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SPROUTING UP

Early-childhood education program growing at Malone Center.

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 Lincoln Journal Star

When the Malone Community Center opened its doors to 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds in August by starting its own preschool, the applicants weren't necessarily pouring in.

In fact, the initial enrollment boasted just one student.

That wasn't unexpected. Nate Woods, the center's assistant director, said administrators predicted it would take up to a year to build the number of students they were looking for.

But more than three months and nine kids later, Woods said they're not just getting their numbers up, but he's also noticing the effect it's had on the kids.

Kids that came in rowdy are now polite and pleasant. Woods also said there was one child who couldn't speak English but now she's saying the teacher's name and responding to rules perfectly.

"We're in a pretty good situation here," Woods said.

It's a good start for the program, which the center began putting together last year as a way to expand its services.

"What we identified is that the younger you can get to the kids, the better chance they have of being successful," Woods said.

It's not the first time Malone's tried something like this, though.

About 10 years ago the center tried to start the same project. However, financial obstacles hindered the program early on and eventually it was shut down before it had a chance to progress.

With that in mind, Woods and others approached the program this time with a plan put together months in advance.

From the time Malone opens at 7:30 a.m. to the time it closes at 5 p.m., the schedule is packed.

At nine, breakfast is served. After that the kids learn about clocks, calendars and seasons. From there



ABOVE: Kamiya Bogan (from left) Kamille Bogan, Gong Yaning, Ali'Yanna Guyton and Brandon Murry dig in to an experiment Wednesday at the Malone Early Childhood Education Center. **LEFT:** Head Teacher Sydney Winters comforts one of her charges who was having a sad moment as the kids played at Trago Park.

they read a book, go outside or to the gym and have naptime. Then around 3 p.m. they have a snack and play outside in the gym or inside before calling it a day.

Woods said Malone is also in a

better situation financially than it was 10 years ago. The community center received a \$26,000 grant from the Goldwin Foundation earlier this year.

The grant gave the center an

opportunity to repurpose an old room into the ideal space for a preschool.

"We didn't have anything before that," Woods said. "We bought tables, cots, all the supplies; we painted the place and also had bathrooms put in."

For the other aspects of the program that the initial grant didn't cover, Woods said it's pretty self-sustaining. The program's fee, \$5 per hour or \$31 per day, covers leftover costs.

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Woods said he's also really pleased with the program's head teacher Sydney Winters.

Woods said she's done more than just teach numbers and letters. She's also promoted good behavior.

"Seeing the growth in (the kids), it's been amazing," Woods said. "You watch a kid come into a program and

they can't stand still, now they're well behaved."

Winters said she's also been amazed with her students' progress. In the beginning everyone was lacking in one area or another, whether it was writing, shapes, colors or numbers, but the group has made big strides.

"They're great, great kids," Winters said.

As far as what the program has accomplished in

such a short amount of time, Woods said he couldn't be happier. The next step is to attract more parents and show them the valuable experience Malone can offer their kids.

"Malone Community Center can provide a quality education," Woods said. "It would meet the goals of any other program to get their kid ready for kindergarten."

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