

Project Renewal family opens its arms wider: Expansion project aims to benefit kids and neighborhood

catholicmessenger.net/2023/02/project-renewal-family-opens-its-arms-wider-expansion-project-aims-to-benefit-kids-and-neighborhood/

Feb 23, 2023



Barb Arland-Fye

C.J. Parker teaches a lesson on music scales to Project Renewal participants in Davenport. The nonprofit organization that serves neighborhood kids is planning an expansion project.

By Barb Arland-Fye
The Catholic Messenger

DAVENPORT — In the cozy living room of the Treat House after school, 14 kids focused their attention on C.J. Parker and his music lesson featuring colorful pitch tubes. Parker, the lead InTune mentor for Common Chord, a nonprofit music organization, distributed the pitch tubes among the kids in grades kindergarten through six. Patiently but enthusiastically, he taught them to make music by thumping the pitch tubes on the floor note by note. Their eyes lit up as they listened to their music making.

Ann Schwickerath watched the budding musicians like a delighted mom in the adjacent dining room that afternoon, Feb. 8. She is the longtime director of Project Renewal, which operates the Treat House at Fifth and Warren streets for the children of families who live in the neighborhood and surrounding area. Project Renewal provides educational, recreational and social activities for children after school and during the summer in a safe and loving environment, Schwickerath says. Among Project Renewal's supporters is the Diocese of Davenport.

"There are other good after-school programs out there," says Alex Cahill, board president of Project Renewal. "The thing that is unique about Project Renewal is that you can stay with us, and your whole family (siblings) can stay with us from kindergarten through high school."



Disclaimer

Over the years, a growing number of children who looked to the Treat House as their second home during elementary school continued to participate through high school. Responding to the needs of its nearly 60 participants, Project Renewal is taking on an expansion project. As a nonprofit committed to the neighborhood's wellbeing, the centerpiece of the expansion effort is replacement of a run-down apartment house across the street that had become "a revolving door of violence," Schwickerath said.

Project Renewal plans to build a new, two-story house in keeping with the neighborhood atmosphere. The first floor will contain a gym/fitness center and an area for arts, such as culinary, visual

and musical. The upstairs will house two apartments for staff, to emphasize working and living in the neighborhood. That was the intention of Sister Concetta Benedicente, PHJC, who responded to the call of the late Father Marvin Mottet to establish a ministry of presence in the neighborhood nearly 50 years ago, Schwickerath said.

The old brick house, where Schwickerath and assistant director Carl Callaway live, the Treat House next door and Sister Concetta Park across the street anchor this grassroots organization, a stabilizing force in this central-city neighborhood since 1974, supporters say. Its website describes Project Renewal as "an important organization in our community which can deeply impact the life of a child and is very rewarding personally for those who volunteer or provide financial support."

Now the next piece is taking shape to benefit the kids, their families and the neighborhood, evidenced by the financial commitment of community grant providers, private and public donors and the board. The estimated \$1.4 million expansion project, planned in three phases, will cover asbestos abatement and demolition of the old apartment house, construction of a new house and the remodeling of the residence and Treat House, Cahill

said. The hope is to break ground on the new structure by this summer with completion by the end of the year.

Quad Cities-based construction company, Russell, is the project's general contractor. Generous financial contributions from Jim and Michelle Russell, Quad Cities Bank & Trust, business leader Duncan Cameron, community grants and the Project Renewal board allowed the project to begin, Cahill said. The board will seek other grants and donations from the public to see the project to completion.

At the same time, Project Renewal is responding to the evolving needs of its participants by tailoring programming for the different age groups. The program serves 27 youths in grades K-6; 12 youths in grades seven through eight; and 20 high school students, Schwickerath said.

As the younger kids practiced their scales in the living room, middle school-age students hung out upstairs with volunteers, working on homework, playing cards or reading and chatting. Olivia Buxbaum-Lara, a sixth-grader at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic School in Davenport, chose to enjoy the music session.

"I like how we do all these activities at the Treat House. It's a very active place," Olivia said. Her older sister, Maribel Buxbaum-Lara, a high school senior, assists at the Treat House. "I've been coming here since I was very little," Maribel says. "I just like to come and help out with everything."

Project Renewal relies on a small staff of two full-time and three part-time staff, five regular volunteers year-round and some college students during the academic year. Conner Beyer, 21, a senior business management major at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, works part-time at Project Renewal and looks forward to a full-time career there in a new position after graduation this spring. "Everyone says I'm good with kids," he says. Coming to Project Renewal every day "puts a smile on my face; to see these kids grow brings me joy." For just



Barb Arland-Fye

High school students, staff and volunteers of Project Renewal enjoy a meal before a presentation on budgeting and personal finance at Project Renewal's Treat House in Davenport.



a few minutes, the smile left his face and he put on his “dad face” to fairly, but firmly, call out a child having a conflict with others. They stepped into the office off the living room to resolve the problem.

At 5:30 p.m. that Wednesday night, as the younger children headed for home, Schwickerath vacuumed the carpet before assembling folding tables and chairs with volunteers to prepare for the high school dinner and program. Tyler Edwards of Quad Cities Bank & Trust arrived to talk with the older youths about budgeting and personal financing. He supplemented his talk with worksheets and games that kept them engaged.

Callaway, working behind the scenes, manages the infrastructure of Project Renewal, where he has worked for 29 years, one year short of Schwickerath. “Project Renewal definitely has a special place in my heart,” says Callaway, a licensed occupational therapist. “Project Renewal takes a wholistic approach to the family. Once you’ve been here a while, you see the fruits of your labor.” The expansion project, he adds, “is going to grow what we are doing and address every aspect of a person.”

How to help Project Renewal

Send donations to Project Renewal, 906 W. 5th St., Davenport, Iowa, 52802 or go to the website at projectrenewal.net to make your donation electronically.

Support The Catholic Messenger’s mission to inform, educate and inspire the faithful of the Diocese of Davenport – and beyond! Subscribe to the print and/or e-edition, or make a one-time donation, today!