

North Hastings Children's Services e-xperience Summer Camp coming this summer

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By Michael Riley Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

This summer in North Hastings, the kids are going to be alright. That's because North Hastings Children's Services will be offering a virtual e-xperience Summer Camp for the area's children in lieu of an in-person camp due to COVID-19.

NHCS started back in 1989 when North Hastings Children's Resource Centre and Bancroft Children's Centre joined together. This amalgamation addressed the diverse child care needs of the communities here in North Hastings, and the group has since come to provide quality services and supports to families with kids in North Hastings and has become a trusted resource.

Sarah Phoenix is the youth and family support manager at NHCS, and says that the summer e-xperience camp will start on July 6 and run until Aug. 14. "So, we just confirmed the activities today.

We're going to have virtual fire station tours put on by the Bancroft Fire Department, we're going to have virtual OPP detachment tours put on by the local OPP detachment. We're going to try to give them the same camp experience that they would have received at traditional experience summer camp to them virtually. They'll also be getting a camper kit sent to them a week before, with all the activities and materials needed to do the activities with their counsellors and peer mentors through various platforms. We'll be doing cooking, food activities, different theme days, music to rocks, to lots of different things they'll be doing," she says.

Phoenix says that their main facility has been shut down since March. However, they have still continued to engage with parents and families during the pandemic with virtual offerings of their Game ON! Programs, youth programs youth advisory programs and virtual school readiness programs to help junior kindergarten kids go into school next year.

"So, we've kind of been at the lead of making sure that these things happen virtually. So, when the pandemic hit, we knew we'd have to plan this way so we've been preparing for this for a while," she says.

Phoenix says that for the virtual summer camp, they were able to hire six youth counsellors and peer mentors through the Canada Summer Jobs Program, funded fully by the federal government. She says it's great they were able to give them a job though the summer and it's been great having access to their technical experience.

"They've really helped us plan the virtual camp, they've been invaluable and they just started this week. With all the planning and activities, we've learned a lot from them and we look forward to them sharing their experiences with the campers," she says.

NHCS is working with provincial and health experts and if it's permissible, they'll offer an on-site summer camp program with restrictions that will run in conjunction with the virtual camp. For more information, you can email them at experience.summer.camp@gmail.com; sphoenix@nhcs.ca; or by telephone at 613-334-1262.

Enrollment has been a little low, according to Phoenix, but that's to be expected considering that we're still in the midst of a pandemic.

"Our first week is the best attended but throughout the summer I think parents are still trying to figure out what to do this summer so we're expecting that enrollment will be a rolling enrollment," she says. "We won't have a cut off date, because we want more kids and I think once word of mouth gets out that it's going to be fun and not like school, I believe we'll have more registrants come forward and enroll. It's just hard to wrap your head around virtual summer camp."