NORTHERN CALIFORNIA ANNUAL REPORT

2025-2026

30 YEARS OF PLAY

PLAYWORKS

LETTER FROM THE CEO

30 Years of Impact, 5 Million Kids and Counting

Hello Friends,

Our journey started in 1995 on a playground in Oakland, California. Our founder, Jill Vialet, was sitting in a school office when the principal walked in - a few minutes late and with three little boys in tow. It was already their third trip to the office that week for fighting on the playground.

The principal looked at Jill and said: 'These aren't bad kids. They're just using their energy unwisely at recess.'

Then, she paused and asked an important question: 'What I really need help with is recess. Can you do anything about that?'

That's the moment when Playworks was created. What started as a few hours of playground support for one school has grown into a national leader in youth development.

Along the way, we've:

- Launched Playworks PRO to train educators and youth workers, reaching hundreds of thousands of kids nationwide
- Piloted different evidence-based services, helping schools build sustainable recess programs with on-site support.
- Set a Guinness World Record for the largest game of Red Light, Green Light.

Today, millions of children have discovered the power of play because one principal dared to ask a new question and, for more than 30 years, Playworks has answered it.

Together, we are making a lasting difference in communities across the country. More than 5 million students reached through play. Over 6,000 schools and partner organizations served nationwide. 100,000 Junior Coaches received a meaningful leadership opportunity on the playground.

Now, we are looking ahead. Our next chapter is about reaching every child, everywhere.

We're scaling through digital tools like SparkPlay, empowering community organizations with Playworks certification, and building innovative partnerships that extend the power of play into the lives of children and adults alike. Our vision is bold but simple: A future where every child in America has access to safe, fun, and healthy play, every single day.

We hope you join our movement for play for every kid.

ELIZABETH CUSHING
CEO

PLAYWORKS NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

MISSION

Playworks' mission is to improve the health and well-being of children by increasing opportunities for physical activity and safe, meaningful play.

VISION

Playworks' vision is that one day every child in America will have access to safe, fun, healthy play every day.

GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Playworks Northern California is proud to provide our programs and services throughout the Bay Area and Northern California. We provide our direct service programming to schools primarily in San Francisco, the East Bay, and the Silicon Valley region, where we are deeply embedded in the school communities and work hands-on with students and educators throughout the academic year. Beyond the Bay Area, our capacity-building services extend across the entire Northern California equipping schools, districts, and youth-serving organizations with the tools and training they need to foster safe, engaging play for every child, regardless of location.

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FROM THE PLAYGROUND TO REGIONAL LEADERSHIP

HECTOR SALAZAR RETURNS TO LEAD PLAYWORKS NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

In July 2025, Playworks Northern California Executive Director Laura Medina Quintanar was promoted to Vice President of Field Operations for Playworks California, recognizing her exceptional leadership and expanding her impact across the state.

Following Laura's promotion, Hector Salazar returned to Playworks in November 2025 to serve as Executive Director of Northern California.

For Hector, the appointment represents both a professional milestone and a homecoming. His Playworks journey began as an AmeriCorps member, when the organization was still known as Sports4Kids, serving students at Stonehurst Elementary School in Oakland. From there, he helped lead Playworks programming throughout Oakland, San José, and Richmond before moving into national leadership roles, where he expanded partnerships and helped shape professional development strategies that continue to strengthen Playworks' work with schools today.

After serving in executive leadership positions with Revolution Foods, the Neurodiversity Alliance, and Reading Partners Bay Area, Hector returns to Playworks with extensive experience in organizational leadership, strategic growth, partnership development, and systems improvement. Just as importantly, he returns with a deep belief in Playworks' mission and in the power of play to transform a child's experience at school.

Hector's return is also a testament to the kind of organization Playworks strives to be: one that develops leaders, builds lasting relationships, and inspires people to carry its mission with them throughout their careers. Having experienced Playworks from the playground to national leadership, Hector brings a rare understanding of where the organization has been, what makes its work powerful, and what is possible for its future.

Today, Hector leads Playworks Northern California alongside an experienced regional leadership team and veteran coaching staff, many of whom have built longstanding relationships with local schools and communities. Together, they bring deep institutional knowledge, trusted partnerships, and a shared commitment to ensuring that every child has opportunities to experience safe, healthy, and inclusive play.

As Playworks Northern California enters this next chapter, Hector is building on the strong foundation established under Laura's leadership while deepening school partnerships, investing in exceptional staff, and reaching more children and educators.

With continuity in leadership, strong community partnerships, and renewed energy for what lies ahead, Playworks Northern California is poised to create more structured playground environments where children feel connected and included and where they can build the confidence, resilience, leadership, and sense of belonging that extend far beyond recess.

HECTOR SALAZAR
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA.

LAURA MEDINA QUINTANAR
VICE PRESIDENT OF FIELD OPERATIONS

MESSAGE FROM HECTOR SALAZAR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I still remember the first day I set foot on a Playworks playground 22 years ago. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I would one day serve as Executive Director of our largest region as we celebrate 30 years of impact.

While I am deeply grateful to everyone who has helped build this community over the past three decades, I am equally energized by the incredible team leading our work today. Together, our coaches, managers, and directors have an opportunity to deepen our impact and reach more young people than ever before.

At our core, Playworks is a purveyor of joy. And in this moment, I can think of few things our kids, schools, and communities need more of.

I'm incredibly grateful to be back, and even more excited about what we will build together.

