



Fort McMurray Boys and Girls Club Feature Story – April 2020

It would be an understatement to say that 2020 has been a challenging year for the Fort McMurray Boys and Girls Club (FMBGC). Already in a double state of a crisis because of significant government cutbacks and the closure of their facility due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FMBGC received yet another devastating blow on April 27th when the Athabasca River surged through Fort McMurray's lower townsite and nearly three feet of river water forced its way into their building.

"The aftermath of the flood to our building was heartbreaking," says Michelle Farrow, Executive Director of FMBGC. "When I was finally granted access to the Club to assess the damage, I was not at all prepared for how emotional it would be." She describes the scene as overwhelming as she walked through each room side stepping the personal belongings of children and staff: from backpacks to diapers, to carefully constructed artwork strewn about the Club and floating in the lingering dirty, sludgy water. "Once I got over the initial shock of the physical destruction," Farrow continued, "My concerns immediately shifted to what impact this will have on the families we serve and our staff who are the heart of our Club."

The FMBGC was already in crisis mode before the flood hit. In December of 2019, the Government of Alberta announced cutbacks to the Benefit Contribution Grant and Staff Attraction Incentive Program. Then another significant loss came in March 2020, when Early Child Educators from the North Zone learned they would be losing their living allowance, which means a loss of \$12,480 annually per income – an incentive that provide their staff a liveable wage in this region. In order to retain quality staff, childcare centres will have to make up the difference which could mean massive childcare fee increases in the near future.

In March, the FMBGC was then forced to shut their doors and lay off staff as a result of Alberta Health Services Guidelines in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19. "Not only did that mean we could not operate our childcare centre, but it also meant the cancellation of two major fundraising events, and potentially any ability to host upcoming events in the foreseeable future – including one of our community staple events Race for Kids," says Farrow.

The FMBGC has experienced a massive financial setback between the loss of their fundraisers and grants (which accounts for 75 per cent of their annual income); and with the indefinite closure of childcare services, the small amount of income they collect from childcare fees is also non-existent. The Club is anticipating a nearly 20 per cent increase to their annual budget that will either need to be made up through fundraising or by an increase to childcare fees. "We still have a significant amount of fixed operating costs to



keep the organization running despite being closed and now flooded, and no money coming in," says Farrow. "Increasing our childcare fees is not an option we want to explore as that would make our centre unaffordable to many of the over 100 families we serve daily."

While the rebuild process has already begun, with an estimated timeline for a functioning childcare facility in the fall of 2020, the FMBGC's biggest concern is the uncertainty that lies ahead. "We are unsure how we will continue to operate with little to no income streams available. And what will become of our organization if we lose families and staff," says Farrow. "We are worried that the Fort McMurray Flood may be the final, devastating blow to our Club."

Despite the incredible destruction, the Club remains hopeful as they begin the rebuild process and look forward to the day when they will welcome back the smiling faces that once filled their walls. Until then, they humbly ask for your support, noting that they understand that not everyone is in a position to give financially and that there are many ways to give support. As the FMBGC prepares to reopen, they will need volunteers for move-in, assembly, landscaping and more. Volunteer positions will be posted via WBVolunteers.ca and applicants who sign up and select the FMBGC as a preferred organization will be notified as volunteer positions become available. In the meantime, they ask for the community to watch for upcoming fundraisers or contact them if interested in holding third-party fundraisers. For those able to give monetarily to support organizational recovery, they can do so by online through their [website](#) or on our [Facebook Page](#) through the donate button. Corporate donors can email <mailto:ed@fmbgc.ca>.