

NHCS supporting area youth and families



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By Kristena Schutt-Moore

When North Hastings Children's Services closed its doors on March 18 due to COVID-19 they knew they would have to find a way to continue to support area families. To plan out how they could continue to support area parents, the NHCS leadership team held an online meeting to discuss what they could do. To meet the needs of their families they began to convert their programs to online and phone versions so that families can still get support and youth can still socialize and learn. Currently they are doing weekly online programs. These include Zoom meetings every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. These meetings are open to the public and security measures are put in place. There are several meetings such as Baby and Me which is held several times throughout the week, Coffee and Conversations held first thing Monday mornings so that parents can talk and help each other problem solve and plan, and Guided Drumming Meditation which is open to all family members to connect and relax through meditation, culture and drumming. Currently these programs are used by 70 youth a week and 20 families looking for support. And more families who are new to NHCS's program are starting to participate. "We know that what parents are dealing with right now is very different for a lot of different parents. Some are struggling with working at home full time, and have children at home. So whether they can break up their day with a Zoom play group, to talk with someone, or just let their kids see and play with their friends, we wanted to offer that," says NHCS executive director Jessica Anderson. The NHCS is also providing programs such as their Triple P Parenting program, one-on-one support for families/parents needing advice or assistance, and even offering support for parents who are now home-schooling their children and providing assistance with items as simple as finding paper and school supplies to helping families

find reliable internet by giving proper references so they can easily find the right information during this confusing time. All programs are available through phone or internet so that the programs can be available to all families. NHCS has released a Who to Call document on their Facebook page to help families connect with area organizations and programs. Recently NHCS has received \$15,593 in funding from Hastings County to do psychological first aid with parents. This means that they are able to provide support to parents with everything from basic needs to providing and developing coping skills. These programs are divided into three groups being lead by a member of NHCS's leadership team. Youth and family support manager Sarah Phoenix helps families and children seven years and up, Early ON manager Nicole Beaudin will provide support to families and children six years and under, and Indigenous cultural coordinator Trevor Pearce will provide cultural support to all parents and children. Anderson says that the needs of parents during this time is very diverse, so this funding is to provide tailor-made solutions for families when they are going through a period of stress. The grant is expected to help NHCS provide assistance for roughly the next three months as families work through the new normal caused by COVID-19. NHCS is also working on developing more programs and tools such as Early Learning Kits and Boredom Busters which will become available for area families once planning is complete. The leadership team is also going to start reaching out to area youth about what they need during this time. Anderson says, "We have a lot of new innovative ideas that we are just preparing. We know that right now as spring comes the youth are going to be itching to get out. So now it's going to start getting really difficult." So NHCS is going to start looking for ways to help families to safely stay active as weather warms. "We are asking families and caregivers to reach out and call NHCS staff with whatever problem they may have. And it's not specific to just income, it's not specific to people who are struggling financially. It's also about people who are struggling with the physical distancing, it's about people struggling with parenting, and it's about people struggling with the teaching from home and working from home, [providing] tips and tricks on supporting their children and it's really about just seeing that friend in the room, even though their not in the room, for parents and family to get through it," says Anderson. NHCS is happy with the amount of people reaching out for help but they are also inviting more parents, caregivers and families to reach out. North Hastings Children's Services can be reached through their website www.nhcs.ca, Facebook page or at 613-332-0179.