

# 2009 METLIFE FOUNDATION & ASSOCIATION OF CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS PROMISING PRACTICE AWARD APPLICANTS



## 2009 Award Recipients

- Boston Children's Museum (MA), KIDS @fterschool, Category: Play, Page 2
- Port Discovery Children's Museum (Baltimore, MD), Port Discovery and PACT Partnership, Category: Diversity, Page 3
- Northwoods Children's Museum (Eagle River, WI), Fun with Fathers Program, Category: Play, Page 4

## 2009 Honorable Mentions

- Connecticut Children's Museum (New Haven), The Farmers' Market Foods Infusion Project, Category: Health, Page 5
- Portland Children's Museum (OR), Center for Children's Learning, Category: Play/Art, Page 7
- Kohl Children's Museum of Greater Chicago (IL), Early Childhood Connections (ECC), Category: Play, Page 8

## 2009 Applicants

- Chicago Children's Museum (IL), Skyline and the Partnership of Playful Learners, Category: Play, Page 9
- The Children's Museum of Denver (CO), G.R.O.W. Collaborative, Category: Play, Page 11
- Children's Museum of Manhattan (NY), PlayWorks™, Category: Play, Page 12
- Children's Museum of Phoenix (AZ), Built by You, Category: Play/Diversity, Page 13
- Children's Museum of Pittsburgh (PA), Charm Bracelet Program, Category: Diversity, Page 14
- Children's Museum of Tacoma (Denison, TX), Play to Learn, Category: Play, Page 15
- The Children's Museum of Wilmington (NC), Field TREKS, Category: Diversity, Page 16
- Children's Museum of Winston-Salem (NC), CM of Winston Salem's Health Initiative, Category: Health, Page 16
- The Discovery Center of the Southern Tier (Binghamton, NY), The Story Garden, Category: Play/Health, Page 17
- Discovery Gateway (Salt Lake City, UT), Chase ArtWorks Program, Category: Diversity, Page 18
- Duluth Children's Museum (MN), Passport to Culture, Category: Diversity, Page 19
- Edventure Children's Museum (Columbia, SC), Hands-On, Minds-On! for K-5 Educators, Category: Diversity, Page 20
- Explorations V Children's Museum, Inc. (Lakeland, FL), Storybook Camp, Category: Diversity, Page 21
- Imagine Children's Museum (Everett, WA), Data Tracking System, Category: Health, Page 23
- Imagine Children's Museum (Everett, WA), Vermi's Wormology Program, Category: Health, Page 24
- Kidsquest Children's Museum (Bellevue, WA), Homeschool Series, Category: Diversity, Page 25
- Miami Children's Museum (FL), Healthy Kids Healthy Families Initiative, Category: Health, Page 25
- Minnesota Children's Museum (St. Paul), Big Fun!, Category: Health, Page 26
- Mobius Kids (Spokane, WA), Cooper's Corner Safety Fair, Category: Play/Health, Page 28
- Paso Robles Children's Museum (CA), K-5 Play & Learn Scholastic Program, Category: Play, Page 28
- Staten Island Children's Museum (NY), Museum Intern Program and Museum Ambassador Program, Category: Diversity, Page 30
- Strong National Museum of Play® (Rochester, NY), Community Programs at Strong National Museum of Play, Category: Diversity, Page 31
- Texoma Children's Museum (Denison, TX), Youth Service Scholarship Program, Category: Health & Diversity, Page 32
- Treehouse Children's Museum (Ogden, UT), "The Play's the Thing" program, Category: Play, Page 32
- Working Wonders Children's Museum (Bend, OR), Family & School Access Program, Category: Play, Page 34

## 2009 Award Recipient

**Boston Children's Museum (MA): KIDS @fterschool**

**Category:** Play

**Contact:** Tim Porter, 617-426-6500 ext. 420

### **Narrative Description**

Decades of work with afterschool programs has convinced us that there is no better place to introduce Museum pedagogies into our community, and there is no better learning environment outside of museums for extended inquiry-based enrichment. What has been missing for some time has been quality curriculum for afterschool programs, and training for their educators that recognize the unique challenges and advantages of Out-Of-School-Time (OST) settings. KIDS @fterschool was created to address both of these needs. Through years of heavily-evaluated work with afterschool programs, we have learned that children can significantly improve and develop critical process skills (problem solving, observing, question-asking, measuring, tool use, discussion strategies, etc.) through team-based enrichment. This is a practice that is happening less and less in test-frenzied schools, but is critical to students' intellectual development. In order to best encourage afterschool educators to offer these kinds of experiences for their children, KIDS @fterschool presents a full year of interdisciplinary activities within a pedagogical framework that teaches educators effective presentation skills, question-asking strategies and other techniques just by implementing the activities with their students. And, most importantly, KIDS is disseminated for free on our Web site. The resulting impact has been significant – KIDS @fterschool is being used in all 50 states in the U.S. and in 8 countries around the world. Our evaluation tells us that these afterschool programs will derive considerable benefit from implementing KIDS – their teachers will teach better, their children will learn better, they'll engage in enrichment experiences more often, and they'll have more fun doing it.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Project evaluation for KIDS @fterschool was conducted over two years by an independent evaluator and included two primary sources of data—surveys and site visits. Surveys were completed by site directors and staff who were involved in implementing the curriculum. Site visits included observations of KIDS activities being conducted by staff, and interviews with site directors. We also continue to track downloads of the curriculum from our Web site.

According to our tracking and the final evaluation report:

- In less than 3 months, KIDS @fterschool has been downloaded more than 1000 times in all 50 states in the U.S. and in 8 countries, even without advertising of the resource.
- 3 years after receiving training from BCM, afterschool sites were still implementing KIDS @fterschool enrichment activities and were still utilizing the curriculum's pedagogy.
- According to director and staff surveys, due to their program's participation in KIDS more educational programming was being offered, more time was being spent on enrichment and their program benefited from using the curriculum.
- Staff reported that they knew more educational enrichment activities, were better able to promote the educational content of activities and were extending skills they learned through KIDS to other areas of their afterschool program.
- Site directors not only felt that staff were more comfortable leading enrichment activities and knew more activities to do, they believed staff increased their questioning skills to promote exploration and learning, linked content to real world application and that the children were learning more during the KIDS activities.
- Staff increased their confidence level and were able to offer better enrichment activities. They experimented and reflected more during activities, became "more confident and willing to deliver academic instruction to the children." used diverse, different activities because of KIDS and they were "more confident when presenting educational materials to the children."

- According to staff, children improved their skill levels, were more excited about educational activities and were generally exposed more often to high quality enrichment activities and small group problem solving through KIDS.
- Children had a better sense of data collection, worked better together, had richer discussions and exhibited “more patience with educational lessons.” Site directors also discussed changes in the youths’ scientific skills and interest.
- Children connected what they were doing through the KIDS activities to their school career and home life, and talked about trying the activities at home with their parents and siblings.
- All site directors reported that they would recommend the KIDS curriculum to other afterschool programs and that the curriculum would continue in their programs.
- KIDS is an “excellent teaching and learning tool”.
- Educators are able to link KIDS with other curricula or activities being used in their afterschool.
- The activities work for different grade-levels and abilities.
- KIDS is easy to use and all levels of staff are able to implement the activities with minimal training.
- Use of the KIDS curriculum led to closer relationships with the Museum.

### 2009 Award Recipient

#### Port Discovery Children's Museum (Baltimore, MD): Port Discovery & PACT Partnership

**Category:** Diversity

**Contact:** Elizabeth Kidd, 410-864-2671

#### Narrative Description

The partnership focuses on four areas:

1. Adapting Exhibits: PACT occupational, physical, and speech therapists, as well as childcare staff, assists Port Discovery in adapting its exhibits to better meet the needs of children with disabilities.
2. Parent-Child Attachment Groups: PACT social workers and Port Discovery staff facilitate “Family Traditions” groups, twelve-week parent-child attachment groups for two populations: young children and their caregivers who are currently living in homeless shelters and children who are enrolled in Baltimore City Head Start and Early Start programs and their caregivers.
3. Groups for Children with Special Needs: PACT therapists and Port Discovery staff enhance services to preschool aged children with disabilities by helping the children and their families generalize experiences in the museum to community settings and by integrating all therapy disciplines (and actually providing the therapy) using Port Discovery exhibits.
4. Inclusive Child Care Training: PACT has been awarded three grants to provide mentorship, training, and consultations to child care centers to enhance their ability to care for children with special needs. PACT offers some of the inclusive training at Port Discovery to increase the awareness of the unique opportunities at the museum and to offer the training to Port Discovery staff.

#### Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact

Both partners administered surveys and questionnaires to measure and evaluate the impact of the program.

Responses for the Parent Feedback and Suggestion Form:

- 100% of Caregivers were “very” or “mostly” satisfied with the knowledge of the staff
- 83% of Caregivers were “very” or “mostly” satisfied with having learned ways to help their child in the community and in managing their child’s behavior
- 83% of Caregivers were “very” or “mostly” satisfied with the services they received in the group
- 100% of Caregivers were “very” or “mostly” satisfied with feeling more comfortable talking to other parent’s of children with disabilities

- 100% of Caregivers would refer a friend for this group Three Month Post-Group Follow Up: We were able to get feedback regarding 5 of the 7 children participating in the group for children with special needs. (Two families could not be reached following multiple attempts).
- All families reported feeling at least a little more comfortable allowing their child to explore more and navigate stores, restaurants or playgrounds more independently.
- All families indicated that they are either more comfortable with, or that their child is more independent in, indicating food or activity choices
- All families also indicated that their child is more social and is better able to interact with others either verbally or with gestures. One parent noted, "S. did something amazing. He went over to a neighbor's house and apologized without my prompting when he did something wrong. S. also includes others much more when he is playing and doesn't seem to be as 'wild'".
- For those families whose child initially had difficulty waiting in line slight improvements were noted here.
- All of the children continue to need assistance with daily living activities (e.g., feeding, dressing) but all families noted slight positive changes here as well.

#### Survey results from Port Discovery Staff Training: Skills and Satisfaction:

- 100% of staff "achieved" or "somewhat achieved" the following:
  - Safety awareness with the children
  - The ability to appropriately encourage the children during activities with consideration for the child's sensory needs, i.e., auditory, tactile defensiveness
  - The ability to establish a good rapport with the families
  - The ability to help foster independence for the children
- 100% of staff were "mostly" or "very" satisfied with the training that they received and with the knowledge of the therapists
- 80% of the staff were "very" or "mostly" satisfied with learning how to help children at the museum or in the community

Staff suggested: more involvement in the pre/ post-group planning and additional training.

#### **2009 Award Recipient**

#### **Northwoods Children's Museum (Eagle River, WI): Fun with Fathers Program**

**Category:** Play      **Contact:** Rouleen Gartner, 715-479-4623

#### **Narrative Description**

The Fun with Fathers Program's primary focus is to allow fathers or father figures and their children to get together in a safe, comfortable atmosphere and to develop healthy family bonds through play, sharing meals, and interactions with peers. With the program only being open to adult males and their children, fathers use this time to discuss similar parenting issues with other fathers. Since everyone involved are exposed to similar experiences, this program is set up for ideal parenting suggestions through firsthand experiences. Not only does Fun with Fathers affect father and child relationships, but by providing a place outside the home for the program, mothers have found this time as a reprieve from a hectic schedule. Mothers have used this time to take classes for personal growth, visit with other mothers in similar situations, or just take some personal time to regenerate themselves. The results from this break indirectly benefits their own relationship with their children and spouses.

#### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Fun with Fathers uses three methods to assess the program's effectiveness and determine outcomes.

### **Evaluation Methods:**

1. Increased Participation: The number of participants are tracked through a point of sale system for each Fun with Fathers session
2. Increase Geographic Influence: New participants in Fun with Fathers are required to complete enrollment forms which include information about home address and distance travelled.
3. Evaluation Instruments: Each year an evaluation form is given to every participating father.

These evaluations are compiled and assessed. The evaluation includes the rating of individual activities provided during the program. We also ask what they like most about Fun with Fathers; what they like least about Fun with Fathers; and why they would encourage another dad to come to Fun with Fathers. Included in this application is an example of the individual evaluation instrument and a final summary evaluation performed by a program administrator. Located in the final evaluation is an example of a "Facilitator Thoughts" form. These instruments allow the administrator to statistically evaluate the program.

### **Outcomes:**

1. Increased Participation At the program's inception, a total of 10 families attended. Eight years later, a total of 47 families are attending, an increase of nearly 500%. Growth of the program is primarily due to word of mouth. When first time fathers or father figures fill out the registration forms, they are asked how they heard about the program. Fifty percent of the time the referral is from a friend who attended the program.
2. Increase Geographic Influence: The remarkable thing about the increasing enrollment was the distance of travel of participating families to the museum. In the beginning, the participants were only 15 miles from the museum. Today, families travel more than 100 miles to participate in this program.
3. Evaluation Instruments: The results of the evaluation instruments have aided the program facilitators and administrators to improve the program.

