

KidsPlay The Scoop

KidsPlay's Donor Newsletter
Mid Year Update 2025
Imagine • Discover • Create



Director's Report

As we move into the second half of 2025, we want to share a few key updates that reflect both our growth and the challenges we continue to navigate.

This spring, we finished the much-needed roof replacement at 61 Main Street. This project was possible thanks to strong community support, including funding from local foundations, corporate partners, and last summer's crowdfunding campaign. The new roof safeguards our exhibits, building, and the children and families who rely on it.

Our work on the Hub@KidsPlay Initiative continues, though cautiously. A preliminary injunction temporarily restored the IMLS funding that was unexpectedly cut earlier this year. While we're grateful that this has allowed us to keep the initiative active, there remains uncertainty surrounding this funding. Despite these challenges, we've continued to strengthen community partnerships and advanced key goals.

In the first half of the year, visitation showed a positive trend, with KidsPlay hosting over 33,000 visits. We also reached the milestone of more than 450,000 total visits since opening in 2012.

Despite challenges and financial constraints, KidsPlay continues to move forward with purpose. We're grateful for the community support that makes this possible and remain committed to building joyful, inclusive learning experiences for all.

Warmly,

Eileen Marriott
Executive Director



KidsPlay
Celebrated its
13th Birthday on
August 7, 2025!



Exhibit Spotlight: Surf City

Surf's up at KidsPlay! Families can enjoy a "day at the beach" in this new seasonal exhibit. Children develop fine motor skills building sandcastles in our sand table, hone their balance on surfboards, and take part in collaborative imaginative play at a beachside campfire, a fishing boat, an ice cream stand, or an undersea tunnel. We all love fun in the sun - but this beach is ready for play even on a rainy day!



Seasonal exhibits like Surf City mean that there's always something new for families to explore at KidsPlay. Be sure to keep an eye on our new South Gallery to see what other new opportunities for play and learning are coming to KidsPlay!

These children playing in Surf City are digging, crawling, balancing, and building. The skills they're honing through play will help them be ready for school in the fall (or in a few years)!



Staff Spotlight: Alyssa Lyga, Group Sales Associate

This summer, KidsPlay is thrilled to celebrate ten wonderful years with Alyssa, who joined the team in July 2015. As the friendly face greeting visitors at the front desk, booking birthday parties, and coordinating field trips, Alyssa plays a big role in helping families have a great experience.

Her favorite part of the job? "Seeing the joy on kids' faces, especially if it's their first time at KidsPlay and they're taking everything in." Outside the Museum, Alyssa wears many hats, working as both a dance teacher and a photographer and bringing joy to many in both roles.



Visitor Spotlight: Jill, Teen Librarian



From early playdates to teen hangouts, KidsPlay has been part of Jill's family story for over a decade. Teen Librarian and mom of three, Jill first started visiting with her older girls and now brings her youngest, 2½-year-old Jenavieve, who lights up the moment she walks through the doors. From kinetic sand and treehouse adventures to beachside pretend play and grocery store shopping, every visit is full of laughter, creativity, and connection.

As Teen Librarian, Jill also hosted two "teen takeovers" at KidsPlay with the Torrington Library Teen Advisory Board. During these special after-hours events, teens enjoyed pizza and played in the exhibits - without needing to worry about bumping into smaller children while making Maker Space crafts or playing Museum-wide hide-and-seek.

Whether hosting teen events after hours or reconnecting with familiar faces like staff members Kristin and Ellie, Jill says KidsPlay is more than a museum: it's a community space where her family comes to learn, grow, and shine together.



The Hub Spotlight: Patricia Pepen, CJR Teacher of the Year



Patricia Pepen, a dedicated instructor with the Connecticut Junior Republic since 2011, was recently honored as Teacher of the Year for the 2024–2025 school year.

In addition to her work with at-risk youth in the justice system, she brings joy and energy to KidsPlay's Birth to Graduation playgroup as a bilingual volunteer. "Kids need motivation. They need happiness," Pepen says. "Everything I do, I do for them." Her passion and commitment continue to inspire those around her, especially the children whose lives she helps to brighten every day.

Over the past year, the Birth to Graduation program welcomed 69 children of program age, 23 siblings, and 93 parents and caregivers to 20 evenings of engaging early literacy, family bonding, and community support. Led by Community Coordinator Julie Fabiaschi, B2G is supported by many dedicated volunteers, including educators and community members.

Board News: Thank you, Brad and John!



KidsPlay is grateful to Brad Oneglia and John Martin for their years of service on KidsPlay's Board of Directors! Brad's experience in the construction industry and John's expertise as an architect have helped KidsPlay become bigger and better over the years.

Brad and John may have come to the end of their terms on KidsPlay's Board, but they will continue to share their knowledge as KidsPlay Advocates.

Thank you, Brad and John!

*Left: Eileen Marriott and John Martin.
Right: Eileen Marriott and Brad Oneglia.*



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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Program Spotlight: Youth Engagement

This summer, thanks to the generous support of the Northwest CT Community Foundation **Draper Foundation Fund**, KidsPlay is pleased to welcome seventeen youth volunteers and interns for a summer youth engagement program! These teens, supported by KidsPlay's Youth Workforce Mentor Erica Begley, are developing important job skills and making connections to our local community, all while helping families play and learn at KidsPlay!



Ways to Give: Legacy Circle

KidsPlay's Legacy Circle is a group of dedicated donors who have included KidsPlay as a beneficiary in their estate planning, helping to enrich our community for generations to come. Are you interested in learning more about how you can make a lasting impact?

Join us for our Legacy Luncheon on Wednesday, September 17 from 12 pm to 2 pm.

