individuals and families who are homeless with support services to help them find and maintain a home. The goal is to help people become better able to keep themselves safe and healthy by providing supports over a period of time.

CENTRALIZED INTAKE

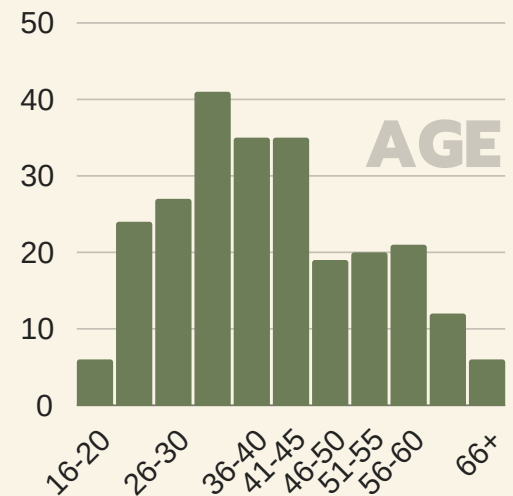
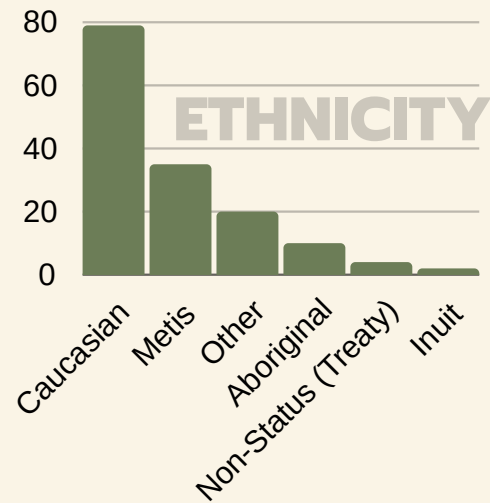
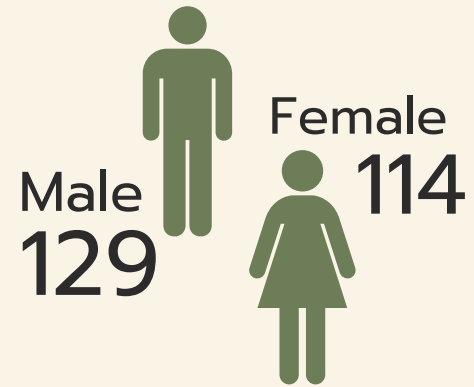


The Wood Buffalo Wellness Society's Centralized Intake Program serves as a crucial gateway for individuals seeking support and assistance within our community. This program serves as the initial point of contact, providing a streamlined and efficient process for individuals to access various housing programs and services offered by WBWS. Through Centralized Intake, individuals facing housing instability, homelessness, or related challenges can receive comprehensive assessments and referrals to appropriate programs, ensuring a tailored and responsive approach to their unique needs. The dedicated team at Centralized Intake facilitates warm transfers to specialized programs, such as Housing First and Rapid Rehousing, while also providing ongoing support and follow-ups to ensure that individuals receive the assistance they require on their journey toward stability and well-being. This program plays a pivotal role in creating a supportive and accessible entry point for individuals seeking assistance, contributing to WBWS's overarching mission of empowering lives and fostering positive change in our community.

