

Vinni Makes History

The first robotic thoracic surgery
in BC right here at KGH

The New Head of Pediatrics

Dr. Jeff Wong was drawn to
Kelowna to make a difference

Parade with a Purpose

From three floats to a
six-figure impact

Winter 2026

aspire

Today's Stories, Tomorrow's Care.

Where It Matters Most

Why strengthening KGH's
Emergency Department
is critical



KGHFOUNDATION

Contents

-
- 03** **Where it matters most**
Why strengthening KGH's Emergency Department is critical
-
- 07** **Meet the new head of Pediatrics**
Dr. Jeff Wong was drawn to Kelowna to make a difference
-
- 09** **Vinni makes history**
The first robotic thoracic surgery in BC right here at KGH
-
- 11** **Re-writing the story**
Innovation and the future of health care in the BC Southern Interior
-
- 12** **Remembering Rutland Thrift**
A 61-year legacy that continues to make an impact
-
- 13** **Use it or lose it**
Investing in physical literacy as a foundation for lifelong health
-
- 15** **Grinches, elves, cozy girls – Oh my!**
Turning everyday purchases into impact for JoeAnna's House
-
- 16** **Anida's gift**
Her legacy lives on in a space for those undergoing chemotherapy
-
- 17** **Parade with a Purpose**
From three floats to six-figure impact

We humbly recognize and acknowledge that Kelowna General Hospital (KGH) and the KGH Foundation operate on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of Syilx Okanagan Peoples.

Thanks to our contributors for their work on Aspire.
Cover & Select Inner Photography: Darren Hull
Graphic Design & Illustration (page 12): Natasha Alfred

A letter from the CEO



Because dreaming big doesn't mean your head is in the clouds.

With the new year comes a new look and feel for our newsletter. After much thoughtful conversation, we have renamed it *Aspire*. For me, it is the perfect reflection of where we are today and where we are headed as a Foundation.

Aspire. It is a small word that carries enormous intention.

Aspiring asks us to ground ourselves even more fully in the present so that we can take meaningful steps toward a future we believe is worth building. It invites us to hold two truths at once: that the challenges in health care are very real, and that our collective capacity to spark positive change is just as real.

Through *Aspire*, we will share the stories of today – the people, progress, and impact already happening – alongside the vision guiding our future. Both matter. Together, they help us understand what is needed now and where we are headed, reminding us that the actions we take today shape the future of care we aspire to build.

Many times over this past year, I've been moved by conversations that reflect those moments where vision meets courage, and where hope takes shape through action.

I think of the privilege I had of spending time with Anida Johnson, story on page 16, in the final days of her life. Anida spoke clearly and beautifully about how she hoped her legacy would impact the future of care. Her aspirations were grounded in gratitude for what already exists, with a belief in a potential still waiting to be unlocked.

I think, too, of Dr. Dimitrios Coutsinos, story on page 12, who recently shared his ambition for KGH to become known nationwide for thoracic robotic surgery and lung cancer treatment. His confidence in this future is not wishful thinking, it's rooted in the progress already made possible through community support for projects like 'Vinni'. He aspires boldly because he sees the path already forming beneath his feet.

When a few colleagues and I first met Dr. Jeff Wong, story on page 8, we left with a genuine sense of hope. His aspirations for the future of pediatric care at KGH, and his deep, evident love for the work, were truly inspiring. One member of our team, a mother of two young children, was so reassured knowing this kind of leader would be shaping pediatric care at KGH that it brought her to tears.

Stories like these remind us that progress always begins with people.

Aspire exists because you are helping to bring these stories to life. Because you believe that progress in health care is not only possible, but worth it. Your generosity keeps us grounded in what matters most, even as we imagine what could be, and helps turn that belief into meaningful change for all who live in the Interior of BC.

So, what does *Aspire* spark for you?

With heartfelt appreciation,

Allison (Allie) Young
Chief Executive Officer
KGH Foundation

Where it matters most

Why strengthening KGH's Emergency Department is critical

Dr. Neil Long is one of the Emergency Physicians advocating for improvements to KGH's emergency department.

"There's an unspoken philosophy on our team: we care deeply, and we always show up. Since opening, our department has never missed a single shift, caring for up to 360 patients a day while maintaining the lowest 'left without being seen' rate in the province by far. I'm incredibly proud of our team, these improvements will help us do what we do best, even better."



