



From the story
to the dream:
London Children's Museum

IMAGINE...

A place for experiential learning.
A place for play and possibilities.
A place for all.



Best Country Girls' Club

BOYS
WELCOME!

A photograph of three children in a playhouse. A sign above the entrance reads "Best Country Girls' Club" and "BOYS WELCOME!". A girl on the left points towards the camera, a boy in the middle looks on, and a girl on the right looks through a telescope. The text "THE STORY" is overlaid in large, blue, hand-drawn letters with a white outline and red wavy lines above and below it.

THE STORY

~ THE STORY ~

Where Children Gather to Learn and Grow

The London Children's Museum is a uniquely innovative childhood development resource that fosters creative learning and the excitement of discovery through play. It has been in the community, and in Londoners' lives, for over 35 years. It's where families go to dream and play, and where children gather to learn and grow.

Every year, the Children's Museum provides approximately 90,000 children and their families the chance to make memories that last a lifetime. Children who visit learn how the world works, who they are, and who they might become through play. Exhibits and stimulating learning experiences allow them to explore their history and heritage, investigate the complexities of science and social relationships, and celebrate the beauty in art and culture. The Children's Museum helps them indulge their curiosity and play their way to a life of innovation and creative discovery.

A Time for Change

After 30 years in the same location, the beloved building of the Children's Museum has seen a lot of play. If its walls could talk, it would tell you about the beautiful laughter, the play, and the learning. It would tell you about the imaginative crafts, the camps, and the events. It would tell you about the extraordinary exhibits, the staff, and the families.

It would also tell you about the challenges, and that over the years, it's seen a lot of wear. It would tell you about the maintenance needs and the cost of running the building, along with the limitations it imposes on new exhibits, programs, and activities. The current space inhibits the ability to create new, dynamic content that appeals to and aligns with the needs of today's children and families.

This transition of moving locations is key to the future success of the Children's Museum. While the essence of the Children's Museum will remain the same, it's time to re-imagine a new space, a new dream, and a new future.

This vision, and a bold new direction, will ensure more interactive play, up-to-date exhibits and shared spaces that foster a community of innovation where all children can learn, connect and grow through play.

Community Support

The Children's Museum asked Londoners to help them re-imagine their future and over 350 people responded with their ideas, hopes and dreams. Their support and enthusiasm was apparent in wanting to make the Children's Museum a state-of-the-art cultural and educational destination for children and families. Key themes were apparent in their feedback, including wanting the Children's Museum to be:

A place for experiential learning. A space offering unique experiences of interactive learning (including hands-on, technology-enhanced exhibits) that nurtures curiosity, builds knowledge and fuels imagination.

A place for play and possibilities. A space filled with places to explore, examine, learn and discover. A place where children can learn about science, technology, art, music, history and nature through hands on, interactive exhibits.

A place for all. A space providing a welcoming environment for children and families of all abilities and backgrounds, acting as a community hub. A gathering place where children can experience the diversity of our city and a vital resource for schools with supporting classroom curricula.





THE VISION

~ THE VISION ~

In order to realize the vision of the community, the Children's Museum needs to be a place to explore and discover for children and families! Permanent galleries and travelling exhibits, hands-on activities and interactive programs will entice and engage children, making it a unique place that brings together children, families and communities for meaningful interaction. Key themes to make the new Children's Museum a reality include:

Play-Based Learning - through interactive exhibits and hands-on activities, children will be encouraged to learn the way experts have said they learn best, through play. Exhibits will be designed to engage families through creative exploration resulting in foundational learning.

Inquisitive Minds - exhibits focused on scientific exploration will build on children's innate curiosity. Children will be inspired to test, question and hypothesize, and investigate the world around them.

Cultural Connections - children will explore the world through exhibits focused on the past, present and future. Children will be exposed to the diversity of the people, places and things that exist not only in London, but around the world.

Creative Expression - through a focus on creative expression, the Children's Museum will encourage children to communicate and engage through the arts. Exposure to visual arts, music, movement, theatre and literature will support early brain development and ignite creativity.

