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McCallsburg daycare supporters grateful for monetary gifts this holiday season

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It's a pretty special thing to get a gift for Christmas. And those involved with the running the Bethany Lutheran Daycare in McCallsburg are grateful for several funding gifts they've received this holiday season.

Connie Tjelmeland, a member of Bethany Lutheran who volunteers doing janitorial work at the daycare, has been excited to get word out about the gifts and about the great small-town daycare that McCallsburg is so lucky to have.

"This has been a really good Christmas for the daycare," she agreed.

Bethany Lutheran Daycare, which transitioned in ownership from the Colo-NESCO School District to Bethany Lutheran Church two-and-a-half years ago, received a \$6,000 grant in early November from the Story County Community Foundation (SCCF). The Foundation's funds, Tjelmeland said, are provided by the State of Iowa's County Endowment Fund Program and local donors.

The daycare also recently received a first-time endowment gift from the city of McCallsburg. That gift, \$1,800, was made possible by an anonymous donor. The city will have a gift, through the endowment, to annually bestow upon a worthy recipient.

The nearly \$8,000 that the daycare is receiving is going to be utilized in three ways.

First, software for better record-keeping will be purchased. "We're using a lot of hard copy yet," Tjelmeland said.

Second, some floor repairs will be made. The daycare still operates out of the school building in McCallsburg, which is owned by the Colo-NESCO district. Tjelmeland and daycare director Tami Julius say the school district is very

generous to the daycare.

“They’re very happy that the building is still being used,” Tjelmeland said. The district doesn’t charge the daycare rent or utilities, which helps greatly.

Said Julius, who is in her first school year with the daycare, “Superintendent (Jim) Walker has been really awesome; if something is wrong with the building, he gets right on it or gets someone here.”

Having a gift of money that allows the Bethany Lutheran Daycare to make a floor improvement, Tjelmeland said, is a nice way that the daycare itself can help share in the expense of the space it is using (the daycare now operates in the newer section of the building, moving from the older section where it was located when there were still classes held in the building several years ago).

Third, the money will help with training, and this is the area the staff is most excited about. Julius, who presently commutes from Ft. Dodge, but plans to move to the area, has been working in child care, day care and teaching for over 20 years. She’s familiar with the services provided through CCRR —Child Care Resources and Referral, a state agency.

“They have tons of training and will actually come in and show us the best way to rearrange our rooms, and the best toys and supplies that are beneficial to kids,” Julius said. CCRR will score the daycare and help them see where they are doing well and what areas they can improve in. “And they provide help along the way,” Julius said. She said training with the agency workers will start this coming spring.

Presently, Bethany Lutheran Daycare has four full-time staff and three part-time staff — serving 15 children who attend full-time and three to four who attend on a part-time basis. The youngest child attending at this time, Julius said, is under 10 weeks old; the oldest child is 10. The child care is certified to handle children ages 6 weeks to 12 years. They are also approved to handle 50 children.

“Our goal is to have (this daycare) at capacity and have a waiting list,” Julius said. That’s a challenge for a daycare that is in such a rural location, but they say they do have parents from as far away as Marshalltown or Jewell, who bring their

children to this small-town child care setting.

“We have a wonderful staff,” Julius said.

One of the staff members, Jade Witt, 27, of State Center, has been with the child-care business a little over three years now. She worked first when the daycare was run by the school and then continued after Bethany Lutheran took over, and she loves her job. “I went to Ellsworth for conservation technology, and then I had a child and my passions kind of changed. I wasn’t quite ready to leave my son and wanted to work and be close to him.” Her son is now 4, and she also has a daughter who’s 1½.

“I like it (working at the daycare)... I thought I was more of an animal person, but after having children of my own, I now gravitate toward kids.”

Witt said she looks forward to the training that will be offered because of the grant funds. And she’s not alone. Julius said the employees of the daycare are always looking for classes they can attend to become better at what they do. “They’re always willing to learn more.”

Tjelmeland said for the church — taking over operation of the daycare has had a learning curve. “In July we’d had this two years, and it’s fair to say we took it on a little naively, but we’ve learned (a lot),” she said. One of the things they realized when they were ready to hire a new director this year was that it would be good to bring in someone with a lot of experience in childcare and running a daycare. They’ve been blessed over the two years with good people who have worked very hard; now they’ve been blessed with a director with a lot of institutional knowledge about this business, and the children are blessed with top-notch people providing their care in a clean and safe small-town environment.

“I think the camaraderie among the staff really stands out in my mind (as a very positive thing about the daycare),” she said. “They like and know each other really well, and that enhances the environment for the kids.”

As for the church running the daycare, Tjelmeland said it’s been a good undertaking for the church. “We see it as a local mission to provide safe and high-quality child care right here in our community.”

To find out more about Bethany Lutheran Daycare, call 515-338-0182 or visit its
Facebook page: Bethany Lutheran Daycare Friends.