

First Shift program outfits kids for hockey at nominal price

Written By **Brian Lockhart**

Having a child express an interest in playing hockey may provide years of activity and fun, or it might just end up being an expensive experiment if it turns out hockey just isn't their thing.

The First Shift program allows parents to outfit kids for hockey at a nominal price to get them on the ice. If it works out ? great.

If not ? the parents aren't out a whole lot of money. The First Shift program is sponsored by the NHL Players' Association and held at locations across the country every year. Equipment is provided by Bauer.

Orangeville Canadian Tire donated all the hockey tape for the kids.

Locally, the Orangeville Tigers have held a First Shift Welcome Night for the past three years. This year they had over 30 young girls sign up and come out to Tony Rose arena to get fully outfitted in hockey gear.

?The First Shift program is geared toward six to ten-year-olds who have never played hockey before, and are interested but not sure they want to commit,? explained Orangeville Tigers president, Michelle Whyte. ?For just over \$200 they get full Bauer equipment and six one-hour ice sessions that the association puts on. We volunteer our time and run the six on-ice practices. The First Shift people that are here tonight come out and do all the outfitting. They check in and get their name tag and bags. They go through and get the equipment including gloves, shin pads, mitts, shoulder pads, pants, elbow pads, helmets, skates and sticks.?

Many of the participants like it so much they end up joining the Tigers.

?We've had many girls that have done the First Shift program roll into our association league,? Michelle said. ?They try it, they love it, and keep playing. Some don't, and that's okay. In the new year we'll offer what we call an ?extended shift' through the Orangeville Tigers. We offer another six or seven weeks for the girls who want to keep trying and keep playing.?

Parent, Hailey Bell, brought her eight-year-old daughter Zoey to get outfitted in the program.

?She's only played street hockey with her cousins and her dad,? Hailey explained of how they got involved with the program. ?A friend told us they were doing it, and they knew we were looking to do something else with other girls, and they told us there was a girls hockey program. It is an amazing program. We want to see if she enjoys it. If she does there's an opportunity for a six week extension.?

The First Shift program was created when organizers realized that hockey equipment can be very expensive for a first time out-fit.

In this program, if the child does not turn out to be the next superstar, the initial outlay for equipment is nowhere near what it would cost if you went out and purchased all the necessary equipment separately.