

# H&R MFRC

## Board of Directors Annual Report 2022 - 2023



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# 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

**Collaboration** – We work in partnership with families, the community, military leadership, and the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

**Accountability** – We demonstrate, integrity, fiscal responsibility, and performance measurement.

**Respect** – We respect the uniqueness and diversity of the military community.

**Excellence** – Our programs and services are flexible, responsive, strength-based, inclusive, and relevant to those we serve.



# Message from the Executive Director

*Shelley Hopkins*

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This year was about learning and innovation. We implemented a new service delivery model as directed by Military Family Services, in the 2020+ Military and Veteran Family Services Strategic Framework. Post-pandemic life brought new challenges for families including mental well-being and financial challenges due to the record-high rate of inflation. We learned that families' needs and the ways they access services had changed. We worked to strike the balance between funder requirements and our local family's needs.

We were not immune to workforce shortages, particularly in the field of Early Childhood Education, which led to the sad and difficult decision to close Windsor Park Children's Centre, a beloved quality service.

Our service delivery shifted to a more family-centred approach, which considers each family's unique situation, with resources applied to address their specific challenges which led us to introduce military family navigators. We heard from families that peer support and social connection programs are meaningful, and we continued such services, so you have opportunities to share your lived military life experience. We expanded our school outreach program to support more military adolescents and expanded our mental health services to include Francophone counselling.

Thank you to our volunteer board of directors who steered the organization by making challenging decisions for its future sustainability. Thank you to an incredible team of professionals who strive every day to offer the best service by listening to military families' experiences. A special note of appreciation to the Early Childhood Educators (ECE) who continued to show up, through the challenges of the pandemic, and staffing shortages, providing quality care to military children.

While preparing this report, wildfires are greatly impacting our community and several of our CAF families are experiencing the devastating loss of their home. Our team quickly responded to the immediate need for accommodations. We supported 33 families with accommodations. We hosted a gathering event for those impacted, to connect with each other. We provided custom care packages with comfort items and gift cards, as families were evacuated longer than expected. Our deepest thanks to everyone who assisted us with the wildfire emergency response and connecting families to the MFRC.



# Message from the Board Chair

*Larissa Page*

This past year has provided an opportunity to learn by doing for H&R MFRC organization, Board of Directors, and myself as a new Board Chair. Collectively we have strategically navigated unforeseen challenges, which have resulted in thoughtful discussion, growth, and resiliency. I am very proud of what we have accomplished over the last fiscal year.

In September 2022, we welcomed seven new board members (four family, three members of base command's). They have clearly demonstrated commitment and passion and bettered our board in many ways. We also said farewell to a member mid-year, who has been missed. As a board we had the opportunity to engage in professional development training and team-building activities throughout the year. This included the development of the framework to establish our Strategic Goals and Values that will steer the organization over the next three years. We greatly appreciate Shelley's leadership as our Executive Director who will initiate and implement the Strategic Plan for the organization.

It is my absolute pleasure to share with you that our organization received the inaugural Holistic Wellness Workplace award from the Chartered Professionals in Human Resources NS (CPHR NS). Shelley and her team went above and beyond for the staff this year, ensuring they had the space they needed to take care of themselves in times of change. Congratulations Shelley and team, you make us very proud to be involved with the Centre!

Heading into 2022/23, we knew this would be a year of transition for the organization. Nova Scotia continues to experience a shortage in trained Early Childhood Educators, which presents a staffing challenge to daycare organizations in our province. We know that having experienced staff is essential to providing safe and sustainable care. After careful consideration and exploring all possible solutions, the board voted unanimously to support the organizational decision to close the Windsor Park Children's Center by March 2023. All families secured new spaces by January 31, 2023, officially closing the Centre two months earlier than projected.

This was a necessary decision to ensure the long-term sustainability of our services. To mitigate the closure impacts and support families affected, a Family Navigator was appointed to assist families in finding childcare in the community. Families were provided with five months notice along with financial assistance. Additionally, we ensured the staff at the Windsor Park Children's Centre were taken care of, including their health and well-being, and offered positions at the Shearwater Childcare Centre, many of which were accepted.

