

# THE GERHARD E. DEKKER REGENERATIVE EDUCATION CENTER



Gerhard E. Dekker  
Regenerative Education Center

**2025**  
**ANNUAL REPORT**



**We are grateful to the traditional land of the Anishinaabe, Ininew, Metis, Dene, and Oceti-Sakowin peoples for holding us here. Currently, we are operating out of several locations to improve the accessibility of nature-based programming in the rural Southeastern region of Manitoba on Treaty 1 Territory.**



# YEAR IN REVIEW



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Greetings,

It has been an exciting year at the Gerhard E. Dekker Regenerative Education Center, with our first full year of School-Aged Forest and Nature School.

We have connected even more with families and organizations such as Shared Legacy, The Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Seine Rat Roseau Watershed District and the Crow Wing Trail - caretakers of the wild areas in which we play.

In January 2025, the Canadian Pediatric Society called on public health authorities and government to support and fund early childhood educators, municipal authorities, and community organizers to help create opportunities for spontaneous outdoor play and risky play. We are humbled to be able to offer, in our own small corner of Southeastern Manitoba, a space for children to have the freedom to create, explore, and grow in these ways.

As we move forward into 2026, we are excited to have funding to continue our Forest School Program and increase accessibility for children and families through free offerings for multiple age groups. We will continue to have the ability to offer our core program to families at reduced rates so that cost is not a significant barrier to participating in Forest and Nature School.

We are so grateful to have welcomed some wonderful and experienced new board members, and we are looking forward to welcoming more in the months ahead. We also look forward to building new connections with children and families, other organizations, and the community at large in the year ahead.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Deanna Kazina', is positioned above the typed name.

Deanna Kazina  
Board President

# Board of Directors

## **Board President, Forest School Co-Director & Facilitator**



Deanna Kazina (She/her/hers) is Metis and passionate about nature and education, and is a co-founder of GEDREC. She is a past Program Director of Wiâniskômohcikan (formally Bridging The Gap) a Winnipeg based culturally relevant environmental learning program, a contributor to the Senior 4 Lake Winnipeg curriculum, and has been published in Green Teacher Magazine. Passionate about seeds, Deanna established the Concordia Seed Project and is the founder of Montreal's first seed library (the Atwater Seed Library) which has been profiled on Radio Canada and CBC News. Deanna holds a BSc. in Geography from the University of Winnipeg and an Indigenous Permaculture Certificate and is a CNAC trained Forest School Practitioner. The mother of two kids, Deanna believes deeply in the need for youth to connect with and honor the land.

## **Chair of the Board, Forest School Co-Director & Facilitator**



Kara Peters Parkinson is a CNAC trained Forest School Practitioner, a lifelong learner, and a homesteading mother committed to promoting holistic well being in our communities through nature based learning and play. As a program director and facilitator of our FNS sessions, she brings her background in camp counseling, performing arts and visual/sculptural art, a deep lifelong interest in animals and herbalism, as well as enthusiasm for outdoor adventures, whittling and other skills, weaving together diverse modalities and frameworks of understanding to benefit a holistic approach to learning. Kara's community work before GEDREC includes sitting on the provincial Council of the Green Party of Manitoba and working for the Manitoba Wilderness Committee advocating for the protection of our natural spaces. Kara is passionate about language and speaks English, French, and conversational Mandarin Chinese, and is learning Nehiyawewin (Cree) and Spanish. Incorporating language learning, art, theatre and storytelling into nature-based education is something she is especially passionate about! Kara lives in the RM of Piney on 160 forested acres, in the homeland of the Oceti- Sakowin, Inineew and Anishnaabe people, with her beautiful 14 year old child, dogs, cats, Kunekune pigs and Nigerian goats.

## **Board Member, Volunteer Advisor**



Shaun Leonoff (she/hers) grew up in Winnipeg but spent all her summers outdoors at her grandparents cottage at Laclu, Ontario where she was a “free range child” roaming the forests and canoeing on the lake with no boundaries. If she was not at the lake, she was camping with her parents all over Manitoba. Her father was a long time Scout leader who believed every child should be skilled in bushcraft and her mother was a conservationist long before the general population understood the need to protect our land. Shaun moved to Ste. Anne to be closer to nature, was hired at Ste. Anne Hospital and started a family. She added 4 children and assorted pets to the family. While raising her children, she became very involved in the community, chairing the Parks and Rec Board for several years, participating in safety advisory committees for Seine River School Division, member of the Southeastman District Health Advisory Committee and a Scout Leader for 20 years including co-leading the first Scout Troop for girls in Canada. She was also always the camp volunteer parent for school camping trips, teaching canoeing and creating adventures.

