

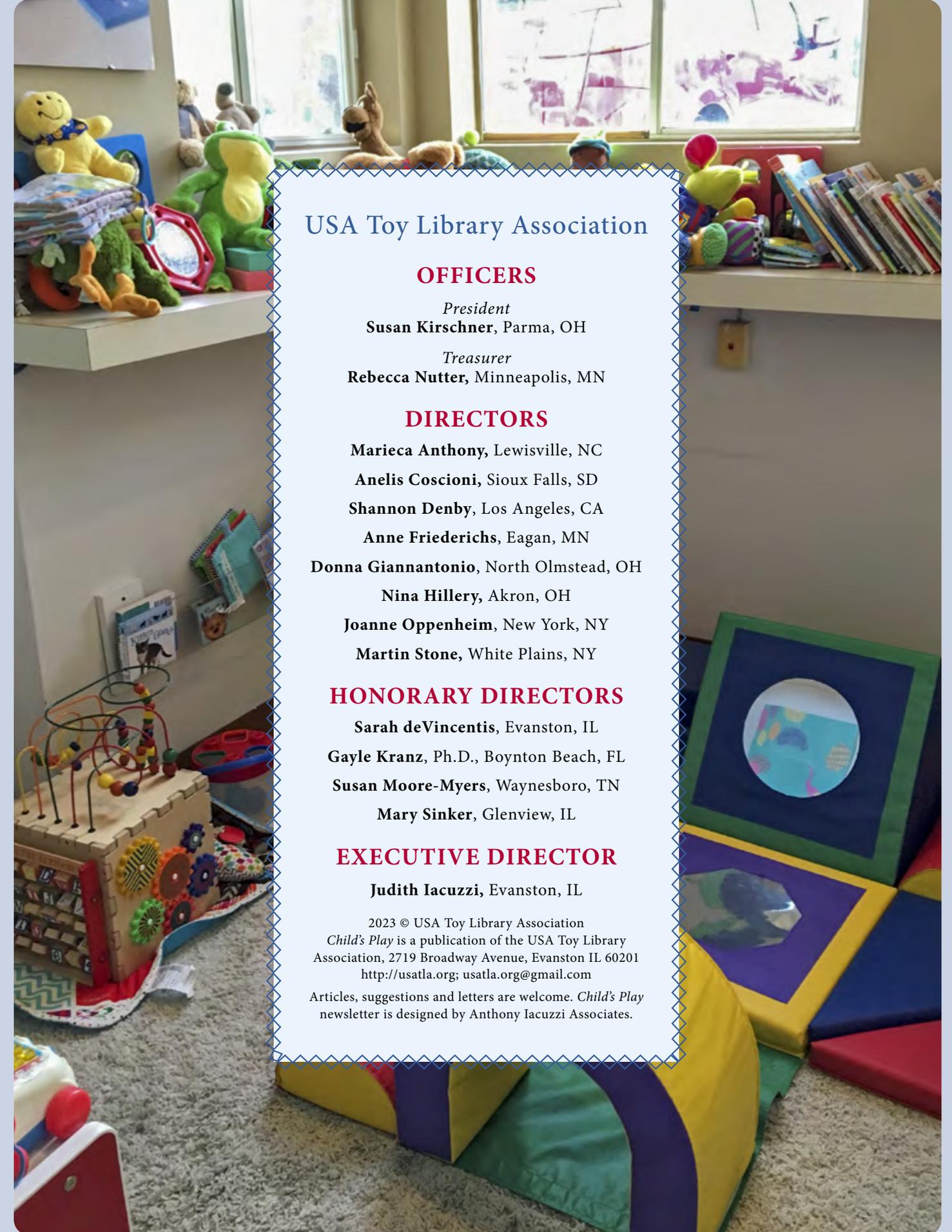
# Child's Play

Newsletter of the USA Toy Library Association  
— Fall 2023 —



*USATLA: Promoting  
Development Through  
Toys and Play*





## USA Toy Library Association

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<http://usatla.org>; [usatla@gmail.com](mailto:usatla@gmail.com)

Articles, suggestions and letters are welcome. *Child's Play* newsletter is designed by Anthony Iacuzzi Associates.

