



Beit Issie Shapiro

Changing the lives of people with disabilities

On the Willie & Celia Trump Campus



Friendship Park

An Accessible & Inclusive Playground

Introduction

Friendship Park is an accessible and inclusive playground, the first of its kind in Israel, located within a city park and open to the general public. The park's uniqueness lies in the way it combines physical accessibility with structured integrative social activities that enable experiential encounters between children with a wide range of abilities.

Friendship Park was born from the realization and from a deep belief that an atmosphere where children will learn and enjoy playing together can be achieved. To realize this dream we understood that equipment and installations that are accessible for children with disabilities are not enough, but that we must combine physical accessibility with social inclusion.

Friendship Park is a model to and a lever for the establishment of accessible and inclusive playgrounds. For this purpose, the work process was documented, starting with the planning stage, the park's construction and ending with implementing the social accessibility program. This booklet summarizes some of the main points from our comprehensive handbook – a helpful tool for all entrepreneurs who seek to advance and implement the idea of integrating children with disabilities in the community's leisure activities.



Theoretical Background

Terminology

Equality and Inclusion

At the core of the idea of inclusion is the belief that every person with a disability, child or adult, has rights that are equal to those of any other person - to be part of society in which he or she were born and live. The idea expresses a change in society's attitude towards people with disabilities, and puts the onus on society to finding ways to enable people with disabilities to actively participate in all spheres of community life. A necessary condition for participation in social life is physical and social accessibility.

Normalization

The principle of normalization defines the human right of people with disabilities to live in conditions which are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of life common to the community in which they live, in a minimally restrictive environment, which prevents isolation and social exclusion.

Integration

Adopting the principle of normalization leads to the integration of people with disabilities in the community in all spheres of life. Integration enables people with disabilities to have equal rights and equal obligations, to be socially involved, active and to contribute to society. The process of integration is aimed to maximize each person's potential to participate in his/her culture's mainstream.

Social Inclusion

The term inclusion refers to a person's ability to have positive interactions with people in his/her environment, be accepted and participate in regular frameworks suited to him/her. Social inclusion depends on the removal of social obstacles to integration, including negative community attitudes towards people with disabilities. A society which embraces values of equality, integration and social inclusion ensures its strength.

Integration and Social Inclusion among Children

Integration and social inclusion benefit all children in society. A community infused with the spirit of integration and social inclusion passes these values on to future generations. Children participating in integration activities with children with disabilities develop habits of helpfulness, openness, patience and tolerance.

Stigmas and Prejudice

For most people, meeting a person with disabilities is an unfamiliar and discomfiting situation. A widespread traditional approach sees the person with a disability as helpless, dependent on others, a burden to his family and to society, in need of treatment and care. He/she is not expected to be autonomous and he/she is not believed to be able to contribute to society; his/her efforts to be active in society are ignored. The transformation that needs to occur is a move from diagnosing the individual to diagnosing the environment, a move from a terminology of pathology to a terminology of quality of life and environmental design, from patronizing people with disabilities to entering into full partnership with them.

Leisure Activities as a Natural Setting for Social Integration

Leisure is one of the spheres of life important to the wellbeing of every person and an essential part of a good quality of life. Three important international documents¹ declare leisure as one of the spheres where equal opportunities must be ensured to all people, including people with disabilities. Children with disabilities have as much need for leisure activities as any other child. A playground is a natural, normative place that enables all children - and in particular children with disabilities - to gain rich experiences, develop skills and meet other children.

The Playground as a Tool to Advance Integration and Social Inclusion

Playing in a playground takes a large portion of most children's leisure time. Playing affects physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing directly.

¹ World Leisure Organization, 1998.
Convention in the Rights of the Child, Article 31.
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 30.

In the context of play environments, integration means that a child with disabilities and a child without disabilities play together at the same place and experience a positive connection, enabling them to get to know each other, leading to positive change in attitudes, to acceptance and understanding. Positive social ties are one of the goals of integration.

