



Playful learning delivers smiles across the United States

Carnegie Mellon University’s (CMU) rollout of Brick Clubs boosts confidence, communication skills and wellbeing for 800 young people across diverse learning environments. And that number continues to grow.

The challenge

The Covid pandemic gave the Extension and Engagement team at CMU’s Entertainment Technology Center an opportunity to pause and reimagine what community outreach could look like. They wanted to find new experiences to help young people develop pride, confidence and improve communication skills. Any solutions had to be rooted in play, grounded in evidence and scalable across a wide variety of learning environments. Initial searches were disappointing: none of the offerings were designed specifically to support neurodivergent youngsters and most fell short on at least one of the key pillars of playful learning. Then a colleague introduced Play Included and the Brick-by-Brick programme.

Support provided

Funded by local foundations, sponsorship and using internal resources, the team began rolling out Play Included’s Brick-by-Brick programme, which creates meaningful, positive social experiences for children and young people through collaborative LEGO® play. Over three years, more than 200 people were trained to facilitate Brick Clubs: motivated by a shared belief in the power of playful learning.

Impact

Since launching, the programme has delivered remarkable results. Young people attending subsequent Brick Clubs have blossomed, developing confidence, stronger communication skills and greater social wellbeing. There have also been reports of positive development in fine and gross motor skills. The number of Brick Clubs attendees ranges from three to 20 young people: with multiple sessions on offer and many clubs following the suggested 14-week structure on a continuous basis. Thanks to the programme, CMU has created a playful learning ecosystem that champions Brick Clubs across in- and out-of-school settings throughout the United States. Facilitators continue to engage and expand the programme with Brick Clubs popping up in different environments from museums to university classrooms.



“Play Included has been a true partner throughout this journey – helpful from day one and mentoring our team through every stage. The training is top-notch; implementation is straightforward; and the programme delivers impressive results. Some of the most rewarding moments come from parents and educators sharing their love of local Brick Clubs, without realising they are speaking to team members. The smiles and continued joy – of young people and facilitators – are a constant reminder of why this work matters. Their creativity and inherent ability to play shine through in every session.”

- John Balash - Director of Academic Outreach, Extension and Engagement Entertainment Technology Center, Carnegie Mellon University

“With the Brick-by-Brick programme, you’ll quickly see smiles. Smiles because it’s fun and because there’s learning happening. That’s the power of play.”

- John Balash