The following selected suggestions from fathers to encourage other fathers to participate clearly show the positive outcome of this practice:

- Meeting other dads and their kids
- Getting out with my child
- Watching my son have fun
- A good time to let my son explore and meet other kids
- Quality time with my children

The final method of measuring the impact of this program is by the recognition we have received on a State level. The Fun with Fathers program was recently acknowledged by a visit from the Secretary of the State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, Secretary Bicha. During his visit, Secretary Bicha requested a meeting with some of the participating fathers and children. He asked these fathers what they like best about the program and why they attend. From his visit he concluded that "the Fun with Fathers program has had a remarkable impact on their lives."

## 2009 Honorable Mention

### Connecticut Children's Museum (New Haven): The Farmers' Market Foods Infusion

**Category:** Health      **Contact:** Sandra Malmquist, 203-562-5437

#### Narrative Description

The Farmers' Market Foods Infusion Project (FMFIP) addresses two overarching needs – to support children's emergent literacy with books and arts-based healthy food programs and to connect families to plentiful, healthy foods at the local farmers' markets. The Connecticut Children's Museum hosts weekly Saturdays at 2 Creating Readers programs where children hear a book read by local artists and educators, using their particular genre, in an entertaining rendition of the story. During the summer market season, each program is based on a healthy foods book such as *Little Pea*, *A Day at the Market*, or *I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato*. Families receive a copy of the book for their home library. At the Museum, CitySeed staff introduces visiting families to the farmers' markets with maps, bus routes and a \$5 coupon to spend at the markets. Families who use their coupon receive an additional \$5 coupon for a return visit. Early childhood education teachers attend a farmers' market dinner and workshop and they receive a curriculum box to help 'infuse' literacy and healthy foods into their classrooms. Mirroring the Museum's Saturdays at 2 Creating Readers program, artists visit classrooms on three consecutive days where children participate in singing, seed planting and art projects all designed to highlight the importance of eating healthy foods. Each child receives three coordinated books for their home library, a \$5 coupon to spend at the farmers' market and a free Family Pass to attend any Saturdays at 2 program with their family.

#### Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact

The Farmers' Market Foods Infusion Project has spanned two years. We have measured its reach, impact and influence using the following methods:

- Families attending the Museum's Saturdays at 2 Creating Readers FMFIP programs return a 'book card' that includes detailed demographic information and provides a count of participating families and books distributed.
- Farmers' Market coupons are numbered. CitySeed catalogs their origin and tallies the redemption rates from coupons.
- Free Family Passes to the Museum are identified with the FMFIP logos and early childhood program names so that we can track attendance.
- Early childhood education programs are recruited from our School Readiness and Head Start sites, and a family childcare network, ensuring that we are reaching our children most at risk for reading and health challenges.

**Year 1.** During the summer of 2007, our Museum-based Saturdays at 2 Creating Readers Farmers' Market Foods Infusion Project programs provided books, farmers' market coupons and arts-based programming for more than 180 families. Data is gleaned from visitor information and the book cards. In Year 1, FMFIP reached more than 400 children in 20 early childhood classrooms and 16 family childcare homes. More than 1,200 bi-lingual children's picture books and activities were provided with 60 visits by artists, staff from the Connecticut Children's Museum and the CitySeed farmers' market. More than 400 families received \$5 coupons to spend at any of our four, local farmers' markets. During Year 1, a total of 583 coupons were given out to preschoolers in centers and family childcare homes and families who visited the Connecticut Children's Museum. 181 farmers' market coupons (31%) were redeemed during Year 1, providing more than \$900 worth of healthy, locally grown food and introducing nearly 200 families to the CitySeed markets. At the request of the funder, CitySeed and the Connecticut Children's Museum are creating a "How To" guide on infusing healthy food projects into children's museums and early childhood classrooms and connecting families with farmers' markets. Year 1 of the Farmers' Market Foods Infusion Project was funded through a grant from the Project for Public Spaces and is a partnership of the Connecticut Children's Museum and CitySeed.

**Year 2.** The Museum-based Saturdays at 2 Creating Readers program was expanded to every Saturday from June through mid-August and provided books, farmers' market coupons and arts-based programming to more than 420 families. 317 farmers' market coupons were distributed through the



Museum during Year 2. In Year 2, we visited 15 early childhood classrooms and invited 15 family childcare providers to the museum for arts-based healthy foods programming, distributing 1,065 food-themed children's picture books and 294 farmers' market coupons. A reduction in funding for the early childhood piece of FMFIP for Year 2 is reflected in these numbers. The expansion of the Saturdays at 2 Creating Readers program, despite the reduction in funding, resulted in 611 farmers' market coupons distributed in Year 2. 221 coupons were redeemed for an overall redemption rate of 36% and a value of more than \$1,100 worth of healthy, locally grown food!

### 2009 Honorable Mention

#### Portland Children's Museum (OR): Center for Children's Learning

**Category:** Play/Art    **Contact:** Sarah Orleans, 503-471-9901

#### Narrative Description

The purpose of the Center for Children's Learning is to produce original research on how children respond to play environments, sensory experiences and cognitive challenges, and to establish best practices for institutions serving young children. This research and subsequent recommendations are delivered to educators, researchers, and museum educators through professional development workshops and scholarly publications. Additionally, this research is used to evaluate and shape the work of the Museum, ensuring that Museum exhibits and programs continually impact children positively in ways aligned with current research in education, development and cognitive science. In addition to disappearing arts programs, a study by the Chalkboard Project recently found that the lack of professional development for educators is a major factor in the decline in the quality of education in Oregon schools and their widespread failure to meet Federal benchmarks. Through the Center, the Museum has become a resource for rectifying these deficiencies. In the Center's inaugural year, more than 500 educators attended workshops, representing the education of more than 8,000 children. Several scholarly publications were published, including a DVD, based on research conducted at the Museum. The incredible reception of the program in the region has only confirmed that educators are eager not only for access to professional development and evolving pedagogies, but eager also to work with the children's museums as they emerge as leaders in brain-based programs and environments. Seeing as the issues the Center addresses are not limited to Oregon alone, we hope to serve as an example for museums nationwide.

#### Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact

To be sure, the Center for Children's Learning is itself an intensive evaluation program. A primary component of the Center's research methods involves documenting, via writing, photography, and voice and video recording children at play in the Museum and at Opal School, the Museum's k-5 public charter school. Museum educators and studio artists are trained by the center to document children at play daily in the Museum. The Center uses this documentation, which is essentially feedback from our most important constituents – children, not only to research the ways in which children learn, play, create, explore and interact, but to ensure that Museum programs and environments are meeting the needs of children and contributing positively to their development. This process is ongoing and is part of the daily activities of Museum educators, artists and staff. This form of evaluating our Museum, we believe, produces the richest and most nuanced information. While we recognize the importance of scalar-based surveys for caregivers, the chief purpose of measuring the outcomes of the Museum is to ensure that children are experiencing the wonder and joy from playing at the Museum that we believe they should have. An extensive evaluation system, a sort of meta-measurement heuristic, is also in place to measure the outcomes of the Center itself. Every educator who attends a professional development workshop at the Center evaluates the workshop with a Liechhardt-scale based evaluation to respond to the program. These evaluations are outsourced to Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, a group specializing in analyzing evaluations of educator workshops. NWREL then consults with the Center in order to shape future efforts based upon past effectiveness. The feedback we've received from these evaluations has been overwhelmingly positive. The Center makes its research visible to the public through documentation panels. These panels, placed throughout the Museum, link child-development research to play, specifically to the play which takes place at each respective exhibit. Temporary panels outline some of the most recent work of the center, while permanent panels help parents understand the

development of their child and ways in which they can take a proactive role in their child's play at the Museum. This continual dialogue between our research team, the Museum and our community is vital to ensuring that the Museum experience is not only fun but meaningful for families and their children. In this respect, documentation panels serve as a sort of liaison, opening a line of communication between children, parents and Museum educators by establishing a groundwork for Museum best practices. Additionally, as the Center has earned a national reputation, practices of the Center are kept in continual check by the reception and evaluation by colleagues and other experts in the field. While this sort of evaluation is somewhat less objective than formal evaluations, it holds no less gravity. If anything, it is often the most honest, constructive and significant form of feedback.

### 2009 Honorable Mention

#### **Kohl Children's Museum of Greater Chicago (IL): Early Childhood Connections**

**Category:** Play      **Contact:** Sheridan Turner, 847-832-6600

#### **Narrative Description**

The cornerstone of this program is the introduction to teachers, children, and parents of the project approach to learning, a child-centered teaching strategy that provides contexts in which children's curiosity can be expressed purposefully and enables them to experience the benefits of self-motivated learning.

Leading educators attest that children learn best through experience, exploring topics and themes through projects based on experiences outside of school. According to Dr. Judy Harris Helm, noted author, expert in the project approach, and lead consultant on the ECC program, most typical classroom activities for young children do not provide sufficient challenge to identify and solve problems, instead emphasizing passive following of instructions, which lacks sufficient intellectual vitality to support or strengthen young children's ability to interpret their experiences.

Projects are in-depth investigations of topics that intrigue the students, and can be anything about which they are curious, from trains to pizza-making to clouds. By allowing children to follow their interests, acquire new skills, and investigate a topic in depth, projects are highly beneficial for academic achievement of children, and assist their social and emotional development. Regrettably, with diminishing financial resources, early childhood programs and schools have difficulty providing children with such opportunities, and continue using less successful, didactic methods.

By including family, through family celebration events at the conclusion of each project and offering free Museum passes, KCM helps reinforce the idea that education is a continuous process and that it can be qualified and strengthened in multiple environments and manners, including the home.

#### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

The effectiveness of the ECC program is evaluated each year to measure its success in achieving goals, changes in attitudes of participating teachers, and improvements in classroom learning and activities. More than five years of data has consistently shown that the ECC program has led to both practically and statistically significant positive changes for participating teachers, their classrooms, and families.

Evaluation methods include: pre- and post-program observations of participant's use of developmentally appropriate methods and strategies; attitude surveys completed pre- and post-program; professional development workshop evaluations; and participant surveys of focused field trip experiences. Feedback from parents is also collected after parent/child sessions and family celebrations. Results of attitude surveys and observation data are analyzed by Dr. Jan Perney, Department of Educational Foundations and Inquiry, National Louis University.

From the results of evaluations over the past several years and an analysis of results conducted by Dr. Perney, the Museum concluded that the training and museum-based experiences made a significant difference for the teachers who participated in improving their overall classroom effectiveness, as well as

providing a more interesting learning environment for the children. From this research, teachers noticed that children's interest and involvement in their learning increased when given the opportunity to participate in project approach activities, and that the ECC program contributed substantially to both the teachers' and the students' success.

A key component of the ECC evaluation process involves use of control classrooms selected from participant schools with similar populations. Classrooms that serve as control groups do not participate in ECC but are given first priority for selection in the program in the following school year and students in control classrooms are given family passes to the Museum.

The results of these studies were significant. Prior to their exposure to ECC, most of the teachers exhibited attitudes and behaviors that experts consider least conducive to early learning. Classrooms were static, with students working either individually or in one large group. Lesson plans focused on short-term projects that frequently did not engage children's interests

Following their participation in the Museum's program, however, observers noted statistically significant changes in both the attitude of teachers toward project-based learning and in their classroom teaching strategies and behavior. Some of the most positive changes noted included:

- Centers were organized within the classroom for independent and small-group use.
- Concepts being taught reflected children's interests and their need to solve problems.
- Individual children's work was predominantly displayed throughout the classroom.
- Teaching staff provided opportunities for students to work together to complete tasks.
- Books and language materials in the classroom related to current activities or themes.
- Creativity was encouraged through music, movement, drama, and art.

These changes represent movement toward more developmentally appropriate practices, creating stronger learning experiences for these children. Perhaps most significantly, the concepts learned from exposure to this one project appeared to have taken solid root in the classrooms, ready to spread from year to year and from one class to the next.

### **Chicago Children's Museum (IL): Skyline and the Partnership of Playful Learners**

**Category:** Play      **Contact:** Stacia Whitmore, 312-464-7717

#### **Narrative Description**

The tri-part Partnership of Playful Learners (PPL) allows children to build STEM skills, strengthens understanding of how adult-child interaction and collaborative learning can increase these skills, and provides a research platform for studying informal learning. PPL has three interdependent deliverables: Skyline, a 2,500 square foot exhibit; educational programming for different audience segments; and nationally significant research into ways to increase family learning. These programs impact children, caregivers, community educators and other professionals by building on what is being discovered about the power of collaborative learning.

With the PPL Chicago Children's Museum (CCM) has:

1. Researched and developed culturally sensitive approaches for increasing adult involvement in children's informal science learning
2. Incorporated documentation to make children's learning more visible to both adults and children
3. Demonstrated how an exhibit can function as a research platform.

