

# SOS Insights

*from my desk to your heart*

**September 21 was a significant date at SOS this year.** It marked the restart of our modified Child Youth and Family programs at both the Parksville and Qualicum Beach locations after a six-month pause due to COVID-19. Even though new procedures and safety protocols have changed the way we do things, we are excited to have the sounds of laughter and activity back in our buildings once again. **We missed you. And you told us how much you missed us too!**

Our recent Take Stock survey asked residents to weigh in on how the pandemic has impacted our community. We learned that parents had been struggling to keep young minds busy. That teens were worried about their future. And that families missed important social and networking time with others. You told us loud and clear what our programs mean to you and that you were eager for them to restart.

However, as keen as we were to restart programs, we also realized that rebuilding would take careful thought and stable funding. **Thanks to supporters of our Grateful Hearts – Project Restart campaign,** we were able to bring back staff who reconfigured programs in a way that would be safe for everyone.



So far things are going very well. And thanks to our supporters, all our programs continue to be free to local residents. We've been able to maintain safe spaces that encourage social and emotional connections. Our programs continue to offer a change of scenery for parents and children, new perspectives, and different toys to play with. And we're grateful for our amazing staff and volunteers who deliver high-quality programs with care and kindness.

But of course, we knew we would have to make some changes in this first phase of our restart plan such as reducing the hours and number of participants in each program. For example, we offer pop-up dates, instead of week-to-week youth programming. And participants now pre-register for all of our programs. **Despite these changes, we're seeing some unexpected benefits.**

The reduced number of participants in the groups has allowed for more openness in interaction between participants and our staff. Parents enjoy having this quality time to talk with staff and other families about struggles they are going through. This openness has facilitated more engagement so that we can better guide parents to helpful resources and services available locally.

Children and youth have also really benefited from the restart. Some kids don't see their friends at school as they may be in different learning cohorts, and some are being homeschooled. Our programs give them important social opportunities to reconnect with their peers, make new friends, and explore their creativity through art, music and games.

**Attendance so far has been great.** We have waitlists for most of our Parksville programs; however, there are still some spaces available for youth at both our Parksville and Qualicum Beach locations. And for children in Grades 7 to 12, we have activities, food and wonderful mentors available to them in a safe and positive space.

There are also openings in our tutoring program for students in Grades 6-12 who need some extra help in Math or English. And space is available in a variety of programs for participants at our Qualicum Commons location. Residents who live in Coombs, Hilliers, Whiskey Creek, Qualicum Beach, Bowser, any of the Northern communities in our region, can attend our programs in Qualicum Beach. For more information about these, check our website at [www.sosd69.com](http://www.sosd69.com) or call us at 250-248-2093.

Looks like this is going to be our new reality for months to come. Because of that, there is even more urgency to restart and expand some of our other programs that residents have been asking for. We know they make a difference.

**Just read what a few of our participants have to say:**

*"I love getting together with friends and doing stuff that SOS plans. I just get to have fun and concentrate on my kids. There's no clean up! It's great! We have grown up in these programs and find that it's a space where we can come together and enjoy company. We really have been missing SOS." Nataliya*

*"I love the patience they show us, the different perspective they give. Sometimes you can be miserable at home because the kids are being one way and then you come here and they are still being that way but it's okay. Suddenly, it's all okay." Kim*

*"I love that they take us as we are." Sarah*

If you would like to help us move into this next phase of [Project Restart](#), your financial donation will be gratefully received. On behalf of the children, youth and families who will benefit from your support, I thank you!



Susanna Newton  
Executive Director  
Society of Organized Services



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