

**News Release**  
For immediate release

**May 30, 2016**

## **Zebra Child Protection Centre officially welcomes third facility dog**

*Fletcher fetches positive outcomes of support for children and families*

**EDMONTON, AB** – On Sunday, May 29, the Zebra Child Protection Centre’s third facility dog, Fletcher, officially graduated from the Dogs with Wings victim services program. As part of the Zebra Centre’s Very Important Paws (VIP) Program, Fletcher will join existing canine employees Wren and Fossey to lend support to children within the Centre, during their forensic interviews and to help them navigate the judicial process at the Edmonton Law Courts.

*“The prospect of sharing their stories at our Centre and testifying in court can be overwhelming for a child,” said Bob Hassel, CEO, Zebra Child Protection Centre. “Having the silent and non-judgmental comfort of a dog can give a child the confidence and security to disclose their experiences of abuse,” said Hassel. “Fletcher along with the other facility dogs at the Zebra Centre play a vital role in providing support to children throughout the entire disclosure, judicial and healing process.”*

Following two years of victim services training facilitated through the Edmonton-based [Dogs with Wings](#) Assistance Dog Society, Fletcher, a Yellow Lab, arrived at the Zebra Child Protection Centre in November of 2015. In his role, Fletcher will primarily support children and their non-offending caregivers within the child-friendly waiting rooms at the Edmonton Law Courts and on the stand as they testify against the accused. In his first six months of employment at the Zebra Centre, Fletcher has assisted in 62 court preparations, accompanied 66 children to court and sat with 34 children on the stand in Provincial Court and the Court of Queen’s Bench.

*“Dogs with Wings is pleased to partner with Zebra Child Protection Centre, as we see the missions of our two organizations as closely aligned,” said Dogs with Wings Executive Director, John Wheelwright. “For 20 years, Dogs with Wings has been providing highly-skilled assistance dogs to Albertans who rely on them to improve their quality of life,” said Wheelwright. “We know that Fletcher will assist countless children and families to overcome their challenges.”*

Fletcher’s position and the Very Important Paws Program are funded in part by the Rotary Club of Edmonton Urban Spirits.

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**Did you know?** Out of 16 Dogs with Wings Class of 2016 graduates, Fletcher is father to seven!

### **About Zebra Child Protection Centre's Very Important Paws (VIP) Program**

Since 2013, the VIP Program at the Zebra Child Protection Centre has utilized specially trained dogs to assist in alleviating the trauma of children who have experienced abuse. In spring of 2015, Zebra Centre's Wren made history as the first facility dog allowed on the stand in an Edmonton courtroom to support a child giving testimony. Combined, Wren, Fossey and Fletcher have accompanied 44 children on the stand in Provincial Court and the Court of Queen's Bench since March of 2015.

### **About Dogs with Wings**

Formed in 1996, Dogs with Wings began providing guide dogs to Alberta's sight impaired. Our service dog program was added in 2003 and shortly after, our autism program. 2013 saw our first victim service dog and three years later, we have six dogs placed across the province. Dogs with Wings' mission is to increase integration and independence for Albertans living with special needs.

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*Founded in 2002, The Zebra Child Protection Centre is a non-profit, community based organization that was established to improve the lives of children who have suffered abuse. As the first Child Advocacy Centre of its kind in Canada, the Zebra Centre's model was revolutionary - bring together a community of professionals under one roof to support the child throughout the entire disclosure, investigative, judicial and healing process. Today, the Zebra Centre leads the way in continuing to providing a safe and child-friendly space where kids can tell. For more information, please visit our [website](#).*

Learn more about the #KidsCanTell story by following us on social media:



**Due to Fletcher's busy working schedule at the Zebra Centre and Edmonton Law Courts, interviews cannot be accommodated until Wednesday, June 1.**

### **Media Contacts**

#### **Lauren Andrews**

Communications Specialist  
Zebra Child Protection Centre  
Direct: 780.391.4219  
Cell: 780.886.3495  
Email: [lauren.andrews@zebracentre.ca](mailto:lauren.andrews@zebracentre.ca)

#### **John Wheelwright**

Executive Director  
Dogs with Wings Assistance Dog Society  
Direct: 780.944.8011  
Email: [johnw@dogswithwings.ca](mailto:johnw@dogswithwings.ca)