

County awards EarlyON funding to NHCS

By Sarah Sobanski

North Hastings Children's Services is rebranding to offer services as an EarlyON Child and Family Centre this summer.

Hastings County has announced three child care organizations will officially be providing EarlyON services as of July 1, including NHCS, Family Space Quinte Inc. and Trenton Military Family Resource Centre.

According to the announcement, 'EarlyON centres are intended to support all children, parents and caregivers in learning, growing and connecting together. This is a transformation from the previous Ontario Early Years Centres; becoming a cohesive and supportive system.'

Executive director for NHSC Jessica Anderson explained, 'Before the EarlyON designation we were an Ontario Early Years Centre and Resource Centre, which is two of the four programs that are now known as an EarlyON Child and Family Centres.'

She said she hoped the new brand would raise awareness of the spectrum of services NHSC offers along with being a registered childcare provider.

'Often we are known as 'the daycare' and we have so much more services that we offer families. We will be focusing on quality and how we can reach and encourage more families to use the Early Years programs to support them in their role as parents and caregivers.'

The county has been working to implement the centres since it received more than \$1.4 million in Ministry of Education funding to support them in the summer of 2017.

Anderson said NHCS received \$124,000 in 2018 and \$80,000 for 2019. She said these funds would be put towards 'replacing and repairing aging assets' including the NHSC outreach van and technologies.

'Our budget has remained static since the '80s and '90s, so as operational costs increased, our ability to replace aging assets and building repairs has decreased. With wages, water and hydro costs increasing, it has been difficult to remain sustainable as there has been no increase to funding until now,' she said noting NHSC didn't get as much of the funding as it requested.

'We've been underfunded for years so we've got a lot of work to do. We also plan on increasing our resources for parents to use ' Right now, we are focusing on opening Algonquin Inòdewiziwin and we don't see our program frequency or locations changing.'

The county announced more than \$680,000 would go to the Anishinaabe Baptiste Community Organization to develop a family centre supporting North Hastings's unique Indigenous heritage near the end of February.

NHCS is partnered with the organization to develop the Algonquin Inòdewiziwin Child and Family Centre at Maynooth Public School. The centre will not be a registered childcare centre, meaning it will not be a daycare. Parents will be required to attend with their children.

The county said in order to qualify for the EarlyON funding, the organizations had to demonstrate they aligned with industry childcare standards, 'the ability to collaborate and integrate services with community partners; and the existing capacity, knowledge and expertise to address the diverse needs of all children, parents and caregivers.'

It said, 'North Hastings Children's Services will be an EarlyON Centre offering child and family services in multiple locations and at outreach sites. This will include increased mobile services to outlying areas of North Hastings.'

'We look forward to working with our community partners to establish EarlyON Centres and supporting children and families in our communities. Working together, we will

succeed in providing kids with a supportive, healthy strong start in life,' county Warden Rodney Cooney said in the announcement.