



2021

Annual Report



A Message from KABOOM! CEO and Board Chair

For more than twenty-five years, KABOOM! has worked alongside communities to build amazing places to play. The importance of this work has always been clear: playgrounds are one of the few public spaces designed specifically for kids, and are an essential tool for fostering not only their health and well-being, but also a sense of belonging within their community.

But in recent years, our mission has become more relevant and urgent than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic upended life for kids all around the country, exacerbating existing disparities in communities of color, which have been denied access to adequate healthcare, educational facilities, and recreational infrastructure — like playgrounds. At the same time, a nationwide racial reckoning underlined the importance of ensuring that every kid has access to safe community spaces where they can feel a sense of belonging.

With these monumental moments in mind, KABOOM! spent 2021 laying the groundwork to drive positive systemic change in the coming years. This foundation includes significant

work across our five strategy areas: scaling our measurement and evaluation and mapping work for data-informed decision making, expanding our policy work at all levels, focusing our thought leadership efforts, strengthening national, regional, and local capacity to address playspace inequity, and building out our ability to evaluate our impact.

This work culminated in the launch of our 25 in 5 Initiative to End Playspace Inequity in January 2022, on the heels of a \$14 million gift from MacKenzie Scott and Dan Jewett. This gift is the first significant funding to accelerate progress towards the goals of the 25 in 5 Initiative. It took focus, creativity, and a network of committed partners to pave the path for this \$250 million, five-year initiative to end playspace inequity in twenty-five high-priority places across the country. Looking ahead to the next five years, our organization will be challenged to change, learn, and adapt on the way to achieving our bold goal. But meeting those challenges head-on will be well worth it — together, we'll lay the roadmap to end playspace inequity for good.



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lysa".

Lysa Ratliff
CEO



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jake Siewert".

Jake Siewert
Board Chair

Making 2021 Count!



137,755

kids impacted



3,318

volunteers engaged



61

playspaces created
or improved



Community Playspaces

Communities lie at the heart of our work and mission at KABOOM!. In 2021, we rolled out a refined community engagement approach, which pairs our 25 years of leadership in playspace infrastructure with our partner communities' expertise in what their new playspace should look like and what purpose it should serve. Over the course of the year, we partnered with 61 communities to create playspaces that reflect their unique values, cultures, and goals. By emphasizing trust and collaboration with our partner communities, we aim to ensure that each KABOOM! playground addresses playspace inequity on the neighborhood level and contributes to a stronger, more cohesive community in the long-term.



Volunteers Return to the First Playspace Project at Franklin Elementary

After a year of professional playground installations due to COVID-19 safety protocols, KABOOM! returned to bringing the community together to complete an amazing new playground, multi-sport court, sensory garden, and mural at Oakland's Franklin Elementary School, one of the city's most diverse schools. Prior to the project, more than 285 local parents actively advocated for help in updating the outdated facilities at Franklin, creating a better place for their kids to play.

Volunteer representatives from the community, Stephen and Ayesha Curry's Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation, and The CarMax Foundation helped to bring this enhanced schoolyard to life, complete with an inspirational custom mural. The result is a holistic outdoor space that sparks joy while also bolstering Franklin's mission of educating the whole child.

“

They can feel inspired and they can believe in themselves. The community has spoken really loudly that we believe in them.”

- **LUSA LAI**, PRINCIPAL, FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



COMMUNITY PLAYSPACES

The Metamorphosis of Butterfly Park

All through decades of disinvestment and segregation in Milwaukee's Metcalfe Park neighborhood, community leaders advocated for local families who needed a safe place where kids could play. These efforts bore fruit in 2021, when Metcalfe Park Community Bridges partnered with KABOOM!, The CarMax Foundation, and the City of Milwaukee to bring together the community to envision a new playspace for neighborhood kids. The new community-led, kid-designed playspace shows kids that they matter and their hopes and dreams are possible. The playground is more than just an amazing place to play – it's a reflection of a resilient and connected community.