The first impact is informed by PPL research studies into how adult-child interaction supports children's learning. CCM has incorporated several strategies, including exhibit design, messaging and signage, and staff training, to support scaffolding behavior. The second impact, offers families the opportunity to reflect on what they've learned and learning itself. The Skyline exhibit and educational programming incorporate documentation techniques in their design. The third impact arises naturally from the research collaborations forged in the administration of the project. Using feedback from partners,



Skyline was designed with tools that incorporate researchers' needs without affecting the visitor experience.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

The research firm of Randi Korn & Associates (RKA) has conducted two evaluations of Skyline, using quantitative and qualitative methods. The evaluations tracked visitors in Skyline, timed their involvement and interviewed them on the effectiveness of the exhibit in problem solving, STEM learning, family collaboration and visitor understanding of building structures. The researchers specifically looked for evidence that participants used and understood STEM learning concepts, that female participants increased building behavior, and that the active collaboration of caregivers in building behavior increased the enjoyment of the exhibit for both caregivers and children. These surveys give CCM an understanding of the overall STEM impact Skyline has on its 500,000 yearly visitors. Among other findings, the research of RKA has shown that:

- Most interviewees spoke positively about their exhibition experience and about one-half of interviewees said there was nothing they did not like about the exhibition activity
- The majority of participants collaborated with someone inside or outside their visiting group to build a structure.
- More than 50% of participants used STEM-based language and concepts to describe their structure.
- Adult visitors who did not participate with their children had less positive feelings about the exhibit than those who were active participants.

If NSF funding is received, two follow-up studies are planned to examine if the photo-narrative component, which photographs visitors as they build, and helps families create an oral narrative about their experience, impacts families' interactions and learning after leaving the museum. These narratives have already provided research data on how and what families understand about STEM-based concepts as well as data for research into what prompts best encourage STEM-related conversations in families. By its structure, the photo-narrative component provides ongoing information about the percentage of visitors who retrieve their photo-narratives on the museum's Web site, but it is not known if it has long-term impact on parent-child conversations about their building experience, including further reflections on STEM-based learning. The Skyline exhibit was built, in part, on lessons learned from a series of after-school programs on building and construction held at two local YMCA branches. In July 2007, RKA used qualitative methods to evaluate the relationship between Chicago Children's Museum and the YMCA branches. The purpose of the evaluation was to better inform future museum/community relationships for both Chicago Children's Museum and other museums wishing to engage in community partnerships. The results showed that while working with a well-established infrastructure, such as the YMCA, greatly improves the effectiveness of programs, such relationships still require a significant commitment of time for planning and engagement by the museum. A research platform within Skyline allows researchers, evaluators, and staff to make video and audio records of nonverbal and verbal behaviors, as well as manipulate variables within specific components. Particularly valuable has been the photo-narrative component. To date, Skyline has served as a research platform for researchers from Northeastern Illinois University, Loyola University, and SILC (Spatial Intelligence and Learning Center). Research conducted both confirms the need for such platforms, and informs future developments.



## The Children's Museum of Denver (CO): G.R.O.W. Collaborative

**Category:** Play

**Contact:** Mike Yankovich, 303-561-0128

### Narrative Description

Transforming classroom learning, a teacher uses phrases like “EXCITED about science!” “hands-on” and “pure joy” to describe her students’ engagement in the G.R.O.W. Collaborative. Serving more than 600 low-income kindergarten, first and second grade students and their educators each year, the Collaborative is a multi-faceted program that uses play-based learning techniques to teach required science curriculum, increasing the fun-factor for students and their desire to learn more. The program includes teacher trainings and curriculum support materials, in-class programming, and field trips to the Children’s Museum, Botanic Gardens, and Butterfly Pavilion. The program aligns with required school science curriculum and builds each year, focusing on animals in Year 1; plants in Year 2; and insects in Year 3. The program culminates with Family Nights for students, parents, and teachers and each family receives a free yearlong Museum membership. G.R.O.W. uniquely impacts a diverse student population over a three-year period, providing educators and involved organizations the opportunity to see marked change over time. Diverse students gain knowledge about life science, literacy skills (with a published book), and become environmental stewards. The program impacts the way teachers teach, bringing play-based learning into the classroom. Classrooms are provided free experiences (in-class and field trips) from three cultural organizations. And finally, families benefit from free yearlong Museum memberships, providing shared experiences that promote learning through play. As the program builds, so do the results. By the third year, students engage in service-learning projects where they apply classroom learning to projects that positively impact their community.

### Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact

“I have continually seen increases in student learning through student journals, letters, and classroom activities.” — Dr. Carole Basile, G.R.O.W. evaluator The Collaborative utilizes a variety of tools to evaluate its work and continually analyzes the results to shape and guide the programs.

With a focus on student learning and overall program effectiveness, the Collaborative implements the following evaluation tools to help better understand the impact its programs have on teachers, students and families and the quality in which they are implemented:

- 1) Pre- and post-tests: implemented prior to and following a particular learning activity to measure students’ change in knowledge and attitudes as a result of the experience.
- 2) Student science notebooks: used before, during and after investigations to formulate and record questions, make predictions, record data, procedures and results, compose reflections and communicate findings. Students also record newly learned concepts.
- 3) Student letters to the G.R.O.W. staff: used to examine students’ use of vocabulary and their conceptual understanding as demonstrated by their thanks for what they learned through the classroom activities and Museum visit.
- 4) Student writing responses: demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills and life science concepts learned.
- 5) Student-published books: the student-written and -illustrated books demonstrate life-science concepts learned by the students as they develop literacy skills.
- 6) Teacher surveys, interviews and focus groups: demonstrate teachers’ beliefs about the program activities and resources and provide feedback on specific program components.

### Summary of outcomes:

- 1) teachers use experiential and play-based learning techniques in the classroom through the program curriculum (utilizing activities such as the “plant part hokey pokey” and butterfly dances with costumes);
- 2) students can explain the stages involved in plant and butterfly lifecycles and can draw conclusions about the relationship between plants and butterflies;
- 3) students increase their empathy for all living things (for example, there was a significant decrease in the number of students who said they would kill an ant on the playground as a result of the program. One student said, “If I come across an ant or insect, I would leave them alone just in case they were carrying a baby or a crumb.”);

- 4) students increase their science-related vocabulary (with words like pollination, chrysalis, oxygen, habitat);
- 5) teachers rate the quality of the program (how it supports state standards and enhances science and literacy learning, as well as how it helps students act differently toward living things) at an average of 4.5 or higher on a 5-point scale;
- 6) families identify the Museum as a resource that can support their child's development and they utilize the free year-long Museum membership.

In addition, teachers' attitudes toward science improve, thereby modeling and transmitting an increased interest in and passion for science to their students.

Anecdotal data demonstrates that the play-based approach utilized by teachers transforms many students' experience of science, as diverse learning styles are addressed through the various activities. All of these tremendous results led to the Collaborative receiving the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education's Non-profit Environmental Education Award in 2006.

### **Children's Museum of Manhattan (NY): PlayWorks™**

**Category:** Play      **Contact:** Emily Lieu, 212-721-1223

#### **Narrative Description**

Since the aftermath of 9/11, CMOM has been identified as a safe and trusted place for families. While CMOM has always been an important educational resource, it has also emerged as a place for the community to gather, interact and learn together. To understand this aspect of its role, CMOM designed PlayWorks™ to foster social interaction, hypothesizing that an environment that promoted social interaction would strengthen its potential to effectively foster early learning. Shortly after PlayWorks™ opened, CMOM conducted several evaluations of the exhibit, the findings of which corroborated CMOM's hypothesis (see below). The evaluations validated PlayWorks™ as a successful model for early childhood education and its philosophy has been applied to the Museum's subsequent exhibitions and programs. Further, the research has demonstrated to external partners the value of the museum experience on both cognitive and affective levels, leading to university partnerships and requests from government officials to apply our programming expertise in new settings. This is evident in CMOM's recently published *Working with Young Children: A Resource for Early Childhood Educators*, a training manual which codified this early childhood education methodology and applied it to a variety of programs and settings such as the Shelter Program, the CMOM/CUNY Professional Development Series and CMOM's work with families in the Bronx.

#### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

CMOM conducted several distinct and complementary forms of evaluation to explore two key questions regarding PlayWorks'™ impact on visitors: What skills and knowledge are gained by children and parents/caregivers and how does the space function as a 'town square' for families and for adults receiving training in early childhood education? CMOM engaged the Michael Cohen Group (MCG) to conduct an observational study of PlayWorks™ to help answer questions including: Who is using the PlayWorks™ space and how are they using it? Is there a kind of community or communal space emerging? Observations were recorded by researchers and included indication of: number of children and adults using the space, the roles of these people (mothers, fathers, and other caretakers), the kinds of interactions observed, and the kinds of play in which children were engaged. Brief, semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifty caretakers who spoke to researchers while watching the children that they had brought to PlayWorks™. Additionally, interviews with Museum educators working in PlayWorks™ enabled researchers to confirm what they had seen or heard during the three weeks of observation. MCG's evaluation confirmed that play spaces that integrate specific learning objectives have a significant impact on both children and their parents/caregivers. Everyone interviewed agreed that PlayWorks™ is a unique space and the exhibition is perceived as providing freedom for children to explore, discover and generate their own play in enriching and stimulating situations with activities that encourage children's interests "without telling them what to do". Many caretakers voiced appreciation for the experience of watching and/or engaging with their children in an environment where they don't

have worry about safety, running out of activities, or scarcity of resources leading to conflicts. The MCG research was complemented by evaluations of two other programs which utilize PlayWorks™. BLiP Research assessed the Shelter Program, which serves homeless families, using a mix of interviews, observation, quantitative data, and review of secondary materials. BLiP's research reaffirmed the role of social interaction in promoting learning for young children as well as adults. Social contact is a key component of the program, with the weekly sessions providing a safe respite from shelter life. The mother-child relationship was strengthened and the women created a supportive network with others in similar situations. BLiP researchers also found that participants learned key parenting skills and techniques to help their children develop school readiness skills. CMOM conducted an internal evaluation of the CMOM/CUNY Professional Development Series for home-based childcare providers using data collected from observation, interviews, and questionnaires. The assessment revealed that learning with peers helped relay the information in an effective and accessible manner, resulting in greater retention of information and acquisition of skills. The evidence for this is that all participants replicated the lessons learned from the trainings in their own care settings, demonstrating how the museum experience can be applied externally. The social setting, coupled with interactive demonstrations in PlayWorks™, provided a rich peer-learning experience that successfully achieved the program's goals.

### **Children's Museum of Phoenix (AZ): Built by You**

**Category:** Play/Diversity

**Contact:** Deborah Gilpin, 602-648-2740

#### **Narrative Description**

Arizona ranks 48th in the nation in early childhood well-being. The needs of young children are not well understood by our population, and, related, is the inability to imagine what a child-centered museum would be like. Built by You (BBY) goals included: Establish community awareness and ownership of the museum; Strengthen community ties among neighborhoods, organizations, and individuals; Leverage community involvement into a unique public space for children and families; and provide constructive play experiences to engage the minds, muscles, and imaginations of children and their grown-ups...even before opening day. 39,000 people participated over a 3 year period—experiencing hands on activities, and learning why it was so important for our community to have this Museum. BBY Leaders specifically targeted certain populations, including our own troubled Garfield neighborhood, the Baltz School with its high population of Somalian refugees, and the National Gratitude Project serving homeless kids. These relationships are vital as we secure sponsored free admissions for these families, who now visit and see objects they helped to make throughout the Museum. Museum educational philosophies and strategies are introduced with BBY. Reusing everyday objects in new ways and using unusual or unexpected objects to solve everyday design constraints is both more fun and results in a more resourceful, interesting end product. It also wastes less and sends a message about conservation and environmental stewardship. The practice of Built By You continues as new needs are defined. The Art Studio 'saw horses' were made by visitors; visitors will embellish our fence.

#### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

BBY projects were tracked quantitatively: number of unique offerings, individual participants, and by the amount/number of resulting materials that have been used in actual museum exhibits (goal was to place a minimum of six major pieces made through BBY activities). BBY far exceeded those quantitative goals: 26 events took place, more than 39,000 participants were involved (some kept their materials), and ten items have been installed, with three remaining to be installed during the next year. BBY projects were expected to reflect three core design principles established for the Museum: Engaging artists so that the museum reflects a high aesthetic standard and unique conceptual content. CMoP's definition of 'artist' is very broad. While artists are commissioned to create works all to themselves, priority was given to artists who have a demonstrated capability of involving children in the process of their artwork. Eleven individuals led projects. Involving children ages 3-8 in the process of building the museum: The child benefits from the experience and feels a sense of achievement and ownership. CMoP ensures that children have the tools, materials, and guidance to make their museum cool. i.e., Jackson Pollock attended this school building as a child. Local kids splatter painted our bench cushions – they are beautiful, honor the rich past of our museum, and foretell that history is always in the making. In-kind

professional donations. CMoP made specific requests for services, items, or materials on an industrial scale. Professional companies volunteered to provide these. The donations and services were coordinated by CMoP staff and supported, if appropriate, by volunteer labor. Vendors donated 9,000 gallons of VOC-free paint, recycled porcelain/glass/mirror terrazzo for all bathrooms, and many other elements of the facility, valued at well more than \$150,000. Built By You projects had relationship building goals. BBY projects were intended to initiate organizational collaborations. CMoP partnered with peer organizations to design, fabricate, or maintain exhibits and/or develop and implement programs. Positive relationships were built, and while mutual benefits have been significant for more shallow collaborations such as one-off educational programs, the deeper collaborations are now in development. Examples include: An artist/educator from The Bead Museum led life story bead strands, which the Museum will install as an exhibit. Southwest Public Art Group coordinated the Mosaic Stepping Stones that now grace the front yard. Calls for objects. CMoP advertised a wish list of items, which were collected at drop-off points, online, by mail, or by staff/volunteers. The collected objects were installed in the exhibit environments by the CMoP fabrication team (shoes, silverware, blocks, CDs, etc.) This goal was successful in public perception, but not in actual materials, usually resulting in some contributed items but not as much as was needed. Larger-scale donations and reduced pricing from Goodwill and other thrift shops, and office supply stores made up the difference. Establishing a Volunteer Base that understands our philosophy. Volunteers had previously staffed museum traveling exhibits. The transition to BBY projects was refreshing, and they carry a strong sense of ownership in the results, which encourages continued volunteering.

<http://www.yousendit.com/download/WnBRZUNpZ2dvQUpFQIE9PQ>

### Children's Museum of Pittsburgh (PA): Charm Bracelet Program

**Category:** Diversity

**Contact:** Deborah Ellwood, 412-322-5058 ext. 283

#### Narrative Description

The Charm Bracelet project began with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The grant funded a combination of community meetings and a collaborative study by four international design teams to look at ways of linking the cultural institutions through urban design, programs and interventions. Their proposals — ranging from light-based pathways to magnet schools to public art on abandoned buildings — were shared at a community salon in February 2007. In the salon, neighborhood residents and cultural institutions expressed unanimous enthusiasm for the proposals generated. The next step was the implementation of the ideas and creation of further linkages. Led by CMOP, the Charm Bracelet Project is now a network of 17 cultural, educational, and recreational organizations transforming traditional understandings of how institutions impact community. Working collectively, they foster a vibrant, attractive and accessible neighborhood that is unified by lasting connections between organizations and amenities. Specifically the Charm Bracelet Project has restored and reopened a historic theater, implemented 4 urban design projects and produced 14 innovative and tangible projects linking 17 cultural institutions in work for and with the neighborhood. As one cultural participant put it, “The beauty of the Charm Bracelet is the variety of perspectives, skills and experiences that mix and match to create fresh approaches to community development. Outdoor enthusiasts + historic preservationists, theaters + arts educators, artists + merchants — the combinations are many, and result not only in worthwhile community projects, but build authentic relationships and organizational capacity as well.”

#### Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact

The methods used to measure the impact of the Charm Bracelet Project are varied. The quantitative measures include the number of institutions involved (17), the amount of money generated (\$3.1 million), and the number of projects implemented (19+). The qualitative measures include national awards related to the project as well as reviews in the local, national and international press. The most important measure, though, is the impact of the initiative on the neighborhood. Ongoing evaluation is being conducted by the CMOP's on-site partner UPCLOSE (University of Pittsburgh Center for Learning in Out of School Environments) who uses a series of questionnaires and observations to assess the project. The Charm Bracelet Project began with the opening of a closed historic theater. In a unique

collaboration with the Andy Warhol Museum and the City, CMOP raised more than \$2.5 million to renovate the Hazlett Theater. Today the theater is a separate nonprofit and a busy venue for the arts and the community. Thousands of people now attend generating income and nightlife in this formerly dark neighborhood. CMOP also provides accounting services and leadership. The second step, led by CMOP, was to create strategies to use more than \$300,000 in foundation funds to impact the community directly. Spearheaded by CMOP, the Charm Bracelet Project has implemented 4 Urban Design Projects initially suggested by the NEA study:

- “The Stoop,” a public artwork that has been in multiple “Charm” locations creating a meeting point, a stage, or just a relaxing place.
- “Where is Allegheny City? Treasure Hunt,” a free interactive, family-friendly cell phone scavenger hunt focused on neighborhood art, science and history.
- “The Federal Street Underpass,” the transformation of the neighborhood’s major entryway into a public art gallery.
- “The Banner Project,” one-of-a-kind banners installed throughout the neighborhood celebrating the Charms and neighborhood artists.

The Neighborhood Microgrant Program supports the imaginative projects that positively impact the neighborhood. A condition of receiving the grant is that two or more institutions collaborate to strengthen the broader community. Grants are read and awarded by the charm representatives and range between \$500 and \$1000. The first two rounds of grants (spring and fall 2008) have resulted in 14 projects including: Charm School Initiative: outreach, sustained school-museum collaborations, and integrated teaching that makes full use of the Charms’ many educational resources. Charms Bike Tours: Themed monthly guided bike tours feature neighborhood Charms. Path to the Park and Performance: Artist Julia Mandle is working with local youth, Manchester Craftsmen’s Guild and the New Hazlett Theater to produce a performance piece. Kayak Lake Elizabeth: Free daily kayaking lessons were offered on the manmade lake in the local park surrounding the Charms. The Charm Bracelet project has garnered considerable attention. It has been the subject of local editorials, articles in Metropolis and The Architect’s Newspaper, and was featured at a Carnegie Museum exhibition. It was cited as a critical reason for awarding the Museum the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Design Excellence.

### **Children’s Museum of Tacoma (Denison, TX): Play to Learn**

**Category:** Play      **Contact:** Tanya Andrews, 253-627-6031

#### **Narrative Description**

In Pierce County, 60% of children enter kindergarten without the social and cognitive skills to be school ready. Play to Learn is designed to help parents and family, friends, and neighbor (FFN) care providers get their children school ready through play. The program shows playful ways to build readiness and connects care providers with early childhood development resources. Play to Learn is a solution to the problem of low levels of “readiness” among entering kindergarten students

#### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Play to Learn is establishing four regular sites in each of the four target investment communities outlined in the Pierce County Early Learning Consortium’s First 5 FUNdamentals Business Plan: Lakewood, Tacoma’s Hilltop, Spanaway, and Parkland. The primary goals are to:

- Create barrier-free access to early childhood development resources to adults providing Family, Friends, and Neighbors child care in the communities where the need is greatest.
- Implement a program that is relevant to, and responds appropriately to the specific needs of the neighborhoods in which they are located and the individuals that are participating. The evaluation process and tools will be patterned after the Play and Learn evaluative methods used in King County. During the Play to Learn program pilot, these tools were refined and revised to make them appropriate and relevant to the Pierce County program. The evaluation uses the following tools:
- Play to Learn Participant Feedback Forms: Play to Learn staff, with the assistance of the evaluator and other Pierce County Early Learning Consortium partners, has refined a simple two page feedback form for Play to Learn groups to use with their participants. The form will use closed-

ended questions to assess changes reported in specific knowledge, skills and behaviors related to supporting school readiness in children.

- Program Partnership Records: Play to Learn staff regularly captures information about the integration and policy/advocacy efforts that identify the individuals/organizations engaged, goals of the interactions, time spent on contact, messages used and outcome of efforts.
- Participant Observation: Play to Learn staff utilizes informal and formal observations the interactions of participants to gauge program content and delivery. Participant interviews with a short survey will also be used to measure the program. Guidelines and strategies will be set forth to enable the site facilitation team to effectively implement the evaluation tools, and ease the process with participants. The term of evaluation review will be frequent during the launch phase of the program, and will move towards a quarterly review once the program is fully implemented.

### **The Children's Museum of Wilmington (NC): Field TREKS**

**Category:** Diversity

**Contact:** Allison Farmer, 910-254-3534 ext. 101

#### **Narrative Description**

Through Field TREKS, we hope to reach 100% of our area kindergarten children (14,000) through their class field trip regardless of their ability to pay admission.

#### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

We will be tracking attendance from classes that visit TREKS, on a county by county basis (we are targeting 7 counties) to measure our impact. We initiated the program with a press conference on 1-26-09 and already have 4 schools scheduled.

### **Children's Museum of Winston-Salem (NC): CM of Winston Salem's Health Initiative**

**Category:** Health

**Contact:** Lesa Pierce-336-723-9111 ext. 205

#### **Narrative Description**

As the problem is found among all children regardless of nationality, age, sex, or economic strata, it became our strategy to immerse all our museum patrons in an environment that promotes good choices reinforced with good education. So the focus has been interjected into all we do. It is important to not just educate the children, but also their families. It is our desire to change habits to create new, healthier lifestyle choices. As a result, the practices employed by our museum are consistent and clearly stated to our members and visitors, a group that includes Caucasian, African American, Hispanic, Asian, and other nationalities. We are reaching individual families, school groups, birthday party gatherings, scout troops, exceptional children, home schooled, and Head Start groups from an area that encompasses four counties. No group is exempt from our focus and we feel we are reaching every individual that enters our facility. In fact, this new focus attracted 21,000 in admissions during a four month period. In an attempt to reach those that might not otherwise hear our message, we welcomed 810 school children to whom we extended free or reduced price admission. Furthermore, by incorporating reinforcing traveling exhibits and heavily promoting them, we have drawn many new patrons to our museum in recent months, further expanding our impact. Our admissions during this focus were an increase over the same period a year ago, reinforcing the fact that this was an emphasis of great concern and interest to our community. In a difficult economy, this has certainly been deemed a success.



### Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact

In reaction to our audience's desire for more physical activities, our strategy has been to implement a wide variety of programs. The Cleveland Children's Museum's traveling exhibit entitled "Healthier Ever After" was brought in to promote healthy lifestyles. It addressed such things as portion size, proper diet, and physical activity. The museum developed themed programs for field trip participants to fit our focus. They included "Eating the Alphabet", "My Amazing Body", "Eat & Grow", and "My Busy Body". Supermarket chain Food Lion presented a 'food safety day' where they talked about the importance of drinking water, the proper way to wash one's hands in addition to healthy eating. A bike safety day taught kids and parents how to pick the right size bicycle and helmet. Donated helmets were distributed to children. Stations taught about breaking, steering, and following the rules of the road. Making participants more comfortable about riding will make them more active riders. Healthy Halloween gave toys rather than candy during trick or treating at the boo-seum. This well received event turned into one of our more popular endeavors. The Junior League sponsored a speaker series on "Healthy Holiday Cooking with Kids". Discount Friday Nights adopted an emphasis on gymnastics. Our 'Sprout Story Times' brought local celebrities in to participate in selections such as "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" which accompanied the creation of healthy crafts. The museum reevaluated its selections at vending machines that have always sold healthy food and drink. All of these initiatives address the stated problem of obesity. This is an ongoing problem that is not changed overnight. It is a lifelong process that, if started early in life, will show results before adolescence. Results will only be known in the years to come. But if patron feedback is any indication, we have been successful to date. Our executive director attended several conferences, the most recent in Chicago entitled "Healthy Choices, Healthy Moves", after which he shared with the staff what he garnered from those experiences. Our emphasis must also be ongoing!

### The Discovery Center of the Southern Tier (Binghamton, NY): The Story Garden

**Category:** Play/Health

**Contact:** Martha Steed, 607-773-8661 ext. 204

#### Narrative Description

The addition of an outdoor environment with *free* admission makes a profound impact on children and families. We created a child's domain that provides a commune with nature. Not a traditional playground but one with exciting plantings, hidey holes and whimsical structures to cast a new ambiance outside of the museum. How better to explore than in imaginative spaces that promote playful learning created from the themes and pages of some of the best loved stories and poems of outdoor adventures; a flowing space with 13 interactive literary vignettes. Included are a Creation Station and an amphitheater — natural venues for performance, storytelling, classes or art adventures.

Applauded, revisited, appreciated, The Story Garden is a popular destination point. Tourists seek us out, children and families participate in garden adventures, storytelling days, hunts, reading and just "being outside." We offer an interactive treasure that gives every child a chance to touch, contemplate and form a serene sense of place. There are flowers and vegetables to water; books to be read; mystery plants and environmental questions to ponder. Recently, The Story Garden received a Community Achievement Award from the American Society of Landscape Architects, New York-Upstate Chapter. As well, an extensive photographic article was featured in the October 2008 issue of *Landscape Architect - Specifier News*. We are located in a historic park, sharing residence with a zoo operating at the South end of the park. The garden in relationship to the zoo affords easy access to exciting collaborative programming.

#### Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact

In 2002 a capital project, the addition of 7,800 square feet to our existing space was completed. Guy Williams, a Washington, DC landscape architect, had occasion to visit The Discovery Center. Wanting to add exterior enhancement, his design consultation started the process. Staff excitement over the possibilities of an outdoor learning and exploration environment prompted us to invite the Junior League of Binghamton (JLB) to collaborate with us and envision a garden project. It seemed natural to look to the museum's founding patrons, one that has proved a worthy endeavor for 25 years. The JLB embraced our vision, raised all the funds and inspired community support with gusto. The seed of The



Story Garden was planted. The engaging of local landscape architect, Michael Haas, a resource and planning expert, garnered us great support. Regional artists, contractors, metalworkers, landscapers, and volunteers worked together to complete the project. Community involvement and state and national recognition have been the measure of our garden success.

In June, 2007, The Discovery Center and the JLB celebrated the opening of The Story Garden. Overwhelming community attendance measured the first instant of this success. Many local and national corporations, foundations and governmental entities made this project come to life. In the first year, we evaluated the garden's success in visitation count (4559), in letters, in media coverage, in program attendance, in the excitement of visual and performing artists who want to perform here, to the comments of our patrons and donors who visit frequently, bringing friends and family. We hear the grateful thanks of families who appreciate having a space, *for free*, that unleashes their child's curiosity and excitement for being out of doors. Note: Books were well-worn, needing replacement! Our hands on learning in all the traditional disciplines of life science, language arts, math, social studies and the arts invites a day in the garden that guarantees a myriad of experiences for all people. From dawn to dusk there are always families in the garden playing, pondering, picnicking and enjoying every minute. It has also become a popular wedding photo backdrop!

In the summer of 2008, we held a reopening of the garden to highlight changes and additions. Well attended, this day instigated follow-up of impressive coverage and congratulations. A recent national notice has only confirmed our measure of success and evaluation of the project outcome. Unsolicited, donations continue to arrive. We answer weekly calls for advice on how to develop and design a fantasy outdoor environment! The outdoor space idea is growing and Catherine Eberbach's *Hand to Hand* article (Fall 1999), "Kids, Museums and the Great Outdoors" was a stepping stone to our dreams that have become reality. Surely, this garden will continue grow!

### **Discovery Gateway (Salt Lake City, UT): Chase ArtWorks Program**

**Category:** Diversity

**Contact:** Cindy Hottes, 801-456-5437 ext. 115

#### **Narrative Description**

The Chase ArtWorks program provides educational support to low-income, abused and homeless families; the goals of the program are to increase school readiness and social skills, learning facilitation skills for parents, and increased interest in school for the whole family. The impact of the Chase ArtWorks program will continue to grow because we recognize that flexibility is essential. Chase ArtWorks is family-centered and recognizes their strengths. For instance, as we plan our FY10 Chase ArtWorks program, we acknowledge that although families can benefit greatly from the program, the situation of families living at the YWCA differs from that of low-income Head Start families, and we have adjusted our program accordingly. As we continue our program, we plan to expand the program so that it not only serves families offsite at the YWCA, but also serves low-income Head Start families onsite at Discovery Gateway. We have innovated Chase ArtWorks by adding flexibility in meeting families' needs.

#### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Ongoing evaluation is based on attendance figures, voluntary participant surveys, client care managers, and is also being assessed by our Education/Programs Manager.



## **Duluth Children's Museum (MN): Passport to Culture**

**Category:** Diversity

**Contact:** Rich Jaworski, 218-733-7544

### **Narrative Description**

In response to the needs of children living in poverty in our community, the Duluth Children's Museum decided to test a method of increasing membership access and serving greater numbers of children living in poverty. Rather than offering periodic daylong events for low-income children, our objective was to provide year-round access that would produce more lasting benefits. A \$6,000 grant secured from the Duluth-Superior Area Community Foundation enabled us to launch a pilot project, Passport to Culture, in July 2007. Renewed support for the program, based on program success and community need, was awarded in FY 2009 with a \$10,000 grant. A 100% growth in membership was experienced between FY 2008 and FY 2009. Museum management maintained Passport to Culture membership at 35.3% of the total membership base. First year figures for the number of Passport to Culture memberships are consistent with the percentage of families living in poverty in the Duluth area. The Duluth Children's Museum works with several social service agencies to distribute yearlong membership passes to children and families of low income. Passes enable program participants to make unlimited trips to the Children's Museum. Passport to Culture is designed to help eliminate financial barriers to educational program services within the community by providing children and their caregivers living in poverty with the means to participate in the learning experiences offered by the Duluth Children's Museum. It provides access to families who would normally not be able to attend programs offered by the Museum on a regular basis.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Evaluation begins with getting information out into the community about the existence of the Passport to Culture program. The Duluth Children's Museum collaborates with area community-based organizations to identify and engage disadvantaged families that can benefit from Children's Museum membership. These organizations include:

- Duluth Headstart, Families in Transition.
- The Salvation Army.
- Lutheran Social Services - Young Parent Program, Supervised Visits Program, Financial. Counselors, First Year Program, Bethany Crisis Nursery.
- Community Action Duluth.
- Family Focus - Foster Family Support.
- Little Treasures Childcare and Family Center.
- Duluth Public Schools Family, Friends and Neighbors Childcare Project.
- Adult Learning Center - ESL and Family Learning Program.

Response to the program has been overwhelming and has been a large factor in a marked increase in total museum membership Duluth Children's museum membership increased from 482 households serving 2,335 individuals in FY 2007 to 968 households serving 4,890 individuals in FY 2008 and 342 of these were through our Passport to Culture program.

Other evaluation components include: Intended Outcomes:

- Disadvantaged families will participate in educational programs offered by the Duluth Children's Museum.
- Program participation provides a positive learning experience that fosters a desire to learn and increases retention of students within the local school system.
- Duluth Children's Museum membership mirrors community demographics and maintains sustainability. Indicators:
- Number of Passport to Culture members that participate in regular and special programs offered by the museum.
- Percentage of Passport to Culture members relative to total annual memberships. Data Source:

- Sign up sheets for all program participants that can be checked against the membership database to determine how many Passport to Culture members are attending. • Interviews with museum visitors by floor staff.
- Membership records. Target for Change:
- Maintain active museum program participation from Passport to Culture members at 35% of all members attending in a given year.

Sign up sheets for programs have indicated that the number of Passport to Culture participants has increased proportionately to the number of members that participate in museum programming. The number of Passport to Culture memberships distributed each year constitutes 30-35% of total annual membership. The membership passes are distributed on a first come/first serve basis by collaborating agencies and the Duluth Children's Museum. Monthly formative evaluations are conducted by Duluth Children's Museum project management staff to determine the amount of Passport to Culture memberships awarded in order to maintain the 30-35% balance relative to the total number of existing museum memberships.

In addition to measuring project outcomes, evaluation data provides information on:

- Demand for memberships and efficiency of membership distribution.
- Number of children and caregivers served through the program.
- Use of membership during the year including attendance at introductory events and other program activities.
- Effectiveness in addressing participant barriers or other participation problems.
- Collaborating agency satisfaction level with program coordination, communication and program results.
- Feedback from program participants about the accessibility of the program and quality of program services.

### **Edventure Children's Museum (Columbia, SC): Hands-On, Minds-On! for K-5 Educators**

**Category:** Diversity

**Contact:** Susan Bonk, 803-400-1131

#### **Narrative Description**

In 2005, EdVenture Children's Museum launched a Summer Teacher Institute called Hands-On, Minds-On! for k-5 educators, which focuses on the South Carolina State Science Standards and methods of successful curriculum integration using these Standards. This innovative program has transformed EdVenture's relationship with the schools, and has significantly impacted teachers and children throughout South Carolina—reaching more than 600 teachers to date. Hands-On, Minds-On! gives teachers the confidence they need to fully integrate hands-on science content in the classroom, while motivating students through interactive, discovery learning.

Primary goals for the Summer Institute include:

1. Strengthening teacher knowledge of science content areas found in the State Curriculum Standards by learning how to develop inquiry-based curriculum units and to effectively use hands-on activities with the students.
2. Building awareness and confidence among participating teachers to use the science standards effectively and learn how to develop "integrated" curriculum experiences for their students. The Institute uses science in context with English Language Arts, Social Studies and Math classroom experiences to aid student interest and achievement in all curriculum areas; avoiding stereotypes such as "I don't do science," shared by teachers and students.
3. Increasing core science skills of elementary-aged students. Teachers who participate in the Institute receive five days of hands-on instruction by EdVenture staff and experts in integrated and differentiated learning, and also receive unique science materials they can use back in their classrooms. Participating teachers are also eligible to receive either recertification hours or graduate credit hours through a local college.



### Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact

Since launching the Hands-On, Minds-On! Summer Institute in 2005, evaluation has been a significant part of ensuring that the program is meeting the needs of teachers and students across South Carolina. More than 50% of the participating teachers are minorities (non-white) and represent schools where the student population is more than 60% minority and eligible for free/reduced lunches. Ensuring that we meet the diverse needs of this population through program design, implementation and evaluation is critical to success. Formative evaluation in the planning stages of the program includes surveys to teachers as well as focus groups. This communication with the participating teachers in advance of the Institute provides the instructional team vital information about the methods, materials and resources teachers are currently using in their classrooms to teach science, as well as any specific cultural or special accommodations needed in the classroom. This formative assessment further provides insight into any potential barriers the Institute might experience and the proposed instructional agenda is adjusted accordingly. The Hands-on, Minds-On! curriculum is designed to include multiple assessment strategies, mirroring what the Institute instructs teachers to do in their own classrooms. Throughout the Institute, teachers are given daily written evaluations to complete. These are reviewed each day and any appropriate modifications to the following day's session are implemented. In addition, these evaluations inform the curriculum development process for the following year's program. Museum staff critically examines the feedback from the teachers and integrates appropriate information from that feedback into the process of developing the syllabus for future Hands-On, Minds-On! sessions. Participating teachers also complete journals during their week-long session, as well as during the first two months back in their classrooms. Teachers are invited to attend a follow-up session in October, during which they present the science units that they have created, and submit their journals to the museum staff. The journals are meant to provide a place for teachers to record their experience throughout the Hands-On, Minds-On! program, discuss their understanding of the concepts taught during the program, and reflect on their experience in teaching an integrated science unit in their classroom. The journals provide the museum staff with valuable information about how concepts are being communicated in the sessions, as well as how well the participating teachers are able to incorporate new knowledge into their everyday work and classrooms. These journals also provide insight into how the teachers believe their students are being impacted by the new tools and techniques gained through the Institute. This comprehensive evaluation method has proven successful for EdVenture to design, implement, and refine the Hands-On, Minds-On! Summer Teacher's Institute to continually meet the needs of South Carolina educators and students.

### Explorations V Children's Museum, Inc. (Lakeland, FL): Storybook Camp

**Category:** Diversity

**Contact:** Georgann Carlton: 863-687-3869

#### Narrative Description

Our solution to the literacy problem in Polk County began by building the language proficiency of pre-school age children through high-quality, language-rich experiences at the Children's Museum. Explorations V Children's Museum targeted students registered for kindergarten, and identified by the school administration and/or teachers as at-risk, low income, or developmentally delayed.

The Museum implemented a United Way grant-funded Storybook Camp, based on children's literature and enrichment activities, to improve language skills. In addition to stories and activities in the classroom, children participated in the Museum's daily programs focused on literature, school readiness skills, cooking, Science, Math, and Art, and explored the Museum's hands-on exhibits every day. Staff encouraged children to express themselves while playing in the Museum with open-ended questioning, journaling, music and movement, sharing time, and playing directly with the children. Bilingual staff encouraged non-English speaking children to verbalize by interpreting directions and stories, and worked closely with families to increase the children's English vocabulary. Daily parent notes included story vocabulary, story synopsis, featured exhibits their child played with, and ideas to continue learning at home.

Children received lunch as part of the US Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service Summer Feeding Program, and transportation through the city's public transportation system, where

available. Parental involvement was encouraged with the gift of a one year Explorations V Children's Museum family membership. Community awareness was increased regarding the significance of playful learning in the Museum's exhibits & daily programs for quality early childhood education with this highly visible summer program.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Collaboration with a local testing firm, the Learning Resource Center (LRC) equipped the Explorations V with the knowledge, tools, and personnel necessary for measurement/evaluation. Following research and discussion, we chose the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), a wide range measure of receptive vocabulary for standard English and a screening test of verbal ability, along with the Expressive Vocabulary Test (EVT) as pre and post test measures. These individually administered tests offered parallel forms for testing and re-testing, required no reading or writing from the children, had a 10-15 minute administration time, and were co-normed for direct comparisons.

