

LOCAL NEWS



Lately, the centre has been delivering meals to 800 individuals every month. /COURTESY – DAWSON BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB

Dawson Club unveils winter programs

Youth. There may still be uncertainty surrounding the health crisis, but the Dawson Boys and Girls Club is ready for anything. Since the start of the pandemic, the recreation centre has been offering virtual workshops and outreach programs to the Verdun community – and this winter will be no exception.



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"We're still finding creative ways to stay connected, respond to local needs, and be there for our community," said Chad Polito, the executive director of the club.

While there is much uncertainty surrounding health restrictions in the coming months, Polito and his team have pivoted by offering a full lineup of safe winter programming for toddlers, youngsters, and teenagers.

In addition to virtual coding workshops and cooking tutorials, kids between the ages of 4 and 12 will be able to take advantage of a hockey drill program with Montreal Canadiens star Tomas Tatar. The player has been working extensively with the club over

the past year by spearheading its sports program and raising funds through various initiatives.

"We're so grateful for the energy and enthusiasm that Tomas brings to our group," the executive director said warmly. "He's already made some really strong bonds with our kids."

Meanwhile, teens will be able to access a music program that teaches them the basics of guitar. Over the course of the next three months, they'll learn music theory, digital composition, and how to play the instrument – virtually, of course. Everyone who signs up for this series will be able to borrow a guitar from the centre for free.

But younger generations aren't the only ones who will be able to benefit from activities. In a bid to break feelings of isolation, the club's 60 senior members will be able to participate in online exercise and yoga classes, as well as regular wellness check-ins.

Said Polito: "The mental health implications of the pandemic are terrible, and we want to do our part to make sure that everyone in the Verdun community is in a good state of mind."

Other Services

As if these programs weren't enough, the Dawson Boys and Girls Club will also be providing essential services to the neighbourhood, such as food delivery.

«Even the smallest act of kindness makes a whole world of difference to some people.»

Chad Polito, Executive director

"Since the start of the pandemic, we've had to pivot on a dime to respond to the immediate needs of the community, especially when it came to helping them put food on the table," Polito recalled.

In regular times, the community centre is accustomed to delivering food to about 40 low-income households. But when the pandemic hit, Polito was inundated with calls, often from people who never needed to rely on the club's services in the past.

With the help of some provincial relief funds and local partners, the club was able to provide food delivery for over 800 individuals every month. This is an impressive feat by anyone's standards, but especially for Polito, who only began working at the centre in October of 2019.

"Being able to lead through a period of crisis and change has been exciting," he noted. "It's been an incredible first year for myself, and I couldn't be happier with the team we have here, and how dedicated they are to the mission."

The Dawson Boys and Girls was inaugurated in 1960 on Woodland Street by the governor general of Canada at the time, George Vanier. The intergenerational center offers recreational activities for over 700 members.