

Save the Children Responds to the Fort McMurray Wildfire

May 9, 2016, Edmonton...In response to the raging forest fires consuming Fort McMurray, Alberta, Save the Children has deployed an emergency response team. While globally recognized as a leader in responding to disasters and ensuring the safety and protection of children following emergencies around the world, Save the Children's domestic emergency response program in Canada is relatively young.

Children are not little adults, during emergencies they are vulnerable and have unique psychosocial needs. These needs are often not taken into account when emergency plans are being executed. A one size fits all approach to emergencies can lead to dangerous situations for children - in mass shelters without sleeping areas designated for small children, the possibility of children wandering unsupervised and situations leading to abuse and exploitation are high. Save the Children's focus is on ensuring the protection and safety of children, whenever and wherever possible.

Within hours after the mandatory evacuation in Fort McMurray began, Save the Children was on the ground in Edmonton. This disaster is still in its early days so the full extent of Save the Children's response is not yet clear. To-date we've begun providing essential materials for the safety and wellbeing of children, caring for children, and establishing Child Friendly Spaces.

For the evacuated families from Fort McMurray and environs, many had to leave their homes with nothing. They're arriving in Edmonton with only the clothes they were wearing and sometimes a few possessions. For children and expectant mothers, this makes them extremely vulnerable. Save the Children has been working to provide necessarily supplies for the safety and wellbeing of children, including pop up cribs, hygiene kits, baby baths, and newborn clothes.

Child Friendly Spaces are the calling cards of Save the Children. A Child Friendly Space or CFS is a critical component to providing support to children and families in temporary locations following a disaster. The program's structured, supervised activities offer needed comfort to children who are used to daily routines, strengthen children's resilience, and help them begin to cope. These Spaces also provide a forum for sharing valuable child safety and recovery information with families when they need it most.

Child Friendly Spaces give kids a sense of normalcy and community when their lives are disrupted by disasters. They provide a safe, designated area where they can play, socialize, and express themselves under the supervision of caring, trained adults. CFSs also help boys and girls interact with peers, build self-esteem, and begin the recovery process by working through their emotions and building upon their natural resilience.

As the extent of the evacuation from Fort McMurray becomes clear, Save the Children's response will solidify. As with all disaster response, Save the Children is committed for the duration, and will work alongside the community not only during the disaster response phase, but also during recovery and rebuilding efforts.

"The forest fires around Fort McMurray are devastating. The horrific images of homes burning and families fleeing are very difficult to watch. It's reassuring that Save the Children was able to be on the ground so quickly and begin its response mere hours after the evacuation began. Edmonton and other evacuation reception areas are doing a wonderful job of welcoming children and families to their new homes. Seeing

Canadians from across the country pull together to show their support and help the affected communities be resilient has been a reminder that disasters, while terrible, can also bring out the best in humanity. I'm pleased that Save the Children is responding to this Canadian disaster and proud that we are committed to working alongside the communities, every step of the way," says Patricia Erb, Save the Children President and CEO.

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About Save the Children

Save the Children is the world's leading independent organization for children, delivering programs and improving children's lives in more than 120 countries worldwide. We are committed to achieving immediate and lasting change for the world's most vulnerable. Our programs reached more than 62.2 million children in 2015. Learn more here: www.savethechildren.ca or follow us on Twitter (twitter.com/savechildrenca), Facebook (www.facebook.com/savethechildren.ca) and Instagram (@SaveChildrenCanada).