

H&R MFRC

2023 – 2024 IMPACT REPORT





Would like to thank everyone at the MFRC for all you do for deployed families. I am a spouse to a military member but having your child be deployed is so different. I really enjoyed the CO chats to keep us all informed. Thank you again!

- HMCS Montreal family member



Families are at the heart of everything we do.

Indigenous Land Acknowledgment

We would like to acknowledge that we are in Mi'kma'ki (MEEG_MA_GEE), the ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq people. This territory is covered by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship.

We are all Treaty People.

Message from the Halifax & Region Military Family Resource Centre Board Chair and Executive Director

Our agility as an MFRC was underscored this year, starting with providing immediate shelter to families displaced by the wildfires and it continued with ongoing assistance to navigate the cost-of-living crisis. We committed to action by launching a Community Pantry; a 'for military families, by military families' service, along with other financial assistance and experienced the highest usage of the OP Dasher holiday assistance program to date.

Dubbed our "growth" year we spent time reflecting and forward-thinking about the best use of resources to ensure the greatest reach and impact. Our team is dedicated to ongoing training and learning to provide a quality, consistent, and evidence-based family-centred approach.

Getting the word out to our community about the range of services available, and how we apply resources to address a family's unique situation, continues to be a challenge. To address this, we enhanced our Unit Family Representative program, increased unit briefings and community partnerships, modernized our marketing approach to include short videos, and added a texting option for deployment warm-line connections.

As a non-profit agency, we are reliant on government funding. Our primary funder Military Family Services (MFS)/Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS) continues to streamline funding and service delivery. We are facing funding insecurity and an increasingly competitive charity climate in the province. We sought new funding sources to avoid service reductions, which are highlighted throughout this report.

We hosted the Atlantic MFRC Board of Directors Conference in November 2023, with six participating Centres receiving training in leadership, financial oversight, and governance. In consultation with the McInnes Cooper law firm, the board committed to updating and developing many policies, committee terms of reference, and most notably the Bylaws.



Shelley Hopkins (left) and Larissa Page (right) at a RCAF 100 celebration.

Throughout the year we advocated at all levels of the Canadian Armed Forces, local government, the Ombudsman, Seamless Canada, as well as the Child Care Primary Office Working Group to address two significant challenges: funding for military-specific child care and a national standardized system of consent to provide MFRCs with family contact information.

We thank the Base Commander, Captain(N) Mackenzie and the Wing Commander, Colonel Holmes, along with their teams, for their support and partnership - an invaluable relationship that assists us in providing sustainable resources to enhance family services.

Handwritten signature of Larissa Page in blue ink.

Larissa Page
Board Chair

Handwritten signature of Shelley Hopkins in blue ink.

Shelley Hopkins
Executive Director

Family-Centred

Our services are offered across a continuum of care, matching military families' needs and their support systems at an appropriate level and setting. Our family-centred service delivery enhances levels of personal resilience and well-being and fosters the readiness, recruitment, and retention of CAF members. Services are designed to meet the needs of the three military family challenges of absences, relocations, and transitions. *Services for Military and Veteran Families: 2020+ Strategic Framework* sets the parameters for our services.

Evidence-based decision-making guides our local priorities and services. We are committed to professional practice and standards. This past year we completed staff-wide professional development in the National Family Support Network's Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening & Support and have begun implementing the standards into our practice.

The Standards uniquely integrate and operationalize the Principles of Family Support Practice and the Strengthening Families Framework and Approach with its research-based evidence-informed five areas of practice.

5 Areas of Practice

Family Centredness



Family Strengthening



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



Community Strengthening



Evaluation





Levels of Service – By the Numbers

The following levels of service are offered based on the needs and strengths of the family.

Information and Awareness

- 4,593** occurrences of information and referral
- 180** referrals to Padre
- 1,900** CAF members checked out our base pop-ups
- 436** CAF family members reached at enrollment ceremonies
- 43** Briefings

Navigation Support

- 10** naval deployments and **13** land-based deployments
- 1,746** check-in calls to **649** families
- 642** morale mail packages sent through our offices
- 52** spouses/partners and youth were supported with Career and Employment Counselling
- Connecting over **1,000** family members of all ages through a variety of navigation programs and services
- 50** family members with diverse needs supported
- 47** families accessed child care navigation services

Intervention Services

- 314** family members accessed our Mental Health & Well-Being services.
- 771** nights of stay in our short-term accommodation apartments. H&R MFRC short-term accommodations are consistently and frequently accessed. They were invaluable during the wildfire crisis and for emergencies and compassionate stays throughout the year.
- 65** families took part in our OP Dasher holiday service thanks to support from **Support Our Troops**
- 19** families experiencing financial challenges were supported with financial assistance made possible by the **Together We Stand Foundation**



Staff members (front row l-r) Kara, Cortney, Natasha and Nancy, at Halifax International Fleet Week 2023, with (back row l-r) Member of Parliament for Halifax Andy Fillmore, Vice-Admiral Angus Topshee, and The Honourable Bill Blair, Minister of National Defence.