This spring, as the final commitment in the KGH Foundation's \$40 million *Closer to Home Than You Think* campaign, we are aiming to raise \$2.5 million to support the incredible teams in the KGH Emergency Department – a critical step in revitalizing and strengthening a department that all of us rely on in times of crisis.

It's hard to believe it's been almost 10 years since we first met Marissa. A lot can happen in that time. Back then, she was a shy teenager from Penticton with a heart for adventure and animals. Today, she is a confident young woman – a vet tech, newlywed, world-traveller and enthusiastic dog mom.

It's a future she almost didn't have.

"It was just another normal day," recalls Marissa. The 15-year-old and her new boyfriend had ventured out with some family and friends for an ATV ride on Apex Mountain. But things took a turn when a tree became lodged in the wheel well. It came up under the door of the ATV, impaling Marissa through her stomach and out her back, pinning her body to the seat. When the response team was able to reach her in the remote location, they could not remove the log from her torso as it was too risky. They had to carefully saw it at the front and the back so they could move Marissa with the tree still intact within her body. They could then fly her suspended from a helicopter to a safe location where they loaded her into an air ambulance and rushed her to Kelowna General Hospital (KGH).

Across British Columbia, a handful of hospitals play a defining role in their region. KGH is one of them. From trauma care to stroke response, to complex medical emergencies, KGH is a primary access point for life-saving intervention for patients and families across the Central Okanagan and the broader Southern Interior. As one of only two tertiary referral hospitals in the region—and its primary teaching hospital—KGH is a vital hub for acute and specialty medicine. At its core is the Emergency Department (ED), providing 24/7 assessment, stabilization, and life-saving treatment for people like Marissa facing sudden, serious illness or injury.

One of KGH's long-standing ED physicians and former Executive Medical Director for Interior Health Central, Dr. Mike Ertel, happened to be on shift that fateful day when Marissa arrived.

"It's a day I don't think any of us who were involved will ever forget," says Dr. Ertel. "We pulled back the blankets and... this was a 15-year-old girl with a tree through her abdomen. There was a moment of silence. You could've heard a pin drop. And then we just got to work."

Thanks to the incredible care Marissa received that day, and in the days and weeks following, she is the thriving young woman she is today.

Marissa's story is remarkable. However, on some level, many of us can relate. A trip to the Emergency Department is never planned and, as patients and families, these can be some of the scariest moments we will face. In those moments, nothing else matters other than knowing you have access to the best care possible.

"They were there for me when I needed them, and now they need us. I would do anything to help the people and the hospital that made all of this possible for me."

Marissa

Today, KGH is experiencing record pressure on its ED as the region's population grows and the demand for acute, unscheduled care continues to rise. KGH now manages some of the highest emergency volumes in British Columbia, ranking second only to Surrey Memorial. This means KGH sees more emergency patients than large urban hospitals such as Vancouver General and St. Paul's. In the 2024/25 fiscal year, the ED recorded 101,089 emergency visits, up from 95,022 the previous year, a significant year-over-year increase.



Scan the QR code to watch Marissa's story

We are aiming to raise
\$2.5 million
 to support the incredible
 teams and patients in the
 KGH Emergency Department

This pressure reflects not only local growth but KGH's regional role. Patients like Marissa arrive from communities across the Southern Interior, often transported by road or air ambulance for trauma, cardiac events, stroke, and other time-sensitive emergencies. Reduced access to family medicine and the closure of walk-in clinics have further increased reliance on emergency care.

Nearly three quarters (74.6%) of ED visits fall into the "emergent/urgent" category requiring timely attention and intervention. Despite rising demand, the KGH ED continues to perform exceptionally with both the lowest "Left Without Being Seen" (LWBS) percentage, and the second quickest "Time to Physician Initial Assessment" (T PIA) in the province for the last fiscal year.

The current ED, located in the Centennial building, opened in 2012. Fourteen years later, volume, acuity, and population growth have exceeded what the existing layout was designed to support. Triage, waiting spaces, diagnostic points, and patient registration are operating beyond capacity. These constraints affect flow, clinician efficiency, and the ability to compassionately manage high-volume surges.

"Every day, we care for patients facing some of the most frightening moments of their lives," shares Dr. Long. "In a fast-paced environment that helps thousands of people each year, efficiency isn't just helpful, it's essential. These updates will help us work faster and more effectively in a place where seconds can change outcomes."

