Annual Report
Exploring History and Culture Through Stories

An imaginatively reinvented Coming to Rhode Island exhibit debuted in November, inviting visitors to embark on a time-traveling exploration of the state’s history, immigration and culture through stories of diverse Rhode Islanders past and present. In an immersive new gallery highlighting the story of John Quigley, a pre-famine Irish immigrant who helped build Fort Adams in Newport, kids don costumes, join the construction crew, and use tools to build brick walls and arches. In an updated “Story Center,” families experiment with engaging activities that explore culture and encourage empathy.

For hundreds of years and continuing today, people have immigrated from all over the world to what is now Rhode Island, and everyone has stories about where their families are from and how and why they came. Designed to foster empathy through pretend play and a variety of hands-on activities, the reinvented exhibit shares real stories of real people to cultivate compassion and promote respect for the diversity of individuals who make our communities richer and stronger.

Researching Play and Learning

In 2016, the Museum’s exhibits and research team:

• Continued its collaboration with Brown University on two National Science Foundation-funded research projects, investigating how to make children’s thinking and learning through play more visible and how open-ended exploration and parent-child interactions might support the development of scientific thinking in museum settings.

• Joined nine other children’s museums from across the country in an Association of Children’s Museums’ project to build a field-wide research agenda and network of practice.

• Conducted front-end and formative evaluations for the new Coming to Rhode Island spaces, including interviewing caregivers and prototyping activities and labels.

• Hosted research studies by academic collaborators from Brown University and Providence College in the Museum’s Mind Lab, where over 1,800 visitors engaged with researchers.

A Framework for Learning

The Museum concluded a multi-year process to review and renew its educational philosophy to create new Learning Frameworks – guiding documents grounded in research and practice that summarize how children learn through play and exploration, and articulate how experiences in Museum environments and activities contribute to kids’ learning and development. The resulting resource defines beliefs about play and its connection to learning, and will inform development, facilitation and evaluation of all Museum exhibits and programs.

The mission of Providence Children’s Museum is to inspire
Increasing the Museum’s Impact

The Museum reached a major milestone as its 20th AmeriCorps team completed a year of committed service to inspire a lifetime love of learning for children living in inner-city neighborhoods. The 2015-16 AmeriCorps members served over 20,000 hours as they:

- Conducted creative problem-solving activities to support scientific thinking and school readiness for nearly 1,100 Head Start preschoolers.
- Engaged 250 elementary school-age children with inspiring play-based math and science activities during after-school and summer Learning Clubs.
- Welcomed over 1,400 low-income children and their family members to play together and receive free year-long admission passes at fun-filled family nights.
- Engaged Museum visitors in exhibit exploration and developed displays and public programs.

Healing Families in Crisis

The Museum’s nationally acclaimed Families Together program, which helps children in state care and their families rebuild relationships through play, conducted therapeutic visits for 438 children and parents in 152 court-separated families. The program worked as part of a coalition of five agencies providing visitation services to implement an evaluation tool to assess the programs’ design and impact on family outcomes, and staff served on committees to support child welfare practice, policies and legislation statewide. At year-end, Families Together was awarded an expanded contract by the Department of Children, Youth and Families to significantly increase the number of families it serves.

A New Chapter

New Executive Director Caroline Payson joined the Museum at the end of February, following a national search conducted by the Board of Directors. Originally from Boston, she spent over 10 years as director of education at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, preceded by leadership roles at Maryland Public Television and the New School’s Parsons School of Design. In her first year, she met with many stakeholders and community leaders to extend the Museum’s mission to reach more children and families.

Mervin H. Browning III was elected president of the Museum’s Board of Directors, following three years of involved Board service, two of those as vice president.

Nearly 400 charitable memberships given to low-income families

Over 10,000 children and caregivers served offsite

and celebrate learning through active play and exploration.
Sharing Our Expertise

In 2016, the Museum provided professional development, offered training in facilitating play and learning experiences, and served in an advisory capacity to the following groups and organizations.