NATION



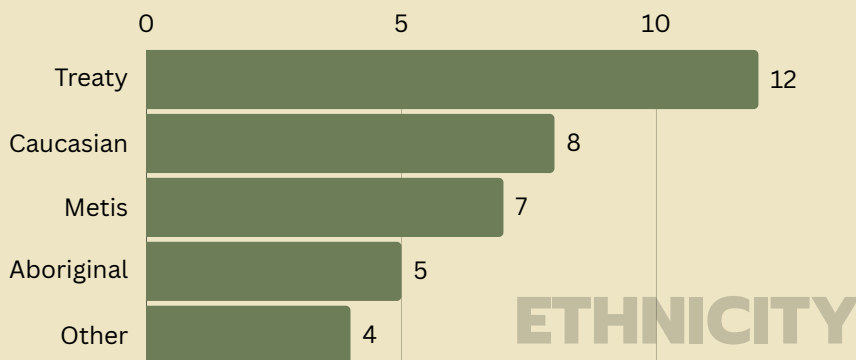
GENDER





HOUSING FIRST

Housing First is a transformative approach to addressing homelessness that prioritizes providing stable and permanent housing as the first step in a person's journey toward recovery and well-being. The core philosophy of Housing First is grounded in the belief that individuals are better equipped to address other challenges, such as mental health issues or addiction, when they have a safe and secure place to call home. By offering immediate access to housing without preconditions, Housing First seeks to break the cycle of homelessness and empower individuals to regain control over their lives. This person-centered model recognizes the dignity and autonomy of each individual, fostering a supportive environment where they can rebuild their lives and work towards achieving their personal goals. Through a combination of housing support and wraparound services, Housing First not only provides a home but also a foundation for lasting stability and positive change.



GENDER



20
Male



16
Female



2

Graduated



36

Housed

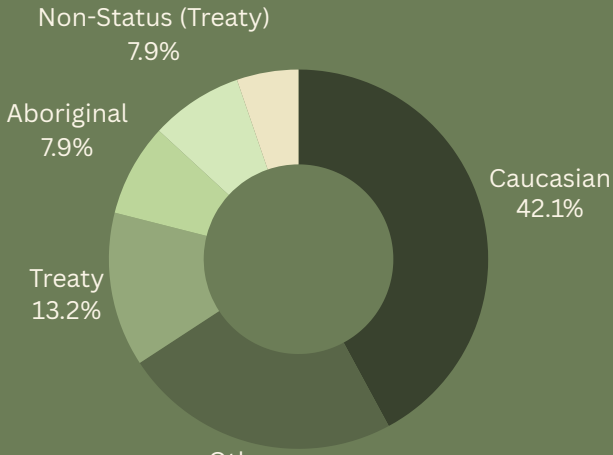


Rapid REHOUSING



12 out of 38
Housed Clients Graduated

Rapid Rehousing (RRH) is a vital intervention strategy designed to swiftly transition individuals and families experiencing homelessness into stable and permanent housing. The core objective of RRH is to provide immediate support, facilitating the exit from homelessness and preventing recurrence. This innovative approach focuses on three fundamental components: housing identification, move-in and rent assistance, and ongoing case management services. By expediting the process of securing housing, offering financial assistance for initial expenses, and providing continuous support through case management, RRH addresses the critical needs of those in crisis. The ultimate goal is to empower individuals, fostering their independence and resilience as they work towards sustainable housing solutions and rebuild their lives. Through RRH, we aim to create a pathway to stability, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to thrive within a secure and supportive living environment.



ETHNICITY

**SUPPORTING
INDIVIDUALS TO
REGAIN CONTROL
OVER THEIR LIVES.**



Outreach

The Outreach Program at Wood Buffalo Wellness Society plays a crucial role in connecting with and supporting individuals within our community. Committed to making a positive impact, our Outreach Workers engage with those facing various challenges, including homelessness, mental health issues, and addiction. Through proactive outreach efforts, we strive to identify and address the unique needs of each individual, providing essential resources, assistance, and a compassionate presence.

Whether it's connecting someone with emergency housing, facilitating access to healthcare services, or collaborating with community partners, our Outreach Program is dedicated to fostering positive change and empowering individuals to overcome obstacles on their journey to stability and well-being. Through this outreach, we aim to build bridges, create a sense of belonging, and ensure that everyone in our community has the opportunity to lead a fulfilling and dignified life.



