A long hospital stay for a child or teen can be uncomfortable, boring and sometimes scary. One of the goals of the 4 The Kids Fund is to make the hospital experience a little more tolerable. The Fund was created through the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln by Gary Lowery, Darin Muller and Denise Young. The Fund provides support to institutions, organizations, or events that care for, service, or raise funds for children and young adults who have emotional, physical or medical needs.

The fund gives with four themes in mind: Comfort, Fun, Healing and Learning. The fund focuses on ways to provide support to children in the form of activities and amenities which aid in the total experience of a child’s treatment and recovery. There are many children and young adults dealing with a variety of challenges and needs every day. Fortunately there are many wonderful organizations and generous people working very hard to fill those needs. Unfortunately the needs are great, and gaps exist. The fund was created with the intent of filling some of the gaps. While the fund is not dedicated to one specific cause or organization, St. John’s Children’s Hospital will be one of the primary beneficiaries. Other beneficiaries will include Camp COCO and the Special Olympics.

The fund will be flexible enough to respond to any unforeseen need that meets the identified criteria. One such example came up last year. In 2009, the Pillow Case Project was started at St. John’s Children’s Hospital to provide hand sewn, children’s themed pillow cases for each hospitalized child. The pillow cases are lovingly created by many caring volunteers, including Judy White, who implemented our local program, the St. John’s Samaritans and Vanessa Tinkous, St. John’s Child Life Specialist. The pillow cases have provided a fun and comfortable alternative to the standard issue pillow case. According to Clinical Child Life Specialist, Susan Spears, “The pillow cases brighten and add warmth to whatever area the pediatric patient may be in. They make an incredible difference in their hospital stay.”

Unfortunately, last year the project lost the grant support needed to purchase the fabric for the pillow cases. Susan contacted the fund donors and asked if they could help. Through the efforts of 4 The Kids, they were able to bring together generous sponsors such as Heartland Credit Union, Brad and Julie Zara of Zara’s Collision Center along with many individual donations to keep the Pillow Case project alive. One great new tradition may have been created in the process. Eighth graders at Glenwood Middle School have incorporated the pillow case project into their Fabrics class. Last year both the fall and spring classes donated over 20 hand sewn pillow cases – it is something the students hope to do every year.

Comfort, Fun, Healing, and Learning are all important to young people dealing with an illness, handicap or facing an extended recovery time. The mission of this fund is to help provide support in one or all of these areas. To accomplish that outcome, those involved with 4 The Kids Fund will be conducting fundraisers throughout the year and will be making directed requests by asking those interested to please consider the 4 The Kids Fund in their annual giving plans. As part of their continued fundraising, they will also be seeking more sponsors to support the St John’s Children Hospital Pillow Case Project.