



# The Play Times

Vol. 4 Spring 2020

Playtime Helps Children Rise



## Keeping Play Going During COVID-19

### What's Inside

#### Playtime to Go

Your ongoing support allows us to keep serving the children.

*page 2*

#### #HelpChildrenRise

Join the #HelpChildren Rise fundraising campaign.

*page 3*

#### Activities at Home

Enjoy some family fun, easy-to-do activities while at home.

*page 4*

#### Thank You Volunteers and Donors

Your support provides great experiences for children.

*page 4*



Page One Photos by Ryan Maine

### A special message from Jamila Larson, Playtime's Executive Director

Around the world, most families sheltering in place are struggling to develop new rhythms with each other, to find ways to keep their children occupied and safe while managing increased stress. At the same time, the call for social distancing has exposed dramatic disparities. For the families Playtime serves, homelessness makes everything harder.

Single parents need to take their entire families to the grocery store on inconsistent bus lines, only to find many staples missing. Most don't have computers to help their children keep up with their distance learning plans. And with multiple family members living together in a single room, tensions can run high.

What's it like for a child when your world is reduced to a single room?

**For families, homelessness makes everything harder.**

continued on page 2





# Your Continued Support Creates Playtime to Go!

Continued from page 1

Petula Dvorak's March 27 column in the *Washington Post*, "Coronavirus shrinks a homeless child's world to a 323-square-foot motel room," tells of a child and his mother adjusting to their "new normal" under quarantine. It paints an important picture of the reality that approximately 500 children and their parents are now facing living in the city's overflow shelter hotels.

Though the world has suddenly changed, I'm proud of how our volunteers, supporters, board, and staff have stepped up to adapt to ensure children keep playing, and that parents will continue to get the support they need to weather this pandemic. When the schools closed, we quickly mobilized to provide "Playtime to Go" kits to give children living in shelters fun and substantive activities to lift their spirits and keep them entertained.

In mid-March, we delivered children's books, coloring books and art supplies, sticker and activity books, active toys and games, plus Girl Scout cookies and fresh bread from Lyon Bakery to families at the hotels. Everything was donated or bought with donations, and the families were THRILLED! Parents were delighted and the children were so excited. Moms kept saying, "We miss y'all," and "Thank you all so much, we really appreciate you thinking of us." They seemed surprised that someone thought about them stuck in their rooms.

We have reached out by phone to all Playtime families to assess their needs, find out how distance learning is going for their children, and offer emergency referrals where needed.



Photo by Bailey Conard

In fact, our social worker held a series of FaceTime sessions with children, providing extra support as they showed her their homework and excitedly jumped around. One little girl pulled out her goal sheet they had worked on weeks earlier to show the progress she'd made on some simple behavioral goals, such as practicing patience with her younger sister—which she had successfully achieved for an entire day!

Playtime has successfully made the pivot to keep children playing in the confines of their rooms and to break through the isolation to support parents. Thanks to our many donors, our second round of play kits was mailed in early April, directly (to limit exposure) to families we serve. And what started as a list of family activities parents can do in a single room (few materials required) has become a biweekly Parent Survival Guide with more practical tips and resources to call for help. Staff and volunteers have created Virtual Playtime on our YouTube channel with videos of book readings and guided activities for families.

With the help of volunteers recording videos, donors like you funding our play kits, and staff connecting with families, Playtime is committed to ensuring our families feel connected, supported, and loved.

**Please join our #HelpChildrenRise spring campaign to keep the play kits and emergency services coming during this unprecedented national health crisis.**

We hope your family and loved ones are safe and healthy. Thank you for being part of this outstanding Playtime family.

Jamila



Photo by Melanie Hatter

## Help Playtime Win 2 x 25K Matching Grants this Spring

When D.C. schools and Playtime's playrooms first closed in mid-March, Playtime staff visited shelter sites to assess our families' needs and deliver some much-needed comfort in the form of Playtime to Go kits and snacks — all thanks to the support of donors like you.

You play an integral role in our ability to serve children and families in shelter. As the city has been grappling

with stopping the spread of COVID-19, Playtime has been adapting and doing what it can from a distance. Every few weeks, we are distributing play kits and emergency supplies and advocating for needed services and supports to ensure families can stay healthy and on the path to housing stability.

**Help us get a \$25,000 matching grant provided by the Robert I. Schattner Foundation and a second \$25,000**

**matching grant provided by Rachel Renée Russell and Nikki Russell, author and illustrator, respectively, of the #1 New York Times best-selling book series for children, *Dork Diaries*. All contributions will ensure children continue to get the support they need to build resiliency and reduce the stress of homelessness compounded by this health emergency.**



Join our #HelpChildrenRise campaign and get your friends, family, and coworkers involved, too! Create a fundraising page to help support families experiencing homelessness during the pandemic. Your support will ensure that safe and fun play spaces where children in shelters can constructively express emotions, solve problems, develop friendships will continue once the pandemic has passed.



