



2023 Performance Report for **THE CHILDREN'S PLAYHOUSE**

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Playhouse Rebounds with Increased Usage and Exciting New Exhibits

The year began with disaster — due to record cold temperatures late December burst heating pipes caused extensive damage to four rooms and closed the museum for five weeks. Thanks to insurance, donations from the community, and the generosity of the Farris Foundation Home Community Fund, we seized the opportunity to significantly improve those spaces and create a new exhibit, the Enchanted Cottage.

To prevent future flooding from aging pipes, we also replaced our ancient gas-fired boiler with energy-efficient mini-splits that provide both heating and cooling and free up storage space previously taken by the boiler.

Despite the early setback, the rest of 2023 was outstanding with all time record attendance spurred by lifting timed ticketing in May, additional new and improved exhibits, and increased programming. We also continued our commitment to serving all families through our robust scholarship program, outreach and collaboration with other nonprofits, and by offering reduced admission to low-income nonmembers through the national Museums for All network.

History and Mission

The only children's museum based in the High Country, The Children's Playhouse offers stimulating arts and science-based programs, enticing play areas and exhibits, and informative parenting resources.

Our mission is to provide children from birth to age eight with enriching, educational play experiences while at the same time offering their parents and caregivers friendly support in the important job of raising children. Parents and caregivers stay and play with their children.

The Children's Playhouse celebrated 21 years of service in 2023.

Children and families served

Open Tuesday-Saturday, The Children's Playhouse serves both locals and out-towners. With an average of 4.7 stars on Google, The Playhouse fills an important niche in our tourism economy.

But we also highly valued by our local members who are both stay-at-home and working parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

We attract a wide cross-section of families representing a range of social-economic, educational, and religious backgrounds thanks to our scholarship program and welcoming atmosphere.

The majority of our members reside in Watauga County and use the museum intensively, many coming more than once a week.



Attendance and Membership

- **15,941 visits from adults and children in 2023** — a 45% increase over 2022



- **360 total family memberships**
- **Over 137 sponsored memberships** awarded to low-income families, first-time parents, social service agencies, and military families.

Program Highlights

- The Playhouse is open for play for over 38 hours per week year round, providing **1,713 hours of play and bonding** in 2023. The museum was closed for 5 weeks January 1, 2023-February 8, 2023 due to burst pipes.
- **180 individual music, art, and STEM programs for kids.**
- **Four six week parent education classes** for adults with childcare.

Exhibits

• **The Enchanted Cottage** is a new permanent exhibit with an inviting, fairy tale feel. Gnarly trees festooned with fairy lights surround a rustic woodland cottage. Special features include a toadstool sink, and a bucket and pulley for sending food up to the second floor and a hidden chute to make them appear in the “magic” stove.



• **Journey to Space**, a six week long exhibit that transformed a whole room into the surface of the moon complete with space ship, space suits, and challenges. *New to the exhibit this year* was a new space ship with working lights and buttons and a touch box for examining “space dirt.” The exhibit was accompanied by science workshops and books about space.

• **Winter Wonderland**, also up for a month, transformed Romp and Stomp with snow-covered peaks for climbing, indoor snowball fights, snow forts, sledding, ice fishing, and a hot chocolate stand. *New to the exhibit this year* was a new sock skating pond and small world play with arctic animals.

• Thanks in part from a grant from the **Clabough Foundation**, two outdoor exhibits, **Waterworks** and the **Gnome Home** were renovated and repaired this year, making the water exhibit handicapped accessible and adding adult seating and redoing the green roof of the Gnome Home. The new **Pebble Harp** and the custom-made **Wind Tunnel** sparked curiosity and delight thanks to the Clabough grant and Cecil Gurganus.



Special Events

• **The 8th Annual BuildFest**, a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) festival for kids 2-12 was held on Saturday April 1, 2023 at Watauga High School with the help of 183 volunteers. Over 1500 attendees enjoyed 70 hands-on activities, a giant Cardboard City and Tiny Town, Touch a Truck, and two physics shows.

• The **21st Birthday Bash** held on Sunday, September 17th at Foscoe Grandfather Community Center was a free event celebrating 21 years of The Playhouse and featuring 20 hands-on activities for kids, food trucks, and free birthday cake.

Outreach

• **“Countdown to BuildFest”** outreach to Bethel School. Staff led astronomy activities with the Pre-K to 3rd grade classes and distributed 64 play kits.

• **Kids’ Corner at the Watauga County Farmers’ Market:** nine Saturday morning activities at the Market from May to October.

• **Community Events:** We provided kids’ activities at the Summer Reading Kickoff, Boonerang, Fairy Day, the Student Parent Fair, the Back to School festival, Buddy Walk of the High Country, and Oktoberfest.

• **Space provided to other agencies:** the Children’s Council’s Babies on Blankets support group met at The Playhouse 44 times. Five Foster Parents’ Nights Out were held at the museum.