### Did you know that membership in USATLA entitles you to:

All training offered through the International Toy Library Association, free of charge. The Headquarters of ITLA is located in Melbourne, Australia. The webinars they sponsor (through What's App) are often in English and/or Spanish (with translation) and in the daylight hours for those of us living in American time zones. Announcements and postings from USATLA are disseminated on our website, Facebook and e-mailings. You just need to validate that you are a member of USATLA.

Special Note: USATLA Board member Anelis Coscioni of Sioux Falls, S.D., has joined the Brazilian Toy Library Association and is enjoying the information exchange, some of it in English. Says Anelis, "You can read it in English: <https://www.brinquedoteca.org.br/>

The 2023 Toy Library Guidelines, in PDF format, is an online compendium of provisions and recommendations for building, expanding and improving a successful toy library. We offer seven general areas for you to consider as you build it or build it better, with specific activities to follow in each area.

We compiled this fourth "operator's manual" published by the USATLA, with the counsel of the national toy library associations of Australia and The United Kingdom. We are indebted to both for the thoroughness and completion of this manual. It is free to all members and was recently emailed to all members from USATLA Headquarters.

### Welcome our newest members!

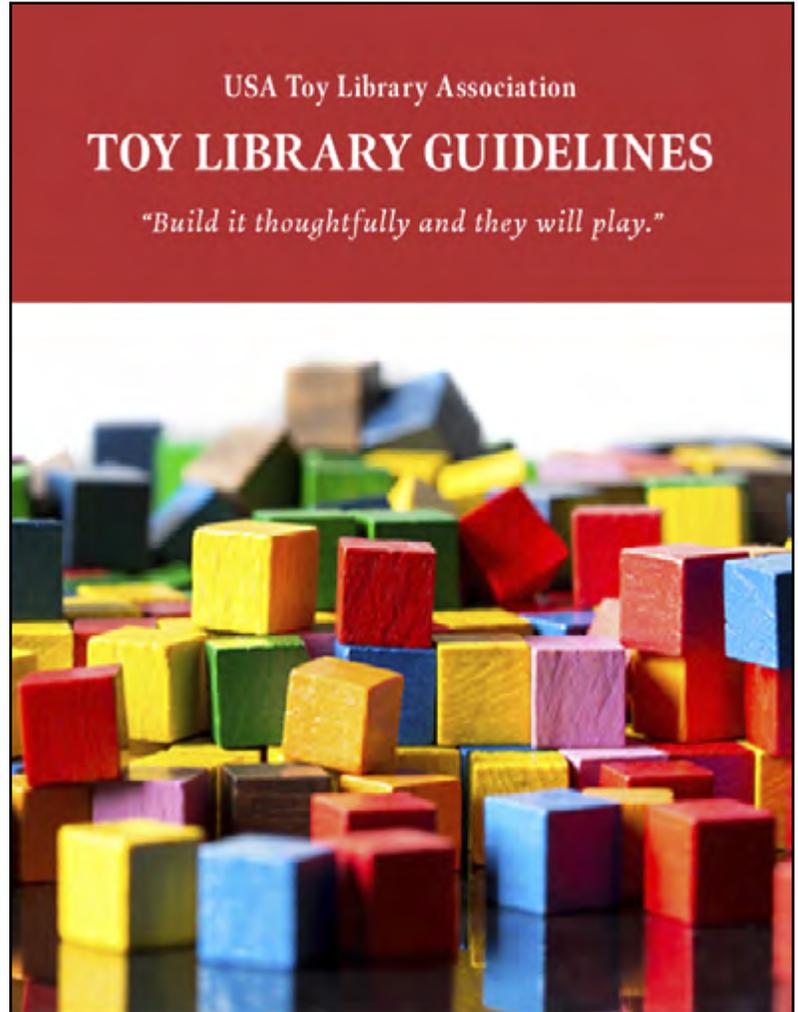
Sonia Bravo, [bravos@unm.edu](mailto:bravos@unm.edu), with The University of New Mexico Early Childhood Services Center

