SAY "YES!" TO KIDS WITH DISABILITIES

Stories and Strategies for Including ALL Kids

SEATTLE CHILDREN'S

PLAYGARDEN

A Garden for Everyone

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SAY "YES!" TO KIDS WITH DISABILITIES

Stories and strategies for including ALL kids

by Elizabeth Bullard, Hannah Gallagher, & Adana Protonentis

Produced in partnership with:

King County
Best Starts for KIDS

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Lou Ann Bullard whose life provided the roadmap for what was to become the Seattle Children's PlayGarden. To Abe Bergman, who took that map and navigated a course to making it happen, and to the staff and board of directors of the PlayGarden who are continuing the journey, everyday.

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LANGUAGE USE, READING GUIDELINES, & FREQUENTLY USED TERMS

Intentional Language Use

The words we chose to describe ourselves, others and the things around us influence our attitudes and beliefs about the word. We always have a choice in how we talk about ourselves or others and can use that choice to bring about positive change. This book is a compilation of stories, told from different people at different times. Some stories come from kids while other come from adults. We recognize that EVERY person is unique and has their own unique way they like to be described. However, for this toolkit, we used the following concepts to guide our writing:

Person-First Language, Identify-First Language and Self-Identification

You will notice in the quotes and stories from families, we use the exact language that kids use to describe themselves or the language their parents and teachers use. Most often, when we describe a child or adult with a disability we use what is called, Person-First Language. At times, we also use Identity-First Language.

Person-First Language puts the individual's personhood first and their disability is presented as one element of their identity such as, "a person with a disability" or "a child with Autism."

Identity-First Language conversely, puts a person's disability first in the phrase, as it is considered a core element of who the person is. For example, "a disabled person" or "an Autistic person."

We use both formats, because we recognize that EVERY individual is different and has a different way of describing themselves. Not every person with a disability wants to be identified in one of these ways or even uses the term "disability;" people self-identify in many ways. People often self-identify with the area of their life they feel most connected to at that moment in time, such as their age, gender, race, ethnicity, linguistic background or by their hobbies and interests. For example, "I'm a teen" or "a PlayGarden Camper" or "a second grader." We honor self-identification. When speaking with someone with a disability it is always best to ask them how they self-identify and honor that language.

Intentional Photo Selection

We are learning more and more about the importance of authentic and diverse representation. Diverse representation of people with disabilities – in community spaces, workplaces, and positions of leadership - is critical to making a more inclusive society. We want to accurately represent the breadth and depth of types of disabilities that exist in our community. That is why every photo in this book includes a person with a disability, whether their disability is visible. Who do you picture, when you hear the word 'disability?' Disability impacts people of all races, ethnicities, genders, ages, and cultures. Throughout this document, you'll see that diversity reflected in the photos. Challenge your assumptions and you will begin to broaden your understanding of disability and thus of inclusion.

Understanding Key Terminology

Accessibility, Disability, and Inclusion are all terms that you will hear repeatedly throughout the book. There are many other terms that are specific to the subject of disability and inclusion and may not be familiar to you. If you come across a term that is new to you or that you'd like to know more about, take a peek at the Glossary at the end of this book.

There are a few terms we want to define upfront:

Disability is defined in many ways, means different things in different communities, and varies depending on the circumstance and the person using the term. For the purposes of this book, we are using the definition that is used **in** the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more **major life activities** of such individual." In this book, we use the phrase "a child with a disability" often. This can refer to a child with vision impairment, deaf or hard of hearing, an acquired brain injury, or a physical, mental, intellectual, developmental disability.

A **disability** may be present from birth or occur during a person's lifetime. It may be used to refer to physical or mental attributes that some institutions, particularly medicine, view as needing to be fixed (**the Medical Model**). It may refer to limitations imposed on people by the constraints of an ableist society (**the Social Model**). Or the term may serve to refer to the identity of disabled people.

Accessibility is the "ability to access" and benefit from some system or entity. Accessibility relates to physical elements and a person's ability to get to, through, and around an environment- such as access to transportation, information such as reading materials, or communication systems. **Accessibility brings benefits to everyone**. For example, a curb cut that makes a street more accessible for a person using a wheelchair, also helps a parent pushing a stroller or a kid riding a bike.

Inclusion goes beyond accessibility- it is **t**he active and meaningful engagement of people with disabilities in all levels of society. The presence of people with disabilities does not constitute inclusion, unless people with disabilities are valued, seen as contributing members of the group, and feel a sense of belonging.

Intersectionality

Though we may describe a child by only one social identifier such as a "child with a disability" or by their age, gender, or diagnosis, please try to remember that EVERY child is made up of many overlapping and intersecting identities. As you read, try to remember how a child's intersecting identities may influence their experiences out in the community.

Reading Guidelines

There is a lot to absorb in the following pages. The following guidelines break it down so that this book can be used in the way that best fits your personal and professional needs.

Read with Respect & Kindness

Read the stories with the highest level of respect and consideration you can. The stories are personal and packed with emotion. They are raw and honest descriptions of experiences families are currently having out in the community. The people who told the stories shared them with the assumption that they would be used to broaden our collective understanding of the lived experiences of people with disabilities and their families and loved ones. Hold their stories with kindness.

Assume Positive Intent

Everything we included in the book was done with the kids in mind. Our goal is to do right by them. Our words are here to amplify their voices and their experiences. There are places in the toolkit where the tone shifts from a more positive frame of mind to a pragmatic frame of mind. The shift may feel abrupt, at first. Lean into the discomfort. Consider why you may be feeling uncomfortable. Is it because what is being said is true? Is it because what we are saying is sad? We wouldn't be doing right by the kids if we only presented one side. We must accurately represent our current reality, and speak about it honestly, directly, and openly, for change to occur.

Embrace a Reflective Practice

Throughout the toolkit, we will ask you to "Pause and Reflect." The questions provided in the Reflection Boxes are there to help you think critically about your day-to-day interactions with kids and consider how you might adjust your personal and professional practices to be more open-minded, curious, and supportive of ALL children in our community. This toolkit is meant to actively engage you. Use it like a tool. Use it to start conversations, change your organizational culture, and shift attitudes.

Be Willing to Learn

We also want to recognize that every single person reading this book is coming at it from a different place. It may be that you are new to the concept of inclusion and curious to learn more (in which case we welcome you here!) or maybe you have been advocating for inclusion for your whole life, or your child's life, in which case we hope this book will help those efforts move forward. Regardless of where you are, read with an open mind and try to learn something new.

Use the Section Titles and Key Themes to Guide your Reading

Though this is written in book form, we have also written it so you should be able to begin at the section that feels most appropriate to the work that you do. Start with the sections that relate most closely to your life and then when you have time, come back, and read more.

All kids love to splash in the PlayGarden water feature.

INTRODUCTION

We are thrilled that you are ready to learn more about including children with disabilities in our community!

This toolkit has been written to support people and organizations as they work to dismantle the stigma of disability so that ALL children are fully included in our communities: at our parks and playgrounds, on our sports teams, swim lessons, gymnastics class, at our museums, zoos and community-wide events. It is common, even routinely accepted, that children with disabilities cannot and should not be on the soccer team or in the so called "regular" dance class. Summer camp programs, preschools, sports facilities, and other recreational programs routinely deny access to children with developmental, physical or medical differences. This is wrong, it is against the law and it needs to stop. As we know, children make friends at the park, at school, and with teammates. If a child is denied access to these spaces, how would they make friends? The statistics are sad, but not surprising. 53% of children with disabilities report having zero to one close friend (Holland Bloorview, 2017).

You may think that fully including children with disabilities is too hard, too expensive, too risky or too much work. You may think you don't have the training, enough staff or the right equipment. You may think that there are "special" programs for "those kids" so you don't need to accept them. You may think that including a child with a disability will slow the "regular" kids down. You may feel unprepared, insecure or scared and perhaps, most commonly, you may not think about kids with disabilities at all.

On a sunny summer day in July, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) into law. In his remarks, before signing the bill, President Bush said,

> And today, America welcomes into the mainstream of life all of our fellow citizens with disabilities. We embrace you for your abilities and your disabilities, for our similarities and indeed for our differences, for your past courage and your future dreams...And on your behalf, as well as the behalf of this entire country, I now lift my pen to sign this Americans with Disabilities Act and say: Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down (Bush, 2018).

The ADA was an extraordinary achievement and a critical milestone in the removal of physical barriers and other impediments for people with disabilities, but gains remain to be made. We've come a long way in improving access, but have we achieved inclusion? The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide describes "inclusion" as "the action or state of including or being included within a group or structure…inclusion involves an authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging (2014).

By this definition, we have not yet achieved inclusion. From the often-heartbreaking stories that PlayGarden families share with us about their experiences with exclusion, to hard data about health and education outcomes for children with disabilities, the difficult truth is that people with disabilities continue to be marginalized and segregated.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, children ages three to five with disabilities and or emotional and social challenges, while comprising just 12 percent of early childhood program populations, represent 75 percent of suspensions and expulsions (Nova & Malik, 2018). Children with disabilities are 2.5 times more likely to be bullied than their non-disabled peers (National Institute for Intellectual Disability, 2012). Children with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to be obese or overweight, and spend much more time in isolated activities, such as watching television or using a computer (Mayo Clinic, 2017). This exclusion persists into adulthood and can be seen in the stunning unemployment rates for people with disabilities. In Washington state, less than 37 percent of disabled people are employed (Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, 2017). Decades after the ADA became law, people with disabilities are still looking for opportunities to prove themselves. We've made great strides in increasing access, but we have not achieved inclusion. Disability continues to be wrapped in fear and stigma. The shameful wall of exclusion has not, yet, come tumbling down. We need a change in attitude to pave the way for true inclusion and acceptance. We need to teach our community to expect inclusion and help community organizations feel empowered to say, "Yes!" to people with disabilities.

In this toolkit you will not see a list of the "benefits of inclusion." We are beyond having to justify what is a basic human right of all children: the right to play. Every child's right to play is a fundamental human right as enshrined in article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (International Play Association, 2018). Instead, what you will find here are stories - stories from parents, youth service organizations, and from children themselves. Through these stories, we learn about the barriers to participation and what has worked to break down these barriers.

The stories you will read were gathered in a series of focus groups and interviews that took place over the spring and summer of 2018 at the Seattle Children's PlayGarden. This toolkit was funded by the Best Start for Kids Initiative of King County. King County believes "We all benefit when each and every King County child, youth and young adult is supported to achieve their full potential."

This toolkit is divided into five sections reflecting the places children and families like to go.

Section 1, Say "Yes" at Parks & Playgrounds, describes experiences parents and children with disabilities encounter in our parks and playgrounds. We will explore the joys of outdoor play and the barriers that make a day at the park a challenge. Readers will learn what each one of us can do to help make the playground a welcoming experience for all kids.

Section 2 explores the world of after school sports and extracurricular activities like soccer and dance class.

In Section 3, we take a deep look into our museums and zoos; and in Section 4, we join the Seattle Mariners on their journey to carry out their core value that "baseball is for everyone."

In Section 5, you will find hands-on practical strategies for designing and implementing inclusive group play, art, cooking and music or circle time activities that can be adapted to work in many settings.

Following many of the stories you are invited to Pause & Reflect on the key themes presented. Reflective practice involves thinking about our reactions, considering our biases and actively questioning our actions, motives, and concerns. The questions and your responses can be used as prompts for learning, planning, discussion, decision-making, or evaluating your organizations practices. Our goal in presenting this toolkit is to change people's hearts, minds, and practices. Each reader will enter this toolkit at a different starting place. We welcome you. We are here to support your efforts. We believe the time has come to create community-wide change and we are thankful that you are here on this journey with us.

Celebrating the opening of the PlayGarden's playground, featuring accessible surfacing and equipment designed to promote social inclusion.

SAY "YES!" AT PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

KEY THEMES

Accessible Design
Multi-age groups
Representation Matters
Supported Employment
The Role of Adults at play areas
Inclusive Play
Talking with kids about disability

Parks, pools, playgrounds, and nature centers are popular destinations for the whole family. Kids live for the playground! Many families make a stop at their local playground a daily outing. For the rising populations that do not have a backyard, parks and playgrounds are vital. But when your child cannot access the play equipment, or you can't let go of your child's hand for fear she will run into the street, or when your child is left out of the play by the other kids, going to the park is anything but fun and relaxing. Playing outdoors with other children is deeply healthy for all children, but far too many children miss out on free play because our parks and playgrounds are unwelcoming and inaccessible to children with disabilities. What are the biggest barriers for children with disabilities to enjoy the simple pleasure of a trip to the park? What can each of us do to help make the park and playground a welcoming experience for all kids?

In this section we will hear from parents of children with disabilities and the children themselves. We will explore what makes for a successful outing and how an ordinary day of play can become a challenge for kids and parents. You will also hear how one community came together in partnership with Seattle Parks and Recreation and created the Seattle Children's PlayGarden, where each and every child and family can have the simple pleasure of going to the park.

THE LOVE OF PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS!

When asked where their children like to play, an overwhelming majority of families surveyed included parks and playgrounds.

- *"My daughter likes the woods."*
- *"We like to go to the sensory park."*
- *"My kid loves any place that has animals she can interact with."*
- *"My child loves to run and throw rocks in the water."*
- *"My son loves Elliott Bay Park. It has trains, a water fountain, a beach, grass, and a bridge."*
- *"My 5-year-old son likes any combination of playground, beach, forest…any place he can get really messy. He loves to be outside."*

A DAY AT THE PARK

Paul, father of two boys, one who is typically developing and one who is on the autism spectrum tells us:

"Our kids love Lake Sammamish State Park. It has a lot of wide-open space with lots of room to roam. There are lots of options. An outing here is successful, because the kids can go to the playground, go the beach, go for a walk or to the sandpit. They aren't restricted to one way and they could play in unconventional ways, like throwing

Eme's family also shared their love of the outdoors:

"We do a lot of family camping at State parks. We have experimented in the last year with bringing her power chair with us with mixed success. Accessibility has a broad range of meaning from place to place. She loves being outside and loves watching kids play. She doesn't necessarily want to play with them, but she likes watching what they do. She loves animals. Both being close to them and watching them. She'd sit on a horse for 12 hours and be the happiest kid on the planet."

WHAT DO FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES WANT WHEN THEY VISIT THE PARK OR PLAYGROUND?

- Activities and equipment to be adapted so that he/she/they can participate.
- Feeling **included**.
- Acceptance.
- **A place to truly be oneself**.
- To be comfortable.
- A sense of **belonging.**
- To not have the sense that my child is bothering somebody else.
- A place that is **equally fun** for kids with disabilities and their typically developing siblings and friends

WHAT DO KIDS WITH DISABILITIES WANT?

- The ability to "gain entry to play"
- To feel like a **legitimate participant**
- **Friends!**

HOW INCLUSIVE ARE OUR PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS?

Since the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990, all parks must comply with federal accessibility standards. But **accessibility is merely the first step toward inclusion**. Accessibility relates to physical elements and a person's ability to get to, through, and around an environment. Inclusion goes beyond accessibility. An inclusive playground is not only accessible, but also encourages and enables playground users to engage with each other. Many communities are incorporating parks with more accessible playground equipment and surfacing, which is a big improvement for children with disabilities (U.S. Access Board, 2005) (Picture Perfect Playgrounds, 2018). But most playgrounds are static, "cookie cutter" environments of rubber surfacing and "off the shelf" playground equipment that offer little to no adventure, novelty, and excitement.

ACCESSIBLE VS. INCLUSIVE

- While parks and playgrounds are ADA compliant, they are often not designed to be inclusive. They are accessible, but not yet inclusive.
- Most parks and playgrounds are not designed with the needs of autistic children in mind, who may need a fence to prevent them from running away or wandering off.
- Most parks and playgrounds are not designed with the needs of a child with a disability like cerebral palsy in mind, who may need postural support to play on a swing or seesaw.
- Most parks and playgrounds are not staffed and parents and children are left to fend for themselves when a difficult social interaction occurs.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Imagine what it would feel like if other kids at the playground excluded your child. What would you want someone to do for you and your child?

2. How would you feel if your child showed up to a park only to find that the play equipment was out of bounds just to them?

Rolling and running through the sprinklers.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO PLAY AT PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

How do we fulfill the promise of the ADA and create playgrounds that are not only accessible, but are **inclusive**? How do we create spaces that enable and empower kids with and without disabilities to engage with each other? Here are our Four Steps for Overcoming Barriers to Play:

Step One: Design Better Play Spaces!

Participating in designing a new park or playground or contributing to a playground renovation is a hands-on way to make your community more inclusive. Parks departments and designers need to hear from those who will use the playgrounds they are building. They need to know what accommodations and adaptations are needed. Why is going to the park hard for you or your child?

Advocating for more accessible play equipment: The Yellow Swing in Every Park campaign

In 2008, parents Rick Jones and Laura Leeman started advocating for more adapted swings in Seattle Parks. Both of them have children with physical disabilities that are not able to use traditional swings. The "yellow" swing at the Seattle Children's PlayGarden was one of 3 adapted swings in a whole city of playgrounds. If Annie or Victor, their children, wanted to swing they had to pass many playgrounds traveling 45 minutes or more for a turn in a swing. The "Yellow Swing in Every Park" campaign was simple. In four steps it was accomplished.

1. Let the Parks department know what the problem is. Public parks are for everyone. Rick and Laura told Parks that although parks are for everyone, their children were being excluded and so were many other children. This is not right, and it needs to change.
2. Present a solution. In this case it meant identifying an alternative swing.
3. Set goals. In this case the goal for the first year was to install 30 adaptive swings.
4. Host a "Kick Off "celebration and give everyone who contributed a lot of credit.

Seattle now has many accessible swings across the city!

Adaptive Play Equipment that Works for All

Traditional playgrounds are the most common type of playground. They typically have a set of manufactured play equipment that meet the safety guidelines set by the parks district or agency that oversees parks. Traditional park equipment is often not accessible to children with physical disabilities. The ADA guidelines for playgrounds address getting to and from the playground but what does a child with cerebral palsy or spinal muscular atrophy or spina bifida do once they are there?

In recent years playground manufacturers have started to design and sell much more exciting play equipment that addresses this basic inequity (U.S. Access Board, 2005) (Picture Perfect Playgrounds, 2018). And the good news is that it is fun for all kids and the adaptive pieces: a foot plate and back on a see saw or a ramp up a climbing structure just add to the fun all kids can have. Many more playgrounds have accessible surfacing and more sensory or nature based elements including water sprayers or musical instruments.

Many of the newest play equipment accommodates many children at once creating much greater social opportunities for kids. But your voice is important. All of these "sensory parks" or "adaptive playgrounds" are built because a parent spoke up and demanded to be listened to and for their child to have what all kids have: a playground in their neighborhood.

Adventure Playgrounds: Loose Parts, Risky Play & Natural Elements

Many playgrounds are built with seeming little to no thought about how fun they will be for any child. They are simply pulled together from pieces in a catalog. One playground is the same as the next and the next. The equipment is made so safe and unchanging that it becomes boring and does nothing to capture children's imagination or even their desire for active play. So what is missing? Loose parts and risky play. That's what. Kids want to move things from place to place: think sand, water, wood chips, rocks, sticks, pinecones. They want to affect change on their environment: think dig holes, paint, build a fort, rake leaves They want to take risks: hammer a nail into a board or tree stump, hang from high places, climb a ladder to pick an apple, or move fast through space. Adventure playgrounds, which started in Europe in the 1940s, allow for this kind of play. They are no more dangerous than traditional playgrounds and have much more play value. These "adventure" playgrounds or nature-based play areas provide many more play opportunities for children with disabilities than a traditional playground. The variety of types of play, the time spent playing and the creativity involved are all vastly higher in adventure playgrounds. For sensory seeking children, for physically challenged children and for ALL children playgrounds with loose parts, natural elements and interesting, changing components are superior.

Water: One Piece of Play Equipment that Works for Everyone

This feedback came from a parent about the importance of play features that promote group play.

"Thank you so much for doing this. We have been coming for years and this is the first time that we have seen the water feature on. It is great because my son is non-verbal and has a hard time playing with other kids but he will play on the water feature for hours and that is where a lot of other kids go as well"

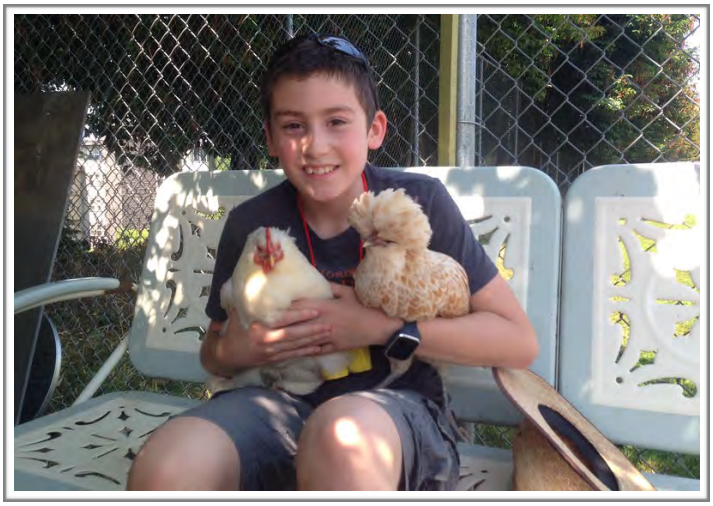
PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What play equipment is available to children with disabilities at the park closest to your home?
2. How do you see children playing at your park?
3. Would a child with a disability be able to play alongside other kids at your favorite park?

Step Two: Talk to Kids about Disabilities and Inclusion!

You can help by talking about inclusion and disability with kids. You can model how to make friends or be welcoming. Adults need to help children include others in their play through modeling an attitude of acceptance and respect. Adults can help children understand unexpected behavior or a new way of doing or being. Kids are capable, compassionate and want to understand themselves and each other. As a parent of a child with autism told us, "It doesn't have to be a big scary thing."

The following is an excerpt from a focus group discussion facilitated by two PlayGarden staff that are well known to the participants. Read this conversation between 4, 14-15 year old's, 2 with disabilities and 2 that have a sibling with a disability and Hannah Gallagher, Camp Director and Liz Bullard, Executive Director. It is honest, challenging, enlightening, and very direct. These young teens are comfortable talking about their own disabilities and the impact having a sibling with disability has on a family. In other words, they do not shy away from the subject. **Let's learn from them; meet Max, Camden, Aadit, and Samantha.**



Liz – We have a little boy that we know that was playing soccer in a class. He has a balance problem, and one practice day his balance was really off. He fell down a lot. Some of the kids and the other parents were laughing at him because he was falling. So, what we're trying to do with our book is to help sports teams and other organizations that work with kids to be more understanding and more inclusive.

Camden – Laughing, because they thought he was flopping a bunch?

Hannah – They didn't quite understand why…

Liz – And they also said, "He shouldn't be on our team"

Camden – So it was not a funny laugh, it was more of an uncomfortable laugh?

Samantha – He was just trying to play soccer and he kept falling over.

Camden – What was the syndrome?

Liz – He has a cyst on part of his brain, called the cerebellum that makes his balance not very good.

Aadit – what's a cyst?

Samantha – Are they trying to fix it?

Liz – Yes.

Samantha – So it doesn't get bigger?