Binational Playground in Brownsville, TX

Monte Bella Park in Brownsville reflects the distinct personality and characteristics of community members, many of whom identify as binational and bicultural. The community felt it was important as they sought for more play opportunities for kids, that they ensured the culture was represented well. More than 700 community members contributed to the design and creation of this unique playspace, alongside KABOOM!, the City of Brownsville, United Way of Southern Cameron County, RGV Focus, and StriveTogether. The new playground incorporates elements of Mexican culture, as well as play components that will help the City address its specific goals around bettering its culture of health. The playground expands access to play in the area, which previously did not have a playground for several miles.



Driving Kid and Community Impact

We know that playgrounds are more than a place to have fun – they are critical public infrastructure with the power to reflect a community’s culture and history, and to mark measurable progress toward community-defined outcomes. We strive for each KABOOM! playground to tangibly lead to better futures for kids, and to support our partner communities in addressing other critical, long-term needs that they face.





DRIVING KID AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Lifting Teen Voices in Rochester, NY

KABOOM! came together with Common Ground Health, Connected Communities, ROC the Future, the City of Rochester, and StriveTogether to create a new adventure course where teens can challenge themselves, have fun with peers, and feel like they belong. A prior mapping project led by Common Ground Health identified “play deserts” across Rochester, with Grand Avenue Park in the Beechwood neighborhood as a prime candidate for a new playspace to serve teens and help address playspace inequity.

With teens themselves at the helm of the design and community engagement process, the project supported the community-defined goal of fostering team leadership and transformed Grand Avenue Park into a multigenerational gathering place that contributes to a thriving, healthy community.

Expanding Access to Nature Play in San Francisco, CA

Play and exposure to nature are vital for children's emotional, social, and physical health, but too often access to nature is correlated with race and economic status. To improve access to nature play in communities experiencing disinvestment, KABOOM! came together with the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department, the Port of San Francisco, Kaiser Permanente, San Francisco Children and Nature, and Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds to create the City's largest-ever Nature Exploration Area. Sourced from all-natural materials, the new playspace cultivates imagination, risk negotiation, and teamwork.



In November 2021, the Nature Exploration Area won a UNICEF Cities Inspire Award, which recognizes projects across the globe that foster child rights at the local level and improve the daily lives of children and young people in cities and communities where they live.



Ending Playspace Inequity at Scale

Kids' futures are deeply connected to the spaces where they gather, learn, and play. Decades of research demonstrates the positive impact of play on children's physical, socio-emotional health, and learning outcomes. However, many cities, school districts, park systems, and neighborhoods lack the resources to create dedicated spaces intentionally designed to spark these outcomes for kids. In 2021, KABOOM! built and expanded critical partnerships at the community, regional, and state levels, laying the groundwork to end playspace inequity not just at the community level, but also across systems that provide critical resources for kids' well-being.





ENDING PLAYSPACE INEQUITY AT SCALE

“Raising the Bar” in El Paso, TX

KABOOM! is partnering with the County of El Paso, TX to address inequitable access to recreation and open spaces in six parks. Residents across the largely rural county have limited access to amenities and community infrastructure, including parks and playgrounds. Thanks to a \$1.3 million grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the partnership will update parks with five multi-sport courts, three adventure courses, and two ADA-accessible playgrounds in an effort to meet the community’s need for updated playspaces, especially as park usage continues to rise during the pandemic.

“ We want to raise the bar so that no matter your race or income, whether you’re in the city or county, you will have access to quality parks and amenities.”

- **VERONICA MYERS**, DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION, EL PASO COUNTY

Turning Everyday Places into Playspaces



While a playground can provide a joyful oasis, play must be accessible where kids and caregivers already spend time. Play Everywhere transforms everyday places – laundromats, grocery stores, sidewalks, bus stops – into stimulating, creative outlets for play. Children spend 80% of their time outside of school, but many neighborhoods lack opportunities for play and informal learning outside of the classroom because of systemic disinvestment. In 2021, alongside our partners, KABOOM! supported the launch and implementation of city and region-wide competitions to expand access to high-quality, culturally relevant playspaces on a broader scale.



