

# NEWSLETTER



June 2026

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

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## River's Edge Atelier to Open in Rainy River This Fall

Families in Rainy River can look forward to a new chapter in local early years services this fall as the District of Rainy River Services Board (DRRSB) prepares to open River's Edge Atelier, a directly-operated Child Care Centre, and an EarlyON in the community's newly built K-12 school. It is expected to open on August 31, 2026, pending child care licensing approval from the Ontario Ministry of Education.

The new centre will offer toddler, preschool, and school-age programming, with planned licensed capacity for 15 toddler spaces, 24 preschool spaces, and 30 school-age spaces, depending on staffing levels.

The opening follows the planned closure of the Learn, Laugh & Play Children's Centre, with DRRSB working closely with the current operator to support a smooth transition for families. Families are expected to be contacted during the week of July 6, 2026 regarding the status of their applications.

Co-locating the new child care and EarlyON programs within the school will help strengthen connections between early learning, before-and-after school care, and school-based programs, while still providing a secure, designated licensed space for children and staff.

As preparations continue over the summer, recruitment for the new centre is also moving ahead, with staffing expected to be finalized by mid-July. The opening of River's Edge Atelier reflects DRRSB's ongoing commitment to providing responsive, high-quality early years services that support children, families, and the broader community in Rainy River.

## Contact Us:

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DISTRICT OF RAINY RIVER SERVICES BOARD

## DRRSB ADVANCES HOUSING-FOCUSED PLANS FOR FIFTH & FRENETTE PROPERTY

The District of Rainy River Services Board has approved Administration's recommendation to stop further exploration of renovating the former school building at the Fifth & Frenette property and instead continue with a broader, housing-focused redevelopment approach for the site.

A review of the building's condition, servicing needs, and redevelopment costs found that major investment would be required to repurpose the existing structure, while still leaving longer-term infrastructure challenges unresolved.

DRRSB will continue exploring opportunities through a Northern Ontario Housing Portfolio Project to support new housing development on the site. Planning will consider housing options for families, seniors, and individuals entering the workforce, helping address housing needs across the district.

Child care, EarlyON, and family support services remain important priorities and may still be considered as part of a future, purpose-built phase of development.

Additional information and opportunities for public input will be shared as planning progresses.

## NOSDA SITE VISIT

In May 2026, the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Associations (NOSDA) CAOs had an opportunity to tour an affordable housing development in Hamilton, Ontario where a former school property is being transformed into new housing for the community. Once complete, the project will provide 261 units in townhouses and two mid-rise apartment buildings, creating more affordable housing options for young families and new professionals entering the workforce.

The visit offered an opportunity to see innovative partnerships and thoughtful redevelopment. By repurposing a former school site, this project reflects a forward-looking approach to housing development, one that helps create attainable housing while strengthening neighbourhoods and supporting community growth. Seeing the project underway was a valuable reminder for all the CAOs of the importance of local solutions that make it easier for people to live, work, and build a future in the communities they call home.



## MINISTRY VISIT SPOTLIGHTS SUPPORT FOR YOUNG WOMEN

Assistant Deputy Minister Taunya Paquette of the Gender Equity Division at the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services met with the DRRSB Housing & Homelessness Prevention (H&HP) team in early June and toured the HOPE Centre. The visit provided a valuable opportunity to highlight the realities facing young women experiencing housing insecurity and discuss how government and community partners can work together to strengthen supports in the future.



The H&HP team shared local perspectives on the complex challenges affecting young women in our district, including human trafficking, violence, and the need for culturally sensitive programming that supports healing and wellness. A key focus of the discussion was creating opportunities for stability, housing security, skills development, and employment readiness. The conversation reinforced the value of community-based initiatives like the HOPE Centre in supporting long-term self-sufficiency and better outcomes for those it serves.

DRRSB appreciated the opportunity to welcome ADM Paquette, share frontline insights, and learn from her perspective, while reflecting a shared commitment to future partnerships, investment in community-based services, and stronger outcomes for individuals and families across the district.

