

# Marquette University, Penfield Children's Center launch adaptive toy project serving children with differing abilities

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MILWAUKEE — Marquette University's Opus College of Engineering and its Orthopaedic and Rehabilitation Engineering Center (OREC), Penfield Children's Center and the Kohl's Building Blocks Program, have launched "Inclusive Play: Toys for all," an adaptive toy project serving children with differing abilities in Milwaukee County.

The Opus College of Engineering and OREC will host the first of two adaptive toy "Build Days" on Saturday, Nov. 12, at Engineering Hall, 1637 W. Wisconsin Ave. Build Days will feature local high school students and Marquette engineering students transforming traditional toys into adaptive toys. Through a collaboration with local FIRST Robotics teams and Marquette, participants will undergo a training session and then execute the electrical modifications for adaptive switch installation on eight different styles of toys.

Adapting these toys with large button switches increases the accessibility for a child to independently engage the toy and experience the reaction.

"I found myself struggling to engage kids who have more severe overall delays. I often found myself bringing regular toys to show the kids, and realized I was the one activating the toy," said Vladimir Bjelic, speech-language pathologist at Penfield Children's Center.

OREC will direct teams as they adapt 144 toys for use at Penfield Children's Center and the Speech and Hearing Clinic in Marquette's College of Health Sciences. The program includes eight different toys, including a teddy bear, a bubble machine and a guitar that will be used for treatment sessions or rented out for use at home.

[Dr. Gerald Harris](#), professor of biomedical engineering and director of OREC, noted, "It's truly a pleasure for OREC to participate in the Marquette mission of service to others through this program. It's amazing to see so many groups come together to make this happen, including Marquette students, local high schools, FIRST Robotics teams, and our partners at Penfield Children's and the Kohl's Building Blocks Program."

OREC engineer Molly Erickson will be directing both Build Days.

"OREC's community engagement efforts allow us to work towards making a difference every day, and the Inclusive Play: Toys for All program helps us take next steps in our community engagement efforts to help others," Erickson said. "These Build Days are amazing STEM educational opportunities that focus on accessible and universal design, showing future engineers the value of designing products with everyone in mind - how the smallest change to adapt something can have a large impact on someone's life."

Participating high schools include Ronald Reagan College Preparatory High School, Rufus King International High School, The Lynde and Harry Bradley Technology and Trade School, Marquette University High School, and Divine Savior Holy Angels High school.

Media interested in attending a Build Day should contact Kevin Conway, associate director of university communication at Marquette University, at [kevin.m.conway@marquette.edu](mailto:kevin.m.conway@marquette.edu).

### **About Penfield Children's Center**

As a leader in child development, Penfield Children's Center helps children with and without disabilities reach their full potential by providing early education, health and wellness services, and family programs. For more information on Penfield, media should contact Shelby Schnell, director of marketing and communications, at [shelbyschnell@penfieldchildren.org](mailto:shelbyschnell@penfieldchildren.org).

## **About Kohl's Building Blocks Program**

Through generous support from Kohl's Cares, the [Kohl's Building Blocks Program](#) helps Penfield Children's Center support children throughout Milwaukee county in Wisconsin. This comprehensive program gives children in need access to early educational and developmental programs, services and equipment.

## **About Marquette University**

Marquette University is a Catholic, Jesuit university located near the heart of downtown Milwaukee that offers a comprehensive range of majors in 11 nationally and internationally recognized colleges and schools. Through the formation of hearts and minds, Marquette prepares our 11,100 undergraduate, graduate, doctoral and professional students to lead, excel and serve as agents of positive change. And, we deliver results. Ranked in the top 20% of national universities, Marquette is recognized for its undergraduate teaching, innovation and career preparation as the sixth-best university in the country for job placement. Our focus on student success and immersive, personalized learning experiences encourages students to think critically and engage with the world around them. When students graduate with a Marquette degree, they are truly prepared and called to Be The Difference.