



We Built a Playground!

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Volunteers Create Fun Space for Children with Special Needs



By Fanny Gomez

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I volunteered with Catholic Charities on October 5th to help KaBOOM, Astor Services and Disney build a 2500-square-foot playground for pre-school children with special needs served by Astor Services in the Bronx. I signed up to help because I've always liked to volunteer, but I had no idea what to expect.

I picked this particular volunteer project because [Astor Services](#) is one of Catholic Charities' biggest affiliates. The work they do to help children with special needs is amazing and truly

inspiring. As the Social Media Specialist at Catholic Charities, I was tasked to promote this project on our social media channels and encourage followers to volunteer with us.

Familiarizing myself with this project enticed me to sign up myself.

For this particular project, they teamed up with [KaBOOM!](#), a national non-profit dedicated to ensuring that all kids get a childhood filled with the balanced and active play needed to thrive. Between Disney and KaBOOM! they've built over 80 playgrounds in New York already.

I arrived at the site at 8:15am worried about being late. I was driving into the Bronx from New Jersey and parking isn't always easy, but I got there 15 minutes early. It was beautiful outside that day, but I still wondered if I was dressed for the weather. I've never built a playground or volunteered outside for 6 hours before.

At registration I received an Astor Services water bottle and t-shirt and walked over to eat some breakfast: bagels, muffins, orange juice and coffee were served. Volunteers – over 100 of them - were excited and cheerful. We danced to the music the DJ was playing, anything from hip-hop to the Bee Gees, and talked to fellow volunteers.

At around 9am, all the volunteers were called over to the grassy area next to where the playground would live. To get to know each other, we played two ice breakers: rock, paper, scissors tournaments and the human-knot game. This was a great way to get to know each other and I met two other volunteers from Catholic Charities.

After getting to know a few of the other volunteers, we were split up into different groups. Some groups painted murals, other groups mixed cement, other groups built benches and picnic tables and my group assembled pieces to the playground. We truly had to work together to figure out where every bolt went.

We built slides, a dome and other pieces. After building those pieces, our team split up and helped other groups.

I went over to help assemble little picnic tables for the children. This was my favorite project because I noticed that building a bench isn't as difficult as it seems. There's a science to it that makes it easy to learn. I don't think I can ever build it again without the pre-cut pieces, but I definitely learned the basics.

Our Catholic Charities Executive Director Msgr. Kevin Sullivan joined us for the ribbon cutting along with other officials.

In 6 hours we built the playground for the school children. It was incredible to see the how much work was accomplished in so little time. Together, in a single we were able to do so much!

Looking back at the playground from the entrance on my way out, I thought about all the children who would come back to school and look at the new playground. I imagined all of the joy on their faces while they run out to play and slide down the slides. It was a great event and I hope I get to do something like this again.

Missed building the playground and want to join the fun?
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