51 Bay Area Schools Experiences the Power of Play

18,968 Students Impacted through Direct Services

5 NorCal Trainers support schools, districts, and CBOs - nearly 194,000 students

714 Junior Coaches became Youth Leaders

69 Schools Trained 43,203 students

THE INVISIBLE ARCHITECTURE OF BELONGING

AT CUMBERLAND ELEMENTARY, STUDENTS ARE LEARNING TO NAVIGATE CONFLICT, SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER, AND STAY IN THE GAME.

At Cumberland Elementary, recess isn't simply a break from learning. It's where some of the most important learning happens.

One student at Cumberland loves 4-Square and basketball, but navigating disagreements during play can sometimes be challenging. In a less structured environment, a disputed call could easily escalate into conflict, a trip to the office, and lost instructional time.

Instead, he stays in the game.

Cumberland's students are "Playworks fluent." They know the games, but more importantly, they know the culture. When disagreements happen, students model good sportsmanship, encourage one another with a "good job, nice try," and keep playing. That shared expectation creates an environment where students learn how to manage frustration, resolve conflict, and move forward together.

A trusted Playworks coach provides another layer of support, offering encouragement and guidance in the moment so students can work through challenges on the playground and return to class ready to learn.

As Cumberland's assistant principal describes it, Playworks has helped create the "invisible architecture" of the school's culture: a place where students hold one another accountable with kindness, where every child has an opportunity to belong, and where the lessons learned through play carry far beyond recess.

Our Partners Report that Playworks:

97% Increases the number of students that are physically active

99% Helps students develop tpostive relationships with their peers

96% Helps foster an engaging learning environment.

98% Supports students' overall health and well-being.

SHE PLAYS. SHE LEADS.

A NEW PARTNERSHIP IS CREATING MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BAY AREA GIRLS TO STAY IN THE GAME—AND BUILD THE CONFIDENCE TO THRIVE BEYOND IT.

Playworks Northern California is proud to announce our partnership with Kaiser Permanente, the Golden State Valkyries, and the Golden State Community Foundation as part of She Plays On — a united initiative designed to keep girls in sports and help them thrive in life.

Through this partnership, we are bringing our proven programs to elementary schools in Oakland and San Francisco. By addressing total health — mind, body, and belonging — She Plays On connects girls with local community resources, mentors, and specially trained coaches to ensure every young athlete has the access and confidence she needs to play on.

This partnership launched in a memorable way: Junior Coaches and parents from Marshall and Moscone Elementary (SFUSD) attended their first-ever Golden State Valkyries game against the defending champion Las Vegas Aces. Before tip-off, our Junior Coaches participated in a pregame panel with Valkyries General Manager Ohemaa Nyanin — an inspiring opportunity to ask thoughtful questions and learn from her leadership journey firsthand.

We are grateful to Kaiser Permanente, the Golden State Valkyries, and the Golden State Community Foundation for investing in the next generation of girls. When young people have the resources, mentorship, and space to play, they build the confidence and skills to lead — on and off the court.

SPARK PLAY: WHERE EVERYONE GETS IN THE GAME

For one unforgettable day, the playground got a whole lot bigger.

At Playworks Northern California's fourth annual Spark Play, children, families, friends, and supporters came together at SPARK Social SF to celebrate something we believe deeply: play is for everyone.

From jump rope and four square to games that got kids and grown-ups moving side by side, Spark Play brought the Playworks experience to life beyond the schoolyard. Children tried new games and made new friends. Adults rediscovered the fun of jumping in themselves. And throughout the day, our community experienced what Playworks students know so well—that a great game can create connection almost instantly.

Spark Play is a celebration, but it is also a glimpse of what we work toward every day in schools across Northern California: spaces where everyone is invited in, children have opportunities to move, connect, and lead, and play creates a powerful sense of belonging. Because when everyone gets to play, everyone gets to be part of the team.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS IN PLAY!

Playworks Northern California is deeply grateful to the schools, funding partners, individual donors, and volunteers who make this work possible. Together, we are creating school communities where every child has the opportunity to experience safe, healthy, inclusive play and to build the confidence, connection, and sense of belonging that grow from it.Thank you for playing alongside us and for believing in the power of play to transform school communities.

Our School Partners

Alisal Union Elementary School District
Brentwood Union School District
Campbell Union School District
Cupertino Union School District
Davis Joint Unified School District
Dublin Unified School District
Elk Grove Unified School District
Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District
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Mt. Diablo Unified School District
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Pacifica School District
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Pleasanton Unified School District
Ravenswood City Schools
Sacramento City Unified School District
Salinas City Elementary School District
San Francisco Unified District
San Leandro Unified School District
San Lorenzo Unified School District
San Mateo-Foster City School District
Santa Clara School District
Soledad Unified School District
South San Francisco Unified
Spreckels Union Elementary School District
Sunnyvale Unified School District
The Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District
Twin Rivers Unified School District
Ukiah Unified School District
Vacaville Unified School District
Washington Unified School District
West Contra Costa Unified School District

Our Funding Partners

Bernard E. & Alba Witkin Charitable Foundation
Clorox
City and County of San Francisco:
Department of Children, Youth and Their Families
Dodge & Cox
El Camino Health and El Camino Healthcare District
Eucalyptus Foundation
Fenwick Foundation West
Franklin and Catherine Johnson Foundation
Golden State Community Foundation
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Laluyaux Foundation
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