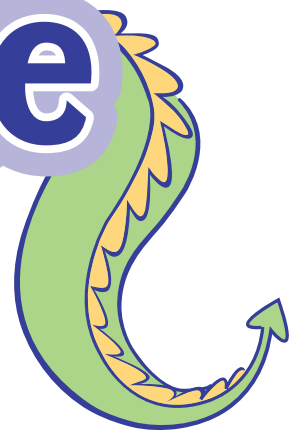




Come play, come learn!

Dragon's Tale

The Newsletter of Providence Children's Museum
Winter 2012 • Volume 15 Number 1



Bringing Families Together at Nina's House

Families Together, Providence Children's Museum's innovative program for court-separated families, is growing! Created in collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) in 1992, Families Together provides therapeutic visitation and permanency planning for children in foster care and their families. In 2010, the program served more than 500 children and parents in 175 families.

Families Together is extending its therapeutic visitation services with "Nina's House," a warm, welcoming environment for children, their parents, siblings and extended families. Opening in February, Nina's House will allow parents to rebuild relationships with their kids while practicing everyday skills in a homelike setting conducive to family healing.

Nina's House, a Providence property purchased and renovated by The Nina Foundation, looks like a family home. It has been redesigned to support family visitation, with a pleasant sitting room, playroom and kitchen for families to engage in daily activities and routine childcare. There is a backyard for outdoor play and gardening and a comfortable porch – perfect for family conversation.

Families in need of special guidance will continue to play and learn together at



the Museum, as they have for 20 years. The Museum is a nurturing and inspiring environment for fostering positive adult-child interaction for *all* families, especially those at risk. With the addition of Nina's House, Families Together can serve more families and better help them with their specific needs.

Families Together is regarded as a best practice in visitation throughout the state and nation, with the program's staff seen as experts in therapeutic visitation. Nina's House provides an opportunity for Families Together

therapists to fill a major need for *assessment* of families – evaluating their strengths, challenges and what help they need. It allows Families Together to expand clinical services to offer earlier assessment of DCYF-involved families; provide parenting skill development for more families with very young children; and serve those with mental health issues and cognitive challenges.

The Museum is grateful to The Nina Foundation as well as to Ocean State Charities Trust, Admirals Bank and the 50 donors who contributed more than \$3,500 in cash gifts, toys and household items to the Nina's House shower. Thank you for supporting children in foster care and their families as they strengthen their relationships and work toward permanency.

Museum Designs Children's Discovery Library

The Children's Museum is committed to reaching beyond its walls to share expertise in play and learning – including expertise in designing innovative learning environments. This winter, the Museum's first major offsite project will open at Providence Public Library.



Illustration by Valerie Haggerty-Silva

The Museum exhibits team was commissioned to create the new *Children's Discovery Library*, an interactive and enriching environment for young children, their families and caregivers. The space will foster children's love of reading; promote understanding of the importance of early literacy activities; and provide professional support for early childhood educators.

A key element of the *Children's Discovery Library* is a whimsical forest environment that inspires imagination and story making with tree trunks, giant leaves and other playful props. A magnetic poetry wall, a selection of activity kits, and 26 artful alphabet doors that open to reveal ants and apples, bears and balls and other alliterative objects complement the Library's collection of children's books.

The *Children's Discovery Library* at Providence Public Library opens on Saturday, January 28 with fun activities for the whole family. For more information, visit www.provlib.org.



When most people think of the Children's Museum they think of kids building fountains and dams in *Water Ways*, or wriggling up high above the ground on *The Climber*. Indeed, the Museum's play and learning environments are its flagship, its public face and identity. They provide valuable opportunities for exploration and produce wonderful "aha moments."

But that's not enough.

We believe the Museum has to be and do a lot more to earn your support and to meet the needs of our community. In a fascinating discussion, children's museum leaders from around the country shared how their organizations were moving from "nice to necessary." Children's museums are nice places – no one

argues with that – but are we *necessary*? The take-away was clear: to know what the real needs are and whether we are addressing them, we need to focus externally.

