



Bri Gabel joins volunteers and Imagine Children's Museum staff as they clean the bones of a gray whale at a Mukilteo-area industrial site early this month. The whale died in 2019. The bones will be part of an exhibit Gabel is designing for the museum's addition, which is due to open in 2022. (Julianne Diddle photo)

## Whale skeleton will be a star attraction at children's museum

Exhibit's designer pitched in and shared expertise as volunteers spent a day cleaning massive bones.

By [Julie Muhlstein](#)  
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The cleaning crew, wearing dish-washing gloves and wielding scrub brushes, looked like volunteers at a car wash. But instead of polishing hubcaps and chrome, they were using Dawn dish soap on massive bones.

On a warm day in early June, the dismantled skeleton of a 41-foot gray whale — identification number CRC-1740 — was washed and laid out in the sun to dry. The bones remain in storage at Edge Concrete Construction, the business along Mukilteo Speedway where the cleaning took place.

The whale, an emaciated male, died July 3, 2019, a week after being spotted in southern Puget Sound. That might have been the sad ending to this whale tale. Instead, the giant skeleton will become the showpiece of a gray whale exhibit in the Imagine Children's Museum. It will be part of the Puget Sound Ecosystem Gallery in the Everett museum's three-floor, 33,000-square-foot expansion project, due to open in 2022.

Bri Gabel, who's been an intern with the museum for more than a year, recently earned a master's degree in museology at the University of Washington. To create the whale display, Gabel said Thursday, she'll collaborate with Edge Concrete. The company has fabricated projects for zoos and aquariums, including what appears to be a rocky tunnel that houses the train exhibit at the Imagine Children's Museum.

With a background in marine biology, Gabel is also working on an intertidal aquarium that will be part of the museum's addition.

The whale bones will be at floor level so children will be able to touch them. Rather than a fully assembled skeleton, Gabel said, the display will show "the most important parts of the whale." That means the top of the body, including the neck and arms — "whales have arms and fingers like we do," she said. The bones in a whale's flipper are much like those in a human arm.