

Stollery Children's Hospital

CHILD LIFE

Annual Impact Report

April 1, 2025–March 31, 2026



MESSAGE FROM LEADERSHIP

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, this has been an exceptional year for the Child Life Program. The program is essential to care at the Stollery Children's Hospital, meaningfully shaping the patient and family experience. Support from the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation and Alberta Health Services makes this important work possible, and we are sincerely grateful.

Judy Dahl

Team Lead for Child Life Program

Rhonda Tomlinson

Manager for Child Life Program, Awasisak Indigenous Health Program,
Patient Family Centered Care



PET VISITATION

This program continues to bring comfort, emotional support, and moments of joy to patients and families throughout the hospital. Volunteer handlers and dogs work closely with Child Life to make regular visits to various units. Offering a calming presence and helping to reduce stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation. The growing number of patient visits demonstrates the powerful role that human-animal interaction plays in healing and patient wellbeing.



FACILITY DOG

On June 16, 2025, the Child Life team welcomed Pumbaa to the hospital community, a specially trained facility dog from Dogs with Wings who now works alongside his primary or secondary handler, both certified Child Life specialists. Since arriving, Pumbaa has become a steady source of comfort for patients and families, helping ease anxiety, fear, and perceived pain during medical care and procedures. His presence offers distraction, connection, and moments of normal childhood in a clinical setting, making it easier for children to engage with their care. Pumbaa's gentle support also reaches staff, lifting spirits and helping create a calmer, more compassionate environment across the Stollery.

“Raider typically does not enjoy ECHO tests, but with Pumbaa laying by his side, it helped him to be calm and relaxed throughout the ECHO.”

—Stollery Parent.



TOTAL INTERVENTIONS

FUTURE WISHES

Expanding the facility dog program would significantly enhance the support available to children, families, and staff across the hospital. Additional facility dogs would increase access to therapeutic, evidence-informed interventions, allowing a greater number of children to benefit from comfort, distraction, motivation, and emotional support during procedures, treatments, and challenging hospital admissions.

With increased program capacity, the Child Life team could extend coverage across multiple hospital units. This expansion would likely reduce wait times for referrals and ensure timely support for high-acuity patients, particularly during peak periods or prolonged admissions. Overall, growing this program would strengthen care, expand the reach of Child Life services, and maximize the positive impact facility dogs provide.



ART THERAPY

Since October 2025, the program's art therapist has supported inpatient and outpatient children, as well as their family members through creative expression. Art therapy offers a welcoming space where patients can share feelings, make sense of medical experiences, and find moments of comfort and choice within their medical journey. Through this work, patients build coping skills and confidence while families are given another way to connect with their child. This presence adds a meaningful layer of emotional support to the overall care experience.

"It is very powerful to witness how children use art to express what they can't always put into words, and gain a sense of control and identity during hospitalization, even in the middle of uncertainty."

—Aurora C.T., Art Therapist.



184

SESSIONS



40

CONSULTS

MUSIC THERAPY

The generosity from the Stollery Children’s Hospital Foundation has doubled the music therapy team, meaning that we are reaching twice as many Stollery kids in 2026. Music therapists support all areas including inpatients, outpatients, and the emergency department through group and individual sessions. Music is a therapeutic tool used by a certified music therapist with a patient to support a variety of goals, including stress and pain management, procedural support, promotion of wellness and quality of life, emotional expression and regulation, promotion of physical rehabilitation, and end-of-life and bereavement support.



SESSIONS

1,539

ATTENDEES

530

“During the dressing changes, it helped my child needed to stay focused on the sounds, and this helped her cope to get through it.”

—Stollery Parent.

RECREATION THERAPY

A patient and family-centered service that uses meaningful leisure to support health, recovery, and quality of life. Since June 2025, two part-time Recreation Therapists, primarily working out of the Enchanted Forest, have joined the team providing individual consults, therapeutic programming, and community integration initiatives to build skills, explore interests, and reduce barriers to participation. Services are designed to promote resilience, functional independence, and successful transition beyond the hospital setting.