Everyone got a kick out of these parents dressed up to welcome their CAF member home from the HMCS Montreal deployment!



Our Executive Director, Shelley Hopkins (centre), meets with The Honourable Ginette Petitpas Taylor (right), Minister of Veterans Affairs, and Jessica Miller from the Veteran Farm Project (left).

Family Strengthening

Occasional and Respite Child Care

This service directly impacts the lives of local military families by offering parents access to short-term, inclusive child care as they navigate absences, relocations, and transitions. It is not funded provincially or nationally, and the program fees help to offset some of the operating costs. It is made affordable and sustainable through generous donations from local organizations and national foundations. This year, a grant of \$75,000 was given by the **RBC Foundation** and a \$10,000 donation was made by the **Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund**. This funding enabled us to be responsive to the community's needs with longer hours and additional qualified Early Childhood Educators.



Spring Tune-Up

We hosted a date night titled Spring Tune-Up: Connection & Communication for Couples, which was organized by a Master of Social Work student on placement with our Mental Health and Well-Being team. Participants joined us for an interactive and informative evening centred around healthy relationships.

The date night consisted of two one-hour workshops. Facilitators offered helpful tips for maintaining relational connection, particularly as it relates to deployments and the re-integration cycle. Couples participated in activities about the role of unrealistic and realistic expectations and communication in their relationships.

The military lifestyle demands a lot of its families, and this date night focused on the importance of regular connection and maintenance. Funding was made possible through the **Gender-Based Violence program of the Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE)**.

“

We had a great time. The presenters were great and gave us a lot of helpful information and tools we have been able to use in our relationship since. Would 100% attend another.

- program participant

Mental Health & Well-being Support

Top presenting issues:

- Accommodations/housing
- Child care navigation
- Mental health
- Special needs funding and navigation
- Couple relationships
- Financial distress

“

As a single mom, it was a great benefit to my children and I. People think that just because we are military and have a good income, that we don't struggle. With the current housing costs, taxes increasing and home heating being outrageously expensive, I don't know how anyone is surviving, let alone saving for retirement.

-OP Dasher holiday program user

Cost of Living Response

The Veteran Farm Project collaborated with us to provide food boxes filled with fresh and non-perishable items over the summer and fall months to those facing financial challenges from the added strain of inflation. Recognizing the need for an expanded and longer-term service, the H&R MFRC piloted a Community Pantry initiative at both our Halifax and Shearwater sites starting November 2023.

Since its opening, the pantry service has seen daily usage and is continually replenished thanks to community member food donations, the **Veteran Farm Project**, as well as a \$5,000 donation from the **Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund**. The service is anonymous; however, feedback is received with one family replying "...without it a family of 7 would be hungry today and tomorrow." Feedback is used to gauge usage as well as the needs of the families, shaping how we stock the inventory.

100% of feedback from community pantry users indicated the service helped alleviate immediate stressors

15 families received food boxes from the Veteran Farm Project

“

I just really appreciate this program. I was embarrassed to access it, but the centre staff made me feel no shame. They didn't have to ask any invasive questions. The amount given my family was way more than I could have hoped for and I just felt extremely grateful. Thank you so much.

- OP Dasher holiday program user

“

During this extremely stressful time for my family, having an emergency accommodation was such an amazing resource. My family with 4 kids 2 dogs and 2 cats would have been separated during the evacuation and the emergency accommodation allowed us to be together. The apartment was welcoming and had everything we could have needed. There are no words to express how thankful I am for the MFRC during this time.

- wildfire evacuee



Staff members Sandy, Chris, Brenda, Nancy and Dan helping to stock the Community Pantry at the Halifax site.

223 Adults

168 Children

119 Pets

were supported through our Natural Disaster and Emergency Response

Natural Disaster and Emergency Response

Last spring, severe weather events impacted our community and dozens of our CAF families experienced the evacuation from or devastating loss of their home. Our team quickly responded to the immediate need for accommodations and hosted a gathering for those impacted. We also provided custom care packages with comfort items and gift cards thanks to the generosity of donors like **Angus G Foods, BMO Bank of Montreal, CANEX, Irving Shipbuilding Inc., Royal Canadian Legion, Support Our Troops, The Personal, and Together We Stand Foundation.**

Community Strengthening



66

CAF members completed our Unit Family Representatives training program.

School Outreach

In addition to continued events held within schools in the area, we are excited to launch our latest initiative – an online, self-directed military lifestyle training course called Educators Supporting Military-Connected Students. This was designed for educators working with military-connected children, including teachers, early childhood educators, and care providers. We believe regardless of what child care centre, home care, or school your child attends, educators and providers can learn about the uniqueness of military life to better support military-connected children.