Liz – I don't know if they're trying to do that. You have to be very careful when you're dealing with someone's brain.

Max – My sister has had, maybe 27 or 28 tumors. And so she – it's kind of constant for her. So, it's been pretty hard, but she gets through them.

Camden – Do you have to go in for checkups?

Max – Pretty much and they almost always find them growing. Luckily, they're benign, though.

Samantha – What's that mean?

Max – It means it doesn't hurt her.

Aadit – Do you know what American Ninja Warrior is?

Samantha – That's off topic.

Hannah – It might not be – let's see where he's going.

Aadit – American Ninja Warrior is very inspiring, because people do a lot of inspiring things there and the point I'm trying to make is this place (The PlayGarden) is kind of like American Ninja Warrior.

Samantha – They had a lot of people with disabilities – like there was a person who couldn't walk, when she was little.

Aadit – Yeah, there's a lot of people with disabilities on ANW and they accept it. And it really is inspiring. They donate kidneys to people. Seriously – like they do that, sometimes.

Hannah – We want to make sure that we give you time to play at the PlayGarden today, so we have just a couple more questions.

Samantha – It's the PLAY garden!

Liz- If you could change the world in any way to make it a better place for people with disabilities, what would you do? That's a big question! Do you want to start, Camden?

Camden – **Sure, of course, I feel like the big thing is obviously acceptance. Some people are just not accepting of kids with special needs and everyone with special needs, in general. But it doesn't stop at acceptance. Kindness adds on to the acceptance part. If you just accept a person for who they are, but you're not nice to them? That's not gonna help them as a person. And then you think you're better because of that? It's not. It's making you worse and making more people not like you, basically. So, kindness provides kindness is kind of what I'm saying.**

Max – Just that impractically maybe not having to worry about people judging other people because of anything that they have. And just maybe having it not be a thing: race, culture, religion, ability, disability…I really wish that there was no way that anyone could judge anyone for anything and it was just the same. Treated the same way.

Samantha – For me, I went to a school the past two years where everyone was super accepting of disability, because everyone had them, and sometimes something would happen and then we'd all work together and figure out how to do it, even if the teacher didn't ask us to.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Does this conversation surprise you?
2. What did you learn from these young people about talking openly about inclusion and disability?
3. How will you change the way you talk about disability with others?

Kids, try this!

- Say "Hi," wave or invite other kids to play.
- Ask to share the swing.
- Offer a shovel in the mud pit.
- Pass the ball.
- Sit next to, paint alongside, or dig a hole with another child.
- As a trusted adult for help, if you need it.

Parents & Caregivers, try this!

- Answer a young child's questions directly and simply. When a child asks, "Why can't he talk/walk, etc." Respond: "I don't know, yet. Let's meet him/her/them and we can learn about each other. I see he's digging. Do you want to dig, too?"
- When a child says something that sounds rude or embarrassing, answer him/her/them in a calm voice and rephrase their comment in a more positive way.
- Teach the language of emotions so that your child can begin to understand their feelings and the feelings of others.
- Help your child approach another child by approaching him/her/them yourself. Say, "Hi!
- Teach children that disability is not contagious. A child with a disability is not sick."

Everybody, try this!

- Say "Hello" instead of staring.
- Read books that have characters with disabilities.
- Reserve judgment of other children and parents.
- Learn about the history of the Americans with Disabilities

Step Three: Adults can Help or Hinder the Play

Be a Helper!

Children look to the adults around them for guidance. Kids watch adult's reactions and behavior. Your actions, words, and facial expressions can communicate acceptance, fear, dislike, confusion, or kindness. Be mindful of your feelings about disability. Check in with yourself. How are you feeling? Are you afraid or uncomfortable? Why might you be having these feelings? As you help the children in your care grow and develop, be mindful of how your experiences shape the messages you communicate to your children and to the other children at the park or playground.

The following guidelines from the Wild Zones Tool Kit, by David Hawkins and Karen Payne, help define the role of adults in kids play areas. It can be difficult to know how and when to intervene in children's play and while these guidelines are not specifically written for inclusive play spaces, they do communicate how vital it is to allow children to engage in free play. Children have less and less free play time and children with disabilities have even less than typically developing children.

Excerpt from The WildZones Toolkit by David Hawkins and Karen Payne

These guidelines can be the basis for trainings that encourage adults to explore ways of being with children that allow them to discover and engage in free play. They are designed to help adults re-learn the joy of unstructured play and feel comfortable with a child-led agenda, with a focus on how to foster rather than regulate play - and how to let kids find their own way, in their own time.

Some of these suggestions will not come easily to adults because we are usually expected to instruct young people in the right way to do things and to regulate all aspects of children's lives. People will find different aspects of these guidelines come naturally or feel challenging - the diversity of adults in your play space can support each other in exploring new ways of being with children.

Don't unwrap the child's presents for them

- Give children time and space to explore what's there without trying to engage them in something that you think they would enjoy.
- Kids are so used to being told what to do and the right way to do it, that it may take some time (and perhaps some frustration) for some kids to find their intrinsic motivation and find out how they want to direct their own activities.
- Tolerate children's uncertainty or boredom-don't try to solve it for them.

Don't show them how to play with their presents

- Let kids discover for themselves how to do things even if it takes them longer or they don't do it in the most efficient manner.

No Gold stars are needed

- Interact with kids in a way that expresses interest in what they want to tell you about what they are doing but avoid praising or passing judgment. Even positive judgment takes it out of the realm of play and into the realm of pleasing others, rather than doing something for the intrinsic pleasure of it.
- Find alternatives to standard phrases for praising, such as 'Good Job!' or 'Well done!' For example: 'That looks like fun' or 'What did you enjoy about making that?' Or anything that authentically expresses your interest in the child's project rather than your judgment of it.

Be Playful Yourself

- Enter into the joy of unstructured play. Engage in your own play or activity but be aware of what is happening with kids and be ready to leave what you are doing to respond to what is happening with the children.
- This concept is called "parallel play" - it is a proven method of encouraging children to play in creative ways. You can dig a hole or skip stones or daub mud on your arm or stack stones or build something…anything…as long as it is truly interesting or fun for YOU - not just something you think would be fun for a kid.

Be interested, but respect the inner life of the child at play

- It is not always possible or useful to put important experiences into words. Falling in love, grief from the loss of a loved one, relating to nature- these are private experiences and it may not be appropriate to explain them to someone else. Avoid questioning children in order to satisfy your curiosity about what this experience means to them.

Refrain from the" teachable moment"

- Allow the child's own meanings or interpretations to take priority over the "teachable moment"-whether it is about science, math, ecology or other forms of knowledge.
- Be curious, share memories, be excited or amused or touched, but hold back from suggestions, instructions, advice or commentary.

Explore ways to feel comfortable with a child led agenda

- Think about times when you have solved a problem or met a challenge without someone else giving advice or instructions. Use these memories as motivation for allowing children to be self-directed in their play and projects.

Allow children to find a way through their own conflicts and challenges.

- Play is an excellent context for learning about how to manage conflicts without adult arbitration.
- Other children may step forward to improve a situation
- As in all parts of life, please do interrupt bullying, racism, cruelty, or violence.

Trust (This above All)

- Children's brains and emotions are designed to learn much of what they need to know by playing. Most studies on the value of free play emphasize its crucial value in developing social skills and all forms of cognitive and emotional development.
- Unless someone is hurting themselves or hurting others, or taking a risk that may truly led to injury, try not to interfere. Self directed play is a key to lifelong learning and evaluating risk is an important survival strategy.

Step Five: Breakdown Biases and Discourage Judgment

Parents told us again and again, the biggest barrier to enjoying parks and playgrounds is the judgment of other parents and the intolerance, staring, ignoring, and excluding of children with disabilities.

Most families go to the park to relax. They know their child will be able to play freely, let off steam, and may even make a new friend. For children with disabilities, and their siblings and parents, a trip to the park can be anything but relaxing, easy, and fun. The kids may face play equipment that they can't use. Parents may worry about busy streets and no fences to keep their "runner" inside the park boundaries, and have difficulty managing siblings with different play styles and needs. Siblings may worry about the other kids' reactions to their brother or sister and may themselves feel conflicted about wanting to both protect them and play themselves.

All of these challenges may be manageable, but when the family feels socially isolated, judged, or ignored it all becomes too much. Children with disabilities and their families face judgment, being ignored, staring, and insensitive comments day by day by day by day. They are excluded from activities and the playing field is anything but level. Parents stated how exhausting this steady exposure to stigma is and how tired they are of "fighting the fight."

- *"I wish people would be less judgmental and more compassionate."*
- *"I can't think of any one horrible experience that we've had taking Gabe out. It's more* ***a little bit all the time****."*
- *"Don't judge my child or me."*
- *"Question your assumptions about me or my child. Take the time to try to figure her out.* ***Don't make snap judgments.****"*
- *"I'd rather have someone say something stupid than not say something at all. It's another thing to be intentionally rude, but asking a question is better than nothing. Maybe they're not using the right words. They might ask 'Is your kid retarded?' or might use the wrong term or might assign a diagnosis.* ***But I'd rather they try to connect****. I hear 'Oh, my dad used to work with retarded people.' I'm like, okay, now I can work with that."*
- *"I usually tell other kids that he communicates differently. Kids are usually fine with that. We were at a park playing basketball, recently, and another kid asked about the sounds JP was making. I said that he communicates differently and is still learning to talk. The kid said, "Well, he needs to grow up!" Then the kid's parent called him over and made him play in a different area. It was really sad."*

Birthday celebration, PlayGarden style.

CASE STUDY: THE PLAYGARDEN STORY

A Community comes together to create a safe, accessible, welcoming play space for ALL kids.

Date established: 2003 | No. of paid employees: 9 year-round; 20 in summer | No. of currently active volunteers: 125, including Board and Leadership Team.

A grand idea took root in fertile soil in late 2002. Through her work as a speech language pathologist, PlayGarden Founder and Executive Director Liz Bullard, saw firsthand how limited the play opportunities can be for kids with disabilities. The lives of kids with disabilities often include a mind-boggling schedule of therapies, medical appointments, tutoring, and school. When these hardworking kids have a break to play, their neighborhood parks and recreation centers are often unaccommodating, or worse, unwelcoming or uninspired. Inspired by the Rusk Children's PlayGarden in Manhattan, The Spiral Garden in Toronto, and the adventure playgrounds in Europe, Liz set out to create more opportunities for fun, adventurous, accessible play for children with disabilities in King County.

In 2003, The PlayGarden became a 501(c)3 organization. Our unique partnership with Seattle Parks and Recreation includes a long-term lease on an acre of park land in south Seattle, which we have developed into Seattle Children's PlayGarden. Our objectives are straightforward: we strive to give every child who walks, rolls, or crawls through our gates the opportunity to play. We do not turn any child away because of their ability to pay or their ability to play. We model inclusion for our community through our Summer Camp, Outdoor Preschool, Open Play, and Supported Employment programs.

Gardener Sara.

Our fully fenced, one-acre space features:

- Extensive gardens to explore including a pollinator garden, vegetable garden, Wild Zone and orchard.
- A playground with accessible surfacing and play equipment chosen to promote inclusion, as multiple children can use the equipment together.
- Animals! Chickens, ducks, bunnies, a resident cat, therapy dogs and a host of insects, birds and small woodland animals in their natural habitat.
- A central play mound with rubber surfacing, a water feature, and multiple ways to climb up and down.
- An accessible tree fort in the "woods'
- A musical sculpture by Trimpin
- A GardenHouse with full ADA kitchen, multipurpose room, and restrooms.
- Plenty of open space to play freely & loose parts for open ended play.

PLAYGARDEN PROGRAMS

Open Play

Spontaneous, free play that is not directed or structured by adults is critical to the mental and physical health of all children and rich with opportunity for learning and growth. Parks and playgrounds have long existed to fulfill this need and as backyards shrink and housing prices climb, parks and playgrounds become the backyards that too many children do not have. Open Play is about removing barriers to play. During these hours, families of children with disabilities can stop by on their way to or from a therapy appointment, without needing to register in advance. Families who are low income are not asked to pay program fees or apply for financial aid. The point is to just show up and play. No fees. No forms. Just PLAY.

The key feature of our Open Play program is the presence of onsite staff during Open Play hours. The experience is similar at most parks: the physical play equipment is available, but there is no one to help facilitate play and certainly no one with an extensive understanding of the barriers to play experienced by children with disabilities. Open Play is different. **The difference between a staffed and unstaffed experience is the difference between accessibility and inclusion.**

When a child arrives at the PlayGarden outside of staffed hours:

- The site is open to explore, but the buildings and bathrooms are closed
- The water feature is turned off
- The animals are inside their coops and hutches
- The bikes, balls, art supplies, shovels, and watering cans are put away
- Parents are on their own to help their children enter play with other children and navigate the challenging social situations that arise when a group of children play together.

When a child arrives at the PlayGarden during Open Play:

- They are met with a welcoming smile
- Children can help fill the duck pond and watch the ducks splash and bathe, harvest carrots, feed the tops to the bunnies and wash and chop the rest of the carrots for their own snack. They can plant, harvest, and weed the vegetable garden. They can make a bouquet of flowers to take home, draw with chalk on the basketball court, ride a scooter, or do an art project.
- Trained staff negotiate conflicts between children, explain differences, and help children of all abilities find ways to play together.

Summer Camp

In June when school is out, the PlayGarden gate opens to host nine weeks of summer day camp. Our programs are multi-age so that young children and older children can learn and play with each other, and siblings can attend together. Children ages three to seven attend our Huckleberries sessions, ages four to twelve attend Garden Explorers, and ten years and up attend Green Thumbs. Like all PlayGarden programs, the backbone of our summer camp is fully inclusive outdoor play. Campers grow, harvest, and cook from our gardens, sing, make art, goof off, hang out and play some more. Camp is staffed by high school and college students under the expert direction of a Camp Director. Our staff is inclusive, too - long time camper Aadit, became a Junior Counselor this summer! Let's learn from his story.

Aadit's Story

Our first summer at the PlayGarden, we walked our five-year old son, Aadit, into what we thought was a summer camp, but turned out instead to be a place of sheer magic! Aadit had been recently diagnosed with autism and it had been a year filled with heightened emotions, temper tantrums, and anxiety. When I met Aadit at the end of his first day at Seattle Children's PlayGarden, he had a huge smile on his face. On the car ride home, for the first time ever, he spontaneously recounted some of the things he had done during his day. And the next morning, he woke up all excited to be going to camp again! To see Aadit transform in a matter of days -- calmly happy instead of overwhelmed, excited instead of anxious, letting go of my hand and rushing into the garden without looking back or clinging to me, was the best feeling. We watched in awe as the weeks of playing outside with complete freedom to be himself, helped Aadit grow calm, attentive, responsive, and relational. He often came back home completely we and covered in dirt and always with a huge smile on his face and a sparkle in his eyes. Being in nature in a safe and secure way, with nothing but love and joy around him, had brought out Aadit's true nature and given him the confidence to be the only person he can be -- himself. **— Shirin, Aadit's mom**

What's it like to work at the PlayGarden? We asked Ella, a PlayGarden camp counselor and big sister to Cleo, who has cerebral palsy, and Miles who is typically developing.

"I have been working at the PlayGarden for 3-4 years, after many years of attending as a camper with my sister. I keep coming back because the kids influence my life in ways nothing else can. They humble me, bring joy, and experiences to my life that I've never had anywhere else. If I were new, I would definitely return because of the amazing staff, the welcoming environment, seeing kids again, and overall, just enjoying everyone who's there. Working at the PlayGarden has taught me countless things - a lot of which aren't even about kids. Over time I have learned more about myself and my deep love for kids, and also, my endless joy of working with kids with special needs. It has honestly made me kinder and more open, while also teaching me to stay present and how to handle different kinds of people - disabled or not. If I could tell the world one thing about PlayGarden, it'd be that not only is it an amazing place and experience for any kid, but for the staff as well, and that it's genuinely changed so many lives, including mine. I wish that the community understood inclusion doesn't necessarily mean access. It mean attentiveness, respect, a willingness to learn, and love. This goes for any kid. PlayGarden is one of my favorite places in the world, and I talk about it constantly. It doesn't feel like a job, more like a privilege, and I'm so grateful for it in every way."

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Aadit's parents noted many positive changes in him following a day at PlayGarden summer camp. What do you think helped him so much?
2. PlayGarden summer camp sessions have wide age ranges. How do you feel about four-year olds playing alongside twelve-year olds?
3. PlayGarden summer camp is "play based." What does this mean to you? Why does the PlayGarden value play over teaching skills to kids?

PlayGarden Preschool

The PlayGarden offers a fully inclusive, nature-based preschool program for children ages three to six years old. Our preschool programs take place Monday through Friday from nine in the morning to one in the afternoon. Children attend two to five days per week. Our staff has extensive experience with children of all abilities and is eager to share their love of the natural world with all children. Read stories from the parents of two preschoolers.

Liam's Story

When a child has different needs, like Liam, finding a school that will meet them at their level is a challenge. Liam has always thrived outdoors, but we struggled to find social situations where he could learn to connect with other kids in addition to nature. When we were introduced to the PlayGarden, we knew that we had found exactly what Liam needed. However, working for a non-profit does not allow for any extras in today's economy. We knew that without another full-time job, we would never be able to afford to have Liam attend. We worried about the experiences he would miss out on. However, when we received our scholarship, our hearts were overflowing with gratitude. Without the PlayGarden, Liam would've been limited to being cared for individually by a family member. While he would be tremendously loved, he would rarely be around kids his own age. Since starting school, Liam's speech has improved, his personality has expressed itself in new ways, his motor skills have increased. The instructors have connected with him in ways that help him connect...taking walks, playing on the slide, feeding the chickens...these are all things that have brought him to life. The best part of him being able to attend is his ability to be a part of a group of kids that help each other and build each other up. In their lifetime, there will always be people that will try to tear them down. The experiences that Liam has gotten with the PlayGarden will remind him that there will also always be people who lift him up.

— Jess, Liam's mom

Langston's Story

We first set foot in the Children's PlayGarden when our son was about 6 months old and it was definitely love at first sight. Our son loved the mud pit with trucks, the wagons, the musical instruments and eating the strawberries from the garden. He loved the bunnies, geese, endless green space to roam and explore. We soon made our visit to this wonderful park a daily experience discovering something new, educational, and surprising around every corner. My son and I often pressed our noses against the classroom windows wondering about their preschool. We were curious about the toys, what they were baking in that big, lovely kitchen, their class parakeet and often admired the paintings and art splattered all over the walls. Because of our limited income we didn't think it was possible for our son to attend preschool and were overcome with emotion when the PlayGarden offered him a scholarship, I literally cried on the phone with them out of joy. He also got to attend a summer camp that he still talks about regularly—there, he had the chance to be with kids of all abilities in a fun safe loving space with counselors who really cared and worked hard to help the kids have a great memorable experience. Our son is now in his second year at the PlayGarden preschool and we have continued to feel so immeasurably blessed by the community that is made possible at the PlayGarden. Each teacher is highly skilled and works with our son from a place of compassion, love and acceptance. It is difficult to put into words the life changing impact the PlayGarden has had on my family and our son. It is truly a place that welcomes everyone just as they are and creates a safe place for people of all kinds to find community, support, acceptance, and to grow and learn. — **Sara & Aisen, Langston's parents**

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What are the benefits of an inclusive preschool for the "typically developing" children and to our whole community?
2. PlayGarden preschoolers spend more of their day outdoors. Inclusive preschools are rare and outdoor preschools enroll very few children with disabilities. Why do you think that is?

Supported Employment

The PlayGarden offers employment opportunities for young adults with disabilities. As the PlayGarden has grown, so have the children who attend our programs. We began offering summer camp in 2005 and the kids from our inaugural camp year are now young adults. As our camp participants grow and return to our camp program each year, we create opportunities for them to take on new roles, as junior counselors, and then full camp counselors. In true PlayGarden fashion, we extend these growth and leadership opportunities to all our former camp participants; those with disabilities and those without. Young adults with disabilities also work in our Open Play, Summer Camp, and Preschool programs.

What are the benefits of supported employment?

- Employment contributes to feelings of self-determination, self-worth, and community inclusion.
- Young adults have an opportunity to transition to the workplace in an inclusive, supportive environment.
- They are able to do meaningful work, for a fair wage, while they negotiate the transition from high school to adulthood.
- Equally important is the diversity these young people bring to your staff. Representation is important. The impact of seeing yourself represented, whether that's in media or in the classroom, is powerful. Recent studies have shown just how powerful representation is in student achievement; children of color who have even one same-race teacher in elementary school are more likely to finish high school and more likely to attend a four-year college. We can infer that representation would be similarly important for children and youth with disabilities, who may struggle to see themselves reflected in the world around them. Hiring young adults with disabilities will give our preschoolers, summer camp participants, and open play visitors with disabilities the opportunity to see someone like them, doing meaningful work in a job where they are respected and valued.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Do you have any coworkers with disabilities?
2. How can you create opportunities for employment for people with disabilities in your community?
3. "You can't be what you can't see." What does that statement mean to you?

We asked Pam, mom of 5-year old Paxton, to describe a successful family outing. She shared the following story about "the trifecta of nature, playground, and nature center."

> *"We went out this weekend to Lewis Creek Park for Earth Day. We had been there before, so he was familiar with it. We set him up and told him the night before, so he was ready. They have a nature center too, so* ***there is the trifecta of nature, playground, nature center.*** *We went into the nature center and there were tons of people. He said, "It's too loud, it's too noisy, too many people!" It's a big thing for him to be able to say that, so we immediately said let's try the playground. We walked around and went there, then went to the restroom and he gradually got more comfortable with the noise in the indoor space. Then he started to get agitated again, so we went out on a boardwalk and saw frogs. He sat there for a long time to try and find the frogs (big deal!). He sat still for thirty minutes and was showing the frogs to everyone. He had something to share. Then we went on the trail to find more things and he was asking lots of questions (another big thing!). He was wondering, having curiosity, and communicating his thoughts and feelings. He was able to stick with the activity for a long time and go back to the nature center and ask the ranger some questions."*

Fresh air, the wind in your face as you swing high and dip low, the excitement of joining other kids at play: these are the "simple" joys of childhood. Let's make sure that all kids have the opportunity to go play outside!

Anna and Wren chatting in the garden with Wren's communication device.

Nicholas, a Special Olympics Athlete, at soccer practice.

SAY "YES!" AT SOCCER AND DANCE AND BEYOND

KEY THEMES

Inclusion as an attitude
Staff training
Communication with Parents
Working with a child's team

Children with disabilities want to do everything that all kids want to do. Some like to play sports, some enjoy art, some love music, and some dream of joining the circus and want to go to circus school. Their parents want to cheer from the sidelines, attend the dance and music recitals, and watch as their child masters a difficult new skateboard trick. So, what is it like to enroll your child with a disability in an extracurricular activity, like tennis lessons, soccer, a dance class or music lessons?

The PlayGarden team set out to find the answer to this question, by hosting many families and youth care providers at small focus group sessions and interviewing parents and kids themselves. The stories we gathered are backed up by recent studies on how children with disabilities spend their "free" time. Children with disabilities are regularly turned away from, denied access to, or made to feel unwelcome or even worse, incapable of participating in youth programs. Children with disabilities often struggle to make friends. They have lower participation rates in summer camps, volunteer work, recreational activities, and part-time or summer jobs – important experiences for many young people to develop life skills and lead a satisfying life.

