

## Grant gives Monroe County United Ministries a new place to play

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•\$1/week provides 26 children with a book of their very own to read and enjoy at home.

•\$5/week provides a year of healthy, balanced meals for a child in MCUM's childcare program.

- \$20/week provides a year's worth of art supplies to help over 100 preschoolers enrolled in MCUM's childcare program to build fine motor and creativity skills.

- \$21/week provides a month of licensed and accredited childcare for an at-risk child.

Donate to United Way's annual campaign at [monroeunitedway.org/givenow](https://monroeunitedway.org/givenow)

*Editor's note: This story is part of a weekly series that will highlight the work of the 25 United Way of Monroe County nonprofits. United Way is in the midst of its annual campaign, which has a fundraising goal of \$1.3 million. Find out more at [monroeunitedway.org](https://monroeunitedway.org).*

Though there are five to choose from, Arlie Taylor has no difficulty picking her favorite slide on Monroe County United Ministries' new playground.

"I like the twisty-est one," 3-year-old Arlie said, pointing to a spiraling blue slide adjacent to four new swings on the nonprofit's property.

It's much harder for Arlie and her preschool classmates to articulate their new playground's one overall outstanding feature. In fact, the kids have trouble playing in any spot for more than a few minutes before scampering away to try a different slide, climb up a small rock wall or skip up a stairway.

"We all love it," Arlie said. "All of the things."

The vibrant blue, yellow, red and green structure can safely accommodate 48 children ages 2 to 12. And with close to 800 children in the Crestmont neighborhood community, MCUM Executive Director Erin Predmore estimates that the new playground will see just as much action as its predecessor did over the past 30 years.

"A whole bunch of them can slide at once, and they're pretty excited that they can have races," Predmore said. "You hear their little squeals of laughter and giggles."

A \$27,475 grant from the city of Bloomington's Jack Hopkins Social Services fund enabled MCUM, a United Way agency, to replace the emergency services' 30-year-old playground equipment with two new playgrounds. One is for private use by MCUM's preschoolers, and one will be open to the community after school hours and on weekends.

MCUM has also partnered with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Bloomington, another United Way agency, to provide kids in that nonprofit's Crestmont Unit with easy access to the vibrant jungle gym.

“They’re playing a lot of tag and running back and forth, which is a great opportunity for them to practice some of the social skills development they need to be ready for school,” Predmore said.

Every year, about 130 children participate in MCUM’s child-care program. The program is open to all children ages 2 through 6, and families pay on a sliding scale depending on family size and income level.

Across the economic spectrum, 71 percent of the children enrolled in the child-care program developed the basic math and literacy skills needed to start kindergarten successfully, according to United Way statistics. And 88 percent of parents of children in MCUM’s program said they have an understanding of how to support their child's development and education at home.

“It’s a great place where kids can get to know each other and get along with each other,” Predmore said. “(The kids) get out some of that energy so they can focus in the classroom and be ready to learn the numbers, colors and letters sort of things kids need for kindergarten readiness.”

On a bedding of mulch made from recycled tires, 4-year-old Liam Blackburn kneels down to hold a football in place for Emmanuel Thomas Jr. to run and kick. After a running start, 4-year-old Emmanuel slides into the ball more like a soccer player than a football player. But his classmates cheer and line up for their turn as kicker.

It’s a scene out of a “Peanuts” cartoon, but everyone is smiling.

“That coordination is part of school readiness as well,” Predmore said. “It’s not just about knowing your numbers and your letters, but also being able to be coordinated in your body movements.”