There are over 5,500 children connected to military families in our area. Using the online learning platform Thinkific, this free module-based course is structured to allow educators to progress at their own pace and will teach the unique lifestyle and its effect on students' academic careers. Funding through **Lockheed Martin** allowed us to develop this course along with other resources and tools.

9 local schools with
500+ children participating



Staff members (l-r) Jenna and Andrée with a welcome home banner created by kids in the School Outreach program.



OP We Care

Thanks to our donors like **Irving Shipbuilding**, we are able to purchase supplies which are thoughtfully packed by our staff.

Over **100** care packages were delivered overseas to help raise the morale of CAF members who are singularly deployed around the world.

Shearwater Children's Centre

Funding changes for both Military Family Services and provincial child care centres solidified a requirement to manage the MFRC and Shearwater Children's Centre (SCC) as two separate operations, governed by one Board of Directors. The year was marked by funding challenges from the province's Early Learning & Child Care Plan as we continue to transition to the new Nova Scotia child care model.

We continue to advocate for a cost of care model, as the current funding model does not fund all staff positions required for operations, but rather only the early childhood educators (ECEs) needed to meet child-to-ECE ratio. The impact of provincial funding allocation resulted in the elimination of the administrator position.

We opted for the phase one transition to the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development's centralized pay and benefits system. Operationally we have no authority over revenue or staff salary and benefits as these are dictated by the province. The volunteer Board of Directors remains responsible for the oversight and liability.

We are pleased to say that after years of staffing shortages in the field, SCC had a full complement of staff which meant increased enrollment. We ended the year with provincial investments in ECE salaries and benefits, including pensions, supporting recruitment and retention efforts in the child care sector, with ECEs finally recognized for the work they do with fair compensation.

Shearwater Children's Centre staff (left to right) Kristen, Nikki, Jayden, Hayley and Courtney strike a pose at our Teal Up photo booth! This was our second year participating in the Teal Up awareness campaign.

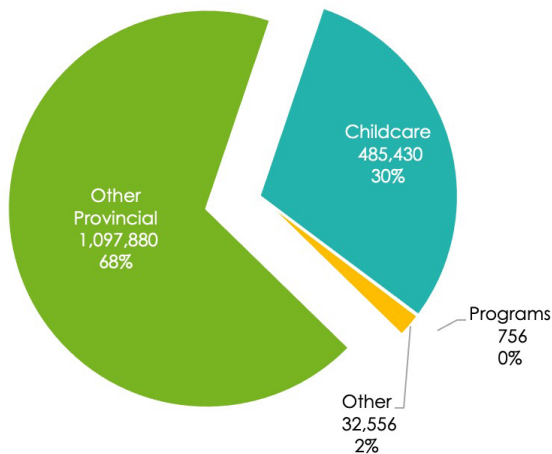


Our staff participated in Teal Up Tuesdays, wearing these shirts on Tuesdays in April, the Month of the Military Child. We had so many requests from supporters to buy the shirts that in March 2024 we opened an online store.

Shearwater Children's Centre Financials

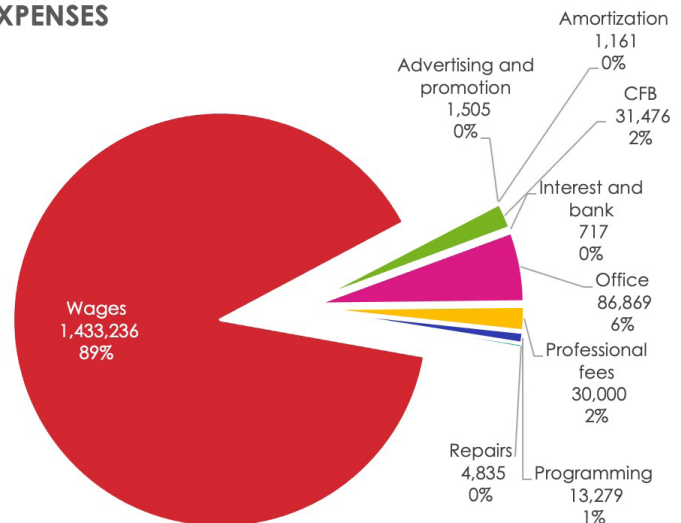
AUDITED FINANCIALS SHEARWATER CHILDREN CENTRE

REVENUE



Surplus \$13,543
MFRC Budget Covered \$33,853

EXPENSES



Donor Impact

We are thankful for the continued commitment from our donors, including the corporate, community organizations, Units, and individual supporters, who fund essential programs and services.

