

# NEWSLETTER



March 2026

Main Office: 450 Scott Street, Fort Frances, Ontario, P9A 1H2 Ph: 807-274-5349 . Fax: 807-274-0678 . Toll-Free: 1-800-265-5349

Children's Services • Paramedic Services • Ontario Works • Housing & Homelessness Prevention

## This issue highlights

Welcoming New Team Members .....	P2
2026 Budget Approved .....	P3
Feast Celebration .....	P4
February Statistics .....	P5
Senior's Active Living Fair .....	P5
Little Artists .....	P6
EarlyON Centres .....	P6
Strong Year for COHB Applications .....	P7
Housing Myths .....	P7
Donation Appreciation .....	P8
Co-op Students .....	P8

## Exploratory Work Underway for Potential Housing Development

The District of Rainy River Services Board (DRRSB) continues to move forward with exploratory work related to the potential development of new housing at the Fifth and Frenette site in Fort Frances.

As announced in late December 2025, the DRRSB is working in partnership with the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) to explore opportunities to build new and much-needed housing in the Rainy River District. Through this collaboration, the DRRSB is undertaking the early planning and technical work needed to determine whether the site is suitable for a future housing development.

Over the past several weeks, work has been underway to assess the site and better understand the conditions needed to support new construction. In mid-March, contractors were on site conducting drilling to gather soil and subsurface information as part of a geotechnical investigation. This information will help guide future planning and engineering considerations for the property.

The current phase of exploratory work is expected to be completed by the end of April 2026. Once this work is finished, the DRRSB will review the findings to determine the next steps for the project.

While still in the early stages, this work is an important step toward addressing housing needs in the district. By completing this planning and analysis now, the DRRSB is positioning itself to move forward more quickly if provincial or federal funding opportunities become available to support the development of new housing.

## Contact Us:

807-274-5349

[connect@rrdssab.ca](mailto:connect@rrdssab.ca)



DISTRICT OF RAINY RIVER SERVICES BOARD

# WELCOMING NEW TEAM MEMBERS

The District of Rainy River Services Board (DRRSB) continues to focus on recruitment and retention to ensure strong services for the communities we serve.

Over the past several months, Rainy River District Paramedic Services has welcomed four new paramedics to the team. Welcome to Aadrin, Thomas, Wael, and Kathryn. Recruiting paramedics remains a priority as communities across Ontario continue to face a shortage of qualified professionals. Each new hire helps strengthen our ability to provide reliable emergency medical services across the district.

The DRRSB also welcomed a new Payroll Coordinator. Richard has quickly settled into the role and is already making a positive impact supporting the finance department. His attention to detail and willingness to jump in and learn the many moving parts of payroll across multiple program areas has made him a great addition to the team.

Recruitment remains an ongoing focus for the DRRSB as we continue working to attract skilled professionals who are committed to serving the people and communities of the Rainy River District. In particular, we continue to seek qualified Early Childhood Educators to support the expansion of licensed child care spaces across the district. Even as new staff join our team, the demand for RECEs remains strong as we work to grow child care services and meet the needs of families in our communities.



## Congratulations

Congratulations to Sandi Wilson for completing the Intermediate Community Paramedicine Program. She is the fourth Rainy River District Paramedic to complete the Intermediate Community Paramedicine Care Certificate.

The Community Paramedicine team focuses on preventative care, chronic disease monitoring, health system navigation, and early intervention that helps keep patients out of the emergency department.

## DRRSB APPROVED 2026 BUDGET AMID SHARED FISCAL PRESSURES

The District of Rainy River Services Board (DRRSB) approved its 2026 Budget, totaling \$38,602,958, at its January board meeting. The budget, which includes a 4.59 per cent municipal levy increase, was approved following careful deliberation and was not unanimous, reflecting the financial pressures facing both service delivery and the municipalities that fund a portion of these services.

The development of the 2026 Budget required extensive analysis, collaboration across departments, and careful prioritization to manage rising operating and capital costs. Significant effort was made to contain expenditures and identify efficiencies, requiring flexibility and creative approaches to bring the budget forward at its approved level while continuing to meet legislated service requirements.

Despite these constraints, the approved budget maintains investments in key areas, including upgrades to buildings and essential equipment to support safe and reliable operations, as well as initiatives aimed at attracting and retaining qualified personnel, which remain critical to sustaining services across a large and geographically dispersed district.

Board discussions acknowledged that the pressures reflected in the budget extend beyond DRRSB and are being felt by municipalities and service system managers across rural and Northern Ontario. Factors such as inflation, increasing service demands, and higher operating costs associated with geography and workforce challenges continue to limit local flexibility and place greater reliance on municipal levies to support provincially mandated services.

