

The new U9 Thunder girls hockey Fundamentals program has been running for just over a month here in the Ottawa valley. 19 girls take the ice Thursday in Cobden and Saturdays in Petawawa throughout the season which kicked off at the end of September. Some of the girls are playing organized hockey for the first time, others coming from different associations like Petawawa, Pembroke, Eganville. A few girls who joined the program were a part of the First shift program run by Monica McGinnis which gave new to hockey girls a chance to learn the game for the first time. The exposure to all girl's hockey through the First Shift program helped the girls get comfortable on the ice as many of them have joined the Thunder this season.

"It's amazing to see the progress lots of them have made in a short period of time. Not only on the ice but the friendships they've made off the ice as hockey isn't just about the on ice stuff, it's the atmosphere and culture they are a part of off it as well." – Coach Jon Murray says.

1 in 3 girls quit sports by their teenage years, compared to 1 out of 10 boys (womenandsport.ca) . The U9 program is important to keep girls in hockey and help the growth in the Ottawa Valley.

"You look at the success early on the younger Thunder teams are having with tournament victories for both the U11 and U13 teams coached by Joey Costello and Kenny Peplinskie. The younger girls see that, they've had a chance to skate with other girls in different age groups which also gives them role models to look up to. Some of the older girls have come out and skated with the U9 team as ice helpers. Some being sisters and cousins and I think that's great for the younger ones and also the older ones as well to share their experiences and skill levels with the new Thunder players." Murray says. "I'm lucky to have two awesome coaches in Jon and Michelle Buckle who were a big part of this program starting up and also the early success the girls are having on the ice. Thunder hockey is a family, for these girls they get to experience that at a younger age and build confidence on the ice earlier as well. It's about growing the game, a big part of it is the success the PWHL had last season. It opened up lots of eyes and I hope to build off that and see the number of girls in hockey grow in the Ottawa Valley."

The Thunder Fundamentals program consists of girls under the age of 9. They practice as a group and are divided into 2 teams throughout the season to play games. The start of the season starts as half ice games and in January the group switches to full ice. They look to put their skills to the test as they plan to have exhibition games against other opponents and travel to East Ottawa to battle it over a weekend long tournament. To Follow the U9 program and other Thunder teams visit girlshockey.ca