Mary T. Didiuk, Ph.D., [marydidiuk@travelingtoys.info](mailto:marydidiuk@travelingtoys.info), with Traveling Toys, Inc. in Madison, Connecticut

Rajeswari Jayavaradhan, [dsquare1922@gmail.com](mailto:dsquare1922@gmail.com), in Mason, Ohio

Clarissa Paige, [clarissapaige@yahoo.com](mailto:clarissapaige@yahoo.com), with HubCityKidzone in Long Beach, California

Dr. Anupama Ravi [scienceblog@natech4kids.org](mailto:scienceblog@natech4kids.org) of Los Altos, California



## INTRODUCING OUR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



### Rebecca Nutter of Minneapolis to Assume the Reins of the USA Toy Library Association

Hello! My name is Rebecca Nutter, and I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to lead as the executive director of the USATLA. I look forward to forging connections with our valued members and the dedicated individuals who manage toy libraries across the nation. The USATLA stands as a crucial resource for our members as well as for play enthusiasts and champions of early learning. My commitment is to continue nurturing our membership base and providing vital support to those who oversee toy libraries, equipping them with the necessary tools for success.



My journey into the world of toy libraries began in 2014 when I played a pivotal role in establishing one in Minneapolis, Minn. Drawing on my background in early childhood and special education, we carefully selected age-appropriate toys and underscored the significance of play in the lives of our toy library families. As our toy library expanded I became increasingly aware of the benefits it brings to all communities. Not only is it environmentally friendly but it also eases the financial burden on families and supplies children with the materials essential for their healthy development.



Prior to being a toy librarian, I served as a teacher and supervisor at the University of Minnesota Child Development Center. I was a preschool teacher and later a supervisor for the preschool classrooms. I worked with fellow educators, student teachers, and played an instrumental role in modeling and demonstrating appropriate classroom techniques and teaching practices.



A bit about my personal life: I reside in Apple Valley, Minn., alongside my husband Mark and our three daughters, Charlotte (11), Emily (8), and Zoe (6). I manage the Minneapolis Toy Library, which now boasts two locations in the Twin Cities and nearly 500 members. When I'm not immersed in the world of toys and libraries, I enjoy actively participating at my children's elementary school, planning and tending to my vegetable garden, and baking delightful treats with my kids.

Lastly, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Judith and Tony Iacuzzi for their unwavering dedication to USATLA and their instrumental role in shaping it into the organization it is today.

Warm regards,  
*Rebecca Nutter*

# FAVORITE TOYS

## Neighborhood Child Care Resource Program's 21 Favorite Toys

TOY NAME	DESCRIPTION	OPTIONAL SOURCE	APPROXIMATE AGES
Animal sets – Polar, wild, jungle, farm	Made from soft rubber, or vinyl with realistic features	Any early childhood catalogue	2-5
Braille, Math, ABC Blocks, Groovie Blocks	Updated version of 'old' ABC wooden blocks	Uncle Goose Toys	2 - 5
Building Topper Block Accessories	Wooden props such as street signs, block town building toppers, vehicles, and people figures	Any catalogue	2 – 5
Busy Box	4 sided with gears, chunky shapes, and handle to carry around	Lakeshore	1.5 - 3
Cherry Tree Blocks	Pieces look and feel like actual tree parts, smoothed and sized for small building activities	Magic Cabin	2.5 - 5
Cozy Coupe II™ Car	classic kid-powered car	Little Tikes	1.5 - 5
Design Builders	hard plastic pieces with interlocking pegs to form letters, shapes, abstract designs	Lakeshore-	3-5
Eggz egg shakers	Egg-shaped rhythm instrument that fits in the smallest hands	Music specialty shops	3 - 5
Feels Real Baby Dolls	Multicultural baby dolls with very realistic facial expressions	Lakeshore	2 – 5
Folding Wooden Barn and Castle	These are 2 separate units made of wood with limited detail leaving play to the imagination	Melissa and Doug	2-5
Folkmanis Puppets	Big Bad Wolf	Folkmanis	All ages
Geomags	Geomag is a magnetic construction toy that is based on simple principles of geometry.		5 +
Magna – Doodle	Great for pre-writing exercises	Fisher Price	2 - 5
Mama Do You Love Me Nesting Blocks	Cardboard nesting blocks with images from the story and related facts	Lakeshore	2 - 5
Marble Run	Look for sets that encourage creative structures		4 - 5
No Ends	hard plastic pieces with interlocking pegs to form letters, shapes, abstract designs	Discount School Supply – open-ended building set with colored hard plastic pieces and connectors	3-5
O-Balls	Plastic, easy to grip, light weight, colorful balls	Environments	Infants – 2
Rhythm Music Makers	Set of 4 easy to grasp sound makers	Environments	1 – 2
Sight and Sound Tubes	Clear plastic large tubes filled with sensory materials	Lakeshore	Infants – 2
Spaghetti maker	Try to find one with all plastic parts and hand crank; Other models require close adult supervision	Lehman's catalogue carries all non-electric tools – see Atlas Noodle Maker	3 – 5
Zoob Tubes	creative, connective, colorful, educational, requires dexterity and spacial relations ability	Many early childhood catalogues	3-5

