

KaBOOM! Community Builds Washington, DC

OVERVIEW

Intent of the intervention: KaBOOM! is a national non-profit that empowers communities to build playgrounds and playspaces for youth. KaBOOM! programs focus on creating great places to play while activating community leaders, all with the goal of improving the health of children and the health of communities. The two primary means of building playspaces are through 1) KaBOOM!-led builds, which are facilitated by a KaBOOM! Project Manager, and 2) “Do-It-Yourself” (DIY) Playground Builds, that include provision of online resources, such as on demand and live trainings, a toolkit with fundraising, planning, construction and maintenance guides, and a free website to help users plan and build a playspace in their community.

Intended Population:

KaBOOM! primary stakeholders are parents and concerned community members who work through the community-build model convening around the common cause of serving the intended population of 2-12 year olds by improving or building new playspaces for them.

Setting(s): Communities, Elementary Schools, Childcare Facilities, Child-Serving Nonprofits

Background: The vision of KaBOOM! is: *A great place to play within walking distance of every child in America.*

KaBOOM! completed its first community-built playspace in 1995 in Washington, DC. They became incorporated in 1996 and currently all fifty states, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Canada have KaBOOM! playspaces.

A community-build playspace is one where volunteers come together to build a playspace that involves the community in the design, construction, and maintenance of the playspace. KaBOOM! has directly facilitated the building of more than 1,700 playspaces through the KaBOOM!-led build program and inspired the building of over 2,000 playgrounds through Do-It-Yourself projects, utilizing grants, training, online tools, and publications throughout North America. KaBOOM! has developed a step-by-step process called the Community-Build Model in the years since its inception in 1995. KaBOOM! provides access to this information at no cost for anyone interested in completing a community-build playground.

Each community build takes place, in partnership, with a local child-serving nonprofit, school or parks and recreation department. The planning process is outlined in the KaBOOM! Roadmap (see **Intervention Materials**). There are primarily two different methods of using the KaBOOM! Community-Build Model.

- **KaBOOM!-led Builds**, which include on the ground leadership of a KaBOOM! Project Manager and community involvement at all stages of planning, development, and building of the playspace. Each KaBOOM!-led playground project is primarily funded (90%) by a specific Funding Partner, typically a corporation or foundation, who often partners with the local community during the planning and building process. Once a Funding Partner has committed to building a playground in a specific geography, KaBOOM! does outreach to identify a local community-based child-serving organization that partners with KaBOOM! and the funder on every aspect of planning. This group,

called the Community Partner, is also responsible for fundraising a portion of the cost of the playground equipment purchase. The Community Partner must own or have a long-term lease and obtain written permission from the land-owner for the community-build project. Children who will benefit from the playspace are actively engaged in designing their 'dream playground' via a "Design Day" event held during the planning phase of the process. This phase is approximately 12 weeks long. During that time, the Community Partner planning committee works with a KaBOOM! Project Manager to map the assets of their community and leverage those assets to plan their community build day. A broad range of community members volunteer to support the planning process, which culminates in a one-day community volunteer event to build the playspace.

- **Do-It-Yourself Builds**, include free online training, planning tools, and advice from professional playground builders at KaBOOM! to help interested communities lead their own community build. The intent of the Do-It-Yourself model is to meet communities at their current level and provide them with a proven model and tools at no cost. Communities can follow the Roadmap step-by-step or they can move around and use the pieces that are most relevant to them. KaBOOM! is able to support these free resources through the generous donations of both individual donors and organizational funding partners.

The KaBOOM! Community-Build Model shows steady and increasing growth with a high demand from communities throughout the country for related support and services. The tools, resources, peer-to-peer mentoring, and technology (i.e. online and in-person trainings) for do-it-yourself playspace builds are currently the focus of the program expansion.

