

Success story

## **Lasting Legacy: How a Vision for Childcare Was Built in Griswold, Iowa**

*By Cecilia Lynch*

Since 1869, the Noble Center United Methodist Church stood on a hill at the corner of Highway 71 and Victoria Road in Noble Township, Cass County, Iowa. Four years ago, the last remaining members gathered.

“We had to make final decisions on where and how to gift the remaining money in the church account as we closed our little white church,” said Barb Baier, life-long church and community leader. “Do we ask the members to take one last leap of faith and donate \$63,000 dollars to be seed money for a childcare center in town? We thought that we could really leave a lasting legacy.”

The decision was made—donate the thousands of dollars left in the church bank account to build a childcare center in Griswold, Iowa. In short order, the Noble Initiative Foundation was formed as a board-governed 501c3 nonprofit corporation. With help from the community, the board launched a capital campaign to fund the project.

“I had no idea where getting involved with this project would lead,” said Karla Wilson, vice-president of the foundation. “I was a stay at home parent. I had an option to take my kids to two separate daycares, but that seemed like it wasn’t going to work for my family. Knowing there was a huge need for childcare in my community, I decided to use my time at home to help however I could.”

Many in the community saw the need and the project began to take shape.

“I watched many parents struggle to find childcare, going from place to place,” said Matt Leighton, owner of Leighton Carpentry and President, Noble Initiative Foundation.

“Another thing I noticed is that kids were going to daycare in other towns. Sometimes parents had to drive, sometimes in the opposite direction, to find care, including myself. So I understood the need for a facility.”

The childcare project gained momentum with a foothold in the town.

“To move the vision of the project forward, we contacted potential stakeholders,” said Steven Baier, Cass County Supervisor, District 4, and Noble Initiative Foundation board member. “Working with a local family, we were able to purchase nine acres next to the Griswold public school with some of our existing funds. This gave us the ideal site of the child development center, plus a way of addressing that other need—affordable housing. Part of the adjacent housing development will contain a storm water management structure, addressing another a critical need in the community.”

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development agency got involved with the childcare project and worked with all the partners. Through congressionally designated spending, the Agency made a \$1 million grant to the Noble Initiative Foundation from the [Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant](#) program.

“I want to recognize everyone involved with this project,” said Jessica Bass, USDA Rural Development area specialist who underwrote the funding. “I’m proud to be a small part of it. It’s an honor to represent USDA Rural Development. This community deserves a lot of recognition for the services that the new child development center will provide.”

She also helped the city of Griswold with another project in 2023. The city needed upgraded communications equipment for the fire department. USDA Rural Development awarded a \$7,100 grant to enable the purchase of pagers for fire and rescue volunteers.

Recently, the childcare center stakeholders held a grand opening ceremony. A week ahead of time, organizers realized that the crowd would be so large that the ceremony location would have to be moved from the new center to a church a block away. The ceremony featured speakers from the [Noble Initiative Foundation](#), the [Charles Lakin Foundation](#), the childcare center, USDA, and a representative from a congressman’s office.

Supervisor Baier noted grants, donations, and volunteers came from many sources including the Lakin Foundation, the Noble Initiative Foundation, the Cass County Board of Supervisors, small business, individuals, families, and the city of Griswold.

After a local kindergarten class sang a song written for the occasion, Chelsea Dvorak, the director of the [Lakin Foundation Child Development Center of Griswold](#), addressed the crowd of 150 people.

“As director, my top priority is providing quality childcare for our families,” she said. “Every child will feel support from our staff and have someone in their corner for help. Their individual needs will be met. This type of support is the reason why my husband and I moved back to the Griswold area and why our children will be raised in this community.”

Visitors were welcomed to tour the new childcare facility after the ceremony. The new center is over 8,000 square feet, slab-on-grade, a wood-framed building with four childcare rooms for children ranging from six weeks old to four years old, and an area for the before-and-after-school program. The building features a gymnasium, a sick bay, office space, and a secure check-in reception area. The infant classroom doubles as the

storm shelter for children and staff. The project also installed a secure entrance with overhead cover for drop-off and pick-up as well as a surveillance camera.

“Without the community, this childcare project would not have been possible,” said Director Dvorak. “The support that we have received has made a huge difference.”

“Look at what we have as a community with partners have done,” said Barb Baier of the Noble Initiative Foundation, gesturing toward the new building. “Look across the street at the new elementary building. Soon we will hear the voices and laughter, not only of the elementary school children playing, but the children at the childcare center doing the same. They are the voices of hope.”

[Community Facilities grants](#) are designed to provide affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas. An essential community facility is defined as a facility that provides an essential service to the local community. These funding opportunities may help increase the competitiveness of rural communities in attracting and retaining businesses that provide employment and services for residents.

Date of Obligation: 07/14/2023

Amount: \$1,000,000

Congressional District: IA-03