444
Referrals

Clients
Served

130



Clients
Housed
35

TAWÂW

Tawaw" is a Cree word that means "Welcome" or "Come in" in English. It is often used to greet someone or invite them into a space. The term reflects a spirit of hospitality and inclusiveness.



Tawâw,) is an Indigenous Permanent Supportive Housing Program for the chronically houseless population. The program is Indigenous led with the primary focus to decolonize and open opportunities to language, land, culture and ceremonies of Indigenous identity in the recovery process.

It offers 29 individual units with the capacity to expand to 45-48 beds and is open to all. The program builds a sense of community and belonging for residents through the application of Indigenous world views on

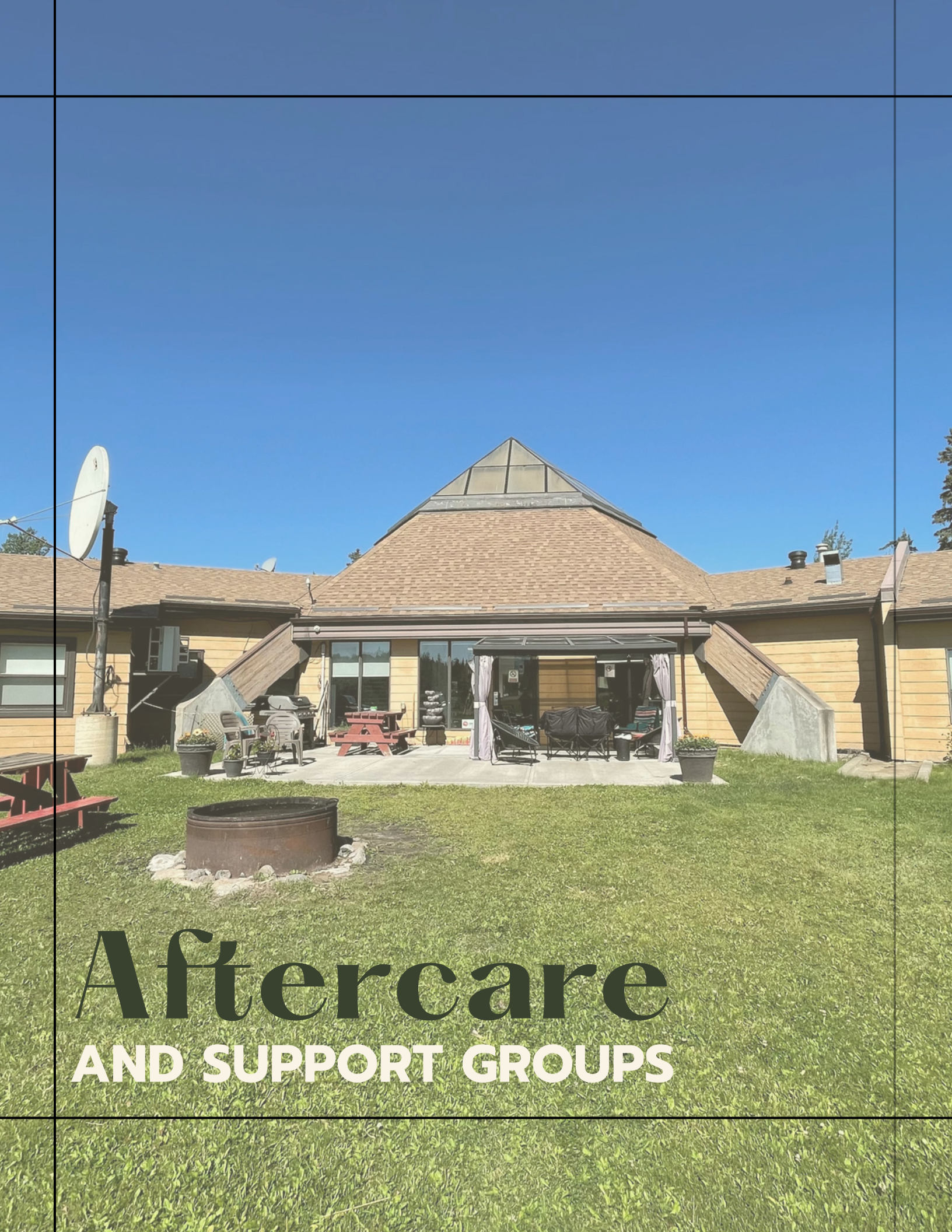
reciprocity, respect and relational/ natural law. The building encompasses various levels of care based on the harm reduction and trauma informed philosophy and is broken into 4 different wings divided by level of care, co-ed, youth, women and 2 short-term/ emergency family suites. Case management and strategies for each group differ but with common themes.