Children were pre-tested during the first week of camp. Results, given as "Above" or "Below" Chronological Age, were shared with parents with a short narrative describing strengths/weaknesses and suggested areas of learning to focus on at home. Staff received numerical scores of the GSV (Growth Scale Value - measures change/growth in vocabulary knowledge over time) with age equivalent scores.

Post tests were administered during the last week of camp and parent surveys collected on the last day. Staff tallied daily attendance records and compiled narratives on each child documenting progress in academic & social skills. Staff witnessed marked improvement in children's speech, vocabulary, and expressions, as well as progress working independently/small groups.

Learning gains/losses evidenced on the post tests were reported to staff, for both GSV and age equivalent, and results reported to parents & Museum staff after children started kindergarten. Gains of as little as one month to as much as one year and seven months progress in age equivalency were made during five weeks of camp!

Parents reported positive first-school experiences, crediting the Museum program with preparing their children for both the academics and routines of school. Parents return often with their children to explore and participate in daily & weekend programs & special events at Explorations V using the program's free family membership.

"My husband & I have observed a dramatic change in my daughter's social skills due to this program."  
L. Loveday, Parent

"The Summer Camp program was language based and developed around children's literature. Our students were involved in hands-on learning, developing language skills as well as making new friends.... It is my hope that the students of Crystal Lake Elementary will be able to have this experience again during the summer of 2009." K. Chapman, Assistant Principal

Some student observations by Camp Director:

- CW - self-esteem seemed to improve...weren't as many melt downs/crying/tantrums.
- SG – learned to open up, trust, bond and form friendships. (parents in custody battle)
- MH – came from a home with parents that understood/spoke very little English – never stopped trying.
- LG – would point to pictures/words/posters in the classroom/all over the Museum, repeating everything.
- DD – the best thing (the program) - DD would have been totally lost and unprepared for Kindergarten.
- MO's Mom – This was for all the times you wondered if you were making a difference and you have, thank you!"



## Imagine Children's Museum (Everett, WA): Vermi's Wormology Program

**Category:** Health      **Contact:** Nancy Johnson, 425-258-1006 ext. 1013

### **Narrative Description**

Children often feel that because they are small, they lack the ability to make significant impact. By introducing them to Vermi, a little worm who makes a big difference, they begin to understand that they CAN make an impact in the world. ICM developed a two-component program to teach children and adults about vermicomposting. The first component was a special event held at the Museum. Visitors participated in "wormy" games and activities, decorated their own take-home mini worm bins (which included worms), listened to the story "Diary of a Worm" and learned how to be good environmental stewards. Representatives from the City's Waste Prevention and Recycling Department showed adults how to create and maintain in-home worm bins, provided information on the County's plans and discussed how to integrate food-waste recycling into the households. Worm bins were also available for purchase. The second component of the program incorporated the book and environmental stewardship information into the Museum's annual literacy outreach program. During the week-long program, 190 community volunteers visited elementary school classrooms and read the book, using it as a gateway into activities and discussions related to food-waste recycling. Each child made their own take-home mini worm bins ... worms included! During the course of the program, children and adults (parents, teachers, volunteers, etc.) learned the benefits and environmental impacts realized when food waste is recycled. Participants also learned what is and what is not on a worm's menu and how to apply what they learned to their own homes.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

#### ***Our goals for the Vermi's Wormology program were to:***

- Raise awareness of the need for food-waste recycling
- Raise awareness of the County's implementation of their food-waste recycling program
- Inform visitors how to begin recycling their household's food waste
- Connect the community (young children and adults) with local government and business community people and resources.

#### ***To reach these goals during the Museum-based event, we:***

- Worked with local government and businesses to create an informative program for children and adults
- Coordinated volunteer opportunities with government and businesses
- Present the program in two forums: 1. Museum special event presented free with admission; 2. Community outreach program presented free to elementary school classrooms
- Provided information to participants about food-waste recycling
- Provided information to participants about Snohomish County's food waste recycling program
- Provided participants with the opportunity to create their own mini worm bins, including worms
- Provided games and other hands-on activities related to composting and worms
- Provided participants with a menu of what worms like to eat and what's off the menu.

#### **Evaluation methods included:**

- Informal observations of participating children and adults during activities
- Data collection on numbers served and information dissemination
- Feedback from children, parents, caregivers, teachers and volunteers.

**Outcomes:**

During the observations, it became apparent that the information and concepts being introduced were unfamiliar to most of the participants. Much of the provided literature was picked up during the program. Informal surveys indicated that a number of the people visiting that day actually created their own worm bins or began some type of food waste recycling program. Our method of presenting the program both as a special event held at the Museum and integrated with our annual community literacy outreach program allowed us to reach not only the young children and their adult caregivers, but also children, teachers and community members through schools. The program was announced with letters and/or emails to schools. Teachers who wished to participate simply called or emailed the Museum and scheduled a time. Informal observation of the mini worm bin activity led us to believe that this hands-on element was very effective. These observations clearly indicated the importance of tactile learning when introducing new ideas to young children. Data collection shows that more than 5,000 children, adults, parents and teachers participated in the program. Additionally 190 community volunteers donated their time and expertise to the development and implementation of the program. By tracking the numbers served, we will be better equipped for future programs to adjust dates and times to serve the largest possible numbers. Feedback from participants was very positive. Many of the comments from the museum-based program allowed us to make adjustments to the program that was presented in the schools.

**Imagine Children's Museum (Everett, WA): Data Tracking System**

**Category:** Health      **Contact:** Nancy Johnson, 425-258-1006 ext. 1013

**Narrative Description**

Imagine Children's Museum tracks pertinent data daily and distributes it weekly to the leadership team. Information tracked includes data on admissions; camp, class, field trip and special event sign-ups and participation; volunteer data; museum store sales; birthday parties reservations; after-hours facility usage and community outreach. This information is compiled into a basic report which shows the current year-to-date information compared to the same time frame from the previous year. The reports are distributed to the leadership team. Using this data, they can identify and respond to areas and community needs that require immediate action, thereby ensuring that the organization remains sustainable and able to continue serving the community. For example, we became aware of the need for expanded Sunday hours while reviewing data on birthday party bookings. Imagine Children's Museum, like most children's museums, is heavily dependent on earned income and donations for its operating funds. The organization's practice of ongoing reviews is used both in implementing new programs and in evaluating how applied changes impact the organization's overall strategic plan and its goals and programs. The information distribution creates an awareness among the Board and staff which has led to many new and innovative ideas for improvement. Regular and frequent evaluations have helped us avoid knee-jerk reactions, leading instead to prudent and well-reasoned changes.

**Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

While we have been tracking and analyzing data for many years, the data traditionally has been primarily used by administrative staff and reviewed monthly by the organization's Finance Committee. Last spring when the shift in the economic tide began, we realized that this standard practice was no longer sufficient. In order to be proactive instead of reactive, we needed to enhance and expand the type of data collected, the frequency of reviews and the dissemination process. We now look at results in real time. If, during the weekly reviews, we do not see the anticipated results and outcomes, we can thoughtfully and responsively modify plans and strategies as necessary. For example, over the past couple of years, as school budgets tightened and gas prices rose, we noticed fewer field trips were being scheduled. Knowing that schools still desired to participate in the museum's enrichment programming, we focused on promoting our Museum-on-the-Go programs, which are very cost-efficient ways for schools to offer special programs to their students. Currently, in response to the large numbers of local layoffs, we have changed the focus of how we market memberships. In addition to focusing on the traditional benefits, we now place more emphasis on promoting the value of ensuring family togetherness time for an entire year for less than the cost of a family night at the movies with snacks.



## **Kidsquest Children's Museum (Bellevue, WA): Homeschool Series**

**Category:** Diversity    **Contact:** Sarah Villian, 425-637-8100

### **Narrative Description**

The number of homeschooled children in the U.S. is estimated to be anywhere from 1.5 million to 2.1 million, with a growth rate of 7-15% each year. Parents who choose to homeschool, do so for many reasons, including dissatisfaction with the school system and religion. When homeschooling their children, parents feel that they must be “experts” in every area to ensure their child is receiving the best education possible. For a lot of parents, science and the arts are not areas they are as comfortable with. Science can be especially hard for parents who are homeschooling. They may find it difficult to gather the supplies for science experiments or to get certain concepts across and some science projects are really messy! Art supplies are also expensive and art history is extensive. Drama instruction often requires working in a group setting.

KidsQuest's Homeschool Series in Science, Art and Drama offers a solution to these families that ensures their children are learning valuable educational concepts that will help them succeed in the future. By nature, homeschooling is less structured and more experiential. The museum environment reinforces the experiential nature of homeschooling. Parents don't have to purchase the expensive equipment and supplies. Curriculums for the year are provided in advance so parents can plan their lessons to complement the programs offered at KidsQuest. The class-like setting of the Homeschool Series also gives homeschooled children an opportunity to work in a team environment and develop social skills.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate the Impact**

KidsQuest has used national and local data on homeschooling trends and needs to develop our Homeschool Series Program. KidsQuest also met with members of our local homeschool organization, Washington Homeschoolers Organization, when developing our programs and curriculum to ensure that local needs are being met. Through this process we found that science was the subject that most parents needed help with. During the 2007-2008, KidsQuest offered our first Homeschool Series in science. Following that year, we learned from parents that they also needed assistance with art and drama. KidsQuest added these programs in the 2008-2009 schoolyear.

KidsQuest measures and evaluates the impact of our Homeschool Series program through parent evaluations and quantitative measures such as enrollment numbers and repeat program participants. As this program is new, we have only completed evaluations for the science component based on the 2007-2008 school year and are currently in the process of doing a mid-year evaluation for the 2008-2009 programs.

Based on feedback received from the 2007-2008 science evaluations, 66% of the respondents reported that KidsQuest's homeschool science program made a positive change in their child's attitude toward science. Twenty-seven percent responded that it has made somewhat of a positive difference in their child's attitude towards science. Seven percent of respondents stated it made no change in their child's attitude toward science, but that their child already loved science.

KidsQuest also asked if the program improved their at-home science lesson. Seventy-five percent of respondents said that yes, it had improved their at-home lessons, with one family reported that they replaced their in-home science lessons completely with the KidsQuest science program. Nineteen percent reported it had somewhat improved their at-home lessons and 6% reported that it did not change their at-home lessons.

“The class was amazing and changed my daughters views on science. Now she would say science can be fun and exciting because the class was so hands-on and the teacher so enthusiastic and knowledgeable.”  
– KidsQuest Homeschool Parent



## Miami Children's Museum (FL): Healthy Kids Healthy Families Initiative

**Category:** Health      **Contact:** Hannah Hausman Greaux, 305-373-5437 ext. 103

### Narrative Description

The Healthy Kids Healthy Families Initiative incorporates healthy lifestyle programming into the Museum's programs and exhibits. For example, the Kids Cooking Club provides healthy cooking demonstrations (mobile cooking cart), take home recipes and alternatives to processed food. A highlight of this program was during National Dairy Month when celebrity Chef Jon Ashton hosted a lively demonstration on incorporating dairy into your diet. In addition, children and families have participated in "cultural" cooking classes, Grilling 101, Back to School Lunches (creating a healthy lunch), and Farmer's Market (pick out healthy foods and create a recipe). Through our outreach, we conduct the Green Team Program, which focuses on the environment and body, children learn about healthy lifestyles, organic eating, and nutrition. In conjunction, the outreach visit involves planting a mostly edible, organic garden at the school, where children will learn how to tend plants and maintain their garden. During this outreach, students learn hands-on, about plant growth, native South Florida plants, the dangers of pesticides and chemicals, and enjoy the actual planting experience. Further, an in-class recycling program is implemented, explaining the benefits of recycling and the hazards of littering and waste. MCM has addressed a critical need in our community through a hands-on, playful approach. It is through these efforts that MCM has a broad impact on increasing health for children and families in our community.

### Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact

In order to evaluate the impact and outcomes of our Healthy Kids Healthy Families Initiative MCM incorporates various measures of success. We employ the use of qualitative and quantitative data dependent upon the program. For example, our after-school program uses a written fitness assessment tool based on the President Physical Fitness Challenge (shuttle run, sit ups, push ups) that is administered to the children (pretest and posttest). It was found that during 2008, 86.7% of students improved or maintained their fitness level. For our curriculum based programs, such as the *Kraft Salsa, Sabor y Salud* there was an increase in the mean difference of .87 from pretest to posttest on attitudes and knowledge related to nutrition education and fitness activities. These programs have been successful in achieving their intended outcomes. As we move forward in expanding our programming and outreach targeting health, nutrition, and fitness we will continue to employ evaluation measures to gauge our impact and monitor program success.

## Minnesota Children's Museum (St. Paul): Big Fun!

**Category:** Health      **Contact:** Jennifer Zarth, 651-225-6113

### Narrative Description

Daily at 11:30, the Big Fun! announcement calls visitors to the center of the Museum where Visitor Assistants and volunteers have laid out an array of engaging equipment designed to inspire physical play. They announce, "Today, we are having a Dance Party." Children start to bounce to energetic music as they explore ribbon sticks, scarves, and rhythm instruments. Children begin dancing, spinning and moving around the room with the colorful props – their adults following alongside.

