



## CASE STUDY

The 2026 Well-Being by Design Fellows participated in a four-month professional development program for designers and producers of interactive kids' technology and media. They met online to workshop their current projects, network with other fellows, and gain insights from research and industry leaders as they worked to incorporate principles of well-being into their designs. We are delighted to share highlights from each fellow's experience.

# Allie Dewey



Allie Dewey is an exhibition designer who creates hands-on, learner-centered experiences for museums and cultural spaces. Gravitated toward projects that draw from multiple fields, Allie believes successful exhibitions should spark curiosity while inviting visitors of all ages to explore, discover, and create through active participation. She currently works at The DoSeum designing interactive galleries for both the DoSeum and clients worldwide.



**PRODUCT:** Big Little Town

**TARGET AGE:** 0-5

Digital media interactives for Little Town Exhibit

→ [THEDOSEUM.ORG](https://thedoseum.org)

Our most popular exhibition is undergoing a reimagination. The enhanced *Big Little Town* experience is designed as an imaginative, immersive, and communal environment where children explore social interactions and real-world scenarios through hands-on activities. Guided by the philosophy “Try it, play it, be it,” the exhibition encourages holistic development with caregiver support. Learning goals include strengthening gross and fine motor skills, practicing foundational concepts like counting, and developing social-emotional skills. As this exhibition is reimagined, I worked to develop “phygital” (the blending of physical and digital worlds to create immersive, interactive, and personalized visitor experiences) elements to enhance the role play. Through the fellowship, I evaluated how the interactive digital experiences we are planning for the *Big Little Town* might contribute to children's well-being using the RITEC framework, focusing specifically on autonomy, relationships, and creativity, as these areas are most directly aligned with the developmental needs of young children.



Current little town gallery space

## WHAT COMPONENTS OF WELL-BEING DOES MY PROJECT ADDRESS?

For the fellowship, I chose four main digital interactives that we plan to develop for the reimagined *Little Town*:

### 1. River/Fishing Projection

Visitors enter an immersive, movement-responsive river experience with animated aquatic life that leads to an interactive fishing activity and periodically transforms into a “floor is lava” activity, fostering open-ended play, collaboration, and accessibility through movement-based and imaginative experiences.

### 2. Dance Movement Interactive

A dance-themed interactive activity, similar to *Just Dance*, where kids can follow along to existing dance videos, learn new dance moves, and create their own. This activity promotes well-being through physical activity, creativity, and social connection through music and self-expression.

### 3. Construction

Built into a wood structure, back-lit screens invite children to explore creativity through hands-on art and construction. The construction zone fosters well-being through hands-on creativity, fine motor skills, and collaboration through open-ended painting.

### 4. Design your own car

Children design vehicles on a tablet and see them projected onto suspended car models in real time, with physical elements they can customize for a blended phygital experience. Blending digital and physical play, the interactive supports autonomy, creativity, and social interaction.

When evaluating our proposed designs, I focused on the well-being dimensions of **autonomy**, **relationships**, and **creativity** using the RITEC framework, while embedding **safety**, **inclusion**, and **identity** exploration throughout. At this stage, competence is not an isolated skill set but is closely tied to opportunities for independent choice, creative expression, social interaction, identity exploration, and emotional development; accordingly, many of the intended learning outcomes emphasize social-emotional growth. Safety and security, along with diversity, equity, and inclusion, were treated as foundational principles embedded throughout the experience rather than as discrete focus areas. Identity, in particular, functions as an overarching theme, as the core premise of the space is to support children in exploring and expressing different roles through active play. There remains an opportunity to further deepen the integration of emotional development beyond turn-taking alone.



