

KidsPlay The Scoop

KidsPlay's Donor Newsletter

Winter 2024/25

Imagine · Discover · Create



Exhibit Spotlight: Maker Space

The Maker Space at KidsPlay Children's Museum is an inspiring exhibit where traditional arts and crafts blend with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) learning elements. This exhibit invites children to explore and solve problems through fun and innovative activities.

Children develop critical thinking and a love for discovery while responding to an ever-changing "Maker Space Challenge" and when engaging with one of the STEM stations, such as the Microscope.

Thanks to the Neag Foundation's generous support, the Maker Space is entering an exciting new chapter. **Over the next year, we plan to restore an educator position to the Maker Space team to design more interdisciplinary activities merging creativity and STEM.** This role will bring fresh inspiration and STEM expertise to our programs.

We also plan to pilot an Artist-in-Residence program that will welcome teaching artists who will introduce children to media such as clay, textiles, and sculpture. **These upgrades will transform the Maker Space into an even more vibrant hub for creativity and STEM learning.**

Thank you, Neag Foundation, for helping us foster innovation and imagination. Together, we're inspiring the next generation of creators and problem-solvers!



The Maker Space is a hub of creativity and innovation at KidsPlay. Here, children are encouraged to let their imaginations run wild as they design, build, and create using a variety of materials and tools.

Staff Spotlight: Deb Kellogg, Senior Guest Service Associate

"I have always been interested in art," says Deb, KidsPlay's Maker Space Assistant, Volunteer Coordinator, and Youth Engagement Specialist.

Deb began at KidsPlay as a volunteer for the Messy Art program, where she spent two years bringing the same delight that she had discovered as a child to a new generation. **When she was invited to join the KidsPlay team, she was thrilled to use the skills that she had developed through her degree in graphic design, fine arts, and photography in the role.**



The final products can be seen displayed around the Maker Space: castles and robots, trucks and trains, each one different. **"Yours is going to look different because it's yours," Deb says. "Everyone has their own unique style. Everyone has their own unique vision."**



"Kids will come in and not know what to do at first," she says. "It's fun to see the wheels start to turn as they come in and see the different materials and start to imagine what they can do."



Visitor Spotlight: Nicole, Alex, Minty, Navah, & Nasir

As a homeschool parent, finding activities that keep your children engaged is incredibly important - but it can also be a big challenge!

Nicole has been a KidsPlay visitor since her oldest was a toddler and has watched the Museum grow alongside her family. With children from ages 4 to 11, she appreciates that KidsPlay's exhibits appeal to a variety of ages. **"There's something for every age," she says. "We can stay for hours."** KidsPlay's variety of exhibits also means that Nicole can target different areas to align with her homeschool curriculum; she recalls playing in Block City and the Maker Space to work on her children's spatial awareness and fine motor skills.

Over the years, Nicole and her family have come to feel at home at KidsPlay. She especially appreciates the patience and friendliness of KidsPlay's Guest Service staff. **"The people that work here are so nice and so helpful. I've never been greeted without a smile."**

Solving Homeschool Challenges

"I'm always looking for different ways to keep their interest," says Nicole, mother of Alex, Minty, Navah, and Nasir. "That's part of what we love about KidsPlay - every few months there's something new for my kids to enjoy."



Supporter Spotlight: Stu and Jane Grodin

Stu Grodin remembers with pride the day he, Jane, and Cathy Schmitz put the first strokes of blue paint on the wall of KidsPlay's original gallery in the front of 61 Main Street, in preparation for the series of Thursday night pop-up events that marked the first opening of the Museum.

Both lifelong educators, the Grodins were always dedicated to the teaching of young children. In 2010, when an advisory committee was formed to investigate the possibility of opening a children's museum in Torrington, they were quick to become involved.

"We realized that we could dream," Stu says. "We could make this happen." Today, through the efforts of Stu, Jane, and others, the Museum now operates three buildings and over 20,000 square feet of public space - far, far more than the small original advisory committee had dreamed.



This is our Legacy

Stu and Jane are both part of KidsPlay's Legacy Circle, a group of dedicated supporters who have made a commitment to support KidsPlay in their estate planning. "This is our legacy," says Stu. "This is how we will continue to educate and amuse children. To me, the best sound on the planet is the sound of a child laughing."

Museum News: KidsPlay to Welcome New Board Members, Kristen Fern & Lori Heath

Kristen Fern is a retired educator with a passion for lifelong learning. In addition to her board role, Kristen volunteers in KidsPlay's CFLC Library, where she continues to inspire young minds and support educational initiatives in her community.



Lori Heath is a lifelong Torrington resident who has been actively involved in the Northwest CT community. In her 35+ year career in banking, Lori has enjoyed the many opportunities for lifelong learning and sees great value in supporting KidsPlay.



Get Involved at KidsPlay!

Volunteer: Volunteers play a vital role in supporting KidsPlay's programming, assisting with projects, and even helping construct new exhibits. It's a wonderful way to share your time and talents while making a positive impact on our visitors' experiences.

Advocate: Advocates are passionate supporters of KidsPlay's mission, bringing specific skills, abilities, and community connections to help advance the Museum's strategic goals and participate in fundraising—without the commitment or fiduciary responsibilities of board service.

Board Member: The Board of Directors sets the mission and strategic goals and fulfills fiduciary responsibilities while playing a key role in fundraising. Board members are generally recruited from our pool of dedicated Advocates.

Would you like to get involved? Contact Eileen Marriott at director@kidsplaymuseum.org to learn more.

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**Board of Director terms to start in January 2025

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Karl Nilsson	<i>Exhibits & Facilities Manager</i>
David Canty	<i>Exhibit Technician</i>

Guest Service Team

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Carolina Gonzalez	Alyssa Lyga
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Jordyn Box	Melissa Killmer
Abby Foulds	Kim Lyga
Sofie Frauenhofer	Carla Marte Ortiz
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Christina Santiago	Jennifer Montero

21+ Event: KidsPlay After Dark

Our Halloween KidsPlay After Dark was a blast! Visitors to this adults-only event enjoyed a spooky scavenger hunt, showed off their scary good karaoke skills, and snacked on refreshments generously supplied by Nutmeg Fudge. Keep a lookout for our next After Dark event!



Ways to Give: Steadfast Friends

Good friends will stick by you through thick and thin! KidsPlay is very lucky to have a group of friends just like that whose steady support throughout the year helps the Museum offer the best possible playful learning experiences.



By becoming a "Steadfast Friend" with a monthly recurring donation, you'll help ensure that our Museum has the steady support it needs to thrive, no matter the season. Your consistent contributions will allow us to plan and grow, ensuring that every child who walks through our doors has access to the joy and learning that KidsPlay offers.



Visit KidsPlay's website or scan the QR code to learn more about the stories from the newsletter!