

North End child care group building permanent home after 6 years of fundraising ^[1]

Little Stars Playhouse on Selkirk Avenue will have spaces for 28 kids, infants

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EXCERPTS

A centre for North End kids and families will soon have a home of its own. The first shovels full of dirt began the construction of a new child care facility Tuesday morning.

"It's just going to be very beautiful for the children to have this opportunity to finally have a home," said Gerrie Prymak, co-founder of the group North End Stay and Play and a board member with the charity Woman Healing for Change Manitoba.

The group has called it the Little Stars Playhouse. The new 3,600-square-foot facility on Selkirk Avenue will have child care spaces for 24 preschoolers and four infants.

The spaces will help meet some of the demand for spaces for families in the North End, where fewer than 20 per cent of children who need a space can get one, Prymak said.

"Even though we're small, we're adding to the numbers," she said.

The group has operated child care spaces using donated space in various locations, but has been forced to move multiple times when their host organizations needed the space back.

The idea for a permanent centre came about in early 2014, when once again, the group was forced out of their space.

"Our families were so disappointed," she said. "We had to move and our families just said, 'why can't we have our own playhouse.' That's where the term playhouse came."

At that same time, the recently released report from the Phoenix Sinclair inquiry weighed on the minds of Prymak and the families in her group. Phoenix Sinclair was a five-year-old girl in the care of Child and Family Services who was murdered by her mother and step-father in 2005.

"When the families had suggested this [child care centre], we knew ... that we all need to never forget Phoenix, and that we need to do everything that we can to step up for our kids and lift them up. If we all did it together, our little stars will become the big stars that they are meant to be," Prymak said.

Small fundraisers

Over the past six years, the group raised \$100,000 toward the project. Money was raised over the course of many small fundraisers, pow wows, and silent auctions, often with the help of local performers such as Don Amero, Al Simmons and Tanya Tagaq.

The process was "arduous and challenging," Prymak said, but everyone in her group, as well as the families of the children, pitched in.

"We just dug in our heels and we're a completely volunteer-based, community-driven grassroots initiative," Prymak said.

They secured \$900,000 in federal government funding, along with a \$128,000 donation from the Manitoba Metis Federation. The MMF also helped them secure a \$600,000 interest-free loan.

The group now has enough money to complete the construction of the building, but they aren't done raising money. They hope to raise another \$400,000 to build a sunroom on the back of the infant room, as well as a playground in the front.

The facility also has a teaching room for community programming geared to adults. Eight of the 24 preschool spaces will be "flex" spots, which are available to multiple kids.

Now that their vision is coming to fruition, Prymak says the feeling is "surreal"

"We never thought we'd get to this place," she said.

"[We're] just so happy that the kids will have a place to call their own ... An opportunity to just keep on learning to be good problem solvers and cooperative and all the things that we need to make our world a better place."

Region: Manitoba ^[3]

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