The 2026 Budget reflects the realities of delivering mandated services in rural and Northern communities, where cost pressures are shaped by geography, rising operating and capital costs, workforce challenges, and increasing service demands. As these pressures continue, DRRSB will continue to focus on long-term planning, financial oversight, and collaboration to ensure services remain available and responsive to community needs.



Also at this meeting, Deb Ewald and Andrew Hallikas were acclaimed to serve another term as Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively.

Ewald, who represents the Town of Rainy River, first took on the role of Chair for the organization back in 2019. Hallikas, representing the Town of Fort Frances, has been the Vice Chair since 2020.

## FEAST CELEBRATION

On March 11, 2026, Housing & Homelessness Prevention Manager, Sandra Weir and CAO Charene Gillies attended a Feast celebration in the Gamikaan Bimaadziwin Roundhouse on Bug Lake with Grand Council Treaty #3 and the Kenora District Services Board. The Feast honoured the ongoing relationship and collaborative work reflected in a Memorandum of Understanding first signed in 2022 by the three organizations. The celebration was a meaningful opportunity to recognize that this relationship is built not only on shared priorities, but also on respect, relationship-building and a commitment to working together in a better way. It highlighted the importance of coming together in a spirit of partnership to acknowledge the work underway and the value of maintaining strong connections as we respond to the needs of communities across the region.

For the DRRSB, the MOU matters because it creates a stronger foundation for collaboration on issues that are central to our mandate, including housing, social services, child care and education. It is an important tool for helping the DRRSB work more closely and respectfully with First Nations partners, support more culturally responsive planning, and identify shared opportunities to improve services and outcomes for people and families in our communities. The MOU also matters in a practical way, because it demonstrates clear partnership and strengthens opportunities for joint advocacy and future provincial and federal funding initiatives that can help address local priorities more effectively.



## Service Milestone

We're proud to recognize one employee who reached a service milestone between January and March 2026. Your continued dedication helps strengthen our organization and the services we provide across the District. Thank you for your hard work and commitment!

**10 Years**

Paul Cross

We also recognize **Shelly VanUden** who reached **40 years** of service in September 2025, which was missed in our previous recognition. Thank you for your decades of dedication and commitment to our organization!

**ONTARIO  
RENOVATES  
PROGRAM**

**NOW  
OPEN**

VISIT: [www.rrdssab.ca](http://www.rrdssab.ca)

## FEBRUARY STATISTICS FROM RRDPS

During the month of February, 911 paramedics attended to 340 patients of which 54 were High Priority Return to Hospital. CP visited 121 clients with 14 Emergency Department Avoidance.

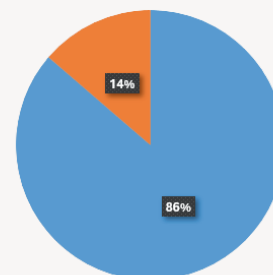
### What is a High Priority Return?

A high priority return to hospital occurs when a patient's condition worsens after initial assessment or treatment and requires urgent transport.

These time-sensitive situations may involve risk to life, limb, or function. Examples include deteriorating vital signs (such as low blood pressure or decreased level of consciousness), new or worsening symptoms like chest pain, shortness of breath, or stroke symptoms, lack of improvement despite treatment, high-risk findings such as sepsis, severe bleeding, or irregular heart rhythms, or paramedic concern that something is seriously wrong.

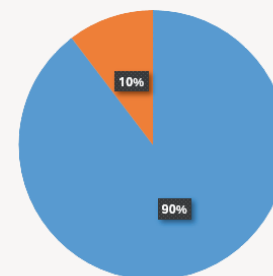
In these cases, the ambulance may use lights and sirens to ensure the patient receives care as quickly and safely as possible.

### 911 Patient Care in Feb.



911 Patients  
High Priority Return to Hospital

### CP Patient Care in Feb.



Clients visited  
Emergency Department Avoidance

## Senior's Active Living Fair



The District of Rainy River Services Board was pleased to attend the Senior's Active Living Fair in Atikokan on March 10, 2026. Housing staff were on site to share information about local housing supports and connect with attendees, while the Community Paramedicine team shared education on Hypertension. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions, learn about available services, and explore resources available across the district.



Donna O'Sullivan (CP-A) interacted with 105 people of which 54 ppl received personal health education and 32 people had their blood pressure checked.

# LITTLE ARTISTS, BIG CREATIVITY!



Creativity has been flowing in our program at Tall Oaks Atelier, as children explore art in many different ways. Through painting, drawing, and experimenting with different materials, children are expressing their ideas, practicing fine motor skills, and discovering that art can be a fun way to share their thoughts and feelings.