According to a recent study titled "Disability and Social Inclusion: Leisure, Sport and Culture in the Lives of Young Disabled People," children with disabilities had just ONE visit to or from a friend, over a two-week period. **They averaged FOUR times as many visits with therapists and specialists as they did with friends**. In fact, some children with disabilities in the study explained that they think of their therapy time as leisure or recreation, because it involves social interaction outside of their home (Aitchison, C., 2000).

Another study found that **adolescents with disabilities watched 2 ½ hours more television per day, than their typically developing peers** (Ng, K., Augustine, L., & Inchley, J., 2018). In all of the literature we've reviewed, we've consistently found reports that children with disabilities experience less diversity in available activities, are excluded from play more than their nondisabled peers, and spend much more time in isolated activities, such as watching television and using computers (Law, et al, 2008) (Spencer - Cavaliere, N., 2010) (Sweet, M., 208) (Holland Bloorview, 2017). This may help explain why children with disabilities are twice as likely to be overweight or obese and are **twice as likely to report feelings of loneliness (**Mayo Clinic, 2017). The restriction of options for recreation for children with disabilities widens as the kids grow into adults.

Imagine your child wants to play soccer like her friends or her brother. Imagine you, as a parent, want your daughter to experience the sense of belonging and mastery that you did playing soccer as a child. Imagine you are a coach and a child with a disability is assigned to your team. We must look at this from all points of view, so that we all may say, "Yes! Please join our team! " or "Yes, we would love to have your child in our dance class."

In this section you will read three stories involving youth organizations: a tennis center, a soccer team, and a dance studio. As you read these stories try and imagine it is you, your child, your team, or your center. Let's look at all of the angles.

Rainier Dance Center says "Yes!" to Kids with Disabilities

Rainier Dance Center is making inclusion work. We wanted to learn more about them and to shine the light on how they have quietly gone about teaching dance to ALL kids. Their website offers the first clue:

"Our Mission: We are a neighborhood studio focused on building community. Our goal is to help our students become respectful, kind, and motivated young people, by offering a structured and supportive learning environment. While we strive to create strong technical dancers, **we also cultivate creativity and individuality**. **We believe everyone should be able to dance regardless of their ability, age or body type.**"

Please read this interview with Jenna Mitchell, the owner of the Rainier Dance Center.

PlayGarden: What does inclusion mean to you in the context of RDC?

Jenna: I think it's important for me that whoever walks in the door feels welcome – whatever that child looks like or the family looks like. So for me, it starts then, when they literally come in the door and ask about classes. It's easy to – there's definitely some hesitance and even fear there, because I've never been trained. I've been trained in dance, but never any formalized training in terms of dealing with kids with disabilities. I came from – my mom is a parent educator and has a ton of background with child development and it just seeped into me. It's just the compassion piece of it and making sure people feel that compassion when they come in the door.

As far as classes go, I think at this point we haven't had a student who has severe disabilities but when they come in the door, my goal is to treat them like everybody. Treat everyone the same and help parents feel comfortable, but also have a lot of communication around it. When students register on our online portal, we ask a general question about is there anything we should know about them physically, emotionally, mentally. Sometimes people use that and sometimes they don't. We've had students come to class and then we notice something and then start a conversation with the parents. I think to your main question: **inclusion for me just very simply is making sure that every student who comes through that door can dance, if they want to dance**. We just figure it out as we go and we've never had a student who is so severely distracted or has been so disruptive that we've had to make a significant shift. **We've had bumps in the road and I do research when I can and talk to parents when I can and there's already schools, teachers, therapists involved, so I just piggyback on that. It's never saying "No" to start with. I feel like sometimes it might be a little bit naïve on my part. I've always been a Yes person, anyway. My mom and I have always talked about people's natural responses to questions and I'm a "I'll just figure it out" kind of person.**

PlayGarden: How long has your center been around?

Jenna: Over 40 years, but I'm the 4th owner and this is my 6th year.

PlayGarden: How does your organization bring inclusion to life? A child or a family registers for classes and you feel like the lines of communication are open with the parents to talk about the child and whatever services they might be getting. Is that formal? Do you ask for a release of information form to be signed by the parent or is it more "so, what's up with this little kid?" How do you approach that conversation?

Jenna: With Winnie, Erin (her mom) came to us first to have a conversation before she enrolled Winnie. **I'd never taught a child with Down syndrome and we'd never had one at Rainier Dance Studio**, so we had a meeting with her teacher and talked about what's happening for her, what she needs, what her mom's goals are for her. She just wanted her to be able to go into a class and be in class for an hour without her mom**. It helped us to know her goals and work on achieving it. We did a lot of talking and planning.**

I've had the opposite happen where kids have been with us for several months and we have behavior stuff. None of us are doctors, so that's a difficult situation. My staff is aware enough to know when a kid is just acting out, versus where maybe there's something else going on. **Broaching the topic is hard if a parent doesn't come to us ahead of time.**

We had a student who has ADHD and he was having a hard time focusing and he couldn't get through the whole class and make the transitions like the other kids could, so I brought that up with the parents and luckily I have some really great teachers. **So I laid it out in a way and said "we really want to help this and make it successful, but here's what's happening and maybe you can give us some feedback." For me, that's been the best way to approach it instead of saying "there's something wrong with your kid," We approach it as "we want to make your child successful, so let's work together."** We had a lot of background about what happens at school and what he's sensitive about and making a plan to make sure he gets what he needs and can complete the class and that he doesn't feel like he's being called out for bad behavior and treated differently. One strategy we used was we had a special folder and when he needed to take a break from class, we'd say, "Can you take this folder to Miss Kristen at the front desk?"

PlayGarden: I'm impressed with how much time you must spend to make this work out.

Jenna: I don't think of it like that, but I guess it is a lot of communication time. I have a really great staff who follow my lead and none have said why are we doing this? They're pretty clear on trying to make sure it's a good place for everyone to be.

PlayGarden: How much experience do you have with disabilities in your program and what kinds of disabilities have you worked with?

Jenna: Down syndrome, 2 students with autism, handful of ADHD/ADD kids. We have one student with a physical disability – leg braces. A wide range. It touches on many things. Prior to these last 5 years, I've had no experience, really**. I've taught dance all my life, but I haven't knowingly taught any disabled students before this, so it's pretty new.**

PlayGarden: What barriers to inclusion exist at RDC?

Jenna: I think, unfortunately with the kids we didn't know about upfront, I think the parents can be barriers. It would be awesome if every parent could proactively reach out to us and say this is what's happening for our student and give us insight. But I recognize there might be stigma there and maybe they want their kid to have the full experience without any labels. **For us, as people who want the kids to get the most out of what we're teaching them, it's helpful for us to have more** information. That's for any kid.

Jenna: If they're going through a weird stage right now and they're really clingy – it's good to know. All of our kids go through some sort of a phase and a parent coming to me and saying we're in the middle of moving or kids come back from break and then have a hard time separating and going into class. It's like, "Duh" no wonder they don't want to stay in class by themselves.

I wouldn't say it's been a barrier at this point, but I do foresee in the future my lack of experience and training and my teachers' lack of experience and training – if we had more resources and training it would better equip us.

What has been a little bit of a barrier is assistants. We have an awesome assistant who has been solely assigned to Winnie and they've established a good rapport and Winnie knows that CeCe is going to be there and will give her a hug and help her in class. I think moving forward, that could be a barrier. If we have 5 kids in one class who need extra help, I'm pretty positive we won't be able to manage a 1:1 ratio like that. So anticipating that and trying to figure that out is going to be a challenge.

PlayGarden: I'd love to hear Winnie's story, but are there other students you have who require aides?

Jenna: We don't. But there's lots of times when – it's tough because the teacher has 12, 14, 16 kids and we try to put an assistant in every class that's bigger. Even with CeCe with Winnie, if there's 2 other kids having issues, it feels pretty hectic. Just normal kid stuff.

PlayGarden: Have you experienced any resistance?

Jenna: Nope. Not from parents or staff.

PlayGarden: Would you share a success story with us?

Jenna: I'll use Winnie because it's fresh in my mind. At the recital, so Winnie took class a full year - we have a big show with costumes at the end of the year - and the first year they opted not to do the recital. This past year, they decided to try it. During dress rehearsal, Winnie was okay, but the lights were on, and it was slower moving and she was able to acclimate herself. That class's dance entered and skipped around the stage to their spots, which was hard for Winnie. So Miss Ellen decided to have CeCe stand with her in the wings and just enter when the class got to Winnie's spot. We had planned at the beginning of the year to have CeCe dancing with Winnie as an option for the recital, but our goal was to have Winnie do it on her own. It was so cute. We were backstage waiting and Erin was back there, I think. We had backstage moms and I was back there and CeCe was back there with Winnie and the music starts and kids start to come in and CeCe before was like "Are you going to be ready? It's soon. You excited?" And Winnie was like, "yeah!" The lights came up and the music started, and kids started to enter and CeCe said, "it's your turn". And Winnie said "No". And I said "I know you can do this." And as soon as she saw the choreography that she knew, it just shifted and she said, "Yup" and just went right on. And everyone backstage was crying and clapping and yelling and so excited that she made that push herself. And she came off stage and was so proud. Lots of high 5's backstage!

PlayGarden: How did it happen that you had this 14-year-old assistant?

Jenna: It was the suggestion of the teacher, Ellen. Ellen was trained through the Creative Dance Center in Seattle, which is a totally inclusive place. I think that training – she's a compassionate loving person anyway, but that training helped her discern when a kid needs something extra. That class 2 years ago had just 1 assistant and it was that first struggle with getting Winnie in the class. She wanted her mom to walk her in and then stay in. So, adding an assistant was based on Ellen's recommendation that Winnie needed someone assigned to her that she could get to know. It started as a person who would help walk her in and they really bonded.

PlayGarden: Is this assistant volunteering? Paid?

Jenna: We have a program at our studio - every hour that our older students assist a class, they get a free class. So assisting not only helps them mentor and learn to teach, but it also offsets their tuition.

PlayGarden: That's a win-win. Furthering your skills – What tools do you need what do you wish you'd known?

Jenna: I think I'm able to do my own research about things like autism, ADHD, DS, but I think some sort of formalized information about how, especially when it comes to dance. I know every kid is different, but maybe how information is processed differently based on what the kid is going through. Something from a developmental – physically or mentally – more data for me. I can go to the internet, but I absorb it better if it's coming from a person who's had the experience. The internet is hard, because there's so much information and sometimes it's conflicting.
Paring it down to if you're going to teach/ mentor/guide a student with autism here's the top 10 things you should know - would be helpful. As an educator, if you're doing it right, you're hyper aware of every kid, anyway and looking at them as individuals. More simplified data would be helpful.

PlayGarden: Do you feel any financial pressure about the hours it takes to meet with parents and coordinate with the teacher? Families with disabilities don't pay extra for that?

Jenna: That never even crossed my mind. It's not different with other orgs, probably, but when I think about what we're teaching it would be odd to have an aide in there who wasn't a dance instructor.

We have a student who's a little older – she's 10 now and she got diagnosed during her first year of class. It was pretty clear to us there was something that was different and during that process she got diagnosed. During that first year she – you could just see she didn't know how to process what was happening in her body and she had some big outbursts in our lobby hitting her mom and screaming. And I felt so protective over them and I wanted to say she has some special stuff going on and I could see other parents saying "I can't believe you let your kid hit you and you should drag her out."
There has been some of that with other parents just looking at the behavior and thinking that it's just a bad kid, **but there ARE no bad kids.** That's the only thing I've seen. We've had a very wide parenting gamut.

We've actually had a young kid who came out of class – she needed a break because she wasn't listening. We have a practice of, when a kid needs a little time out or a break to refocus, they go sit with whoever is at the front desk. We had a parent who said, "If that happens again, you're gonna get a beating" and we were all like, "Whoa." So the teacher and I agreed to just handle everything inside the classroom and not send the kid out. I didn't feel okay about that. So we've got that and parents on the complete opposite end who are super understanding. I don't think that will ever change.

It's not my place to say to everybody "this is what's happening" but I struggle with that, because I wonder is it my place from an educational and information perspective and I should talk to the parents about that.

PlayGarden: How do you communicate to the public that you're willing to include children with disabilities?

Jenna: I've been reactive with my teachers – as a student comes in and a kid starts class. But I'd like to have something – I have our annual teacher kick off meeting and I'd like to start the year being proactive saying "Here's who we have right now. There could be a kid who needs some special things. I'd like to set the tempo for the year and include that information with them" I have several teachers who are not as well versed/experienced with little kids/whatever.
I don't, actually do anything special with communication. In the last year I've gone back and forth with whether we start a separate class for special ed students. We don't have anything on our website that specifically targets or any text about kids with disabilities. Our mission statement says we're inclusive. I don't know the answer to that. Most of the reason for that – I felt like if/when I do that – it could be at that place where we have a lot more kids in that situation. Do I do a creative dance class for kids with disabilities? I'm sure there are different situations where it makes sense and where it doesn't.

PAUSE & REFLECT:

1. Ms. Jenna tells us that she had no formal training before accepting students with disabilities in her dance classes. How does that make you feel?

2. One idea Ms. Jenna is thinking about is offering a dance class specifically for children with disabilities. Is this a good idea? What are the advantages and disadvantages of separating children by ability?

3. How do you feel about Ms. Jenna's statement that "There are no bad kids?"

4. Ms. Jenna found an affordable and creative way to help Winnie participate in class, by offering older dance students the opportunity to reduce their fees by volunteering to be an in-class aide. How does this arrangement foster inclusion?

What Went Wrong at Soccer?

Inclusion begins with saying "yes." Your child is valued. You deserve to be here on the soccer field and in the dance studio and anywhere else you want to be. Ms. Jenna "gets it." She knows that accepting students, all students, is the right thing to do. She looks for creative solutions and is proactive and unafraid of talking about her fears and concerns about how including all children may impact her classes. She passes this attitude on to her staff, who also all believe that Winnie has every right to be in class alongside the other kids. Ms. Jenna is proactive in asking how she can help and truly listens to Winnie's mom and her teachers. She offers older students the opportunity to reduce their class fees by mentoring younger students, and the result is the very definition of a "win-win-win" situation. Winnie gets to dance, her aide gets tuition assistance, mentorship and friendship. The other dancers keep dancing and the parents get to attend the recitals and be proud, just like all the other parents. Meanwhile, across town at the soccer class, Isaac's family is disheartened. Isaac, himself, has lost his confidence, the other parents continue to be bullies, and the coach may feel helpless or worse, confirmed in his bias that soccer is only for some children. The following story was shared at one of our parent focus groups. Let's learn from Isaac and his mom about their experience at soccer.

My son, Isaac, is almost 5 years old. He is a PlayGarden kid. He has a cyst in cerebellum that impacts his fine and gross motor skills. Isaac loves Elliot Bay Park because it has trains, water fountain, beach, grass and bridges.

Isaac is in a soccer class right now, for 4-5-year olds. There are only three kids in the class. One of the children is very good at soccer. His parents show up 20 minutes early and drill him. He should probably be on a better team, but because of his age he's on this team. Issac does well. One day, two weeks ago, he was just having a hard gross motor day. In 40 minutes, he fell 50 times. He'd just stand up and fall back down. Other kids would push him, when he tried to get the ball. It started really getting to him and he completely lost his confidence. He started crying and asking, "What's wrong with me?" Other parents started making fun of him and saying,"He shouldn't be here. What's wrong with him?" I didn't know what to do or what to say. The coaches are very young and didn't know what to do. We tried again the next week and now he's asked me to take him out of the class. Tomorrow we start a class with 3-year olds. It was the first time that he started asking, "Hey, I can't do what they can do and why is that happening to me?" Which is how it will be when he leaves the PlayGarden bubble. ***- A.F.***

Coaches, instructors and assistants are right there in the room or on the field with your child. They teach, mentor, inspire, and set the tone for the kids. These roles are crucial to the atmosphere of the team or class. Often these positions are filled by a person who is quite talented in their area. They usually love the thing they are teaching and want to pass this on to the kids. They have good intentions. But they also are often un-mentored on child development, under pressure from parents, and on their own. Most have very little to no training on disabilities. Even Ms. Jenna feels like she needs more mentoring: "I think I'm able to do my own research about things like autism, ADHD, Down syndrome, but I think some sort of formalized information, especially when it comes to dance. I know every kid is different, but understanding how information is processed differently based on what the kid is going through, something from a developmental perspective would help. I can go to the internet, but I absorb it better if it's coming from a person who's had the experience. The internet is hard, because there's so much information and sometimes it's conflicting."

Many youth organizations operate on a tight budget and utilize young adults as coaches and instructors both as a way to build mentorship, and to keep their expenses low. Both the soccer class Isaac attended and the dance center use young people to help teach their classes. But the results couldn't be more different. Is it acceptable to believe that teens and young adults are not able to be inclusion allies? How does an organization create a culture of inclusion?

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Why do you think the soccer coach did not step in to help Isaac?
2. Compare these two stories: Winnie's success at dance and Isaac's treatment at soccer by other parents and lack of support from the coach. What do you think contributed to the success and the failure?
3. How will you talk to your child about another child with a disability on their team or in their class/program/lesson?
4. What could the soccer coach have done differently?

In the *Thinking Guide to Inclusive Childcare*, the authors share their ideas on how to adopt an inclusive mindset.

A THINKING GUIDE TO INCLUSIVE CHILDCARE
Mark Sweet, Ph.D.

- Commonly asked but poorly thought-out questions about inclusion include: *can this child do what we do in our room? Will s/he fit?* An inclusive attitude does not start with decisions about which children cannot be served.

- **Apply the *just this much* approach** to your ideas about participation. A child might not want or be able to deliver as much as you want at a particular time. Can you accept just as much as s/he can offer? Can you help the child feel respected and safe for doing just this much for now?

- Adult attitude is a key to inclusion. Inclusiveness requires flexibility. Adults have to focus on children's interests and energy. This should not be understood as surrendering to an *anything goes* model. To the contrary, the inclusive adult is wondering what it's like to be the child, with her/his abilities, interests and energy. The inclusive adult tries to honor child comfort factors with the knowledge that **you cannot force learning** and young children learn best when they have a feeling of play.

Let's learn from one more story that was shared during our parent focus groups. This one is from Chin

Can I talk about belonging from a parent's perspective? Partnership is important to me. We both care about this child. I took Marcus to the public tennis facility. We signed up for tennis classes. We talked to the teacher and told them "he is really high energy and might need extra support." They didn't listen. They were just like, "Yeah, yeah, ALL kids are high energy." But Marcus has ADHD, it's different. Just 20 minutes into the class the teacher comes to me and says that we need to watch him. He stated, "I have other kids."

That evening we got a call from the tennis instructor, and they said, "your son cannot be in this class." Period. They don't want to partner with me. It is either "we can't have you here" or "we don't want you here." The end. It was all very abrupt. There was no, "Can we talk about this?" This public funded program is not for my son. It is created for other people's kids. - **Chin**

PAUSE & REFLECT:

1. Was the tennis instructor justified in dismissing this family?
2. If the parents are willing to provide information about their child and work on a "partnership" how can the center respond?
3. Considering what we've learned from the *Thinking Guide* and from Ms. Jenna's flexible and creative approach, what could the tennis center have done differently?
4. What are some creative ways your organization could offer additional support to children and families with disabilities?

Communicating with Parents

A recurring theme in our conversations with parents was a **plea to be listened to.** Parents want to set their kids up for success and have a lot of wisdom to share with teachers, coaches, and instructors about what their child needs to do their best.

- "*Trust us as parents that we know what our children need. I called the director before an acting class and wrote tips in an email. They were ignored and Ted hit another kid in class. We went over the tips again and the rest of the week went fine. People often dismiss me as a helicopter parent, but I want them to know that it will be so much easier for them if they listen to me. We are the experts on our children and want to be respected for that. We know what our kids need.*" - Lynn

- "*If you don't know what to do, ASK the parents. It doesn't have to be a mystery. It doesn't have to be an uncomfortable conversation.*" - Parent of a child with autism.

Many people feel uncomfortable talking about disability and feel equally uncomfortable talking with parents of children with disabilities. The parents want to talk. They want to share their expertise. They want their child to be successful and know that he/she/they can be successful if only instructors, staff, and coaches would give them a chance and listen to a few tips for assisting their child. Parents find themselves struggling to choose between disclosing their child's disability and risking being told that their child is not welcome or can't be accommodated; and keeping their child's needs quiet in the hopes of avoiding prejudgment but knowing that this approach makes it impossible for teachers and coaches to plan for their child. The answer to this problem is open and honest communication.

Let's look to the *Thinking Guide* for some simple guidelines about communicating with parents.

A THINKING GUIDE TO INCLUSIVE CHILDCARE

Mark Sweet, Ph.D.

People are often told to *just be yourself.* When talking to parents about their children, unless you are usually thoughtful, accurate and relatable in what you say out loud, it might not be good advice to just be yourself. When you are communicating for professional reasons about someone else's child, it is wise to think carefully about your purpose, your message and your attitude.

What do you imagine parents want to hear about their children?

Parents want to hear that their child is liked, safe and happy. They want to hear that their children are learning. Think about some of the words that are used by childcare workers about some of the children in their care: *fussy, spoiled, naughty, mean, disruptive, aggressive, manipulative, stubborn, needy, noncompliant,* and more. Parents might also use some of these words. That does not mean that they reflect best practice from childcare workers.

We can do better. **We can use language that results in parents recognizing their children without sacrificing the truth**. With our choice of words we can try to reflect a child's perspective or experience. We can also offer our most responsible and respectful guesses about a child's point of view.

When beginning a conversation about a child's behavior begin by describing the context in which it happened - the bigger frame. Describe a recognizable situation, without judgment**. You can talk about anything if you approach the conversation as a caring reporter rather than as a complainer or a person with a judgmental attitude.**

Remind yourself about what you have learned about a child's interests, temperament, relationships, communications, sensory sensitivities, problem solving approaches and learning strengths. For example, when talking about child's learning you might say: *to get started she likes ... and when she's stuck it seems to help when ...*
Check your own attitude before talking with parents about their child's actions, especially unwelcome actions. If your current perspective is that the child is the problem and s/he just has to stop *misbehaving*, you are not ready to talk with this child's parent.

Talking with parents should never be about masking the truth or ignoring relevant information. If you are a caring and accurate reporter, chances are better that you will be heard. Remember that reporting details is different than providing your judgments or emotions about those details. If this kind of conversation makes you nervous or uncomfortable, take a breath. Exhale. Prepare.

Parents report fatigue from constantly advocating for the children and are grateful when an administrator or program director reaches out to invite their child to participate. This is what Patrick shared with us about his experience advocating for his son, Gabe:

"School is tough and how much can you advocate for your kid? Seattle Public Schools is not a giving organization. You have to pull, pull, pull. It gets tiring. One of the Garfield High School security guards is the coach of the track team and they go out of their way to invite special education kids to join. So, I finally signed Gabe up for track. At least three kids from his class were there. They're just hanging out, but they're there. And it's tolerated and promoted. He sought us out. Unfortunately, you shouldn't have to rely on someone who wants to do that. That's this person's desire. If it was baked in, more of that would happen. There would be a sense of urgency about we have to figure this out and make it happen. — ***Patrick***

Change can be hard and one of the most challenging parts is deciding where to begin. When it comes to deciding how to start including kids with disabilities, the *Thinking Guide* has some valuable wisdom to share.