Shaun believes strongly that children need to be part of nature in order to thrive and grow to be caring, empathetic adults. Making a career change midlife, Shaun has been employed at Assiniboine Park for the past 14 years, developing and growing their volunteer program to its current size of over 1000 volunteers ranging in age from 14 to 90 years. For Shaun, working in the park is not really “working” because everyday she gets to share her love of the natural world with like-minded people in a park and zoo.

## **Board Member, Marketing Director**



Keely is a lover of nature, art, writing, and all things Forest School. Her respect for the land and passion for the outdoors began at a young age, growing up on a sustainably-operated herb farm in BC in a family with deep agricultural roots.

After completing a BA in English and French at the University of Winnipeg, Keely spent several years working in elementary schools in rural Quebec and rural Manitoba, promoting and celebrating both official languages. She then returned to BC to join her family's agri-tourism business, Okanagan Lavender & Herb Farm. Over the next six years, she gained extensive experience working in tourism, marketing, content creation and brand identity; a skill set she is excited to bring to the GEDREC team.

In 2022, Keely and her young family relocated to the RM of Hanover where they have been able to embrace a slower pace of life. Keely now spends her days reading storybooks, building cardboard box trains, and exploring the beautiful outdoors (rain, snow or shine!) with her two kids.



## **Board Treasurer**

James Elmore spends his free time enjoying the outdoors with his kids and gardening. He is an RN who has worked in research and project management. James generously donates his time, energy, thoughtfulness, and experience to GEDREC and is an invaluable addition to the team.

In 2025 the Gerhard E. Dekker Regenerative Education Center developed and launched Southeastern Manitoba's first rural Forest & Nature School programming, thanks to grant funding from the Manitoba Government's From the Ground Up program - Healthy, Safe, Connected Children and Youth Stream. We have welcomed children, youth, families, adults and seniors for weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly play-based, learner-centered sessions on and with the land.



# Community Survey

To aid us in determining the locations, dates and scope of our Forest and Nature School programming, we developed a community survey through the TypeForm platform, which gathered detailed feedback from over 165 individuals in Southeastern Manitoba.

This survey featured pathways for those interested in enrolling, volunteering, and joining board committees, as well as for educators and teachers interested in collaborating in program delivery. It was advertised via our website and newsletter, on social media and via posters in public locations.

We identified two wonderful new board members and many prospective volunteers, as well as connecting with educators and individuals interested in collaboration, and families interested in various kinds of programming, including preschool age, family, teen, and elementary age Forest and Nature School programs.



# Forest & Nature School



Forest & Nature School supports the whole person in their unique learning journey, and has at its heart building meaningful relationships with the land, self, and others.

Forest School always occurs in the same natural area, building a deep relationship with place.

Participants are supported to take healthy risks, initiate and pursue creative ideas and projects, build skills, cooperate with one another, and connect with nature and the land in their own ways.



Forest and Nature School is a learner centered, play-based pedagogy that empowers and supports participants' confidence, agency, creativity, problem solving, and holistic well being.

# Planning, Locations, & Partnerships

When exploring potential locations for program delivery, we met with representatives from the RMs of Hanover and La Broquerie, the Seine Rat Roseau Watershed District, Musee St. Pierre Jolys, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and Shared Legacy Partnership. We have explored the merits of many locations, including the Tourond Creek Discovery Centre, Grunthal Park, Musee St. Pierre Jolys, La Broquerie's Parc Tetrault Park, and the Prairie Preserve at the Weston Family Tall Grass Prairie Interpretive Centre.

As Forest & Nature School requires adequate warming facilities for safety and learner well-being, as well as a nature rich area to explore, we were grateful to work with the RM of La Broquerie's Recreation Department to rent a meeting room with direct outdoor access as a warming space at the HyLife Centre, adjacent to the natural learning area of Tetrault Park.

