

Steelcase Sponsors “Children Designing for Children” at Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital

By Kim Dabbs – June 17, 2019



What happens when kids get together to imagine a place for other kids to play? This spring, students from Grand Rapids Public Schools participated in [SiteStudio’s second annual Children Designing for Children project](#). Created and led by Professor Margaret Vega and sponsored by Kendall College of Art and Design to “enhance quality ‘maker’ experiences” for GRPS students, Children Designing for Children gives middle school students in the Grandville Avenue corridor the opportunity to work with professionals, like Steelcase employees, to bring their ideas to life.

This year’s challenge went to 8th grade students at the Southwest Community Campus. When asked to design a special seating application for the lobby of Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital, students worked in groups to brainstorm ideas that would not only be functional and safe — but whimsical and fun. Over a series of weeks, they concepted and iterated with Steelcase designers and industrial design students from KCAD before presenting their final designs to judges last fall, who named Happy Tree the winner.



“The best part of this project was the energy within the collaboration. It took many hands to create, design and build the Happy Tree. It truly is the result of each one of those contributions and the time and passion of the team,” said Professor Vega.

The eighth-grade winners behind Happy Tree are Daylin Sanchez, Yannet Huinil, Alicia Florez and Alyandra Mendez. They reflected on their experience:

“The hardest part of this project was getting all of us to agree while we were brainstorming. Something we all learned was teamwork. It may not end up the way you want it, but we had to work together.”

“I think it’s very important for grown-ups to listen to kids’ opinions, because we experience things differently than you do. It may be shocking or surprising, but you might find we have good ideas.”

“Through my whole life I’ve wanted to do this and going through this process made me want to do this with my life.”

To bring their vision to life, the Steelcase model shop prototyped and built the girls’ winning design, adding paint and texture to bring it to life. Also included in the May 9 installation are several stackable Smith System Oodle Stools to give kids reconfigurable seating while they wait.

“One of the doctors at the hospital has already told me where he would like the next Children Designing for Children initiative. We begin again in the fall with students who don’t know Industrial Design, KCAD, the Children’s Hospital or Steelcase, and we’ll create a project that involves each of us,” said Professor Vega. Adds Bob Connors, president Of Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital, “We believe art has a special place in healing environments.”



A big thank you to the Steelcase Design Team and the Model Shop where the students were coached, mentored and ideas were brought to life. The Happy Tree can be seen in the lobby of 25 Michigan, the Helen DeVos Children’s Hospital location at the corner of Bostwick and Michigan in Grand Rapids.

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