

Kanitra Charles / Louisiana Children's Museum

My experience with Louisiana's Children's Museum started almost 6 years ago. We won a one year membership to the museum. Prior to our initial visit, I assumed that trips to the museum would be similar to trips to places such as Chuck-e Cheese. This was not the case at all. The different areas and play things really challenged them and provided real world experiences, at a child's level. For example, they were importing and exporting cargo from a ship, shopping or being the cashier at the grocery store, and performing all the jobs and duties at the museum's restaurant play area. They loved it – I love it!

While participating in the Eat, Sleep, and Play program my kids and I were introduced to several healthy snack ideas, some I just knew they would not like. To my surprise, my boys were eating healthier snacks such as wheat tortillas stuffed with coleslaw and white beans. This experience taught me how to really think outside the box when it comes to food. Not only did we get recipes for other snacks to try, majority of the snacks we prepared together at home because this was how it was done during the program. Another great benefit of this program was exercising. I didn't think it was important for them to exercise because they were not big. From the program, I learned that starting early really plays a role in their activity level in the future, which makes a lot of sense to me now. Being that I am a visual person, there is a big difference in hearing statistics about the benefits for our children and actually participating and seeing, firsthand, the reasons why things such as healthy snacks and exercise are important. Growing up, we would eat whatever we wanted so this actually broke that cycle. This was by far my favorite program. Being able to actually meet our First Lady was also a big plus! Not too many people can say they've met her, we were all ecstatic about that experience!

The Word Play program taught me how to properly read to my children. I used to think reading to them, then showing them the picture was the best way. From this program, I learned the importance of having my children close enough to follow along with the words. Although they were not able to read all of the words, they gained the basic concepts of reading, such as, sentences go from left to right and, how to locate the front of the book, the title page, the spine of the book and the back of the book. At the end of year celebration for this program, my son was able to actually have his very own personal book made. We also received another one year pass to the museum!

Shortly after that program ended and our membership expired, we found ourselves back in the museum as I took part in The Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) - which we just completed. Every Tuesday evening for 20 weeks we were at the museum. Had the museum not provided a place (with dinner and paid parking) for both my kids and myself, it would have been very hard to make that 20 week commitment. A little older now, my sons were able to really grasp the reasoning's behind the toys and materials at the museum. One thing that really stuck out was the organization in the grocery store. I watched my 4 year old explain the store design and location of the different foods to another child that was simply placing things wherever as he did, the first couple of times we were there.

My family has shared countless joyous occasions either at the museum or participating in a program of the museum – all eye-opening, fun, learning experiences!