As a military community we are fortunate to have an organization that can provide these services to our families. We also recognize this decision was difficult one, and we received some grievances from a family group impacted by the closure. Our board has been working diligently, volunteering much of their board time and personal time to help address concerns related to the closure and help bring this matter to resolution. While these efforts have impacted some of our regular work, we have learned from this experience and further strengthened our policies and procedures.

We look forward to the upcoming board year where we can use what we've learned this year, welcome new members, continue to strengthen our board, and work toward steering the H&R MFRC to supporting as many military families as possible.



# Military Family Services Strategic Framework

New positions called Military Family Navigators were created to better meet the needs of families, by offering individualized and customized supports and sessions using a navigational assistance approach that is based on each family's unique situation. Navigators provide peer support opportunities and education in the areas of relocation, absences, and transition into the military and throughout the release process.

Our services are offered as part of a continuum of care, taking a family-centred service delivery approach. We provided staff-wide professional development in National Family Support Network Standards of Quality for Strengthening & Support. The following levels of service are offered based on the needs and strengths of the family.

## Information and Awareness

The H&R MFRC is a point of contact for families as they navigate and access services when and how they are required. Our team is here to help answer questions, including how to send morale mail, assistance with relocating, finding a family doctor, accessing mental health support, getting a family ID card, and so much more.

Online platforms are vital in communicating with military families. Closed Facebook groups are a meaningful way to keep families connected to each other and receive timely information about the MFRC and CAF operations. Groups are set up to support individual ship deployments, parenting support, Francophone families, Volunteers, Unit Family Representatives and we have added a new group for Cape Breton families.

5,596 occurrences of information and referral support were provided this past year. Of those, our team directed families to the on-duty padre 196 times.

We assisted families ship over 855 morale mail packages! Morale mail is a priority service for families as well as a personal and thoughtful way for families to stay connected with loved ones and friends serving overseas.



## Navigation Support

Military Family Navigators work with families to learn about their military journey; listen to their questions, strengths and needs to identify the best tools, services and supports available to assist them. Military members and their families transitioning out of the military were supported by our Veteran Military Family Navigator.

The operational tempo was high with 10 naval deployments and 13 land-based deployments.



Our team engaged with deployed families, completing over 1746 check-in calls to 649 families.



"Love the options that have been provided, the check-in phone calls have been a great way to connect, and for a good laugh."

We supported 41 spouses/partners and youth with Career and Employment Counselling. Most were seeking support because they were unemployed, underemployed, or transitioning careers. Our Employment Support Services Coordinator, Holly Rye, CCDP, is a Certified Career Development Practitioner with over 20 years of experience coaching hundreds of military spouses through successful career and job transitions.

Military families are located throughout the region, so we identified opportunities to meet families in the greater community. Outreach activities such as the Elmsdale Family Swim and weekly stroller walks in various communities were very well received. We reconnected with Northern and Eastern Reserve Units through surveys, a children's Christmas party, attending the Mental Health Roadshow and creating a closed Facebook page.

As COVID restrictions were lifted, we were glad to be able to connect with families in person once again. We learned that virtual programs are the preferred option in some instances, so continued to offer a variety of connection opportunities using in-person, virtual and hybrid options. Virtual briefings allowed us to reach and connect with parents of deployed CAF members from across the country.

Supporting children and youth connected to military families provided opportunities for families to get together during our regular Stroller Walks, Expecting Baby, New Baby, and Play & Learn. Our Building Blocks program uses LEGO® as a tool in a structured and inclusive way to increase motivation to participate and positive interaction with peers. Our Henderson Sweetman Youth Centre offered virtual and in-person programming including open drop-in sessions, art nights, cooking classes, Home Alone training, and game nights.

