



**The Play Lab  
Foundation**

# **Impact REPORT**

**2023-2024**

# INTRODUCTION: CLOSING THE QUALITY CARE GAP AT THE PLAY LAB

In our community, many children and families face a significant quality care gap, where access to enriching educational resources and support is limited. This gap prevents many children from obtaining the tools they need to succeed academically and socially, especially as families navigate financial challenges.

Enriching early childhood programming doesn't only impact those families straddling the poverty threshold. Post-COVID, the rising cost of care has placed immense strain on middle-class families, many of whom don't qualify for subsidies and are left to choose between quality care and affordable care. At The Play Lab, we are committed to closing this gap by providing high-quality, child-centered, play- and nature-focused programs, alongside family engagement and collective care. Our goal is to ensure that every child and family receives the support they need to reach their full potential.

In fact, 30% of the children in our program attend with full scholarships, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent access to the care and education every child deserves.

We also recognize the unique needs of our neurodivergent children, who often face additional barriers in traditional educational settings. At The Play Lab, we are deeply committed to creating an inclusive environment that embraces and supports these children, ensuring they are able to fully engage in their community. We provide tailored programming and resources that help neurodivergent children thrive, empowering them to actively participate in all aspects of their education and development.

Through our comprehensive programming, mentorship, and holistic support, we strive to create an environment where all children, regardless of their developmental needs or economic background, have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

# Our Story SO FAR

## Our Mission

At The Play Lab, our mission is simple: to foster joy, trusting relationships, nature stewardship, and learning through play. We recognize the need for a paradigm shift in childcare, one that centers inclusivity, individual support, and collective care. By prioritizing the well-being of children, families, and practitioners, we're reshaping the concept of belonging within our community and society. We are committed to providing high-quality, accessible childcare, ensuring every child has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their background or abilities.

### Key Highlights of Our Projects:

- Commitment to Quality, Access, and Equity
- Scholarships for Families in Need
- Inclusive Programming for Neurodivergent Children
- Community Engagement and Partnership
- Professional Development for Staff
- Focus on Family Relationships
- Nature-Focused and Play-Based Learning
- Inclusive and Collective Care
- Transparency and Accountability



## Our purpose

The Play Lab Foundation believes Quality, Access, and Equity (QAE) should be universal, regardless of race, privilege, background, or neurotype. We're committed to collective care, supporting children, families, and staff in a nurturing environment. Our vision is to offer child-centered, holistic care that fosters growth through play-based, nature-focused learning. We go beyond basic needs by prioritizing family engagement, building strong relationships, and investing in staff education, bridging gaps in access and affordability so every child has the opportunity to thrive, their background or financial means.

**LIBERATION  
IS A RIGHT,  
NOT A PRIVILEGE,  
STARTING AT  
BIRTH**

# OUR GOALS 2024

For 2024, The Play Lab aims to expand access to inclusive, high-quality, play-based learning, deepen family engagement, and strengthen support for neurodivergent children. We remain committed to fostering a joyful, nature-centered environment that benefits children, families, and educators.

## 1

**Provide Quality Care for All Children, Regardless of Race, Socio-Economic Status, or Neurotype**

**Progress/Outcome:**

We fostered an inclusive environment by providing scholarships to 30% of our children, reducing financial barriers to quality care. Our programs were also adapted to support neurodivergent children, ensuring meaningful engagement with our play-based curriculum.

## 2

**Provide Collective Care, Meeting the Needs of Staff, Children, and Families**

**Progress/Outcome:**

We supported staff with shortened hours, team meetings, and additional support staff to prevent burnout. Families benefited from monthly engagement activities, weekly Learning Lab newsletters, and bi-annual home visits, fostering strong connections and continuity in care.

## 3

**Provide Access to Child-Centered, Play-, Nature-, and Art-Focused Programming**

**Progress/Outcome:**

We offered diverse, child-centered experiences, including visits to the library, Wonder Works Children's Museum, the Gymnastics and Recreation Center, and bi-monthly music therapy sessions, supporting holistic growth and exploration for every child.

## 4

**Advocate for Humanizing Pedagogies that Center the Genius, Justice, Love, and Joy of Every Child**

**Progress/Outcome:**

We centered each child's unique strengths and joy, ensuring that our practices reflected values of justice, love, and respect for all children.

# OUR STRATEGY 2024

## Every Child Deserves Equal Access to Quality Care

Our 2023-2024 strategy focuses on bridging gaps in access and equity by offering high-quality, child-centered care. We will continue to prioritize inclusive, nature-based, and play-focused learning, while supporting families and staff through engagement and wellness initiatives. We aim to expand our programming, enhance community partnerships, and ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of background or support needs.



PROJECTS	DETAILS	OUTCOME
<b>Inclusive and accessible care</b>	Provide scholarships and partner with local organizations to ensure affordable access for all children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Scholarships</li><li>• Community Partnerships</li></ul>
<b>Collective Care</b>	Support children, families, and staff through team meetings, family activities, and wellness support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Staff wellness</li><li>• Family Support</li></ul>
<b>Nature-Focused, Play-Based Programming</b>	Provide play-based, nature-focused learning with music therapy and community outings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Music Therapy</li><li>• Community Outings</li></ul>

# QUALITY, ACCESS, AND EQUITY: THE PLAY LAB'S 2023-2024 RESULTS

This page showcases how The Play Lab is achieving its mission of ensuring quality care, equitable access, and inclusive programming for all children, regardless of background or support needs



These statistics highlight our ongoing commitment to providing inclusive, high-quality care that meets the unique needs of every child and family, ensuring equitable access and support for all.

- Every family actively participates in monthly activities and home visits.
- The majority of our children represent diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Half of our children receive tailored support to meet their unique needs.
- 30% of children receive financial assistance to ensure equitable access.

**100%**

Family Engagement

**80%**

Children Enrolled are either Black or of the Global Majority

**50%**

Individual Needs Supported

**30%**

Scholarships Provided

**\$2,480**

In Programming  
For All

**\$19,974**

In Play Lab Scholarships



# OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- **Oak Park Public Library**
- **Oak Park Handy Human**
- **Mama Kat's Sweets**
- **Daley Bagel**
- **Wonder Works Children's Museum**
- **CAYR (Come As You Are)  
Connections**
- **Community Contributions & Support**

**YOUR  
CONTINUED  
SUPPORT HELPS  
SUSTAIN  
OUR MISSION.**

**WE THANK YOU**