In partnership with the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation's Built to Play Initiative, KABOOM! launched the third Play Everywhere Design Challenge in July 2020. Winners announced in 2021 have begun to unveil their finished playspaces – from a Playful Dragon, to inclusive nature play at the Autism Nature Trail – all of which contribute to equitable opportunities for active play.



In October 2020, KABOOM! announced the 16 winners of the first-ever Play Everywhere Philly grant competition, funded by the William Penn Foundation. Installations completed in 2021 such as Play Mobile – a pop-up play kit for use at the City's parks and recreation centers – support child development and literacy skills for kids living in Philadelphia.

Building Municipal Partnerships to End Playspace Inequity

Municipal partnerships are critical to our ability to work across a system, advancing our efforts to address playspace equity at scale. KABOOM! is partnering with The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Department of Parks and Recreation, Prince George's County, and community leaders to address playspace inequity in Prince George's County, Maryland, by building or improving six new playspaces by 2023. With Sparks@Play leading site preparation and installation, the partnership completed two new playspaces in 2021, providing equitable access to play for more than 1,600 kids across the County.

At Bladensburg Community Center, Monumental Sports & Entertainment Foundation supported the creation of a vibrant new playground, as well as a sports-themed mural by artists Isak Shah and Darren Soto. Washington Capitals player Garnet Hathaway also joined community kids for Design Day, when they shared drawings of their dream playgrounds, which KABOOM! incorporated into the final design.

At Suitland Community Center, kids in the STEAM-themed summer camp contributed designs for a multi-sport court featuring basketball, volleyball, football, a gaga pit, and a playground, all connected by moonwalk sidewalk art by artist Brandon Donahue. The new playspace was completed in October with support from BGE and Pepco.



Data-Driven Decision-Making for Impact

To end playspace inequity, we must understand how and why Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and low-income communities disproportionately lack access to high-quality, inclusive playspaces. However, most cities in the United States do not have a data-informed understanding of the access and quality of playspaces across their municipal systems. KABOOM! expanded our capacity in measurement and evaluation to help guide decision-making, implementing a data-informed, community-centered approach to understanding playspace access and quality.

This work has laid the groundwork to build a national data platform that is enabling us to leverage data to drive targeted investment support in play infrastructure. City by city, system by system, we are knocking down the barriers that hinder equitable access to playspaces across the country.



KABOOM! Launches Playspace Mapping Program in Colorado

In December, KABOOM! announced a new community-informed research effort to map playspace inequity in three Colorado communities, in partnership with The Colorado Health Foundation, researchers, and community members. The 18-month program aims to inform and catalyze investments to close racial and economic gaps in access to quality spaces to play. The first phase of the program will gather data on the location and quality of existing playspaces in the East Colfax Corridor, Otero County, and Rio Grande County. Together with Jing-Huei Huang and Aaron Hipp, our accredited partners from the North Carolina State University research team, we published a literature review of papers, reports, and other academic sources that illuminated trends in playspace equity both nationally and in Colorado.

Following this phase, the partnership will overlay racial, economic, and public health data to create community profiles for each region that outline key learnings and actionable recommendations. KABOOM! is also partnering with Streetwyze and local advisors to understand each community's unique needs and make recommendations for responsive, culturally-relevant playspace investments. This body of work is a monumental step forward in our ability to lead research that guides informed decision-making by funders to drive community solutions and impact.