We collaborated with the Nature Conservancy of Canada to determine parameters and policies for site use, ensure insurance compliance, and deliver our program at the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve in the RM of Stuartburn.

We are grateful to the NCC for their in-kind donation of the Interpretive Centre, as well as to Shared Legacy Partnership (Norm Grégoire, RM of Stuartburn and Nature Conservancy of Canada), for the in-kind services of Norm Grégoire as an additional program facilitator with wonderful knowledge of the natural world to share with participants.

We have also partnered with the Seine Rat Roseau Watershed District to offer Families & Tots Nature Play Days at Tourond Creek Discovery Centre. They have provided in-kind nature interpreter support to programs.

# Forest & Nature School Locations

## **Apple Blossoms Cohort**

### ***La Broquerie's Parc Tétrault Park***

Featuring the Seine River, riparian and naturalized areas with long grasses and bushes, Birch, Scotch Pine, Cottonwood, and large Willow trees great for climbing, this is a rich, varied and engaging site for Forest School learners. It features a wheelchair accessible warming space with washrooms for indoor breaks, and paved pathways throughout the park.



## **Skipperlings Cohort**

### ***Stuartburn's Weston Family Tall Grass Prairie Interpretive Centre***

This beautiful space for learning and connection with the land is in some of the last remaining endangered Tall Grass Prairie on Earth. It offers a unique experience of rare biodiversity, quiet, and true nature immersion to Forest School learners with a cozy and enriching warming space in the Interpretive Centre.



# Program Dates

## April - June 2025

Our Forest School pilot program launched with 20 weekly 5 hour sessions for ages 6-12.

**Skipperlings Cohort** - 10 Weekly 5 hour Sessions

**Coyotess Cohort** - 10 Weekly 5 hour Sessions

## September 2025 - June 2026

Serving many of the same children and families, as well as many new enrollees, we offered weekly and bi weekly programs in these same locations from September 2025 - June 2026.

**Coyotes Cohort** - 36 Weekly 6 hour Sessions

**Skipperlings Cohort** - 19 Bi-Weekly 5 hour Sessions



# Enrollment

- Students have come from many areas of Southeastern MB, including RMs of Hanover, Piney, Ritchot, La Broquerie and Stuartburn, Niverville and Steinbach, and from as far as Altona in the RM of Rhineland.

- **30 children** aged 6 to 12 have enrolled in our weekly and bi-weekly Forest & Nature School program, with many repeat enrollees.



- We welcomed **8 students** in Grades 1 and 2 from Roseau Valley School to join 4 full day Skipperlings sessions with their outdoor education class in Spring 2025.

# Tuition Rates and Financial Assistance

In many communities in Canada, Forest School can be cost prohibitive, and our community is very grateful for the support of the Manitoba Government's *From the Ground Up* program in making this meaningful opportunity possible for children and families in rural Manitoba.

- Our regular tuition rate of \$8.3/hour was also subsidized by grant funding (1/4 price reduction from total cost to run).
- We offered sibling discounts of 15% and 10% for additional siblings.



- We were able to offer tuition assistance to all families who requested it, with nobody turned away due to lack of funds.
- Tuition assistance was offered to 11 students, with discounts of 50% to 75% off the total tuition price.

# Indigenous Learning

First Nations and Métis students, as well as students from all backgrounds, have participated in Indigenous language learning, land acknowledgments, seasonal teachings, and Indigenous led workshops and activities.



We have enjoyed books by Indigenous authors teaching about seasonal rhythms, traditional medicines, the Seven Grandfather Teachings, and language learning including Anishnaabemowin and Nehiyawewin.

Alicia Alphonso of Waywayseecappo First Nation was invited to share a red willow dreamcatcher making workshop and teachings with the Coyotes cohort.



Lindsey Brown shared a smudge ceremony, water song, and Nanaboozhoo story with the Skipperling and Coyotes cohorts.

We read the Orange Shirt Story by Phyllis Webstad during Orange Shirt week, and discussed the realities and harmful legacies of Residential Schools in a heart centered, empathy building way.

