

School playground upgrades get support from Miramichi business

Credit union facilitates \$10,000 grant through Concentra playground fundraiser

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Shayla Mutch feared the COVID-19 situation would put a damper on fundraising efforts for a revamped playground and new outdoor recreational space at her school.

The principal at North and South Esk Elementary School in Sunny Corner said the playground committee paused its work shortly after the coronavirus pandemic began, as the ensuing business closures and job losses would make it difficult to seek donations.

Her concerns were eased, however, when Beaubear Credit Union in Miramichi facilitated a \$10,000 donation through Concentra — a wholesale bank and trust company for Canada's credit unions — toward the proposed playground overhaul and new outdoor space.

"It means everything," Mutch said Thursday afternoon.

"We were basically at zero for our fundraising before, and now we have a jumpstart on our fundraising efforts.

"We couldn't ask for money when people throughout the community are hurting, so it was a nice boost for us. Just as we thought there was no hope, a ray of sunshine came."

The K-6 school on Northwest Road plans to reconfigure its current playground, repaint, and refurbish most of its existing equipment to make it safer for students. The new space will include a walking trail in the woods near the school, wooden bridges to cross ditches, an outdoor volleyball court, and an outdoor



The North and South Esk Elementary School playground PHOTO: SUBMITTED

classroom.

In partnership with nearby Indigenous communities, Mutch said, a cultural area with a talking circle, stump stools and a Mi'kmaq wigwam will also be added.

She said the project's price tag is estimated at \$44,000, and raising that amount is no small feat. The playground is also among the few outdoor recreation facilities in the area, and the nearby ballfield, soccer fields, North and South Esk Regional High School and Sunny Corner Arena make the school site a hub of the community.

The \$10,000 donation and a \$5,000 gift from the 4Av Legacy Foundation as an act of kindness in memory of Avery Astle, one of four local teens who died in a car crash last year, puts the playground fundraising committee at \$15,000 raised toward that goal.

The last playground update at the school was in 2002, Mutch said. The equipment currently slated for upgrades was installed 30 years ago, so staff and parents wanted to make it safer and more aesthetically appealing.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic

began, Mutch said, the school's playground fundraising committee contacted potential donors in Sunny Corner and the surrounding areas about supporting the project. They put their efforts on hold when the virus came to New Brunswick.

Two weeks ago, Mutch heard the project was approved for a community empowerment grant the credit union obtained through Concentra.

"I was just in shock," she said about receiving the news.

"I burst into tears and felt so amazed.

"This is a spark that could light a fire for this project. We're hoping this is enough to help push it forward."

Tosha Hamilton, Beaubear Credit Union chief executive officer, said she was pleased to submit the grant application to Concentra on the school's behalf and deliver Mutch the good news after finding out the bid was successful.

"We enjoy giving back to our community," she said.

"It was a great opportunity to prepare the application on behalf of the school, and it was really nice to see it come to fruition during this time."