"I feel like there has been an incredible amount of support available, more so than I thought would be given. I am very impressed with the MFRC"

# Military Family Services Strategic Framework (continued)

## Intervention Services

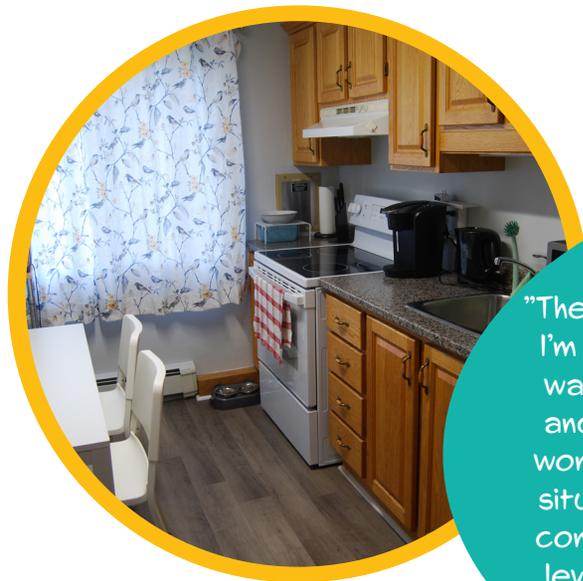
The Mental Health and Well-Being Team is comprised of mental health professionals with experience in counselling, family and peer support, and crisis intervention. They address a complexity of issues, tailored to specific military challenges, and targeted to families or individual family members looking for general support, counselling, resources or who are in crisis or are experiencing an emergency. Support was offered, in-person, virtually and over the phone to 220 family members who accessed our Mental Health & Well-Being services this year.

We manage six apartments in Halifax for families of CAF members to use when a crisis, compassionate or exceptional circumstance affects the family's ability to remain in their home. This year, we had 646 stays in our short-term accommodations for emergencies and compassionate reasons.

In addition to supporting those through gender-based violence, we offer educational opportunities and hosted a panel presentation, inviting community guest speakers from Transition House Association of Nova Scotia on Empowering Military Families: Parenting in a Gender Based-Violence Environment.



64 family members accessed our support for families with diverse needs.



"The apartment is fantastic!! Very well appointed! I'm extremely fortunate to have been sent your way... I can't thank you all enough for helping me and my family. There are so many people in the world suffering, and I sometimes forget that my situation, although unfortunate, is insignificant in comparison. So when I encounter this enormous level of support and kindness, my heart swells. It reminds me that I can be a better person. I'm humbled, to say the least."



# Fund Development

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

## Donor Highlights

**\$15,000** Angus G. Foods has been an integral partner, not only through donations and fundraising events like McHappy Day but also with in-kind support of our deployment activities and events.

**\$14,500** The Royal Canadian Legion including Vimy Branch 27, Centennial Branch 160, Nunavut Command, and Caen Branch 164 have been contributing for the past three years. Collectively, they have donated more than \$30,000 demonstrating their support of military and veteran families through the H&R MFRC.

**\$10,250** Happy Harry's annual Remembrance Week campaign is one of our longest-standing partnerships. Over the past 12 years, this campaign has raised close to \$235,000. The funds directly support our Occasional Child Care and other non-funded but vital services that support the needs of local families.

**\$10,000** Lockheed Martin funding has allowed us to create up-to-date resources and tools for educators that will support our expansion of school outreach and licensed child care outreach. Monthly support groups for children were offered in seven elementary and junior high anglophone and francophone schools.