Accessibility

The term “accessibility” is made up of two words: “access” and “ability”. It means the ability to access a certain place, or the level of ease and convenience involved in accessing a place.

Physical or sensory accessibility is the technical aspect and requires that the physical environment is designed so that a person with disabilities can move from one place to another as independently as possible.

Social accessibility entails opening the gates to whoever wishes to enter. Social accessibility means removing social barriers (especially attitudes & stereotypes) that prevent people with disabilities to participate in the community.



In many cases, physical accessibility is a pre-condition to social accessibility.

Currently, most playgrounds are not adapted for children with disabilities and are not accessible, physically or socially.

The Planning Process

Friendship Park is a groundbreaking, unique model of an accessible and inclusive playground for children up to the age of 12. The park embodies concepts of accessibility and social inclusion, both through the planning processes of its physical and social aspects and in the activities held within it since its opening.

Target Population

The accessible playground targets children up to the age of 12:

- Children with disabilities and their families;
- Children from the community and their families;
- Rehabilitative daycare centers, special education schools and nursery schools;
- Typical educational frameworks;
- Youth movements;

- Non-formal education frameworks and activities (afternoon child-care facilities, after-school child care facilities, summer camps).

The Planning Process

An accessible and inclusive playground requires addressing two interconnected aspects simultaneously: physical accessibility and social accessibility, under the assumption that physical accessibility alone is not enough.

Hence, the planning process needs to take place via two parallel routes, managed by two planning teams – a Physical Planning Team and a Social Planning Team.

The Principles that should Guide the Planning Teams

- Combining professional and experiential knowledge of people with disabilities
- Including parents
- Collaborative process: professionals from various systems and organizations
- The physical aspect and social aspect are interconnected and complementary
- Social integration
- Addressing all types of disabilities.

Planning Physical Accessibility

The planning and development of the physical aspect should be led by an occupational therapist - an expert in the field of environmental design and Universal Design.

The Planning Stages

- Building a planning committee for the physical aspect
- Formulating the planning principles
- Presenting the physical design plan
- Preparing a detailed construction plan
- Construction of park – executing the plan

Guiding Principles

- Universality
- Continuum of accessibility
- Adaptations for different disabilities
- Convenience of movement
- Integration and playing together
- Safety and security
- Accessibility and independence
- Durable and easy to maintain
- Harmony

- Sensory stimulation

The plan took into account the following three layers:

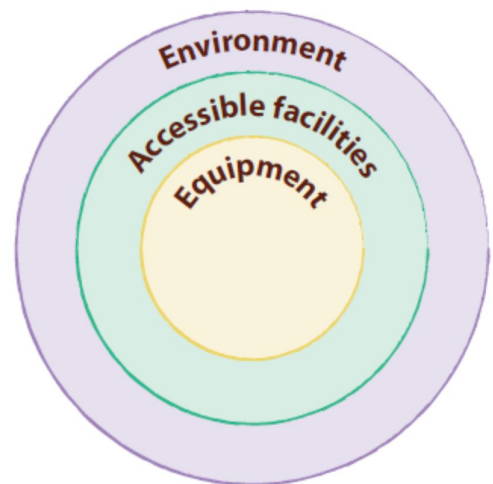
- **First layer: Surrounding Environment** - parking, public transportation, access paths, entrance, etc.
- **Second layer: Accessible Facilities** - path, railing, placing of equipment, shading, seating areas, restrooms etc., as well as activity zones to enable children and their families to experience different activities in each zone. Activity zones can include:

- Playground equipment for motor activities
- Musical equipment
- A maze
- Water elements
- Amphitheater for community performances, etc.

Signage - The site's signage conveys a message of partnership, respect of and acceptance of difference, patience and tolerance.

