

School closures having impact on youth locally

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When local resident Amber Kingsley, sent her seven-year-old son off to school for the second grade in September, she already knew he would need a tutor for extra help.

Going through a school year where months were spent learning online due to provincial school closures was a huge transition, and something Kingsley said her son struggled with.

"For the first half he didn't want his camera on because he could see himself looking at the class, he got pretty good being online, but when it came to offline work and homework he was done because we were at home and he just wanted to play," said Kingsley.

Despite what she says were the best efforts from teachers, by the end of the school year she began to notice his reading abilities slowing.

"At the end of grade one, his reading was slower. He could pronounce the words, but he wasn't putting them all together," said Kingsley.

When she attempted to enroll him in tutoring last year, she found many places were already full with the maximum number. In October, when 4Word Thinking Tutoring in Shelburne opened up free tutoring for children between Kindergarten and Grade 8, she quickly contacted them, and was able to secure a spot.

"They did a half hour evaluation and he's at the Grade 1 reading level when he's in Grade 2," said Kingsley.

Belinda Gyawu is a tutor at 4Word Thinking Tutoring, and said they've seen more and more students as the school year goes on.

"The pandemic has made a huge, negative impact on their progress so far, and we're seeing that in the level they're at with reading, writing, and math," explained Gyawu.

Last month the local tutoring company opened up a free tutoring program for children between Kindergarten and Grade 8 to help with the virtual learning fall out. Since then, they've had around 20 clients sign up for the twice weekly tutoring sessions, with more being added regularly.

"Most of them are in Grade 1 to Grade 6, we're seeing that the younger kids have definitely been the ones most affected," said Gyawu.

While taking their time to help each client, Gyawu said they are also balancing the need to expedite the learning so students can catch up to the learning level they're supposed to be at.

In early June, a new analysis by the COVID-19 Science Table, citing research from the U.S, England, Belgium and the Netherlands, indicated that Ontario students could be between one to three months behind in learning because of school closures.

According to the analysis, younger students had greater losses than those in older grades and in secondary school with schools closures.

The report also noted three studies where the return to in-person learning was associated with some recovery of learning loss.

Since joining the 4Word Thinking Tutoring program, Kingsley said she's already seeing a change in her son's reading, specifically seeing him reading more independently.

?He's still a bit shy about it, but I feel with the twice week [tutoring] he'll get there,? said Kingsley.