



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Westshore Community Foundation invests \$176,500 into outdoor play projects across its catchment area through Free to Play

Gimli, Manitoba — Westshore Community Foundation is proud to announce **\$176,500** in funding to support **four** community-led projects across **its catchment area of Riverton, Gimli, Fraserwood, Winnipeg Beach, and Dunnottar** through Free to Play, a growing national movement to bring outdoor, child-led play back into the everyday lives of children. The funded projects will create more opportunities for children to move, imagine, explore, connect, and play their own way outdoors.

“Our goals are to enhance the physical health and development of our youth, to improve their social and emotional growth, and to foster environmental and cognitive connections by encouraging a sense of wonder and stewardship towards nature. Our intended outcomes include enhancing children’s motor skills and sensory processing, reducing screen time, increasing participants’ Vitamin D levels, and encouraging natural exploration. We hope to provide opportunities for children to safely test limits, build confidence, and assess risks. We will foster cooperation, sharing and conflict resolution during group nature play, and will provide space for self-regulation, stress reduction and improved mood through interactions with natural, calming environments.”

— Dr. Audrey Swift, Administrative Head of the Gimli Wave Youth Drop-In.

The following projects are being supported in Westshore Community Foundation’s catchment area:

- **\$125,001** to support **Winnipeg Beach School** in enhancing their current playground space by adding a Nature Kitchen and Outdoor Theatre Space along with a Curriculum Cupboard to store loose parts and props for creative play. Additionally, an accessible paved path will be constructed around the perimeter with Balance/Climbing Stations that promote movement, climbing, and further opportunities for students of all ages. The space will also be available to the local daycare centre and community members outside of school hours.
- **\$32,220** to support **Gimli Wave Youth Drop-In Inc.** in holding nature-based activities at Hinterland where certified Forest and Nature School practitioners and Knowledge Keepers will offer sessions that will allow children the freedom to explore and provide the freedom to explore and engage in child-led nature play.
- **\$12,606** to support **Manitoba Down Syndrome Society Inc.** in purchasing Playground Communication Boards for three elementary schools in the Westshore Community Foundation catchment area – Riverton Early Middle School, Sigurbjorg Stefansson School in

Gimli, and Winnipeg Beach School. These make communication accessible to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) users while they are outside with friends and unable to use their high-tech devices due to weather or glare from the sun. These boards will also raise awareness of AAC and familiarize all students and playground users with symbol-based language.

- **\$6,673** to support **Riverton-Bifrost Parks and Recreation Commission** in offering a Summer Pop-Up Adventure Play program for Riverton children ages 3 – 12. The project will provide ongoing opportunities for child-led, unstructured outdoor play through a reusable Adventure Play Kit, which will provide access to loose parts and materials to build, explore, invent games, and take safe risks outdoors.

This investment is part of Free to Play, a national initiative led by the Community Foundations of Canada and powered locally by participating community foundations across Canada. Seeded by support from Waltons Trust, with additional support from The Lawson Foundation and Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities, Free to Play is helping communities reimagine childhood by creating the conditions for more outdoor play, curiosity, risk-taking, and belonging.

Join the Movement

Free to Play generated significant interest across the country, reflecting growing momentum around the importance of outdoor play for children, families, and communities. The initiative is designed not only to fund local projects, but to help spark a larger cultural shift that recognizes outdoor play as essential to healthy childhoods and connected communities. The overwhelming response to Free to Play demonstrated a clear appetite for more investment in outdoor play and community wellbeing, with many strong projects seeking support beyond the funding currently available.

Westshore Community Foundation is inviting local funders, businesses, governments, and community partners to join Free to Play and help grow outdoor play opportunities for children in our catchment area.

Partners joining Free to Play have the opportunity to:

- **Help more children get outdoors**, off screens, and into joyful, active play close to home.
- **Expand equitable access** to outdoor play, particularly for children in Indigenous, rural, remote, and underserved communities.
- **Join a growing national network** of philanthropic, private, public, and community leaders helping drive a larger cultural shift around outdoor play and childhood in Canada.
- **Stretch investments further** by pooling resources alongside community foundations and other local and national partners.
- **Support community-led solutions** designed by organizations and leaders who understand local children, families, and neighbourhoods.

About Westshore Community Foundation

Westshore Community Foundation Inc. is one of only two community foundations in Manitoba

chosen to participate in the Free to Play program for 2026 – 2028. To learn more about this and other activities at www.westshorefoundation.ca

About Free to Play

Free to Play is an initiative led by Community Foundations of Canada, seeded by the Waltons Trust with support from the Lawson Foundation and Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities. The fund supports outdoor play for children across Canada through projects funded by local community foundations.

Learn more at: <https://communityfoundations.ca/initiatives/free-to-play>

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