The care Marissa received in the ED, care so many of our loved ones and friends have also relied on, not only saved her life. It gave her a future: the opportunity to work with animals, travel across the world, and marry Austin, the boy who was with her that day on the mountain.



Dr. Mike Ertel and Marissa back in 2017



Planned Upgrades

Additional triage stations

Allowing patients to be assessed more quickly on arrival, reducing time to diagnosis and treatment and overall time in the department which will reduce congestion and improve flow.

New patient registration area

Updated to streamline check-in and support safer, more efficient interactions for patients and staff.

Redesigned waiting room

Refreshed layout and new furnishings will improve comfort, visibility, and patient monitoring.

Culturally welcoming design

Inclusive design elements that incorporate different languages and a new mural will create a welcoming and respectful space for all patients who need to access the Emergency Department.



Marissa and her husband, Austin, on their wedding day



38

Emergency Department Physicians at KGH

Emergency department visits rose to

101,089

in 2024/2025, up from 95,022 the previous year

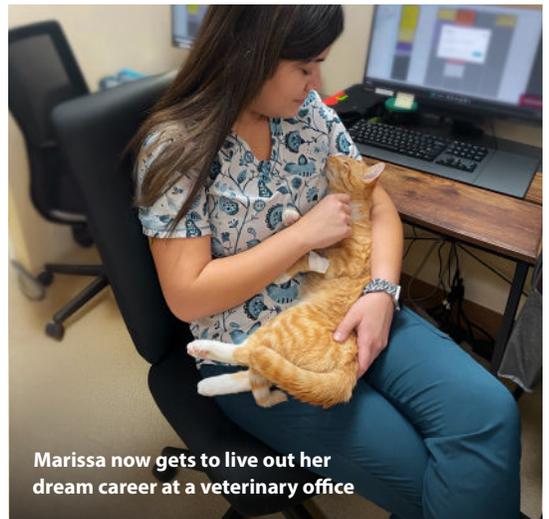
2nd

busiest Emergency Department in BC*

*In the 2024/25 fiscal year



Dr. Jared Baylis
Emergency Physician



Marissa now gets to live out her dream career at a veterinary office



“Seeing firsthand the added burden of having to leave their communities was a clear signal to me. I wanted to be part of the solution.”

Dr. Jeff Wong
Physician | Head of Pediatrics at KGH

Meet the new head of Pediatrics

Dr. Jeff Wong was drawn to Kelowna to make a difference

Across the country, stories of doctor shortages and the strain they place on families and health-care teams have been plentiful. What those headlines often miss, however, is what happens next; how communities come together, clinicians step forward, and a shared resolve emerges to find solutions.

Last May, families in the Central Okanagan experienced the reality behind those

stories when the pediatric unit at Kelowna General Hospital temporarily closed. For parents, it meant making difficult decisions and, in some cases, travelling to BC Children’s Hospital in Vancouver in order for their children to receive care.

Through it all, our local nurses, physicians, and administrative teams showed extraordinary dedication under challenging circumstances. The experience reinforced

something families and clinicians already know to be true: having access to pediatric care close to home matters deeply.

During that same period, Dr. Jeff Wong was working as a locum physician at BC Children’s Hospital, where he met families who had travelled from the Okanagan and Interior.

“I really felt for those families,” recalls Dr.

Wong. "Seeing firsthand the added burden of having to leave their communities was a clear signal to me. I wanted to be part of the solution."

That desire ultimately led Dr. Wong to accept the role of Department Head of Pediatrics at KGH in September. A pediatrician with a subspecialty in respirology, he brings a depth of experience shaped by work in large urban health-care centres. His career includes helping establish the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) at Hong Kong Children's Hospital, holding an academic post in Halifax, and most recently practicing at BC Children's Hospital.

For families across the Central Okanagan, KGH is the place they turn to when a child is sick. As a tertiary referral hospital, KGH pediatricians also manage and coordinate care for some of the region's more complex pediatric cases, often working closely with BC Children's Hospital when



highly specialized services are required. This integrated approach helps ensure children receive the right level of care, at the right time, while keeping families as close to home as possible.

It's work that demands a unique combination of strong communication, adaptability, and clinical expertise—the kind of superpowers essential to pediatric care at KGH.