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Where do we start? The usual answer is *at the beginning*. However, in the process of becoming more inclusive, everyone involved might have a different starting point. Administrators, old and new staff might have different starting points. It was written at the beginning of this Thinking Guide that when the subject is including children with disabilities, some minds imagine and assume. Some imaginings are helpful and others are a distraction**. Focus attention on a child in front of you.**

Make a commitment to be as inclusive as possible - one child at a time. This is not a statement only about children with known disabilities. Many children who will never be categorized as disabled or having a particular syndrome or status other than typical can be a handful at times. Inclusiveness is an attitude that reflects on how adults think about children with or without disabilities. So, **start with conversation about how staff think about children and about their roles in the lives of children in your care.**

Consider having conversation about any of the ideas presented with your staff:

- Inclusion is an attitude and a practice.
- Children are not little adults.
- Each child has her/his own point of view.
- What is usable information?
- Learning is not the same as learned.
- There are many ways to participate.
- How can you find a way to say *yes* to a child?
- How can you avoid being someone who leads with *no, don't, stop, you need to…*
- Each day adults should have far more positive and encouraging interactions with a child than corrective or critical ones.
- At the end of the day each child should feel happy and want to return.
- How many ways can we answer the question, *what might help*?

It is through sports, dance, art, and music that children develop skills, establish friendships and learn to follow their passions. We can all help children with disabilities have equal access to and full participation in extracurricular activities. There are many resources to help. Kids Included Together (KIT) offers a Readiness Checklist (see appendix I), Examples of possible accommodations (see appendix II), and suggestions on how to communicate that your organization is committed to inclusion (see appendix III).

Langston measuring his wings at KidsQuest Children's Museum.

SAY "YES!" AT MUSEUMS, ZOOS, & FESTIVALS

KEY THEMES:

Social or Sensory Stories
Sensory Backpacks
Line Busters
Organizational Barriers

Zoos, science centers, natural history museums, traditional history museums, art museums, botanical gardens, and of course children's museums are community-wide investments in our children. Families visit zoos and museums to play, explore, learn and wonder. Zoos and museums are full of exciting, wondrous opportunities. Likewise festivals of all kinds offer delight, drama, fun and excitement for the whole family. But are they welcoming to children with disabilities?

The PlayGarden studied this question by interviewing key stakeholders including other youth-serving organizations, parents, and kids and asking them to share their experiences. What makes a trip to the science center go well and what can turn a trip to the zoo or children's museum into a challenging experience?

In this section we will discuss inclusion from both the perspective of the directors and staff of several local organizations and parents of children with disabilities. In the following pages, you will read three stories. Each story includes a positive family experience and a challenging one. These parents are sharing their stories, so that others may understand the barriers they face when they visit a museum, festival, or zoo. We'll start with a family's experience at two community festivals.

Big Day of Play vs The Young Athlete's Festival: A Tale of Two Community Events

"The big day to play *your* way!" That's what all the signs said. It sounded like the perfect community event for my family – for *any* family. But, as the mom of a kid with a disability, I know that sometimes "everyone" doesn't really mean "everyone," so I kept reading. The event website advertised the presence of "adaptive play equipment" and emphasized that this event is intended to be a celebration of diversity and would include activities for everyone. I noticed that the logo for the event included someone who was a wheelchair user. I decided to give it a shot.

My kids are best friends and do almost everything together. Aurelia (age 5), loves chocolate and thinks it should be a food group, is wild for obstacle courses, and is a prolific crafter and artist. She's typically developing. Langston (age 7), loves strawberries with an intensity that borders on obsession, he's fiercely competitive, loves sports, and is a voracious reader. Langston is autistic, has hypotonia, sensory processing disorder, and anxiety. Finding activities that these two incredibly different kids can do together is a challenge, so I was especially excited for this festival.

The big day finally arrived and there was a huge turnout, which was exciting to see. This really looked like a fun event! Langston immediately wanted to dive in. He took a brief moment to look around the field and then his eyes lit up. "I want to do THAT!" I followed his gaze and saw that he was looking at Bubble Soccer. I have to admit, that I had a sinking feeling - it just looked so hard for a kid like Langston. Bubble Soccer involves playing soccer, while your upper body is completely encased in a giant, plastic bubble.

I didn't want to start the day by telling my little boy, "I don't think you can do that," and the event was supposed to be inclusive, so we decided to give it a try. He ran on the field and got a coach to help him put on the big, plastic bubble. He took his place with his "team" on their side of the field and the whistle blew. He started to run toward the ball and fell, almost immediately. I waited, for what felt like ages, while he struggled to get up. Finally, one of the coaches or volunteers came by and helped him up. He started to run, again, and fell. Again.

This time, the coaches took even longer to help him. They spent an eternity just watching him from afar, waiting for him to get up on his own. I could see the perplexed looks on their faces and hear them chuckling, "What is *wrong* with this kid?" Ouch.

But he's tenacious and ran toward the ball as soon as he was back on his feet. Within moments, he'd fallen again. I decided enough was enough and started toward one of the coaches, just as another coach headed over to Langston. She stood next to him and kept repeating, "Just get up. Just push yourself up. What's wrong? Why can't you just get up?"

"Just." "Just." "Just." As if it were that easy.

The whistle blew as I got past the other parents and made it onto the field. The game was over and it was time for another group of kids to have a turn. I made it through the crowd to Langston, who was still next to that same coach, sobbing and sobbing. She looked at me, shrugged, and walked away. I told him how proud I was that he never gave up and how brave he was to keep trying, even though it was so hard. But he was devastated. He never got anywhere near the ball. He spent most of the game waiting for someone to help him up.

Langston insisted on trying something else. He scanned the field again and said, "That!" He was pointing at a real life Foosball game. Oh, boy. This time, I tried to redirect him toward something a little easier, but he only had eyes for Foosball. So we took a deep breath and gave it a try. He took his place, hanging onto one of the bars, and waited for the whistle to blow. I walked over to the attendant for the activity and said, "My son really wants to play, but I think he'll need a little extra support." He shrugged and blew his whistle. Game time.

I wish I could say that things worked out better, this time. Unfortunately, that's just not the case. Langston did his best, but just couldn't keep up. The other kids were too fast and, to make matters worse, they said mean things when he couldn't kick the ball quickly enough. After 5 minutes, he gave up and walked away, even though the game wasn't over. Sobbing, again.

He was discouraged and embarrassed. He desperately wanted to play on a team, to help score a goal, to feel successful – but that was simply impossible in this environment. Our fun family event was quickly becoming a nightmare.

We decided to take some time to regroup. We watched a magic act and caught our breath. And then my tenacious boy was ready to try again. He scanned the field and pointed. This time he wanted to try the climbing wall. Oh, my. I wasn't sure my heart could take anymore, so I tried to talk him out of it. I felt terrible about that – I want him to believe he can do anything, but enough was enough. He wouldn't budge. The climbing wall had to happen.

We made our way across the field and stood in line. When it was our turn, I pulled the attendant aside and was very frank. I told her that Langston had had two extremely disappointing and unsuccessful experiences at the festival. I told her that he's autistic and has low muscle tone and would need a lot of help. She listened, gave me a warm smile, and said, "I've got this." She turned to Langston, helped him get into the harness, and he started to climb. He started to struggle almost immediately and this wonderful person didn't blink. She stayed by his side, gently coaching him through the climb. "Great work, Langston!" "Try putting your right hand up there and then push with your feet." "You've got this, Buddy!"

He didn't make it to the top and it didn't matter. He climbed until he was tired and then came down, smiling. "Did you see how high I went?!" He felt supported and successful. I felt supported and heard. Our new best friend gave him a high five and wished us a good day. What a difference one person can make!

Special Olympics: Young Athletes Festival

A year later, we signed up to participate in a different community event. The Special Olympics were in town and Langston was thrilled! I signed the kids up, took the day off work, and we headed off to Seattle Center for the Young Athletes Festival. I really wasn't sure what to expect, but the promotional materials made it clear that inclusion was a priority, so we decided to give it a try. From the moment we arrived, it was clear that this was going to be a very different experience. We checked in at the front gate and were greeted warmly. Then a volunteer walked us onto the field and helped us get oriented, pointing out the way activities were laid out, letting us know how long it would probably take to complete them all, and pointing out areas to take a break, if needed. A series of tents were set up around the lawn and a volunteer guided us through each one. Each tent represented a different Olympic event and volunteers were running activities inside. One tent had kids running soccer drills, another had kids learning to hit a golf ball, in another kids could practice playing tennis. Every single adult greeted us with a smile. Every single volunteer was warm, encouraging, and quick to adapt activities to be accessible. There were volunteers with and without disabilities, so my son could see adults just like him. I was amazed at how quickly my kids and I felt comfortable. Langston was beaming as he completed sport after sport successfully. Aurelia bolted ahead and didn't feel like she needed to hang back and help her brother.

It's funny how we get used to carrying weight and eventually it just recedes into the background and we stop noticing it. Langston's disabilities are invisible and he has so many great skills and we're so used to accommodating his needs, that we just don't think about it. At the Young Athletes Festival I realized how hard I'm working to support my son, because I got to stop doing it. Not once did I feel like I needed to step in and explain him to someone. I didn't have to make special requests or ask for help and even if I had, I wouldn't have worried about how that request would be received. Langston's little sister felt the same way. It's sobering to realize how hard she works, too, at just 6 years old, to care for her big brother.

But the difference between our experience at Big Day of Play and the Young Athletes Festival paints a clear picture. At Big Day of Play, Aurelia stayed glued to her brother's side, trying to coach him through too-hard tasks and help cheer him up when he was unsuccessful. At the Young Athletes Festival, she didn't worry about him. She dove into her own play experience, secure in the knowledge that her big brother would be just fine.

It was clear that these people *got it*. They got my kid. They got my family. They'd really planned for kids like mine and feeling seen and planned for and supported like that is priceless.

We finished the course of tents and headed toward the next activity – a bike course. Langston was anxious. He doesn't really know how to ride a bike. We've been working on it in physical therapy for a few years, but it's still slightly out of reach. Not to worry, though, these were adaptive bikes. Another great volunteer listened to Langston's worries and promised him that she'd help him find the perfect bike for his body and that he could take the course as slowly as he wanted. He finished with a smile and ran to the next event: the obstacle course.

By now, we were as comfortable as if we'd been in our own backyard. I didn't worry a bit about whether the course would be too hard or discouraging. The kids just dove right in. It's hard to overstate Langston's love of obstacle courses. They are his favorite activity EVER and this one was no different. He ended up doing it three times, because he just loved it so much. And every time, volunteers patiently coached him through the hardest parts and cheered and applauded when he finished.

Langston was delighted with the medal he received for finishing all the activities at the festival, but more importantly, he felt successful and empowered. He felt seen and planned for. He felt included and it was all thanks to some very kind and well trained volunteers. The hardest part of the day was convincing the kids to leave – a big sign of success!

The Same Science Center, Same Family, Two Very Different Experiences

A story of one family and their two visits to the Pacific Science Center, in Seattle:

"Our good and bad experience were linked. I took Ted, a friend, and his sibling to the Pacific Science Center. Ted's autism makes it hard to wait in lines. We had to wait in line to get to the booth. We asked for tickets to the laser show. Their printer would not work, and we were asked to wait 10-15 minutes. Ted started flipping out and touching everyone and everything. I asked for an accommodation (give us the ticket digitally or call ahead to the laser show and let them know we already paid) and was told no. By the time the tickets were printed, Ted was escalated and agitated. We got to the theatre and the show had already started, which set Ted off again. We had to walk into the theatre in the dark. People were unaccommodating. I wrote to the museum and told them about the experience. It was near the solar eclipse. I said we'd like to come for the eclipse, but Ted can't wait in a line. They arranged for two staff people met us at the gate and escorted us in. They guided us in a quieter way and gave us the best viewing spot. It was an amazing experience!"

Fun with fish at Seattle Aquarium.

Flying at the Museum of Flight.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What feelings did you have as you read these stories?
2. Have you ever experienced challenges like these children and families?
3. What could the organizers of the Big Day of Play have offered Langston to help make his experience more successful?

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION AND FULL INCLUSION

Children with disabilities and their families want the same things that everyone wants: they want a place their child is safe, is able to be him or herself, and to sit back and watch their child play freely with the things he/she/they like. Many youth service organizations work very hard to anticipate the needs of all of their visitors and make the needed changes to procedures, policies and play spaces so that all kids can enjoy themselves at their center. Others wish they could be more inclusive but do not know where to start. In this section we will identify barriers of all kinds and how easily these barriers can be taken away.

Barriers from an Organizations' Perspective

Many youth serving organizations care deeply about providing high quality experiences to all children. Careful thought and attention are paid to the design of their space, their programs and their staff. However, as we read in the stories above, these efforts often stop short when it comes to giving children with disabilities the same experiences that typically developing children and their parents receive. The struggles parents and children endure are painful to read about and even more painful to live through. Let's examine the trouble spots and the successes and learn what goes wrong and what changes or adaptations can make all the difference.

> *"The stairs are barriers. It's usually physical barriers, and then with sensory and motor it can be overwhelming, even if you have a weighted jacket and headphones. We try to be very aware of it being visually stimulating, like the colors that are on the wall and what things are moving. Just the amount of people that come through, that can be a barrier. If you're not able to move things the way that everyone else is moving things and you're having this parallel play right alongside another child, sometimes that can be really frustrating, because you might end up knocking something over unintentionally, and because you're dealing with other children those other children might get frustrated." —* ***KidsQuest Children's Museum, Bellevue, WA***

What are the barriers? Let's break it down

We wanted to learn more about barriers from an organization's point of view, so we interviewed staff from Coyote Central, Burke Museum, the Woodland Park Zoo, Kids Quest Children's Museum, the Seattle Bouldering Project, and Roots of Connection. Here's what they told us:

- I think our biggest barriers are flat out **physical accessibility**- roots, things climbed over or under- challenges because we move around the park a lo that can be a challenge to kids with physical disabilities.
- Our l**ack of fencing** is a hard environment for kids that will flee.
- The **high sensory environments** at our climbing gym can be overwhelming. It's an active place with loud music, colors, and wide-open spaces. You can see a lot of people. It can be overwhelming
- We don't have **accessible technology** that would make our museum more accessible for kids that use it.
- **We don't get a lot of kids with physical disabilities**. I'm not sure I see what blocks kids from attending. Maybe it's our public relations or marketing that is a barrier. We could make it happen if kids got through the door.
- At Woodland Park Zoo we have identified two core challenges. First, we have developed tools to support families, but we struggle with communicating the availability of the supports to the families who would use them. Second, we have work ahead of us to ensure al individuals have an equitable experience at the zoo. For example, some habitats are not optimally visible to wheelchair users.
- At the Burke Museum we have challenges **balancing all our stakeholders**. If we label exhibits so visitors with low vision can see things better, does that take up space for different languages? As we think about serving all the different communities that have needs, we wonder where to start in that sea.
- Seattle Bouldering Project: We are a business- we have paying members who are adults. They come for what they want and see anything else as a disruption. We get a lot of glares and **kids in general are seen as disruption**. The owners love the children and youth but that is a big tension.
- One issue is with kids going home with stories of behavior about other kids. The parents text me and I feel like I need to find a way to appropriately talk with the family. If I say things up front, parents are more understanding. But is that a breach of the other child's privacy? Is there a better way I can handle a situation without giving personal information about another child?
- The museum is such a public place- **people feel they can jump in and tell us how we should be interacting with our visitors.** Each kid is an individual. That has been challenging working with kids who have specific ways to self-regulate. The public lectures me. But things can look unconventional.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What are some attitudinal, organizational, physical and access barriers to inclusion exist where you work? (See Glossary for definitions of these types of barriers)
2. What are three things you can do right away to remove these barriers and what are three things you can plan do to in the future to remove barriers?

Barriers from Parents' Perspectives

Now, let's hear from parents about the barriers they experience.

- Waiting in **lines** is hard!
- The **judgment of other parents** is one of the biggest prohibitive factors for going out into the community. It shuts us down. I don't want to keep feeling like a bad parent or like I'm perceived as a bad parent. **Loud noises, lines, and crowds** are all so hard for us.
- It really bothers me when I sign up for a class and ask if my son can bring an **aide and get the response that it would be distracting to the other children.** I consider my son's aide like a wheelchair. It comes with him and it's what enables him to access the class. I have to say under ADA, they have to make that accommodation. Other kids don't even notice.
- Also, the cost. **Having to pay for another person to participate in the activity.** We need an extra person on all memberships, so someone else can come with us.
- Judgment of other parents. He doesn't look disabled, so **people assume he's just a misbehaving** kid and that's really not the case.
- We did a cooking class that was a disaster, mostly because of **other parents trying to discipline Ted.** I appreciate offers of help but hate it when people scold him directly and interfere with him.
- **Trust us as parents that we know what our children need.**
- I'm often uneasy when I call to ask if their place is going to work for my family. Do I tell them my daughter has autism and risk them saying no or do I just give it a try, knowing she might have trouble? **I want to give them all the information, but I'm afraid she will be left out or treated differently because of her disability.**

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What would parents say about your setting or program?
2. How do you provide parents the opportunity to tell you about their child?
3. Everyone hates standing in lines, but for some kids it is practically impossible. What can your organization do to minimize this stress?
4. What strategies can you use to withhold judgment of parents and kids? How can you be an ally to families that are being judged?

As we have read, many organizations recognize the need to improve their services to families with children with disabilities. One organization that is making inclusion a priority is the KidsQuest Children's Museum in Bellevue, Washington. We visited KidsQuest and spoke with their Director of Education, Jamie Bonnett, on how they strive to make inclusion work everyday. Let's hear from Ms. Bonnett.

"*Inclusion for us is broad. We want to serve people not only with disabilities but also all races, religions, and cultures. We want to be an inclusive space for everybody. We work on cultural responsiveness and talk about the myriad of cultures that are living in our area. We bring in people to do cultural story-times and we talk to them about what else they would like to bring to us. We ask them to tell us a little bit more and then infuse that into the art studio and the story tree and other areas of the museum. We have a lot of conversation about toys that are picked out. Who is going to be able to pick this up? Who can manipulate this? Is this too small of a part? We go so far as to consider what barriers grandparents may encounter at the museum. Can they twist the screwdriver in the same way as someone else? We're trying to make sure that the tools and toys that we have out can be manipulated for multiple generations.* ***We plan for whole families from the cradle all the way up.*** *We host things like Low Sensory Evening and a day for the deaf We know that we can't say low sensory is for the deaf and the blind. Their needs may be different. The blind might need lots of bright lights and sensory people might need lowlights. So we really try to understand all the different people who want to come to the museum and what can we do.*

We're pretty flexible and bend rules constantly. *That's what customer service is about. For us, inclusion is a really huge thing we're constantly working on. It's probably the biggest thing we work on all the time. We don't want to pretend that we know everything, so we're always bringing in different people to teach us about what people are experiencing. It's really interesting learning about all the different populations and all the different things that they need.*" — Jamie Bonnett, KidsQuest Children's Museum, Bellevue, WA.

Practicing inclusion can be hard. Many organizations are new at it and even those who put a lot of time and energy into making great spaces for kids find themselves managing challenging experiences. Let's hear how KidsQuest identified a barrier, communicated with the parent, and turned it around! Ms. Bonnett shared the following story that occurred during a museum program.

"*One of my teachers, she and a child were just not able to get along. I went to observe and saw that it was how she was running the class that was making it impossible for him to function. We contacted the mom and let her know we'd love to give her a full refund and that we would be teaching a class in two weeks and if she'd like to come back and try it again, she could. I explained that* ***it was the environment that was created that was causing him to fail*** *and* ***it wasn't her child's fault****. So they came back and he had absolutely no problem at all. We also met with the teacher to talk about what was happening in her program. What was she doing to make it difficult for the child? We walked through some different things. She is a new teacher and needed more input from us on how to set kids up for success.*

I was almost in tears that day. Because he wailed in such a way that I have never seen. And then we had a completely successful return. The other educator just has more background and experience and the first teacher wasn't trying to do anything malicious, but she was setting unrealistic behavior expectations.

We called the Mom to let her know. She was already aware that there were some struggles and she'd said he does have a problem with people being in his space and asked if we can make sure he has his own space. And the teacher was like, 'Yes, but this is a class of 15 and there's only so much room.' Whereas I'm like, 'that's not the answer.' So it was lots of work that was happening with all of that, which is great. When the child really broke down, we just called her and brought him back in the office with us. He had 3 staff members around him, talking to him, and he was very happy. His mom arrived and said, "Here's your 2-minute timer, we're going to clean up." She already had her tools set in place. One of our educators told her, "this has nothing to do with your child and only has to do with the way this camp was formatted, because it was art. If you come back we'll be doing science. I'll be the teacher in there and this will be run very differently." We refunded them, they came back and did one day, and he was wickedly successful, so she just signed him up at that point."

— Jamie Bonnett, KidsQuest Children's Museum, Bellevue, WA

Organizations' Perspectives on What Works

Many youth serving organizations shared with us what they do to promote inclusion.

- Burke Museum: I think we have done a good job **being flexible**. Actually, listening to people. Trying to help them with whatever needs they have and asking people what they need and trying to get it for them. It sounds basic, but for the museum, **teaching with objects** is such a great thing. It serves so many audiences well. Having tangible teaching tools serves us well. We are accidentally pretty good at a lot of things - object based teaching that breaks down barriers without us being terribly mindful. Having cool stuff at the museum helps! When people **tell us in advance** that they have needs and we can work with them. We can **prepare ahead of time** to make sure we have extra staff and have time to prepare.
- Coyote Central: We focus on how to **bring kids into the decision-making** and where they are more actively learning- that kind of training has been great for all kids
- At Coyote Central we have very small classes with an 8:1 student-teacher ratio. The kids that come to us are artistic kids. The families get to know it is a wonderful place and they are safe. We worked on group dynamics- reflections- planning- check-ins. Constantly check in and get to know one another. How do kids work together? The kids feel comfortable and highly respected.
- Seattle Bouldering Project: Creating a **culture that is collaborative rather than competitive**.
- Roots of Connection: Kids will compliment each other. Kids notice one another, support each other and their own learning levels and see each other. We encourage that.
- The Woodland Park Zoo: In Zoomazium, our nature-inspired indoor play space for children, we have opportunities for them to participate in multiple sensory experiences. Examples include live animal touch opportunities and informal sensory bins. We also created a social story to help families know what to expect during their visit to the Zoomazium. To expand this to the entire zoo, we created a sensory map that is available online and in the Zoomazium. The sensory map includes Quiet Corners (low foot traffic and less noise), Exploration Nooks (tactile discovery), Romping Ranges (space to move your body), Shade and Shelter (cool areas under trees or structures).

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What does your organization do to make sure that children with disabilities have the same quality of experience that typically developing children have?
2. Is there a culture of inclusion at your organization? What does that look like?

