At Portland Children’s Museum and Opal School, we offer children, parents, and teachers the opportunity to express themselves through materials like clay, wire, and paint. In our refurbished Twilight Trail, the “material” is light.

Walking through this darkened exhibit, I’m amazed by the experimentation underway—particularly with the glowing campfire. I’ve witnessed not only the roasting of hot dogs from the Theater and steaks from the Market, but also pegs from the Lite Brite and ice bricks from the cave—just to see what the “coals” would do.

Indeed, our Museum, School, and professional development experiences ignite the imaginations of children and adults alike. We witness their faces light up with joy and confidence when they discover a new phenomenon or master a skill.

In so doing, we strive to highlight the creative capacity of children. By cultivating Museum and classroom environments that encourage children to take the lead and shape their own learning, we focus the spotlight on their innate problem-solving abilities.

Your support results in countless lightbulb moments every day. As a result, we nurture children who can break through the world’s dark clouds, shining with solutions.

Thank you!

Ruth G. Shelly
Executive Director
Playing with LIGHT

Renovated in 2018, the Twilight Trail exhibit illuminates the wonders of our region, encourages authentic connections between children and caregivers, and expands learning opportunities by offering light as a material of exploration.

“In the heart of this space,” says Director of Exhibits Somya Singh, “families come together in a calm, cozy setting meant to evoke the wild.” New exhibit components include a waterfall composed of reflective fishing lures, a twinkling night sky complete with shooting stars, a faceted ice cave, and an alluring campsite. “All of us are attracted to a campfire and gathering around a warm hearth,” explains Somya. “It’s part of our nature as human beings—we are wired for community.

Designed to increase accessibility for all ages and abilities, Twilight Trail invites visitors to dwell in the space for longer periods of time. If the elaborate stories created in the ice cave (“I’m a king! There’s a unicorn!”) and conversations heard ‘round the campfire (“I’m making hot cocoa with marshmallows!”) are any indication, that’s precisely what’s taking place beneath the twilight glow of this re-envisioned space.

The real magic wand is the child’s own mind.

—José Ortega y Gasset
Opal School six and seven-year-olds developed theories and ideas about compassion with input from the world’s primary expert: His Holiness the Dalai Lama. When Executive Director Ruth Shelly prepared to attend a summit in India, *Fostering Universal Ethics & Compassion Through Museums*, she invited involvement from first and second graders in Opal School’s Dogwood classroom. After extensive conversations about their own experiences with inclusion and exclusion, they worked to construct their own practice framework for compassion: **Notice—Feel—Pause—Think—Act.**
Ruth brought the framework to the Dalai Lama and posed the children’s question: Do you need all these parts of compassion for it to still be compassion? His Holiness replied, “A sense of concern for others’ wellbeing, or compassion, creates action, and action makes the difference to others.”

The children wove the Dalai Lama’s message into their dialog, honing their thinking and transforming their linear framework into a circle.

Grey:  **What is the next step after you act?**

Vanya:  **It keeps going like that, like the cycle, like how you get rain. It’s a cycle like that, but also compassion could be a cycle.**

How powerful for children to develop their own understanding of the world rather than having definitions imposed upon them by adults. At Opal School, children engage around issues, practice decision-making, ask complex questions, listen with compassion, and invent their own understandings. Absorbing a sense of agency, they know that their curiosity matters and their ideas can have an impact.
Local Research—GLOBAL IMPACT

What draws people from Tanzania, Singapore, Brazil, and 12 other countries to Portland Children’s Museum? A set of programs that have impact both locally and globally: our professional development opportunities. Through workshops, online courses, consultancies, keynote speeches, and an annual Symposium, our professional development team shares learning originating within Opal School to influence classrooms all over the world.

Deeply steeped in research, Opal School Teacher-Researchers glean best practices from children to evolve and strengthen our learning approach, Playful Inquiry. This powerful approach draws more than 1,800 teachers and administrators from across the country and the world to learn how to incorporate Playful Inquiry into their own classrooms.

One recent participant said, “I feel so motivated and energized now, at a time when I was questioning my desire to pursue this career. So frustrated—and now so willing! [I have] more courage and more confidence.” She, along with her peers, impacted more than 50,000 students last year with lessons learned through Opal School.
At the Museum, we strive to serve all children. If families are unable to venture to our Washington Park location, devoted staff bring activities to them.

Through intentional outreach, Community Engagement Manager Stephanie Madrid helps serve as a bridge between the Museum and diverse communities across Portland.

“I visit residents, speak to them in Spanish about our programs, and help families feel accepted and included,” she says. One challenge some may face is “not seeing other people who look like them at the Museum. I show them that I work here and that this is a space for everyone.”

Ongoing partnerships with local organizations such as King School Museum of Contemporary Art and KairosPDX bridge transportation, financial, language, and cultural barriers. “Cultivating genuine relationships throughout the city encourages more children to play, connect, and explore,” says Director of Museum Experience Jeremiah Sazdanoff.

And the impact can last a lifetime. It’s this type of grassroots community collaboration that helps all children feel welcome at the Museum. As one young visitor shared, “This is a place for me, and I can come back here.”

Connecting with people and letting them know how we can support the development of their child is always a great experience.

—Stephanie Madrid, Community Engagement Manager
Preparing for the **FUTURE**

In 2018-19, we planted seeds for growth in three strategic areas.

Through our **Birth-Three Initiative**, we support the development of our youngest visitors—manifested in our new exhibit, Sprout Spot, and new programming in Sprout Studio, to debut November 2019.

Our **Adult Learner Initiative** invites adults to notice and support the experiences children have in our spaces through enhanced programming, intentional signage and materials, and increased professional development options for teachers.
Additionally, supported by a diverse advisory committee, we developed Drip City, our new place-based water exhibit, with generous initial funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and The Collins Foundation. We eagerly look forward to building this space over the next two years.

Each of these projects propels us forward as we deepen our commitment to developing innovative problem solvers, reminding adults of the gifts and talents of children, and providing spaces for playful exploration and imagination.

We know that plants need sun, water, and food in their soil, but they also need love, help, and protection...just like kids do.

—Ethan, age 7
135 Lanterns created for Opal School's annual Lantern Walk

$315,025 Provided in free and subsidized admission

16% Increase in camp attendance

5,202 Memberships

254,516 Visitors

7,890 Offsite visitors

110% Increase in average donation amount

7,200 Pounds of clay
In the Maker Studio, children can transform corks into anything imaginable.

A whole lot of corks!

9,564 Miles (from Tanzania)
Furthest distance traveled to attend our teacher Symposium

267,320 Shooting star appearances in Twilight Trail

450 Teachers who took courses on opalschool.org

4,071 Volunteer hours

13 Private play events for children experiencing disabilities

Most popular Instagram post

292 Choruses of “Happy Birthday” sung
REVENUE

Total revenue: $4,761,947
Less gifts in-kind: -484,888

$4,277,059
EXPENSES

Total expenses: $5,107,712

Less depreciation: -295,525

Less fair market value of facility rental, utilities, and maintenance donated by Portland Parks & Recreation (noncash) -603,160

$4,209,027

* Includes technology, events, equipment & maintenance, printing & advertising, interest & bank fees
2018–19 ANNUAL FUND CONTRIBUTIONS

$50,000–$99,999
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The Collins Foundation

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Our Mission
To develop innovative problem-solvers through playful learning experiences that strengthen relationships between children and their world.

A moon glows from above in Twilight Trail.