

Roseville Needs Universally Accessible Playgrounds

Eight-year-old Roseville resident Zoie Digne gets where she needs to go in her wheelchair. But when she goes to the park, she can't get through the sand pit to the swings. Even if she could, the swings are not designed for children who cannot hold themselves in. It is frustrating for Zoie, and heartbreaking for her grandmother, Jackie DeMuth.

Roseville does not have a playground universally accessible to all of its residents--children and adults alike. This is a vital need; the National Association for the Education of Young Children indicates "Young children learn best through direct sensory encounters ... Learning should be the outcome of hands-on experience, especially play." While school playgrounds and neighborhood parks meet Americans with Disability Act requirements for accessibility, they are not barrier free. Children who use wheelchairs and walkers get trapped in sandpits and their leg braces get caught in narrow pathways. Traditional playgrounds often do not have sensory components that stimulate touch, hearing and smell, key factors to play for those with sensory or developmental disabilities. Often this leaves disabled children sitting on the sidelines, watching as their able-bodied friends and siblings play. Zoie can only watch as others squeal in delight on the swings.

Including all children in fully accessible play environments has positive effects on social, emotional, cognitive and physical development. Studies have proven that integrated play helps disabled children develop fine and gross motor skills, receptive communication skills, cerebral functions, physical strength, and social skills, including independence and self esteem. Integrated play also gives able-bodied children the opportunity to experience and accept children with disabilities as equals. Universally Accessible playgrounds are fully accessible and sensory-rich, delighting children of all abilities while providing a place where compassion and acceptance flourish.

The US Census Bureau estimates that of the 2,122 disabled children aged 5-15 in Placer County in 2006, more than half, 1,218, live in Roseville. Roseville plans to be the first community in Placer County to address this need by partnering with Shane's Inspiration, a company known worldwide for its work in this area, and building Universally Accessible playgrounds at each of our three regional parks.



Parents First Introduced Roseville to the Need

Attending a Folsom park event, DeMuth met Laurie Newton who had been researching accessible playgrounds for her son. When the two women put their heads together, building a playground to bridge the gap between able and disabled children grew from an idea to their mission. With a new playground in the works at Mahany Park, the women approached the Roseville Parks and Recreation Department to discuss making it more accessible. The City Council and staff enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to fill this unmet need and pledged support for the project. Not only would the new playground be Universally Accessible, but existing playgrounds at Maidu and Royer regional parks would also be renovated and upgraded to this new standard. While some cities have one Universally Accessible playground, Roseville will be the first in Northern California to build all of its regional playgrounds to this standard. The City of Roseville, already known for its award-winning parks, is raising the bar in the region.

Roseville staff visited Universally Accessible playgrounds in Sacramento, Calabasas and Los Angeles and witnessed first hand the rewards these playgrounds bring: disabled and able-bodied children playing together side-by-side, children and adults of all abilities interacting without barriers. Roseville has a tremendous park system and an adaptive recreation program; building Universally Accessible playgrounds will provide an even higher level of service and interaction.

Program Objectives Include:

- Provide a place for children of all abilities to have the opportunity for social, physical, and emotional development through play
- Provide the rare opportunity for disabled and able-bodied children to experience and accept one another
- Raise community awareness and educate the public on the need for play for all children
- Help dissolve barriers for disabled youth
- Construct three Universally Accessible playgrounds
- Provide “playdates” after construction is complete (programmed and staffed activities coordinated with local schools and designed to bring youth together)

While these playgrounds are specifically designed to provide access for disabled children, the real benefit is for all children to interact. Thirteen-year-old Kaitlyn explains, “My buddy taught me that I am not that different from someone with a disability. They can still do anything I do, just in a different way. Truly we are all the same.”

Community Support is Extensive

The Roseville community offered its first support of the project as parents, children, and educators came together for a Community Input Workshop in November 2007 to begin designing Mahany Park. A steering committee of 11 community volunteers meets monthly to review plans, discuss design and create the structure of the project and fundraising campaign. Community service organizations and the Roseville Chamber of Commerce have pledged support and contributed financially with fundraising events. Local contractors have pledged in kind services. Community business leaders, including our honorary chair, Michael Ziegler, President and CEO of PRIDE Industries, are helping to spread the word on this exciting project.



Playground Construction is Underway

The first playground at Maidu Park is about to break ground on its Universally Accessible retrofit. Design of Mahany Park, a unique one-acre playground and the signature site of this project, is complete and will go out to bid this winter. The third playground, Royer Park, will be retrofitted as part of the Downtown Master Plan currently under design.

Playground features include sand and water play, an interactive wall, swings, tunnels, bridges, and shade areas. By incorporating rubberized surfacing, wide walkways, ramps, waist level play areas, sensory garden and other elements, the playgrounds will provide full access to all play areas. Tactile surfaces, water play and auditory elements engage all the senses and swings are designed to support children with disabilities. The rubberized (resilient) surfacing, also known as poured in place, is a recycled rubberized mat used throughout the playgrounds. This surface greatly increases accessibility and mobility but also substantially increases the cost of construction materials and labor.



Total construction costs for all three parks are estimated at \$2.3 million – nearly twice the City's available funds and double the costs of traditional playgrounds. A fundraising effort has begun and \$1.6 million in City and community funds has been received or pledged.

A project of this importance cannot and should not be funded solely by the City or by individuals--it needs an entire community effort. One of the unique aspects of this project is the combination of public and private groups joining together to make these playgrounds a reality.

“Playdays” Will Bring Children Together

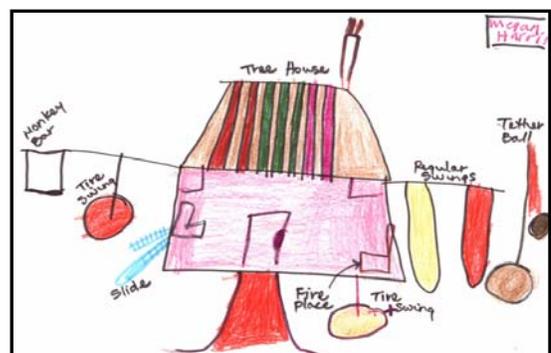
By partnering with Shane’s Inspiration, we will learn from their experience and use them to reach out to the community and organize play days. These play days will bring children from local schools to the playgrounds for organized and staffed programs. The playgrounds will also be used by families and community groups throughout the region.

Why Here, Why Us and Why Now?

We recognize that the need is real, the need is here, and we have the ability and responsibility to meet the need. Our three regional parks are geographically situated and ready for construction (or retrofit) at just the right time.

The City of Roseville Parks and Recreation Department already has an adaptive recreation program in place providing indoor social and recreational opportunities for special needs children and teens. The Universally Accessible playgrounds extend our commitment to the disabled community by providing outdoor recreation opportunities as well.

Our mission is to improve the quality of life of the community by providing exceptional programs, facilities and services at a good value to our taxpayers and customers and preserving and protecting our City's natural resources. Our vision is to foster healthy lifestyles and create a vibrant community. A natural extension of our mission, vision and current programs is to enhance services to disabled residents and stimulate interaction between all residents.



Ultimately this is how our success will be measured. Join us in taking the inclusion movement to the next level and setting a standard of compassion and innovation for generations to come.

Some children dream they can fly, while others simply dream of playing in a park.



Parks and Recreation Department