

# HOMETOWN NEWS

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Anika and Logan Bayly play in the corner with mirrors of the Snoezelen Room at Westminster Elementary School that was dedicated Tuesday. Also known as a controlled multisensory environment, a Snoezelen room offers people with special needs a safe environment in which to explore various sensory experiences and exercise choice.

Herald photo by David Rossiter

## A little miracle room

WESTMINSTER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL THRILLED TO HAVE A SNOEZELLEN ROOM FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

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**J**ake Jeffery inspired those who worked with him and the results of that inspiration produced a room with sights and sounds like no other.

Jake's Bridge, a Snoezelen room, was formally dedicated in his memory at Westminster Elementary School Tuesday afternoon.

Nancy Brown, Westminster principal, called it a little miracle room. Also known as a controlled multisensory environment, a Snoezelen room offers people with special needs a safe environment in which to explore various sensory experiences and exercise choice. Some of the features in Jake's Bridge are a bubble tube, fiber optic cables that change colour, interactive carpets, a projector that allows stars to glide across the room or show videos and a glow-in-the-dark carpet.

"It engages every aspect of the student's

body," said Deb Hiebert, educational assistant with the Lethbridge public school district. "It's a calming space for those kids that maybe struggle with anxiety, as well as a space that could encourage communication with kids who struggle and maybe lack in those skills."

She said she first met Jake, a non-verbal student with autism, when he was 10 years old and in Grade 4.

"He was very loved by his school community and the Lethbridge community. He was involved in many activities in and outside the school," Hiebert said.

One of those activities was music therapy at Nicholas Sheran school, where he also used the multisensory room. When music therapy was moved to Westminster, Hiebert thought the school should also have a Snoezelen room for students who don't live in west Lethbridge.

"I saw how much he really, really loved the room," Hiebert said.

Hiebert applied for a grant through the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta and last fall she

succeeded in obtaining \$5,000. The grant was augmented by the Lethbridge public school district.

"I was simply amazed. It was everything I could imagine," Hiebert said. "I really hope that it's going to be used all the time."

While Hiebert submitted the grant application on Jake's behalf, he never got to use the room.

"My dear Jake passed away on December the 18th," she said.

Roz Jeffery, Jake's mom, created a piece of art for the room that blends Jake's portrait and Snoezelen-room style bubbles; she said Jake would have found the room very calming.

"He was one of those types of kids who preferred to be very, very stimulated because it had a calming effect," she said.

"We are so grateful to have this space. We have six children right now who use this room daily and you wouldn't believe the change in these kids," said Nancy Brown, principal at Westminster. "It's been amazing to see, even just in three weeks, that communication is starting to develop."

Brown said a wheelchair lift is next on the list to allow students in wheelchairs to access the room.