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Play is Child's Work: Play Pods Invade North Philadelphia to Put Children to Work

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The Community Site

In 1899, Smith Memorial Playground and Playhouse opened in East Fairmount Park, fulfilling the vision of its founders, Richard and Sarah Smith, in memory of their adult son, Stan, to provide a place for the children of Philadelphia to engage in free play at a time when many children in the city lived in crowded and dangerous conditions.

Smith's 16,000 square foot mansion and 6½-acre playground were designed to allow children to stretch their imaginations, improve their physical health through active play, and learn to negotiate and solve problems with their peers. Parents and other caregivers accompany children on visits and learn how to use play to enhance their children's health and well-being.



Project Goal

- To develop strategies to teach caregivers that play is an essential and critical part of all children's development.
- To introduce local area caregivers to Smith Playground



Strategies

- Built relationships with various community recreation centers, health centers, and social agencies focusing on North Philadelphia neighborhoods near or within reach of Smith Playground
- Designed "play pods", interactive play tables with toys, easy DIY crafts for children to play with while the parents receive information from the interns about the importance of play
- Children experimented with homemade bean bags and play-dough made from everyday materials that demonstrate the ease of playing without having to go into debt.
- At both the play pods and Smith Memorial Playground and Playhouse, the interns also conducted surveys regarding the caregiver's views about the impact of play.

Personal Statements

"Working with BTG and Smith has shattered my previous notions of what kind of neighborhoods are in North Philadelphia. I've learned the resilience of its residents, the willingness to improve childhood experiences for its children, and the openness to change in order to improve the quality of life. The single-story that North Philadelphia is an area to stay away from has a new layer to it; North Philadelphia is a community that is working hard to make changes to pull itself up to make life better for all of its residents. Its a work in progress that I am so grateful to have been a part of." – Nicole



"This summer BTG has provided a unique interdisciplinary experience that not only educated me about the Philadelphia community, but about myself. As a student of the University of the Sciences, I usually do not venture out of University City. It has been eye opening to work with the community of North Philadelphia and learn about their socioeconomic needs. The Smith Memorial Playground and Playhouse provided us with an inspiring experience that will resonate with me throughout my career as a health care provider." – Amanda