## DRRSB WELCOMES MP MARCUS POWLOWSKI TO HOPE CENTRE

The DRRSB recently welcomed MP Marcus Powlowski for a tour of the HOPE Centre and a discussion with the Housing and Infrastructure management team about the need for affordable housing for individuals and families who want to live and work in the district, and the importance of strong government partnerships to help make new development possible. The conversation highlighted the realities facing Rainy River District and communities across Northern Ontario, where higher construction costs, smaller projects, and limited local scale can make it difficult to move housing projects forward through traditional funding approaches.



DRRSB also shared information about the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association's Northern Housing Portfolio Project, which aims to build more than 1,100 units across 25+ sites in the north, including a potential project in Fort Frances. The discussion reinforced the importance of federal investment models that recognize Northern realities and help communities create safe, affordable housing options for district residents.

## DRRSB STAFF ATTEND OMSSA CONFERENCE

Some members of the Children's Services and Housing and Homelessness team attended the OMSSA 2026 Exchange Conference, held May 26–27, 2026, at the Hamilton Convention Centre. The conference was both inspiring and highly valuable, providing an excellent opportunity to learn, connect with colleagues from across Ontario, and bring back fresh ideas and perspectives. Sessions throughout the program focused on innovation, leadership, service integration, and improving outcomes in human services, reflecting a strong sector-wide commitment to responsive, people-centred service delivery.

A particularly memorable way to close the conference was the final plenary, *From Skid Row to CEO: A Story of Community Investment*, presented by Joe Roberts, an inspirational leadership speaker, also known as the "Skidrow CEO." In his keynote, Roberts shared his lived experience of moving from homelessness and addiction in Vancouver to becoming a successful entrepreneur, philanthropist, and advocate. His story offered a powerful and thought-provoking perspective on resilience, community investment, mental health, substance use, and the importance of seeing possibility in vulnerable populations.

## DRRSB SUPPORTS NORTHERN ADVOCACY AT NOSDA

Mayor Deb Ewald, Chair of the DRRSB, and Board Member Mayor Rob Ferguson attended the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) Annual General Meeting in North Bay in June as the DRRSB's voting delegates. On behalf of the Board, they took part in discussions and voted on resolutions that will help guide NOSDA's advocacy and priorities for the coming year, with a focus on strengthening human services across Northern Ontario and advancing practical solutions for rural, remote, and northern communities.

The adopted resolutions call for policies and funding models that recognize the higher delivery costs, workforce pressures, travel distances, and small tax bases that shape service delivery in Northern Ontario. Other important resolutions focused on municipal-Indigenous partnership infrastructure, housing and services for justice-involved individuals, seniors housing and accessibility, and reforms to better support community housing operations.

Together, these priorities reflect the interconnected challenges northern service managers face and the importance of coordinated advocacy for communities like those in the Rainy River District. By participating in the AGM and casting DRRSB's votes, Mayor Ewald and Mayor Ferguson helped ensure the district's voice was part of shaping NOSDA's work and advocacy agenda for 2026–27.

## Moffat Fund Supports Community Partnerships

The District of Rainy River Services Board is grateful for support provided through the 2026 Moffat Family Fund, which awarded \$5,000 to the Northwestern Health Unit & Community Paramedicine Program and \$4,400 to the Northwestern Health Unit & Coming Together for Kids Coalition.

The \$5,000 in funding for Community Paramedicine will help cover unexpected costs for clients in the Fort Frances area, including emergency food supplies, bandages, clothing and other essential items. DRRSB extends sincere thanks to the Northwestern Health Unit, especially Elaine Fisher, for partnering with us and helping make this support possible.



DRRSB is also proud to be a lead partner in the Healthy Living Food Box Subsidy Program, delivered with the Coming Together for Kids Coalition and the Northwestern Health Unit. Since 2023, the program has helped improve access to fresh fruits and vegetables for families through participating DRRSB childcare and EarlyON centres in Fort Frances. The \$4,400 in Moffat Family Fund support will further strengthen this important community partnership.

DRRSB also thanks the Moffat Family Fund for supporting initiatives that strengthen the health and well-being of children, families and individuals in our community.

