

## Leonardo's Basement opens a messy playground

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Kids try out their new waterslide and sit on a “headless Trojan horse” at Adventure Playground.

An art shanty that stood on the Lake Harriet ice is now standing in the back lot of Leonardo's Basement. Kids recently added a water slide. They also built a zip line tethered to an old car. And they poured buckets of water to make mud.

It's called the [Adventure Playground](#), specifically designed for “unfettered and messy” play at 150 W. 60<sup>th</sup>St.



“It’s that kind of stuff you can’t do in a public park, and you can’t do in your yard,” said Program Director Tracy Nielsen. “...They play outside without a plan.”

The waterslide concept, for example, started simply. First the kids used a tube and a piece of gutter to send objects off the art shanty. Then they added water to float down buckets. Next the kids naturally wanted to ride themselves, so they talked with staff about how to build a strong slide.

“We finished it an hour ago,” Nielsen said.



The park operates under basic rules to be safe, be nice and have fun. Kids dig trenches in pursuit of molten lava. They add secret passageways to the “Millennium Falcon,” where they can sit on a rooftop chair and peer through a makeshift spyglass while kids below spin them around.

“You kind of just can build whatever you want,” said Kaia, one of the kids at the park.



Kaia (l) and Olivia sit in the control room of the homemade Millennium Falcon at Adventure Playground.

Earlier that day, she worked on a pulley system so she wouldn’t have to carry buckets up a ladder.

“It’s never the same week twice,” said Nielsen.

Inside Leonardo’s Basement, teens made skateboards. The workshop offers classes to make creations like Lego mosaics, a theater set, a Viking ship and Plinko, with open-ended hours to build whatever kids might imagine.

Executive Director Steve Jevning said this is the second adventure playground in Minnesota. The first was “The Yard,” an experimental playground created 70 years ago in Northeast Minneapolis, reportedly containing tools, an old boxcar and a milk truck body. A 50,000-square-foot junk playground in New York is named “The Yard” after the early Minneapolis park.

At Leonardo’s Basement, staff planned to disassemble the water slide when the day was over, giving the next day’s kids a chance to start something new from scratch.

“It’s ever-changing. Nothing is sacred or permanent. It’s really about play,” Nielsen said.

Adventure Playground is open the second and fourth Saturdays of the month from noon-2 p.m. through September.