Length of time in the field: The intervention has been in the field since October 1995

IMPLEMENTATION

The Community-Build Model focuses on both the process and the product of the project. KaBOOM! works to facilitate that change through:

- 1) Creating Places to Play, and
- 2) Activating Community Leadership.

Focusing members of a community on a playground project and facilitating the building of a tangible place to play activates community leadership. Additionally, mobilizing community leadership creates more places to play at a much greater rate.

Simply, through building a playspace together, a collective cause and achievable wins spark action that leads to cascading steps of leadership and greater community change.

- **Convening Around a Collective Cause:** The well-being of children is a universal call to action that generates interest and focuses the energy of a wide range of individuals on working together for positive change in their community for their children.
- **Achievable Wins:** Achievable wins are an important element of community empowerment. If a community group has successfully advocated for a simple change, such as a new speed bump or stop sign in their neighborhood, then they are more likely to believe that they can collectively make a difference.
- **Cascading Steps of Leadership:** Cascading steps of leadership move individuals from small steps into greater acts of community leadership.

Main Components:

1. Community Partner

A local community-based child-serving organization, (i.e., YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, school) parks and recreation department, or other group that has decided to create a playspace for their children using the Community-Build Model will begin by identifying the location for their new playspace and working through any land ownership issues, etc. The process helps them to leverage their local community members, parents, churches, schools, local businesses, etc. to participate in the planning and building of the playground. The Community-Build Model also helps them through the vital tasks of recruiting volunteers, planning for all aspects of the build day(s), raising funds, and, over the long-term, insuring, maintaining, and programming the playspace. Community Partners will typically fall into one of two categories. Either they already own the land or they are leasing the land. In cases where the land is being leased the land owners are asked for written consent before the Community Partner is approved for the playground.

- For KaBOOM!-led builds this group is called the Community Partner and each is identified by KaBOOM! through an application process that ensures that they are committed to using the KaBOOM! Community-Build Model. KaBOOM! then consults with the Funding Partner (discussed below) to choose the Community Partner who will be the final partner for this particular playground opportunity. That Community Partner then works directly with a KaBOOM! Project Manager throughout the planning process and the playground is completed in two or three months.
- For a Do-It-Yourself build the community drives the entire process without the on the ground support of a KaBOOM! Project Manager and without the funding support of a Funding Partner arranged by KaBOOM!. Using KaBOOM! online tools and resources, the playground is completed on a timeline that they establish. For Do-It-Yourself builds, KaBOOM! staff are available for consultation, but they do not manage the process.

2. Funding

Fundraising is a big component of the KaBOOM! Community-Build Model. The act of reaching out to one's own community and gathering support, monetary or otherwise, for the project is at the heart of the KaBOOM!'s process to facilitate change. KaBOOM! offers many tools and resources to help a community jump-start and continue their fundraising efforts.

- For KaBOOM!-led builds the primary Funding Partner is identified by KaBOOM!. They commit to supporting approximately 90% of the funds for the playground equipment and project management by KaBOOM!. They typically participate in the planning process and bring out volunteers for the eventual Build Day event. Many corporations use this event to provide a team-building and volunteer opportunity for their employees. The Community Partner, as a part of the Community-Build Model, must raise around 10% of the funds for the project. KaBOOM! believes this is critical as it is sweat equity that increases the feeling of accomplishment and creates a sense of ownership within the community.
- For Do-It-Yourself builds the fundraising is handled completely by the Community Partner. The KaBOOM! website provides resources in the form of webinars on fundraising and grant writing for playspace projects, as well as an entire section of the KaBOOM! online toolkit outlining how to get started in the fundraising process.

3. *Community-Build Model*

The KaBOOM! Community-Build Model is used in all KaBOOM!-led builds and is the basis for all of the tools and resources provided online for Do-It-Yourself community partners to use. The KaBOOM! Community-Build Model includes the following main components.