We have long looked past our walls to understand the challenges faced by children and the adults who care for them. And, as we learn about the needs, we ask ourselves, "What do we do really well that can help?" Our Families Together program exemplifies this. The Museum is a place that brings families together, so we put that strength to work for families who need it most. Learning Clubs are another example. Many children living in poverty don't have access to high quality after-school programs. Our educators know how to engage kids in lively learning experiences, so we partner with community centers that need what we do well. And our designers create great spaces for play and learning. How wonderful to bring that beyond our walls to Nina's House, Providence Public Library and the Boys & Girls Clubs' South Side Clubhouse.

If you believe, as I do, that *all* families need respectful, warm and welcoming environments where they can spend meaningful time together and that *all* children need fun informal learning opportunities in engaging spaces, then you'll agree that the Children's Museum is necessary – at 100 South Street and beyond.

– Janice O'Donnell, Executive Director

Making Learning Visible

In January, discover a new display for kids, by kids: "how-to" books created by preschool children from 11 Rhode Island childcare programs and Head Start centers. The books are a product of "Making Learning Visible: Inspiration Takes Flight," a course taught by Ben Mardell of Lesley University and sponsored by Ready to Learn Providence, with funding from the RI Association for the Education of Young Children. Course participants – 22 early childhood educators – learned how to observe and document children's learning by having them make "how-to" books (how to make a paper airplane, how to build a sand castle) as a way to learn from and with one another.

Participants' classes visited the Museum for inspiration during the course and the children's books will be exhibited in *Discovery Studio* for four weeks this winter, some of them incorporated into weekly programs. Join an opening celebration and view the children's creations plus try out some of their activities on Friday, January 20 from 5:00 to 8:00 PM, during MetLife Family Friday.

The mission of Providence Children's Museum is to inspire and celebrate learning through active play and exploration.

Providence Children's Museum
100 South Street
Providence, RI 02903
www.ChildrenMuseum.org
(401) 273-KIDS (5437)

Winter Hours:

Open Tuesday - Sunday and Monday school holidays, 9:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

Admission:

\$8.50 per person 12 months and older.
Members are always free.

For more information:

General Information, Birthday Parties & Group Visits

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To contact staff members by email, use last name @ChildrenMuseum.org. For a full staff phone directory, visit the Museum's website.

Stay Connected

Join the conversation with Providence Children's Museum and others who care about kids' play and learning:



PlayWatch community discussion listserv
www.PlayWatch.org



Sign up for the Museum's monthly e-newsletter (at www.ChildrenMuseum.org) to keep up with the latest news and events!

Editor:

Megan Fischer

Designer:

Valerie Haggerty-Silva



Playful, joyful, *powerful* stories about children and families, shared by Museum staff and volunteers

In Families Together, we are privileged to witness firsthand just how powerful play can be.

A young mother and her 2 1/2-year-old son have weekly visits at the Museum, the only time during the week that they see each other. They are rebuilding their relationship after months of separation.

At our first visit, the mother appears unsure of herself and the interactions between mother and son are tentative. The child calls his mother by her first name, acts shy and resists affection, not even wanting to hold hands. They play together for an hour, the mother following her son's lead.

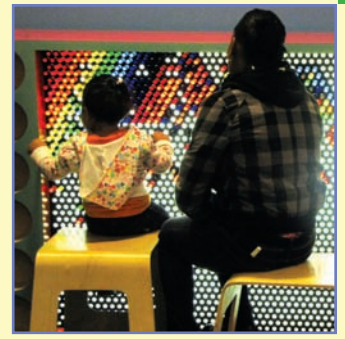
By visit six, the little boy sees his mother as a playmate, but not "Mommy." They play throughout the Museum, smiling and laughing, no longer tentative.

By visit 14, the child runs to his mother, greeting her with a hug. He initiates play with her and says, "I love you" at the end of the visit.