The program is designed to serve those that have been unsuccessful in other housing settings and for those who often utilize space within hospitals and

care facilities due to a lack of appropriate supports in community. The goal of the program is for residents to return to a life of autonomy and wellness of their own design, but we recognize that many, particularly the Elderly, may live out their days with us in dignity and respect.

"As the river flows, so does the wisdom of our ancestors, guiding us to cherish the land, honor our traditions, and walk in harmony with all living things."

-Unknown Cree Elder



Aftercare

AND SUPPORT GROUPS

Aftercare

Aftercare at Wood Buffalo Wellness Society (WBWS) plays a vital role in supporting individuals on their path to sustained well-being. Our aftercare programs are designed to provide continued guidance and assistance to those who have completed specific programs or interventions. By offering ongoing support and resources, we aim to help individuals maintain the progress they've achieved and navigate the challenges of daily life. Whether it's connecting with community resources, providing emotional support, or assisting with future goals, our aftercare services are tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual. Through this sustained commitment, WBWS strives to ensure that participants not only achieve positive outcomes during their initial engagement but also experience lasting improvements in their overall quality of life.



Support Groups

The Co-ed Addictions Support/Wellbriety meeting, facilitated by William Weibel and Kayla Lushman, provides a virtual space for individuals seeking recovery and cultural support. Guided by the principles of Wellbriety, the sessions extend a spotlight to general recovery discussions, creating a supportive environment for those directly and indirectly affected by addiction. Notably, Elders Gilly Alook and Dianna Watson contribute their wisdom to the meetings, attracting guests from various parts of Canada. In the reported period, the group witnessed substantial engagement, with 1548 individuals participating, of which 65% were men and 35% were women. Among these, 79 were new unique members, while the meetings welcomed the presence of 4 unique elders. This robust attendance underscores the importance of the Co-ed Addictions Support/Wellbriety meeting in fostering a community of shared recovery and cultural healing.

Women's Support Group

The Women's Support Group, offers a weekly gathering that combines both Zoom and in-person interactions. This group, fostering general recovery, serves as a supportive space where women, whether in addiction or affected by it, come together for mutual support. Welcoming all who identify as female or two-spirit, the group features various guest speakers addressing topics such as LGBTQ2S+ awareness, yoga, art therapy, Indigenous-led art sessions, and general recovery themes. Attendees find a safe haven to connect, build community, and offer support. With 394 women participating, including 39 new members, the group's impact is considerable. All attendees identified as female or two-spirit, and four elders regularly join these sessions. The meetings provide essential resources, such as 210 bus tickets, particularly benefiting women within the RMWB/MATC community. While attendees come from across Canada, the group has a primary presence within the RMWB. Additionally, approximately 15 women received traditional medicines like sage and sweetgrass, enhancing the cultural and holistic aspects of the support group.





Client Comment

"Thank you very much for allowing me to stay two rounds. I won't forget this place, and I will suggest or how do you say it, refer this place when I get back home. I enjoyed my stay. I enjoyed all the sweats and the teachings. God bless you all, I am very grateful Mark Amy gave me a chance to live longer."

