Castles, moats, barbells and time machines! The possibilities for creating unique play structures are almost limitless with an Imagination Playground in a Cart™. And having opportunities for such boundless, imaginative play is vital for the health and wellness of young minds and bodies.

“Play is an important part of childhood,” said Dr. Eugene Sun, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico (BCBSNM) vice president and chief medical officer. “Active play on a daily basis helps children develop physically, mentally and emotionally.”

To help increase access to play for kids throughout New Mexico, BCBSNM donated five Imagination Playgrounds to organizations across the state in 2017.
With a collection of oversized blue foam parts, Imagination Playgrounds allow children to build and rebuild objects using their imaginations. The equipment encourages physical activity while also inspiring creativity, teamwork and just plain fun.

“Kids love imaginary play,” said Rita Condon, manager of the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) Obesity, Nutrition and Physical Activity Program. “It takes them away from screen time, such as watching TV or playing with video games.”

Condon spoke at the Imagination Playground unveiling to Healthy Kids Socorro County, which is part of the NMDOH program, Healthy Kids Healthy Communities. The program supports the prevention of childhood obesity by fostering increased opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating.

Our children absolutely need that time for creative, unstructured play.
Other groups receiving Imagination Playgrounds in 2017 included:

- **Bernalillo Academy**, a sub-acute residential treatment facility in Albuquerque for children with autism, developmental and intellectual disabilities, neurodevelopmental disabilities and other emotional and behavioral disorders

- **Boys & Girls Club of Gallup**, which offers after-school and summer programs for children in McKinley County

- **Embudo Valley Library and Community Center**, which provides an after-school program and early literacy and reading programs for children in Rio Arriba County and nearby areas

- **Youth Development, Inc.** (YDI), a community and family-based organization; with an accepting environment, diverse services and proven results, YDI prides itself on partnering with New Mexican families to help solve life’s problems

Dr. Diego Gallegos, president and CEO of YDI, noted that the Imagination Playground will help children at YDI develop their creativity, intelligence and social skills. “For us, it’s a great tool for our teachers to use with the kids,” he said.

“Our children absolutely need that time for creative, unstructured play,” said Melinda Heller-Nellos, executive director at Bernalillo Academy.

BCBSNM worked with KaBOOM!, the national nonprofit dedicated to giving all kids the childhood they deserve through play, to select organizations to receive the playground equipment. With these donations, BCBSNM supports efforts to make sure all kids get the balanced and active play they need to thrive.
Imagination Playgrounds Delivered to New Mexico Communities

For more information about Imagination Playgrounds, visit KaBOOM!

MAKING THE HOLIDAYS BRIGHTER

BCBSNM employees provide meaningful holiday gifts for families.

PROVIDING HEALTHY FOOD

Roadrunner Food Bank’s Childhood Hunger Initiative, supported by BCBSNM employees.

VOLUNTEERS GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

BCBSNM employees volunteer time and money to help make a difference.
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico (BCBSNM) employee volunteers, also known as Blue Corps\textsuperscript{SM} volunteers, put in a full workweek assisting our members. And they also generously volunteer their personal time to help their fellow New Mexicans.

Michelle Hawthorne, a Blue Corps Ambassador\textsuperscript{SM}, and her loyal group of volunteers start preparing boxes of food early on Saturday mornings for Silver Horizons’ senior population. Doug Anaya, 2017 BCBSNM Volunteer of the Year, and his motorcycle ministry deliver more than 350 meals each weekend to people experiencing homelessness. Add to the mix the many BCBSNM employees who choose to spend an evening sorting school supplies for our annual Operation Back to School deliveries.
In 2017, our employees volunteered more than 11,000 hours to a wide variety of organizations and causes. A small sample of what Blue Corps volunteers accomplished in 2017 includes:

- Through our Operation Back to School campaign, BCBSNM employees raised $15,000 to purchase more than 29,000 schools supplies that were delivered to 18 Title I elementary schools throughout the state. “Having the right tools for learning can make a big difference in being prepared and confident when a child starts school,” said Janice Torrez, divisional vice president of external affairs and chief of staff. “Our employees helped make the difference for many students.”

- On the second Saturday of each month — also known at Silver Horizons as “Blue Cross and Blue Shield Saturday” — Blue Corps volunteers sorted food, packed food boxes and assisted seniors with their shopping. Silver Horizons is an organization working to provide extra help for older adults with limited income in the greater Albuquerque metro area.

- BCBSNM employees helped raise more than $20,000 for the American Cancer Society’s annual Making Strides Against Breast Cancer walk in October. Employees organized salad bar lunches, sold grab bags and salsa and held silent auctions to raise the funds. “Our employees understand that breast cancer impacts our members, coworkers and families. We need to help provide funds for research and patient assistance,” stated Cynthia Baldonado, senior manager of community relations at BCBSNM.
Each year, BCBSNM recognizes one employee volunteer who exemplifies the spirit of giving back to the community. Doug Anaya, a care coordinator for BCBSNM Medicaid members, was named the 2017 Volunteer of the Year for his selfless work heading up a motorcycle ministry that provides food, clothing and shelter to people experiencing homelessness. The ministry, which was started by Anaya and his family, has grown to 50 volunteers who lend a hand every Saturday evening.

In 2017, our employees volunteered more than 11,000 hours to a wide variety of organizations and causes.
BCBSNM’s philanthropic investments, combined with the dedication of our Blue Corps volunteers, help many organizations doing worthwhile work for our state.

Watch these videos to learn more about Operation Back to School and our Volunteer of the Year.
MAKING THE HOLIDAYS BRILLIANT
BCBSNM employees provide meaningful holiday gifts for families...