Promoting cultural awareness and sensitivity is deeply important. Many participants have improved their contextual understanding of the experiences, stories, languages, traditions, and land based knowledge of First Nations people.



# Removing Barriers to Access

We work with participants and their families to improve accessibility and remove barriers to access wherever possible.

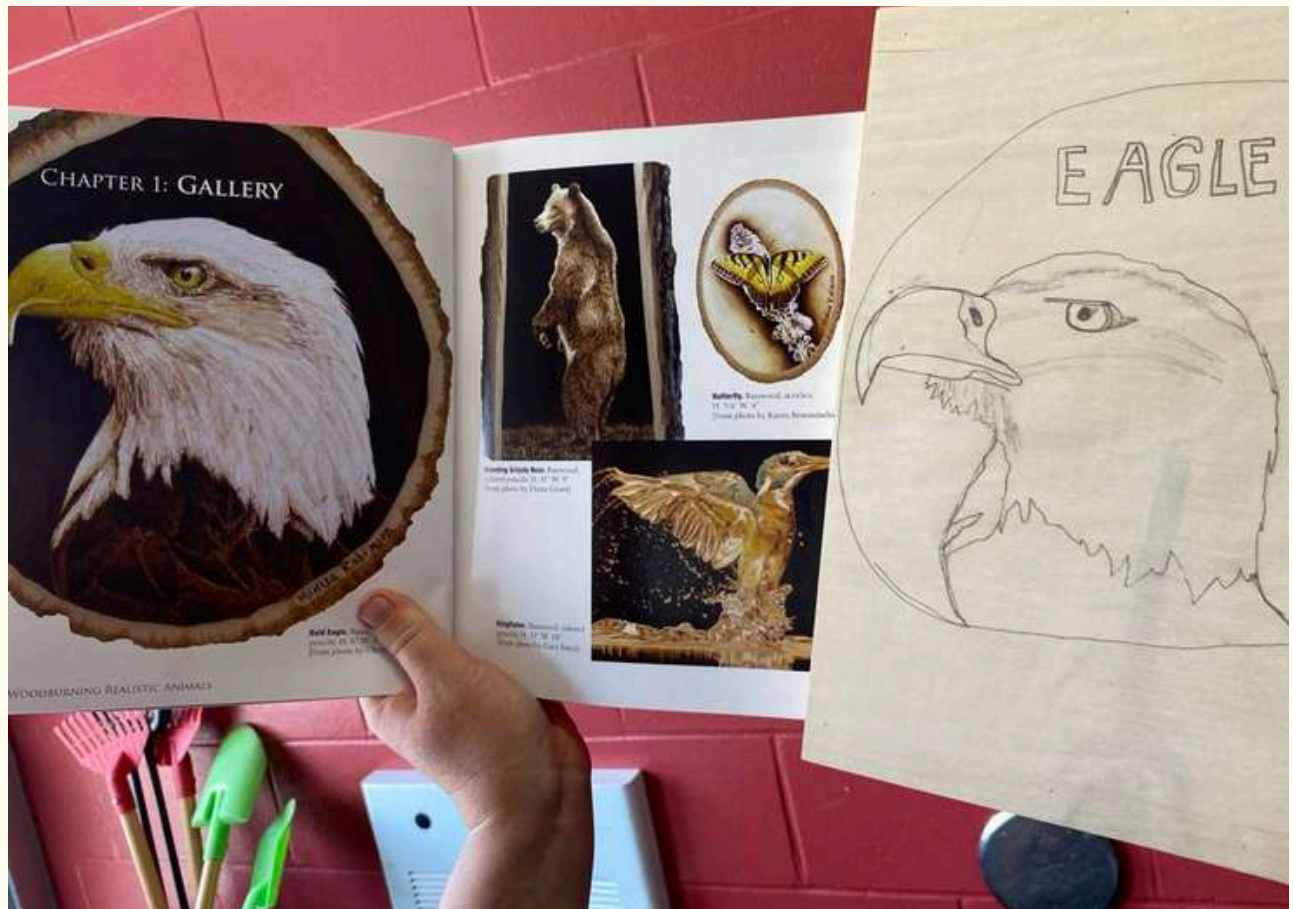


We have several students enrolled with disabilities and SEN (Special Educational Needs), including ADHD and autism.