A new central location, with approximately 30,000 - 45,000 square feet of space, will accommodate current, new and travelling exhibits. With improved exhibits, children and families will have a richer experience in the new space. Current exhibits and interactive spaces will be integrated into the new space while opportunities for fresh displays and travelling exhibits will be easily accommodated. In considering new and travelling exhibits, they will be:

- designed with children, parents and educators in mind;
- created by industry experts;
- built by local artists and craftspeople, where appropriate; and
- evaluated to meet age-appropriate cognitive, emotional, and social skills.

Flexible and modular designs will ensure that children and parents can explore the Children's Museum many times over, always discovering something new through self-directed and facilitated (by volunteers or staff) experiences.

Finding the optimal site is a critical task for the Children's Museum. The following criteria will be considered for a new location, including:

- an interior building space that accommodates current operations and the opportunities for future growth;
- opportunities for outdoor play and learning activities;
- easy access to parking;
- space for school bus drop off;
- proximity to a bus route;
- a loading dock that can accommodate travelling exhibits; and
- low overhead fees and costs to support the long-term sustainability of the Children's Museum.





A NEW DIRECTION

~ A NEW DIRECTION ~

Setting a new direction for the Children's Museum requires commitment and support from the community. In August 2013, the Children's Museum set in motion a seven-stage plan to engage with audiences (including children, parents, educators, community stakeholders, staff, board members, and the general public) to hear their dreams, aspirations and hopes for the future of the Children's Museum. Currently at stage five of the plan, the Children's Museum continues to require support from both the City of London and the community in order to reach its dream.

Our Strategic Visioning Process



Children's Museum Case for Support

Stage One: Launch – the Children's Museum hosted an event that brought together donors, partners and community members to hear about upcoming changes and the strategic visioning process.

Stage Two: Community Engagement – over 350 children, youth, parents, educators, donors, community partners and community members shared their ideas, strategies and dreams for the Children's Museum through insight surveys (online and in-print survey available for a month), dream camps (six hour-long events, hosted by a facilitator), community connections (third-party locations meant to engage with community members that may not have visited the Children's Museum).

Stage Three: Research & Scan – discussions with other Children's Museums globally provided insight into sustainability and service excellence. This stage also included research on local, social and economic trends.

Stage Four: Analysis - feedback from stages two and three were analyzed to identify key themes, patterns and insights.

Stage Five: Decision-Making - using the information gathered and analyzed from stage one - four, decisions about the future of the Children's Museum will be made.

Stage Six: Business Planning – decisions will translate into a plan for the next phases of our journey towards a new Children's Museum. Each phase in the journey will have strategic work plans associated with it for the next 2 - 4 years, however children and parents will see new things happening at the Children's Museum immediately, long before there is a new space and location.

Stage Seven: Reporting To The Community – reporting back to the community to outline key themes gathered from stage two and the next steps moving forward.



A young boy with brown hair, wearing a camouflage t-shirt, a white and black baseball cap, and blue sneakers, is looking upwards with a curious expression. He is standing in a brightly lit museum or children's center. To his left is a tall, yellow, textured vertical structure. In the foreground, there is a large, light blue, rectangular interactive display table. The background shows other museum exhibits, including a blue railing and a person in a black shirt walking away. The overall atmosphere is educational and engaging.

THE IMPACT

~ THE IMPACT ~

Helping London Thrive

The Children's Museum is an essential thread in London's economic, cultural and community fabric. Tourism, spending, jobs, culture and community partnerships all see measurable, positive impact from the Children's Museum, for all Londoners. And with a sustainable future, the Children's Museum will be able to continue and build upon all of these things as an innovative and integral part of the community.

Economic Impact

CURRENT:

Londoners often choose to visit the Children's Museum instead of attractions in other cities, **retaining their spending** in our city.

The Children's Museum is a gateway to London for children and families who don't live here. In fact, 46% of Children's Museum visitors are from outside of the City of London. These **tourists have a direct impact on local businesses** thanks to their visits to local restaurants, hotels, stores and other venues.