### Sioux Falls Toy Lending Library acquires 35 new toy boxes to aid inclusion of children with special needs

The Sioux Falls Toy Lending Library has 16 locations and nearly 1,500 toy boxes available to families with kids ages 0-5. Its newest toys are promoting inclusion.

“Our goal is to create inclusion,” says Anelis Coscioni, executive director of the Sioux Falls Toy Lending Library. “If you go to a playground or school and you see a kid that looks different, acts different, (we encourage our children to) go and ask them, ‘How can we play together? What can we do to play together?’”

The new toy boxes, paid for in large part by the South Sioux Falls Kiwanis Club, focus on disabilities or impairments, including children with vision loss.

“Inside there is a toy and a book, and a book that talks about how a blind child sees the world. I invite people to get those toys and close your eyes and try to do what they have to do,” Coscioni says.

The Toy Library partnered with the Center for Disabilities to select appropriate toys, books, and categories for each of the 35 new toy boxes. Each box costs about \$120 to create.

“We are very thankful to all the organizations that supported us in buying these toy boxes,” Coscioni said.

“We wanted to do a project that was new to the club and that was a special need in the community,” South Sioux Falls Kiwanis Club Treasurer Dave Reimnitz said. “Young children is what Kiwanis is all about and this especially meets those needs, the ones that are really impacted with their special needs,” Reimnitz said.



### Fundraising Success

The Community Foundation of Sioux Falls recently granted \$10,000 to support the growing toy library program there. No stranger to finding valuable funding sources when she spots a need, Anelis worked with the Soroptimist Club of Sioux Falls in 2015 to launch the first toy library site in the area. Each box contains a toy and book and may include activities popular in other cultures. Boxes are identified on the outside with pictures so that the borrower doesn't have to read the language to know what she is checking out.

# Welcome New and Returning USATLA Board Members!

These individuals were elected to the USATLA Board in October 2023; each will serve a 3-year term.



**Newly elected Naveeda Qadir from Memphis, Tennessee**, worked first as an organic chemist in industry and academia for 10 years. She then began homeschooling her children and became interested in early childhood education. She helped set up the non-profit WINStep Forward, to promote educational and cultural exchange between students in the U.S. and India. Naveeda still works with homeschooling groups and is keen on play and toy lending. She said she believes that toy libraries are not only excellent vehicles for learning but also are instrumental in bringing communities together.



**Newly elected Lara Lehman from New Mexico** has been managing the Gallup, N.M. branch of the University of New Mexico Early Childhood Services Center's regional toy and resource lending library for more than four years as part of her work as an education consultant supporting community-based early childhood programs in northwestern New Mexico. She has been a member of USATLA for three years.

Lara has been working in the early childhood field for more than 23 years, the first 16 as a classroom teacher. She has been with UNM since 2016. While in the classroom, I practiced *Constructivism* creating a hands-on, play based environment for my students to direct their own learning through the materials and play they chose. "I am fortunate to have the space in the Gallup toy library to offer this same experience to children and families," she says.