Our Mapping in Action



Introducing the mySidewalk Playspace Partnership Assessment

KABOOM! worked with mySidewalk to create an interactive, web-based report that highlights communities meeting KABOOM! playspace equity criteria, including areas with a high density of people of color, a high child dependency ratio, and a low median household income. The report offers a data-guided approach to drive decision-making about where and when to build playgrounds. Through this partnership, mySidewalk subscribers can use the company's data storytelling platform to leverage these reports publicly for coalition building and advocacy. [LEARN MORE](#)



Mapping for Playspace Equity in Colorado with OpenStreetMap

In 2021, KABOOM! launched a partnership with OpenStreetMap US to ask for support in mapping playgrounds in Rio Grande and Otero counties and the East Colfax Corridor in an effort to identify and communicate local community needs for playspaces. This supports our continued efforts to expand playspace equity in rural Colorado alongside The Colorado Health Foundation. OpenStreetMap is a free, editable map of the world that is being built by volunteers largely from scratch and released with an open-content license. [LEARN MORE](#)

Following the mapping campaign, 1,712 park & playspace features were mapped in Colorado project areas including:

- 326 playgrounds
- 168 parks
- 351 individual playground components
- 427 sports fields & pitches



Public Policy & Advocacy

In 2021, KABOOM! continued to expand our policy work at the federal, state, and local levels, mobilizing support for critical bills and policies that advance playspace equity. We work with NGOs, companies, and all levels of government to fund playspaces for kids that need these spaces most. This means making sure that lawmakers understand the importance of playspaces, effective distribution of federal funding to outdoor spaces, and ensuring local government officials have the resources to utilize this funding. This all-in approach means that we are consistently telling our story and elevating this important issue across all levels of government.

We also know that we cannot do this work alone. We work closely with fellow nonprofits, local governments, and companies to advocate for shared goals. In DC, we believe it is vital that lawmakers hear from a diverse group of stakeholders on the importance of racial equity, access to the outdoors, and health and wellness of children when crafting policy. Working across several influential coalitions, we are able to elevate our message and reach an even broader audience.



Playspaces as Infrastructure

Co-founded by KABOOM! and Independent Sector, the Nonprofit Infrastructure Investment Advocacy Group (NIIAG) entered its second year of engaging our diverse group of leaders from across the charitable nonprofit sector to identify and advocate for the essential federal investments needed to rebuild the nation in the wake of the pandemic, the economic crisis, and racial injustice and inequity. The coalition, 70 organizations strong, notched significant victories in the American Rescue Plan Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, while also mobilizing around the ongoing Build Back Better debate. NIIAG co-chairs, KABOOM! CEO, Lysa Ratliff and Independent Sector CEO, Daniel J. Cardinelli, attended the White House signing of the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, a victory for nonprofits and communities across the country.

2021 POLICY SUCCESSES



- \$100 million for local parks in the House-passed version of the Build Back Better Act.
- House passage of the Outdoors for All Act, which would formalize the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program. This program directs Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars to local parks in underserved communities.
- Worked with partners to secure a record \$150 million in annual funding for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program.
- Active participant in multiple national coalitions, including Nonprofit Infrastructure Investment Advocacy Group, Urban Parks Coalition, Percent for Place, and Build America's School Infrastructure Coalition (BASIC).

Cultivating Champions

With an endless number of competing issues in DC, building champions that will fight for playspaces can be difficult. However, we were proud to work with elected officials that are fighting every day for increased access to local parks. U.S. Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA) is one example of a true champion for local parks, and his office celebrated the ribbon cutting of our nature exploration area in Heron's Head Park in San Francisco. By sharing local examples of the importance of access to play, we are continuing to build greater support within Congress and the White House for this important issue.

CROSS-SECTOR VISIBILITY



Re-emerging from COVID-19: Why children and cities need play now more than ever

Panel Conversation with Lysa Ratliff
The Brookings Institute

[**READ MORE**](#)



How one nonprofit is ensuring that diversity and inclusion are informing the way we create and establish play spaces around our country

Interview with Lysa Ratliff Nonprofit
Leadership Podcast

[**READ MORE**](#)



Why Investing in Play Must Be Part of COVID Recovery

Ronda Jackson Meeting of the Minds

[**READ MORE**](#)

KABOOM! Culture

In 2021, as KABOOM! reached our 25th anniversary, we continued to navigate the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and a nationwide racial reckoning alongside our partners and communities. It is important to us that we continue to acknowledge the role of systemic racism in determining access to basic rights and resources, including safe places to play. As we convened committed communities and partners around our mission to end playspace inequity for good, we ensure our work is centered around racial equity and communities guiding how we work together to impact the lives of kids.