"These aren't things you learn in medical school," says Dr. Wong. "It's a combination of experience, communication, clinical judgement, and the ability to tailor care to each individual patient."

It was a challenge Dr. Wong was ready to take on. Having previously visited the Okanagan, he and his family were eager to return to a region they love. While the beauty of the Okanagan made the move appealing, it was the patients and families that truly called him here. As a father of two, this mission is deeply personal.

"That's why I feel so strongly that it's important to rebuild and regain the trust from the community. It's because I'm a father, as well as a pediatrician. That's the main calling for me to take this leadership role," he shares.

In the wake of the temporary closure this summer, the health authority's recruitment strategies, some of which were funded by KGH Foundation donors, have successfully resulted in five additional pediatricians joining the team at KGH, in addition to Dr. Wong.

Looking ahead, Dr. Wong sees a much brighter future for pediatric care at KGH, one that includes improved accessibility, expanded services, and the growth of subspecialty care, including the long-term goal of one day having a pediatric intensive care unit in the region. Above all, his focus remains on families.

"I am excited. We are expanding," shares Wong. "We are redefining ourselves as a team, and everyone is committed to providing continued and uninterrupted service for the region. We are here to provide the best care for the kids—there's no doubt about it."



At a glance

10
Inpatient beds supporting pediatric care at KGH

13%
Of emergency visits were children and youth aged 0-17*

6
Pediatricians recruited to KGH since services were restored

[Listen Now](#)



Get to know Dr. Wong beyond the practice on the w(healthy) Podcast

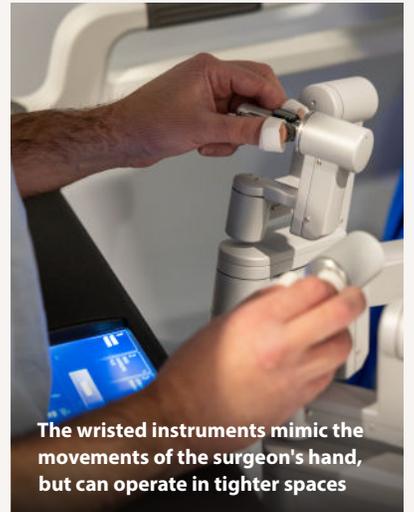
*Source: KGH Facility Profile 2023/2024



Dr. Coutsinos at the console where he uses his feet and hands to maneuver Vinni's instrumented wands as they perform the surgery

“This is monumental for our province, for KGH, but most importantly, for people like Doug and his family.”

Dr. Dimitrios Coutsinos



The wristed instruments mimic the movements of the surgeon's hand, but can operate in tighter spaces



Vinni makes history

The first robotic thoracic surgery in BC right here at KGH

On November 13, 2025, history was made at Kelowna General Hospital when Dr. Dimitrios Coutsinos performed British Columbia's first-ever robotic thoracic surgery using Vinni, KGH's new robotic-assisted system (RAS). Thanks to \$6 million raised through the Foundation's *Closer to Home Than You Think* campaign, donor generosity made the acquisition of Vinni possible.

Around the province, there are a handful of RAS systems being utilized by surgeons, but not like this.

Thoracic surgeries include those taking place in the chest, often involving the lungs, esophagus, trachea, and more. They are often more complex and delicate as the surgeon is working in very close proximity to the heart, lungs, and vital arteries.

Doug Beaver learned about this firsthand, when the Kamloops retiree was diagnosed with a growth and told he would need his thymus gland removed. The thymus sits high in the chest, in front of the heart and nestled between the lungs. Traditionally, removing it requires either an open-chest surgery with a long, six- to eight-week recovery, or a video-assisted thoracoscopic procedure that offers surgeons only a two-dimensional view and limited precision.

When Doug's doctor in Kamloops suggested waiting a little longer for RAS to become available at KGH, he was intrigued by the possibility of a better option.

That option became reality thanks to Dr. Dimitrios Coutsinos.

After previously helping develop the renowned robotics program at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon, Dr. Coutsinos was drawn to KGH specifically to help

launch KGH's new robotics program. As an experienced thoracic surgeon who has seen firsthand how RAS can improve precision, reduce recovery time, and optimize patient outcomes for a variety of surgeries, Dr. Coutsinos was ready.