The communities she works with are very diverse and reflect the long history of the area and people. Her work with programs and the library supports families of differing ethnic, racial, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds.

Says Lara, "I am committed to improving the lives and education of young children and their families. Thank you for the opportunity to do this through my work with the USATLA!"



**Returning Board member Martin Stone was former director of SEIT** (Special Education Itinerant Services) for the Toward Tomorrow program in Scarsdale, N.Y., and has since retired. He is a founding member of USATLA and has served as its president, secretary and treasurer. Among his many career posts working with children and families, Marty most recently provided educational and administrative services to pre-school children with disabilities who were participating in mainstreamed pre-school programs. He has worked successfully with children with special needs throughout his professional life. Marty is always there when you need him! According to many of his closest friends and colleagues.

## “I Never Wanted to Be USATLA President.” ~ Elaine Adler

Elaine Adler, who died in August at 95, is the subject of an extraordinary number of obituaries, notices, and remembrances. Her long life was full of accomplishments, and both public and private, even secret, acts of kindness and generosity. Many of them were creative in their focus and scope, such as the toy library. She served on the USA Toy Library Association Board for more than 20 years. She founded the Adler toy library at the Turrell Child Care and Early Learning Center in Paramus, New Jersey.

But it might be Dr. Sandra Gold who was the most straightforwardly eloquent about her beloved friend. “If you did an MRI of Elaine Adler, you would not find a single mean cell in her body,” Dr. Gold said. “That’s very unusual. I don’t know another human being like that. She never took herself seriously, but she took herself with confidence.”

When she was asked to be USATLA president, she said, “I don’t like to be president; I’d rather be president of vice. More fun.” Her twinkle was infectious.

Also, “she was a great equalizer,” Dr. Gold continued. “One of her charities, the Fortune Society, is for recently released prisoners; another that she was very fond of is the USA Toy Library Association; it’s a library for toys for kids whose parents can’t afford them.

“A lot of people avert their eyes when they’re approached for money or help or food or anything. Elaine never did that. No one was invisible to Elaine.”

We so miss her!



Elaine Adler, 1927-2023



## Achievements

**USATLA President Sue Kirschner**, Youth Literacy and Outreach Supervisor for Cuyahoga County Public Library in Ohio, said recently that in April 2023 the library’s toy circulation skyrocketed to 3,493 loans, the highest ever in its 30+-year history. (It began with 1,100 toys in 2008.). Such good news after the Covid pandemic; play is back in business!

A little more about President Sue...a forward-thinker, she has always wanted the Cuyahoga County Public Library to lead the nation in creative and enriching service to its patrons. A sizable development on her watch: Youth Literacy Kits, several of which have won national awards of excellence. Sue has also teamed with others in the redesign of children’s rooms in many of the 27 branches in the Cuyahoga system, a major and important undertaking that continues today. Sue’s talents are sought here and nationally in the American Library Association and the Public Library Association. We are fortunate to have such an accomplished president who does so much for play and kids, including devising games for the branches and awarding prizes to the winners. She means it. Her sign-off below her email signature: *Remember to play every day!*

### A REMINDER OF WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

Peter Gray, play authority and professor at Boston College, has been quoted by *Vox* on the value of play today, in parenting, healing many things, especially anxiety. An excerpt of the article follows. In its entirety you may read it here: <https://www.vox.com/23759898/kids-children-parenting-play-anxiety-mental-health>

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*“About 30 years ago, something happened to the way kids play.”*  
~ Peter Gray

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“While American children had once commonly enjoyed the freedom to run around outside with minimal adult interference, they began to spend more time indoors where their parents could watch them. When they did go outside, they were more often accompanied by a grown-up; unstructured roughhousing and roleplaying were replaced by supervised play dates or carefully shepherded trips to the park. Kids began to spend more time in organized activities, like dance or sports, and less time in the kind of disorganized milling-about familiar to generations past.