### **DRRSB CONGRATULATES 2026 BURSARY RECIPIENTS**

The DRRSB is proud to announce the recipients of its 2026 Bursaries, awarded to local high school students pursuing careers in key service areas.

This year's recipients are:

- Payton Dolyny (Fort Frances High School) – Social Work
- Matthew Strain (Fort Frances High School) – Primary Care Paramedic (PCP)
- Liam Stafford (Fort Frances High School) – Skilled Trades
- Maloree Caron (Northern Lakes K-12 School) – Social Work
- Lexi Lacosse (Northern Lakes K-12 School) – Primary Care Paramedic (PCP)
- Julian Vos (Northern Lakes K-12 School) – Skilled Trades

An additional bursary from the District of Rainy River Services Board and the Fort Frances Medical First Responders was awarded to:

- Tristen Taylor (Fort Frances High School) – Primary Care Paramedic (PCP)

Each student has been awarded a \$500 bursary to support their post-secondary studies in a field aligned with the services provided by DRRSB.

## AN INSPIRING EVENING WITH MICHAEL JACQUES

Michael Jacques is a determined and inspiring young adult with autism and an intellectual disability who challenges the idea of “can’t.” Members of the Children’s Services team had the privilege of attending his evening presentation, hosted by Fort Frances Community Living and the Rainy River District School Board this spring, where Michael and his father shared his life story.

With humour, honesty, and a positive outlook, Michael offered meaningful insight into his experiences growing up, while speaking about learning, inclusion, advocacy, independence, and perseverance. Michael is also a talented author of two books, *Can’t Read, Can’t Write, Here Is My Book* and *I Belong: Can I Play?* Through his work, he shares powerful messages about inclusion, friendship, and belonging.



## Service Milestone

We’re proud to recognize five employees who reached a service milestone between April and June 2026. Your continued dedication helps strengthen our organization and the services we provide across the District. Thank you for your hard work and commitment!

### 5 Years

Karen Jensen  
Kenzie Godin

### 10 Years

Kevin Douse

### 25 Years

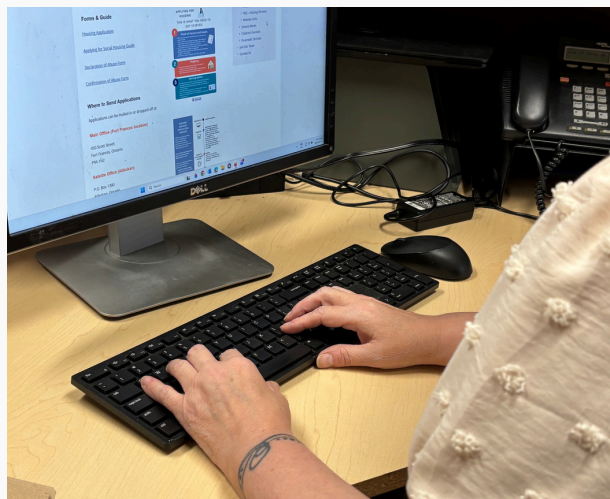
Michelle Jewell  
Myrna Beachy

## APPRENTICESHIP EVENT

Tania Bimm and Kristi Langer attended the Rainy River District School Board’s “5 Ways to Support Apprenticeship Pathways” Event on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, promoting apprenticeships and the Child Development Practitioner pathway to becoming an Early Childhood Educator. They had the opportunity to speak to students and parents about this opportunity and the many pathways of becoming ECEs, and employment opportunities with the DRRSB.

## BEHIND THE SCENES: THE ROLE OF INTEGRATED CASEWORKERS

When someone reaches out to the District of Rainy River Services Board for support, their first connection is often with a Customer Service Representative. When more in-depth assistance is needed, our Integrated Caseworkers step in to help. Working across Housing Services, Ontario Works, and Children's Services, Integrated Caseworkers take a coordinated approach to supporting people. They rotate through intake on a weekly basis, helping ensure people are connected to the right support at the right time.



Integrated Caseworkers provide comprehensive intake services while also managing specialized responsibilities within their program areas. Their work may include supporting housing applications and tenancy processes, such as move-ins, rent calculations, and income verification. They also determine and maintain Ontario Works eligibility, administer financial assistance, and support participation requirements. In Children's Services, they help families access child care fee subsidies and navigate available supports.