And so, Vinni, Doug, Dr. Coutsinos, and a large surgical team were in the OR together the day that established KGH as a leader in the province in thoracic surgery.

But beyond this historic moment, a beloved grandpa and husband was able to return home faster because of this technology. Technology made possible by generous donors like you.

"It all went so well, I can't believe how fast I've healed. It's incredible that the community made this robot possible, and I had no idea that I was the first in BC to receive this kind of surgery. I could not be more grateful, this technology will help so many people, and it will help the entire system as patients heal and return home so much faster."

Doug Beaver

When Doug returned home after surgery, although he was still sore, he was thrilled to be home with his wife, Penny. A month after his surgery, he was feeling better, meeting friends for coffee, and able to play with his granddaughters. But he realizes how different his healing journey could have been without RAS.

"I was recovering from just three small incisions on my side," Doug shares. "They were nothing compared to the long line the team had drawn down my chest in case they had to open me up. Every time I saw that line, I was reminded of how lucky I was to have the robotic assisted surgery. And how different my story could have been."



Doug Beaver at KGH in November 2025





Re-writing the story

Innovation and the future of health care in the BC Southern Interior

Story by **Dr. Dimitrios Coutsinos** | MD PhD FRCS(C), Robotic and Minimally Invasive Thoracic Surgeon, KGH

KGH thoracic surgeon, Dr. Dimitrios Coutsinos, reflects on innovation, pivotal career moments, and what it means to aspire in health care today.

I'll never forget the very first robotic lobectomy I performed. The surgery went so smoothly that when I checked on the patient the following morning, he smiled as he was getting ready for discharge and asked, 'Doc, did I break the record?' He meant the record for the shortest hospital stay after a lobectomy. At the time, I chuckled and told him I wasn't sure, but he would certainly be close. Later, when I looked back, he had indeed set the record. He went home the very next morning, something that would have been very rare with traditional techniques. When his final pathology confirmed we had effectively cured his lung cancer, we shared a moment of profound gratitude and hope. That experience reminded me why innovation matters: it changes lives in ways that words can barely capture.

Looking back, the progress in thoracic surgery has been remarkable. Not long ago, major procedures meant large incisions, significant pain, and weeks of recovery. Today, thanks to advances

in robotics and minimally invasive techniques, we are rewriting that story. Performing the first robotic thoracic surgeries in British Columbia was not just a milestone, it was a promise of what's possible when technology and compassion come together.

Right now, extraordinary work is continuing at KGH. We are bringing world-class technology to our region, ensuring patients receive care that equals the best anywhere. Robotic surgery allows us to operate with precision that was unimaginable a decade ago, reducing complications and improving outcomes. These breakthroughs may not make headlines, but they change lives every single day.

What excites me most is the future. In the next five years, I see robotic surgery becoming standard across multiple specialties. In ten years, I envision artificial intelligence guiding surgical planning, predicting complications before they occur, and tailoring procedures to each patient's unique anatomy. And in twenty years? I believe surgery will be profoundly personalized, guided by real-time data, advanced imaging, and innovations we can only begin to imagine.

These possibilities are within reach because of partnerships that fuel progress. Donor support accelerates innovation in ways that cannot be overstated. Every new piece of equipment, every training opportunity, every breakthrough, it all happens because people of the Okanagan believe in what's possible and choose to invest in their community. That belief turns vision into reality.

As a surgeon, I am deeply committed to advancing care for our patients. Progress is never the work of one person alone. It is a shared effort, a collaboration between healthcare workers, researchers, engineers, and the generous individuals who make innovation possible. Together, we are shaping a future where patients in our region receive the best care possible. One robot has opened the door; additional systems will ensure that more patients benefit from this level of care without delay.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Your support inspires us to push boundaries, embrace new ideas, and never stop striving for better. The future is bright, and with your partnership, we will continue to lead the way.

Remembering Rutland Thrift

A 61-year legacy that continues to make an impact

Story by **Nancy Wells** | KGH Foundation Employee for 18 incredible and impactful years



This past December, Rutland Thrift closed its doors. For more than sixty years, the store served as a central hub of friendship and tradition in one of Kelowna's oldest neighbourhoods. For 15 years, I had the privilege of leading the store's operations and facilitating the volunteer program on behalf of the KGH Foundation.

