

➤ COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT



Ensuring play space equity for rural communities in Marshall County

The Kansas Children's Discovery Center's Rural Discovery Play Space project used a collaborative and community-based approach to construct an educational play area in Marysville, Kansas

"The Discovery Play Space in Marysville fills a substantial need in Marshall County for an affordable play area for young children where they can learn and grow through free play. We are thrilled to be able to offer this service for the residents of Marshall County and the surrounding area and hope to keep creating fun, educational play opportunities across the state. That only happens thanks to the generous support of our donors and through the use of grants that help provide positive outcomes for all. We are thankful for all of the support we have received in those endeavors."

– Laura Burton

*Kansas Children's Discovery Center
director of marketing and development*

With Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Renewal Quality Subgrant funding and partnership with Marshall County Partnership 4 Growth, the Kansas Children's Discovery Center was able to create the Discovery Play Space, an outdoor educational play area that is free and open to the public. Located in Marysville, Kansas, the Marshall County seat, the play area was designed to be the most accessible to the county's population of 10,965 (with a quarter of the residents being children under 18). The Discovery Play Space opened to the public on Nov. 17, 2021, and feedback from community residents ensured the play space reflected the community culture while also meeting the early child development awareness needs identified by surveys to residents.

Drawing on the local culture and history of Marysville, the Discovery Play Space has black squirrel statues, the town's official mascot, and an installation themed after the local Pony Express home station and museum. Similar to the Kansas Children's Discovery Center's "Nature Explore" Outdoor Classroom, the Marysville play space features an installation of musical instruments – a whale drum, a bongo set, and a xylophone – with additional signage prompts that encourage play and a sign with a QR code that directs parents and caregivers to the Discovery Center's Ages & Stages questionnaire. For families seeking outdoor activities due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and for those unable to travel to the museum in Topeka, the Discovery Play Space provides a quality play space and additional child development resources that support and engage a child's physical and mental development through play.

The Kansas Children's Discovery Center has completed its project but will continue to seek ways to create and advance equity play space resources and opportunities that encourage children to learn as they play. As a partner to many communities, the Kansas Children's Discovery Center recognizes the impact local communities have in creating and designing public resources, and looks forward to expanding its service and resources from its northeast Kansas location.

**All In For
Kansas Kids** 

CONTACT

To learn more about the Kansas Children's Discovery Center and its rural outreach efforts, email vice president of play and learning Caitlin Lutjohann at cluttjohann@kansasdiscovery.org.