Photo by Melanie Hatter

### #HelpChildrenRise During This Crisis

Here's what to do. Visit [playtimeproject.org/donate/helpchildrenrise.html](https://playtimeproject.org/donate/helpchildrenrise.html) to get started!

#### 1. Create Your Page

Click the "Create a Fundraiser" button and set up your fundraising page. Post a picture of yourself or your team and tell the world why you think supporting play is important to you.

#### 2. Tell Your Friends

Once your fundraising page is done, tell your friends that you want to help raise funds to give safe and fun playtime to children experiencing homelessness in Washington, D.C.

#### 3. Help Children Rise

The money you raise will provide play kits and resources that give children living in temporary housing the chance to reduce stress, develop interpersonal skills, and build resiliency.

If creating a fundraising page isn't feasible for you, **consider making a contribution on May 5 when the nation will join together for #GivingTuesdayNow**, a global day of giving and unity as an emergency response to the unprecedented need caused by COVID-19. As a partner of the United Way of the National Capital Area, Playtime will also participate in the coordinated campaign **#GivingTuesdayDMV**, which is this year's 8th annual Do More 24 event. **Help us raise \$10,000 in 24 hours** (which will go toward our \$25,000 goal) to ensure access to play for hundreds of children experiencing homelessness in D.C. For details, visit: [www.domore24.org/playtimeproject](http://www.domore24.org/playtimeproject).

## DID YOU KNOW...

Researchers estimate an additional 400,000 shelter beds will be needed to address the needs of the U.S. homeless population during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: ProPublica



# Simple Activities When Stuck at Home

With schools and Playtime closed, many families are looking for fun and easy ways to keep children occupied. Here are some ideas we shared with our Playtime families stuck in shelter rooms:

- Take turns telling a story. Parent starts with, "One day, I was walking down the street and saw a flying dragon! She came up to me and said ..." The next person adds a sentence. Keep going around, one sentence per person, until the story is complete.
- Make a gratitude list. Have each family member write out or say all of the good and great things about their life. See how many great things there are.
- Meditate. Breathe in through your nose for 7 seconds and breathe out through your mouth for 11 seconds. Imagine yourself in your favorite place while doing so. Repeat as many times as you like. You can do it together as a family meditation.

Playtime has expanded the parent section on our website to share resources, including our YouTube channel featuring original content created by staff and volunteers to help keep families playing and connected to Playtime. We also are sharing free educational apps with families as we advocate for expanded computer and wi-fi access in all shelter settings.

## Thank You to Our Many Volunteers and Donors!

*Your support provides long-distance play opportunities and emergency support to children experiencing homelessness during this time of crisis and ensures in-person play programs will resume as soon as it is safe.*



**Natalia Oster**, 10, donated profits from the sale of her hand-sewn utensil holders (complete with bamboo utensils). She and her mom Nicole stopped by our office in February to drop off the check to Development

Director Brandi Stanton (pictured center). Natalia's \$150 gift made a difference for some of D.C.'s most vulnerable children.

**Diamond Press** and **Beth Kingston** of **The Kingston Home** held their first eBay auction for charity and selected Playtime as the recipient. The auction raised \$854.

**F**ourth graders and parents from **Adas Israel Congregation** assembled snack packs for children living in our partner shelters across D.C. Playtime provides a healthy snack at the end of every play session and greatly appreciates snack donations. If you'd like to assemble snack packs for Playtime kids when our programs are back in action, contact Rebecca at [info@playtimeproject.org](mailto:info@playtimeproject.org).

**M**any thanks to our **group volunteers** for January-March: **YouthBuild Public Charter School** and **U.S. Navy/Andrews Air Force Base**.

**W**e are deeply grateful and thrilled to have received the following grants in recent weeks:

- The **Robert I. Schattner Foundation** and two of our donors and former volunteers, **Rachel Renée Russell** and **Nikki Russell**, each offered a \$25,000 matching grant for our spring campaign. Rachel and Nikki are author and illustrator, respectively, of the #1 New York Times best-selling book series for children, *Dork Diaries*.
- **Tomberg Family Philanthropies** provided a \$10,000 grant in support of Playtime and our partnership with My Sister's Place. During this unprecedented time, their grant ensures that children living in D.C.'s oldest domestic violence shelter will continue to benefit from the healing power of play.
- **Congressional Sports for Charity** gave a \$5,000 grant to help us distribute play kits and supplies to families living in our partner shelter sites.



Text "Playtime" to 44-321 to donate now!

Your continued support helps to cultivate resilience in children experiencing family homelessness by providing and expanding access to transformative play experiences.

**Thank you for making play possible.**

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