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## NEWS

# HOMESCHOOL PROGRAMS CONTINUE AT PARK DURING PANDEMIC

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to a wetland, forest, trails, waterways and more.

"It's a nice dynamic of ecology that support different types of wildlife," said ecology centre executive director Tunde Otto. "When you come (to Willow Park), you get that enrichment of being immersed in nature."

Prior to the pandemic, Willow Park was busy running education programs for school groups and outdoor events for the community — undertakings that have been put on hold for the time being.

One thing that has continued is outdoor programming for small cohorts of home-schooling families, with COVID-19 safety protocols being followed that strictly adhere to public health guidelines, noted Otto.

Among those taking advantage of the opportunity is local home-schooler Shasha Vidal, who said her daughter enjoys interacting with the other children and having the freedom to explore nature safely.

"My daughter has seen turtles, snails, different types of birds, fishes, toads and so much more," she said.

Vidal's family also takes part in the centre's volunteer program, along with the seasonal drumming circles that were held before the pandemic.

"It (Willow Park) allows kids and adults alike to unplug and connect with nature, each other and what really matters," she said. "We believe that teaching children to be responsible stewards of nature is part of a holistic education, and is also the only way this planet and our species has a chance of survival. We admire Tunde's ability to lead the programs effectively."



Graham Paine/Torstar

Willow Park Ecology Centre offers a nature immersion experience, says executive director Tunde Otto.

**"We believe that teaching children to be responsible stewards of nature is part of a holistic education, and is also the only way this planet and our species has a chance of survival."**

**- Shasha Vidal, Willow Park program participant**

While the Willow Park property might be a bit quieter these days, a small but dedicated group of volunteers have continued to come to tend to the gardens, and perform other seasonal maintenance, said Otto.

The ecology centre operates in partnership with the Town of Halton Hills and Credit Valley Conservation (CVC), with the trio also working together over the past five years on the Hungry Hollow Collaborative (HHC) — a project that saw targeted removal of invasive buckthorn from 26 hectares in Hungry Hollow.

"We're now looking at the next steps for the ravine," said Otto, noting the

CVC has a Sustainable Neighbourhoods Action Plan in the works that will be piloted in the HHC project area.

Willow Park is also planning to do a local tree planting with its supporters in the spring.

For further details, visit [willowparkecologycentre.wordpress.com](http://willowparkecologycentre.wordpress.com).

*STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With climate change and environmental sustainability being key issues in today's society, we took a closer look at what's being done locally to preserve the natural environment, such as the efforts of the Willow Park Ecology Centre.*