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Children's Museum Research Network (CMRN) Original Cohort

DuPage Children's Museum

Alix Tonsgard, Early Learning Specialist

Nicole Rivera, Academic Research and Evaluation Partner/ North Central College

The DuPage Children's Museum (DCM) has participated in the analysis and dissemination of the first research study and data collection and analysis of the second research study. As a result of the participation in the Research Network, DCM initiated a year-long process of developing a learning framework, developed studies that expanded on topics explored by the network, and hosted a meeting of Chicago area children's museums to share the work of the network and explore potential local collaborations. DCM has been involved in dissemination through participation in blog posts, articles (*Hand to Hand* and *Curator: The Museum Journal*), and presentations at conferences (ACM's InterActivity, VSA, and local Chicago area early childhood conferences). Partner organizations in the Research Network have provided excellent resources and suggestions for the development of research and grant studies at DCM.

Thanksgiving Point Institute

Stephen Ashton, Director of Audience Research and Development

Kari Nelson, Part-Time Researcher and Evaluator

Our participation in the Research Network has been very beneficial. We have exchanged ideas and tools with other network museums and are building our own capacity in research and evaluation. Thanksgiving Point has participated in the second and third research studies. As a result, we co-authored an article titled, "The Children's Museum Research Network: Progress Report," for *Hand to Hand*. We are also contributing to a second article about play and how the CMRN's research can be useful for practitioners (*Curator: The Museum Journal*). Thanksgiving Point has also shared findings at conferences (ACM's InterActivity and VSA). Sharing ideas, research methods, and evaluation instruments with others in the network are interactions we have enjoyed. The relationships we have formed have led to grant applications as well. The opportunity to have Thanksgiving Point be recognized as a national leader in the children's museum field with these other great institutions has been one of the most valuable aspects of our involvement in CMRN.

Minnesota Children's Museum
Barbara Hahn, VP of Learning Innovation

Minnesota Children's Museum is a founding member of the CMRN and is represented by Barbara Hahn, VP of Learning Innovation. MCM has participated in the first and second research studies and has co-authored an article on the first research study findings titled, "Perspectives on Learning Outcomes," for *Hand to Hand*. Collaborating with museum professionals with deep backgrounds in research and evaluation has provided rich insights and learning and has helped to strengthen MCM's own research and evaluation capacity.

Children's Museum of Pittsburgh
Lisa Brahms, Director of Learning & Research

Participation in the network has introduced me and our Museum to the research efforts of each institution, and the lovely people behind the process—who have become amazing resources themselves! The network has showcased the numerous ways research and practice can meet within an organization, which is informing how we shape our research-practice work and organizational structure. The Children's Museum of Pittsburgh participated in the first and third research studies and contributed to writing an article on play for the journal, *Curator: The Museum Journal*. The relationships with some of my colleagues has strengthened as a result of my participation, making current collaborative studies even more meaningful. I've loved knowing that the group is "out there" as a resource to share news, announcements, and gain and gauge feedback on ideas and studies. It's such an insightful group—I've loved how the group has truly become a network—feeling comfortable with one another's strengths and approaches, leveraging that difference, and moving forward in new and interesting directions together. One of the most valuable aspects of the CMRN is being part of a field-wide and field-defining initiative to raise meaningful and shared understanding and activity at the intersection of research and practice.

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis
Susan Foutz, Director of Research and Evaluation
Claire Thoma Emmons, Research and Evaluation Associate

The Children's Museum of Indianapolis is represented by staff members Susan Foutz, Director of Research and Evaluation, and Claire Thoma Emmons, Research and Evaluation Associate. As part of the CMRN, we have learned a great deal about the diversity that exists among children's museums including different philosophies of learning and approaches to research. An unexpected benefit has been discovering that another institution within the network shares a similar mission. This has led to sharing research instruments and partnering on a grant proposal independent from the network's activities. We are impressed by the passion and commitment of the network members and how much we have been able to accomplish together.

The Magic House, St. Louis Children's Museum

Melissa Swank, Community Health and Program Evaluation Manager

The Magic House, St. Louis Children's Museum, joined the CMRN in 2015 as part of the first cohort of network museums. As the Museum's representative on the network, the Community Health and Program Evaluation Manager actively participates in the CMRN and functions to liaise between the network and the Museum at all in-person meetings with the network. We actively participated the first two research studies, and plan to contribute to the current research study. Participation in the CMRN spurred conversations and practice changes in our Museum, facilitated discussions about developing an evaluation framework for our Museum, and opened avenues for The Magic House to collaborate with other Museums on outside studies. Additionally, the focus of the second research study coincided with The Magic House's enhanced focus on play, as emphasized in our newly adopted 2017-2021 strategic plan and the 2016-2017 Annual Report with its theme of "Remember to Play". This was also the theme of The Magic House's recent Media campaign, which complemented, and was complemented by, discussions within the CMRN. Overall, participation in the CMRN offers The Magic House opportunities to think critically about the role children's museums can and do play in the education and development of children.

Children's Museum of Tacoma

Kimberly McKenney, Grants & Assessment Director

The Children's Museum of Tacoma participated in the first two research studies and will be actively involved with the third study. The Museum representative co-authored an article for *Hand to Hand* which provided an overview, chronology, and purpose of the CMRN activities. Participation has been a catalyst for many conversations with senior-staff regarding the role of "play" in the mission and institutional documents. Additionally, engagement in the network has sparked an interest and initial effort towards creating a learning framework. The Museum has shared evaluation, tools, data, and other information with other members of the Network. On a personal level, participating in the Network has provided a professional development opportunity and insights about what research small museums such as the Children's Museum of Tacoma can complete now and grow into. The most valuable part of the participating in the CMRN has been networking with colleagues and learning about other museums' research and evaluation efforts in greater depth.

Boston Children's Museum

Robin Meisner, Evaluation and Grants Associate

Leslie Swartz, Director, Child Development Team and SVP Research and Program Planning

Sarah May, Evaluation and Grants Association (previously held)

The Boston Children's Museum participated to some extent in all of the research studies. For the first study, BCM was part of the team that compared and contrasted the learning frameworks of five network museums, and disseminated the main themes of the learning frameworks to the field. As part of the second study, BCM joined the team that conducted interviews about institutional views on play with colleagues at children's museums across the US, and took part in the collaborative analysis of the data. BCM plans to actively participate in the current study. Through participation in the Research Network, BCM staff have been exposed to a range of research techniques and tools that have generally informed evaluation design back at the museum. The Museum is thinking about the work may be used to reflect on institutional philosophies about learning and play. BCM's former Evaluation and Grants Association was one of the proud co-authors of the peer reviewed journal article and she gave talks to BCM staff on the results from the work. Current team members are involved in aspects of the ongoing dissemination work for the second research study. Participation in the Network has provided BCM with information about the work of other children's museums. Members of the CMRN have been generous about sharing their work and findings. The Research Network is truly an active community of practice which values members thinking and learning together.

Not included above: Providence Children's Museum and the Children's Museum of Houston.

For More Information:

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