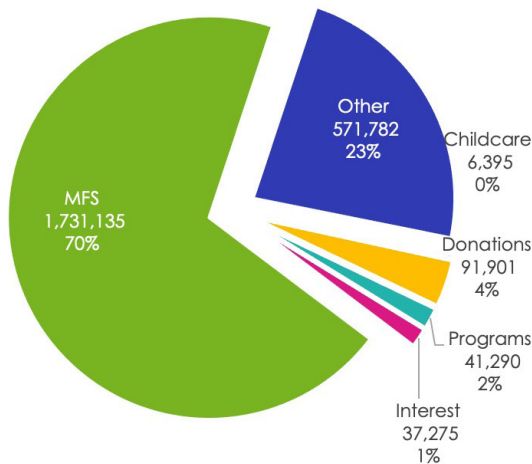
- Angus G. Foods
- Antojo Tacos & Tequila
- BMO Bank of Montreal
- BOYNECLARKE LLP
- CANEX
- Eastlink
- General Dynamics-Mission Systems Canada
- Halifax Wanderers FC
- Happy Harry's
- Irving Shipbuilding Inc
- Lockheed Martin
- Pratt & Whitney Canada
- Royal Bank of Canada
- Royal Canadian Naval Benevolent Fund
- Support Our Troops
- TD Bank
- The Personal
- The Royal Canadian Legion
 - Centennial Legion Branch 160
 - Caen Legion Branch 164
 - Nunavut Command
 - Vimy Legion Branch 27
- Together We Stand Foundation
- Vets Canada



H&R MFRC Financials

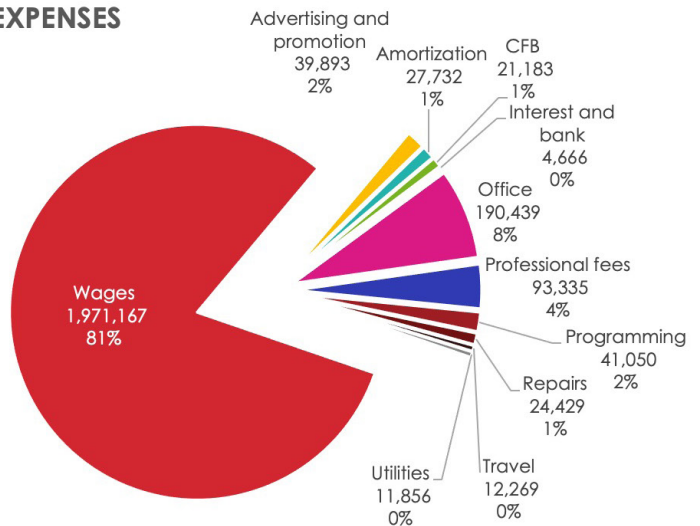
AUDITED FINANCIALS MFRC (OPS AND SERVICES)

REVENUE

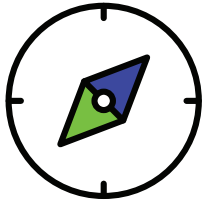


Surplus \$41,758

EXPENSES

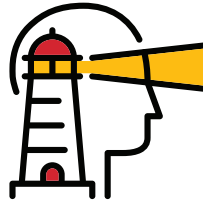


Mission, Vision & Values



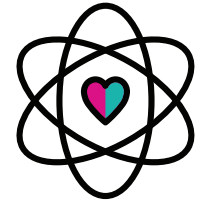
Mission

To strengthen the well-being of all those who share the unique experience of military life.



Vision

Strong, connected, resilient military families.



Values

Innovative
Compassionate
Inclusive

Looking Ahead

Families are at the heart of everything we do. Engagement with military families, combined with our over 38 years of experience, will help to guide our innovation and responsiveness to our community's needs.

As we look to the future of service delivery, we will consider the impacts of high operational tempo, rising living costs and how we can support families while ensuring continuity of care in an unstable charitable climate. Our ability to continue the level of responsive and quality services is contingent upon Military Family Services funding sustainability.

We will extend our Community Pantry service into this fiscal year and monitor its use and feedback, looking for partnerships, donors, and opportunities to help families through these challenging times.

Strengthening our team is one of our strategic goals. We are committed to a workplace well-being strategy that values employees by acknowledging that to be of service to others, they too must be healthy and have work-life harmony. We are committed to ongoing evidence-based learning, training, and research to ensure quality service delivery provided by skilled professionals who are passionate and compassionate about the work they do.

Connect with us!

halifaxmfrc.ca

  @hrmfrc



Colonel David Holmes, Commander of 12 Wing Shearwater (right) and Chief Warrant Officer Kevin Wezenbeek (left) chatting with H&R MFRC volunteer Darrell Ling (centre) at our Bluenose Bienvenue event.

Darrell was a member of Team Canada at the Invictus Games. He is an advocate for The Yellow Bench project, an initiative from the Invictus Games to encourage meaningful conversations.

This bench is now at our Halifax site and we welcome you to come by, take a seat and have a chat!