When I think about Rutland Thrift, I'm struck not only by what was accomplished, but by the spirit in which it was done. There was a time when volunteering was deeply woven into everyday life, a way of showing care for your neighbours and support for those in need. Rutland Thrift was built in that spirit. It reflected a shared understanding that strong communities are created through service.

Rutland Thrift began in 1964, when the Rutland Auxiliary was established by a determined group of nine women who wanted to make a difference. Their enthusiasm quickly caught on, and before long, the Auxiliary was not only operating the thrift shop but also leading a range of community fundraising initiatives, from bake sales and sponsored teas to baseball game concessions and

the 1968 Hospital Ball. All in support of KGH, the local hospital at the heart of the community.

Over the decades, the volunteer team continued to grow, as did the store, its fundraising efforts, and the collective impact of this dedicated group. Across four locations and more than two million volunteer hours, Rutland Thrift raised millions of dollars for KGH. These funds helped support essential equipment needs, including a CT scanner, cardiac monitors, warmers, and so much more.

But for a team with so much heart, the vision extended beyond equipment alone. Rutland Thrift also provided clothing donations to the Emergency Department, offered vouchers for urgent care patients in need, created a youth volunteer program, awarded annual bursaries, and contributed to the establishment of the Uptown Rutland On-Call Safety Team, among many other initiatives. Each act of generosity reflected a simple belief—that caring for one another strengthens the whole community.

In the fall of 2025, the KGH Foundation sold the building that housed the store.

It was an incredibly difficult decision, but the business was no longer financially sustainable.

Rutland Thrift's legacy will continue. Proceeds from the sale are being reinvested directly back into the Rutland community. A \$100,000 grant is supporting the Rutland Community Clinic's new Caring Space, a healing hub offering culturally informed programming, referrals, and case management. Another \$100,000 grant will help purchase a new shuttle for the Seniors Outreach Society, providing older adults with safe, reliable transportation to health programs, helping them stay active, connected, and supported.

The true hallmark of a great legacy is the community it builds and the sense of belonging it leaves behind. In this way, Rutland Thrift will forever be remembered for the connections it created, the stories it held, and the countless lives it touched along the way.

For nearly two decades, Nancy Wells led the operation of Rutland Thrift and facilitated the volunteer program for the KGH Foundation.



Use it or lose it!

Investing in physical literacy as a foundation for lifelong health

We've all heard the saying "use it or lose it." We nod along, assuming we know exactly what it means, stay active, work out, keep moving. And in many ways, that's true. But when it comes to physical literacy, most of us think we understand it... until we stop and really consider what it actually looks like in everyday life.

Physical literacy isn't about running faster, lifting heavier, or excelling at a particular sport. It's about the small, often invisible movements that allow us to move through the world safely and confidently. Hopping over a puddle without hesitation. Catching yourself when you lose your balance. Navigating uneven ground on a trail. These micro-movements rely on coordination, balance, strength, and awareness, and they aren't automatic. They're skills that need to be learned, practiced, refined, and not taken for granted.

Drew Mitchell is the CEO of Sport for Life, a national not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving sport and physical activity by promoting physical literacy. Drew works with governments, schools, recreation, and sport organizations to ensure people of all ages and abilities have access to inclusive, positive movement and sport opportunities throughout their lives.

As our lives become more sedentary and our environments more predictable, we use these skills less, and we lose them faster. Everyday activities carry greater risk. Independence shrinks. Injuries become more likely. Physical literacy isn't a "nice to have", it's a vital pillar of health that quietly determines how well we move, adapt, and age.

"The first thing we learn in school are the basics – for literacy it is the A, B, C's and for numeracy it is the 1, 2, 3's. Physical literacy is comprised of the basics that allow a person to move confidently and safely. Fundamental movement skills, hopping, skipping, balance, coordination, agility. Learning and practicing these basics is vital."

Drew Mitchell

Supporting this kind of foundational health is central to Thrive Okanagan, a donor-funded KGH Foundation initiative focused on prevention-based solutions to mental health and wellbeing challenges. By bringing community leaders together around one collaborative table, Thrive Okanagan works to break down silos, identify shared priorities, and support work already happening across our region.

This work is being done through facilitation and convening by a Community Catalyst.

One of the priorities identified by the Thrive community is the declining physical literacy of children. A combination of factors, including reduced outdoor play, limited school program funding, time constraints on parents and educators, and the rising cost of extracurricular activities, has contributed to a steady erosion of basic movement skills at a young age.

