

Creating Community Through Care: Misgana Gidey's Inclusive Summer Camp

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In the heart of downtown Calgary, where play spaces are few and families often face barriers to accessible programming, one resident is making a remarkable difference. Misgana Gidey, a longtime childcare professional with over 30 years of experience, has created a vibrant, inclusive summer camp for children with disabilities and those on the autism spectrum—right in her own community housing building.

Misgana's building is home to a culturally diverse mix of families, many of whom live in below-market or lower-market rental units. Several residents have children with disabilities, and until recently, there were few opportunities for these kids to engage in safe, stimulating play—especially downtown and outdoors. Recognizing this gap, Misgana stepped up.

With support from The City of Calgary's Community Social Work (CSW) Program and a neighbourhood micro-grant, Misgana launched a weekly summer camp that runs from July through August. The micro-grant from The City of Calgary, which provides up to \$1,000 to residents, empowers community members to create inclusive, culturally rich, and socially supportive programming. Misgana used the funding to purchase supplies, cover entry fees for outings, and provide snacks and sensory activities tailored to the needs of the children.



The camp welcomes children from five to 12 years old, offering a wide range of activities that support physical literacy, fine motor skills, communication, and social development. From kinetic sand and storytelling in multiple languages to football and community garden visits, every detail is thoughtfully designed to foster growth and connection. Indoor activities are available for rainy days, and outings include trips to the fire hall and the Calgary Food Festival, where kids can try new foods and drinks for free.

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Additionally, Misgana also has a Saturday morning playgroup that has been running for years, which offers a space where parents can connect over coffee while their children play. The summer camp builds on this foundation, creating a deeper sense of community and inclusion. Parents are involved from the start—meeting with Misgana to discuss the program, share meals, and learn how their children will benefit. Many residents volunteer their time, and City volunteers also support the initiative, helping to build a network of care and collaboration.

The impact is profound. Children are making new friends and developing essential social skills. Parents express deep gratitude, saying they're thrilled to see their children happy, engaged, and thriving. Word of mouth has spread quickly, bringing more families into the fold and strengthening the community.



The camp is more than just a summer activity, it's a model of what inclusive, community-led programming can look like. It addresses real needs, celebrates cultural diversity, and creates a welcoming environment for all families, regardless of background or ability.



Community social workers (CSW) play a vital role in empowering residents like Misgana to lead meaningful, inclusive initiatives. Through funding, support, and collaboration, CSWs help build stronger, more connected communities where every resident has the opportunity to play, learn, and contribute in the neighbourhood. This summer camp is a shining example of how small grants and big hearts can transform lives!

