

Why Chicago Children's Museum Matters



World-class cities are defined by the breadth of their cultural offerings. By this standard, Chicago is a leader, with an abundance of first-rate theater, dance, music, art, and museum experiences. Chicago Children's Museum is one of the newest in a brilliant array of cultural institutions. Founded 28 years ago in two rooms of the Chicago Cultural Center, it is now the second most-visited children's museum in the country.

Children's museums have a relatively short history, most having been established only in the last 30 years. Now, there are nearly 350 children's museums nationwide, attracting nearly 30 million visitors annually. Unlike collections-based institutions, children's museums offer authentic, open-ended experiences, encouraging children to test ideas, play actively with their peers, and explore the world around them.

Chicago Children's Museum matters because:

- It is unique to the cultural landscape, with its **exclusive focus on children** from birth through age 10, their parents, caregivers, educators, and communities. This focus ensures an easy-to-navigate, welcoming environment. It also gives the museum special credibility on matters pertaining to children, their needs, and their development.
- It is a **safe and supportive gathering place** for children and families from the city and beyond. At Chicago Children's Museum, children learn and play with others who may not look like the children they see in their neighborhoods. It provides an opportunity to connect across racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines.
- It is an **exciting learning venue**. Parents and caregivers know children will be appropriately engaged and challenged, and children know they will have fun! To maximize the learning potential of young children, the museum also offers in-depth, professional development programs to educators, students, and caregivers.
- CCM **presents serious subjects to children** in age-appropriate ways. Among the numerous examples: *Katrina's Kids Project*, an exhibition created by Hurricane Katrina child evacuees; *What is Home? Where is Home: Life Through the Eyes of Afghan Child Refugees*, art created in a Pakistani refugee camp; *What Does It Mean, Dr. King?*, CCM's interactive



musical drama about the Civil Rights Movement; and *Face To Face: Dealing with Prejudice and Discrimination*, an exhibit dealing with issues of bias and exclusion, a traveling version of which took these messages to families nationwide.

- CCM has become an **influential research hub** in the field of informal learning. Findings from the museum's global *Standards of Excellence in Early Learning* study found practical application in its groundbreaking *Partnership of Playful Learners*, a National Science Foundation-funded project aimed at promoting collaborative, science-based family learning.
- **Community partnerships** are core to Chicago Children's Museum and a hallmark of its unique presence. With a commitment to making resources available to all children, the museum reaches out to families living in underserved neighborhoods by working with schools, libraries, community groups, and families to provide educational programming in and beyond their communities.
- **Children learn to love museums.** They expect them to be dynamic, interesting, and inclusive places. As a city with a rich museum culture, Chicagoans must care that children have this initial, positive experience.

At Chicago Children's Museum, children learn to trust their instincts and discover that learning is fun. Reaching children during their formative years forever enriches their lives.



Located at Navy Pier

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www.chicagochildrensmuseum.org