37

CONSULTS

253

TREATMENTS

“Robbie is waiting for a heart transplant. He has to pull a machine everywhere he goes. Natalya and Kerissa, the Recreation Therapists, have been amazing at making sure Robbie gets outside. They throw snowballs with him and spin endlessly on the playground equipment. With all the kids these rec therapists see, them remembering my child feels really wonderful.”

—Lisa M., Stollery Parent.

EVENING PROGRAMS

Evening programs take place in the Saville Family Beach, offering children and their families a welcoming space to enjoy play, connection, and a sense of normalcy. The program is available for families for two hours, five days per week, and hosts a variety of special guests and planned activities. It is designed to support coping, comfort, medical understanding and emotional expression. Facilitated by Child Life specialists, this program encourages meaningful play experiences, family bonding, and moments of togetherness during the hospital stay.

"Child life specialists should be on every unit, around the clock. Every Nurse, Doctor and any type of Specialist should have to spend time with these special people when caring for kids to understand how to better support kids."

—Stephanie R., Stollery Parent.

1354
patient visits
this year!

BEACH PROGRAM

The Beach is a “magical” place where children and families can return to normalcy. The Child Life Specialists who work in the playroom draw on the essence of Child Life, providing developmentally appropriate, imaginative, artistic and creative play opportunities for patients and families. Here, patients can simply be kids again!

Once monthly, the Beach is transformed into a Teddy Bear Clinic where patients can become the doctors and nurses. Due to the generosity of the foundation children are provided with medical supplies and equipment, allowing them to engage in medical play, creating a sense of mastery and coping skills related to difficult procedures.

This year, the Saville Family Beach

served **8242** participants!

