

Portage Ukrainian Nursery School - Creating a Community for Families

Community Foundation of Portage & District Grant Feature proudly sponsored by Southport

Portage Ukrainian Nursery School (PUNSI) has served as a pre-school for local families for over 40 years, and is an important part of our community. Each year 80-100 children and their families spend time together in a play-based, family involved space. They have a diverse nursery school community including many newcomer families and children with special support needs. Their program is often chosen because it is high quality, inclusive, and accessible.

PUNSI is also chosen by many families because of the wonderful staff who create and maintain a community for the children and parents. The relationships formed between staff and the families not only provide support to navigate life with preschooler's, but these relationships often last long after their days at nursery school.

In 2013, the Portage Ukrainian Nursery School moved into their current location in Trinity United Church. This space offered them a secure, accessible area for their program, but storage space has always been limited.

Now, imagine you are walking your child into nursery school to find a play hair salon set up complete with a salon chair, accessories and more. Then next month it's a grocery store with miniature carts and cash registers ready for kids to start shopping. Then one of the favorites, the doctors office, with child size crutches, plastic casts and stethoscopes! How great is this?



However, now imagine every time you have to change the play theme you are packing storage bins and hauling them up and down a shaky ladder, into a small dark storage loft. Not only would you never allow the kids to help out, having your staff and volunteers do it is quite scary.

This was the case with PUNSI's storage space, although grateful for the space it was not safely accessible. With government funding having been cut in half, and trying to keep parent fees reasonable, the priority had always been programming, not safe access to storage.

PUNSI came to the Community Foundation of Portage & District looking for a grant to remodel their storage space, and make it safely accessible. Their solution was very creative, a fireproof doorway could be added in an existing stairwell and an elevated walkway created from one loft to the other. The staff **AND** kids could then have access to the storage area directly.



By providing this accessible walkway to their storage loft PUNSI would avoid potential injuries, jeopardizing their operations and provide an opportunity to have the children & volunteers involved in the set up and take down of their play areas.

The new walkway has now been completed and its been exciting for the preschoolers who can now take part in moving supplies to and from the playroom. The children get to choose the equipment they want to see featured in the space and see their ideas brought to life. Working together with other children is empowering and supports social and emotional growth and feelings of connection.

Trips on "the new bridge" are fun!

The kids are proud to contribute to setting up new play areas and work as a team to carry heavier items. The new space has also allowed the staff to spend less time away from the playroom and children.



Nursery School Director, Lori Carpenter, is grateful for the funding provided by the Foundation. "Instead of hauling supplies up and down stairs and ladders, its now part of our curriculum to have the children help brainstorm the next play space and go pick out the props they want to use."

Often times the grants provided by the Community Foundation of Portage & District are not so "flashy", CFPD doesn't always fund the new programs or new equipment most people will notice. Sometimes the best way CFPD can support the non-profits in our community is by providing the necessary funding for things like desks, computers, heating systems or in this case new, safe and accessible walkways to make accessing storage rooms easier. This is the "foundation" CFPD provides to those doing the vital work in our community, so they can continue doing the great work that impacts so many lives in Portage la Prairie and area.

If you want to get involved with the Community Foundation of Portage & District, as a donor, volunteer or grant recipient contact our office or visit our website for more details.



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Thanks to the ongoing support from Southport, the Community Foundation of Portage & District is able to share this grant story and show how your donations make an impact on Portage la Prairie & area.