



An SDCF grant is helping the Wildlife Rescue Network continue to do good work.

SDCF spring grants support 38 organizations with \$166,852

What has become the Wildlife Rescue Network, started some 30 years ago when Shannon Kurbis found a baby squirrel in her yard and learned how to care for it. After saving the squirrel, she became the go-to animal saver in her neighbourhood.

And she's still doing it today, with the help of about a dozen dedicated volunteers who give money, drive to pick up injured animals and help care for them at their St. Andrews location.

A grant from the Selkirk & District Community Foundation's donor-advised Polinuk Family Fund will help the rescue purchase a storage shed where they can stockpile feed and do some rehabilitation work.

“We’re a hundred per cent volunteer. We don't have any paid staff at all and that's why this grant has been a huge help because we don't even have enough volunteers to do fundraising,” Kurbis said.

“We just don't have volunteers for that sort of thing. The majority of our stuff is funded by our volunteers, it's a small group of people, but they put up a lot of time and a lot of cash to help everything out.”

It’s a passion for Kurbis, who is recently retired but worked full-time on top of running the rescue for years. She said she treated the rescued animals much like children, doing feedings at night and dropping them off at her mom’s during the day while she worked.

“It’s important to me and there just aren’t any places for these animals to go,” she said, noting there is a rehab south of the city, but their intake is very specific.

“They're not taking any non-protected species, so no starlings, no sparrows, nothing like that. And that's sort of the majority of what comes in. It’s easy to get 20, 30 sparrows dropped off like nothing, but they need to live too. Right?”

The volunteers’ time is spent rescuing and to a large extent, counselling people on the do’s and don’ts. Sadly, many of the small animals brought into the rescue don’t need to be rescued, but interference by people who don’t know any better leads them to the rescue.

Kurbis said a large majority of the babies that are brought to them should have been left alone. She says seeing baby birds on the ground, or baby rabbits alone doesn’t mean they have been abandoned. The bird’s parents are usually still around, and Kurbis’s advice is to leave them alone and watch from a distance – inside your house preferably – and you’ll likely see the parents coming back to feed the baby.

The Foundation’s second Vital Signs report is set to come out this fall, and one of the sectors in it is the environment. Kurbis says climate change is affecting the bird population.

“We’ve been around long enough that we can see the effects of climate change, and the increased development of land going on, it’s getting harder and harder, especially for the songbirds,” she said.

“It’s even more critical to keep doing this work now. Things have changed since I was young, we used to have barn swallows around all the time and now I haven’t seen one around here in the last five years.”

The grant to the rescue is one of 38 given out this spring. In total, the Foundation granted \$166,852.

Foundation Chair David Thorne says matching grants with community needs is important, and information gathered during the Vital Signs process provides valuable information.

“We have 10 sectors in the report and going forward we’ll be able to use the information from the report and target areas that need the most support,” Thorne said.

“But even now, we can see that the grants we are providing are meeting those needs. The environment is a concern and we’re able to support organizations that are working in that sector. Food security is a big concern, and we’re able to focus on that as well.”

Selkirk’s Knox Presbyterian Church received so it can provide a weekend meal at the Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen once a month.

Vital Sign’s Food Security and Access sector shows people in the region are concerned about not having enough money to buy food. Twenty-nine per cent say they worry that they’ll run out of cash before the end of the month and won’t be able to buy groceries.

Reverend Naggie Sterling is new to the church and when he learned that Knox was part of a group of churches that used to provide a weekend meal at the soup kitchen, he wanted to revive that ritual.

“Churches would come together and one church would take a week to offer the soup kitchen. The pandemic stopped that and we wanted to find ways and means to be supportive of the community, do community outreach. We want our outreach to be touching lives and meeting real and practical needs,” Sterling said.

“It was done before and it is a present need.”

Sterling said there’s a men’s group that meets for coffee and conversation every Friday and he challenged them to take on this project. They’ve accepted, and committed time and their own finances to make it happen. The church has put the soup kitchen meal in its budget as well.

He said they’re thankful for the Foundation’s grant.

“The men have committed a financial contribution, as has the church, but those contributions in themselves could not fund the soup kitchen.”

Church members volunteer their time for the Saturday meal, which began on March 1. The first offering didn’t go so well – only two people showed up – but Sterling and the volunteers have engaged with clients to determine what time of month is most beneficial for users of the service.

Now the meal is offered the third Saturday of the month. Doors open at 11 and coffee and cookies are served. Lunch is served from 11:30 am to 1 pm. More people showed up for the April meal and the next meal will be on May 17.

Watch for more grant announcements in the June Community report, Community is Vital.