



September 21, 2022

The Caregiver Allegation Support Team (CAST)* Representatives have been an integral part of the Alberta Foster and Kinship Association (AFKA) for over 30 years. The role of the CAST Representative was to provide non-judgmental support, assistance, advocacy and information to foster and kinship caregivers during an assessment process, which can be a scary and isolating time. What made the CAST Representatives so special is that, in their already busy lives as caregivers themselves, they made the time to share their experience, compassion, and knowledge with their peers.

Through feedback provided by the CAST Representatives (past and present) as well as stakeholders, the AFKA has been busy evaluating and re-shaping the delivery of our CAST program. We have worked hard to ensure that the quality of support continues to improve and expand to meet the needs of foster and kinship caregivers in our ever-changing world.

We have learned so much from our CAST Representatives; they have really paved the way for how we are supporting caregivers now and into the future. As an association, we want to ensure consistency in support as well as to collect information for the purpose of identifying trends and gaps; this helps provide us with the tools we need to advocate for areas where caregivers may benefit from additional support, learning, or resources.

Out of this learning grew a new position at the AFKA, the Caregiver Advocate. The Advocate works together with other team members to provide similar support as our former CAST Representatives, but as a staffed position; the Caregiver Advocate also provides resolution support and systemic guidance to caregivers who need some help.

As we move forward, we want to recognize and honour the tremendous efforts of the compassionate group of our dedicated CAST Representative volunteers who have supported caregivers facing allegations; we will be forever grateful for the difference they've made in the many lives they've touched. Many of them are still involved in supporting caregivers through our Provincial Mentorship Program to support you, the caregivers.

A sincere "thank you" to all our past CAST Representatives for the time, dedication and unwavering support to fellow caregivers. We would also like to extend a very special thank you to Marie Brownell, former CAST Program Chair, as well as so many others in the past who supported the development of the program; for the many hours put in to ensure caregivers received support in challenging times. You are all appreciated more than words can say and we really can't say thank you enough.

We look forward to what the future brings for supports and services to our members. Remember, if you are a licensed foster or approved kinship caregiver in Alberta who has questions, or is in need of support, please contact our office! (Monday – Friday, 8:15 am – 4:30 pm, 1-800-667-2372)

** CAST (Caregiver Allegation Support Team) was formerly known as FAST (Foster Allegation Support Team) In 2017, the AFKA Board approved a change in the program name from Foster to Caregiver Allegation Support Team. This change in name is reflective of the evolution of the program to support foster and kinship caregivers who are engaged in an assessment of concerns related to allegations of abuse and/or non-compliance.*

Sincerely,

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