- **Third layer: Equipment** - Guiding Principles:

- Quality
- Safety
- Accessibility and independence
- Durability and maintenance
- Resistant to vandalism
- Different levels of challenge
- Appealing



Planning Social Accessibility

The social planning process should be guided by a community worker, an expert in project planning and in disability. The process also involves parents of children with disabilities, parents of children without disabilities, representatives from the education systems, and professionals from various organizations that are connected to disabilities.

The Planning Stages

- Building a wide committee and sub-committees
- The committees discuss the idea, map the challenges of the planning procedure, suggestion how to deal with the challenges and shape the guidelines for the planning process.
- A comprehensive work model.

The Social Accessibility Model

Changing attitudes in society is a long-term process which requires a systematic and comprehensive approach. Based on this understanding, we developed the community model of intervention, which is the basis for planning the social accessibility aspect. The model contains four levels of intervention:

■ Spontaneous play

The community: families with children up to 12 years old, with or without disabilities, who come to the park for recreation and fun.
Focus of work: activity on site to advance integration and changing of attitudes.

■ Advancing the independence of children from special education frameworks

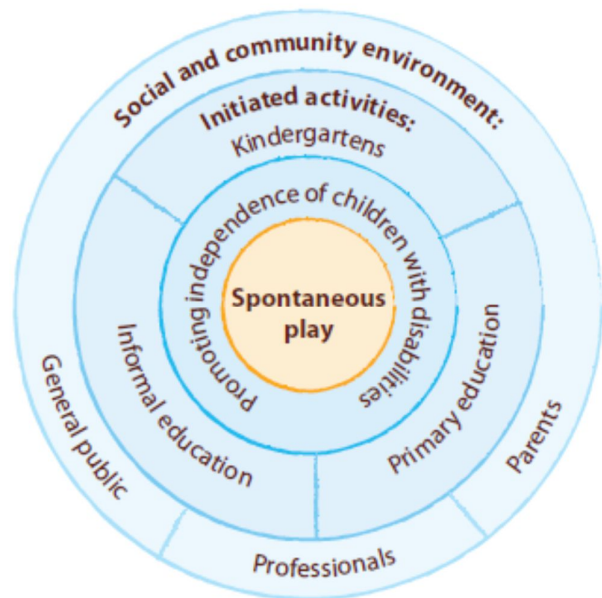
Special education: children from special education frameworks.
Focus of work: activities planned by the frameworks' staff to advance and improve the children's functional, motor and social skills. The frameworks' staff accompanies the students to the accessible park and helps them learn to play in the playground, while developing motor/sensory and social skills.

■ Planned activities by education systems to change and mold attitudes

Education system: children up to 12 years old and their educators from formal and informal education systems.
Focus of work: planned activities to enrich existing integration programs; create new opportunities for integration encounters; structured activities to present and promote the idea of integration and attitude change within the education system.

■ Changing the community and social environment

Community system: residents, parents, children and professionals.
Focus of work: presenting and promoting the park's raison d'être, the idea of integration and instilling positive social attitudes towards children with disabilities. Raising awareness of families with children with disabilities to the park's existence and its special features .



Each level of intervention has a variety of activities and programs. Each program has a defined target population and goals, as well as materials, guidelines or kits. The programs are run by trained volunteers and professionals.

Bring Friendship Park to Your Community

Beit Issie Shapiro has been guiding some 30 municipalities throughout Israel on both the physical and social accessibility aspects of the playground. Internationally, we are consulting a number of organizations interested in setting up inclusive playgrounds within their community, as well as presenting our model at the United Nations and international conferences. Our model recently won the International Play Association's *Right to Play 2014 Award*.

With the guidance of Beit Issie Shapiro, you can make a change in your community!

Beit Issie Shapiro can provide its best practices through consultation and training for:

- Adapting an existing playground to become accessible and inclusive for children with disabilities, including social and educational programming.
- Creating a new accessible and inclusive playground based on our model, including social and educational programming.



**For more information, please contact
Ms. Sharon Yeheskel-Oron,
International Professional Development
Manager,
at sharony@beitissie.org.il**

**Or visit our website:
www.beitissie.org.il/eng**