

Peel charity goes virtual as COVID-19 crisis forces centre to close

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In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have transitioned to going virtual to allow the community to stay involved, while keeping safe at home.

The Child Development Resource Connection Peel (CDRCP) is a charity organization that works to support families and children in the Peel region.

CDRCP was created in 1993, to oversee childcare needs in Peel. CDRCP includes parents, CDRCP members, resource centres, the Region of Peel and other community groups.

With children at home from school, and parents working remotely waiting to go back to work, events and programs have had to be cancelled or postponed to flatten the curve of the virus that has overturned our world. CDRCP, following along majority of other organizations, have switched to providing virtual programs to allow their work to continue.

"Our goal is to offer clients an opportunity to not just engage in activities that will develop their child's skills, but offer parents and caregivers the opportunity to come together and talk about the new challenges their children and family may be facing because of COVID-19," said Sara Ammar, Executive Director of CDRCP.

The organization developed a digital engagement strategy offering online learning opportunities for children and parents, as well as training for new staff members. Staff-recorded webinars were presented for the community, while funding sessions and EarlyON programs were also offered through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. These programs include supports children's learning development, resources for parents, consultations, and even video playtime or sing along activities.

The team at CDRCP conducts roughly 1,000 training sessions for the Peel community annually and had transitioned the face-to-face learning sessions to online prior to closing.

"Launching a digital engagement strategy is a part of CDRCP's Strategic plan, however, COVID-19 essentially expedited the process of virtual delivery of CDRCP," said Ammar.

Staff members at CDRCP, such as Early Years Manager Noreen Hornsby, explain that their schedule towards virtual learning for children revolves around providing opportunities for families and children to connect and enjoy time together.

"With the virtual activities, we have four things that we aim to have impact on," said Hornsby. "First is bonding and self-regulation, so children can have a sense of attachment to an adult. Second is for parents to be connected to one another. The third is to offer an opportunity to grow people's resourcefulness. And the last is to support children's learning experiences and to create lifelong learners. We want people to still be able to have an avenue where they're connecting with us so that they can ask their questions and get resources."

CDRCP has also launched a website for the community of Peel to have resources for childcare, special needs services and other services for the community call Info Peel.

"With one simple click of a button, families can go right into a program and not feel as isolated, but instead feel like part of a community," said Kim Machete, Information and Referral Services Manager at CDRCP. "The benefit of our Info Peel database is that families can visit one hub and be able to access everything like which childcare centres are open for essential workers."

Staff members are available through online chats to answer any questions or inquiries the public may have regarding programs,

resources and services.

?I am so proud of the CDRCP team and their passion for what we do. For them to take everything we do and move it virtual, very quickly, and do it in a manner that represents the high quality that CDRCP is all about, I am so proud of being part of a team that continues to put families and educators first and create responsive methods of supporting our community,? said Ammar.

For more information about CDRCP, visit cdrcp.com or infopeel.ca.