- Community Engagement and Volunteer Support: The community's buy-in and ownership of the process and final product is critical from the beginning of the identification process through the build completion. Key to this process is Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) in which communities' leaders work together to identify resources (material, skill, and financial) within the community in order to build their playground. The volunteer planning committee members, themselves, are assets and this will be reinforced through the successful planning process. The planning committee comes together to map the assets of their community and secure necessary resources for the build including people, materials, tools, food/drinks, etc. The concept relies on the idea that everyone has something to offer to the community-build process.
- Design Day: This event kicks off the planning process for the playground project. Children and adults gather together to discuss the playground project. Children draw their "dream playground" and discuss their ideas with the group. Adults then go through a process of asset-mapping to identify resources they can utilize within their own community. Adults then form planning committees to carry out the planning process for the playground project.
- Planning Process:
 - For KaBOOM!-led builds the planning process is approximately 8-12 weeks and is managed by the KaBOOM! Project Manager through weekly check-in calls.
 - For Do-It-Yourself builds the planning process happens on a timeline determined by the community and, generally ranges from two months to a year. KaBOOM! encourages communities to establish a "build date" and stick to it in order to keep the momentum up throughout the planning process.
- Site Preparation: Before the Build Day occurs, the site must be prepared for the playground. This could include clearing the site of old equipment, leveling the site, digging the holes for the posts, and receiving and inventorying supplies and materials all in order to create a site ready for a volunteer playground installation.
- Build Day: The KaBOOM! Community-Build Model culminates in a volunteer "barn-raising" of a playground where community members and volunteers construct the playgrounds and any side-projects that further enhance the site (these can include benches, asphalt games, outdoor classrooms, planter benches, gardens, landscaping, etc.). When pre-fabricated equipment is used, the playground construction is typically supervised by a professional playground installer assessing the playground for proper installment.
- Maintenance and Programming: Planning for the long term maintenance and programming of the playground is important to the model. The Community Partner is responsible for developing a maintenance plan and identifying someone to be in charge of the overall maintenance of the playspace. This may be a school custodian, parks & recreation staff member, or a community member. They are responsible for checking all fixtures and connections to ensure the playground is secure, no hazards are present and both the equipment and safety surfacing are maintained. In addition, weekly walkthroughs of the playground by parents, teachers or other community

members are completed in which they make note of any loose bolts, rust, or vandalism to report to the appropriate person.

Keys to Success:

- Identifying a Community Champion: This person may be a parent, an employee of the community organization (organization building the playground), or other local informal or formal leader.
- Forming a Planning Committee: This will ensure that tasks are assigned and specific people are accountable for making it happen. The community-build process also encourages folks to celebrate the smaller accomplishments that finally culminate in a great Build Day.
- Setting a Date: By setting a date early in the process everyone has a goal to work towards and deadlines helps to keep the momentum going.
- Mapping and Tapping Local Assets: The Community-Build Model incorporates a process of asset-mapping that asks communities to be deliberate about identifying and engaging local assets that can contribute to the playground process. Assets may include anything from a local college student to provide music for the Build Day to a grocery store that can donate water.
- Building on Lessons Learned from Alumni: KaBOOM! provides a wealth of web resources and trainings that have been developed from many years of lessons learned on playground building projects. In addition, the social networking portion of the kaboom.org website allows individuals to connect directly with others who have been through the process before, as well as KaBOOM! staff who can provide suggestions for overcoming barriers.

Barriers to Implementation:

- Getting Started with Such a Big Project: Many people have never undertaken a community project like this and very few have ever built a playground. Figuring out where to start and learning all that is needed is too often a barrier.
- CAVEmen (Citizens Against Virtually Everything): Occasionally a person or small group of people can stand in the way of progress. To move the process forward a champion who works diligently to overcome hurdles is needed.
- Getting Overwhelmed: Interested individuals can sometimes become overwhelmed with fundraising and other necessary work.
- Land Ownership Issues: There are a variety of challenges that arise when land ownership is concerned. These issues must be addressed in order to move forward with a community build.
- Concerns about Liability: Many communities have concerns about liability re: the physical playground space. As a general practice it is suggested that agencies obtain liability insurance in the amount of at least \$100 million for their playground. If sites currently have liability coverage they should check with their providers to ensure the playground is additionally covered.
- Loss of Momentum: Committed individuals can sometimes lose momentum and inspiration, often when there is not an established planning committee or when success is hinging on just one person.