At every stage, Integrated Caseworkers focus on helping people understand their options and move forward. They guide individuals through complex systems, explain eligibility and program requirements, and connect them with the services that best meet their needs. They also play an important role in advocacy, referrals, and ongoing case management, while ensuring documentation is accurate and program requirements are met.

Much of this work happens behind the scenes, but it is deeply human. The reality of this work is not always easy. Many people seeking support are facing challenging circumstances such as housing instability, financial stress, or unexpected life changes. Integrated Caseworkers meet people where they are, offering support with patience, respect, and professionalism.

This role requires a high level of knowledge, adaptability, and problem solving. Whether helping someone secure housing, access financial support, or navigate services, Integrated Caseworkers play a vital role in strengthening well-being across our communities.

We sincerely thank our Integrated Caseworkers for the care, dedication, and expertise they bring to their work every day.

## WELCOMING NEW TEAM MEMBERS

In Paramedic Services, Rebecca has joined the team in Logistics. We are also welcoming Nadia and Fletcher, who will be supporting local communities as casual paramedics, bringing valuable skills, compassion, and dedication to patient care. Jillian has also joined the team and will be bringing her skills to the west end of the district, working out of the Rainy River Paramedic Station.

We are also excited to welcome new HOPE Support Workers, as well as our summer students, who will be contributing their energy and talents across the organization.



## Congratulations

Congratulations to paramedics Ray Luck and Steve Youden, and Superintendent Alyssa Goldamer for their outstanding work in assisting with an out-of-hospital baby delivery. Both mom and baby are doing well—great job!

Congratulations also goes out to Sheri Potter on becoming the fourth paramedic in our service to complete the Community Paramedicine Intermediate Care Certificate.

Congratulations to this year's co-op students, Matt and Lynden, on graduating from high school. We wish them all the best in their future studies.



RRDPS responded to



**432**

calls in May

# CELEBRATING PARAMEDIC SERVICES WEEK

Paramedic Services Week is an annual recognition week in Ontario and across Canada that celebrates the contributions of Paramedics who provide pre-hospital and community-based healthcare. It recognizes the skill, professionalism, and dedication of Paramedics along with advances in Paramedicine and Community Paramedicine. Most importantly, it is a week to thank Paramedics for their service.

This year we held a central event at the Fort Frances Headquarters, not only recognize the frontline work that Paramedics and Community Paramedics do, but to also recognize individuals who have dedicated 5, 10, 15, 20 & 25 Years of Service to Rainy River District Paramedic Services.

This year we were fortunate to be able to recognize every milestone! Several individuals were also recognized for “Saving a Life” throughout 2025, for which they received a certificate and a lightning bolt pin. Staff participated in nominating their peers for special awards while enjoying lunch from Talk On The Street Eatery.



## Touch A Truck Event



RRDPS was pleased to take part in Fort Frances GM's Touch a Truck event on June 18. This fun, family-friendly community event gave children and residents the chance to get up close to a variety of vehicles, including an ambulance, and learn more about the equipment and services that support our communities every day.

## Ongoing Training Keeps Paramedics Prepared

Behind every emergency response is a highly trained professional working to stay ready for whatever comes next. In the Rainy River District Paramedic Services, paramedics participate in regular, mandatory training to ensure their skills stay sharp and up to date with the latest medical practices, safety standards, and protocols.

From advanced life support techniques and patient assessment to new equipment training and scenario-based exercises, the ongoing education requirements are rigorous—and essential to continue providing the highest standard of care for residents across the district.



## 2026 TWOMO ELECTION: INTERESTED IN REPRESENTING YOUR COMMUNITY?

Did you know that residents of the Rainy River District's unincorporated areas elect representatives to the District of Rainy River Services Board (DRRSB)? The next Territory Without Municipal Organization (TWOMO) Election will take place on October 26, 2026, alongside Ontario's municipal elections.

