

Update

from the
AFKA Executive Director



June 2022

Dear AFKA Members,

It's hard to believe the month of June is half over! May was a little quieter with regards to updates, however we continued to be busy in the office supporting caregivers, advocating and collaborating with partners, as well as supporting transitions in programming and new staff within our team.

June is National Indigenous History Month and a great opportunity to recognize, honour and share the rich history, achievements and cultures of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada. We are continually striving to learn more, understand better, and connect and build relationships with our Indigenous communities, colleagues, families, and organizations. To support the cultural lessons and engagement in activities, the AFKA is sharing events as they become aware of them through our social media and email distribution list to members. We will continue to share these events throughout the year, provide training and event opportunities for caregivers provincially, and continue to educate ourselves through various modes of learning in order to increase our own level of understanding and commitment to reconciliation.

I would like to thank my whole team at the AFKA (ie. Shelly, Cassandra, Amey, Yvonne, and Rolly) for the support they have given and additional commitment to helping our association evolve into what it is becoming. We have a wonderful team, with great expertise and knowledge, that is only continuing to grow! I am pleased to announce we have two new team members with the AFKA, both providing support to our caregivers as Foster/Kinship Caregiver Advocates. This is a

very important new role within our association, one that has been developed out of feedback from our volunteers, membership, caregivers, Board of Directors, local/district association Presidents, and AFKA staff.

Welcome to our team, Bo Antal ([Kinship Caregiver Advocate](#)) and Stacy van Cingel ([Foster Caregiver Advocate](#))! We are so pleased and excited to have these individuals join our team. They both bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to these roles, which will be important as they support and advocate for caregivers across our province through various situations, such as systemic navigational concerns, resolution support, and CAST (direct support through allegations/Assessment of Care Concerns). Their contact information can be found on our website at [Staff - Alberta Foster and Kinship Association \(afkaonline.ca\)](#).

Along with changes in our AFKA team, we also have some changes occurring within the regional councils for caregivers. At this particular time, we would like to welcome: Bernie French as the new President of the Central Alberta Caregiver Council, Samara Stonehocker as the AFKA Board Director for Central Region, and Patricia Mensink as the AFKA Board Director for the North Region. We look forward to these new working relationships. Being involved within your local or regional associations provides you with an opportunity to not only network with other caregivers, but to have your stories heard and to receive support at a regional level. If you are interested in becoming involved in your local/district associations and/or your regional councils, please contact a President or AFKA Board Director from your region for more information: [Board of Directors - Alberta Foster and Kinship Association \(afkaonline.ca\)](#)
[Regional and Local Association Presidents - Alberta Foster and Kinship Association \(afkaonline.ca\)](#)

The AFKA Board of Directors has vacancies within our Treaty Representatives. If you are interested in getting involved within the AFKA Board as a Treaty 6 or Treaty 7 Representative, please contact myself (melissa@afkaonline.ca) or our Board President, Sylvia Thompson (president@afkaonline.ca).

The AFKA has started discussions with the South Region to schedule some networking sessions with caregivers and staff in September 2022. We look forward to meeting with caregivers, as well as CFS, DFNA and Agency staff in that region to have some focused discussions and share information about local and regional associations. If you'd like to have the AFKA network and collaborate in your region, please let me know!

I would also like to extend a deep gratitude of thanks to the volunteers who have supported our CAST Program for many years as CAST Representatives. Your time and commitment to supporting caregivers has been so appreciated, not only by the AFKA, but by the caregivers themselves. Although these volunteers will no longer support caregivers directly through the Assessment of Care Concerns process, their expertise and deep empathy for caregivers will be

very beneficial in their new roles as CAST Mentors. This role has evolved to extend the support to caregivers after these assessments, providing a unique level of mentorship support when caregivers in these situations need someone who understands the process, loss, and grief they have just experienced and to support them in moving forward in their roles as caregivers. Thank you to all of you!

Our Caregiver Supports Pilot, in partnership with Little Warriors, is near completion. Once we have a summary of information from the feedback provided by participants, we will look at the feasibility of offering pieces of the pilot to caregivers moving forward. We have two weeks left of theme-based group support sessions available for licensed foster and approved kinship caregivers to sign up for (ie. June 20

and June 27). If you'd like to see what's coming up and register for one or both of them, check them out here:

[Caregiver Supports Pilot - Alberta Foster and Kinship Association \(afkaonline.ca\)](http://afkaonline.ca)

The AFKA has been in discussions with the Adoption Unit within Children's Services. We had "door opening" conversations around the apparent disconnect of programming/practice of Supports for Permanency (ie. SFP) and other service providers that support adoptive caregivers and their children/youth. Conversations continued from this new relationship to invite the AFKA, regional council Presidents, and Agency leaders to participate in some focused group discussions around SFP as there is movement toward improving and updating the policies and practice guidelines. A great deal of information was shared regarding what was working well within the practice across the province, what the challenges were from all parties in attendance, specific stories of concerns from the caregivers, and sharing of the hopes for how this support could ideally look moving forward. I'm hoping to have more information about the results of this discussion and how the information is being rolled into the policies and practice guidelines being developed to ultimately provide more clarity and consistency across the province.

With respect to our ongoing discussions with the Ministry regarding increases to cost of living, we have been notified these concerns have been heard and understood, and are being addressed with the Regional Directors. Continued conversations will be had as to how caregivers can request and receive additional supports to assist through these financial challenges. I commit to sharing updates with you as soon as I have some concrete information to share.

Don't forget to check out our website for updates and additional information you may find useful:

Descriptions of the new provincial PRIDE pre-service and in-service training for Alberta's foster and kinship caregivers, as well as registration information:

[Children's Services Provincial Caregiver Training - Alberta Foster and Kinship Association \(afkaonline.ca\)](http://afkaonline.ca)

Additional Information:

- Planning for our 2022 Training Conference and Awards Banquet is underway; dates for this event will be October 27-30, 2022. Registration will be online and membership will be notified as soon as it is open. We are aiming for online access to registration packages by the first week of August 2022.
- The provincial review of caregiver supports has been paused. The Ministry unit responsible for this project has decided there needs to be a more robust look at these supports, more so than originally thought. Once we have more information about when caregivers will be involved, I will share that information with you.

Please follow us for more information sharing and engagement with members on our Facebook and Instagram accounts; links below! We truly appreciate your input and feedback, whether it is directly provided to us, or provided through your local associations or regional councils, as we want to ensure we are supporting you in the best way we are able to. I do hope you see more benefit to the supports we are developing and providing to you, our valuable foster and kinship caregivers.

Wishing you all the best,

Melissa Jones, BEd, MEd, CPC
Executive Director/CEO, AFKA