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Staff: Community volunteers are the backbone of the project, but the KaBOOM! staff play a key role, especially for the KaBOOM!-led builds.

- For KaBOOM!-led builds, an Outreach Coordinator, works to confirm community partners for KaBOOM!-led builds by identifying and readying the community for the community-build process and the definable project in a definable timeline. Once confirmed each community is assigned one Project Manager who facilitates the community-build process through in-person meetings (Design Day, and Preparation and Build Days) and phone conference calls (weekly throughout the planning process).
- For Do-It-Yourself Playgrounds, participants have access to KaBOOM! social networking where they can pose questions to the broader population, attend trainings facilitated by KaBOOM! staff, and engage in conversations with staff members via the online help desk.

Training: A series of 40+ free, online trainings are available on various topics designed to educate participants about the importance of play and help prepare them to lead a community-built playspace project. In addition, there is a print version of the “Roadmap” with guidance on implementing a successful community build. (See “Intervention Materials” for more details.)

The underlying principle behind online trainings at KaBOOM! is to meet participants at their level. KaBOOM! offers introductory trainings designed to provide a baseline of information for individuals just getting started as well as more detailed trainings that outline best practices in the field and offer more detailed information on implementing play based strategies at the community and national level.

Online trainings are broken out into four categories to help participants better determine which content best meets their current needs. The categories include:

- **Building a Playspace:** Designed for participants looking to build or update an existing playspace. Content here is focused on project management, playspace design, fundraising, and best practices to ensure the success of the project.
- **Hot Topics in Play:** Features our premiere live training events with guest experts from the field and academia.
- **Podcasts:** With more than 14 years of experience, KaBOOM! has developed, collected and refined numerous best practices and tools to support playspaces. Participants will hear first hand from BOOMers (KaBOOM staff members) who work with communities to create great spaces to play. Topics range from engaging youth at builds to navigating the process of obtaining permits.
- **Promoting Play:** For individuals who are interested in championing the cause of play at local and national levels. These trainings equip participants with the tools needed for powerful yet playful advocacy.

Materials: There is a large variation in playground equipment costs depending on the numbers of children served, ages of children served, and the budget available to the entity building the playground. A community can install some swings and safety surfacing for less than \$10,000 or they can build a huge destination playground with rubber surfacing, shade and enough equipment to engage hundreds of children at one time for \$500,000 plus. Individuals are encouraged to work directly with vendors, landscape architects, and other local resources to determine site needs and pricing.

Funding: Playground projects require a large amount of funding. The amount of funding sought varies based on the size of the project, materials used, and the type of playground project. Individuals are again encouraged to work directly with vendors to determine how to create an individualized playspace while working within their predetermined budget.

UNDERLYING THEORY/EVIDENCE

Strategy Used¹:

This program seeks to:

- **Increase access to opportunities** for physical activity through environmental changes by increasing the number of physical spaces where people can engage in physical activity.

Findings from the Early Assessment²:

Site visitors that conducted an early assessment of KaBOOM! concluded the following:

- The underlying theoretical model is social change and this is implicit in the approach that the organization takes in empowering communities. This is a model example of social change using the playspace as the catalyst.
- It is expected that by providing the community with great playspaces, children will play (be physically active) more often, with greater intensity and duration, and come back more often to do so, which will help address childhood obesity.

POTENTIAL PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT

Reach: This intervention has the potential to reach many children and families in close proximity to a built playground/playspace within a community. Almost four million children have been served by KaBOOM!-led, community-built playspaces.

