

COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE  
BUSINESS REVIEW

# Playworks Children's Therapies opens second location

When Sarah McDonnell, MA CCC-SLP, first launched Play Works Children's Therapies in 2016, she provided therapy to five families. Now, four years later, her business is helping hundreds of families from throughout the Gorge and approximately 200 youth every week. Play Works Children's Therapies recently opened its second clinic in Hood River, home to the Play Works Center for Autism Services.

"This location is unique from our pediatric outpatient clinic on the Heights, as this clinic is ABA centric, while offering wrap around services including occupational, speech, and physical therapy," McDonnell said.

Located in Hood River, Play Works taps the evidenced-based power of play and uses it in the specialties of speech and language therapy, applied behavioral analysis (ABA), occupational therapy, physical therapy and feeding therapy.

"When we first opened, we were the second pediatric therapy clinic in the area, so deciding to expand our scope and square footage felt risky as all business ventures do," she said.

McDonnell is currently working with funders, specifically state funded insurance plans, to access reasonable rates so that she may continue to attract and retain the highest level of staff in order to meet the needs of families in the Columbia River Gorge.

Play Works Center for Autism Services works with children ages 2-18 and their families, with programming including the Intensive Early Childhood Program and After School programs for adolescents and teens with Autism and related disorders.

Play Works addresses conditions ranging from developmental delays to motor skill impairments, speech and feeding disorders, autism, memory/cognition, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and much more.

Since the business launched, McDonnell has expanded her children's therapy clinic to a staff of 20, relocated three times to accommodate growing patient access and patient services, and most recently added a second location. Today, Play Works is the only resource of its kind not just in the Columbia River Gorge but the entire state of Oregon.

Play Works also offers bilingual (Spanish) services and provides access to all people, regardless of their social, cultural, linguistic or economic backgrounds.

Play Works is planning its fourth open house and patient celebration in March (details will be announced soon) at the Center for Autism Services. The event will honor the excellence of its growing staff, the patients they serve, and their second location.



Erika Ellis, OTD, OTR/L and her pediatric patient enjoy a social play routine together. Photo courtesy of Playworks

Owner Sarah McDonnell in front of PlayWorks' new location on the Heights in Hood River. Submitted photo



## Bouldering community, cont.

In the light of the stained glass, and the Psalms-inspired lady of the rock, Will Bickerstaff of Government Camp tries a route, also known as "problem"; at left, kid-friendly routes in the next room are no problem for Ronan Scott-Roberts, 5, of Hood River. Photos by Kirby Neumann-Rea

"The goal is to have enough variety in the route setting," Byrne said, "both in difficulty and style." Routes include straight verticals as well as a variety of overhangs called *aretas* — French for ridges.

Altschl and Byrne both have climbing and indoor gym experience, and started writing business a plan just under two years ago, after considering other locations in Hood River.

"Shortly thereafter, we started looking at spaces and Jen found this on Craig's List," Byrne said. "We did a long feasibility study to see if we can make it work in this town and in this building. So far so good," he said. Vertical Solutions of Salt Lake City designed the multi-colored climbing walls, and the general contractor was Orange Construction of Hood River. Notably, new burnished brown wood mixed in with the climbing surfaces mimics the church's original distinctive "bead board" woodwork.

Brandon Bertram of Hood River said of Brimstone, "It's like a puzzle piece on the wall; It's very involved." Bertram, who has used several facilities in Portland, said, "When I heard this was coming around, I came to the open house and they had a very cool presentation, I was hoping they would do it the right way, and the answer is yes — world class routes, I could come here every day for six months and find something new."

Routes are changed every five weeks, giving repeat users time to get to know and perfect "projects" while keeping things fresh, according to Byrne. Molly Beard is head route setter. Nathan Frankel runs the youth programs, and staff members also include Eric Holmes, Hansen Urdahl, Mark Pearce and Jenny Harris.

The gym is open noon to 9 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekends, though the schedule is subject to change once the owners have a better handle on user needs, and climbing options vary including day passes, punch cards, and annual and family passes. Climbers sign a waiver at a counter fashioned from the original organ keyboard, and climbing shoe rentals are required. Chalk, and chalk bag worn on the hip are also available.

Altschl said, "Coming up the with name one was one of the hardest parts for us. We wanted something that did not ignore the fact that we are in an old church, that gave a nod to that, but people wouldn't mistake for religiously affiliated. We wanted to have some nod to climbing." Hence the word "stone."

"We wanted it to be a little irreverent without offending people," Altschl said.



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