

Pass It On®...

The Dream Builder.

Mark Ostrom and the Joy Collaborative customize spaces for children with physical and emotional needs. The result is a place where dreams flourish, friends and families gather, and wonderful kids get to be the center of something magical.

From blanket forts to rickety treehouses, our childhood escape pods birthed some of our fondest memories. They are where our imaginations were untethered and trusted friends joined us on fantastic adventures.

Having a space of your own means everything to a child. But for some kids, physical limitations or health sensitivities require accommodations that aren't readily available or covered by public assistance funds. Children with spina bifida, cystic fibrosis or who require daily nurse visits are sometimes isolated. Enter Mark Ostrom and his talented team at the Joy Collaborative.

Mark Ostrom studied design and architecture, but as his career moved ahead, he felt something pushing him to do more than make a living — to find a way to give back using design as the vehicle. He watched children with disabilities struggle to attract friends to their homes and express themselves in ways their peers could. It seemed unfair and exclusionary.

"Every child should experience the joy of a space that enhances independence, encourages creativity and accommodates a friend community," Mark says. So he went to work. "It's definitely a passion project. I have an amazing circle of friends and volunteers who are very talented. And to see these kids blossom into confident, sharing, outgoing little humans is so worth it."

We are blessed to be able to witness transformations in real time that are intended to shift a negative outlook to one of thriving and excitement.

Being sequestered between homes and clinic visits can be lonely, as was the case for a young girl who was the recipient of a heart transplant before she was 1 year old. Mark and his team designed and built the "Imagine Theater" in her backyard, complete with stage, theatrical lighting, wardrobe

and bunk beds. It is a place where imagination takes flight for a cadre of her peers. At the center is the blonde-haired maestro creating musicals for family and friends.

"It was amazing to see her confidence grow, see her become a thriving new person in a matter of days," Mark says.

Ten-year-old Isaac lives with cystic fibrosis. While his physical limitations may keep him from going full bore on an athletic team, getting outdoors with friends is good for him. Mark's team built the "Secret Haven" treehouse that encourages physical exercise and provides a creative place to gather, a treetop lookout that takes Isaac's vision beyond his physical constraints.

"Isaac comes alive in the treehouse," Mark says. "He has a place where friends can visit, read graphic novels (over 300 were donated to the project), run the zip line circuit and just be kids."

Research shows creative play is more than having fun. Creative play and supportive spaces benefit emotional and mental health. Joy Rooms have been built adjacent to a hospital for young burn victims to heal, and in quiet neighborhoods for victims of domestic abuse to feel safe. There's an indoor "park" for children to support rehab and the "Brave Bear" den for a young boy who is both deaf and blind and craves sensory stimulation.

"Our mission is to create life-enriching spaces for kids," Mark says. "Because joy should be available to everyone."

Joy...[PassItOn.com](https://passiton.com)

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