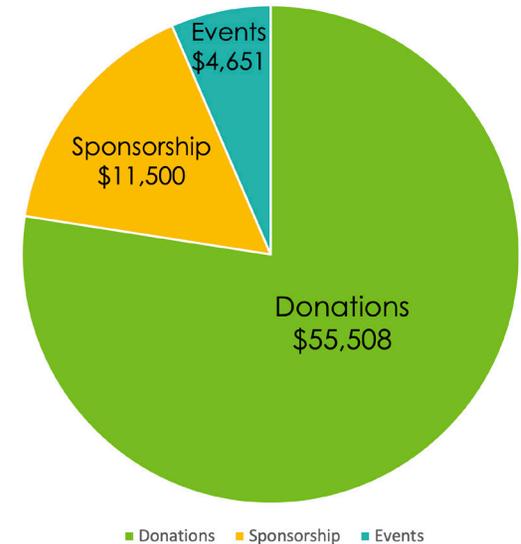
**\$7,500** Irving Shipbuilding in donations and sponsorship, as well as gift cards for displaced families impacted by the wildfires in May 2023.

We would also like to thank Eastlink, BMO, the Personal Insurance, TD Bank, Ultimate Home Comfort, General Dynamics-Mission Systems Canada, Pratt & Whitney Canada, HMCS Scotian and HMCS St. John's for their contributions!



John McCabe (left), H&R MFRC Fund Development Coordinator, and Mary Keith (right), Vice President, Communications at Irving Shipbuilding, with turkeys that were donated and given to military and veteran families, particularly those who had experienced a difficult year.

Fund Development Sources of Income  
2022-2023



Funding from True Patriot Love allowed us to add a Francophone Family Well-Being Counsellor to our Mental Health & Well-Being Team, extending our services to French-speaking families. This funding was also used to cover the training costs for the Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support for our whole team!

# Community Partners & Advocacy

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We recognize the importance of working with other organizations to provide a collaborative approach to supporting families. We were pleased to be able to partner with the defence community stakeholders in hosting events for families. Our team had fun with PSP in providing a family movie night, helping with the DND Snow Festival, and hosting the Bluenose Bienvenue welcome event with 12 Wing at the Sea King Club!

Developing strong connections within the CAF community allows us to reach more families. Our Unit Family Representative (UFR) program was revitalized, and ongoing efforts are underway to recruit, train and support these members so they can connect with members seeking support.

Our team attends several National working groups, including the Military Family Services Funding Application, the Child Care Primary Office, Home Care pilot, Veteran Family Program, Family Liaison and Deployment and Absence. Taking part in these working groups gives us the opportunity to advocate to enhance service for local families at a national level.

We presented at the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research (CIMVHR) pre-conference session and two staff members also attended the forum. We also spent time fostering relationships with military family researchers and assisted in establishing ongoing research-focused presentations to MFRCs across the country.



Scenes of the fun at Bluenose Bienvenue, which included a petting zoo, face painting, food trucks, and much more!



## Windsor Park Children's Centre Closure

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As a result of systemic, multi-year Early Childhood Educator (ECE) staff shortages and the adverse impacts of the Nova Scotia Early Learning and Child Care System Transformation Plan, the H&R MFRC announced the closure its Windsor Park Children's Centre in October 2022. This decision was heartbreaking for everyone, especially staff and parents. All impacted families were offered places at Shearwater Children's Centre, as well as alternative care options within the community, through our Military Family Navigator.

The H&R MFRC continues to take all reasonable efforts to provide a small group of concerned families with information regarding the decision. We would like to thank our resilient and dedicated staff for their continued and extraordinary efforts. All of us at the H&R MFRC remain committed to providing quality service to our community.

# Volunteer Recognition

Volunteers continue to play a vital role in the growth of our organization and our connection with our community. We are grateful to our volunteer Board of Directors who provided us with strategic directions and thoughtful perspectives as well as our program, administrative, and event volunteers.



Adult Volunteer of the Year (left): Larissa Page is a dedicated leader who consistently acts in the best interest of the organization, even in the face of tough decisions. She values diverse opinions and as a Board Chair, she fosters this in all board members at board meetings by encouraging all voices.



Youth Volunteer of the Year (right): Jack Burton set a great example of what young youth can do for their community. He works diligently to ensure that the Henderson Sweetman Youth Centre provides adequate and interesting programs while encouraging others his age to get involved.