This creativity is extending beyond the classroom. Our preschool and school-age children are participating in the “Little Line” Youth Art Show at the Fine Line Art Gallery. Each child has had the opportunity to create their own unique piece of artwork that will be displayed in the gallery. Artwork will be displayed from April 13-May 6 as part of the Gallery’s spring show.

Participating in this community art show allows children to see themselves as artists and experience the excitement of sharing their work with others. We are proud to support their creativity and grateful for opportunities like this that help connect our program with the broader community.

## EarlyON Centres: Welcoming Families, Supporting Growth

EarlyON Child and Family Centres continue to play a vital role in supporting families across the district. Over the past year, nearly 600 children (ages 0–6) made over 5,500 visits to local EarlyON centres, highlighting their value as trusted spaces for early learning and connection.



With five locations in Atikokan, Fort Frances, Emo, Stratton, and Rainy River, EarlyON Centres provide welcoming spaces where families can learn, play, and grow together. Children benefit from engaging, play-based learning experiences, while parents and caregivers build connections and access valuable support.

At the heart of each centre there are caring, knowledgeable educators who are dedicated to supporting families. They offer guidance on child development, answer questions, and help connect families to additional services when needed. Families can take part in a variety of programs such as infant massage, music and movement, and toddler story time. Flexible drop-in options also make it easy to participate at times that work best for busy families.

Programs are free and open to all families. To learn more or find a centre near you, visit: <https://rrdssab.ca/find-child-family-centre/>

## **STRONG YEAR FOR COHB APPLICATIONS**

The District of Rainy River Services Board set a goal of submitting 10 applications to the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) program this past fiscal year. We are pleased to share that this target was not only met, but exceeded, with a total of 11 applications submitted.

The Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) is a portable housing benefit that helps eligible households pay rent in the private market. It provides monthly financial assistance based on income, helping to make housing more affordable and stable.

This marks the first time the annual target has been achieved, making this a significant milestone for the organization.

At the end of the reporting period, in early March, the Ministry offered additional spaces. Despite ongoing housing limitations across the district, staff were able to act quickly and submit an application for one of these additional opportunities.

Given the current challenges in accessing housing locally, this outcome reflects a strong and coordinated effort to connect eligible households with available supports.

## **Clearing Up Common Housing Myths**

The District of Rainy River Services Board recently launched a short video series to address some of the most common myths we hear from people applying for housing. These videos are now available on the DRRSB Facebook page and are designed to provide clear, straightforward information about how the housing system works.

The series covers four key myths. The first looks at the belief that paying market rent will result in faster housing, when in reality, housing is offered based on eligibility and waitlist order, with Rent Geared to Income units prioritized. The second myth addresses the idea that housing staff choose tenants, clarifying that applications are processed based on date, eligibility, and unit size, not personal selection.

The third myth focuses on how applications are reviewed. Housing staff determine eligibility based on program rules, and applicants are not screened based on personal circumstances. The final myth addresses a common misunderstanding about services, explaining that while staff can help connect tenants to supports in the community, the housing provided is not supportive housing.

This series is part of an ongoing effort to ensure applicants and community members have accurate, accessible information about housing services in the Rainy River District. Residents are encouraged to visit the District of Rainy River Services Board Facebook page to watch all four videos and learn more.

## Donation Appreciation



In December, the Out of the Cold Warming Centre received a \$5,000 donation from Mitaanjigamiing First Nation. This contribution supported the Centre’s ability to provide a safe, warm place for individuals to go during the coldest months of the year. We extend our sincere thanks to Chief Janice Henderson and Mitaanjigamiing First Nation for this generous support.

## GIVE TO GAIN



Brenda Witherspoon-Bedard, Homelessness Community Engagement Coordinator with the DRRSB assisted at the Free Household Item Giveaway that took place March 5<sup>th</sup> at the Métis Hall. The event, hosted in partnership with local agencies, was held in recognition of International Women’s Day and focused on the theme “Give to Gain.”

## HIGH SCHOOL CO-OP STUDENTS AT DRRSB THIS SEMESTER



**TRISTAN**

### Pathways Atelier

Tristan chose to do her placement in childcare because she enjoys working with children and feels that she does well interacting with them.



**LESLIE**

### Tall Oaks Atelier

Leslie finds her placement in childcare very rewarding, especially because every day is a little different—even when there is a routine.



**LYNDEN**

### Paramedic Services

Lynden is the third co-op student with RRDPS. Her lifeguarding experience supports her as she learns lifesaving skills from local paramedics in the field.