

## **Save the Children Establishes Second Child Friendly Space in Edmonton, for Evacuees from Fort McMurray & Surrounding Communities**

May 11, 2016, Edmonton...Save the Children's team in Edmonton, Alberta, deployed in response to the devastating Fort McMurray fire, is supporting more evacuated children and families every day. The Chateau Nova Hotel is the site of our first Child Friendly Space. Two First Nations communities who were evacuated from areas surrounding Fort McMurray are calling this hotel their temporary home, and Save the Children is staffing the Child Friendly Space with members of its National Indigenous Program team.

Save the Children's second Child Friendly Space or CFS has just opened at the University of Alberta. Currently acting as a temporary home to over 1,000 people, this CFS is already welcoming significant numbers of children and Save the Children expects these numbers to grow as families learn about the space.

With these two Child Friendly Spaces established, as well as essential material provision continuing for families with babies and young children, Save the Children's wildfire response is on track to provide vital support to evacuated children and families. In the aftermath of disasters and trauma, Save the Children's focus is on ensuring the protection and safety of boys and girls. Save the Children's staff are trained to address and support the unique needs of children following emergencies. The Child Friendly Space is the calling card of Save the Children's emergency response programming. The structured, supervised activities offer comfort to children whose daily routines have been disrupted. Routines assist with children developing their coping mechanisms, and strengthen their resiliency. They also give kids a sense of normalcy and community, when everything familiar has been disrupted and potentially lost. Safe, designated areas allow children to play, socialize, and express themselves under the supervision of caring, trained adults. They also provide kids with the opportunity to begin their recovery process by working through their emotions.

Play is vital for children to recovery from trauma. Play helps them learn, explore, and experiment. Play is therapeutic and is a child's work. Child Friendly Spaces provide spaces for boys and girls to interact, play, build self-esteem and begin their own recovery processes.

Save the Children prides itself on partnerships and collaboration and is pleased to be working with teachers from evacuated schools in the Fort McMurray Catholic School Board. Teachers are ideal assistants for a Child Friendly Space, as they are experts in communicating and working with children. After receiving Child Friendly Space and Child Safeguarding training from Save the Children, these volunteers are essential to helping children on their recovery journeys. An added bonus of this collaboration is the familiarity some boys and girls will have with these teachers, allowing the Child Friendly Space to prove even more welcoming.

An equally important aspect of Child Friendly Spaces is the relationship it allows for Save the Children staff to establish with parents and caregivers. Details on how to access education and health services are essential, and can be challenging to find during the immediate post-disaster period. Save the Children provides service referrals and helps parents determine which service providers to contact to ensure children are able to access health and education services.

“The city of Edmonton and the many different charities on the ground have done a wonderful job of supporting the families from Fort McMurray and surrounding communities. We look forward to partnering with other organizations as much as we can, filling any gaps existing programming might have. Emergency responses are complex and time is needed to fill in all the details. We know that these first few days are just the beginning of our commitment to helping boys, girls, and families in their recovery process,” said Patricia Erb, President & CEO of Save the Children.

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**For more information:**

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**About Save the Children**

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