Three representatives will be elected to serve a four-year term beginning January 1, 2027—one each for the East, Central and West TWOMO areas of the Rainy River District.

Residents living in unincorporated areas who are interested in helping shape services and programs that support residents across the district, are welcome to submit their name as a candidate. To be eligible, candidates must be Canadian citizens, at least 18 years of age, and meet the qualifications outlined under the DSSAB Act.

Eligible voters are encouraged to confirm that they are on the voters' list before Election Day. Residents can visit <https://www.registertovoteon.ca> to check, update or add their information to the voters' list for municipal and provincial elections in Ontario.

For more information on voter eligibility, how to confirm you are on the voters' list, candidate nominations, and the areas represented, visit the DRRSB TWOMO Election webpage at <https://rrdssab.ca/twomo-elections-2026/>.



## CANADA ONTARIO HOUSING BENEFIT RETURNS FOR 2026–2027

The District of Rainy River Services Board is pleased to announce that funding for the Canada Ontario Housing Benefit (COHB) has once again been allocated to our district for the 2026–2027 year.

This is exciting news, as the program helped more than 10 households in Rainy River District reduce their monthly rental costs over the past year.

Through COHB, eligible low-income households receive financial assistance to help make housing more affordable in the private rental market.

The Canada Ontario Housing Benefit is intended for households that are on, or eligible to be on, the social housing waitlist and who meet program eligibility requirements. Applicants must reside within the Rainy River District. Households currently receiving rent-g geared-to-income assistance or another government-funded housing benefit are generally not eligible.

With rental costs continuing to place pressure on many households, COHB provides an important opportunity for eligible residents to receive assistance while remaining in their current housing.

If you know someone who is struggling with rental costs and would like to learn more about the program or determine whether you may qualify, please contact the District of Rainy River Services Board for more information.

We look forward to helping more households access safe, affordable housing throughout the coming year.

## A Warm Place on Cold Nights

When winter temperatures dropped and the nights grew longer, the Out of the Cold Warming Centre was there for those who needed a safe place to go.

During the 2025 season, 106 individuals accessed the Centre, accounting for 1,825 visits over 181 nights. On average, more than 10 guests visited each night, finding warmth, a meal, and a welcoming space during some of the coldest months of the year. Staff and volunteers also provided an average of 3.6 meals each night, helping meet basic needs while offering a sense of comfort and connection.

The need was especially evident during periods of extreme weather. The Centre operated through 30 nights below  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  and 12 nights below  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$ . On the coldest night of the season, when temperatures plunged to  $-36^{\circ}\text{C}$ , 16 guests came through the doors seeking shelter from the cold.

While the numbers tell part of the story, they also highlight the ongoing need for a safe, warm place during the winter months. The Out of the Cold Warming Centre remains an important resource, providing shelter, comfort, and support to individuals when they need it most.

# PROMOTING BELONGING AND RESPECT



The Inclusion Committee has been busy supporting awareness, belonging, and respectful spaces across the organization through a number of meaningful initiatives. For Day of Pink, small pink buttons were created and distributed at 450 Scott Street and the HOPE Centre to encourage staff to show support for kindness, inclusion, and respect for all. The day also helped raise awareness about standing against bullying, discrimination, and hate, while showing support for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

The committee also recognized Red Dress Day with a staff reflection activity, inviting employees to share messages of remembrance, support, and commitment to learning in honour of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people. Completed red dress messages were displayed in the DRRSB lobby and at participating locations throughout May.

Looking ahead, the committee has developed support cards with helpful contact information for Pride Month, which will be made available throughout the organization, and is creating respectful-space signage for all DRRSB buildings to reinforce that all are welcome. The committee is also beginning plans for Truth and Reconciliation Day in September.

## Recognizing Significant Days

In addition to the initiatives supported by DRRSB, the organization also recognized several other important days and awareness campaigns throughout the last quarter, including:

- World Autism Acceptance Day – April 2
- First Responders Day – May 1
- National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week – May 11–17
- National AccessAbility Week – May 25–31
- National Indigenous History Month – June
- National Indigenous Peoples Day – June 21
- PTSD Awareness Month – June



The DRRSB 2025 Annual Report is online!