Our Commitment to Racial Equity and Belonging

The talented and passionate staff at KABOOM!, affectionately called “Boomers,” are the heart of what we do. We work together across teams to advance our mission to end playspace inequity, guided by these core values:

- PARTNERSHIP
- HUMILITY
- EQUITY
- PLAY
- ACCOUNTABILITY

As part of our ongoing commitment to racial equity and belonging, three Employee Resource Groups, the LGBTQIA+ Group, Black Boomer Caucus, and White Anti-Racist Group provided employees with opportunities to engage with issues both internal and external to KABOOM!, and served as a space for people with aligned identities to connect and learn together, supporting efforts to advance our mission.

KABOOM! also provided numerous opportunities for continued learning through lunch and learn discussions organized by the Equity and Belonging Committee. These interactive discussions were led by a series of creative leaders working on aspects of youth justice, community healing, belonging, racial justice, and LGBTQ+ inclusion.



KABOOM! Partner Milestones

As KABOOM! turned 25, we also celebrated significant milestones with our partners. Thank you to Colorado Health, UnitedHealthcare, The CarMax Foundation, and Discover for your ongoing commitment to ensuring every kid has an amazing place to play.



THE COLORADO
HEALTH FOUNDATION

25
BUILDS



UNITEDHEALTHCARE

50
BUILDS



THE CARMAX FOUNDATION

150
BUILDS



DISCOVER

25
YEARS

Partners

LEADERSHIP

The CarMax Foundation
The Colorado Health Foundation
The William Penn Foundation

PARTNER IN PLAY

AbbVie Foundation
Amway
Baltimore Gas and Electric Company & PEPCO
Battelle
Casetagram Limited
City of Akron, OH
The Cleveland Foundation
E*Trade Financial (etrade)
Eat. Learn. Play. Foundation
Edwards Lifesciences Corporation
Fiesta Bowl Charities
GAR Foundation
General Motors
JetBlue
Kaiser Permanente
Keurig Dr Pepper

INITIATIVE PARTNER

National Philanthropic Trust/
MacKenzie Scott and Dan Jewett

SIGNATURE

Discover
Morgan Stanley Foundation
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation
UnitedHealthcare

Landscape Structures
LA Sprout Fund
Major League Baseball Players Trust
Mead Family Foundation
Monumental Sports and Entertainment
Nashville Predators
Nora Roberts Family Foundation
Orfalea Family Foundation
Pennsylvania Municipal League & the City of Lancaster
Related Affordable Foundation
The Smile Generation
The TJX Foundation, Inc.
U.S. Bank
Unilever PLC
Unruly Splats



The Colorado Health Foundation™



Morgan Stanley Foundation



RALPH C. WILSON, JR.
FOUNDATION



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Vice President
Partnership Development



Joy Hathaway
Vice President
Programs



Amy Levner
Vice President
25 in 5 Initiative



Gerry Megas
Chief Financial Officer

Financials

REVENUES

Contracted Program Services	\$5,109,001
Contributions & Grants	\$18,056,272
Government Grants	\$3,378,277
In-Kind Contributions	\$269,042
Other Revenue	\$102,737
Total Revenues	\$26,915,329

EXPENSES

Programs	\$10,138,731
<i>Direct Impact</i>	\$7,858,652
<i>Thought Leadership</i>	\$2,280,079
Development	\$1,571,513
Management and General	\$943,316
Total Expenses	\$12,635,560

Change in Net Assets from Operations	\$14,261,769
Investment Income/(Loss), net	\$1,205,272
Change in Net Assets	\$15,467,041

Net Assets, Beginning of Year 2021	\$13,804,932
Net Assets, End of Year 2021 End.	\$29,271,973

View our full Consolidated
Financial Statement.

[CLICK HERE](#)

