

## **The Magic House, St. Louis' Children's Museum**

516 South Kirkwood Road

St. Louis, MO 63122

(314) 822-8900

<http://www.magichouse.org>

### **Rating of Accessibility (out of 5 stars)**

Overall Rating: 4.75 stars

- Accessible by Metro's bus routes: 0 stars
- Docent guides upon request: 0 stars
- Well staffed and well supervised: 5 stars
- Tactile and auditory components: 4.5 stars

This evaluation was conducted between July 9, 2009 and August 14, 2010 by Stephen Kissel, Blind Community Enrichment Associate for the St. Louis Lighthouse for the Blind, with the assistance of Ms. Carolyn Daniel, Vice President of the Magic House.

Magic is so frequently associated with optical illusions and slight-of-hand tricks, but the exhibits and activities at the Magic House explore magic that can be observed using all of the senses, not just sight. The facility itself presents some significant navigational obstacles to sight-impaired individuals, but with the assistance of a sighted companion, blind and visually impaired youth can experience a wide array of fun and engaging activities.

Visitors wishing to take advantage of public transportation will wish to solicit the services of local cab companies, Metro's Call-A-Ride service, or other sighted drivers, for there are no bus stops or Metro Link stations close to the Magic House. Parking is free, and admission is very reasonable: \$8.75 for an individual and \$5.75 a person for groups of at least fifteen people. There is no clearly defined path through the Magic House, and existing paths are often full of energetic youth, so utilizing Sighted Guide assistance when navigating the Magic House is highly recommended. It is not currently possible to arrange for a personal docent guide, but the building is well staffed and well supervised, making the facility safe for youth, and enabling visitors to easily solicit assistance when necessary.

All exhibits at the Magic House rely on the use of many different senses, not just sight. For this reason, the blind or visually impaired visitor is not at a complete disadvantage. The sense of touch allows young visitors to experience the magic of gravity, static electricity, vibrations, and both magnetic and mechanical forces. The sense of hearing allows visitors to experience the

magic of musical sounds, harmony, and melody. Finally, all of these senses are combined into the sense of imagination by allowing visitors to step into the role of a construction worker, bank clerk, early American explorer, detective, Jack (of Jack and the Beanstalk fame), and the President of the United States.

Some featured attractions such as the Hall of Mirrors, the Bubble Room, and the Garden Kaleidoscope rely heavily on the sense of sight, but most can still be enjoyed with the assistance of a sighted companion to describe the visuals. Furthermore, there are enough tactile and auditory exhibits and activities, such as the Children's Village, the Water Works Room, and the iconic ball of static electricity, to allow for a totally fun and enriching experience for blind and visually impaired youth.

The Magic House also contains a small café which serves a selection of soups, sandwiches, and other basic cafeteria-style foods. As with most cafeterias, there is no Braille or large-print menu, but the menu is basic enough that staff members should be able to assist a blind or visually impaired individual in making an informed decision in a timely manner. The menu may also be downloaded from the Magic House's web site in a pdf format, making the information accessible to blind or visually impaired individuals through the use of screen reading and screen enlarging software. Thanks to the use of headings and the clear alternative text on the page's links, blind computer users should have little difficulty in obtaining basic visitor information from the website. The one exception to this is the "Exhibitions" page. This is because the information on the various rooms and attractions is presented in the form of cycling still images of kids enjoying the many attractions. Screen reading software will not be able to detect the captions within the short slide shows, the only descriptive text on the page. No real problems are anticipated for low-vision individuals using screen enlarging software.

For any questions or general inquiries, please use the "Contact Us" E-mail link on the homepage or call the main telephone number for the Magic House during regular business hours, using the phone number provided at the beginning of this evaluation.