<https://rrdssab.ca/reports/>

## **DRRSB TAKES A SAFE, RESPONSIBLE APPROACH TO AI**

The District of Rainy River Services Board is embracing innovation with a new Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy and the adoption of GovAI as its approved AI tool. This marks an important step in modernizing how work is supported across the organization by giving staff access to a practical tool that can improve day-to-day efficiency. At the same time, the policy makes clear that AI is a support tool only. It does not replace professional judgment, legal obligations, human accountability, or decision-making authority.

DRRSB is taking a thoughtful and responsible approach to AI from the outset. The policy recognizes that while AI can be helpful, it can also be inaccurate, incomplete, biased, overconfident, or misleading. For that reason, all AI-assisted work must be treated as a draft and reviewed by a person before it is used, shared, or relied upon. Staff are expected to check AI-assisted content for accuracy, completeness, tone, fairness, accessibility, and consistency with legislation, policy, program requirements, and professional obligations.

The policy also sets clear guardrails around privacy, confidentiality, and appropriate use. Only approved AI tools may be used for DRRSB work, and sensitive information, including personal information, personal health information, client details, legal advice, financial information, and in-camera materials, must not be entered into an AI tool unless expressly approved. Staff are also expected to use safe inputs and be able to explain how AI was used.

At its core, DRRSB's use of GovAI is not about replacing staff. It is about giving staff better tools to support their work in a safe and responsible way. By pairing innovation with clear policy direction and practical guidance, DRRSB is showing that new technology can strengthen service while keeping staff, accountability, and sound judgment at the centre.

### **SYSTEM UPGRADE SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTED**

The upgrade to Sparkrock 365, DRRSB's finance, human resources, and payroll system, has been successfully implemented thanks to the dedication and collaboration of our Finance, Human Resources, and Information Technology teams, along with the support and adaptability of staff across the organization.

Throughout the transition, managers, supervisors, and staff have demonstrated flexibility and a willingness to embrace new processes. While there have been some challenges and learning opportunities along the way, the overall implementation has progressed very well, and early feedback has been positive, with many users already experiencing improvements in efficiency and workflow.

As we continue to refine processes and build familiarity with the system, we appreciate the patience, commitment, and professionalism shown by everyone involved. Thank you for helping make this important organizational upgrade a success.

## Keeping busy in Early Years



Rainy-day play offers children valuable opportunities to explore, learn, and stay active outdoors. Splashing in puddles, noticing how weather changes the environment, and engaging their senses in new ways all support curiosity, creativity, and physical development. With appropriate clothing and supervision, playing in the rain can be a safe, joyful experience that helps children build confidence and a positive connection to the natural world.

The toddler and preschool children from Pathways Atelier, enjoyed a wonderful visit to *Under the Sea*, a creative and engaging experience presented by the students at St. Mary's School. The children had fun exploring and taking in the colourful displays. Thank you to the students and staff at St. Mary's for inviting us to view your display. Our little ones really enjoyed the visit, and we appreciate the opportunity to share in something created with such care.



The preschool and toddler children at Pathways Atelier had the chance to meet Emus that were visiting St. Mary's School. What a fun interaction!



Preschool graduation is a special milestone that celebrates a child’s growth, learning, and readiness for the next step in their educational journey. We are proud of all our preschool graduates and look forward to seeing them continue to learn and thrive as they move on to kindergarten.

Celebrating the International Day of Pink at Northern Lights Atelier.



The preschool and school-age children from Tall Oaks Atelier participated in the “Little Line” Youth Art Show at the Fine Line Art Gallery. Each child had the opportunity to create their own unique piece of artwork, which was displayed in the gallery. The artwork was displayed from April 13 to May 6 as part of the Gallery’s spring show.



# DRRSB IN THE DISTRICT



Nursery School Visit to Ambulance Station



CMHA BBQ for Mental Health Week



Career Coaching at FFHS



Rocking for a Reason



Pushing Up Daisies Event



Rainy River High School Career Fair



Youth Skills for Success Summit



Flora's Walk for Perinatal Mental Health



Confederation College Education & Career Fair