

Whitchurch-Stouffville children and teens who don't know how to skate can learn free of charge beginning in October, thanks to ongoing efforts from the Kids First Fund which is sponsored by many generous donations from local families and the Mayor's Legacy Fund and supported by Hockey Canada.

Learn to Skate is aimed at children aged 8 to 14 years old who want to learn the fundamentals of skating. A second program will be offered in the new year for children interested in coming to try hockey.

Spots fill up quickly for these programs and once all spots are filled, we will continue to add to a wait list.

The program is currently in its third year and "it's been amazing," according to Peter Harmsen of the Kids First Fund. "To see the sheer joy on the faces of these kids and their parents has been totally gratifying. We have as many family members in the stands watching their children skate as we do for our minor hockey games. The parents are happy. Some are asking about next steps, including playing hockey. Others asked about lessons for adults who didn't know how to skate."

"It's all about building community through skating. We know there are kids and teens in Stouffville who have never been on skates. We want to give them that opportunity to hopefully pick up a pastime they can enjoy for the rest of their lives."

Beginning October 16, 2024, the program includes ten sessions held Wednesdays from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. or 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Stouffville Clippers Sports Complex, 120 Weldon Road, Stouffville.

A maximum of 35 participants will be enrolled for each session. Please note that you are not guaranteed the time slot you have selected, and an email confirmation will be sent out from kidsfirst@wsmha.com. You will be provided your time slot, and we will need confirmation back for your child's participation. Accommodations for preferred time slots will be made on a first come first served basis according to registration.

Priority will also be given to residents of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Participants will spend one hour on ice each week with a very high ratio of instructors to skaters. Instructors will include facilitators from the Ontario Minor Hockey Association Coaching Program.

Mandatory equipment in order to be on the ice are skates, a neck guard and a CSA approved hockey style helmet. Additional equipment such as elbow pads, gloves/wrist guards, shin guards/knee pads are all optional.

"They'll learn the fundamentals of skating," said Harmsen. "And we hope this program will

encourage them to come and try hockey with the Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association. It allows children who are unsure about playing hockey the opportunity to try without committing to an entire season.

“But if they never play hockey, they’ll know how to skate.”