

SPARK STRIVES FOR INCLUSION AND EQUAL ACCESS FOR ALL FAMILIES

Children’s learning is directly linked to their health, and research has proven that health disparities for low-income families directly influence development and school performance. In-person learning, and socialization has been greatly limited since March of 2020, specifically learning through play at local Children’s Museums where children are encouraged to explore their interests through authentic objects, hands-on exhibits, and activities.

Despite the pandemic, Spark, Rochester Minnesota’s Children’s Museum, opened to the public with limited capacity and social distancing at their new Apache Mall location in August of 2020. Their mission is to enrich the lives of young learners by creating shared, interactive experiences that engage people of all ages in the joy of play, the power of learning, and a sense of community.

“Our goal is to integrate inclusion and equal access to educational experiences in a safe and family focused environment through our three focus areas: STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math), Health and Well-Being, and Cultural Connectedness,” says Lindsey Hemker, Spark Development Manager. “Families realize the potential their children have and really create a structure of family time while in the space. There is so much for families to do and learn together.”

Like all nonprofits, fundraising has been a challenge the past twelve months. It was a bit simpler before the pandemic, now; however, they are hesitant to ask for donations or services because it is hard to know if donors are struggling due to the pandemic. Grants that correlated to what the museum is doing are no longer available because many foundations have stopped their grant cycles due to limited funding.



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To assist nonprofits like Spark, Altra has partnered with NetGiver to enable credit union members to give 100 percent of their donation freely to non-profits. “These funds will help support continued programming in our space that is accessible to all,” says Hemker. “With additional funding, we are able to generate more programs through our program partners that in turn directly affect more families and children who may not be able to get these resources otherwise.”

As a connector for the community by bringing children, parents, and families together, Spark is a place for innovative learning experiences that create teachable moments through exhibits, outreach programs, and environments that invite hands on learning. The museum is a resource that appeals to all disciplines and levels of learners while helping engage and support families in the Rochester community as their child’s first teachers.

Spark welcomes all families, age ranges, and special accommodations regardless of financial barriers. They provide every child with the opportunity to learn through play, and make sure all children are getting equal accessibility to the museum in support of the community’s efforts to improve education, health, and disparities. Spark has welcomed over 300,000 visitors since inception in 2012 and provided over 3,000 free memberships to families in need.