As conversations deepened and momentum grew, it became clear that Thrive Okanagan needed to take the next step. The result was the formation of a Physical Literacy Working Group, focused on co-designing practical strategies to integrate movement and play into everyday settings such as schools, parks, workplaces, and beyond.

Now, the Physical Literacy Working Group meets regularly to identify gaps and co-create solutions to introduce these skills early in life, with a clear goal: to build a generation of physically literate adults who are healthier, more confident movers who are less likely to rely on hospital care later in life. Drew has been highly involved with this Working Group.

“To develop physical literacy you must be taught the skills. You have to learn the skills, and you have to practice the skills. Right now, we’re not teaching enough, we’re not learning enough, and we’re definitely not practicing enough. And because of that, we have a population that lacks confidence in how they move.”

The work is already gaining traction. The

group is moving from discussion to strategy, and from strategy to real-world solutions. With multiple organizations aligning their efforts, the impact becomes collective, like ships steering in the same direction, creating waves together. By working differently, prioritizing inclusion, and focusing on accessibility, this collaboration has the potential to create meaningful, lasting impact for our community’s

young people.

When we prioritize physical literacy, we don’t just support movement, we strengthen the foundation of community health. This is prevention in action, and it brings us closer to a future where better health begins long before someone ever walks through the doors of a hospital.



It’s the small, often invisible movements that allow us to move through the world safely and confidently.

+ Listen Now



Hear Drew Mitchell,
CEO of Sport for Life, on
the w(healthy) podcast



Drew
Mitchell

+ Watch Now



Explore the importance
of physical literacy with
Thrive Okanagan

Grinches, elves, cozy girls – oh my!

Turning everyday purchases into big impact

Story by **Carly Reuter** | Director of Community Engagement, JoeAnna's House

After two years of JoeAnna's House Winter Wonderland, a beloved community celebration that brought joy and impact to our holiday season, the time came to reimagine the event. As the team began to envision what this new holiday celebration could look like, one question kept coming up: How can JoeAnna's House give back to the community that gives so much to our families every single day?

From that question, the Winter Wonderland Wish List was born. Instead of one big event, we created a month-long celebration inviting the community to support local businesses while also supporting JoeAnna's House. The idea was simple and fun: shop, sip, dine, move, and celebrate locally—and a portion of sales would provide support for families facing some of life's hardest days.

What made the Wish List especially meaningful was how naturally it fit into people's lives. By grabbing coffee with a friend, trying a workout class, or picking up a cozy gift, generosity was simply woven into everyday routines.

And then came the storytelling, which might have been my favourite part. With the help of our incredible local business

partners, and UNDRdog Media, we brought the Wish List to life through fun Instagram videos. Appearances included KGH Foundation faces like Georgia as "cozy girl", Darwisy as "serious young professional", Mr. Green (the Okanagan Grinch), and even my husband Darryl Reuter as "Buddy the Elf". Each video reflected the unique spirit of the business involved, while sharing a bigger story about showing up for one another.

At JoeAnna's House, connection is everything, between families, staff, volunteers, and the wider community that wraps around them. The Winter Wonderland Wish List reminded us just how much our community and our local business partners care (even getting into character to support our cause). And for the families who stay with us, generosity means more comfort and the reassurance that they are not facing their journey alone.

This year, you raised

\$76,000+

and together, we found a new way
to welcome the holiday season

Community partners who made it possible

- Analog Coffee
- Basis Medical Aesthetics
- BLKBOX
- Castanet
- Cristalina Parc
- Crowe MacKay
- Current Taxi
- Deville Coffee
- The Fat Marmot (at Big White)
- Lagree Kelowna
- Mid-town Station Kitchen + Drink
- Montana's BBQ & Bar
- Morso
- Pattison Media (The Beach 103.1, OV 103.9, & 104.7 The Lizard)
- Prestige Hotels & Resorts
- Pretty Not Bad
- Reuter Kotler Real Estate Team
- Red Bird Roasting
- Save-On-Foods
- Sunny Space Studio
- Tim Hortons
- Vice & Virtue Brewing Co.

 **JoeAnna's
House**



Anida's gift

Her legacy lives on in a space for those undergoing chemotherapy

On June 25, 2025, Anida Johnson, a long-time friend of the KGH Foundation and supporter of health care at Kelowna General Hospital, took her last breath. A 'never-smoker', Anida passed from lung cancer, but not before she left a gift in her will to help others in our community facing a similar struggle.

