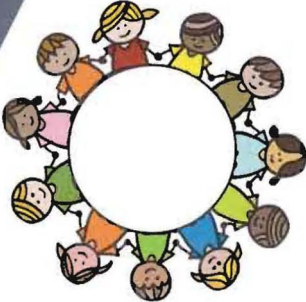


Youth Revolution



**TWO INNOVATIVE BRANDS ARE FORCING US TO
RETHINK WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT KIDS' FITNESS:
GREAT PLAY, USA AND SHOKK FITNESS, ENGLAND**

"Now we have a new generation of entrepreneurs who are bringing new ideas, technology and business models, as well as a fresh passion, to the problem of keeping children active in an increasingly inactive world."


"Their vision seems destined to, at the very least, inform and, possibly, to transform the industry's perspective on the children's market."

"As anyone who's been involved with the industry for a short while knows, Keith [Camhi, Great Play's co-founder], is one of its star entrepreneurs... Camhi, who earlier made industry history with FitLinxx, a firm that delivers a wide range of technology-based fitness solutions worldwide, has devised an innovative business model."

By Stephen Wallenfels

Drew Blakely, 2, peers out from the lobby window at the 2,000-square-foot Interactive Arena with obvious longing. The fact that the shock-absorbing Taraflex floor is imported from France, has a 98% rebound-accuracy rating for bouncing balls, and is infused with an antimicrobial shield that kills fungus on contact doesn't matter to her. The carefully choreographed interactive video displays beamed onto three walls from multiple ceiling-mounted LCD projectors—operated by a bank of PCs running proprietary software designed for optimum visual impact and age-appropriate involvement—is appreciated on some level, but not her central focus at the moment. She likes the brightly colored activity stations of various shapes and configurations, but doesn't care to comment on how each specifically addresses motor-skill development, balance,

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and coordination. All she knows is that kids are out there playing with their parents and having *fun*. They're climbing ramps, crawling through tubes, and jumping on her personal favorite—the trampoline. Even though her face is still flushed and her blond hair a little bit sweaty from the 50-minute session she's just finished, she seems more than ready to do it all over again. At two years old, Drew has been coming to the Great Play facility in Redmond, Washington, once a week for one-and-a-half years. "She loves it here," her mother, Kim, says. The observation is welcome, but unnecessary—Drew's beaming smile says it all.

It wasn't all that long ago that the words *clubs* and *children* rarely occurred in the same sentence. But, for a number of years now, there's been a steady shift toward providing youngsters with programs, equipment, facilities, and, even, fitness-franchise brands designed to meet their specific needs. Today, driven by greater awareness about children's health and increased concerns about the *lack* of it—particularly given epidemic childhood obesity—the trend is accelerating.

Now, in addition to the kids' Field House at Chelsea Piers, in New York City; Strive's kidzSmart strength-training circuits; the O2 MAX club for teens in Santa Monica, California; and franchises such as Fitwize 4 Kids... Now we →



Great Play, Stamford, Connecticut

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A NEW GENERATION OF ENTREPRENEURS IS BRINGING NEW IDEAS, TECHNOLOGY, AND BUSINESS MODELS TO BEAR ON THE PROBLEM OF CHILDHOOD INACTIVITY.

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Linxx to youth fitness

Great Play, LLC, was launched in Stamford, Connecticut, in 2006 by cofounders Keith and Jyl Camhi. Today, there are two corporate locations, in Stamford and in Scarsdale, New York, and one franchised operation, in Redmond, Washington, which opened one year ago. As anyone who's been involved with the industry for a short while knows, Keith is one of its star entrepreneurs: the cofounder and chairman of FitLinxx, a Norwalk, Connecticut, firm that delivers a wide range of technology-based fitness solutions worldwide.

"We wanted to get into the kids' fitness market and considered operating an existing franchise, like a My Gym or a Gymboree," he recalls, "but we felt the industry had grown a little stale relative to the emerging research and technologies. We were confident that, with my experience at FitLinxx and Jyl's extensive marketing background at Microsoft, we could create a business model that would introduce innovation and energy to the sector and make it a whole lot better."

FitLinxx's success at engaging exercisers is predicated on improving technique and providing ongoing encouragement, and, not surprisingly, the same approach is utilized by Great Play. "For instance," Camhi explains, "the curriculum for older children includes six sports-skills programs—for football, baseball, basketball, soccer, volleyball, and floor hockey. Staff teaches individual competence across 24 skills, all of which are geared toward developing proper technique and sport proficiency. To enhance the learning experience, proper techniques are demonstrated by the staff and displayed on big screens."

To make practice fun for young members, the video displays can be interactive, with features such as virtual bottles exploding when "hit" by a thrown ball. "We're constantly building their skills and reinforcing their sense of success," Camhi points out, "but the kids aren't aware this is happening—all they know is that they're having fun."

A Great Play site requires about 3,000 square feet and can function as a stand-alone facility or as part of a health club. "It's about the size of three racquetball courts," says Camhi.

"We're providing a safe, healthy environment for kids ages six months to 12 years to play, develop motor skills, improve sports performance, and increase confidence and self-esteem," says Camhi. "It's a very happy place to be."

For more information visit:
www.greatplay.com/franchise