The Children's Museum offers **meaningful employment, internships, co-operative education placements and volunteer opportunities for a wide range of skills**. With 8 full-time staff, 19 part-time and seasonal staff, the Children's Museum is also supported by more than 150 active volunteers.

Just under **\$1,000,000 is annually contributed to the local economy** through direct operational expenditures.

FUTURE:

The new Children's Museum will increase all of these economic outcomes because the number of visitors will grow (locally, regionally and beyond), there will be more opportunity for employment and volunteer roles, and there will be an increase in direct operational expenditures.



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A Cultural Cornerstone

CURRENT:

The London Children's Museum was **the first in Canada and is one of only six across the country today**. It is a testament to London-born creativity, innovation and perseverance. The Children's Museum is a vibrant cultural attraction that adds value to our community, helping to make London a great place to live, work and play and is **key to attracting and retaining 25-44 year olds and their children to London**.

FUTURE:

The re-imagined Children's Museum will be at the heart of the arts, cultural and education community continuing to build a foundation for creativity and play; nurturing and inspiring children. Through the hands-on exploration of the exhibits and galleries, educational programs and self-guided visits, children learn, connect, grow, play and develop a deeper understanding of their world. This will be **a cornerstone in attracting and retaining families in London, contributing to the creation of a vibrant and diverse community**.

An Education for All

CURRENT:

The first years of life are essential to future learning and when children visit the Children's Museum, they are excited to learn. The Children's Museum nurtures creativity in a supportive environment. The **informal learning environment of science, math, heritage, culture, arts and humanities transcend age, ability and experience, and empower children to set their own pace**.

By exposing adults and children to unfamiliar concepts through a welcoming, hands-on approach, and ensuring that the museum experience is accessible to those of differing abilities and backgrounds, the Children's Museum creates **bridges of understanding**.

FUTURE:

Future: The new Children's Museum will be focused on impact for all of London's children. Children will learn and grow through play, through various programs, and through an expected increase in museum-based programming in the community.

Bringing People Together

CURRENT:

The Children's Museum is **open and accessible to all** London families. For those families in difficult financial situations, access to free and subsidized memberships are available through partnerships with Ontario Works, the Salvation Army, women's and family shelters. Further, any resident of the City of London can apply for a subsidized membership.

By **eliminating the financial barrier to participation, children from all across London are inspired**, have the freedom to explore their interests and skills, are inspired to pursue their education and to set goals for their future - ultimately helping to break the cycle of poverty.

FUTURE:

As a place for children and families, the new Children's Museum will serve even deeper as a community hub, engaging families and the community to share their talents and points-of-view further supporting and advancing London.



Partnering With Schools and Community Organizations

CURRENT:

Navigating the leap from the intimate learning experiences of family, friends and neighbours to the focused curriculum of the school can be challenging for children. Through partnerships, the Children's Museum **creates a bridge** between these two environments by designing programs rooted in educational pedagogy.

Collaborations with schools and community organizations that support and provide services for children and families are key to this success. In partnership with local schools, the Children's Museum designs classroom and museum activities that align with provincial curriculum. The Children's Museum will also partner with educators to complement lesson plans and support childhood learning. This symbiotic relationship means that educators bring museum resources to the classroom or they can bring students to the Children's Museum.

Strong collaborations with community organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club, the Children's Aid Society, Ontario Early Years Centres, London Public Library, Merrymount Children's Centre, Women's Community House, Cross Cultural Learner Centre, The Salvation Army, Neighbourhood Family Centres and many more are currently in place and thriving.

FUTURE:

Partners will be invited to connect with the Children's Museum. The new Children's Museum will also actively seek out innovative and collaborative opportunities to strengthen community connections.

Sustainability

CURRENT:

Building sustainability is a core focus of the Children's Museum. The profits from the sale of the current building will be invested into the new Children's Museum. A capital fundraising campaign will be launched, private and family foundations, all levels of government support and corporate and individual sponsorship will be explored. Finally, in-kind donations, grant funding, and exhibit sponsorships will round out the **comprehensive fund development strategy**.

