

Preschool readiness program starts up



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By Kristena Schutt-Moore

The days leading up to the first day of school can be a hectic and scary time for both children and parents. Now with COVID-19, that only increases the concerns and worry for many parents. North Hastings Children's Services has come up with a way to help area families prepare for their first days of kindergarten.

Every Tuesday at 10 a.m. the NHCS hosts the Virtual Preschool Readiness Program over the ZOOM online meeting format. The

goal of the program is to support families through the transition into school. The families will be able to participate in new activities, investigate learning techniques, and prepare for the first important steps towards school. The school readiness program works to prepare students for all aspects of school including helping to develop emotional and social skills.

The program includes school readiness bundles and learning kits that the NHCS team prepares for the families. The learning kits are prepared for every week's meeting and families are able to pick them up at the NHCS building before the meeting. The school readiness bundles are given to a family once they are registered and they contain school resources such as construction paper, pencils, sharpener, erasers, glue sticks, note books, wooden letters, pencil case and the Night Before Kindergarten story, and education resources such as the How Does Learning Happen Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years book. This book is a guide to support program and curriculum development in all early years.

The Let's Get Ready for Kindergarten tool kits for parents will also contain vision, dental, hearing and speech and language screening that they could do on their own to assess their children. If the parents need assistance with that, Early Years manager Nicole Beaudin, will schedule appointments to meet with families. Also included in the kits is the Hastings Prince Edward District School Board's family questionnaire. Parents will have to complete the questionnaire on the school boards website as part of registering their child for kindergarten, however the NHCS printed some copies so that the families can see it off the computer and know what they will have to fill out before they go online.

"We just want to help make this transition, for parents, as smooth as possible," says Beaudin. "I know it is a huge milestone in their child's life. We are here to help, just call us."

Some of the projects that the families will be participating in include: how does language skills develop through art; social and emotional skills help to develop through art; thinking skills and fine motor skills. The programs are not all online. There are also things that families can do together on their own time to provide ongoing learning for the new students.

Currently there are roughly 10 families that are participating in the weekly Zoom meetings. Parents or caregivers who would like to register their "soon to be student" can email register@nhcs.ca or call 613-334-2941 and talk with Beaudin.