By visit 18, their last with Families Together, the mother is almost always "Mommy." She's confident and clearly the parent, not just a playmate. Her son willingly holds her hand and asks to be held. They are mother and son again.

This is the power of play.

- Amber Massed, Families Together Clinician



Reaching Out to Children in Need



Since 1997, the Museum has been an AmeriCorps site, committed to training a team of educators to bring engaging play-based activities to children whose exposure to rich learning experiences is limited. MuseumCorps - the Museum's AmeriCorps program - has served nearly 20,000 children through innovative outreach to inner-city community centers and Head Start programs.



The newest 12-member MuseumCorps team began in the fall and serves some of the poorest neighborhoods in Providence, Central Falls and Pawtucket through these programs:

- MuseumCorps members lead inspiring hands-on activities in 58 Children's Friend Head Start classrooms to help improve school readiness for 1,000 preschool children.
- Learning Clubs provide engaging STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) enrichment activities for 500 low-income elementary children at over a dozen community center after-school and summer programs.
- New this year: To deepen engagement with the neighborhood in the Museum's backyard, MuseumCorps members are a daily presence after school at the Boys & Girls Clubs of Providence South Side Clubhouse. Students from Mary E. Fogarty Elementary School and other neighborhood children participate in playful STEM activities in a Museum-dedicated space.

Members also welcome participating children during Museum field trips and family nights, as well as facilitate play and learning for Museum visitors in exhibits and programs. Welcome, team!

Left to right: Front row - Rebecca Gormley, Ann Kerrin, Stacy Greenberg, Meagan Amylon; Middle - Andy Axel, Suzie Doogan, Sarah Bonowitz, Abbey Jones; Back - Ryan Queenan, John Rossi, Kassie Edwards, Leah Paladino

The Museum's AmeriCorps program is made possible by a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service and Serve Rhode Island with support from additional sponsors, listed on the AmeriCorps pages of the Museum's website.

WHODUNNIT? Scout Adventures



Calling all detectives and supersleuths! Investigate an intriguing Museum mystery during suspiciously fun evening adventures. Scouts puzzle through perplexing hands-on science challenges to crack the case. Search for fingerprints, decode ink stains, analyze handwriting and study mysterious substances to piece together "whodunnit!"

Scout adventures are held on Fridays from 6:00 to 9:15 PM and include captivating educator-led activities; time to explore the Museum's exhibits; a Providence Children's Museum fun patch or Science Belt loop; a snack; and a pass for a future Museum visit.

Brownies and Junior Girl Scouts
February 10, March 2,
March 23, April 13 and May 4

Register NOW!

Cub Scouts
February 24

Talking Back

Michael Dionne, executive director of The Nina Foundation, spoke about the journey to create Nina's House.



Some of The Nina Foundation trustees, left to right: Front – Diane Sullivan, Michael Dionne, Mary Dionne, Olga Beauchamp; Back – George Sullivan, Elaine Sullivan, Richard Sullivan, Gail Savastano

Who was Nina?

Olga “Nina” Sullivan Bertuglio was my wife Mary’s mother. She was a warm, loving, caring person who was all about family – the oldest in a working class family of six kids, mother of eight, and often took in kids from the state home. She was always there to lend a hand and give support to those in need.



In 1954, Hurricane Carol took their home, for a time forcing them into public housing. Her first

husband had a heart attack at age 43 and three more followed. He died at the young age of 62. She married her high school sweetheart and cared for him, a diabetic who later suffered as an amputee. Through all of the tragedies she suffered – losing her daughter to leukemia and three siblings lost within six months – Nina always, *always* kept positive.

Nina’s involvement with children was incredible. Each of her children and her 64 grandchildren and great-grandchildren had a special relationship with her. That was her legacy, what it was like at her house – children came first.

Why was The Nina Foundation formed?

After we lost Nina in 2002, at age 82, we searched for a way to fill the void. We wanted to do something to extend her legacy and created The Nina Foundation, with her children as trustees and grandchildren as operating officers. We formed a relationship with DCYF to award annual grants to families in need – to cover utilities, tuition, food and clothing. Over five years of fundraising through golf tournaments, cookbook sales and raffles by family volunteers, we affected 40 families’ situations.