Anida Johnson made Kelowna her home more than twenty years ago. She embraced life with curiosity, enthusiasm and deep appreciation for the world around her. To all who knew her, she embodied wellness and vitality, making her lung cancer diagnosis even more difficult to understand.

Guided by a shared desire to turn loss into lasting good, Anida and her husband, Mark, knew they wanted to create meaningful change at KGH.

“We wanted to find a way to help as many people as possible. We chose to support health care because it touches all of us, from birth until our last breath.”

Mark Johnson

Today, their generosity lives on through Anida's Room, a dedicated treatment space that stands as a tribute to Anida's life and has already made a profound difference for patients and care teams at KGH.

Having opened this past fall, Anida's Room is already transforming care for patients undergoing chemotherapy across KGH. Designed with safety, comfort, and dignity at its core, the space allows therapy nurses to safely administer cancer treatments for inpatients, direct admissions, patients from medical and surgical units, and those coming from the ambulatory care clinic.

By enabling close patient monitoring, immediate access to specialized equipment, and a more streamlined flow of care, Anida's Room is reducing delays and easing pressure on care teams. The impact of Anida and Mark's generosity is already being felt—helping ensure patients receive the treatments they need, when they need them, while supporting practitioners to deliver the

best possible care.

Anida's generosity will continue to shine through this space. In Anida's Room, her legacy can be felt in moments of calm and in the quiet relief that comes when care is delivered with dignity and compassion. She is deeply missed by all who loved her and had the privilege of knowing her. Yet through her gift, Anida's life continues to bring comfort to others, transforming loss into healing and offering a sense of peace when it is needed most.

Anida's Room

*Let the rays of the sun
bring warmth & happiness
and the love from above bring
us healing power & peace*

Supported by
Anida and Mark Johnson

KGHFUNDATION

Parade With a Purpose

From three floats to a six-figure impact

On a crisp December evening, Bernard Avenue transformed into something magical. Hundreds of families had bundled up, claiming their spots along the curb with eyes fixed down the street, waiting for the first sign of movement. Just after 6 pm, the lead float started forward and Kelowna's fifth annual Parade with a Purpose, presented by Rite-Way Fencing, officially began.

Thirty-six floats filled the downtown core with music, movement, and holiday cheer. Marching bands and dance troupes brought rhythm to the street. Santa and the Grinch made their appearances. A holiday train chugged along. A helicopter, minions, firetrucks, and more, made their way down the procession.

Although Parade with a Purpose is now a grand production, with countless community members and organizations supporting its success, the event's roots are humble. Founded five years ago by mother-daughter duo Pam Turgeon

and Shadia Doty, the event began as a neighbourhood parade with just three floats. Their vision was to bring people together and use the joy of the season to raise funds for youth mental health services.

It was after the loss of Pam's son and Shadia's brother, Ryan, and Shadia's husband, Cody, that the women were motivated to channel their grief into purpose.

"There's a gap that needs to be addressed when it comes to mental health. It's our hope that by investing in youth mental health services, it will have a trickle-down effect, preventing tragedies before they occur."

Shadia Doty

And the Parade has had remarkable results, with the 2025 parade raising over \$170,000 for mental health care initiatives in our community through

the KGH Foundation. All proceeds from the parade will support tangible, local solutions including: the expansion of CMHA Kelowna Foundry services into West Kelowna; a second Integrated Health Outreach Team (IHOT) Mobile Clinic Van; and CMHA Kelowna's Georgia's Wish which creates safe spaces for open, compassionate conversations about mental health.

As the last float cleared Bernard Avenue, and the crowd dispersed, the impact of the evening was only just beginning. More than just a seasonal celebration, Parade with a Purpose represents the community choosing to invest in local mental health care. The funds raised will translate into expanded services, greater access, and meaningful support for people across our region. Long after the holiday season, the magic of the event will continue to show up where it matters most.



\$170,222

Raised for mental health care in 2025



36

Parade floats participated



67

Event volunteers made it all happen



173

Donors gave to make an impact

Big Cash Prize. Big Impact for Health in BC.

Purchase your
tickets today

HeartofBC.ca



BC Gaming Licence #166661