**Professional development training for educators and childcare providers**
- Boys & Girls Clubs – games for fun and learning, science and math in out-of-school-time programs
- The Children’s Workshop – exploring diversity through stories for preschoolers
- Family Childcare Homes of RI – exploring diversity through stories for preschoolers
- RI Afterschool Plus Alliance – science and math in out-of-school-time programs

**Advisory activities and professional associations**
- Grade Level Reading Workgroup – committee member
- London Children’s Museum – emerging museum advisory board
- Museum of Science, Boston – National Living Lab advisory committee
- National Science Foundation – grant reviewer
- New England Museum Association – board of directors
- Partnership for Providence Parks – board of directors
- RI Coalition for Children and Families – association member/committee chair
- RI Department of Children, Youth and Families – permanency support team
- RI Visitation Services Group – coalition member

**Conference presentations**
- Association of Children’s Museums – creating a nurturing visitor experience, engaging caregivers, learning frameworks, open-ended exploration and research in museum environments
- Association of Science and Technology Centers – engaging adults, harnessing play to support STEM learning, resources for making learning through play visible
- US Play Coalition – supporting unstructured play and risk taking in the community
- Visitor Studies Association – making learning through play visible

Staff also hosted Museum study visits and presented to various groups about:
Informal education, museum/university research partnerships to explore learning, scientific reasoning and parent-child interactions in children’s museum environments, and more.

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**Exhibit Explorations**

Committed to providing many avenues of exploration and keeping its play and learning environments regularly refreshed, the Museum introduced exhibit updates that encouraged visitors of all ages to:

- Explore beats and rhythm and make joyful noise on vibrant interactive sound sculptures installed in The Children’s Garden.
- Challenge their perception and spatial thinking with two intriguing new drawing activities in ThinkSpace.
- Discover a whimsical array of different displays featuring playful puppets, spring-inspired scenes, mythical creatures, intricate fabric art by artist Salley Mavor and more.
Community Partners

Organizations with which the Museum collaborated to deliver play and learning experiences, to increase awareness about the importance of play, or to otherwise serve its mission:

- 1696 Heritage Group
- The Autism Project
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Providence
- Boys Town New England
- Bricklayers and Allied Craftsmen Union, Local 3
- Brown University’s Science Center Outreach
- The Causality and Mind Lab, Brown University
- Children’s Friend
- Children’s Friend Head Start
- Community Care Alliance
- Dorcas International
- Institute of RI
- Family Service of RI
- The Fort Adams Trust
- Highlander Charter School
- Kid Think, Providence College
- Kidoinfo
- Louie’s Place at South Providence
- Neighborhood Matters
- Mount Hope Learning Center
- The Museum of Newport Irish History
- The Nina Foundation
- Partnership for Providence Parks
- Providence Community Library
- Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism
- Providence Department of Parks + Recreation
- Providence Healthy Communities Office
- Providence Public Library
- Providence Public Schools
- RI Commission on the Deaf & Hard of Hearing
- RI Department of Children, Youth and Families
- RI Latino Arts
- Serve Rhode Island
- The Fort Adams Trust
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- RI Latino Arts
- Serve Rhode Island

Advocacy for Play

Delivering on its dedication to increasing awareness of the vital importance of children’s unstructured, self-directed play, the Museum:

- Brought joyful fort building, bubble blowing and other open-ended play experiences to hundreds of kids and community members at city parks and festivals for a fifth summer.
- Collaborated with the City of Providence and other partners on the third summer of Providence PlayCorps, a program to activate inner-city neighborhood parks with play and creative exploration in conjunction with the free federal summer meals program, which welcomed over 3,500 people at seven sites.
- Served as a leading collaborator of Recess for Rhode Island, which was a key player in passing a new state law requiring 20 minutes of recess that includes free play for all elementary school students.

Playful Programs

The Museum’s educators design and deliver hundreds of hands-on activities each year. Visitors dropped into Discovery Studio to investigate a rich array of art and science stations; families fashioned fairy houses from found materials; young engineers erected super structures from big blue Imagination Playground blocks and tinkered around with Rigamajig contraptions; homeschoolers explored a host of creative challenges; Scouts sleuthed their way through an intriguing Museum mystery; audiences enjoyed participatory performances and toe-tapping tunes; and all ages got out and got active in The Children’s Garden throughout the summer. And, in celebration of the new Coming to Rhode Island story gallery, special programs exploring construction and Irish culture invited visitors to create Celtic knots, build with bricks, engineer tunnels, and more.

9,430 guests celebrated at 344 birthday parties
46% of the 2016 operating budget supported services for children and families in need.

**Significant Support**

Individual, corporate and foundation donors contributed a record $366,551 to the Museum’s 2016 Annual Campaign – its largest donated source of general operating funds – to support access for all families, advocacy for play, stimulating programs, exhibit upkeep and more. In addition, six designated gifts totaling more than $198,000 supported the Coming to Rhode Island exhibit renovation.

