

Community art project brings families together



By Nate Smelle

Continuing their work in bringing families closer together the North Hastings Children's Services (NHCS) celebrated the Family Day weekend at the Bancroft Legion with their first-ever community art project. The project entitled "A Piece of You", was held on Saturday, Feb. 14 between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Participants were encouraged to express what North Hastings meant to them by painting a one-of-a-kind puzzle piece with family members.

The project was made possible through the "Our Shared Commitment" program, which began back in October 2014 after receiving \$70,000 in funding from the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services Safer Vital Communities grant.

This two-tier program, which involves families and young children collaborating with professionals from a variety of disciplines, looks to provide opportunity to children and families through better access to technology, nutrition, literacy, arts and music.

"The HPE Children and Youth Services Network have identified food insecurity and children developmentally at risk as the top two concerns facing the children and youth in our community," said NHCS executive director Jessica Anderson.

"Children here consistently have higher levels of developmental risk and have the highest or second highest level of food insecurity in Ontario."

The next two years the program hopes to recruit and employ 20 youth to form the North Hastings Youth Advisory Board (YAB). The project aims to engage a minimum of 120 youth in the community along with their families through such programs.

"The goal is to reduce crime and for the youth to reclaim spaces, so everyone can take ownership of our community," said NHCS program coordinator Sarah Phoenix.

"These types of programs have been proven to reduce mental health issues, improve community safety and well-being. It's also important that they feel included and empowered to make a difference."

Once the puzzle painting is completed NHCS intends to display the artwork of prominent location in Bancroft.

Working on his own puzzle piece at a table with Bancroft's Mayor Bernice Jenkins and CAO Hazel Lambe was YAB member Sam Riedl. At 14 years old he is already eager to get involved in making the community he calls home a better place to live for all.

"We're going to be doing a number of workshops and I am really excited about the idea of learning new things," said Riedl.

"It's the main reason I joined this group. It's something I really believe I want to do the rest of my life is learn every day. At the risk of sounding cliché knowledge is power."

Mayor Jenkins agreed with Ridel. She also sees value in bringing families together through creative community collaborations.

?By bringing people together it causes a conversation to happen,? Jenkins said.

?From there we can work together to make things better. So often we think we can fix things from the top down when really we need to start in our own communities.?

YAB's next big project in conjunction with the NHCS is the North Hastings Has Talent competition at the Village Playhouse in Bancroft on Mar. 13 and Mar. 14. Registration is free and all ages are welcome.

Musical talent videos and applications must be submitted by Mar. 5. For more information visit: www.nhcs.ca.