

CMOM EXPANDS ON- AND OFFSITE PROGRAMS FOR FAMILIES LIVING IN NYC SHELTERS

Amid Pandemic, CMOM Completes Additional 10 New Learning Hubs throughout the City and Launches Free in-Museum “Play and Learning” Sessions Supporting Families in Need



L: Families enjoy “Play & Learn” programs with CMOM educators at the museum;
 R: A CMOM Learning Hub installed at a temporary housing facility in the Bronx

New York, NY (August 31, 2021) – Continuing its decades-long commitment to working with families living in New York City shelters, the Children’s Museum of Manhattan (CMOM) is pioneering crisis-responsive models to better support those children who are among the hardest hit by the pandemic. With the support of the Robin Hood’s Fund for Early Learning (FUEL) and in partnership with the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), CMOM will have completed 10 new Learning Hubs with interactive installations in temporary housing facilities throughout New York City between fall 2020 and fall 2021, bringing the total completed to date to nearly 40 hubs. Additionally, CMOM launched a free “Family Play & Learn” program supported by a lead grant from the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund that brings these families to the museum, where educators facilitate hands-on exhibit exploration and creative activities. These initiatives reflect CMOM’s enduring commitment to meeting children and families where they are—emotionally and physically—through research-based programs that extend beyond the museum’s walls.

“At the start of the pandemic, we saw firsthand how inequities across socio-economic divides were becoming further exacerbated. We knew we needed to redouble our efforts to support families experiencing homelessness who were among the most isolated and hardest hit communities during this period. We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to our donors, including Robin Hood’s Fund for Early Learning (FUEL) and to Founding Board Chair Laurie Tisch, whose generous support enabled this programmatic expansion,” said Aileen Hefferren, CMOM’s CEO and Director.

Added Leslie Bushara, CMOM’s Chief Program Officer, “CMOM has for decades supported families living in temporary housing through our research-based programs. We have experienced the essential role that CMOM plays for these families in offering a safe place of learning and joy that bridges home, school,

and community. It is both gratifying and timely to be able to expand these experiences in such a meaningful way, especially during such uncertain and isolating times. The enthusiastic response we've received from families and our partners at DHS is a testament to the importance of CMOM's service and the powerful impact its programs have on our community."

"With more than 1,800 babies born to mothers living in the New York City shelter system each year, it's more important than ever to support opportunities for learning during this period of development," said Kelly Escobar, Robin Hood's Fund for Early Learning Senior Program Officer. "Robin Hood is proud to partner with CMOM as they expand services to the families that need them most."

CMOM's work with families living in shelters dates back more than 25 years, when it began welcoming teen mothers and their children to the museum for weekly writing, arts, and parenting workshops. Since 2013, CMOM has partnered with the Department of Homeless Services on specialized program development, including the creation of permanent Learning Hubs, which to date have brought elements of CMOM exhibitions to nearly 40 shelters, low-income housing, and Head Start centers across New York City.

Alongside this programming, CMOM is continuing a three-year-long research project focusing on the impact of living in shelters on early childhood development. Initiated in 2019 and supported by grants awarded by Robin Hood and the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the program is evaluating new strategies for promoting literacy and executive functioning in children ages 0-3 in under-resourced communities. This work is part of CMOM's broader efforts to advance scholarship in the field—working with partner institutions and experts to spearhead new research, which in turn informs the creation of its exhibits, programs, and curricula, and best practices in the industry.

About CMOM's Learning Hubs

Designed to reach children and their caregivers living in shelters, low-income housing, and Head Start centers throughout the five boroughs, CMOM's Learning Hubs transform interstitial spaces and rooms into impactful access points for early childhood health and literacy programs. Drawn from CMOM's research-based exhibitions, Learning Hubs feature permanent museum-quality graphics and interactive installations, and include professional development programs for educators, and skill-building workshops for children and parents.

Despite the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic, CMOM fostered first-time partnerships with numerous family shelters and will have completed 10 new Learning Hubs by the end of the year—with eight finished over the past 10 months—bringing its total number of sites across the city to nearly 40 and resourcing an estimated 15,000 children and adults annually. These hubs were supported by the Robin Hood's Fund for Early Learning, Institute for Museum and Library Services, and the Volo Research and Education Foundations.

About Family Play & Learn Program

CMOM's "Family Play & Learn Program for NYC Families Living in Homeless Shelters" is designed to foster connection and community as it cultivates essential school-readiness skills through hands-on engagement and active play at the museum. The program was developed in direct response to the closures caused by COVID-19, which in addition to schools and playgrounds, included shared gathering spaces at temporary housing sites, magnifying the impact of pandemic isolation on these families.

Launched in October 2020, when the museum first reopened following quarantine, the program welcomes families from shelters in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Manhattan—including Albemarle Family Residence, HELP Bronx Morris, HELP USA, New Albemarle East, and Homeward—to the museum twice a week on Mondays and Tuesdays, when CMOM is otherwise closed to the public. The families take part in

specially curated visits featuring exhibit exploration, music, movement, language, and creative activities led by CMOM's expert educators. CMOM provides transportation to and from the museum, a healthy snack, age-appropriate activity toolkits for the children to take home, and a free yearlong membership to the museum.

Made possible by the generosity of the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund, the Gray Foundation, and the Meringoff Family Foundation, the program works to fill the learning gaps deepened by this crisis and the uncertain school year ahead, and to help families regain a sense of normalcy through safe and joyful community experiences.

About Robin Hood

Robin Hood has been fighting poverty in New York City since 1988. Because Robin Hood's board covers all overhead, 100% of every donation goes directly to the poverty fight. Last year, Robin Hood awarded \$172 million in grants, filling a critical void during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing cash assistance, meals, housing, healthcare, education, and other urgent needs to one million New Yorkers impacted by COVID-19, as well as funding an array of programs and initiatives developed to elevate families out of poverty in New York City. Follow the organization on Twitter @RobinHoodNYC and learn more at www.robinhood.org.

About the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund

The Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund is a New York City-based foundation that strives to improve access and opportunity for all New Yorkers and foster healthy and vibrant communities. Founded in 2007 by philanthropist Laurie M. Tisch, the Illumination Fund plays an active role in supporting innovative approaches across a range of issues—increasing access to healthy food, building healthy communities, supporting economic opportunity and ensuring that arts and arts education are accessible to all. In 2018, the Illumination Fund launched Arts in Health, a \$10-million-dollar, multi-year initiative to support organizations working on health issues that impact New York communities and that emphasize the arts as a tool for healing and building understanding. The areas of focus include addressing mental health stigma, trauma, and aging-related diseases. In 2021 the Illumination Fund expanded this initiative to work with arts and culture organizations addressing mental health challenges for people and communities disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information, visit www.lmtif.org or follow @LMTischFund on Twitter.

About Children's Museum of Manhattan

Established in 1973, the Children's Museum of Manhattan is a vital destination and resource for New York City children and their families, dedicated to cultivating life-long learners across backgrounds and boroughs. A steward of early childhood education and development, CMOM offers imaginative and enriching exhibitions and programs that support, challenge, and inspire. Beyond the Museum walls, CMOM mounts outreach programs in 60 sites across the city, equips colleagues via professional development training programs, and shares its award-winning content through traveling exhibitions and online offerings. To meet growing public demand and ensure that this child-centered, interactive resource is available for future generations, the Museum is planning a forthcoming move to an expanded home at 361 Central Park West, which will include state-of-the-art exhibition and programmatic spaces.

For more information about CMOM, visit www.cmom.org.

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