For inclusion to be successful parents and children need to be listened to and organizations need to have the information they need to plan for each child and family. Parents often express frustration that had they just been listened to, many difficult situations could be avoided. **Parents and children themselves know what they need**. They can help organizations be ready. They can help navigate many barriers. They live daily with challenges of accessibility. Families are constantly adapting to a world where they, themselves, and their children are not planned for, welcomed, and are often actively left out. With a little effort, all organizations can be well on their way to inclusion. Communicate with parents. Really listen to parents and children. **You will find that they are your best resource**.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What information do you need to feel ready to include each child in your program?
2. How do your marketing materials let parents of kids with disabilities know they are welcome to your space or in your programs?

Navigating Diverse Needs

One of the parents from our focus groups shared this insight:

> *"Open autism hours are always at 8am. Yes, it's a financial loss for the museum, but inclusion costs something. Asking families to always come at 8am is unfair. It is well intentioned, but insulting. Your family can come, but at 8am."*

1. Are Sensory Friendly hours a reasonable accommodation or a hindrance to full inclusion/ participation?
2. Disability is expensive. Many families struggle to cover the many additional expenses a disability presents: therapy copays, aides, tutoring, necessary medical care, time off work for appointments, assistive technology and equipment - these are just some of the added costs of disability. When these expenses mount, the price of admission to the zoo or children's museum quickly becomes out of reach for many. What can organizations do to make sure that ALL kids get to participate?

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Are your "autism hours" or "sensory friendly hours" set at times of the day that families can actually attend?
2. Do you offer other kinds of accommodations that children with physical or intellectual disabilities need?

At KidsQuest Children's Museum, they grappled with the best way to include low-income families. The San Diego Children's Museum offers free admission for families paid staff, personal assistant or one-on-one aid. The museum also offers a discounted membership for families with children with disabilities. Let's hear about some of adjustments KidsQuest has made to make their museum more accessible to families with limited financial resources.

"Another one we hugely changed was a lot of museums used to do Free Friday Nights, so you could come to the museum for free on Friday nights, but now looking back we hate that. It was like, "You're poor, you get to come on this Friday night. No other time.

The Institute of Museums and Libraries is trying to make everybody aware that museums and libraries should be for everyone all of the time, regardless of what you can pay. So what we now have, and we're constantly looking for funding to back this up, if you have an EBT card or an Apple Care card or any other kind of government assistance card, you can come to the museum for $3, any day of the week. It doesn't matter; just come in, show us the card and that's it. We've also partnered with our local libraries to give out a number of passes a day to visit the libraries so checking in at the museum is like checking out a book."

— Jamie Bonnett, KidsQuest Children's Museum, Bellevue, WA

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What can your organization do to reduce the cost of admission?
2. What can your organization do to make children with disabilities feel welcome at all hours?

Social Stories, Sensory Backpacks, Sensory Maps and All Those Lines

Getting through the door can be the hardest part. Just as programs need to be prepared for all children, families also benefit from being prepared when they visit a museum, zoo or festival. If families can find accessible parking, skip the lines, know where to find restrooms and quiet areas, and what sights, sounds, and activities they can expect, they can begin their experience with the tools they need for a successful day. Many museums and zoos are stepping up for inclusion by creating a set of tools for families including sensory maps, sensory backpacks, social stories and solutions to those long lines.

> *"At KidsQuest we have "Sensory Backpacks" to give families that include our social story that tells the child, "today you're coming to the museum and this is what it will look like". It walks you through each gallery. It lets you know that when you walk into On the Go there might be loud sounds and those sounds are from boxes dropping and moving. The book is also on the website as a flip book. If you register for the low sensory event it gets sent to you, but then it's also available in its physical form. The sensory backpack also includes noise canceling headphones. sunglasses, two different slap bracelets and fidget toys. We are also looking into having a couple of weighted vests to loan."*
>
> — Jamie Bonnett, KidsQuest Children's Museum, Bellevue, WA

Sensory Maps

At Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington, you can download a "Sensory Map" of the zoo. The map labels "Quiet Corners," areas with low foot traffic and less noise, "Romping Ranges," spaces to move your body, "Shade and Shelter," areas to cool off, and "Exploration Nooks" areas with tactile discovery in addition to all the many wonders the zoo has to offer.

Social Stories

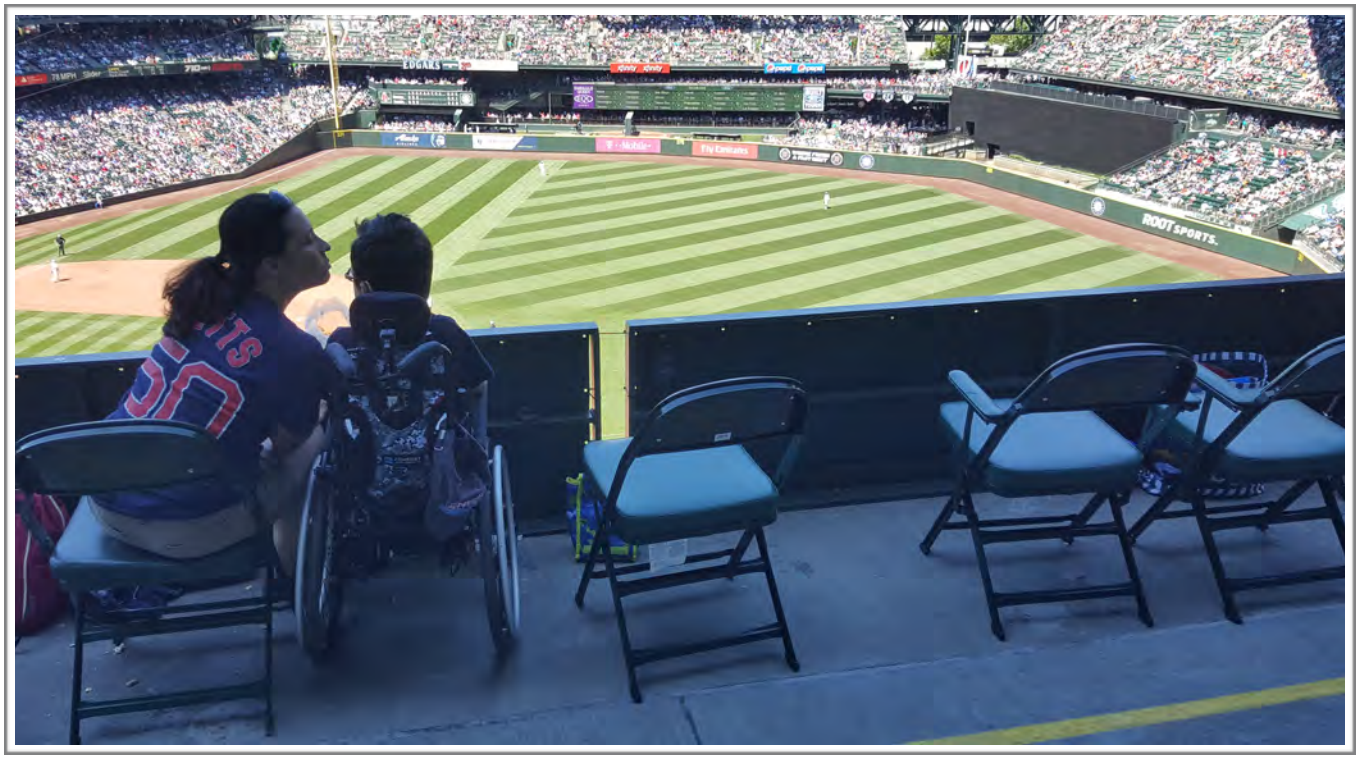
Social stories, first developed to help children on the autism spectrum, are now provided by many museums and zoos to help children understand what they can expect to hear, see and do on a visit. Stories are easy to make using simple photos or hand drawn pictures and text. Parents can make one for a favorite park, the neighborhood grocery store or coffee shop, or any place you and your family visit. You can find a great example at www.hocm.org/sensoryfriendly

Tools for Waiting in Line

A recurring theme in our parent focus groups and in our conversations with organizations, was that lines are HARD. We asked Jamie from KidsQuest about their strategies for making lines a little bit easier on kids and families. Here's what she told us:

> *"At KidsQuest, we have found is a lot of times the parents are not going to self-advocate, because they don't want their child to have a label. So, they come in determined, "we can do this, we can get in this door or wait in this line." Whereas the front desk staff is trained to notice a child who may not be able to wait and just wave them on through and say, "You guys just come on in and then come back and talk to us at the end." Getting through the door can be the hardest part. A lot of parents turn around and leave before they can even get through the door. They may walk up and see a line and start to lose their mind, because your child isn't going to be able to do that. Whereas this other 3-year-old may not like it, but they'll be able to do it.*
>
> *As administrators we think, ok, everybody needs to pay when they come in but having a parent come and say, if she could pre-register just to pay and not have to stand in a line, she would do that. Or if she could pay on the way out, she would do that. How can we bend even though she's not even asking us to bend? She was just saying, getting out of that car, standing in that line, getting in the door is literally the hardest thing of my entire day. And for the front line staff to have heard that their policies and procedures were making it harder for people coming to the museum was really eye opening for them. We also learned from Families for Effective Autism Treatment that they teach kids that there are going to be lines, sometimes and they give the kids some coping skills for waiting in lines. One thing we adopted is passing out an egg shaker to kids waiting in a line. This allows a child to wait in a line, better. So for my staff it wasn't like we have to give people everything, it was here are some coping strategies that we can do. So when we do have lines out the door, they give an egg shaker to every child in line, because it makes every child better able to wait. And then when they walk in, they hand us the egg shaker and come on in. It's even safe for infants to have. We also use pinwheels. We appreciate that it's not parents telling us people what we should be doing. They are letting us know, "This helps me". "This is what I have a hard time with" and then we can say, "Okay, what can we do?" I can't eliminate lines, but maybe there's something I can do."*
>
> — Jamie Bonnett, KidsQuest Children's Museum, Bellevue, WA

A trip to the zoo or children's museum is exciting! There are animals to visit and hands on art, science, and cultural exhibits to explore. We can all help make our cultural centers more welcoming to children with disabilities. There are many resources to help you get started. Kids Included Together (KIT) offers a readiness checklist and help learning how to communicate that your organization is committed to inclusion. See Appendices I & III. To learn more about leading organizational change efforts, please see Appendix IV.



SAY "YES!" AT BALL GAMES

KEY THEMES

Creating a culture of Inclusion
Staff training
Supported Employment
Representation Matters
Listening and incorporating feedback

According to the Seattle Mariners, Seattle's home team, "baseball is for everyone." It's that simple. Every person that comes through the gate is treated as their guest, as if they were hosting them in their own home. So, it was not surprising to hear how much fun it is for families of children with disabilities to go to a baseball game. But, with over 2,000 employees how do they create this culture of inclusion? On their website the Mariners state the following:

"The Seattle Mariners believe that all young athletes should have the opportunity to play baseball and softball regardless of the barriers they may face."

They also weave inclusive practices through every level of their organization, from employing people with disabilities, to welcoming all to the ballpark, to hosting events for a wide range of individuals with special health care needs, disabilities, and limited income or access to participating in baseball/softball. In this section we will learn from Michael Hilburn, former Director of Ballpark Event Operations, and Trevor Gooby, Senior Vice President of Ballpark Operations, how each point of contact the public has, from parking, to entering the stadium, to seating and beyond is carefully planned to be as stress-free and enjoyable as possible. The Seattle Mariners take including people with disabilities very seriously. We can learn a lot from them about how to make everyone feel welcome and planned for.

Let's go to the ball field with Eme and her family:

When asked to describe a successful outings in the community several families told us of the sheer fun they have going to root for their baseball team.

"I have a 13-year-old daughter, who's been coming to the PlayGarden for 6 years. Eme has Cerebral Palsy from birth, and developmental delay. She's pretty intelligent, really stubborn, and opinionated and into girly things. She has bad muscle coordination, so speech is really a problem and feeding herself is a problem. She's a really fun kid. Her greatest strength is her persistence and stubbornness. Even though sometimes it gets frustrating. We have a picture of her on the fireplace of her at PlayGarden camp with a chicken on her lap. And I have a 5-year-old son who is typically developing. He is going to kindergarten this fall and he talks for both of them in quantity and quality. I'm impressed with Mariners games. They are fantastic for wheelchair users. They look your child in the eye and have conversations with them. They take you to your seats and check in on you. As opposed to other games we've been to where they just leave you to figure it out on your own. The Mariners are really involved and check in on you and talk to you. We don't have to call in advance or anything. Parking is expensive, but it works well. And there are staff in the garage that make sure you can park safely and manage the elevators." — **Jackie, Eme's Mom**

Eme's family wasn't the only one in our focus groups to sing the praises of the Seattle Mariners. So we were curious: **How do they do it?** Read these excerpts from our interview with Michael Hilburn, former Director of Ballpark Event Operations and Trevor Gooby, Senior Vice President of Ballpark Operations. There is so much to be learned from how they approach inclusion at all levels of their organization.

"*We really preach on accepting all individuals with every background – ability or lack of ability – whatever it is that everybody is coming together at Safeco field for the experience of a baseball game, and everyone is a welcome part of it. And really try to drive home that message that everybody has a right to that same experience and everybody that's come out to be a part of it is one of our guests. And we use that word: guest. We don't use "fans," we don't use "customers." We don't talk about people in broken down metrics – they're all just "guests." And we kinda treat it like this is our home and these are guests coming into our home. They might be Mariner fans, they might not be Mariner fans. We have teams that come – some travel in great numbers and some don't really travel at all, but they're all equal guests coming to the ballpark. Some people may need more services, some may need more attention than others, but we're gonna provide whatever we need to provide for them to have a great experience here. It all goes down to that central core of creating that exceptional experience.*" - Michael Hillburn, Seattle Mariners

Notice how they make a point of articulating that "everyone" is welcome and that "everyone" should be treated as a guest. Michael also says "some people may need more services, some may need more attention than others." This is an acknowledgement that "everyone" includes people with disabilities and that part of "creating an exceptional experience" is planning for accommodating people who need additional support. This also points to a key piece of the Mariners' organizational culture - the belief that baseball is for everyone and that every visitor is a guest in their home. This language of visitor as "guest" serves as a reminder for all members of the Mariners organization to prioritize hospitality and to look for ways to ensure a positive experience for all - just as they would for guests in their own homes.

Inclusion training for their staff of 2,000

Michael told us, *"We have – across all of our teams that are actually in-house Mariner employees a little under 2,000 people. It's a lot. And quite honestly, the training is not very cheap. We are a Class A, or whatever the designation is in the City of Seattle, so we're the first to get to $15 an hour and so putting everybody through these hours of training is an investment on our end, but we've seen it – just you guys being here is a testament to it – we've seen the dividends. It's well worth the investment to put our folks through these trainings and really talk about it."*

Trevor shared, *"And then as things come up, because things do come up, we've learned there's been experiences that we didn't expect, and we use that as "in-season" training. And, so, as something comes up that we weren't either prepared for or we didn't realize was an issue – we then have in-season staff that can go to the groups, individually, and say, "Okay, here's something that's come up recently. Let's address it. Let's talk about it." So it's constant training and I think the staff really appreciates that, too. They're asking us questions. "Hey, this situation happened, did I do this the right way? How should I handle this?" And the ongoing type of communication has really been helpful for us. And I think focusing on kids, as well, with disabilities I think one of the things that we really try to do a good job with is making sure the parents and the kids, when they're here, are really having a great time at the ballpark. Because we know it's a lot of work to raise a child with a disability and so we want to make sure that when they're here, that if they do have something that they need that our staff's available for them. Our staff really tries to go out of their way to make sure that the child's needs are taken care of, but also that the parent can for two hours or three hours take their mind off of whatever is going on and just enjoy the game. I think our staff really does a nice job with that. I'm proud of our team for being able to do that."*

How to identify who needs accommodations or assistance and how to deliver support in a respectful way

Michael told us, "*That's what we try to do with small gestures like giving a kid a baseball card,* ***we open the lines of communication with the parent. So that if they are experiencing something and they don't really know where they're supposed to go****, if we're just approaching every family that comes through and saying, "Hey! Would you guys like a baseball card?" Immediately there's a resource right there. Then they say, "Oh, this person is welcoming. Maybe I can ask them if they have noise cancelling headphones. Now I know of somebody I can talk to." And so many of our interactions start with that really basic greeting. The baseball cards break down a barrier. Just smiling and saying, "Welcome to the ballpark" can be the exact same effect. But we really push for them to make that personal connection so they know – because we're not gonna go and pry and say, "Oh, it looks like you might need a little extra help!" – we just want to show up and just show that we're there and attentive and then let them let us know what they need.*

And as far as the sensitivity component of that, we really wanted to drive home the most appropriate way to approach those guests and have those conversations. Because our staff, probably to a fault, at times, were so eager to help that they were crossing some boundaries or maybe asking questions that came across as offensive, even though they were usually coming from the right place. They were trying to be helpful they were trying to assist someone, but they didn't have the tools to do it properly. So, we really talked about how to have those conversations, how to connect with someone who may be differently abled, who may have a vision or hearing disability – all of those kind of things that, without the kind of training or without the experience of it, you're kind of walking into a minefield to just kind of feel your way through it and see what happens.

So we want to give them those tools. We have a great trainer who comes in who is vision impaired and talks about his experience as a blind person and about what he appreciates in how people talk to him. It gives our staff the right tools for the conversation, instead of just trusting that, "You guys are all nice people, so go be nice to people!" They need a little bit more than that to navigate it successfully."

Beyond the ADA

Trevor told us, "*Two years ago we had building issues related to the original design of the building from 1999. Our big focus was going above and beyond what we needed to do to be more inclusive beyond just fixing the ballpark, but also training our team. Michael and his group did a really great job of talking and teaching both inclusion and sensitivity training. We made sure that our hosts and staff understood what our expectations were.*"

Representation Matters: Hiring People with Disabilities

Trevor shared, "*That's probably one of my highlights of working here. The staff – I don't know the exact percentage – but a decent amount of our employees have some sort of disability. And just going around and talking to them about their job and hearing that they love working here. And they help us out on the giveaway teams, as hosts, a variety of our different teams, and they love working for the Mariners. It's really cool to be able to talk to them and they'll finish their job and stay for the game. They are fans and it's pretty awesome. We have some employees who have probably worked here for 15 years.*"

Michael added, "*Yes, some of them opened the building, so they're on year 20, now. They've been here the entire time and we hear from their families about how much it means to them and being able to socialize and come out and be a part of something just means a lot. It's really great to have them around. There's a group of high school and college students that are a mix of all different abilities and backgrounds and I think it's just as great for the typically developing kids that don't have a disability to work with that group, because a lot of times they haven't – it shocks me that by the time they are 19-20 years old, they haven't had interactions with that group, they don't have that exposure, and we're providing that and they're better people for it. They're better for having gone through that and working with those individuals and really understanding where they're coming from.*

Some of our staff that are in the field – the team that does promos – some are nonverbal and need full time assistance from a parent or caregiver and sometimes the caregiver is doing most of the actual job functions, but they're out there and smiling and greeting to the best of their ability. Ranging all the way up to some different levels of being on the spectrum and need a little extra attention or a little extra management but are pretty high functioning. So it's really the whole range and we've been working with that population for as long as the building's been open and it's been a really successful initiative."

"Yeah, a lot of people with disabilities work for the Mariners. Do you know Jordan? He's on my brother's softball team and he works for the Mariners."

- Camden, 12-year-old brother to Porter, who has autism

Kids notice. Show them what they want to see, which is themselves reflected in the workforce, at ball games and in their whole community. Marian Wright Edelman famously said, **"You can't be what you can't see."** When we think about what it is to belong and to feel connected, a key piece of that is seeing ourselves reflected in the world around us. Children (and adults!) feel a greater sense of belonging, when they see people like them in the community and in media. Just as importantly, children (and adults!) need to be exposed to a wide range of diversity that offers us a true reflection of the world we live in – a true sense of who is in our community.

In Washington state, people with disabilities are employed at less than half the rate of people without disabilities. People with disabilities make up just 6% of Washington's labor force and only 37% of Washington's working age (18-64) individuals with disabilities are employed. Meanwhile, 76% of Washington's working age non-disabled individuals are employed (Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, 2017) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2017, only 18.7% of people with disabilities, nationally, were employed. In contrast, 65% of non-disabled people were employed. These numbers represent a lot of untapped potential!

Inclusion is Ongoing

Michael explained, *"We're learning right along with the experts. Things are really coming out and we're trying to stay caught up with it. But there are certain things that haven't really come around yet, and when they do, we'll adapt and work it into what we do."*

Unconscious Bias

Michael went on to tell us, "*I think the other barrier is the same that anyone faces anywhere and that's those unconscious and subconscious biases that happen. And so that's where the sensitivity and inclusion training comes in to help counter those. And I think it's something that goes back, quite a ways, we had some really unfortunately incidents with our guest services team or our hosting team that fell back to those biases and so that bias training that falls under sensitivity helps diminish those roadblocks, too, and I think we've come a really long ways in that regard.*"

Let Everyone Play!

Trevor told us, "*We did a game this year with Challenger Little League and it's a league designed for kids with disabilities and they were able to come out and play on the field for one of our games and the gates were open, so fans were in the stadium, we had the announcer on the field, our players were on the field, the parents were on the field, it was just really, really cool. That will be a partnership I think we'll continue to work with and see some of those kids with a variety of different disabilities – wheelchairs, vision impaired – they were all able to get on the field and play. I think it was an eye opener for a lot of our staff, they were like, "Wow, look at these kids! They really want to play."*

Go Mariners!

Go Seahawks!

Listening and Incorporating Feedback

This exchange between Michael and Trevor illustrates their practice of incorporating guest feedback and their efforts across the organization to make all of the little accommodations that make inclusion work.

Michael — "Thankfully, we have some really great fans who come out as guests and they speak up. So, they might say, "Hey, we came out and everything was great, but here was this one component that wasn't great." And they don't come to us from a place of anger, they just want to help us get better and we appreciate that and we act on it. And that's a way where we can find some of those missing links and shore things up."

Trevor — That's probably been our most helpful thing is to learn from people. I think we do a good job, but we're constantly learning and parents telling us, "Hey this would be really helpful" is how we've learned a lot.

Michael — I think the biggest success story, for me, is when someone emails and thanks us for being so accommodating and when you read through it, it isn't that we did anything that was especially extraordinary or special**. It was that our front-line team members were able to make small little impacts that added up to one big great experience.** And it's really rewarding to see that our training has come through and that staff feel comfortable engaging with the guests and find a way to make sure that their experience is really positive. It's really just great to see and just know that the hard work we've put in on the training side of things has provided a great experience for folks

PlayGarden — Have you experienced any resistance to including people with disabilities?

Michael — No, it's been really, really positive. And I think to Trevor's point, when we've brought out some of these experts and had these conversations with staff it's opened their eyes to it, it's usually met with surprise and a desire to fix what had previously been bad behavior. We've never had anyone say, "I'm out. You guys want autistic kids to come to the ballpark? No thanks."

