

## NHCS helping families prepare for September



A child sorts counters into coloured mason jars using tongs at the school readiness program. This will help her develop problem solving, fine motor and counting skills before she starts school in September. / SUBMITTED

**By Sarah Sobanski**

North Hastings Children's Services is helping preschoolers prepare for their first day of school.

Children's Services has brought back its school readiness program for the second year in a row but in a different format. Coming of school age children and their parents can attend to get an idea of what to expect in the fall.

"This program is about helping children and families get ready for that transition into school, sometimes that can be a scary thing. Having them come to our program will help them prepare for that drop off in September," said program co-ordinator and registered early childhood educator for Children's Services Nicole Beaudin.

The free program now runs an hour every Wednesday until June in the York River Public School Library. It started the second week of February.

"[It's] whatever fits [parents'] schedule[s]," said Beaudin. She explained parents don't have to have started the first week of the program or attend every week until it's finished. They should consider the development needs of their children and what works best for them.

"It's something they should plan to come every week just if they're having problems with socialization before starting school. We have a few success stories from last year's school readiness that they're transition this year was a breeze."

The program is designed to help socialize children and help them acclimatize to the busy buzz of school. It also helps them develop their independence including a school tour with the children but without their parents.

"You walk into the library? [and] we have stations set up for the children to walk around and explore," said Beaudin, explaining the stations are modeled after kindergarten curriculum and for play-based learning.

"It's a lot of loose parts [such as playing dough and numbered rocks] and for them to manipulate and get used to numbers, shapes, colours and letters," she said. "The kindergarten teachers also use this curriculum. It's getting them more prepared for what to expect in kindergarten [and] having more of that play based material with the four core foundations of belonging, well-being, expression [and] engagement."

Parents can get answers to questions such as when kindergarten starts, when registration is and what their children will be learning. They can also look at early development evaluations, development support for their children and become acquainted with the programs available for their children, such as those available at Children's Services.

"We're there for that family support piece," said Beaudin. "[We're really focused on] having that easy transition [and] having the families there to have this experience with their child."