The Community Outreach Program

The Children's Museum has a long history of commitment to children from all socio-economic backgrounds. During the 1970's the Museum piloted a variety of free and low-cost programs designed to make the Museum and its resources more accessible to a broader audience, and to assist community education, recreation and social service agencies in their work with children. Museum staff provided both training and consultation services for agency staff and direct service programs for children. Cooperative relationships were established with many agencies in low-income communities in and around Boston. Over the years, Museum staff have consistently worked to secure funding to enable community outreach to be more extensive and to become an integral part of the Museum's program.

In 1983 The Children's Museum formalized and expanded its commitment to communities and audiences that are traditionally underserved by cultural institutions by establishing the Community Outreach Program. This program targets cities in the Metropolitan Boston area and Boston neighborhoods, and provides Museum services, resources and programs, on-site and off, low-cost or free of charge, to children and adults in these communities.

The Community Outreach Program is supported, in part, by the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities, a state agency whose budget is recommended by the Governor and approved by the Legislature. With this funding The Children's Museum has been able to:

- establish working relationships with and provide a variety of programs for over forty community agencies that service children outside of school. We work with many kinds of agencies, such as: housing projects, community schools, libraries, multi-service centers, neighborhood houses, Boys and Girls Clubs, and YMCA's and YWCA's.
- actively spread the word about the Museum's existing free and low-cost services including:

  —Free School and Community Group Visits
  —Kit Rentals
  —Free Friday Nights
  —Teenage Work Program
  —DETOURS
  —RECYCLE
  —Early Childhood Program
  —Special Education Program

Chinese Lantern Festival—A Chinatown Community Night

Flyers about these programs were produced, then posted and distributed in targeted communities. Some of the flyers were translated into other languages, an important consideration when trying to reach an ethnically varied audience. News releases and advertisements were printed in community newspapers. We have learned over the years that it is not enough to offer free and low-cost programs; ways must be found for information about these programs to reach the intended audience.

In the first year of operation, the Community Outreach Program served approximately 20,000 children and adults in targeted, low-income communities.

What does the Community Outreach Program offer to participating communities and where do the programs take place?

Programs take place in the community and at The Children's Museum. Outreach staff travel to community agencies to teach multicultural arts, crafts and science activities to kids and to work with and train agency staff. Museum resource materials are provided free of charge for agency staff to use in their programs. We have found that running programs in the community strengthens the relationship between agency and Museum staff and gives us a clearer understanding of the needs and strengths of the agencies we work with. At the Museum we offer: an afterschool program with activities specifically designed for older kids ages 8-14, free family nights for each participating community, science workshops for kids and monthly staff training sessions for community agency staff. An important goal of our program, in addition to offering free and low-cost programs in the community, is to integrate new audiences into existing programs throughout the Museum. Important considerations in this regard are financial accessibility of the institution and its programs and bilingual program and service staff.

Workshop At Villa Victoria In The South End

Afterschool Program For Older Kids

Why does the Community Outreach Program work primarily with afterschool programs in community agencies?

Given the changing structure of families and work, afterschool education has assumed a greater importance. Yet little attention has been paid to designing an afterschool curriculum or effective afterschool environments. Afterschool programs in community agencies service large numbers of children in need of something to do and a place to go after school. Most of these programs are understaffed with little money for materials or staff training. Our program, by providing interesting materials, activities, ideas, resources, training and staff support, is able to have a significant impact on the environment of the children who frequent these agencies.

"What If You Couldn't . . ." Kit At The Condon Community School

What kinds of materials are provided to afterschool programs at community agencies?

The Community Outreach Program sponsors the rental of Children's Museum activity and curriculum kits. These kits contain all materials for the activity, guides for use of the kit, and artifacts. Kits function at agencies as staff training vehicles as well as by providing creative, participatory learning experiences for kids. Rubber Stamp Printing, Plant Dyes and Dyeing, Papermaking, Batteries and Bulbs and Fluid Patterns are among the most popular kits.

Outreach staff have developed, through trial and error, a number of thematic workshop series which work well in afterschool environments. Activity sheets which provide instructions for doing the activity, age recommendations and a list of needed materials and where to get them, have been produced and printed for agencies we work with.

In addition, vouchers for bags of Children's Museum RECYCLE materials are made available for use in afterschool programs. RECYCLE materials are an inexpensive source of inspiration for creative arts, crafts and science projects at these community centers.

Why is staff training a focus of the Community Outreach Program?

Staff in afterschool programs are often entry level with little prior training. Agencies have little or no money for staff training and often can only afford to employ program staff for the hours the children are actually there, resulting in little or no time for materials preparation or development. These staff work with large numbers of children day after day. The Community Outreach Program can have a more lasting impact on agencies and thus the children who frequent them by including staff training as a focus of the program.

Community Agency Staff Training Session

For more information about the program contact: Suzanne LeBlanc or Leslie Swartz, Community Outreach Directors at (617) 426-6500 or write to the address below.

The Children's Museum
The Community Outreach Program
300 Congress Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02210

Photographs: Fredrik D. Bodin

DIRECTIONS:

Follow Museum Wharf signs displaying a milk bottle, our landmark.

1 From North, take Expressway south to HIGH STREET/CONGRESS STREET exit. Third left on Congress Street.

2 From West, take Mass. Pike to EXPRESSWAY NORTH signs. Take ATLANTIC AVE/NORTHERN AVE exit (see 3 below).

3 From South, take Expressway north to ATLANTIC AVE/NORTHERN AVE exit. Right on Northern Avenue bridge.

(T) MBTA Red Line to South Station (2 blocks from museum).

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Steve Rosenthal

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