We asked DCYF Director Patricia Martinez and Regional Director Anne Lebrun-Courmoyer how we could best impact children in state care. Anne suggested a homelike setting for supervised family visitation. Our focus became finding and funding a house reflective of Nina’s impact on children.

How did you come to partner with the Children’s Museum?

We felt early on that we needed a partner and Families Together was always at the forefront of visitation. Nina’s House will only be as successful as the program partner,

and this is a dedicated, committed team.

What were you looking for in a space for Nina’s House?

We wanted it to be homey, comfortable and able to accommodate staff without intruding on the homelike value. A yard – a safe place to play. Safety and security. Off-street parking. Near transportation and bus lines. We wanted to keep it central to Providence, in the area of need. And financially reasonable.

It was more than a coincidence finding the house as a foreclosed property. I had driven by months earlier and said, “this is the kind of house we’re looking for” – before it was even available. My grandfather built that house, and my grandmother lived there until 1965.

We had 48 hours to decide and make an offer.

What’s it been like renovating your grandparents’ house?

It’s a sentimental place. My dad and four of his brothers left there for World War II. Opening one wall, out floated a 1930s era postcard sent to my now 93-year-old aunt. The second floor ceiling hid a beautifully written love letter, dated April 1943, to Uncle Clint from Aunt Mary.

What’s your vision of what Nina’s House will provide?

A successful program will have impact on visitation as a model – that’s the Families Together team’s job and they’re well prepared for it. We want to create an environment where they can work their magic. It will bring longer visits, more assessment and will hopefully shorten the time of families’ separation, improving positive outcomes.

Nina’s House is about and for families – “a place where families can grow” through the reunification process. It’s really going to be an exceptional place.

GIFT SHOP PICKS

The Gift Shop carries a variety of educational and playful items, inspired by the Museum’s hands-on exhibits and environments:

Contraptions 200 Plank Set \$49.95

Build imaginative ball and track structures and explore basic principles of physics and engineering. As in *Play Power*, investigate cause and effect by creating crazy contraptions with ramps, funnels and chutes and send a ball from start to finish. Includes 200 pine planks, two balls and an 18-page idea book. *Ages 7 and up*

Green Creativity Kits \$10.00 each

Create with reused and recycled materials in *Discovery Studio* and with these two engaging hands-on kits! Use aluminum cans, plastic bottles or milk cartons plus wheeled bases to build one-of-a-kind rolling Trash Robots (*ages 5 and up*). Includes materials for two robots. Explore Paper Recycling (*ages 8 and up*) and turn old paper into patterned and textured bookmarks, notecards and more. Kits are sold separately.

Monkey Balance Board \$25.00

Improve balance and coordination with this colorful, sturdy wooden board, similar to toys in *The Children’s Garden*. Great for active, physical play indoors and out! *Ages 3 and up*



More Time for Toys!



Discover *The Power of Play: From Trash to Treasure*, now on display through February 26. This charming collection of imaginative toys crafted by children from around the world illustrates the universal importance of play in children’s development. Families look closely to spot creative uses of simple everyday materials and found objects plus share their own stories of toy-making.

of \$1,500 or more for non capital campaign support received September 9 to December 5, 2011

Amgen Foundation

\$30,000 to support science education: Learning Clubs and *Discovery Studio*

MetLife Foundation

\$25,000 to sponsor MetLife Family Fridays

The Hassenfeld Foundation

\$12,500 to support outreach: Head Start/Good Start, Learning Clubs and Families Together

UnitedHealthcare of New England

\$7,500 for free Rte Care member admission

Anonymous

\$5,000 for general operating support

The Feinstein Foundation

\$5,000 for general operating support

Anonymous

\$3,000 for general operating support

Admirals Bank

\$2,500 for Nina's House

Joan D. Martin

\$2,500 for general operating support

Hope Global

\$1,500 for an employee appreciation day



The Museum welcomes charitable gifts of all sizes. For information, please contact Jennifer Laurelli at (401) 273-5437 ext. 120.