The H&R MFRC and PSP Community Recreation hosted the CANEX Gives Back Volunteer Recognition event on November 30, 2022, at the Neptune Theatre. Volunteers were treated to a magical performance of “Elf” plus a reception with a sweet sampling of holiday cheesecakes!

# Board Committee Reports

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## Development & Evaluation Committee

*Sarah Nixon-Miller, Committee Chair*

The committee's goal is to develop the skillset and cooperation of the board, identify areas for training and evaluate processes. In 2022-2023, the committee facilitated board team building, spring training, reviewed and revised the self and board evaluations, started planning for fall training and revising new member onboarding.

## Governance Committee Report

*Amanda Lutz, Committee Chair*

The governance committee updated existing policies and created new Board policies to ensure we have a comprehensive set of governing documents, particularly for use in our new hybrid way of conducting business. We used what we learned over the first few months of the board year to create clear and concise policies that will help guide future generations of our board, including: remote confidentiality, meeting minutes, recruitment and reoffer, and travel and expenses. After needing to implement the Succession Plan policy, we applied our learnings and improved this policy. This upcoming board year we will continue the policy review as well as a by-law review.

## Finance Committee Report

*Lisa Purdy, Committee Chair*

The Finance Committee fulfilled its oversight duties with respect to financial matters of the H&R MFRC. The committee convened for a total of six meetings, at which several financial topics were discussed including financial results, investment and bank account structure and restricted funds. The committee coordinated with the external auditors and contracted accountants to review the results of the external financial audit and the upcoming fiscal year budgets.

## Departing Board Members

We would like to thank Jacquelyn Stevenson, Mora Giovennetti, Tracey McDonald, and Hannah Hachey, who are departing the Board. Thank you for your time and dedication to the H&R MFRC.

## Election of New Members

We would like to welcome our five new members: Dani Alarie, Desiree Tan, Greg Moffat, Jordan Elliott, and Suzette Belliveau Legault. Welcome to the Board of Directors and we look forward to working with you over the coming year!

## Members Remaining on 2023-2024 Board of Directors

Executive: Larissa Page (Chair), Amanda Lutz (Vice Chair), Lindsey Coshell (Secretary), Lisa Purdy (Treasurer/Chair of Finance Committee), Shelley Hopkins (Executive Director, non-voting)

Members at Large: Keeley Anderson, Sarah Nixon-Miller (Chair of Board Development & Evaluation), Ellen MacDonald, Rhonda Gaudette, Alena Mondelli (Formation Chief), Cavel Shebib (Fleet Chief), Kevin Wezenbeek (Wing Chief), Troy Beazley (Base Chief), Leon Ledgister (5th Division Chief)

# Moving Forward

Our Strategic Goals for 2023-2026 include Cultivating and Enhancing Relationships, Educating and Advocating for a broader understanding of military life, and Strengthening our Team. As we look forward to this coming year, programs and services will continue to be offered both virtually, as well as in-person, so everyone can connect with their peers. A pilot project is underway to expand our methods of communication through a text messaging service for families who prefer to communicate by text.

There are over 5,500 children connected to military families in our area. Families are geographically dispersed and attend schools which have varying levels of understanding of military life. We have been creating tools, videos, and resources and hope to expand our current school outreach initiatives like the ones at Horizon and Oceanview Elementary! These resources will provide a background for educators to better understand lifestyle challenges such as relocation and its impacts on children and families, and how we can work together. We will be working with Early Childhood Education institutions to provide training to their students, about living the military lifestyle and how it affects children, so they are knowledgeable even before they enter the field.

We piloted a Francophone Family Well-Being Counsellor as an addition to our Mental Health & Well-Being Team in 2022 and are now extending that position to a permanent one. This extension of service can be accessed on an as-needed basis for short-term counselling support, financial resources, as well as connections to organizations in the area.



# H&R MFRC

## CONNECT WITH US!

 [halifaxmfrc.ca](http://halifaxmfrc.ca)

 24/7 Information Line: 902-427-7788

   @hrmfrc

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