

Home Schooling Scores an A Plus With Stouffville Families

Stay at home approach to educating children the perfect choice for many

By Kinjal Dagli Shah
Stouffville Free Press

While most children walk to school each day with backpacks on their shoulders, there's a significant number that stay home to learn. Home schooling is becoming an increasingly popular option for Stouffville families who choose to replicate a school environment in their home that is customized to suit a child's pace and abilities.

For Caralyn Shantz, home schooling her four children was as natural a decision as it is for many to send their kids to school. "My mom was a teacher so perhaps it's in my genes. By the time my first child, Keeley, was school-age, my sister-in-law had already graduated some of her home schooled kids from high school. I always admired their family dynamic and how their kids were maturing and wanted that for my family," said Caralyn.

Caralyn has since followed the same path with her other children; 16-year-old Teegan, 12-year-old Tatum and 10-year-old Holden. However, she admits it has been anything but easy. "I didn't realize back then that my kids wouldn't be cookie cutter! I thought I was a great teacher when a teacher friend took a look at my firstborn's grade five work and exclaimed that it was at a grade eight level. But then my second-born, Teegan, began floundering and I wondered if it had to do with my teaching abilities. After getting psycho-education evaluations done, I realized that while Keeley was gifted with a learning disability, Teegan had ADHD with learning disabilities, and Holden was dyslexic. School at home was a perfect choice through the elementary years because of this. I could go faster in the subjects where my children were strong and slower in the subjects they struggled with," explained Caralyn.

While the Shantz family took to home schooling naturally, there are others like Liz Green who start out wanting to test the method. "My husband and I decided to home school Leah because she was a very curious and intelligent child. She was reading at three and was interested in everything going on. Since school isn't mandatory until age six in Ontario, we decided to home school her for Junior Kindergarten. It went really well so we decided to home school for SK and then Grade 1. By then, I had two other kids and it was only natural to continue home schooling our sons," said Liz.

There are others like Sunni and Greg Smith who were unaware of the homecoming concept. "When our daughter Senia was very young, we knew we wanted her to have an enriched educational experience. This led us to explore the many different public and private school options available.

During our search, we met a dear friend who introduced us to home schooling. When we started to research all the options and opportunities available to homeschoolers, we knew it was the perfect fit for our family. It has been one of the best decisions we have ever made," said Sunni.

Much like regular school, the homeschoolers divide their day into work, activity and play. Liz said it helps to have a schedule. "We follow a normal routine, which is to wake up by 8, finish breakfast by 9:30 am and then start lessons. The kids do Math, Science, Social Studies and English in workbooks. We finish by 11:30 am and eat lunch. We have other activities in the afternoon. We participate in the home schooling community so we are very active with other kids who are home schooled. And we participate in activities with schooled kids, like karate and Scouts and Guides," she added.

Caralyn and Sunni also address the need for socialization through various groups and activities. "The number one question that homeschoolers receive is about socialization," said Caralyn. "School years are the only years that humans are together in one specific age group. Once high school is over, adults are in mixed ages and one needs to learn to relate to everyone. My kids have always played sports, been part of church groups, and played with kids on the street. They know how to work alone and know how to work as a team. Are homeschoolers awkward? Some are but then so are some public school kids. When we go to our yearly track and field event we see all types of kids, from the ungracefully non-athletic to the serious jock."

As home schooling parents will point out, teaching at home isn't without its challenges. But it also has its benefits. "My kids learn differently and some are more resistant than others and that means tears for both the kids and me," said Caralyn. "I've had to adapt to each learning style and plan over thirty subjects some years. We've chosen to be on one income since my youngest was born and though I now work a few hours each week outside the home it means we've sacrificed financially."

Sunni has a similar story but like her home schooling peers, she said she wouldn't change her decision. "Our biggest challenge has definitely been financial. We had to give up one full-time income. There are no subsidies from the government so we are 100 per cent responsible for providing all of the curriculum, books, supplies, and activities for our home school. Despite this, we would not change a thing."

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Sunni Smith, who home schools daughter Senia (second from left), addresses the need for socialization through various groups and activities with other home schooled children.

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