



Our Backyard

Long Island Children's Museum, Garden City, New York

www.licm.org

With an unsightly alley on one hand and the desire to nurture in children a lifelong connection to the outdoors on the other, the Long Island Children's Museum created Our Backyard. This innovative green space extends the museum's indoor exhibitions featuring familiar ecosystems of Long Island to the outdoors, and gives children the opportunity to learn about solar heating, birding, the identification and role of insects and the "what" and "how to" of composting.

In addition to welcoming daily visitors, Our Backyard is a key component of the museum's access programs serving low-income children and families. Eco-literacy programming includes weather information stations; a touch, smell and taste garden; and areas for playing with and manipulating dirt, sand and water.

The Long Island Children's Museum has proactively become a leader in addressing the need on Long Island for children to engage in educational, outdoor play to enhance body development, health and well-being, as well as experience the natural joy that comes from playing, exploring and developing in an exciting natural environment."

— Dana Friedman, Ed.D.,
Executive Director,
Early Care and Education-
Long Island (ECELL)

The fact that many children living in densely populated Nassau County, New York, were not spending significant time playing outdoors came as no surprise to the museum. Many families living in the area don't have access to parkland or public gardens, and many don't have yards where children can safely play and explore. But it was only during the prototyping of Our Backyard that the museum learned that some parents didn't encourage outdoor play due to fears of disease, animals or the sun. This information was important for the interpretive development of Our Backyard and continues to inform programs. Preliminary evaluation indicates that Our Backyard is changing parents' perception so that playing in natural environments is beneficial and something to be encouraged.

Long Island Children's Museum has benefitted from the support and partnership of Cornell Cooperative Extension, corporations, local nurseries, landscapers and the State of New York to make Our Backyard possible. Now the museum is giving back. It is a founding member of Long Island Nature Collaborative for Kids (LINCK), an organization that combines the knowledge and power of educators, naturalists and policy-makers dedicated to creating natural exploration spaces for children. Due to LINCK, the Dimensions Educational Research Foundation named Long Island a national demonstration site for nature education.

