

## Making learning fun in Gallup

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor  
Friday, 20 October 2023 05:13

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### Parent group aims to bring children's museum to Gallup

Children's museums across the country serve as informal learning opportunities for young kids. From space to hands-on activities about the Earth, children's museums cover a multitude of topics that expand kids' minds. But almost all of them have one thing in common: they are located in major U.S. cities.

However, a group of parents want to change that and bring a children's museum to Gallup.

In an interview with the *Sun*, one group member, Laura Ippel, said that they took inspiration from the Play Sharity Museum in Deming, New Mexico.

They drove down to Deming and met with the Play Sharity board, which is made up of parents just like them.

"What struck us in Deming is that they did it to fit their community and it was a smaller size, but just really well done," Ippel said. "And we wanted to do the same thing here."

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The Play Sharity board suggested opening a second Play Sharity location in Gallup, and the group of parents jumped at the opportunity. The partnership began in July. Ippel took on the title of Director of the Gallup branch.

Monica Topham, the director of Play Sharity's Deming branch, said her board was more than happy to help Gallup.

"Starting a children's museum, there's not really a how-to guide to it," Topham said. "So when they approached us and they had an idea and they wanted to learn more from Play Sharity, of course we told them we would love to help them...."

The group is still in the beginning stages of making this dream a reality, but they've been hosting pop-ups at ArtsCrawl and holding community meetings to gauge interest.

"So we kind of set up some community meetings just to get that kind of feedback, and really the response was so encouraging," Ippel explained. "Just so many families saying 'this is something that we want and need in Gallup, and this would help us think long-term about staying in Gallup.'"

Ippel said the group's long-term goal is to open a permanent location for the museum, but they'll probably start with renting out a space. She said they hope to rent out a place by March or April.

"In the long-term plan we would love to have a larger facility, but we see a lot of benefits to starting and being able to show what a children's museum is and what the benefits are," she said.

Right now, the group's main focus is fundraising. Their current goal is \$25,000, with that amount covering rental fees and any exhibits they will have to purchase.

The group is hosting a Day of Play Oct. 21 at Courthouse Plaza from 3 pm to 8 pm to pique

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people's interest and raise some money for the museum.

The event will be full of family-friendly activities, including carnival games, inflatable obstacle courses, a foam machine, food trucks, and cornhole. Touch-a-Truck, a company that brings ambulances and fire trucks that kids can climb in and explore to events, will also be there.

Exhibits that showcase what the museum could possibly entail will also be at the Day of Play. A sensory walkway that includes a pool noodle car wash and a pool filled with corn will entice all five of the children's senses.

According to the Children's Museum of Phoenix's website, there are five educational benefits of children's museums. Interactive play learning helps develop a child's critical thinking skills; they might not even realize they're learning while they're having fun.

Children's museums also excite and inspire creativity and promote literacy. They also push children to be imaginative.

Finally, children's museums often explore topics that aren't always taught in school.

Topham highlighted further benefits of a children's museum.

"It just gives them a space to be free and happy," she said. "Children learn through play, so it just gives them a space where they can learn and they can be happy and safe and free."

Ippel and her team are looking at exhibits that can do all of those things. The Early Childhood Coalition already donated an exhibit called the Imagination Blue Box to the future museum. This exhibit provides big boxes kids can climb on and interact with.

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Other exhibits Play Sharity hopes to include are a color mixing exhibit and a wind energy exhibit.

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