FUTURE:

The new Children's Museum will be sustained through **diverse revenue streams**: admissions, memberships, special events, donations, sponsorships, endowments, social enterprise initiatives, program fees, facility rentals, third-party fundraising and gift shop sales.



THE DREAM

~ THE DREAM ~

The Children's Museum is committed to implementing a plan for the future and is moving forward. During this time of major transformation, transition and re-imagination for the Children's Museum, a strategic focus is necessary to implement the dream, and to continue to serve the community for another 35+ years. **It is the hope of the Children's Museum that the City of London, along with the community, will support the vision of the new Children's Museum.**

It is not possible to reach this dream alone. Support from the City of London is needed, and an investment will demonstrate to the community that the City believes in the future of the Children's Museum. In turn, the Children's Museum will be able to leverage this investment to secure future investments from donors, sponsors and other levels of Government.

The investment in the Children's Museum from the City of London will:

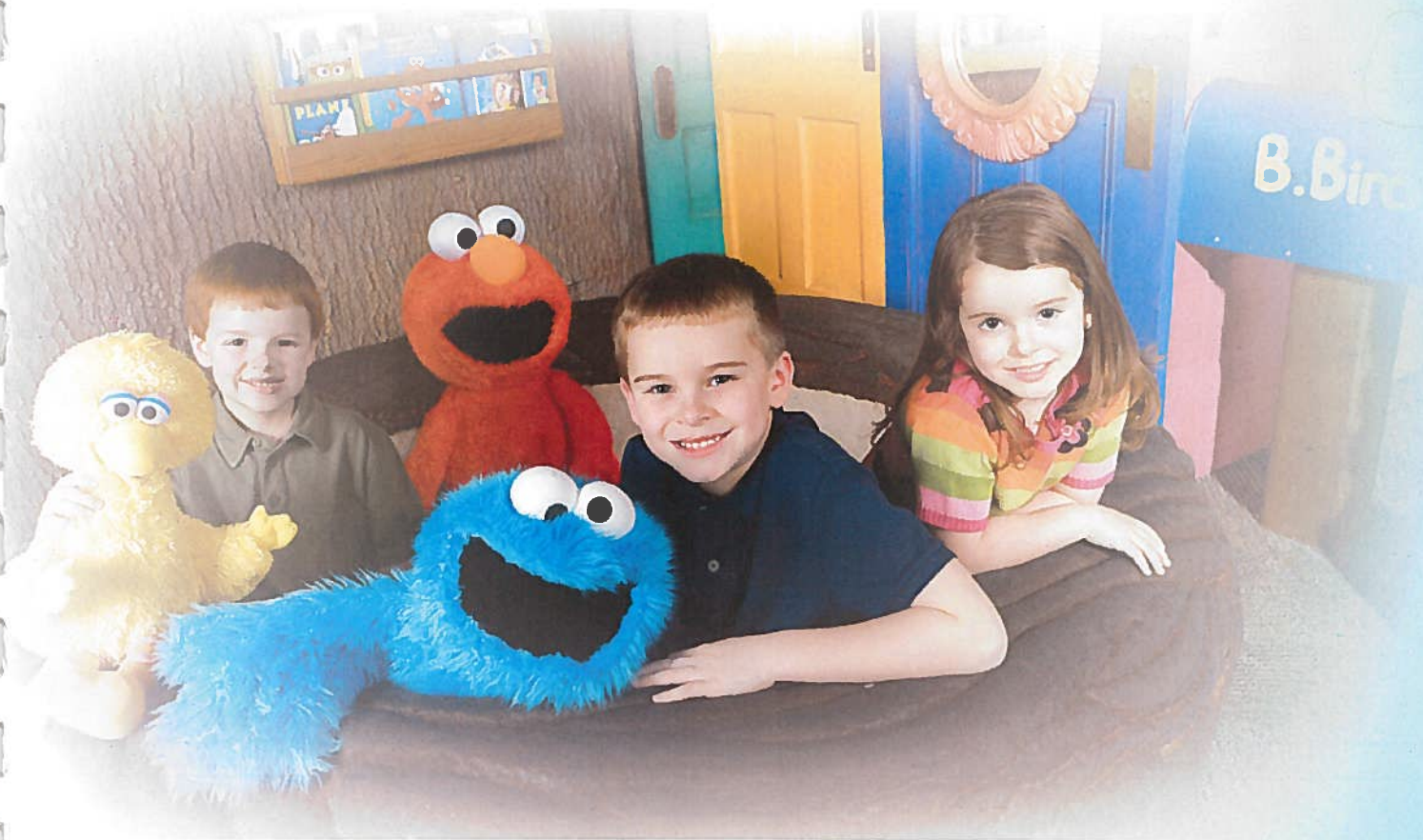
- elevate the City of London's profile and build the reputation as a city rich in creativity and innovation;
- support the City of London's drive to revitalize the downtown core;
- position the Children's Museum as a leader in science, arts, heritage and educational experiences for children;
- raise awareness of the Children's Museum and its programs for families;
- enhance the Children's Museum's ability to contribute to London's economy;
- advance the Children's Museum's ability to serve London's diverse community;
- breathe new life across the organization helping to build the framework for development and knowledge that this generation of children will need in becoming future leaders of our community; and
- provide unique opportunities that make London a great place to live, work and play.