Effectiveness: There are over 1,700 KaBOOM!-led community-built playspaces, and over 2,000 Do-It-Yourself Playspaces.

Adoption and Implementation: There are KaBOOM! playspaces in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Canada. Given the widespread expansion of the intervention across the country, it appears that implementation is feasible. In addition, KaBOOM! resources are available for free and in many cases, communities will use the Community-Build Model without direct input from KaBOOM!, so the possibility exists that many more playspaces go un-counted each year.

Maintenance: Sustainability is dependent on the infrastructure within targeted communities, the emphasis on maintenance throughout the application and planning processes, and the widespread community engagement throughout the project. At the end of the day the community pride in the transformed space and the community ownership, when optimally employed, will go a long way toward ensuring the long-term maintenance of the space.

¹ A full description of the *intervention strategies* used can be found on www.center-trt.org with references to the sources of evidence to support the strategies.

² KaBOOM! participated in the Early Assessment of Programs and Policies to Prevent Childhood Obesity project, a collaborative effort of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, CDC Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity, CDC Division of Adolescent and School Health, and Macro International. The findings in this section are based on the opinion of the site visitors and derived from the KaBOOM! Summary Report (August 2008).

INTERVENTION MATERIALS

The following can be downloaded from www.center-trt.org

- **Logic Model** conveys inputs, outputs, activities and outcomes of the program.
- **Getting Started with KaBOOM!** one-page resource list for getting started

The resources available on www.kaboom.org for communities interested in a Do-It-Yourself build include:

- Free website that provides step-by-step guidance throughout the project and a forum for communicating with your team <http://projects.kaboom.org>
- The KaBOOM “Roadmap” highlighting specific steps to successfully complete a playspace project, in addition, to online presentations and resources regarding play equipment that is age-appropriate, fundraising, media communications, etc. <http://kaboom.org/roadmap>
- Comprehensive toolkit that includes detailed instruction for each step, as well as tips based on the ten-plus years of experience with community builds <http://kaboom.org/toolkit>
- Free online training sessions available for those interested in learning more about how to get corporate sponsorship, how to start the community-build process, asset mapping in your community, etc. <http://kaboom.org/playschool>
- Online social network to ask questions and share knowledge/experience <http://kaboom.org/connect>
- Resources on creating play environments that include benches, mural paintings, landscaping, etc. <http://kaboom.org/sideprojects>
- Vendor directory with ratings based on experiences by others <http://kaboom.org/vendors>
- A free, user-generated mapping tool called the KaBOOM! Playspace Finder, which allows communities to map the quantity, quality and locations of their playspaces to assess local needs. (This tool also is helping KaBOOM! to build a national map of play deserts). <http://playspacefinder.kaboom.org>

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Web links: www.kaboom.org

In addition to the community builds, there are supportive components that KaBOOM! implements to advocate for play:

- Connect is an online community of people interested in building playgrounds and/or advocating for play in their communities where people can learn from one another and share experiences/knowledge. <http://kaboom.org/connect>
- KaBOOM! National Campaign for Play seeks to raise the issue of play to one of national importance through:
 - Playful City USA, a network of communities that share their experiences, develop exciting programs to support the health and well-being of their children, and strengthen their framework for a successful agenda on play. http://kaboom.org/help_save_play/playful_city_usa
 - Playmaker Network, a national network made up of individual advocates, deemed Playmakers, each working at the local level to ensure an abundance of

time and space for play in their community.
http://kaboom.org/help_save_play/playmaker_network

Training/Technical Assistance available:

- There are a variety of free online training sessions available at: <http://kaboom.org/playschool>
- There is an online social network to ask questions and share knowledge/experience via a message board, posted videos, discussion group, etc. at: <http://kaboom.org/connect>

Publications:

Reports Released By KaBOOM! can be found at the following link.
http://kaboom.org/about_kaboom/reports_and_studies

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