



Erin Kennedy, left, with fellow staff and students from Robert Smith, ready for the snowshoes!

SDCF grants help students make tracks in the winter snow while learning

We've learned a lot about learning over the years, and among the many important lessons are that everyone learns in different ways and learning doesn't have to be confined to the four walls of a school classroom.

Students at Robert Smith School and kids at the Selkirk Friendship Centre Day Care have taken their learning outdoors and this year they're able to get around on snowshoes during the winter months, thanks to grants from the Selkirk & District Community Foundation.

Erin Kennedy, a teacher at Robert Smith, said they started a walking club at the school in 2023 to get kids outside where they can exercise their bodies and their minds. The Friday afternoon walks have been a success and the grant will allow them to purchase about 23 pairs of snowshoes to keep the outdoor experience going year-round.

“I think my favourite part I’ve witnessed in the kids we work with is they’re typically students who may struggle in a school classroom setting and then you take them out in nature and it just makes me cheery-eyed, there’s a complete 180 turnaround,” Kennedy said.

“It’s so cool to see them in a different element that is still so very beneficial for their minds. We let them play. We let them be kids and it’s a good way to form friendships too for kids who struggle making friends. I feel snowshoeing will collectively be something new that they get to try together.”

Both applied for their grants last year. This year’s deadline to apply for a Community Fund or Western Canada Games Legacy Fund grant is Feb. 28.

SDCF grants support numerous non-profits and charities in Selkirk, St. Andrews and St. Clements.

At the Friendship Centre Day Care, kids have been getting outside to learn for a while now.

Director Lorie Fiddler said they are a nature-based, screen free program and they often have the kids outdoors all day long. They hike in the bush at Selkirk Park, build forts and get to see owls, birds and deer. The snowshoes mean they’ll be able to stay outdoors during winter.

“We feel we are balancing the technology that children are exposed to with the beautiful outdoors. Play in nature strengthens all domains of child development,” Fiddler said.

“Another beautiful benefit of our outdoor philosophy is the immunity boost all children get when playing in the forest. As the saying goes, there’s no such thing as bad weather, just bad choices.”

David Thorne, Chair of the Foundation, says the grants are, quite literally, like providing a breath of fresh air.

“Being able to give grants that get kids outside, exploring, exercising and moving, and of course learning, is amazing,” Thorne said.

“Our donors have causes that are important to them and kids and learning and being healthy are important to everyone. We have funds that specifically target these areas and to know that there are young people strapping on snowshoes and heading outside during the winter months thanks to those funds is really a wonderful thing. I know the board members are thrilled and I know the donors are as well.”

The snowshoes for Robert Smith School were provided through the Michele and Gary Polinuk Promoting Health Fund and the Friendship Centre's were through the Kirstin's Walk for Kids Fund. Both are donor-advised funds.

Bev Clegg, Executive Director for the Foundation, says Kirstin's Walk for Kids Fund has provided many grants that benefit youth over the years. The snowshoes for Robert Smith students represent the first ever grant from the Polinuk's fund.

"Every time we make that call to let recipients know about their grant, it's exciting," Clegg said.

"There's such an excitement because these grants allow them to accomplish goals that would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve without the support of the Foundation's donors. It's a beautiful thing when donors' wishes connect with the community's needs and everyone at the Foundation feels blessed to witness that little bit of magic."

The SDCF is accepting grant applications for the Western Canada Games Legacy Fund and the Community Grant program now, with the deadline to apply being Feb 28. Grant applications have moved solely online. Go to sdcfa.ca for an application. Call 204-785-9755 or email selkirkfoundation@shaw.ca for more information.