Listening and Incorporating Feedback

We asked Michael if guests ever express discomfort with being in an inclusive space.
He told us "*I think that's part of it, too. Our fan base that comes out are mostly understanding and compassionate people. As you mentioned earlier, maybe they're making some extra noise or has some behavior that could be disruptive, they're really understanding and they want the family that's there with them to have a good experience. We really don't see complaints – it's really great. And honestly, if there's any kind of disruption going on that somebody's unhappy with, we're more than happy to relocate somebody. And so that's the great thing. If somebody comes to us and says, "this is a problem" we just move them. We would NEVER go to the family and say, "You're causing a problem, this is an issue, we're going to have to move YOU, because these people are complaining." We take the people who are upset with what's going on around them and move them, not the other way around."*

PlayGarden parent, Rose, is a single mom of two kids. 23-year-old Asher has developmental disabilities, his sister is 17 and typically developing. She shared with us *"Asher loves sports teams and games. Because Asher doesn't look disabled, people assume he isn't. He makes these throat noises. We don't need physical accommodations and people are sitting around us and there are certain ranges of how you're loud that's okay. If it's super loud, his noises get drowned out, but if it isn't loud, people glare at him and want him to keep it down. From our vantage point, it's been generally a good experience, but I will sit next to him and I have to work to keep him behaving within the norm."*

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Michael told us that he considers the Mariners' best success comes from many "small, little impacts that add up to one big, great experience." That they don't do anything "especially extraordinary or special." What small steps will you take to increase your organization's inclusive practices?

2. Throughout this Toolkit, we have heard from parents that a big barrier they face daily is the judgement of other people on their parenting or their child's behavior. How will you think, feel, and act when you encounter a child or adult that looks, moves, communicates, or behaves differently than you expected?

3. How can you tell if someone needs assistance? Do you need to know if a child has a disability to reserve judgement and practice kindness?

Attending a sporting event and cheering your team on is a bonding experience for siblings, parents, friends and your whole community. Children with disabilities and their friends and family deserve to be a part of the camaraderie experienced through sports. Let's follow the example set by the Seattle Mariners and extend a kind word, a welcoming smile and a helping hand. Let's examine our practices to ensure we are providing support where it is needed. Look carefully at the obstacles families may face, be it parking, waiting in lines, restroom facilities, or seating as they travel from their car to your door. Evaluate, adjust, listen, respond, adapt, and adjust again. Go Mariners!

This octopus piñata was made by kids with help from local artist Barbara Oswald. A helper adjusting the height of the piñata ensures everyone can join in the fun.

SAY "YES!" TO INCLUSION EVERYDAY

KEY THEMES

Inclusion in practice
Effective accommodations
Assessing a child's needs
Reflective practice
Team collaboration

This section offers strategies for how educators, parents, or community members can lead inclusive experiences for all kids. The section examines the philosophy of inclusion, looks at inclusion in practice from the perspective of a inclusive preschool teacher, and provides ideas for how to provide accommodations for typical activities found in youth programming.

The adaptations and considerations in this section align with core principles of Universal Design for Learning. UDL is an educational framework that guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences. Instead of making changes to learning environments as an afterthought, children are afforded a range of ways to learn and to express themselves, multiple means of engagement, representation, and means of expression (Harte, H.A., 2013).

As your read, remember that every child is different and is going to need different accommodations and supports to be successful. A child with ADHD needs different supports than a child with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, or autism; just as a child who is five years old needs different things than an eight-year-old. Most importantly, meet the child where they are and choose the adaptation or accommodation that meets that need of that specific child.

Let's hear from PlayGarden Lead Preschool Teacher, Sophie Barnett-Dyer, about the difference between inclusion as a philosophy and inclusion as a practice.

Inclusion is a Philosophy and Practice
Sophie Barnett-Dyer, Seattle Children's PlayGarden

The philosophy of inclusion means *why* we do it
The practice of inclusion means *how* we do it

Philosophy of Inclusion

Inclusion means creating a positive sense of belonging, building friendships, community and empathy for others.

And, it also means the fundamental philosophy that diversity is an asset to all, and that we want Equal Play for Every Body.

And, the educational mandate that all children should be in the least restrictive environment possible. Or, as we like to think of it, it is a child's human right to have educational equity Every learner matters equally.

And, it is the philosophy that *all children* benefit we we remove barriers in our teaching environment, whether those barriers are physical, social, emotional, or simply our attitudes and assumptions.

Practice of Inclusion

As a teacher in an inclusive program, the practice of inclusion means:

- Having a shared mind state and expectation that children experience and interact with the world in their own unique way
- There is no one standard- we hold each child to their own individual best
- We plan for a diverse group of learners/players, and that we are flexible and creative in that planning.
- We are process based in our planned activities- our focus in on the experience not on the product
- That we think about and welcome the use of adaptations and supports that will assist participation
- That we try new things as a staff and class

• We share information and are collaborative in our approach with fellow teachers, and our students' families
• We practice self-reflection, and ask ourselves questions like what worked today, and what didn't? Why did I say that that way? What were my assumptions? How can I do better? How can I be more inclusive tomorrow?
• We do not necessarily consider ourselves experts, but we are willing to try
• We scaffold social play and interaction
• We encourage children to speak directly to one another and ask permission: *May I push your wheelchair, Liam? May I help with your G-tube, Chaya?*
• We don't speak about a child who is present in the third person
• We use our voice as a teacher to advocate for children who cannot verbally advocate for themselves
• We use our voice to draw attention to shared interests or to create a meaningful narrative that enhances play and social interaction *Wow, I see Leo is enjoying putting his hands in the mud just like you!*
• We highlight and celebrate each other's successes, learning, and growth
• We make sure each member of our class has a turn being front and center, whether that means putting a child with a disability right in the middle of a play scenario, or taking time in circle to support a child in speaking up, sharing, or asking for a favorite song
• We draw from a solid foundation in child development, and that we always keep in mind the appropriate developmental stages and needs of our students, despite individual learning differences
• And finally, that we practice teacher supported conversation about disability and differences, using concrete information and language in our conversations, and that we highlight strengths and shared interests within these conversations. *Winnie has Down syndrome, so she sometimes learns things more slowly than another child, but have you noticed how good she is at catching the chickens and holding the bunnies? Wow!* The core message in these conversations being *We can't all do everything, but we can all do something!* (We take our cues from parents as to what specific medical language or diagnoses we will reference in these conversations.)

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Which of the inclusive teaching practices do you already use in your interactions with kids?
2. What practices can you adopt into your organization right away? What practices can you add with intentional planning or restructuring of your organizational practices?

Examining Group Experiences: What makes them successful?

If you have experience working with kids or have kids of your own, you know that there are many kids with and without disabilities that find group activities such as group games, circle times or table time activities to be overwhelming or confusing. In fact, for many kids group activities are source of anxiety and can be the reason a child chooses to withdraw completely from the group.

There are many reasons why a child might withdraw from a group experience. The most obvious is that the activity simply isn't exciting to the child and the child would prefer to do something else. This is a perfectly understandable reason to leave an activity. In this case, it is the educator's responsibility to make the activity more exciting for the child. However, when a child is leaving a group activity either before it even starts or mid-way through, it is important to consider why the child may be leaving or withdrawing. **Could it be that the child does not perceive the environment to be welcoming?**

Some reasons why a child may not feel welcome to join in on the play:

- A child may withdraw because they don't know how to play and no one is taking the time to orient them.
- A child may withdraw because they have tried the activity in the past and felt "unsuccessful."

Unsuccessful could mean:

- They tried to play, didn't understand the rules, and became upset about how the game was being played.
- They had established their own set of rules and were upset when these changed unexpectedly.
- The game was overwhelming for them to process. This could mean the game was too loud, fast, chaotic, unpredictable, or disorganized.
- A child may withdraw because they feel they will "mess up" the game, upsetting kids and teachers or lead to the game ending.
- A child may withdraw from a physical group activity such as tag because they think they can't keep up physically with the rest of the kids, are worried they will get hurt, or will "lose" the game.

These are all reasons why a child may develop anxiety around group games and choose to withdraw from the experience, even if they really do want to play.

Exclusion of Children with Disabilities in Group Experiences

Unfortunately, even if they themselves do not withdraw, children and youth with disabilities are often overlooked or excluded from group activities. This is rarely due to intentional efforts to exclude or ignore. More likely, it is due to a lack of understanding of the student's abilities, the fear of potential injury related to the limitations implied by the students disability, or from a lack of awareness of how to lead inclusive activities.

Physical, developmental, cognitive, behavioral, social-emotional and sensory disabilities influence how a child engages in a group activity, not if they can participate. However, when educators, coaches or counselors have a fixed attitude about what a child can and cannot do before an experience even begins, the child becomes framed by their disability rather than excited by their abilities. When staff have low expectations on what a child is capable of, they can make one of the following dangerous assumptions:

- A kid with disabilities wouldn't want to play the game.
- A kid with disabilities won't know how to play the game.
- A kid with disabilities won't be able to play the game.
- Making an accommodation for one child will negatively change the game or experience for everyone else.

These assumptions are often used to explain why a child is not participating in an experience when the real reason they have withdrawn is that the environment does not support them. When staff have limited awareness of how to include children with disabilities, do not feel that inclusion is important, or have not been exposed to possible accommodations, they stick to familiar patterns.

Imagine a situation where there is a group of kids of all different ages and abilities together in a space and a child asks the adult, "Can we play tag?" The adult may respond, "Yes, definitely!" and start play as usual: kids who are able to run quickly chase and tag. They may see a child, let's call her Sara, in a wheelchair but feel unsure of how to include her in the game. The other kids may not take the initiative to include her, and the adult may not want to counter their natural momentum, assuming that the child in a wheelchair can't or does not want to play.

If, however, the adult has seen someone else include a child who uses a wheelchair in an active game they may think, "Yes! Let's play tag but let's go and ask Sara first if she wants to play!" and then proceed to find creative solutions for including Sara in the game.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Think about a time you were included in a group experience. What did that feel like? Have you ever been made to feel excluded from a group experience? What did that feel like?
2. What are some activities that might need to be adapted for a child with disabilities? Can you envision what these adaptations might look like?

Ready, Set, GO!

Facilitating Inclusive Circle Time

The following ideas can be applied in service of a fully inclusive circle time experience.

1. Pick an accessible, appropriate, and intriguing location

- Leading a successful circle time is in part dependent on how comfortable the kids are. Try to choose a space that is small enough that participants are near one another yet is large enough that no participants are pushed out to the edges of the circle or unsure of where to focus their attention.
- In an inclusive setting, you often have more adults present. Plan for these adults to be in the circle. You may also need to have an adult ready to get up and help kids who wander away from circle.
- All children, regardless of disability, are looking for excitement. Try not to limit the places you go, simply because you assume it will be too challenging for a child who needs physical assistance. Rather than limiting your spaces to those that are most convenient, build in time for those who need assistance to move to and from the site.

2. Plan for engagement

- Find a creative ways to invite children to circle time. Many kids need a personal invitation to join or a more specific reason to join. Take the time to develop child-specific strategies to encourage all kids to join the group.
- Find activities that allow children to participate. Children enjoy circle time more and behave much better if we give them ways to participate, rather than demand that they simply sit and listen. For example, you can bring an easel and take notes as you talk (or ask a child to write ideas down as you talk), print out big pictures of the things you are talking about and ask the kids to hold them and describe them, or bring interesting objects to pass around.

- Keep circle time active and incorporate a variety of movements, sounds, and visual cues into every piece of the circle time experience. Imagine you have a child in the group who is non-verbal. Just singing a song out loud does not give them a way to participate. However, if you add in hand motions, they are able participate through motion.
- Find roles for kids such as turning the pages to a book, leading songs, sharing a personal story, or being the timekeeper. You may have a child who asks a lot of questions. These questions may feel like an interruption. Instead of asking the child to be quiet, which can lead to the child shutting down or leaving the group, make time in your circle time to let them ask the questions you were going to ask the group anyway. This allows the child to practice being part of a group in a way that is comfortable for them.

3. Model inclusive behavior and language

In an inclusive environment, you will have kids in your group that communicate, move, behave, or process in different ways. As the lead, you can draw attention to this variety by respectfully calling attention to various children during circle. This can be done gracefully without putting the child on the spot.

- When leading circle time you might ask the group, "Does anyone have a song they want to sing?" As the lead, it is easy to call on the kids who raise their hand or call out a suggestion first; however, kids who don't have the ability to raise their hand or verbally communicate need should be recognized as well. You can respond to the first few hands by saying something like, "I see your hand over there, and I'll come back to you, but first I would like to see if Chaya can pick a song on her talker." This demonstrates to the rest of the group that even though Chaya doesn't have many words to communicate, she enjoys the same songs as everyone else. This exchange also models how other kids might interact with Chaya in the future.

- There are other ways that you can use circle time to help the group understand how another participant communicates. A common strategy for children who are non-verbal but have the ability to communicate with their eyes, hands, or an assistive device. You can present a child who is non-verbal and non-mobile with two options, option A in your left hand and option B in your right. You can verbally explain to the rest of the group "I want to see what song Gaius wants to sing. Gaius uses his eyes to tell us what he wants." Or you can pose a question that gets the other kids thinking about different forms of communication. You might ask, "Can you use your eyes to communicate what you want?" Then present Gaius with his options and share the song he chose with the group.

- You can also use circle time to model how different kids move. Imagine you start to sing a song where everyone is expected to do big body motions such as "If You're Happy and You Know It." While singing the song, make your way over to a child that cannot perform the motions on their own. Take their hands in yours and assist them. The motions may be very small versions of the motions that the other kids are doing but it doesn't matter. What matters is that the child is participating and that the other kids see them enjoying the song along with them. Subtle modeling like this shows the rest of the group that even kids that may not be able to stand, run, clap, dance, or run like they can want to play and participate.

4. Let the kids be curious!

When you start to model inclusive behavior such as helping kids understand the variety of ways kids communicate, think, behave, or move, other kids will start to feel comfortable enough to ask questions. In a setting with kids of all abilities, you may hear questions like, "Why doesn't she talk?" or "How old is he?" Answer these questions with specific information and language. When the unknown is addressed, kids can relax, accept differences, and move on to becoming friends. If the unknown is left unaddressed, awkwardness and exclusion will dominate.

5. Be patient, open-minded, and allow for more time.

Plan for activities like circle time taking more time than they would in a non-inclusive setting. It takes longer to bring kids of all abilities to together to start a circle time. It takes patience and repetition to understand a child with limited speech. It takes longer to get a child who has limited mobility in a position to participate. Don't be afraid of this extra time. At first it may feel uncomfortable to add longer pauses between songs or activities, because you are helping a specific child, but by taking the time you demonstrating that every child has value.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What is the closest thing to a circle time experience in your program?
2. How have you slowed down to consider how each child in the group may be experiencing the activity?

What time is it, Mr. Fox?

Facilitating Inclusive Group Games

Group games are important to consider when thinking about how to make your programs more inclusive for all children. Group games such as tag, relay races, obstacle courses, or pick up soccer are staples of daily life for school age kids. The goal of group games for many educators is to bring a new group of kids together or to build cohesions among kids who already know each other. Group games also create opportunities for kids to be silly, move their bodies, get exercise, and make new friends. Kids learn how to be a member of a team, develop their problem solving and social skills, and of course, have fun with their peers. If facilitated with every child in mind, everyone benefits from a group activities.

When leading group games, activities, and experiences, consider following the following recommendations:

1. **Start with positive assumptions**
    - All kids want to feel like they are part of the group
    - All kids have a right to participate equally
    - All kids are able to play

2. Plan for the unique needs, interests, and skills of every child.

Some kids need direct instruction throughout the whole game, some will need someone to help them get started and then are fine on their own, while others will need physical assistance to participate. This variety of abilities can and should also be used to make games more complex and interesting. Invite the kids to design the games using their knowledge and skills! This will build buy in from all kids, help them develop autonomy in their play, and build self-confidence.

3. Consider what supports you need for every child to be successful

- How many kids will be participating in the activity?
- How many people will be needed to support the kids? Can the support be provided by another participant, or does it need to be an adult?
- What has worked well for the kids in the past?
- How has the game fallen apart in the past? How can you preemptively plan for these things so they don't happen again?

4. Set an inclusive tone

Your introduction to play sets the tone for the rest of the game or experience. Is the language you are using inclusive? Is it framed in such a way that children who may have felt unsuccessful in the past will be encouraged to try again? "To get started, everyone stands up," or "Everyone run to the yellow line!" can be exclusive, if you have children who are not able to stand or run. Consider saying something like, "To get started, I'd like everyone to stretch up," or "Everyone can roll, hop, or skip to meet me over at the yellow line."

5. Set clear guidelines and expectations for the game each time you play

Do not assume that if you explained how to play a game the week before, you don't need to explain it again. Explaining helps all kids understand the rules of the game and is a reminder for how they can participate. An example of an inclusive introduction may sound like, **"**Okay everyone, we are going to play 'What time is it Mr. Fox?' Some of you may have played this before but this is a special [organizational name] version of this game and what that means is..." Or "This is a game that I know EVERYONE can participate in! We are going to work together to come up with fun roles for everyone. What ideas do you have so it is fun for everyone?" By framing a game as a new or a unique version, you can set guidelines and expectations for participation with the kids, and make the rules of the game naturally inclusive. If you set an inclusive tone first, the kids will follow your lead.

Ways You Can Help

There are many things you can do to help children feel excited and able to participate. The following scenarios and stories highlight common situations that arise when playing group games and provide strategies and language for how to respond to them. You may have a child in your group who…..

- Wants to play but doesn't know how to join the group
- Wanders away before the game starts
- Wants to participate but is nervous about participating in the same way as the other kids
- Didn't even know the game was happening and now is missing out on the group experience

Let's look at a couple of these situations a little more closely.

To help a child that wants to play but does know how to join the group, have an adult or support person go up to the child and say, "Want to play the game with me?" The child may respond, "no." Instead of taking this response at face value, continue to investigate. Ask, "Can you tell me more about why you don't want to play?" The child may be able to give you a verbal response back and they may not. They may also feel shy and hesitant to bring up a reason. This is a great opportunity for the adult to say something like, "Have you played this game before? Was it challenging for you?" Or, just start explaining how the game works. A child who was too shy to ask the rules now has them available, without having to come forth and ask for them to be explained.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. How do you think it would feel to withdraw or feel excluded from a group experience the rest of your peers are participating in?
2. How does it feel to be included? Planned for? Or supported through a new or challenging experience?

To help a child who wanders off, start with the same strategy. Wandering could be a result of many things, but it doesn't necessarily mean they don't want to play. Consider this scenario:

Context: At the PlayGarden we have a camper who has attended our summer camp programs for many years. His name is Nicholas. He is a bright eight-year-old boy with autism who also is non-verbal. He enjoys exploring the garden at his own pace, has a very active, mind- always problem solving and testing things out. He often spends most of his day alone wandering the garden. Because his default is to wander and spend time on his own it can be easy to assume that, "Nicholas doesn't like groups, so he probably won't want to participate in our game." In fact, Nicholas does enjoy time in groups, he just needs a little more help to be successful in a group game.

Scenario A: The group is all at circle time. Nicholas is part of the group and actively participating in the songs. Then the camp director announces that the group will all play a group game and proceeds to give a series of instructions. Kids start to move around and get ready for the game. Meanwhile, Nicholas becomes unclear what is going on, gathers that circle time must be over and wanders off. Other counselors see him wander off but let it happen because, "That's what he always does." The group proceeds to play a game. A counselor leaves the group to check on Nicholas to make sure he is safe. While the rest of the group is running, laughing, playing together and making friends Nicholas is off by himself either unaware that the game is happening or aware but unsure how to join in, especially now that the game has already started. The other kids know that Nicholas is part of the group from seeing him at circle time but since Nicholas wanders away from the group it is unlikely the other kids think of him a friend because they haven't shared a playful experience together. Because the counselors have the mindset that he prefers to be alone, the rest of his day is spent in similar situations.

Scenario B: The group is all at circle time. Nicholas is part of the group and actively participating in the songs. Then the camp director announces that the group will all play a group game. Before giving a long series of instructions the camp director gives one clear instruction "Okay everyone we are going to play a game that I know everyone can play! On the count of three everyone can make their way to the yellow line." They have talked with counselors beforehand and given them strategies for helping Nicholas join in. Before Nicholas has the opportunity to wander off and while the other kids are moving the yellow line, a counselor goes up to him and says "Nicholas! Come play "What Time is it Mr. Fox? with me!" and takes hold of his hand and gently guides him over to the yellow line with the other kids. Nicholas, happy to have been noticed and have someone help him with the transition begins to smile and bounce his way to the line. While the camp director is explaining the rules of the game the counselor stays with Nicholas, reminding him of what they are doing, "Nicholas stay with me. We are about to start the game!" and "Are you ready? It is going to be so fun!" Once the game starts the counselor continues to hold Nicholas's hand. When the rest of the kids begin to run the counselor and Nicolas can then run together, hand in hand. At this point, Nicholas is running, laughing, playing, and making friends with the other campers. Because of a little staff support in his participation, he now feels like he belongs - he is part of the group and the other kids see him that way too. A successful group experience like this early in the day, sets the tone for the the rest of the day and Nicholas is able to join in other group activities and join play with his peers with greater ease throughout the day.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Making an experience more inclusive can be a subtle process. What strategies did the Camp Director use in the second scenario to help Nicholas participate?

For the child who wants to participate but has a hard time doing so in the same way as the other kids: Again, start by talking with the child and finding a way for them to participate in a meaningful way. Try to figure out what it is that they don't like about the game. Do they not like to be tagged? Do they have a hard time running? Do they need to be in control of the game for it to be fun?

At the PlayGarden we have a camper who loves group games; his name is Langston. Once again, we were playing 'What Time is It Mr. Fox?', a game nearly every child seems to love because it includes counting, slow progression, and then a sudden change in events. Langston loves to be the fox, as do most of the other kids. If he can't be the fox, he often removes himself after the first round. However, the camp director knew that Langston liked telling stories and so she suggested that he be the narrator of the game. He quickly latched onto the idea and said, "Like David Attenborough!" and then got busy positioning himself so that he could narrate the ten rounds of the game. Not only did he love it, but the game grew and evolved and became more interesting for the rest of the kids as well.

To help the child who didn't know the game was happening, but still wants to play: Bring them over to the group and have them observe a round first. While they are observing, explain the game to them and any rules the group has already established. Then be their "bridge" into the play. You don't want to embarrass the child who is joining in by saying something like" Hey everyone, stop, _____ wants to join in." Instead, join with the child at a natural point. You can say something like, "Oh you all look like you're having so much fun! Lee and I are going to join you!" Again, kids want to share in the joy of playing a game. So long as the addition of a "player" is framed positively, kids will be willing to roll with the addition.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. Did any of the scenarios or stories about participation remind you of experiences you've had with your own child or children you work with?
2. What strategy presented here will you try the next time you are facilitating a group experience with kids?

Facilitating Inclusive Art Experiences

Art is one of the most common activities that people working with children use to engage kids and bring them together to spark creativity and imagination. With some planning and flexibility, all types of art activities can be made accessible and inclusive of children of all ages and abilities. The following are some strategies for how to plan for inclusive art experiences.

1. Make sure the child can access the art materials comfortably. Proper placement of tables, chairs, and art materials are all key to a successful art experience for any child.

2. Provide structure and support: Structure an art experience by providing some structure and ideas, but with options for each student to incorporate their own ideas.