CULTURAL TEACHINGS AND EVENTS

Cultural Events

Wood Buffalo Wellness Society (WBWS) is proud to offer a series of culturally enriching activities and teachings as part of our commitment to holistic well-being. We held three on the Land Culture Camps exemplifying our dedication to fostering a deep connection with cultural traditions. Two of these camps were specially tailored for our clients, providing an immersive experience that intertwines nature and cultural teachings. Led by knowledge Keepers and Elders, participants engage in activities such as drumming, creating rattles, and crafting traditional birch bark baskets guided by the expertise of Robert Shatilla.





Additionally, our cultural initiatives extend to the wider community, with a special camp designed for Kookums (grandmothers), acknowledging and honoring their role as keepers of wisdom. This unique program offers an opportunity for Kookums to share their knowledge and stories, creating a space for intergenerational learning.

The heartbeat of our cultural endeavors is found in the rhythm of drums and rattles, echoing the rich traditions of Indigenous cultures. Workshops dedicated to crafting these instruments provide participants with the chance to not only connect with their heritage but also to create tangible symbols of cultural pride.

Further embracing traditional craftsmanship, WBWS explores the artistry of Moose hides, celebrating the significance of this material in Indigenous cultures. Participants engage in the intricacies of bear harvest, learning about sustainable practices and the cultural significance of this age-old tradition.

Our commitment to cultural revitalization extends to the realm of fashion, with workshops on creating ribbon shirts, skirts, vests, and bags. These items are more than just clothing—they are a representation of cultural identity and pride.

Through these diverse cultural teachings, Wood Buffalo Wellness Society strives to create an environment where individuals can reconnect with their roots, fostering a sense of identity, pride, and well-being deeply rooted in the traditions of the land.

**"IN THE CIRCLE OF LIFE,
HONOR YOUR ROOTS,
EMBRACE THE TEACHINGS
OF THE LAND, AND LET
THE SPIRIT OF UNITY
GUIDE YOUR JOURNEY."**

-UNKNOWN CREE ELDER

Community Events

The Wood Buffalo Wellness Society actively engages the community through a series of impactful events and initiatives. On August 31, 2022, we organized the Overdose Awareness Day walk, drawing approximately 175 participants to raise awareness about the impact of overdose in our community. From May to August, we spearheaded a detox program for the Dene Tha First Nation in High Level, showcasing our commitment to extending support beyond our immediate community. Additionally, we hosted five open community sweat lodges, providing a culturally rich and supportive space for individuals to connect and heal. Our dedication to community well-being was further demonstrated through a perogy lunch fundraiser for the United Way in December 2022. To enhance our reach, we actively participated in community events such as Homeless Connect in February 2023, reinforcing our commitment to providing after-care and support services to those in need. These events reflect our ongoing efforts to foster community engagement, support holistic well-being, and address the diverse needs of the populations we serve.





STAFFING

Mark Amy Treatment Centre

We currently employ five full-time Addiction Counsellors/peer support workers, ensuring manageable caseloads and responsiveness to our clients' individual needs. Complementing our clinical team, our staff includes a Team Lead, an Aftercare Coordinator, an Administrative Manager, and additional support staff such as a Cultural Coordinator, Intake/Admin personnel, a cook, night attendants, and several casual support workers. Elders and Knowledge Keepers are contracted to provide ceremony, cultural teachings, and support to both clients and staff. Although recruiting and retaining individuals of Indigenous ancestry for various positions pose ongoing challenges, we are actively developing strategies to attract talents and enhance capacity within our community and existing staff.

Community Services

Our Team Lead oversees a staff cohort comprising two Centralized Intake Workers and five Case Managers across our Housing First, Rapid Rehousing, and Outreach programs. Furthermore, we have a Tawâw Program Coordinator actively engaged in program setup and design, all supported by our Administration Manager.



Thank You to our FUNDERS AND DONORS

