

Grounded Warrior Men's Group kicks off new season



By Bill Kilpatrick

On Sept. 28 the Grounded Warrior Men's Group gathered behind the Child and Youth Hub to catch up with each other after the summer break, enjoy some pizza and drinks and learn how to process a moose hide. The group, that was begun by Scott Adams and Trevor Pierce in 2021, is described on the North Hastings Children Services web page as "once-a-month Indigenous based men's group that encourages learning new tools and strategies to gain knowledge in maintaining positive family & community relationships. Our focus is providing supports for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous men in our community encouraging healthy self-esteems and building friendships in a safe non-judgmental environment based on balance from the Medicine Wheel Teachings." Zenon Hunter, one of the group leaders, began the evening with some community drumming followed by a meal. At this point Hunter gave some history of the hunting practices of the Algonquins along with leading a discussion regarding what a moose hide would be used for. Hunter explained the drying practice for a moose hide in order to ensure that the hide is processed properly and then gave a demonstration of the tools that were to be used by those present in order to remove the meat and fur to expose the membrane of the hide. Once the demonstration was over it was time for the group to try out the tools. Doing activities such as processing a moose hide, Hunter explained, is like a form of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, that opens up a space for young men and older men as well to make connections, learn new skills, all while completing a task. The Canadian Centre for Addictions and Mental health defines Cognitive Behaviour Therapy as, "a structured, time-limited, problem-focused and goal-oriented form of psychotherapy. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy helps people learn to identify, question and change how their thoughts, attitudes and beliefs relate to the emotional and behavioural reactions that cause them difficulty." For Hunter, the group allows this kind of change to occur, as it provides a very different context for what it means to be a "man" as it is a chance for younger men to interact in a

different environment and in a different way than they might if they were just hanging out at the skate park. "Young people come here and they understand that this is a place where you're not going to come and act like a 'tough guy,'" says Hunter adding that while the group is easy going and accepting there is zero tolerance for violence and aggression. The leaders and the other group members, adds Hunter, have created an environment where the youth feel respected and in turn show respect to others in the group. And despite the group being called Grounded Warriors men's group, Hunter wants to remind people that everyone is welcome in the space. "If someone has a girlfriend, [they can] come and hang out and watch what's going on," says Hunter adding that he does not ever want someone to feel left out. Adams says that when he came to the Bancroft area five years ago he noticed that there were no men's groups and specifically no Indigenous men's groups and so he decided that had to change. When the group first began, says Adams, they initially wanted to use it to identify Indigenous men in the area and help them learn some traditional teaching and reconnect with their culture, but now the group has expanded to allow both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. At first, Adams explained, we did a lot of drumming and some counselling as well, but as the group continued the men wanted to do more intense activities such as skinning, going into the woods to do medicine hunting, and learning to start a fire using flint rocks. The group, according to Adams, brings together people who might otherwise have never crossed paths and by participating in similar activities and overcoming adversity together a bond is created which has positive effects like creating empathy and preventing bullying in other environments such as school. Shane Finigan is another non-Indigenous leader and supporter of the men's group who enjoys the connections that the group provides along with the cultural learning and acceptance that is fostered within the group. Finigan, who has many years of experience as a scout leader and as an instructor for the marital arts, says that it is rewarding for him to see the sense of accomplishment and pride when young people have created things like moose calls, rattles, and medallions. For others, like Keith Lake, who has been bringing his son Keith Lake Jr. out to the group since last year, the group provides a supportive environment. "I found the drumming really relaxing," says Lake who, has been using the group to help process the grief that he and his son have been experiencing since the loss of his daughter Kathleen to cancer earlier in the year, "It helped, coming here helps."