*[By including both physical and digital interactives] I get two sides of the story that help me get a fuller picture of what I’m learning about.*



Co-designing with DoSeum’s Youth Advisory Board

## HOW CAN MY PRODUCT BETTER ADDRESS CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING?

### 1. Design for open-ended, communal play that supports autonomy and relationship-building

Feedback from youth advisors and observations of preschoolers show a clear preference for open-ended experiences over structured interactives, as they foster creativity and allow children of all abilities to engage at their own level. In response, I shifted the dance experience away from predetermined choreography and toward a more flexible environment that encourages children to explore movement, creativity, and self-expression. This approach aligns with the RITEC framework by prioritizing autonomy and creativity, allowing children to engage on their own terms while also creating opportunities for collaborative play, social interaction, and relationship-building.

### 2. Add more opportunities for meaningful social connection

Participants in the co-design sessions expressed interest in incorporating educational elements into the interactive river experience to transform it from an individual activity into a shared learning opportunity. This feedback highlighted the potential for the river to foster meaningful interactions between children and caregivers. In response, we plan to integrate opportunities for caregivers to actively participate by offering guidance, responding to children's discoveries, and helping identify different fish species. These interactions can create shared moments of exploration and learning, strengthening social connections while enriching the overall experience.



Co-designing with DoSeum's Youth Advisory Board

## REFLECTION

Feedback from young people has been a critical part of the design process for the reimagined Little Town. Both the DoSeum's Youth Advisory Board (YAB) and the fellowship's Youth Design Team identified the river projection as a standout concept, with strong alignment in preferences despite differences in age and prior experience with children's museum environments. Across both groups, there was notable enthusiasm for enhancing the construction experience through alternative tools—such as spray paint or shape sponges—either alongside or in place of traditional brushes.

Participants also expressed a desire to engage more deeply with content, including opportunities to learn about fish species and car facts, and emphasized the value of integrating audio and physical elements to create a more immersive experience. Overall, there was a clear preference for physical and “phygital” interactions over strictly digital alternatives, reinforcing the importance of tactile, hands-on engagement in an increasingly digital landscape.



## LOOKING AHEAD

I have gained valuable tools to further develop and strengthen my co-design practice. In particular, I found the Cooney Center's [Co-Design with Kids Toolkit](#) to be very helpful and plan to continue using it as we expand community conversations with children and stakeholders, and as we grow and evolve our Youth Advisory Board. We are continuing to conduct co-design sessions and have actively incorporated key learnings and participant feedback into our ongoing development and ideation processes.

I also plan to continue to reference the RITEC framework for this project and others I will design and develop throughout my career.

### 1. Rebalancing play through physical–digital integration

As children grow up in increasingly screen-saturated environments, thoughtfully designed “phygital” experiences can restore balance by blending tactile, embodied play with meaningful digital augmentation. These experiences encourage movement, collaboration, and sensory engagement while still leveraging the interactivity and adaptability of digital tools. For kids, this can lead to deeper learning, improved social interaction, and stronger memory retention. For designers, the key lesson is not to compete with digital media, but to integrate it in ways that enhance—not replace—physical exploration.

### 2. Designing for shared family engagement

Both children and caregivers are signaling a desire for experiences they can participate in together, rather than parallel or isolated forms of engagement. Phygital environments create opportunities for intergenerational interaction by offering layered experiences that appeal across ages and abilities, inviting collaborative problem-solving or storytelling. This highlights for designers the importance of creating flexible systems that support multiple entry points, fostering connection rather than fragmentation within family groups.

### 3. Shifting expectations for meaningful interactivity

As digital natives, today's kids expect interactivity to be intuitive, responsive, and personalized—but they also crave authenticity and real-world connection. Physical components ground experiences in reality, while digital layers can provide narrative depth, feedback, and adaptability. This shift challenges designers to move beyond novelty-driven tech and toward intentional, purpose-driven interactivity. The broader lesson for the field is that successful experiences will be those that feel cohesive and human-centered, using technology to deepen engagement rather than distract from it.



Joan Ganz Cooney Center

For more information about the Well-Being by Design Fellowship program, please visit [joanganzcooneycenter.org/fellowship2026](https://joanganzcooneycenter.org/fellowship2026)