The American Heart Association states that one of the most effective ways to inspire children's activity is for parents to be active too. Equipment is chosen for Big Fun! programs to appeal to adults and children and to inspire open-ended play scenarios. This program provides an engaging opportunity for adults to model being active alongside their children.

The physical nature of the program encourages children to develop physical skills such as balance, coordination and strength, but they also build social-emotional skills. They take turns with equipment and successfully try out new large-motor skills. They also take a variety of "safe" risks such as exploring new equipment and playing with others.

Another goal for Big Fun! is to inspire ideas to try at home. Adults often ask staff where they can get certain equipment and frequently comment that the activities would be fun to try at home.

Finally, it offers visitors opportunities to connect. In this way, Big Fun! facilitates community gathering as visitors throughout the Museum come together to participate in the same activity.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

We evaluate Big Fun! using several methods to determine how well it meets identified program outcomes. These outcomes are based on best practices in cognitive, physical and social-emotional development for young children. Each day, the Big Fun! facilitator chooses the theme for the day's activity. Using factors such as attendance and age of the audience, or the larger program theme or events for the day - the facilitator chooses from a wide range of activities. The program allows for a great deal of flexibility to meet changes in audiences needs on the spot and for the creativity of the facilitating team. The design of Big Fun! activities is evaluated on a matrix of dimensions including:

- Program accessibility for all abilities  
Evaluation conducted by partners that serve families with disabilities found this program to be highly accessible and adaptable
- Developmental appropriateness and appeal to wide age range  
Attendance demographic indicate the program is appealing to visitors with a broad age range
- Appeal to multiple intelligences  
Big Fun! has entry points that are musical, artistic, kinesthetic, interpersonal, and spatial
- Potential for social-emotional skill development and practice  
Because an element of the program involves equipment and space sharing, as well as group involvement, children practice the above skills
- Potential for practicing physical skills  
Big Fun! allows children of varying abilities to engage in a wide variety of large motor activities
- Degree of adult involvement  
The Museum actively engages adults in child-centered activities like Big Fun! Facilitators, parents and caregivers actively participate with children in Big Fun!

Other methods used to evaluate Big Fun! include:

- Visitor comment cards and surveys  
Big Fun! has been noted at the top of the list as an activity that museum visitors are likely to have participated in and are aware of.
- Attendance tracking  
Big Fun! is one of our most well attended programs. In FY08, two 30-minute Big Fun! programs were conducted each day that we were open. We had a total of 354 program hours and served 33,885 visitors. That's an average 95 visitors in each hour of Big Fun! or 8.5% of our total attendance for the year.
- Cost per head  
Big Fun! has a very low per person cost. Our annual budget for Big Fun! is \$2,500. The money is used to replace equipment and purchase new equipment. In all, Big Fun! costs \$.07 per visitor served.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MlfeXr2qIA>



## **Mobius Kids (Spokane, WA): Cooper's Corner Safety Fair**

**Category:** Play/Health

**Contact:** Marty Gonzales, 509-624-5437 ext. 302

### **Narrative Description**

MOBIUS KIDS children's museum is located in Spokane, Washington. Created in memory of local cyclist Cooper Jones, Cooper's Corner is a permanent Mobius Kids exhibit. The exhibit promotes the principles of bicycle and traffic safety as children pedal and walk their way through a miniature city. Our COOPER'S CORNER SAFETY FAIR is an interactive event built upon the concepts of this permanent exhibit. During our three-hour Safety Fair, visitors receive a "Passport." Various stations provide hands-on activities, and children collect "Passport" stamps from each station they visit. For example, during 2008, the Spokane Police Department's station focused on bicycle safety and conducted helmet fittings. The Spokane Fire Department provided a fire truck Avista electricity company brought Wattson (their costumed mascot) and a lineman to share information about electrical safety. Additional stations were provided by the Spokane Transit Authority, Eastern Washington University Police Department, COPS Family ID, and Spokane Public Schools, with a special appearance by McGruff the Crime Dog of the National Crime Prevention Council. After collecting stamps from each station, children return their completed "Passport" to receive a prize donated by local businesses. Our promising practice is to address the health and safety of children by involving community partners in a Safety Fair. This low-cost event presents information which is accessible, engaging, and age-appropriate. By involving community partners, we strengthen relationships for future museum initiatives. In addition, by expanding on a current exhibit, key Safety Fair themes are reinforced each time children visit the museum.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Mobius Kids uses several methods to measure and evaluate the impact of our promising practice.

**ATTENDANCE:** To measure attendance, Mobius Kids tracks the number of paid and Scholarship Program (for low-income children) attendees. This information reflects the number of Safety Fair event beneficiaries. We also compare Safety Fair attendance with similar museum dates and time periods in order to gauge the effectiveness of our outreach and marketing.

**ENGAGEMENT:** To measure the engagement of our event visitors, we collect completed "Passports." This information allows us to determine what percentage of children and families visit all of the Safety Fair stations, reflecting the degree to which the event is applicable, engaging, and age-appropriate.

**EFFECTIVENESS:** Quantitative data is collected from the local safety experts and partners who participate in the Safety Fair. Based on a scale of 1 to 5 in which 1 is "Poor" and 5 indicates "Excellent," our 2008 partners provided average ratings of 4.3 to 4.7 for the educational content, effective delivery of information, age appropriateness, and overall quality of the event. In addition, participants reported a 4.6 rating for the likelihood that they would participate in future Cooper's Corner Safety Fairs.

**RELATIONSHIPS:** Qualitative responses are also collected from participating safety experts. These comments reflect (1) our ability to reach key program goals related to effectively engaging children and (2) the satisfaction of our partners with whom we are building relationships for future museum activities. For example, the Spokane Transit Authority (STA) participated in our Safety Fair by bringing one of their busses for children to visit. The STA also provides free bus passes for families involved in the Mobius Kids Scholarship Program. Explained the STA coordinator, this was a "Great event to market to a difficult market ... [and] a great way to promote [our] partnership with Mobius Kids." The Spokane Public Schools participated by sending school crossing guards ... who helped visitors arrive safely at the Safety Fair. The school representative shared that that they "had a fantastic time and great response from the visitors. Great publicity for my organization and a great way to get safety resources to children and their parents." COPS Family ID made identity DVDs for the children: "Everything went very well! We'd love to come back again!" Because of the challenges related to measuring preventative impact (particularly for our target age group of 8 and under), Mobius Kids chose a variety of process and outcome measurements to collect both quantitative and qualitative information. These tools help measure how well this promising practice met our goal of supporting the health and safety of local



children through community partnerships. By evaluating this data, we are able to effectively plan for future successful Safety Fair events.

## **Paso Robles Children's Museum (CA): K-5 Play & Learn Scholastic Program**

**Category:** Play

**Contact:** Natalie Schaefer, 805-238-7432

### **Narrative Description**

Recognizing the need to reach out to schools with our non-formal educational model, and understanding the need to create a standards-based educational program, the Educational Committee developed the K-5 Play & Learn Scholastic Program. Each grade level's lessons were developed with an eye to imbedding the state content standards into lessons that utilize the Museum's exhibits. For example, first grade students learn how to read scientific instruments by visiting the Museum's Weather Station. The children discover the rain gauge, the anemometer and the thermometer (Science Standard 3.a.). After taking the temperature reading, students develop a bar graph (CA Math Standard 1.1.2). First grade students also learn about animal adaptations in our Animal Corner (CA Science Standards 2.a.), the components of habitat (CA Science Standard 2.b), and the life cycle of an oak tree at our giant indoor Oak (CA Science Standard 2.c.). They go shopping for a healthy meal using "money" (CA Math Standard 1.1.5), and they make a seasonal tree in our Creation Station (CA Visual Arts Standards 2.1, 2.2, 5.2). All of this happens with the guided instruction of Museum staff and volunteers, many of whom are former public school teachers themselves. We've recently expanded this extremely successful program to include in-class presentations to first, second and fourth grade classes within San Luis Obispo's north county. Still standards-based, we are taking the Museum on the road, educating even more students (and their teachers!) in the value of the non-formal educational model and its impact on children.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Grade level standards in Science, Math, Social Studies, and/or Visual and Performing Arts are covered by directed play and discovery through guided practice. We measure and evaluate the impact of this program through several assessments. To measure educational objectives and student retention, we determine what children know about the subject matter before and after we teach it, utilizing inquiry-based teaching strategies to pre and post test the children. For example, "What are the food groups?" and "Can you shop for a healthy meal?" (Kindergarten); "What is the instrument we use to measure how hot or how cold it is outside?" (First grade); "Can you name the simple machines, and what is their purpose?" (Second grade). Each lesson has an essential question, which relates back to the content standard to be taught. Student retention rates for the educational objectives run between 95-98%. Students are allowed to learn the objectives in a hands-on, experiential and fun-filled environment that provides for play and discovery through guided practice. To measure teacher/parent satisfaction, we conduct an informal survey after the scholastic program, during the time that the children are allowed to play in the Museum. Teachers, as well as parent chaperones, are offered an opportunity to provide feedback on the program. Teachers and parents are both thrilled with the results, because they see that the children are discovering that playing and learning goes hand in hand. We track repeat performances — teachers that return, or recommend our services to other teachers. We measure the increase of classroom requests from each of the schools in our region. Although classrooms are challenged economically to avail themselves of extracurricular programs, we continue to run a full program schedule because teachers can justify the expense of our programs. Standards-based programming meets their classroom objectives, and the Paso Robles Children's Museum provides them another avenue for teaching the content.



## **Staten Island Children's Museum (NY): Museum Intern Program and Museum Ambassador Program**

**Category:** Diversity

**Contact:** Dina Rosenthal, 718-273-2060 ext. 145

### **Narrative Description**

The Museum Intern program (currently in its ninth year) takes a comprehensive approach to engaging 15 teens in group projects designed to foster better interaction amongst peers, conflict resolution, community service and training as in preparation for becoming Museum Educators. A second tier, the Museum Ambassador program (currently in its fourth year) invites 6 Intern alumni to train in preparation for assuming greater leadership responsibilities outside the Museum as well as serving as positive role models for the other youth. Both groups represent the Museum in the community. Even before drastic budget cuts, the Museum chose the teens to fulfill many of the outreach requests received by the Museum (70+ were fulfilled last year!). Lack of staff was not the only reason for drafting the teens into this role. Their youthful energy makes the Museum table a standout at community functions throughout the year. Community service is an important aspect of the Intern/Ambassador programs. President Obama's "call to service" to the nation has further inspired the teens to maintain their connection with the community. In what is probably the most unique example of community service, the Ambassadors lead the Constructive Mood Management program for children in grades 3-5. The program, developed by Ambassador alumni, incorporates drama, writing and art in aiding the children to express anger, frustration and develop creative responses to aggression. Without a tremendous difference in age, and a host of similar experiences to relate to, the Ambassadors are effective mentors and role models for the next generation.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Third-party evaluation has been essential to the success of the Intern and Ambassador programs and the Constructive Mood Management Program (CMM). In 2006, the Museum hired evaluators from St. John's University to assess the Intern and Ambassador programs. The evaluators met with Museum staff, the trainers, Interns, Ambassadors and representatives from schools that have participated in CMM workshops. Using this information, the evaluators developed instruments that could be administered to program participants by one or more of the stakeholders — Interns, Ambassadors, school, and Museum staff — in order to conduct front-end, formative and summative evaluation. At the end of the 2005-2006 evaluation, the teens were asked questions related to their training and outcomes by the St. John's evaluators. The questions that received the lowest ratings were, "Are you confident that you can help other people resolve conflicts?," "Are you confident that you can handle disagreements with your peers?," and "Are you confident that you can deal with situations where you feel angry?" The St. John's evaluators wrote, "A critical area for all young people in high school is that of anger management and conflict-resolution. The SICM Internship program incorporates this topic into its programming within the areas of developing leadership skills and working with diverse individuals. Based on the responses, it appears that even more attention to this area is necessary to help the interns develop life-long skills in dealing with their own personal emotions, and mediating the problems of others in peer relationships." The Museum staff was surprised to learn that conflict resolution was an area in which the teens felt they lacked proficiency, given their training and even their development of the Constructive Mood Management program.

The staff's response was two fold:

1) to focus on strengthening the conflict resolution curriculum and 2) to provide additional training for the teens. The Museum obtained a \$25,000 grant that allowed for the provision of improved training for the teens and formalized the Constructive Mood Management curriculum in a manual that will serve the Interns and Ambassadors for years to come. The Museum continues to conduct the survey at the beginning of the program (which coincides with the school year), mid-term and then again at the end of the year. This allows the Museum staff to address areas of need very specifically and quickly, as well as allow for tracking of growth experienced by individual Interns and Ambassadors. Having the evaluation tools in place has strengthened the Intern and Ambassador programs measurably. The teens have become so confident in their conflict resolution skills that they are now providing training for other teen



groups. Most recently the teens led a conflict resolution workshop for their peers at a local community college during a youth summit.