IMAGINATIONS RUNNING WILD
Imagination Playground™ donations bring creative play to...

PROVIDING HEALTHY FOOD
Roadrunner Food Bank's Childhood Hunger Initiative, sup...

For media inquiries, contact Becky Kenny, Manager of Public Relations for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico at 505-816-2012 or Becky_Kenny@bcbsnm.com.
Thirteen-year-old Ajah tried on her brand-new ballet shoes and stood on her toes. Ajah and her grandmother Theresa were one of the 41 families who received holiday gifts from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico (BCBSNM) employees’ Adopt-a-Family gift drive in 2017.

“I’m excited to use the ballet shoes,” Ajah said. “I’m getting the things that we can’t really afford, and I’m really happy and thankful for that.”

For the third year, employees provided gifts for New Mexico families in the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren program. Families are identified by three local agencies that work directly with grandparents — Outcomes, Inc., Pegasus Legal Services for Children, and Methodist Children’s Home (MCH) Family Outreach.
Tamie Gregg of MCH Family Outreach said that the holidays can bring added stress for grandparents who are raising their grandkids. “Many grandparents are barely making ends meet as it is,” Gregg said. The Adopt-a-Family gift delivery, Gregg explained, “adds a lot of joy.”

Every year, employee teams “adopt” families. Each family member completes a wish list, which helps the teams provide meaningful presents for both the children and adults. Leading up to the holidays, employees organize a variety of activities to raise money to purchase gifts. In 2017, fundraisers included a cake walk, a homemade posole sale and a gift wrapping station, among other efforts. Staff members also contributed personal donations and gifts.

“We wanted to give back to the community,” said Theresa Teeter, a BCBSNM team captain whose group adopted three families. As a grandparent herself, Teeter said that the initiative is “dear to my heart.”

“I'm getting the things that we can't really afford, and I'm really happy and thankful for that.”
Once fundraising is complete and gifts have been collected, teams hold wrapping parties to adorn each present with brightly colored paper, bows and ribbons.

All efforts lead up to a special delivery day when families come together to unwrap gifts and spend time with employees.

“It helps us out a lot,” said Beverley, a grandmother who attended the event with her grandchildren. “We’re very grateful.”

As BCBSNM employee Michelle Martinez put it, “We just want to bring them joy.”

Watch our video of the gift delivery.
Adopt a Family 2017 – Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

PROVIDING HEALTHY FOOD
Roadrunner Food Bank’s Childhood Hunger Initiative, sup...

VOLUNTEERS GIVE BACK TO
BCBSNM employees volunteer time and money to help make...

IMAGINATIONS RUNNING WILD
Imagination Playground™ donations bring creative play to...
Hunger is an issue for 1 in 6 New Mexicans, according to Feeding America’s 2017 Map the Meal Gap report. The rate of hunger for children in the state is even higher; 1 in 4 children is food insecure. In some counties, the percentage of food-insecure children climbs to as high as nearly 35 percent.

To help address this problem, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico (BCBSNM) supports Roadrunner Food Bank’s Childhood Hunger Initiative. In 2017, BCBSNM renewed a three-year annual grant for $60,000 to Roadrunner Food Bank to give low-income families at 11 schools across New Mexico access to healthy food.
The grant, funded through BCBSNM’s Healthy Kids, Healthy Families® program, also supports mobile food pantry distributions at two senior centers as part of Roadrunner Food Bank’s Senior Hunger Initiative.

In the first three years of the partnership, BCBSNM’s grant brought more than 780,000 pounds of food to 50,000 clients at schools.

School personnel identify families and children in their schools who are experiencing hunger and invite them to participate. Each family receives 50 pounds of food monthly, including fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy and non-perishables.

Miriam Guerrero is a food recipient at Van Buren Middle School, where her sister goes to school. Guerrero said that the food pantry helps feed her family. “It’s helped us because my dad is the only one that works,” she said.

A primary goal of the Childhood Hunger Initiative is to feed hungry children by bringing nutritious food to families in their own communities. In addition to supplementing a household’s monthly food needs, the pantries help families save their limited resources for other essentials, such as gasoline and utilities. The distributions ease families’ worries about where their next meal will come from. And having access to food pantries at their schools fosters a sense of comfort and trust.
“It’s a support system,” said Perla Garcia Manjarrez, a volunteer at the mobile food pantry at Van Buren Middle School.

On distribution days, a large truck delivers pallets of food, which volunteers unpack and organize. The school space transforms into a farmer’s market where families move from table to table, picking up fresh foods as well as packaged items.

The food pantries have had a positive effect on the participants. Roadrunner Food Bank’s Childhood Hunger Initiative poll shows that 97 percent of surveyed families said that they ate more fruits and vegetables. Eighty-three percent said they ate less unhealthy foods. Sixty-one percent said their children had better grades, and 56 percent had better school attendance.

Each family receives 50 pounds of food monthly, which includes fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy and non-perishable food items.
The BCBSNM grant has also brought more awareness about health, explained Sonya Warwick, Roadrunner Food Bank communications officer. This is due in part to the Care Van®, BCBSNM’s mobile health unit, teaming up with licensed medical professionals to provide basic health services at many of the school distribution sites.

Shawn Morris, principal at Van Buren Middle School, said that students often go home to empty cupboards and refrigerators. “The mobile food pantry provides food for those families,” Morris said. “So when they come to school, they’re not hungry, and they’re ready to learn.”
Partnership with Roadrunner Food Bank

For more information about the Childhood Hunger Initiative, visit Roadrunner Food Bank.