

## **Fresh Start to School 2016**

### **Fresh Start to School**

**Contact: Rita Aman, Alberta Health Services (on behalf of the planning committee)**  
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**WHEN:** August 24, 2016

**WHERE:** St Mary's school gymnasium 11:00am – 7:00pm

**WHAT:** community collaboration at its finest. Fresh Start to School (FS2S) focuses on wellness, providing valuable resources to families, helping to ease the financial burden of the back to school season. Families will also be connected to a wide range of health, safety, social and recreational resources that they may not be affiliated with. Organizations that attend look to improve, enhance or maintain the health, wellness and safety of the families in attendance. Fresh Start to School offers families an opportunity to access a wide range of health services and community based services that support children and youth. The following Alberta Health Services (AHS) will be represented: Population Health, Oral Health, Public Health Nursing, Addictions and Mental Health, Healthy Children and Youth, and more. The following community service providers will be in attendance: McMann Youth and Family Services, Bridges Family Programs, Saamis Immigration, Medicine Hat Catholic School Board, the Food Bank, Medicine Hat YMCA, City of Medicine Hat and more. The event is intended to provide families with access to wrap around services that help them form a network of support in preparation for the new school year and beyond.

Back to School is very stressful for children, youth and families. There is added financial burden and often feelings of despair when parents are not able to provide their children with basic back to school necessities. Items such as personal hygiene products, lunch kits, haircuts, clothing, and shoes are essential for school readiness and social inclusion. The families that are served by FS2S need a helping hand to gather resources and get connected to organizations and community services that provide a positive start to the school year. Being fully equipped for back-to-school excites children and helps to create positive social interactions; in turn teachers notice positive self-esteem and improved school performance.

The children and youth that will be invited to participate in this event are the most vulnerable and without community support and have barriers to access the provided supplies and services. Targeted families will be referred by local community agencies and schools. In 2015 referrals came from many sources, the majority from Saamis Immigration, City Community Workers, Bridges Program, Home Visitation (Best Babies/Building Blocks) and Child and Family Services. The current economic climate dictates that FS2S will need to target 300 preselected children and youth in 2016. The need is great and continues to grow. It is expected that word of mouth will be a powerful tool in 2016, leading to greater investment from referring agencies.