Our program is learner-centered and relatively low-demand, with a high degree of choice, agency, and flexibility for each student.

Outdoor learning environments can help support nervous system regulation, reduce stress, and improve learning.

Parents have expressed gratitude for the accessibility of this program for their children, for whom other learning environments may not be fully accessible.



# Benefits of Forest & Nature School



- Social-emotional learning, improved cooperation, conflict resolution and communication skills
- Self-care, including dressing appropriately for the weather, attuning to physical and emotional needs, and assessing risk
- Physical well-being through exercise and movement outdoors
- Physical literacy: improved balance, strength, agility, proprioception, and sensory perception (sight, hearing, and overall observation on the land)
- Improved confidence, empowerment and agency through self-directed and project based learning
- Development of fine and gross motor skills
- Skills-based learning and development, e.g. tool use, whittling, fire-starting, wildcrafting, cooking, needle felting, tracking, drawing, self-expression, etc.
- Natural literacy and ecological awareness through nature journaling, inquiry, games, and exploration
- Care for the land and awareness of Indigenous peoples' traditions, stories and relationship to this land
- Intrinsic motivation to learn through inquiry-driven and emergent learning
- Improved executive functioning and time management skills and awareness





# All Ages, Intergenerational Community Forest & Nature School

Community Forest & Nature School is an intergenerational program rooted in Forest School relationships and pedagogy, designed to be inclusive of and welcoming to community members of all ages, build greater social cohesion and well-being for children, youth, families, adults and seniors, encourage creativity and learning, and connect community meaningfully with nature and the land.

This pilot program launched in March 2026 and offers 4 monthly sessions at the Weston Family Tall Grass Prairie Interpretive Centre in Stuartburn, Manitoba.

We have reached out to Senior's Services coordinators and organizations including Rat River Recreation, Village of St Pierre Senior Services and the Pat Porter Active Living Center.

Gerhard E. Dekker Regenerative Education Center



## All Ages Community Forest & Nature School

• Wild Skills • Arts & Crafts • Exploring & Play •  
In Reciprocity with the Land

Weston Family Tall Grass Prairie Interpretive Centre,  
Stuartburn Manitoba 1:00 - 4:00 pm, Monthly

Sat. March 28 -	Pine Needle Baskets, Bug Hotels & Fairy Houses	
Wed. April 22 -	Whittled Dolls, Needle Felted Animals, Shelters & Forts	
Sat. May 2 -	Red Willow Dreamcatcher Workshop with Alicia Alphonso & Big Group Games	
Wed. June 17 -	Nature Inspired Self Portraits & Herbal First Aid	
All sessions-	Free creative play, with access to loose parts, art materials, equipment, books & tools • Games, sit spot & nature journaling • Intergenerational skill sharing	

• Sliding Scale Attendance Fee • Ages 0-99+  
• Children must be accompanied by an adult

TO REGISTER, VISIT [WWW.GERHARDCENTER.ORG](http://WWW.GERHARDCENTER.ORG)



With thanks to the Manitoba Government's *From the Ground Up* grant funding, which has made this program possible.





- **39 individuals have enrolled** in this program so far
- This program has been offered on a **sliding scale cost basis** to ensure it is welcoming and accessible to all, with pricing offered at \$5 - \$15 / person to attend, with nobody turned away due to lack of funds. We have found that families are very generous in supporting the program.

At our first session, we offered pine needle basket making, creative fairy house builds, and bug hotel making. Participants ranging in age from 0 to 60 years old, including many children and teenagers, engaged enthusiastically with icebreaker games, enjoyed free play with loose parts and on the slackline, and built their fairy houses using hammers, saws, carpenter's brace drills, screw drivers and whittling knives. 'Nature Norm' Grégoire led a nature walk where we encountered Marsh Hawks (Northern Harriers).

Participants expressed joy, inspiration, and excitement to return. It was really beautiful to see how the intergenerational environment enriched learning and social well being, brought out everyone's silliness and sense of humour, and promoted holistic well being.