Annual Unplugged gala netted nearly $78,000 while highlighting the Museum’s critical outreach and honorees that empower families and encourage imagination. The 33rd annual Chatterton Memorial Golf Tournament netted over $45,000 to support Museum programs benefiting children and families in need. And Play On! A Night Out for “Big Kids” raised awareness of the Museum’s impact while inspiring grown-ups to explore the exhibits and try creative activities.

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**Finances**

**Statement of Financial Activity Year Ended December 31, 2016**

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<th><strong>INCOME</strong></th>
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*Unaudited

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**Free and Discounted Admissions**

- Regular Admission: 31%
- Members: 24%
- Discounted Admission: 9%
- Free Admission Others: 30%

**Families and Friends Come From**

- Greater Providence: 28%
- North County: 10%
- South County: 4%
- East Bay: 11%
- Rhode Island: 46%
- Massachusetts: 23%
- Connecticut: 4%
- Other: 7%

**Income**

- Admissions: 23%
- Private Giving: 32%
- Memberships: 12%
- Families Together Services: 15%
- Program and Consulting Fees: 4%
- Government Grants: 8%
- Investment Income: 2%
- Gift Shop, Rentals and Parties: 4%

- Earned: 58%
- Donated: 40%
- Investment Income: 2%
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Neil D. Steinberg
Michael F. Sweeney
Manuel J. Vales IV
Stephen D. Zubiagi
**Deceased

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Amy Brown
KD Brown
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Sally Strachan*
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Carol Lin Vieira
Nicole Kirk Webster
Marcy Wemple
*Kirg 2016 Gala Committee Member

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Denise Costello
Development Associate
Maggie Dawson
Visitor Experience Manager
Susan Delfs
Experience Coordinator
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Clinician, Families Together
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Graphic Designer
Roseann Houser
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Amanda Howard
Experience Coordinator
Corrie Ignagni
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Cheryl Lepre
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Research & Evaluation Specialist
Amber Massed
Clinician, Families Together
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School-Age Learning Programs Developer
Jessica Neuwirth
Exhibit Developer
Caroline Payson
Executive Director
Kolby Purcell
Operations Manager
Liliana Rios
Program Assistant, Families Together
Mandy Roach
Experience Coordinator
James Robinson
Building Manager
Chris Sancomb
Exhibit Designer & Fabricator
Jonathan Santana
IT Assistant
Cathy Saunders
Director of Education
Ian Williams
Exhibit Technician

2015-2016 AmeriCorps Team

Cara Adams
Sadie Bills
Elizabeth Bringham
Yenaiye Chukwuezi
Abigail Cummings
Filipp Estrela
Leigh Holmes
Cathren Houssay

Volunteers

In 2016, 447 dedicated volunteers, interns and college work-study students served nearly 12,000 hours. The following volunteers and interns served over 100 hours.

Noura Al-Zamil
Ariana Dickie
Diane Grenon
Greg Joseph
Jaclyn Metzger
Thomaeke Speaks

Volunteer Advisors and Committee Members

Laurence Blau
Allen H. Chatterton III
Nicolle Diebold
Mark Fisher
Natasha Greco
Virginia Hopkins
John Houle
Marcus Howell
Pete Lucas
Dave Marchetti
Hayley McGuirl
Tracy Moran
Megan Ramsey
Tiffani Schmitt-Signorelli
Deb Thomas
Laurie Tickle
Don Wells

In addition to members of the Board of Directors and Overseers and the Children’s Museum Council.

Editor Megan Fischer
Graphic Designer: Valerie Haggett-Silva
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Gifts of $100,000 and above
The Champneys Foundation
Corporation for National
Local Government and Service
Rhode Island

Gifts of $25,000 - $99,999
Amigos Foundation (10+)
The Hassebrook Foundation
MetLife Foundation (10+)
The Nina Foundation*
WPR 123-Providence*

Gifts of $10,000 - $24,999
Admiral Bank
Amica Insurance*
Bank of America
Charitable Foundation (10+)
Providence College Athletics*

Gifts of $5,000 - $9,999
Anonymous (5+)
CVS Health Charity Classic

Gifts of $2,500 - $4,999
Aron, Inc.
BNT Melon Wealth Management
Blithewold Mansions,
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& Gino Browning
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