

## 2005 UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING AWARD Presented by VSA arts and Association of Children's Museums

The 2005 Universal Design for Learning award identifies model programs in children's museums that demonstrate learning standards for inclusive practice. Following are summaries from the four children's museum award recipients.

Kidspace Children's Museum  
Pasadena, CA

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Kidspace Children's Museum re-opened its doors on December 16, 2004, to throngs of San Gabriel Valley children and families. Accessibility is a theme that underlies both the architecture and the exhibits of the new Kidspace. The needs of all of the museum's visitors were considered; the museum provides all guests with accessible points of interaction. An example of a design decision includes choosing height clearances that provide visitors using wheelchairs hand-on experiences like building a fantasy insect model at the museum's exhibit *Bug Diner*. When exhibit design did not allow for physical accessibility, other solutions were invented. A live ant colony housed in the museum's 10-foot deep *Earthquake Trench* is only accessible by walking down a flight of stairs. However, through the use of an "Ant Cam" at the gallery level, guests with disabilities can watch the activity of the colony. In July 2005, Kidspace hosted an Americans with Disabilities Act 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration focusing on two themes: creating awareness and learning from each other. A variety of planned programs and activities includes opportunities for children to express creativity and imagination through *Very Special Arts* experiences in its outdoor amphitheatre that features children with disabilities.

Connecticut Children's Museum  
New Haven, CT

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A driving force for the Connecticut Children's Museum's programmatic strategy is the need for innovative and inclusive learning opportunities for children, their families and teachers. The museum uses Howard Garder's Theory of Multiple Intelligences as the inspiration and template for its design. This inherently inclusive theory honors the myriad ways in which children are competent and creative in the world provides families and teachers with a way to discover their young children's passions and support learning patterns. Exhibits are designed to include entry points that Gardner considers important for successful learning (foundational, experiential, logical/quantitative, aesthetic and narrative). Children at the museum are invited through the exhibits to ask fundamental questions. For example, turning a long rain stick cylinder, a child who is visually impaired might ask: "What is making that sound?" While a child who is deaf studies the transparent stick, seeing the sound while feeling the motion of the tiny stones descending the cylinder. The museum's *Accessible Art Works* series, which combines literacy events with hands-on activities and services to help those of differing abilities, is another example of the museum's on-going effort to program playful, educational programs for all.

Boston Children's Museum  
Boston, MA

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In June of 2004, Boston Children's Museum opened a new 1,200 square foot exhibit *Access/Ability*. The highly interactive exhibit delivers the message to children, parents and educators that as human beings, we are more alike than different. It presents people living with disabilities as participants in the world and features fun and engaging activities that show the similarities and differences in how each of us, with or without disabilities, go places, communicate, have fun and learn. The exhibit was developed for the Youth Museum Exhibit Collaborative and in 2005 began its initial nine-museum tour. Extensive support materials for staff training and public programs travel as part of the exhibit package. At the exhibit entry, visitors are introduced to a variety of tools they will find in the exhibit from listening cones with bilingual recordings of the exhibit text, to exhibit components based on sound and touch. A tactile map of the exhibit provides alternative orientation — the message of diversity and universal access is demonstrated by the exhibit's form. Physical access to all components was carefully considered and the range of activities built into the exhibit appeals to a wide variety of visitors. Some components, such as the wheelchair track/course, may be easier for users of wheelchairs than for novices trying a chair for the first time!

Lynn Meadows Discovery Center  
Gulfport, MS

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All exhibits at the Lynn Meadows Discovery Center are designed to be accessible by visitors with disabilities, the outdoor tree houses as the most obvious examples. With staff expertise in special education and curriculum development, the museum created a checklist of criteria for exhibits and programs. One of Lynn Meadows Discovery Center's latest exhibits, *What It's Like to be Me*, addresses physical disabilities directly and is the catalyst for weekend programs and a performing arts touring show in fall 2005. Planning for the exhibit began two years prior with funding from the City of Biloxi. Community leaders wanted a permanent exhibit for school children and families to better understand the challenges of a disabled person. With limited money and experience in this area, the staff and volunteers from several agencies began to plan. Volunteers included representatives from del'Epee Deaf Center; Gaits to Success, which offers equestrian physical therapy for children with disabilities; Paws for Cause, which provides service animals for persons with disabilities; a Braille instructor; and the University of South Mississippi Toy Library, which collects adaptive toys and devices. The exhibit opened on February 19, 2005, with an enthusiastic response from visitors. Collaboration with exhibit sponsors, Living Independence for Everyone and Mississippi Independent Living Services, will continue as the staff evaluates the exhibit.