

Children's Museum of Manhattan Raises \$2.5 Million at Annual Gala Celebrating Early Literacy Leaders



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Children's Museum of Manhattan Celebrates Early Literacy Champions at Annual Gala

More than 500 supporters, civic leaders, and philanthropists gathered at the Ziegfeld Ballroom in celebration of CMOM and champions of early childhood literacy across New York City

Photos: High-resolution images from the evening are attached with accompanying captions.

NEW YORK, NY -- The Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM) hosted its 2026 Annual Gala on Monday evening, April 20, bringing together more than 500 supporters, civic leaders, and philanthropists at the Ziegfeld Ballroom in Midtown Manhattan. The evening, themed to celebrate the power of language and literacy, raised \$2.5 million in critical funds to support CMOM and celebrated the power of early literacy and the foundational role it plays in a child's development, honoring two remarkable leaders whose work reflects that belief in action.

The gala drew an extraordinary cross-section of New York City life – elected officials, cultural institution leaders, and philanthropic families united around a shared purpose: more than half of New York City students in grades 3 through 8 are not reading proficiently. Early literacy, a foundation of skills children build from birth through their first years of school, is the single greatest predictor of long-term academic success, high school graduation, and economic opportunity.

The evening opened across two floors of the Ziegfeld Ballroom, with guests gathering for cocktails before moving to dinner and a program that included a rousing performance by Brooklyn United Music and Arts Program, the acclaimed youth drumline. The lively performance set the tone for an evening that kept children – and their futures – at the center.

Celebrating Leadership in Early Literacy

Nessia Kushner and the Heckscher Foundation for Children

Nessia Kushner and The Heckscher Foundation for Children were recognized for their sustained and impactful philanthropic investment in early literacy programs serving underserved youth in New York City. Nessia Kushner, a CMOM board member (2018 – 2025) and Director of Strategy and Vice Chairman of the Board at the Heckscher Foundation for Children, represented the organization.

"The spaces that CMOM creates and the educators in them are extraordinary. They meet children where they are, they inspire curiosity, and they send kids home with more words, more ideas, and more confidence than they arrived with."

– **Nessia Kushner, Director of Strategy and Vice Chairman of the Board, Heckscher Foundation for Children**

Laurie M. Tisch Award for Leadership -- Linda E. Johnson, President and CEO, Brooklyn Public Library

Linda E. Johnson received the Laurie M. Tisch Award for Leadership in recognition of her transformative work expanding literacy access across Brooklyn and beyond. Under Johnson's leadership, the Brooklyn Public Library

has become one of the most innovative and accessible public library systems in the country, with programs that begin at birth and extend through adulthood.

"When we create spaces where children can dream boldly and build fearlessly, we are not simply educating them, we are shaping the citizens and communities our democracy will depend on. I am very grateful to be in the community building business with CMOM and the Heckscher Foundation, and my dear friend Laurie and the team at the Illumination Foundation."

– **Linda E. Johnson, President and CEO, Brooklyn Public Library**

A Shared Commitment to New York City's Children

The gala reflected the growing alignment among New York City's leading institutions around investing in evidence-based approaches to developing early literacy skills—a deep part of CMOM work since its founding more than 50 years ago.

"It feels magical to be in this room, surrounded by 500 friends, supporters and colleagues, all aligned around a common purpose: nourishing curious, creative children ready to thrive in this city and in our society."

– **Dava Schub, CEO and Museum Director, Children's Museum of Manhattan**

About the Children's Museum of Manhattan

For more than 50 years, the Children's Museum of Manhattan (CMOM) has been a cornerstone resource for families in New York City, delivering research-based programming that supports the social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children during their most formative years. Located on West 83rd Street, CMOM develops and presents hands-on exhibits and experiences designed to build lifelong learners -- and is committed to making those experiences accessible to all families through partnerships with New York City agencies, Head Start facilities, shelters, and community organizations across the five boroughs.

In 2024, CMOM launched the final phase of a \$300 million campaign to build a new museum at West 96th Street and Central Park West, with an expected opening in 2028. The new museum will more than double current visitor capacity and expand programming to serve children from birth through age 10.

For further information about CMOM: **cmom.org** | For additional press inquiries: **ahandelman@cmom.org**