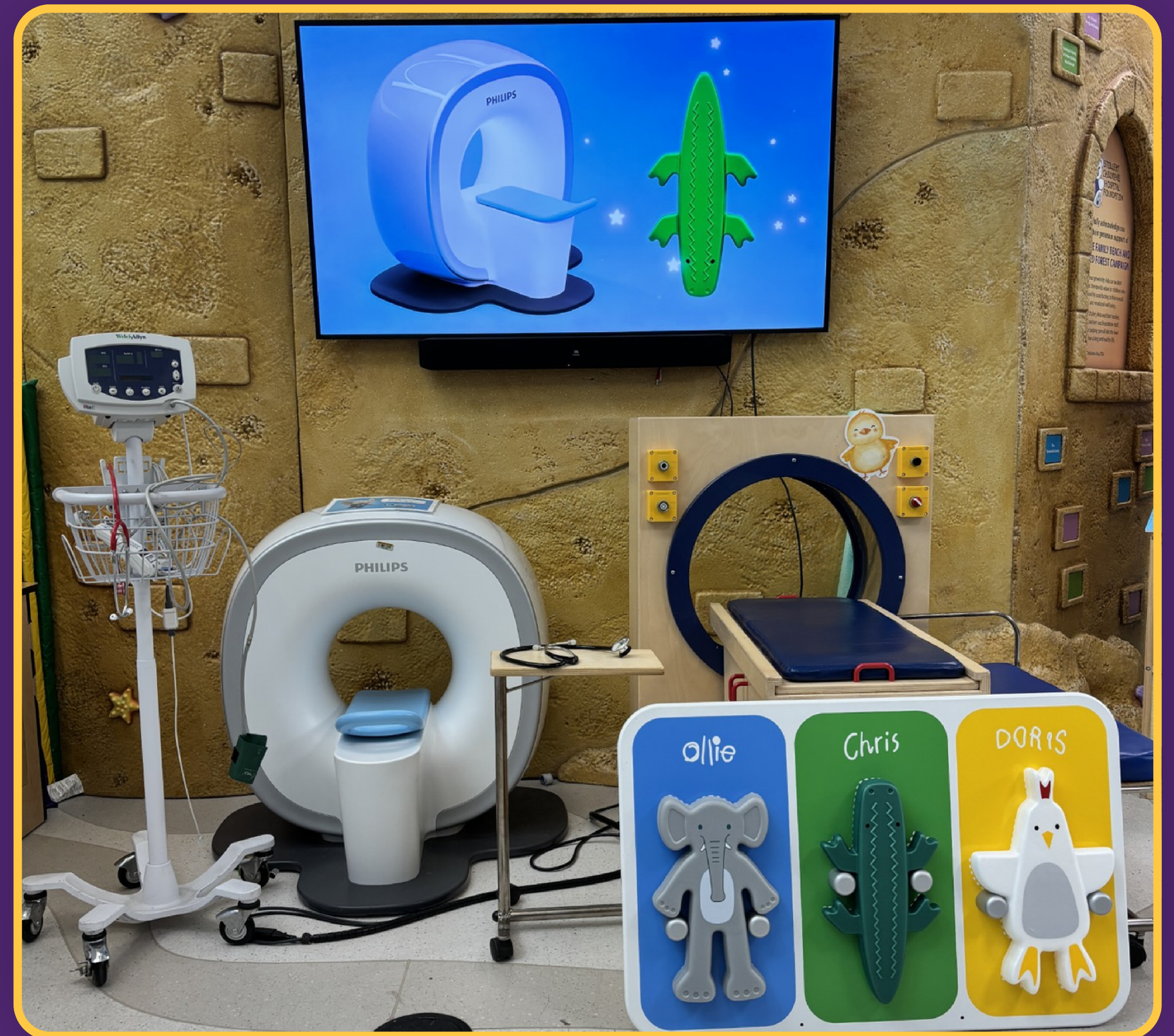


“The Beach is where Jesse could have fun and forget his pain and feel like a normal child again.”
—Erin J, Stollery Parent.

FUTURE WISHES

An expanded medical play area on the Beach would provide Child Life with increased opportunities to guide patients in developing coping techniques with diverse medical demands. Ultimately, growing the programs capacity to support patients in minimizing medical distress.

A highlight of the Beach's current medical play area is the new Philips Kitten Scanner. This interactive teaching tool allows patients to choose a compatible animal to place in the scanner, they are then introduced to the animal's story that brought them to the hospital, and why they need an MRI. The virtual experience of the animal is played out on the screen, and coping tips for aiding the animal through the MRI are provided.





ENCHANTED FOREST

The Enchanted Forest is an accessible outdoor play space featuring a traditional Indigenous Tipi. The space provides a safe, inclusive environment for therapeutic play and seasonal programming. It supports exploration, socialization, and connection to nature in a setting free from the demands of clinical care.

This unique play space offers children an opportunity to feel, hear, see and smell all four seasons. Elements that promote holistic child development and healing.

Children are free to engage in play, choice, and curiosity. It's where confidence is built, connections are made, and meaningful experiences lay the foundation for a smoother transition back to life after hospital.



TEEN ROOM

Providing a dedicated, age-appropriate space where adolescent patients can relax, socialize, and engage in meaningful activities during their admission. This unique space, led by many team members, is designed to support emotional well-being and can offer opportunities for peer connection, creative expression, and respite from the clinical environment. By fostering independence and a sense of community, teen programming plays a vital role in enhancing the overall patient experience for youth navigating hospitalization.