## **Strong National Museum of Play® (Rochester, NY): Community Programs at Strong National Museum of Play**

**Category:** Diversity

**Contact:** Laura Sadowski-585-410-6358

### **Narrative Description**

Strong has made a significant, sustained commitment to provide access for financially challenged families and children with special needs through three primary outreach programs: Since 1998 Passport to Family Fun (PFF) has provided museum access to families served by community agencies that provide primary support services. PFF provides memberships to families in transitional and supportive housing programs such as Sojourner House and Wilson Commencement Park, and free admission passes to families served by 25 other community service organizations including Ibero-American Action League and the Urban League of Rochester. In 2008, nearly 3,000 museum visits resulted from the program. Since 2000 Strong has provided free admission to more than 1,700 foster children and nearly 1,000 foster parents served by 18 agencies in an 11-county region through its Foster Family Admissions (FFA) program. FFA is a collaboration with Foster Adoption Network, a partnership between Children Awaiting Parents, Inc. and the New York State Region II Office of Children and Family Services, including the Departments of Social Services within the upstate counties of Monroe, Chemung, Livingston, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Wayne, and Yates. In 2008, nearly 2,300 museum visits resulted. Since 2003 Early Intervention/Education of Children with Disabilities Program (aka Play Therapy Access program) has offered free use of the museum to nearly 400 therapists in Monroe County, who provide Early Intervention services and educational services for children with disabilities, to work on treatment plans with their child clients and the child's adult caregiver(s). In 2008, nearly 1,000 museum visits resulted.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Strong evaluates the success of its community programs and services through both quantitative methods and qualitative analysis. Through our standard Admissions and Membership procedures, we are able to calculate museum attendance and collect and analyze data on the number of guests per day, week, month, and year; ZIP codes of visitors; membership growth; and other key information about our guests. This data is reviewed and analyzed by appropriate museum staff to identify trends in visitation and determine the effectiveness of community service activities. Regular analysis of this Admissions and Membership data enables museum staff to address any identified problems immediately and make "course corrections" as necessary. The museum also conducts qualitative and quantitative research with frequency and as necessary and staff consult regularly with the community partners involved with each program to determine if revisions or changes are desirable. Much of the evaluative information comes from anecdotal evidence supplied by the various community partner agencies with which the museum works to deliver the programs. Additionally, the museum receives notes and letters from participants in the various programs regularly telling us how meaningful the museum visits are to their children and families. In the most dramatic anecdotal example, a participant in the EI/ECD program—a four-year-old girl who had never walked before—took her first steps here at the museum. While working with her physical therapist and her mother on therapies in the museum's kid-sized supermarket exhibit, the therapist suggested that the child try to take a step while supported by a child-sized grocery cart. The child not only took a step but she kept right on stepping thanks to the physical support of the cart and traveled several hundred yards during that visit. That experience inspired the exhibit's benefactor, Robert Wegman, to purchase the child her own child-sized grocery cart which she continued to use at home until she was able to walk independently and without support.



## Texoma Children's Museum (Denison, TX): Youth Service Scholarship Program

**Category:** Health & Diversity

**Contact:** Sasha Best, 903-463-5678

### Narrative Description

The Youth Service Scholarship Program significantly affected the region, introducing populations and cultures to one another. Participants in the YSS program were varied: Choctaw Nation students, Merit Scholar, Grayson Shelter Resident, CASA recipients, ESL students and more. As a small Museum, we rely solely on volunteers to provide programs, exhibits and exhibit maintenance, cleaning; almost every aspect of Museum operations. The YSS provided an inspiring model of cooperation. Administrators and educators from 'rival' districts served together on the Selection Committee; local city officials and agencies participated in promoting the program and attended the Awards Dinner; local merchants assisted with program T-shirts and provided incentives to participants through gift cards and coupons. Families that had never attended the Museum now visited due to their connection to a youth worker and stayed to explore, experiencing the benefits of Children's Museum to various populations within its community. YSS participants facilitated enriched experiences with each exhibit, adding activities to enhance patrons visit and serving as a personable Museum representative. Children engaged with these youth in a mentor capacity, eager to interact. Finally, participants, their friends and families learned first-hand about responsibility and pride in their projects; while the program demonstrated the significant influence individuals, even youth, make within other people's lives and, as an extension, their community.

### Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact

The YSS evaluation was developed with the area's institutions of higher education (Austin College, Southeastern Oklahoma State University and Grayson County College) and local school district administrators. By using college admission requirements and Texas Standards for Education objectives, the program's core foundation was developed and reviewed. YSS applicants attended a mandatory training day, not counting toward the required 30 Service hours (per semester), to ensure that all volunteers were knowledgeable, well-versed Museum representatives while on the floor. This was also a time for Volunteers to brainstorm and connect as a group. Applicants were also required to diligently keep track of time and record Museum experiences by writing in a journal. The essay component of the application process combined the journaling to measure project completion, overall experience and expectation fulfillment. This information was used for evaluation at the projects' completion. Polls were used online, where Museum visitors were asked to rate their Museum experience and Volunteer performance. In addition, report Cards were available at the Front Desk and in the local Newspaper, enabling visitors without access to computers to provide feedback. This feedback was then placed into the scholarship applicants' files for review upon selection. At the completion of the Scholarship cycle, evaluations were sent to all the applicants, Committee members, Museum members and applicants' families to rate their experience with the program. These evaluations were used to determine whether the program was clearly defined, the objectives were met, the timelines were reasonable and that the overall experience was rewarding. Finally, all of this material was combined into a document for the sponsoring Foundation to review for the grant's renewal. Due to the positive publicity, high enrollment and feedback, the Youth Service Scholarship is a success.

## Treehouse Children's Museum (Ogden, UT): "The Play's the Thing" Program

**Category:** Play

**Contact:** Lynne Goodwin, 801-394-9663

### Narrative Description

Psychologists and educators have recognized that literacy involves a wide set of skills and a large network of teachers, including family members. Treehouse Children's Museum pioneered the model of a museum based on Family Literacy. Treehouse's downtown location is not an accident, but reflects the commitment of the institution to guaranteeing that all children have access to the resources provided. A major component of "The Play's The Thing" program is an extensive partnership with area Head Start providers to distribute 350 family memberships each year to 700 children and parents, encourage their participation, and monitor and assess the benefits of the memberships. Beyond the Head Start partnership, "The Play's the Thing" program impacts fully 90% of the nearly 150,000 children and parents who visit Treehouse annually. Parents and children are involved in wide array of activities, from

a weekly program for prereaders and their caregivers that involves rhythm, rhyme, and movement, to a weeklong theater camp for elementary students, who write and perform a play in the Treehouse theater for their families. Almost every child – and now every parent – in the community knows about Treehouse “ParticiPlays,” where children step on stage in costume to act out a story, in part because all 26,000 school children coming on field trips to the Museum experience a “ParticiPlay.” “ParticiPlays are also offered to the public every day, and, like other activities in “The Play’s the Thing” program, these promote the mental creation of story worlds central to understanding fictional narratives.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Treehouse is committed to documenting the impact on our activities. Our assessments include indirect and direct measures of program impact. The Museum carefully documents attendance at specific activities that are part of “The Play’s the Thing” program. Annually more than 17,000 children and adults attend the weekly pre reading activities called “Toddler Time at Treehouse,” and more than 10,000 children and adults attend “Alphabet Soup” and “Theater Thursday” every week. Another 15,000 attend ParticiPlayHouse on Saturday afternoons. Many of the activities of “The Play’s the Thing” program are underwritten, making them even more accessible to families by providing discount admission, and these attendance counts have been key in finding and keeping sponsors. Additionally, Treehouse staff and volunteers ask program participants to fill out comment cards and every teacher is asked to their tour experience and comment specifically on the dramatic play activity. The two local Head Start programs, who are partners with Treehouse on this program, have documented over the last two years the role that Museum attendance, particularly repeat visitation, plays in deepening and expanding shared dialog at home about learning, literacy, and play. Davis County Head Start focused this last year on involving fathers and they found that the fathers who participated regularly with their children in visiting the Museum had much more positive views of learning in general and were much more supportive of dramatic play both at Treehouse and at home. Because the families receiving these memberships are a defined group that is surveyed by the Head Start programs over the course of a full year, these findings are especially exciting and have resulted in continued sponsorship by a local foundation and a bank. To determine Treehouse’s impact on our more “fluid” general audience, Treehouse staff, in conjunction with Dr. Eric Amsel (a Treehouse Board Member and a Psychology Professor at Weber State University), have undertaken research assessing the achievement of our literacy goals. Three studies are particularly relevant in demonstrating the impact of “The Play’s the Thing” program. A study, documented in Amsel & Goodwin (2004), explored whether parents understand the central role they play in scaffolding their children’s literacy experiences at the Treehouse. Researchers found the form of questions parents posed to their children varied appropriately by activity, suggesting that the grownups did indeed understand their role as facilitator of the play and the learning. In a study focused on “scaffolding” processes, also documented in Amsel & Goodwin (2004), the consequences of repeated parent-child visits to the same exhibits at the Treehouse was examined. It was assumed that repeated parent-child interactions would result in deeper and more complex learning by the child and the findings supported the assumptions with evidence of a change over visits from the child acting alone with the exhibit artifacts to acting in consort with his caregiver. And, in a study of “fictional understanding,” younger (approximately 5-year-old) Treehouse “ParticiPlay” participants, who were audience members or characters in the story, were interviewed about the story’s plot after a performance. Of interest was the finding that the children’s account of the story depended on their role in the ParticiPlay. Children reported the plot of the story from their character’s perspective, suggesting that they were able to adopt the character’s perspective in the play, a central skill in creating fictional worlds. For the Museum, being able to document this impact through scholarly research has helped staff and Board members make the case for the importance of the play and literacy activities at Treehouse to the learning lives of our children.



## **Working Wonders Children's Museum (Bend, OR): Family & School Access Program**

**Category:** Play

**Contact:** DeeDee Erhard, 541-389-4500

### **Narrative Description**

Working Wonders provides a scholarship program (Family & School Access Program) to underprivileged children and their grown-ups which provide free and discounted admission to the museum. This program is administered through the partnership we have with more than 20 non profit and social service agencies in Central Oregon. . Because Working Wonders values the non-stigmatization of families and non-duplication of services, families receive their "scholarship" passes through their relationship with a service provider, entering the museum through general admissions. This model has proved to be incredibly successful over the past few years as our staff has developed trusted and respected relationships with the nonprofit and social service agencies throughout the region. These agencies assess and determine the individuals most in need of our services. Working Wonders then equips those agencies with the resources (admission passes, transportation monies, marketing materials, etc.) for their clients. This unique model allows the agencies to successfully use Working Wonders as a resource as well as ensure that admission passes and other resources get directly in the hands of the people who need them the most. In support of our mission, recent findings in brain research and bonding confirm that hands-on, self-inspired learning experiences in early childhood through positive adult-child interaction directly contributes to positive child development, self-concept, emotional health, and, attitude and motivation toward learning. Our environment provides creative spaces that foster experiences in best practices and includes a target population of early childhood: prenatal through age 12, their families and caregivers.

### **Methods Used to Measure and Evaluate Impact**

Working Wonders keeps daily statistics on museum use such as visitors tracked by zip code and special events. For example, last year 13% of our visitors came from our free and reduced admissions programming. We measure and evaluate our impact through evaluations and personal conversations with all our partners. Our program is a part of the Partnership for Young Children in Central Oregon. Our goal is to ensure that our community's most at-risk members are able to attend and benefit from our museum. The program also offers special Family Nights during off hours to allow the families uninhibited access to our museum. We also track attendance during these events. Our School Access Program provides free or discounted admission to students based on the percentage of children enrolled in the free lunch program. For many schools transportation costs are also offset through these scholarship funds. We keep statistics on transportation costs and reimbursements. We also use evaluation forms for any special workshop, activity, or parenting class. We ask that teachers evaluate our classroom field trips. And, feedback from parents and caregivers is also collected in a daily museum log. According to recent statistics provided by Child First of Oregon, more than 40% of the children in our community are considered low income. Providing reduced fee museum days ensures that all children and their families have access to this rich learning and play experience. We have a strong relationship with Central Oregon Community College (COCC) Early Childhood Education program faculty and students. The COCC class uses our museum for trainings and assists in educational development issues as a part of our partnership, including the use of interns in the museum. Studies have also indicated that children benefit from hands-on learning when they have regular and frequent opportunities; therefore, our program is not limited to one visit per child, but rather continual visits to truly impact and enhance children's learning opportunities.