Partner in Philanthropy

On November 22, the Museum recognized Hasbro as its Partner in Philanthropy at the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Rhode Island Chapter annual National Philanthropy Day celebration. Sharing a commitment to those most in need, Hasbro has helped address educational inequities by supporting Museum after-school enrichment programs for inner-city children. Hasbro's leadership helped relocate the Museum to a larger facility in 1997 and recently helped build two new major outdoor learning environments. The Museum salutes Hasbro for fostering kids' healthy development and for the hope and joy it brings worldwide.



Museum Board President Matthew O. Littlefield and Board member Michael J. Cashton, managing attorney at Hasbro.

Providence Children's Museum received \$35,000 for general operating support from Bank of America. The gift demonstrates the Bank's strong commitment to southern New England's children and families, especially those who need it most, and will help the Museum continue to serve low-income families; over 40 percent of the Museum's \$2 million operating budget goes to services for children and families in need.

Pictured, left to right: Museum Executive Director Janice O'Donnell and Bank of America Consumer Market Executive Cynthia M. Lariviere.



Honor Someone Special

Celebrate someone special by making a gift to the Museum in his or her honor. A "recognition" gift shows that the donor not only cares about the individual, but also cares about the importance of play in every child's development.

A contribution to the Museum in someone's honor helps provide inspiring, joyful play and learning experiences to children and families who need them most. Recognized individuals will be notified that a gift has been made in their honor and - new this year - listed in the Museum's Annual Report. Give online at www.ChildrenMuseum.org/Support.asp.

Providence Children's Museum welcomed **282** new and **214** renewing member families in September, October and November.

Save BIG! Memberships guarantee free and unlimited admission to Providence Children's Museum for one year plus other great benefits.

Did You Know?

Providence Children's Museum members always receive a 10 percent discount at the Museum's Gift Shop.

Bring a Friend! Members, on March 25 bring an adult friend and his or her family to the Museum for **FREE** to enjoy exciting hands-on fun and other special offers. Watch for details.

Visit www.ChildrenMuseum.org or call (401) 273-5437 ext. 221 to join or renew today.

Member Corner

Save the date!

Providence Children's Museum's
Annual Gala
2012

Unplugged
The Way to Play

Thursday, April 26 • 6:00 - 10:00 PM
The Botanical Center at Roger Williams Park
1000 Elmwood Avenue, Providence, RI

Celebrating the spirit of creativity and innovation

Enjoy a fun and festive evening, featuring silent and live auctions, music, cocktails and delicious fare by Russell Morin Fine Catering.

Sponsorships start at \$1,500;
individual tickets are \$100.

For tickets, donations, sponsorships and other information contact the Events Manager, (401) 273-5437 ext. 121, or visit www.ChildrenMuseum.org/FundEvents.asp.

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Seeing Stars?

If your address has a star (★) by it, it's time to renew your membership. Renew before your expiration date and get an extra month FREE!

Try it
at home!

Texture Exploration

Foam Play *Ages 3 and up*

What You Need:

- Shaving cream
- Cookie sheet or tray
- Tools like plastic utensils or a wooden spoon

What You Do:

Drop a dollop of shaving cream on the cookie sheet or tray and begin exploring its texture. Using your hands or other tools, spread until it's smooth, or stir it up until it has peaks like mountains. Try writing your name or making doodles and designs in the cream.

Try This: With a grown-up's help, add a drop or two of food coloring to the shaving cream and swirl it around lightly but don't mix it completely. Gently press a piece of paper into the cream to create a print of the design.



Fabric Art *Ages 4 to 11*

Collect different fabrics and cut them into scraps or strips. Create a textured collage by gluing the pieces to a sheet of paper or another piece of cloth. Experiment with other types of materials, like thick yarns or even plastic bags.