3. Assess skill levels and how much assistance each of your students/participants may need. Even when you are doing a process-based experience, some students really need some structure to get started. You can provide this structure by writing out or telling the group the steps of the experience before you get started.

4. Find out how each of your participants communicate and absorb information. Take the time to learn if they prefer to be given options, or need visual or verbal cues.

5. Help the more independent students get started. Next help your students who need some level of support get started. Walk through the first step with them. Observe anyone who may be struggling. Try to figure out why they are struggling. Is the space to overwhelming? Are they crowded? Can they access the materials easily enough? Do they need someone to support them physically in the activity? After making an appropriate accommodation for the children that need it, demonstrate the next step of the lesson or experience.

Move through your group and give a few minutes of one-to-one time to the students who need it. This is a perfect time to adapt the experience to each individual child by making an activity more challenging, playing around with different materials or incorporating the kids ideas into the activity. Move to the next step of the lesson. Continue to observe and provide any help your participants may need.

6. Praise artwork uniquely to help build intrinsic motivation and a sense of accomplishment. Instead of saying "Great painting," customize the praise by saying "I like the way you used your red and yellow colors for the trees, to make it look like fall." Or, instead of "Nice job," be more specific and say, "I can tell you are putting a lot of effort into your clay project."

7. Be persistent and keep experimenting! Kids may struggle with handling art materials. This can be for many reasons, such as limited fine or gross motor skills, an aversion to how a material feels, smells, or looks, such as the stickiness of glue or messiness of paint. Give them enough opportunities to keep trying and experimenting with different mediums of art over a wide span of time. If you are doing an activity with scissors, but you have a child who can't hold onto scissors, allow them to rip pieces of paper, instead. If you have a child that has a hard time holding onto a paintbrush, let them paint with their hands. If you have a child who can't get close enough to the table to work on an art project, try putting the materials directly on their tray, instead.

Reflections from Arni Adler, a teaching artist at the Seattle Children's PlayGarden

Arni Adler is a local Seattle artist, musician, teacher and parent. For the past five years, she has been leading Saturday morning art classes at the PlayGarden. When we asked her to reflect on her journey of learning how to lead inclusive art experiences for kids of all ages and abilities this is what she had to share:

"Working at the PlayGarden with children of all abilities is a lesson in awareness and adaptation. From the beginning, I assumed that we would all find our way (myself included) in helping each other learn to be more expressive, freer with our imaginations. We do this in part by looking at other artists' work and trying to figure out how they did what they did, but also by looking at a variety of materials to see what can be done with them. And then, of course, there's looking at the children to learn about their tendencies toward creating art.

One example of a lesson featured the work and approach of Dutch painter Corneille His paintings of animals and objects fill the page and with colorful exuberance. Giant speckled chickens, blue cats, birds in hats. How did he do it? Or maybe why? He said that he wanted to paint joy, and so that's what our lesson was really about. Choose a color that makes you happy. What color would look happy next to that color? Keep on that happy track and pretty soon you have joy in your painting.

Sometimes it's the materials and a simple idea. Make your bed was a popular lesson. Something most kids are told to do, so we took a spin on that. We used only paper towels, toilet paper rolls, cardboard, string, tape and glue. Some beds were tiny, some had multiple bunks, and some swung like swings. Some had little pillows and creatures lying on them. The idea was to make your own idea of a bed, your ideal bed, your wildest imagination of a bed.
We don't all arrive at the table with the same expectations or ideas or abilities. Each session we've attracted students with a wide range of abilities – from the "typically developing" child, to those with severe challenges. Everyone has been able to do something with color, shape, texture, building and so on. But, to my mind, the important lessons are the ones no one sees hung on the wall or taped to the fridge. The ability to ask a new friend for help, to see how someone else is doing something and learn from them, to take a break and come back to your work if you're overwhelmed, to choose a color and make a mark that makes you happy. There is usually something in each of my formal lessons of this nature, in addition to the craft skill of the lesson. The absence of these types of "soft" strategies can be the biggest block to creative expression. During one lesson, we painted some of these "tips for success" signs, which are now hanging in the garden house (reminding visitors and staff perhaps to take care of themselves and each other, I hope).

The children I most remember over these three or four years are the ones who I didn't know immediately how to help. Some of the classes are crowded, but I try to sit alongside each child to get to know them, to see how they work, what their challenges might be, and how I can move them along a bit. One of my most memorable experiences was maybe one of my most difficult moments. I was sitting with James who wouldn't take the paintbrush in his hand, and seemed as though he was only somewhat aware of the paper in front of him. He was talking about a variety of subjects, repeating short phrases. I remember feeling like I didn't know how to engage him, and I just held the paintbrush in his hand and started singing. (Maybe I asked him if he knew any songs, and he started singing). This seems funny to me in retrospect, because I didn't think about it. I just took his hand and made some marks in rhythm to some silly melody. But he perked up and became interested in this new game. Soon, I took my own paintbrush and sang a simple short melody across his page, and he responded with his own paintbrush. ***Playing is a lot of what the PlayGarden is about, and the best way to learn.*** *I had a similar experience with another child who was nonverbal. I made a mark, he made a mark, we went back and forth as though the colors and movements of our arms and hands were the game, like fencing or tangoing.*

Many of the students I tutor privately (both adult and kids) have lost the sense of play in their learning. ***My job is to loosen up the barriers and point back to their native sense of curiosity and discovery, which a sense of play helps foster.*** *For some kids the play needs a bit more structure: Some kids lose their focus or jump from idea to idea, and my job is to narrow their field of vision, so that they can get something done. Sometimes this is in the form of redirecting attention back to the project, or simplifying a task, or helping them find a new strategy that leads back to the work. Kids -- like adults — are expert at finding ways to avoid a problem. My job is to figure out what they see as the problem, so they can come back to their work.*

For all of the kids, I try to observe what they do, what they're capable of doing, where they get stuck. If it's physical, I try to find some an appropriate tool, or angle their physical approach to the material. Luca is a great example of this. Luca's arms don't bend or have much muscle in them, so the challenge is not too daunting: just put the materials at the right distance and angle to his body. Same with Lucas in his wheelchair. The materials should come to them. This is one of the easier judgment calls we get to make.

It's harder when the hurdle is more mysterious. There was a girl who came with her father to one of the summer playdates. These are less structured than my formal classes, and so the lessons are very quick. This girl explored everything with her tongue. I tried holding materials for her, exchanging marks …. I have to say, I felt that I would have needed to have more time with her to really understand how to help her engage in a more expressive way. I'm sure Liz and Hannah, who're really the crowning experts, would have known what to do. Tho' even now, I suspect I'm missing the point. Maybe that was expression for her.

This is the part where my awareness is challenged, and I have to shift my thinking. I know that what we create and how we create varies person to person, and so when I'm confronted with a very different way someone engages, I have to expand my own thinking.

One artist whose work I like to show the kids is Judith Scott. She had Down syndrome, was nonverbal and deaf, and kept in an institution for much of her life. In her middle age, she was brought to art classes by her sister. She did not respond to painting or drawing classes, or sculpture or sewing, but one day started wrapping yarn and string around objects — anything she could get her hands on: cardboard, garbage, objects she "found" (stole). She developed her "wrappings" into large sculptures -- beautiful and intriguing shapes. She appears in some photos from her exhibit at the Brooklyn Art Museum with her arms around her work. The kids at the PlayGarden loved this wrapping project. The lesson was not just about the craft of wrapping and making shapes that please you (though that was part of it). The lesson was more importantly about finding your own way of making things of beauty, the materials that intrigue you, and creating your own idea of art. And maybe you fall in love with your creation like Judith Scott!"

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What did you learn from reading Arni's reflection on leading inclusive art activities?
2. What other types of activities can you apply these same principles to?

Five Things to Keep in Mind When Facilitating Inclusive Group Experiences

1. Kids are naturally inclusive and want to play together.
2. Kids are curious about each other and about the complexity of the world,
3. Kids want to ask their questions and have them answered in an honest and direct way.
4. Kids look for differences, but they also look for similarities amongst themselves,

and….

5. Kids want to build meaningful and authentic relationships with others just like adults do.

Circle times, group games, and art activities discussed in this section are adult-directed activities where adults play a critical role in helping kids build these connections and play together. These types of activities are wonderful opportunities to model inclusive language and behavior and empower kids with the skills they need to play together.

By modeling inclusion and teaching kids to celebrate and embrace diversity in their lives, they will learn, believe and consider it normal to see ALL kids-, of all abilities, playing together.

NEXT STEPS

Thank you for reading this tool kit. We hope you feel ready to take the necessary steps to make your organization welcoming to all children. It will require thought, planning and an opening of your heart and mind. You may have doubts or feel unsteady at first. So, we offer you the rules to the game, *What Time is it Mr. Fox* as a fun way to begin. There are so many ways to adapt this game so everyone can participate. Gather your kids for a game. It will be wild fun for everyone!

How to Play "What Time is It Mr. Fox?"

One (or more) players is Mr. Fox. He/She/They gets in position at one end of the playing field or gym.

All other players gather at the opposite end of the field or gym.

The group calls out, "What time is it Mr. Fox?"

Mr. Fox states the time on the hour (e.g. "3 O'clock").

The Players take 3 steps toward the Fox.

The Players then ask again, "What time is it Mr. Fox?"

The Fox responds and the players take that number of steps (e.g. ten o'clock = ten steps).

When the Fox says, "dinner time!" the kids race to the end of the field or gym and the Fox tries to tag as many kids as he/she/they can.

A different player becomes the Fox and the game continues…….

Let the fun begin!

GLOSSARY

In talking about inclusion, a common vocabulary is essential to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Words often have different meanings to different people based on their lived experiences. The purpose of this glossary, which is a work in progress, is to help avoid such misunderstandings. Not everyone will agree on the definition of every word; but everyone should have a common understanding of how words are being used in particular circumstances.

This glossary does not include definitions or descriptions of all the different types of disabilities. If you want to know more about specific disabilities, take some time to do research outside of this toolkit. There are many resources that can provide more comprehensive descriptions that we can provide here in this glossary. As always, the best resources for information about disabilities come from disabled people. Organizations like the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, Adapt!, and the Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund are great places to look for additional information.

As you dive into the world of inclusion you may come across the following terms:

Ableism
In the context of disability, ableism is a bias that describes the expectation that people with disabilities should have to adjust to the "non-disabled" world and that this is a "normal" state, rather than seeing "normal" as a world where everyone can participate and belong. Ableism sees people with disabilities as inferior to others. The term ableism is the equivalent of terms such as "sexism," "racism," and "homophobia."

Accessibility
Ensuring that people with disabilities are able to have access to the physical environment around them, to transportation, to information such as reading material, to communication technology and systems on an equal basis with others.

Accessible surfacing
Refers to material used on the ground in playgrounds and public spaces that provides ease of use for individuals that use a mobility device. Some examples of accessible surfacing include poured in place rubber, synthetic turf. Examples of inaccessible surfacing include sand, pea gravel and loose wood chips.

Accommodation
An adjustment to make a program, facility, or resource accessible to a person with a disability.

Adaptive technology
Hardware or software products that provide access to a computer that is otherwise inaccessible to an individual with a disability.

Ally
Someone who supports a group other than one's own (in terms of racial identity, gender, ability, faith identity, sexual orientation, etc.) Allies acknowledge disadvantage and oppression of other groups than their own; take risks and supportive action on their behalf; commit to reducing their own complicity or collusion in oppression of those groups and invest in strengthening their own knowledge and awareness of oppression.

Alternative Formats
Having alternative formats available to people with disabilities ensures that information is accessible to them. For example, in this toolkit we have used Alternative Text photo captions to make photos more accessible to people with vision impairment.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
The ADA, which became law in 1990, is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. It guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in public accommodations, employment, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications.

Assistance/Service Animals
Highly trained animals that improve the lives of people with disabilities by increasing the individual's independence or quality of life.

Assistive Technology/Device
Any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities (e.g. Communication device, hearing aid, wheelchair).

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
A spectrum of conditions that can cause social, communication, and behavioral challenges. Learning, thinking, and problem solving capabilities range from gifted to severely impaired. Also now includes several different conditions which used to be diagnosed separately: Autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder, not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger Syndrome.

Barriers
Obstacles that prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in society.
- **Attitudinal Barriers:** Attitudes, fears and assumptions that prevent people with and without disabilities from meaningfully interacting with one another.
- **Physical Barriers:** Physical obstacles that hinder people with physical disabilities from gaining access.
- **Access barriers**: Any obstruction that prevents people with disabilities from using standard facilities, equipment and resources.

Barrier-free Design
An approach to design that aims for buildings, transportation systems, and outdoor environments that people with disabilities can access and use independently and safely. (see universal design)

Braille
System of embossed characters formed by using a Braille cell, a combination of six dots consisting of two vertical columns of three dots each. Each simple Braille character is formed by one or more of these dots and occupies a full cell or space. Some Braille may use eight dots.

Captioned film or videos
Transcription of the verbal portion of films or videos displayed to make them accessible to people who are deaf.

Captioning
Text that is included with video presentations or broadcasts that enables people with hearing impairments to have access to the audio portion of the material.

Categorization
The natural cognitive process of grouping and labeling people, things, etc. based on their similarities. Categorization becomes problematic when the groupings become oversimplified and rigid (e.g. stereotypes).

Cognitive Disability
Clinical diagnoses of cognitive disabilities include autism, Down Syndrome, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and even dementia. Less severe cognitive conditions include attention deficit disorder (ADD), dyslexia (difficulty reading), dyscalculia (difficulty with math), and learning disabilities in general.

Collusion
When people act to perpetuate oppression or prevent others from working to eliminate oppression. Example: Able-bodied people who object to strategies for making buildings accessible because of the expense.

Colorblind
The belief in treating everyone "equally" by treating everyone the same; based on the presumption that differences are by definition bad or problematic, and therefore best ignored (i.e., " I don't see race, gender, etc.").

Communication device
Hardware, such as an iPad that allows a person who has difficulty communicating using their voice to use words or symbols for communication. May range in complexity from a simple picture board to complex electronic devices that allow personalized, unique construction of ideas.

Deaf/deaf
Uppercase "Deaf" refers to a group of people who share a language (American Sign Language) and a culture. Lowercase "deaf" is used to refer to the audiological condition of not hearing.

Deaf Culture
A set of values, behaviors, and traditions belonging to the deaf and close allies. American Deaf culture centers on the use of American Sign Language (ASL) and identification and unity with other people who are deaf.

Disability, Person with a
Legally defined in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended; and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 as " a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; has a record of such an impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment.

Disability Rights Movement
The collective efforts of advocates to secure equal rights, equal opportunities, and a barrier-free environment for people with disabilities.

Discrimination
The unequal treatment of members of various groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, ability, religion and other categories.

Diversity
The wide range of national, ethnic, racial and other backgrounds of U.S. residents and immigrants as social groupings, coexisting together. The term is often used to include aspects of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, ability and much more.

Dominant Culture
The cultural values, beliefs, and practices that are assumed to be the most common and influential within a given society.

Elopement
Wandering, bolting, fleeing or running away from a caregiver, home, or school.

Empowerment
When target group members refuse to accept the dominant ideology and their subordinate status and take actions to redistribute social power more equitably.

Equal Opportunity Employment
A legal term and federal requirement that employers not discriminate because of factors unrelated to job qualifications including race, color, religion, sex, national origin or disability.

Equality
The condition under which every individual is treated in the same way,
and is granted same rights and responsibilities, regardless of their individual differences.

Equity
When everyone has access to opportunities necessary to satisfy essential needs, advance their well being and achieve their full potential.

Ethnicity
A social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history and ancestral geographical base. *Examples* of different ethnic groups are: Cape Verdean, Haitian, African American (black); Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese (Asian); Cherokee, Mohawk, Navaho (Native American); Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican (Latino); Polish, Irish, and Swedish (white).

Exclusion
In the context of disability, exclusion happens when a person with a disability is ignored or not given a chance to participate in something that they should be able to participate in.

Identity-First Language
Places the disability-related word first when describing disabled people. Those who prefer identity-first language often argue that their disability is an important part of their identity and/or that they wouldn't be the same person without their disability. Identity-first language is also a reclamation and is about thinking about disability as a type of diversity, instead of a source of shame. Some communities that use identity-first language are the Autistic, Deaf, and Blind communities. Other communities and individuals prefer to use person-first language.

Implicit Bias
Negative associations expressed automatically that people unknowingly hold; also known as unconscious or hidden bias. Many studies have indicated that implicit biases affect individuals' attitudes and actions, thus creating real-world implications, even though individuals may not even be aware that those biases exist within themselves. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to be favored above individuals' stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behavior that diverges from the explicit attitudes that people may profess.

Inclusion
In the context of disability, inclusion means the active engagement of people with disabilities in all levels of society. The presence of people with disabilities does not constitute inclusion unless people with disabilities are valued, seen as contributing members of the group and feel a sense of belonging.

Institutional Segregation/ Institutionalization
Until very recently many people with disabilities were removed from communities and put into institutions where they were denied self-determination and access to the opportunities of independent living, education, and livelihood.

Intersectionality
This term was created by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1988 and is a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. It was intended to bring to light the invisibility of constituents within groups that claim them as members but fail to fully represent them. Intersectionality describes the fact that there are many overlapping identities and related systems of marginalization (such as ableism, racism, sexism, and classism) that combine, overlap, and intersect in the experiences of marginalized people or groups. This concept recognizes that individuals: 1) belong to more than one social category simultaneously and 2) may experience either privileges or disadvantages on that basis depending on circumstances and relationships. Exposing [one's] multiple identities can help clarify the ways in which a person can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. For example, a Black woman in America does not experience gender inequalities in exactly the same way as a white woman, nor is her racial oppression identical to that experienced by a Black man. Each intersection produces a qualitatively distinct life.

Invisible Disability
Most disabilities are not visible. Non-apparent disabilities include mental and cognitive disabilities, some hearing, visual disabilities, and learning disabilities. Other examples include brain injuries, addiction, Epilepsy, Diabetes, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Major life activities
Functions such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, breathing, learning, working, and participating in community activities (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990)

Marginalized
Excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community.

Medical Model of Disability
Arose from the biomedical perception of disability. This model links a disability diagnosis to an individual's physical body. The model supposes that this disability may reduce the individual's quality of life and the aim is, with medical intervention, this disability will be diminished or corrected.

Microaggressions
Verbal and nonverbal cues that are hostile, negative or derogatory to reinforce dominant culture and minimize the target person's experience.

Mobility Impairment
Disability that affects movement ranging from gross motor skills such as walking to fine motor movement involving manipulation of objects by hand. In addition to this people who are born with a disability, this group includes a large amount of people whose condition is related to age or accidents.

Neurotypical "NT"
an abbreviation of neurologically typical, is a neologism widely used in the autistic community as a label for people who are not on the autism spectrum.

People of Color
A collective term for men and women of Asian, African, Latin and Native American backgrounds; as opposed to the collective "White" for those of European ancestry.

Person-First Language
Many disability organizations advocate putting the person first when speaking of people with disabilities. For example: "person with a disability" instead of "disabled person"; "people with disabilities" instead of "the disabled"; "she is a wheelchair user" instead of "she is wheelchair bound" or "she is in a wheelchair." This is intended to create distance between the person and their disability and encourage others to see people with disabilities as people first, and disabled, second.

Personal Identity
Our identities as individuals–including our personal characteristics, history, personality, name, and other characteristics that make us unique and different from other individuals.

Physical or mental impairment
Any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological; musculoskeletal; special sense organs; respiratory, including speech organs; cardiovascular; reproductive; digestive; gentio-urinary; hemic and lymphatic; skin; and endocrine; or any mental or psychological disorder, such as mental retardation, organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities. (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990).

Privilege
An unearned advantage granted to individuals by society based on visible characteristics such as race, perceived gender, age, language or ability.

Program Accessibility
Central requirement/standard under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 , as amended as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 which requires that recipients of federal funds or contracts and /or state and local government entities operate programs and activities so that "when viewed in its entirety" such a program/activity is readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities."

Reasonable Accommodation
Legal term defined by ADA and Rehabilitation Acts as " any modification or adjustment to a job or work environment that will enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to perform essential job functions." Example include: restructuring a job; modifying work schedules; acquiring or modifying work equipment; and, providing qualified readers for persons who are blind or American Sign Language(ASL) interpreters for individuals who are deaf.

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)
A condition in which the brain has trouble receiving and responding to information that comes in through the senses. Some people with sensory processing disorder are very sensitive to things in their environment such as sounds or bright lights.

Specific Learning Disability
Disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in difficulties listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or doing mathematical calculations. Frequent limitations include hyperactivity, distractibility, emotional instability, visual and/or auditory perception difficulties and/or motor limitations, depending on the type(s) of learning disability.

Speech Impairment
Problems in communication and related areas such as oral motor function, ranging from simple sound substitutions to the inability to understand or use language or use the oral-motor mechanism for functional speech.

Speech input or speech recognition
A method of controlling a computer and creating text by dictation. Speech input software is combined with a microphone.

Stigma
The shame or inferior status that people consciously or unconsciously ascribe to others they perceive as different from themselves. Underlying stigma are negative perceptions or attitudes about disability that are based on outdated and incorrect assumptions

Social Identity
Involves the ways in which one characterizes oneself, the affinities one has with other people, the ways one has learned to behave in stereotyped social settings, the things one values in oneself and in the world, and the norms that one recognizes or accepts governing everyday behavior.

Social model of disability
A reaction to the dominant medical model of disability which sees the body as something to be fixed in order to conform with normative values. The social model of disability identifies systemic barriers, negative attitudes and exclusion by society (purposely or inadvertently) that mean society is the main contributory factor in disabling people.

Universal design
The design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

Vision impairments
Complete or partial loss of ability to see, caused by a variety of injuries or diseases including congenital defects.

This glossary was compiled with the help of many external sources including the *Glossary of Disability and National Service Related Terms* published by the National Inclusion Service Project (2018), the *Glossary of Disability-Related Terms* published by the DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) Center at University of Washington (2012), and the *Glossary* from Racial Equity Tools (2018) and the *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Glossary* published by the School of Public Health at the University of Washington.

Kids Included Together

Inclusion Checklist for Programs

Creating and maintaining a fully inclusive program takes ongoing work and planning. Fill out this checklist to see how your organization is doing.

