



## Wood Buffalo Housing Supports Homelessness Initiatives

**Fort McMurray, AB, April 28, 2022** – Wood Buffalo Housing (WBH) wishes to address inaccurate statements that were made about the organization at last Tuesday’s Council meeting, and to clarify its ongoing involvement with the Housing First Program.

At that meeting, the impression was given that WBH is not currently involved in the Housing First Program and homelessness initiatives in the region. Also, when a member of Council asked a presenter if they were able to access any of the units at WBH for their homeless programs they stated “no”.

When in fact, WBH has been actively involved with the Housing First Program since the ‘10-year Plan to End Homelessness’ initiative began. Over the years we have housed well over 50 clients from that program within our properties, and we currently house three individuals and 11 graduates of the Program in our properties. We are also members of the Homelessness Initiatives Strategic Committee (HISC) and regularly attend those the meetings.

“WBH prides itself on our successful partnerships and collaborations with social profits, community groups and stakeholders in the region,” says Henry Hunter, President and CEO of WBH. “We have been involved in the Housing First Program since its inception, as well as many other initiatives to help the homeless community.”

WBH operated the Marshall House Emergency Shelter on behalf of the province for a number of years, up until the province made the decision to cut the funding and close the shelter in 2019. Since then, the Center of Hope (CoH) has moved their daytime drop-in shelter into the Marshall House building’s first floor and also use the second and third floors for permanent supportive housing and Housing First programming. WBH leases the property to the CoH at cost.

WBH also assists clients in this program by providing access to funding through the Rent Supplement Program. Clients can apply for Rent Supplement dollars to subsidize where they are currently living, and as long as they meet the provincial qualifications they will receive funding based on priority.

“There is absolutely a need for more permanent supportive and social housing in our region,” says Hunter. “WBH helps as many clients as it can without oversaturating our properties. However, we do not receive government funding to operate 90% of the units in our portfolio and we already have a vacancy. We have a wide range of tenants from families to young professionals just starting out, to seniors and people who are subsidized through one of the provincial programs we manage. We have a duty to all of our tenants to maintain a healthy balance of social and next-to-market rental housing in our properties so that it doesn’t impact the quality of life of the people that live there.”

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WBH remains committed to supporting the social profits in this community. Similar to the CoH, WBH provides affordable space to many social profits on a cost recovery basis, like:

- *David's Place* and *Carla's Place*, permanent supportive living that was operated out of our townhouses for many years (they have since been relocated to the Marshall House building).
- *Captain's Place*, a group home for men experiencing independent living under the guidance of an on-site mentor.
- *McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association*, a group home for foster children.
- *Salvation Army Start Program*, a program to support individuals with disabilities.
- *Support Through Housing Team (STHT)*, provides safe, affordable, subsidized housing for hard to house individuals. Many of the graduates from this program were successfully able to continue living with WBH.
- We are in the process of partnering with the *Autism Society of Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo* to provide them affordable space for their operations.

WBH also partners with seniors groups, other local not-for-profits, and private entrepreneurs to provide affordable space for businesses and programs. We have MOUs with a number of Indigenous groups in the rural communities to assist them in accessing affordable housing solutions.

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