From May 2025 - March 2026, we hosted 8 programs for Families & Tots:

May 28th (Tourond Creek Discovery Centre)  
June 25th (Tourond Creek Discovery Centre)  
July (The Weston Family Interpretive Centre)  
October 15th (Tourond Creek Discovery Centre)  
October 29th (Tourond Creek Discovery Centre)  
November 26th (Grunthal Centennial Park)  
March 4<sup>th</sup> (Grunthal Centennial Park)  
March 18<sup>th</sup> (Grunthal Centennial Park)

At each session, families were provided with various nature stations to explore. For example, magnifying glasses and live critters in basins, watercolors with natural-beam paints, insect discovery, and bird and butterfly exploration through puppets and playdough. They were provided with a guided craft with natural materials (butterfly wings, driftwood watercolors, wool ghost, willow wreaths) in each session. We read a nature book while snacking after our guided hike or critter dip. We also included an opening and closing circle and warm-up nature games.

Connecting with the Steinbach Family Resource Centre allowed us to reach more families, many of whom came to our outdoor programming. We offered a short nature craft or story to families in the Steinbach Family Resource Centre preschool program and invited them to the Families & Tots Program. We also shared with parents the importance of child-led and risky play opportunities for children. After our initial visit, we had 8 families from the Steinbach Family Resource Centre join our outdoor programming and newsletter.



## Project Goals

The goals of the Families & Tots Project was to promote and facilitate the mental health and physical well-being of mothers/caregivers & children by:

- a) bringing families together to experience local natural areas
- b) building community and fostering social connections
- c) offering place-based education that gets families excited about nature
- d) and nurturing children's innate love of nature through play

We were able to do all of the above and we saw that the same families repeatedly took part in our programs. The children expressed joy and enthusiasm both when in free play and in structured crafts.

As an organization we were able to build a relationship with the Seine Rat Roseau Watershed District who kindly offered support to this program by providing the materials for critter dipping as well as leading this portion of our Spring Programming. In the Fall the Seine Rat Roseau Watershed District offered an interpreter for a guided hike for families.

We also continued to build on our relationship with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, which continues to support our organization in various capacity. We held our July program at the Weston Family Interpretive Centre free of charge and with the assistance of Nature Norm on site to provide a guided hike to families.





# Blind Creek Clean-Up



On September 25th, with the support of Healthy Together Now, GEDREC conducted a community clean-up at the Blind Creek Trail. We look forward to doing another community clean-up in the near future. The garbage pickers and gloves have also been used by our Coyote Group in the early spring for a spring clean-up of Tetrault Park in La Broquerie.

# Every Child Matters Bench

We have been working with the Crow Wing Trail group, who have helped us to connect with the Roseau River South Rapids Anishinaabe First Nation to install an Every Child Matters Bench along the Roseau River. We look forward to continuing to connect and setting a date to install the bench. This initiative has been made possible with funding from Healthy Together Now. Look out for future updates on our Facebook page.

**THANK YOU**



**Nature Conservancy of Canada**

**Shared Legacy**

**Seine Rat Roseau Watershed  
District**

**Healthy Together Now**

**Steinbach Credit Union**

**Steinbach Sobeys**

# Financial Statement Summary

REVENUE	March 31, 2025	March 31, 2026
GEDREC initial account balance	236	
<b>Grants (Total)</b>	<b>39,986</b>	<b>37,000</b>
Healthy Together Now (Art in Woods)	2,000	--
Healthy Together Now (Orange Bench)	---	2,000
Province (From the Ground Up 24/25)	35,000*	--
Steinbach Credit Union	1,936	--
Healthy Together Now (Blind Creek)	1,050	---
Province (From the Ground Up 25/26)	--	35,000
Friends of the Forest Profits	--	18,420
Interest	3	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40,225</b>	<b>55,432</b>

\*Pending additional 15,000 in Aug/Sept 2026

EXPENDITURES	March 31, 2025	March 31, 2026
Wages and Honorariums	4,820	39,874
Equipment	337	8,544
Materials and Supplies	1,208	3,496
Other Expenses*	549	8,639
Banking Fees	28	93
<b>TOTAL 548.54</b>	<b>6,942</b>	<b>60,646</b>

\* Insurance, Indoor Rental Space, Website, Brightwheel, Training

SURPLUS (DEFICIT)	March 31, 2025	March 31, 2026
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>33,283</b>	<b>(5,214)</b>