Written Materials:	Y	N
Do program printed materials, including applications, newsletters, and signs, state your policy on welcoming all individuals, including children and youth with disabilities?	☐	☐
Is written language about persons with disabilities respectful?	☐	☐

Staff Training & Support:	Y	N
Do all staff members have access to training and information on inclusion?	☐	☐
Do staff members avoid stereotyping?	☐	☐
Do staff members hold high expectations for all children and youth in the program?	☐	☐
Do staff members have the opportunity to reflect on how to better meet all children and youth's needs?	☐	☐
Is disability considered when talking about diversity?	☐	☐

Confidentiality:	Y	N
Is a staff policy in place for maintaining confidentiality?	☐	☐
Do management and staff maintain the confidentiality of children and youth's personal and medical information?	☐	☐

Relationships:	Y	N
Does your program support positive and cooperative relationships?	☐	☐
Is communication between all individuals valued and supported?	☐	☐
Is the work environment conducive to collaboration among staff?	☐	☐
Do management and staff work to establish and maintain positive relationships with all families?	☐	☐
Do management and staff collaborate with other members of the community?	☐	☐

Schedules:	Y	N
Does your program follow a routine in which staff, children and youth, and families know what activities and events to expect?	☐	☐
Do all rooms have a schedule posted that is accessible to everyone?	☐	☐
Do children and youth who need additional support with transitions receive individual schedules to carry or post where they can easily access it?	☐	☐

Activities:	Y	N
Are program activities designed so that all children and youth can participate?	☐	☐
Are all children and youth included in routines and play experiences?	☐	☐
Are all children and youth physically and emotionally safe when participating in activities?	☐	☐

Transitions & Supports:	Y	N
Do staff members plan for transitions?	☐	☐
Are the number of transitions per day minimized?	☐	☐
Are children and youth informed of transitions ahead of time?	☐	☐
Is individual support given to children and youth who have difficulty making transitions?	☐	☐
Do staff members provide cues to signal upcoming transitions?	☐	☐
Are staff members present and thoughtful during transition times?	☐	☐

Visual Environment:	Y	N
Is the visual environment in your program welcoming?	☐	☐
Is the visual environment in your program calming?	☐	☐

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Physical Accessibility:	Y	N
Is program space accessible to all children and youth in your program?	☐	☐
Do all children and youth have access to activity spaces?	☐	☐
Are toys, materials, and tools (appropriate for a wide range of abilities) available and accessible?	☐	☐

Designated Space:	Y	N
Is there a dedicated space for movement available?	☐	☐
Is there a dedicated quiet space available?	☐	☐

Sensory Input:	Y	N
Is the staff aware of sensory elements in the environment including lights and other visual stimulation, sounds, and smells?	☐	☐
Is the staff aware of individual sensitivity to these elements?	☐	☐

Communication Support:	Y	N
Is individual support given to children and youth who have difficulty communicating or who need an alternative communication method?	☐	☐
Do staff members use picture schedules, pictures with words, sign language, or other visual communication to increase comprehension?	☐	☐
Do staff members speak clearly and slowly when a child or youth does not understand?	☐	☐
Do staff members model appropriate conversations and interactions for children and youth?	☐	☐

Ratios & One-on-one Support:	Y	N
Does management provide for lower ratios when a child or youth requires individual attention?	☐	☐
Is there a written plan for support and phase out when one-on-one support is provided?	☐	☐
Do staff members use one-on-one support when children and youth need ongoing attention?	☐	☐
Do one-on-one providers work to help children and youth successfully interact with others?	☐	☐
Do staff members re-evaluate the need for one-on-one care after progress has been made?	☐	☐

Expectations & Partial Participation:	Y	N
Do staff members adjust expectations according to each person's abilities?	☐	☐
Do staff members allow children and youth to partially participate in activities if they are not able to fully participate?	☐	☐
Do staff members break down tasks into manageable parts as needed?	☐	☐
Do staff members encourage participation with positive reinforcement?	☐	☐

Support with Coping Skills:	Y	N
Do management and staff support children and youth in developing and practicing coping skills?	☐	☐
Do staff members help children and youth identify and practice replacement behaviors for negative behaviors?	☐	☐
Do staff members and children have access to calming tools like play dough, koosh balls, soft toys, art supplies, and relaxing music?	☐	☐

Accommodations for Persons with Specific Disabilities:	Y	N
Do management and staff have a system for researching and learning about what accommodations can be made for children and youth with specific disabilities?	☐	☐
Does management work to ensure that accommodations are made?	☐	☐

How did you do?

How many questions did you answer with a "YES"?
Celebrate those positive steps!

How many questions did you answer with a "NO"?
Use these items as growth opportunities. Work with your colleagues to prioritize which points to address first as you increase the inclusiveness of your program.

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APPENDIX II: POSSIBLE ACCOMMODATIONS

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Examples of Possible Accommodations
for Children/Youth with Disabilities

For Children/Youth with
Developmental Disabilities

- **To give directions or demonstration:**
  - Keep it simple, organized and sequenced.
  - Speak clearly and slowly.
  - Stay in the child's/youth's visual field.
  - Break down activities into manageable and learnable steps.
  - Be consistent.
- Offer assistance with activities requiring fine or gross motor skills if needed.
- Pay special attention to transition times. Give independent timelines or ask another child/youth to assist their peer in getting ready.
- **Stay positive!**
  Keep the positive reinforcement going.

For Children/Youth with
Neurological or Physical Considerations

- Learn how to use and care for specialized equipment.
- Become familiar with handling and positioning techniques so that the child/youth is moved safely.
- Remember to set brakes on wheelchairs.
- Always ask the child/youth before you assist them. Communicate what is happening before you begin to move a wheelchair, or assist in other ways.
- Assist the child/youth in activities they may not be able to do alone (*self-care, throwing/kicking a ball, an art project, etc.*).
- **Always keep the needs of the child/youth in mind when planning activities or field trips:**
  - Transportation
  - Barriers that will need to be removed
  - Allowing for adaptive equipment
  - Modifications to allow for full or partial participation

For Children/Youth with
Visual Impairments

- Understand exactly what the child's/youth's impairment is, they can vary greatly.
- Assure the child's/youth's physical safety at all times.
- Use sighted-guide techniques. Work with the child/youth to train peers how to safely assist.
- **Consider the environment:**
  - Be aware of increasing or decreasing light as well as glares.
  - Use materials or pictures that are clear and uncluttered.
  - Use large print books or computer software that enlarges print materials.
  - Add tactile cues throughout the environment to increase independence.
  - If the environment needs to be adjusted, orient the child/youth to changes.
- Encourage the child to learn through hands-on activities.
- Borrow or purchase adapted materials such as a beeper ball (*has a bell inside*) so the child/youth can participate in sports or games.
- If the child/youth reads/writes braille, borrow, rent or purchase materials to create braille labels; purchase or borrow braille books and other braille materials.

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For Children/Youth with
Speech and Language Delays/Disorders

- Listen closely and use contextual cues to understand the message.
- If you can't understand the message after it is repeated, ask the child/youth if they can tell you with different words, or if they can show you.
- Keep directions simple and clear.
- Expand on what the child/youth is saying to model language and/or to help clarify the message.
- Model the correct usage and pronunciation of words versus correcting the child/youth.
- Provide frequent and concrete visual reinforcement while trying to encourage attention to facial cues.
- Learn to use adapted communication the child/youth may be using in other settings (*computers, tablets, keyboards, pictures, etc.*) and teach peers how to use them as well.

For Children/Youth with
Social-Emotional Disorders

- Offer consistent structure and routines.
- Prepare the child/youth for unexpected or planned changes in the schedule or routines.
- Teach the child/youth to use the posted schedule; offer an individual schedule if the group schedule is difficult for them to use successfully.
- Offer the child/youth two or three choices to help them problem solve, engage in activities and/or meet expectations.
- Use visual and/or auditory cues to prepare children/youth for transitions (*songs, lights*). For children/youth who struggle to transition, provide 1:1 cues early and additional support as needed.
- **Be vigilant:**
  - To anticipate when and where they have difficulties
  - To help the child/youth express their feelings in appropriate ways
  - Teach the child/youth how to remove themselves from stressful situations and to take steps to manage their emotions when needed.

For Children/Youth with
Hearing Loss or who are Deaf

- Learn the degree of hearing loss and what that means to the child.
- Learn how the child/youth communicates (*sign language, lip reading, hearing aids, etc.).*
- Position yourself near the child/youth and face them to increase likelihood they will understand your messages.
- Demonstrate new activities in more ways than just verbally.
- Determine a signal with the child/youth that they can use if they do not understand or if they need assistance.
- As a group, learn basic sign language and help the group learn the best techniques for communicating with peers with hearing impairments.

For Children/Youth with
Learning Disabilities

- Understand what the child's/youth's learning challenges are.
- Allow adequate time and repetition to learn a new skill with many opportunities to practice.
- Break activities down into small steps and sequence them accordingly.
- Recognize attempts at participation and continue to encourage skill development and increased engagement.
- Use pictures to label objects and actions you are talking about.
- Assist children who have a difficult time with impulse control to improve self-regulation by offering calm reminders before an activity and practicing in fun ways such as playing freeze dance, red light-green light and other stop/start games.
- Make expectations realistic.
- Give frequent and consistent positive reinforcement.
- Know the child's/youth's learning preferences. Have information and materials presented in appropriate and respectful manners.
- Recognize their skills and gifts and allow them to be seen as competent or skilled by other children/youth.

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APPENDIX III: COMMUNICATING YOUR COMMITMENT TO INCLUSION

Whether you're new to inclusion or have lots of practice, it's important to think about communication. How do you let your community know that your program or organization is inclusive? Are you sending the messages that you want to send? This guide from Kids Included Together (KIT) offers some suggestions about communicating your commitment to inclusion.

Kids Included Together

Communicating Your Commitment to Inclusion

Your program sends messages to children and families about inclusion. Everything from the language used in your marketing and print materials, to the pictures on the walls, to how staff approach individual children sends a message. Some things send the message that your program is inclusive and children with and without disabilities belong there. Other things may send the message that your program is not designed for children of all abilities and that only some children are welcome. Spend some time looking at your program brochures and materials, the pictures on the walls, the people represented in books and other program materials, and how staff approach individual youth. Then answer the following questions.

Message 1:

All families are welcome.

- ☐ Does your program have language that lets families of children with disabilities know that they are welcome?

  Example: *"We welcome children with and without disabilities. We make accommodations so that children of all abilities have access to our program."*

- ☐ Are families notified of their rights to request accommodations to policies, practices, and procedures to support their children?

  Example: On the intake form there is a statement that reads: *"Our program strives to meet the needs of all participants. Please contact our director at ###-#### to discuss accommodations or supports."*

Message 2:

Children with and without disabilities belong here.

- ☐ Does your program have pictures of children with and without disabilities on the walls?
- ☐ Does your program have books that include characters with disabilities?
- ☐ Would a child with a disability feel like he or she belongs in your program?

Message 3:

Staff feel comfortable with all children.

- ☐ Do staff receive training on inclusive best practices and group management techniques?
- ☐ Do staff approach all children with the same tone and enthusiasm?

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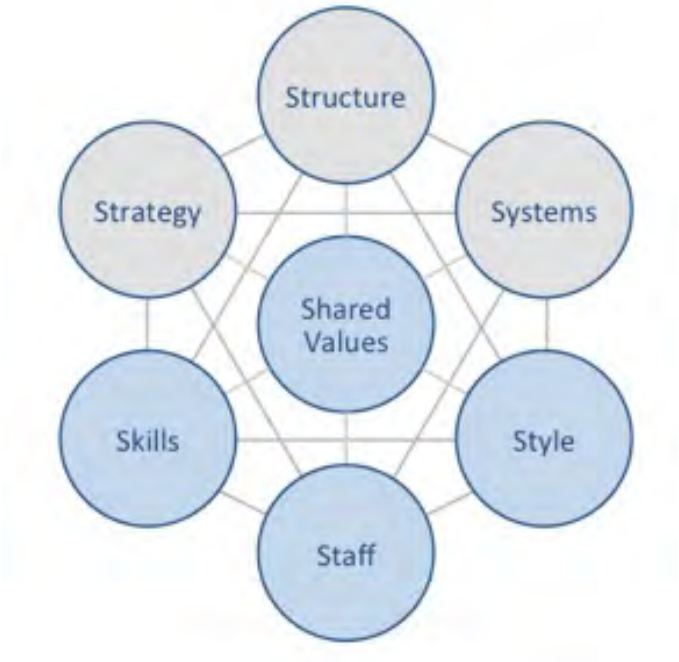
APPENDIX IV: PLANNING & LEADING CHANGE

You're ready to make some changes to help your organization be more inclusive, but where to start? How do you know if your organization needs to change? How do you know what needs to change? And once you've identified what needs to change, how do you change it? A useful tool for analyzing when/what/and how to change is the McKinsey 7-S model.

The McKinsey model was created by Robert Waterman and Tom Peters in the 1980s. It's based on the idea that for an organization to perform well, there are seven elements that must be in alignment and that they are mutually reinforcing. When we think about applying this model to organizations that are becoming more inclusive, the model can be used to determine which elements of the organization's performance are in alignment with the value of inclusion and which elements need attention. This model helps us visualize how these elements are related and plan for the impact changes may have throughout the organization.

The seven elements are:

- Strategy - Purpose of the organization and the way the organization operates in the community
- Structure - Division of activities; departments and the relationships between them. Think of this as your organizational chart.
- Systems - Processes and procedures of the organization; daily activities and how decisions are made.
- Shared Values
- Skills - The organization's core competencies and distinctive capabilities.
- Staff - Organization's human resources, demographic, educational and attitudinal characteristics.
- Style - Typical behavior patterns of key groups, such as managers, and other professionals.



Inclusion is your "Shared Value" notice whether the other elements support that value. Does your current organizational structure support inclusion? What about your skills or staff? For example, maybe including more kids with disabilities in your program means you'll need to adjust your staffing ratio. Or perhaps it means your staff need different skills and some training is necessary. Maybe some systems need to change - possibly enrollment procedures or funding allocation. This model helps us visualize the distance between our values and our practices. Where are we in alignment with our values and where do we need to focus our attention?

The McKinsey model is a great tool for determining what needs to change and John Kotter's 8-Step Model is an excellent roadmap for implementing change and making it stick. The steps fall into three categories, or phases of change: Create the climate for change, Engage and enable the whole organization, and implement and sustain the change.

Step 1: Create a sense of urgency. This is all about establishing the "why" of your change. Begin by having open, honest dialogue to make your team aware of the need for change and the reasons that the change can't wait. Be bold and aspirational about the opportunities that change will create.

Step 2: Build a guiding coalition. Collaboration is key - we are strongest when we work together - and this coalition is a great opportunity to practice inclusion. The coalition should be made up of members of your organization from all different jobs and positions, to make sure that all perspectives are considered. For example, if your organization is a dance studio, your coalition should include administrators, dance instructors, teaching assistants, parents of dancers, and kids enrolled in your dance classes.

Step 3: Form a strategic vision and initiatives. Work with your coalition to create a clear, shared vision of what you are trying to achieve and an agreed time frame. Incorporate perspectives from all members of your coalition and be specific; describe your vision in detail.

Step 4: Communicate your vision and enlist your whole organization in making it a reality. This is arguably the most important step. Remember that this step is about having a conversation; communicate the vision and *listen* to the ideas and concerns that your community members have to share. Are there anxieties? This is an opportunity to listen to those and use them to proactively consider potential challenges.

Step 5: Enable action by removing barriers. Identify and remove barriers that could undermine the vision. Make sure your team is empowered to act. Do they have a clear mandate? Do they have the resources they need? Do they have the skills or training that they need? Again, this is an opportunity for a conversation. Communicate with your team and ask if they have everything they need to make this vision a reality.

Step 6: Generate short term wins. Success is a huge motivator! Set your team up for success by setting initial goals that are manageable. If your organization is new to inclusion, start small. Begin by saying "Yes!" to one child or by partnering with an organization that has more practice including kids with disabilities and planning an event, together. Your change is more likely to be sustainable and lasting if it starts at a manageable pace and with a positive orientation. Every time you have a success, big or small, communicate it to your team and celebrate it, together.

Step 7: Sustain acceleration. Many change efforts fail, because victory is declared too early. Inclusion is about a shift in culture and that takes time. Continue to press forward after the initial successes and use the momentum and lessons learned to continue to improve systems, structures, policies, and practices. Regularly evaluate and discuss your progress. Challenge your team to look for ways to make inclusion an everyday practice and a core value. The goal is to make inclusion the very definition of "business as usual."

Step 8: Institutionalize change. This is the part where the change becomes the "new normal" and is anchored in your organization. Articulate the connections between new behaviors and organizational success. Amplifying these connections helps ensure that the new practices continue and become new habits. Make the practices that you've adopted a part of your everyday organizational life and part of your onboarding process for new team members. And keep celebrating the wins. One of the best things about inclusion is that it feels GREAT!

APPENDIX V: NORMALIZING DIFFERENCE - MEDIA FEATURING CAPABLE DISABLED CHARACTERS

Books and television shows are incredible tools for having conversations with kids about differences. They are powerful vehicles for representation and can go a long way toward normalizing difference and making kids from marginalized groups feel seen. Not all books and shows are created equal, though. When selecting media with disabled characters to read with kids in your life or enrolled in your programs, it's important to consider the following ideas from Ashia Ray, creator of Booksforlittles.com, a website that provides age-appropriate book recommendations to help adults discuss complex topics with children.

Accurate & Respectful Stories:

- Center on a disabled character in their own voice.
- Are created by makers who are *actually* disabled, or who extensively consult with actually disabled adults.
- Avoid language that depicts disability as inherently tragic or a deficit to be overcome.
- Back up statements with data-based facts and refute myths and stereotypes.
- Open discussion of disability without shame, including downsides and upsides.
- Thoughtful, inclusive language, and well-crafted images of characters with integrity.
- Engaging, story-based plot lines.
- Avoid tropes that portray disabled people as helpless, sidekicks, or villains.
- Portray competent, multi-dimensional disabled protagonists representing a spectrum of races, ethnicities, and genders.

Here are some books and shows that we love (in no particular order):

Just Ask, Be Differnt, Be Brave, Be You! by Sonia Sotomayor

Lovely, by Jess Hong

Rosie the Raven, by Helga Bansch

We'll Paint the Octopus Red, by Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen

The Waiting Song, by Natasha Barber and Rayah Jaymes

Mama Zooms, by Jane Cowen-Fletcher

My Travelin' Eye, by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw

Moses Goes to a Concert, by Isaac Millman

King for a Day, by Rukhsana Khan

Hello, Goodbye Dog, by Maria Gianferrari

Hands and Hearts, by Donna Jo Napoli Susan Laughs, by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross

Happy in Our Skin, by Fran Manushkin Clean It!, by Georgie Birkett

Henri's Scissors, by Jeanette Winter

A Splash of Red, by Jen Bryant and Melissa Sweet

The Girl Who Thought in Pictures, by Julia Finley Mosca

Some television shows we love

Born this Way
Parenthood
Speechless
The A Word
Joan of Arcadia

Movies:

Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution

RESOURCES

We have created a free Online leaning hub where you can access interactive lessons on inclusion, read blog posts that highlight the stories and lives of people with disabilities, sign up for inclusion workshops and more. We highly encourage you to visit the learning hub (www.childrensplaygarden.org/learn-about-the-playgarden/) as well as use the following resources to learn more. You can find all of these resources with active links from our website.

Local Washington State Resources
Washington State Resources for Parents of Children and Youth with Disabilities
The Arc of King County- Resources Guide
Open Doors for Multicultural Families
The Northwest Center
Provail
Washington Education Ombuds

Inclusion Toolkits and Tip Sheets
Dear Everyone: A Campaign to end disability stigma
Kids Included Together (KIT)
Let's Play Toolkit from Act Now BC
Inclusion Toolkit from SF Dept. for Children, Youth and their families
Embracing Diversity, Toolkit for creating Inclusive Learning-Friendly Environments-
Disability Inclusion Toolkit- Youth Inclusion Hub in Ireland
Making Play Inclusive- Sense. Uk
Inclusive Schools Network
Think Inclusive
National Catholic Board On Full Inclusion – Working toward full inclusion for catholic schools Top Tips for Inclusive Programs
Conversations with Parents
Creating a Simple Behavior Plan
Easing Transitions
Cultivate Respectful Disability Awareness
Ollibean

Nature-Play Resources
International Play Association
Children and Nature Network
Child and Nature Alliance of Canada
Natural Start Alliance
Wild Zone Toolkit
Wild Play: Parenting Adventures in the Great Outdoors" by David Sobel
When You Want To Say " Be Careful" by Petra Eperjesi
World of Wonder - International Play-Based Early Learning Conference
Nature-Based Playground Design for Children with Autism by Shruthi Selvam

Diversity, Equity and Social Justice Resources
Teaching Tolerance
Tools for creating Healthy, Productive, Interracial Multicultural Communities (Community Building Toolkit) Conflict Resolution Guidebook
Othering and Belonging Institute resources
Diversability Community

TED Talks
Why separating kids with disabilities from their peers hurts, not helps
To Raise Brave Girls, encourage adventure
Why design should include everyone
Love no matter what
Disability & Innovation: The Universal Benefits of Accessible Design, by Haben Girma @ WWDC 2016
I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much | Stella Young, TED Talk

News Articles
Parenting: The Top Priority when a child is diagnosed with a developmental difference
StoryForm
Why so many kids can't sit still in school today by Valerie Strauss
Why cities need accessible playgrounds by Megan Barber
How to Convey Dance to Those Without Sight? All Hands On by Serena Solomon
'We batter them with kindness': schools that reject super-strict values by Josh Halliday
Why is Unstructured Play Crucial?
'We are caring people: Australis's youngest ever senator delivers first speech by Miles Morgan
How to Have an Inclusive Prom

Sensory
Reduce the Noise: Help Loved Ones with Sensory Overload Enjoy Shopping
Home Modifications for Kids with Sensory Concerns

Videos
Community Inclusion for Parents of Children with Disabilities
Tips for Raising Kids with Disabilities, from Zach Anner
#IncludeUsFromTheStart "Lea goes to school"
Zeno Mountain Farm, A Great Big Story
Channel 4: Life Lessons From The Playground

Training Materials
How to Use Pictures to Enhance Activities
Implementing Visual Supports for Activity Areas
Communicating Effectively with Parents
Accommodating Children Who are Over or Under-Sensitive
Supporting Positive Communication
Teaching Children What is Expected of Them to Prevent Challenging Behaviors

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Elizabeth Bullard, founder and Executive Director of the PlayGarden. Liz has an M.A. in Speech-Language Pathology from Indiana University at Bloomington. She has worked with children and families in the Seattle area since 1985, and enjoys working and playing alongside PlayGardeners of all ages.

Hannah Gallagher, Inclusive Programs Director and Lead Preschool Teacher. Hannah is an Environmental Educator from Seattle, WA. Hannah started working at the PlayGarden when she was fifteen and has been working to develop the skills, knowledge and awareness for how to include children of all ages and abilities in meaningful outdoor learning ever since. In 2015, Hannah completed a Teaching Residency program in Education for Environment and Community (EEC) from IslandWood and in 2016 received her Masters in Education and a certificate in Non-profit Management from the University of Washington. Hannah spends her free time at local farmers markets and playing outside all across the Pacific Northwest.

Adana Protonentis, Director of Operations. Adana studied Political Science and Organizational Leadership at Seattle University and has a background in civil litigation and parent advocacy. As a parent of a child with a disability, Adana is excited to bring her advocacy skills to the PlayGarden and loves finding ways to help connect families with resources in the community. Adana is a community educator, focusing on anti-racism and disability justice work. Her two children are wild about the PlayGarden and can often be found hunting bugs in the garden, splashing in puddles, and having adventures under the trees.

THE DREAM

"There are two tracks. There's the disability track and the mainstream track; you can do soccer or disability soccer. My dream is that there's just one track and somehow, Ted can fit into that track. There's room for him. No separate school events for special education kids and general education kids. Make space for him to participate in the mainstream events. We want to all be at the same Easter egg hunt and access it in our own way. I don't know how to do it, but that's my dream." - Lynn