Creating a Play Space in Brooklyn

By MELANIE GRAYCE WEST, Wall Street Journal

The children of Nuestros Niños Day Care Center wanted a playground with a miniature rock wall, five slides and a tic-tac-toe wall. On Thursday, about 200 volunteers will converge on Williamsburg, Brooklyn, to build that playground. By Friday, children will be sliding, running and jumping.

Creating playgrounds is the mission of KaBOOM!, a Washington, D.C.-based advocacy organization. In the past 15 years, the organization has built nearly 2,000 playgrounds across the country, including 36 in the five New York boroughs.

Nuestros Niños, a city-run day care that provides low-cost or free child care, approached KaBOOM! more than two years ago for its help in transforming a small garden park adjacent to the day care into a playground for its 140 children. Since then, Nuestros Niños has raised funds and planned and prepared for the playground, bringing together the community and parents.

KaBOOM! works with organizations to develop a fund-raising plan and recruit community support. Most of the funding for a playground, which costs about $85,000 to $100,000, comes from a KaBOOM! corporate partner. For Nuestros Niños, most of the funding comes from Dr Pepper Snapple Group Inc., which is sending volunteers to the build. The remaining $8,500 needed for the playground was raised by the children and their parents through bake sales, raffles and a children's art sale. A movie crew that needed space for film equipment borrowed space from the day care and contributed to the playground fund, too.

Even the mother of Miriam Cruz, executive director of Nuestros Niños, sold turkey sandwiches to raise money.

During Thursday's build, some parents will be there as will volunteers from local community organizations. GrowNYC, a New York City environmental nonprofit, is bringing tools and has helped prepare the site for the build. A team from KaBOOM! will coordinate the day. The children will create art and help plant the garden. When it's all done, there will be a play space with picnic tables and a garden.

"They're going to be able to go out and exercise, climb and run," says Ms. Cruz. "It's wonderful."

Beyond the benefit to children, the playground rallies the community around a project, says Darell Hammond, chief executive and founder of KaBOOM!. "The playground project as the Trojan horse becomes an entry point for the community to continue to do significant and great things," says Mr. Hammond.