It is time to take the dreams of the community and make them a reality. The following road map highlights key stages in the strategic plan for the next three to four years:



During the time of transition, the focus of the Children's Museum is to let the community know that they are open for business and encourage families to continue to visit. Through outreach programming, the Children's Museum will be taken into the community so that even more children and families can experience interactive play and learning. Re-imagining the future and focusing on sustainability means changes to how services and programs are delivered so that relevance now and in the future is retained.



Investment from the City of London will help create an innovative, resilient, sustainable organization that will serve children and families for years to come, and is foundational for the Children's Museum's future success.



THE TEAM

~ THE TEAM ~

The Children's Museum is led by a passionate and experienced board and staff team who deeply believe in the power of play for children, learning and community impact. The Board of Directors, made up of educators, professionals, and parents, is led by newly-elected President Natalie Spoozak whose 10 plus years on the board gives her the insight and knowledge to lead the Children's Museum into this next phase.

The Children's Museum is fortunate to have a dedicated staff team led by Executive Director Amanda Conlon. With 10 years of service with the Children's Museum, post-secondary education in educational pedagogy, and a collaborative approach, Amanda is a strong, committed leader who is passionate about the new direction of the Children's Museum.

Board of Directors

- **Natalie Spoozak, President**
Business development, publishing, sales and marketing professional, with LightBulb Ventures and Brands in Balance
- **Megan Winkler, Vice-President**
Director of Community Engagement, Brain Tumour Foundation of Canada
- **Drew Forret, Treasurer**
Chief Financial Officer, CarProof
- **Ryan Warren, Secretary**
Lawyer, Szemenyei Mackenzie Group Law Firm LLP
- **Carol Johnston, Founder and Honorary Chair**
President, Creative Learning Group
- **Alison Hannay, Director**
Principal, Cornerstone Architecture Incorporated
- **Angie Kehoe, Director**
Law Clerk, Siskinds LLP
- **Greg Marshall, Director**
Teacher, Thames Valley District School Board
- **Stephane Ouellet, Director**
Director of Clinical Operations and Human Resources, Thames Valley Family Health Team
- **Kerry L. Robbins, Director**
Vice President, Sales Support, Retail Strategy & Solutions Group, TD Bank

Senior Leaders

- **Amanda Conlon, Executive Director**
- **Kirsti Cheese, Director of Operations**
- **Linda Leja, Director of Development**
- **Nicole Puchala, Controller**

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Photos courtesy of the Manitoba Children's Museum and the Strong National Museum of Play.