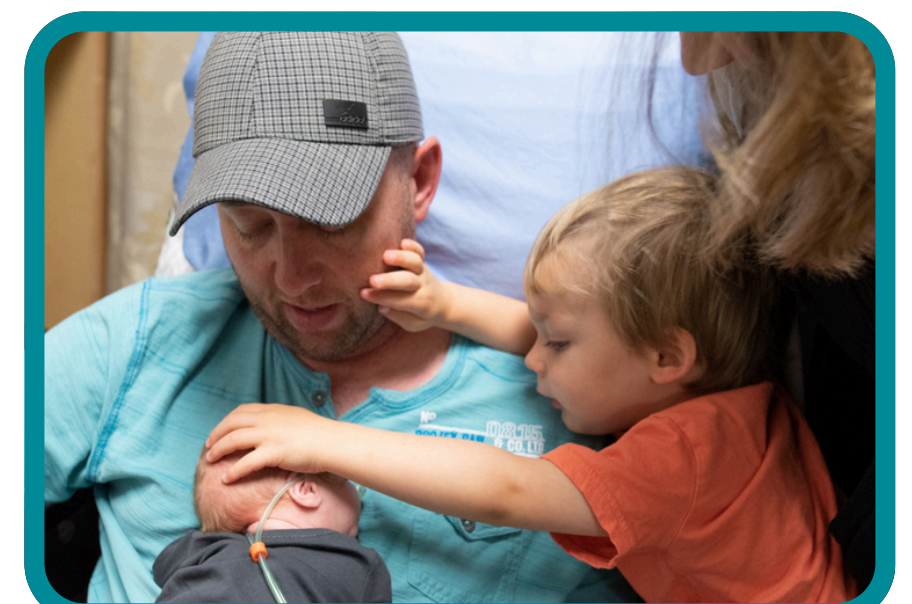
“I've spent quite some time in the Stollery these last few months, one thing I really looked forward to doing was going to the teen room. They had all kinds of crafts and games to do. All the ladies that worked there were always so kind and welcoming, and even if I didn't feel like doing a craft that day, they would always sit and talk to me or play a game with me. I will always remember the positive vibes it gave me, and all the memories I made, that I will always be really grateful for.”

—Kendra H., Stollery Patient.

STOLLERY PHILIP C. ETCHES NICU AT THE ROYAL ALEXANDRA HOSPITAL

In 2025, 1230 babies were cared for in the Stollery Philip C. Etches Neonatal Intensive Care (NICU). Premature birth can result in long admissions and disruption in family routine. Many of these babies have ongoing medical and developmental challenges. Child Life provides family support and neuroprotective care within this 69-bed unit.

Your assistance helps enhance the playroom environment for siblings, purchase resources, and augment supplies required for bereavement keepsakes. Together, we build programs and create an inclusive, safe environment that cares for the entire family.



SPECIAL EVENTS

The Child Life Department hosts a variety of special events throughout the year that enhance the patient and family experience and create lasting, positive memories during hospitalization. Monthly themed parties and seasonal holiday celebrations held at the Saville Family Beach and the Enchanted Forest offer children and families opportunities for joy.

Team members also coordinate and support visits from professional athletes, including members of the Edmonton Oilers and the Edmonton Elks. These visits provide inspiration and encouragement, helping children build confidence, motivation, and hope as they navigate their individual health journeys.

Community partnerships play a vital role in enriching these experiences. Organizations such as Star Wars cosplay groups and performers from the International Children's Festival of the Arts bring creativity, entertainment, and meaningful engagement.



OPERATION HO-HO-HO

The most memorable event of the year! Santa Claus made a grand arrival at the Stollery via a Royal Canadian Armed Forces helicopter. This extraordinary event brought excitement and wonder to patients across the hospital and exemplified the department's commitment to creating unforgettable moments of joy for children and families.





Excellence

The Child Life team is guided by the Team Lead Judy Dahl and Professional Practice Lead Alison Naylor who together bring more than 60 years of experience as Child Life specialists. Their leadership ensures the highest standards of care through a competitive nationally known internship program, strong mentorship, and ongoing professional development that supports both current and future practitioners.



Through the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation, donor generosity is a driving force behind innovation and excellence in care. Your generosity enables the team to expand clinical expertise, respond to the increasingly complex needs of patients, and advance psychosocial care at the Stollery. Because of this support, Child Life specialists are not only maintaining best practices but pushing them forward, encouraging innovation, strengthening advocacy, and meaningfully improving the patient and family experience.

We'd like to thank all
of our donors and
the Stollery
Children's Hospital
Foundation for their
generous support.

