



Date: September 14, 2004

To: The Honorable Mayor and Councilmembers

From: Bonnie Lowenthal, Councilmember, First District
Rae Gabelich, Councilwoman, Eighth District
Val Lerch, Councilmember, Ninth District

Subject: Universally Accessible Playgrounds

BACKGROUND:

Most playgrounds in Southern California are inaccessible to disabled children. Tens of thousands of children with physical disabilities are excluded from these playgrounds due to the lack of appropriate equipment and play settings; children's wheelchairs get trapped in sandpits or leg braces get caught in narrow pathways. Because there are so very few opportunities for disabled children to participate in the same playground environment as able-bodied children, they often become stigmatized and isolated.

There are certain institutions and non-profit agencies that are committed to improving the lives of physically disabled children. For example, Shane's Inspiration is an organization that has developed several universally accessible playgrounds in the greater Los Angeles area as a way to improve disabled children's quality of life. Universally accessible playgrounds are those, which create accessible and integrated play environments for children with physical disabilities. Unlike regular playgrounds, universally accessible playgrounds provide a setting where disabled and able-bodied children can play together and accept each other.

Additionally, universally accessible playgrounds have had a positive impact on the lives of the children and on the communities in which those playgrounds are located. Furthermore, universally accessible playgrounds not only provide disabled-bodied children with a space to play, they function as a catalyst in building community support; educating parents, teachers, children, municipalities and government agencies about the special needs of the children; and in bringing together children and families of all backgrounds regardless of socio-economic conditions.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

We respectfully request a report from the Department of Parks and Recreation within 30 days regarding the feasibility of:

1. New parks in the City of Long Beach to be constructed as universally accessible playgrounds.
2. Incorporating components of universally accessible playgrounds to parks that are currently under design.