“The reasons for this shift were many: fears of kidnapping, stoked by a series of highly publicized cases; an increase in the length of the school year; parental anxieties about children’s futures in a time of growing income

inequality and economic insecurity. The result was a 25 percent drop in children’s unstructured playtime between 1981 and 1997, setting in motion a pattern of less freedom and more adult surveillance that historians and child psychologists believe continues to this day. “All kinds of independent activities that used to be part of normal childhood have gradually been diminishing,” said Gray.

The story continues. “Playing is fun. It’s also necessary. Free play, though, has a host of benefits, experts say. Free play helps develop kids’ executive functioning abilities, a set of skills that includes planning and self-control. It’s also important for building friendships. One study, conducted in Switzerland in the 1990s, compared children who played unsupervised in their neighborhoods to children who spent more time playing in parks with their parents looking on. The free-playing kids had more than twice as many friends as the park visitors and had better social and motor skills — they also spent more time outside overall.

Play can also be a way for kids to develop a sense of autonomy, which in turn helps them feel good about themselves. Regardless of age, “people are happier and mentally healthier when they feel that they are in charge of their own lives,” Gray said. “When people feel that they’re not in charge, that other people are making their decisions for them, they don’t feel so good.”

## USATLA Publications and Resources

The following publications are available for purchase [HERE](#)

### ***Child's Play Newsletter***

A newsletter full of information about toy libraries and related topics.

### ***Read It! Play It!***

by **Joanne and Stephanie Oppenheim**

An illustrated, 112-page book of fun activities that build literacy through reading and playing.

### ***Read It! Play It! With Babies and Toddlers***

by **Joanne and Stephanie Oppenheim**

An illustrated, 103-page book that builds literacy with babies and toddlers. *Now in English and Spanish. Please specify*

### ***Hey Kids! Out the Door, Let's Explore***

by **Rhoda Redleaf**

This 245-page masterwork includes twenty-seven nature, community and concept walks.

### ***Learn and Play the Green Way***

by **Rhoda Redleaf**

This 220-page book is grouped into six age-related sections that range from infants to schoolagers.

### ***When Play Isn't Easy: Helping Children enter and Sustain Play***

by **Sandra Heidemann and Deborah Hewitt**

This 87-page book helps children enter and sustain play.

### ***The Power of Play***

A discussion about early childhood education with Dr. Michael K. Meyerhoff, The Epicenter Inc.

Friends,

It's tough saying goodbye, but it's time. Thirty-eight years with the USATLA has been a tremendous journey, filled with wonderful people creating all kinds of opportunities for children and families throughout the USA. The common vision -- cultivating minds and talents through self-guided play experiences -- still sticks, as does the fact that quality toys rule.



The journey has been a great adventure, and I want to thank just a few of the individuals and institutions that continue to bolster toy libraries everywhere.

The LA Toy Loan, first in the world, started in a garage in the Great Depression giving toys to kids who didn't have any. It continues today bringing toys to playful centers throughout LA County where children can borrow, play, return and borrow again. The remarkable pioneering spirit of **Jane Donelson** who ran the LA Toy Loan for 30 years lives on in USATLA through the **Jane Donelson Player of the Year Program** which recognizes outstanding contributions to toy libraries and early childhood development. Fifty "players" have received the award dating to 1985 when Fisher-Price, the company that funded USATLA with parent company Quaker Oats, received it. Sally deVincentis, founder of Lekotek in the USA and the mastermind behind the USA Toy Library Association, received the second. We are indebted to those first award winners because without them, there would be no USATLA as we know it today.

I want to talk a little about another pioneer in the field, Rebecca Nutter. Incoming Executive Director, Rebecca is in toy library land for the long haul. Her two toy library sites in Minneapolis would be nowhere without the tenacity, vision and knowledge evident throughout her career. Her priorities of developing children's minds and curiosities through self-guided play, her commitment to recycling and saving landfills, her resolve to engender values of responsibility and cooperation, and her patient, unflappable embrace of toy libraries will give USATLA strong footing and a bright future.

Brava to Rebecca, the most recent leader of USATLA. You have a strong start, a strong team behind you, and much to look forward to. USATLA is very fortunate you said "yes."

Gratefully,

*Judy Iacuzzi*

Executive Director