

Good Cause:

New surface for One Hope United playground



One Hope United recently received a grant for \$18,300 to resurface its Aurora Early Learning Center's play area. | Courtesy of One Hope United

Cathy Janek | For Sun-Times Media | July 16, 2014

The kids at the Aurora Early Learning Center have more room to roam and play thanks to a grant from the Community Foundation of Fox River Valley.

One Hope United recently received a grant for \$18,300 to resurface its Aurora Early Learning Center's play area.

Initially, when the learning center was built, sod was put in. The sod frequently turned into a "mud pit," said Beth Lakier, the associate executive director of the Child Development Centers of One Hope United. "The children were not able to run around."

The learning center depends on the ability to take the children out during the day to play or participate in other outdoor activities, said Ralph Voris, grant coordinator for the Community Foundation of the Fox River Valley.

The combination of kids and grass can lead to things getting pretty worn out, he added.

“After a rain or at certain times of the year, what had been grass would turn into a muddy mess that was being tracked into the building,” he added.

The sod has been replaced by artificial turf so that the area could be used almost year round, Voris added.

With the new turf, kids can don swimsuits and enjoy water play, Lakier said. Walking out on the playground, Lakier spotted a girl who was enjoying her very first time playing under a hose.

The new experience hit for Lakier.

“With the beautiful new space, the kids get to go out do things that they typically don’t get to do at home,” she said.

One Hope United operates an array of early childhood education, prevention, intervention and community-based programs throughout northern Illinois. It also serves communities in southern Illinois and parts of Florida.

“Many of our programs are focused on child welfare,” she said.

At its 12 early learning centers, One Hope United provides a healthy lifestyles curriculum that focuses on helping children, families, and staff learn about developing healthy routines and activities by emphasizing proper nutrition, daily exercise and environmental sustainability, she said.

“Running around and playing sports in a large open play area comprise a portion of what we want to accomplish in our programs every day,” she added.

The Aurora Early Learning Center initiates other programs aimed at reducing childhood obesity like having an on-site garden and cooking all food on site.

“We serve low-income families, she said. “Most of our child-care centers are in communities with high-risk children.”

The Community Foundation of the Fox River is a collection of 400 individual funds that are used to provide grants to nonprofit organizations and scholarships to area students. It typically funds about 12 to 15 grant applications twice a year.

“We helped One Hope United in the past and saw this project as a good request,” Voris said.

Previously the Community Foundation of Aurora, it was renamed to the Community Foundation of the Fox River Valley to better describe the area it is serving, he added, and it is third largest community foundation in the state of Illinois.

FACTBOX

How To Help

One Hope United

For more information, visit onehopeunited.org or contact Ann O’Malley, director of the Aurora Early Learning Center at aomalley@onehopeunited.org

Community Foundation of the Fox River Valley

For more information on the Community Foundation, visit CommunityFoundationFRV.org
