



Rec for all

**Creating a Pathway for an Inclusive Recreation
System for Philadelphians of All Abilities.**

Parks & Rec's Inclusion Plan at a glance

Access to recreation is a critical part of a fulfilling life for residents. Philadelphia Parks & Recreation aims to provide all Philadelphians access to high-quality recreation facilities and programs. For residents with disabilities, that means making inclusive and adaptive programming available across the city.



A letter from the Commissioner

Dear Residents,

Philly's rec centers are familiar spaces where residents come together to learn, play, and grow. They are neighborhood spots where new friendships are formed, and communities grow stronger. For residents with physical disabilities or neurodivergence, being welcomed into recreation facilities and the caring communities built within their walls is especially vital.

That is why Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR) began exploring what more we could do to better serve residents of all abilities. We know all Philadelphians benefit from welcoming, inclusive recreation opportunities in their neighborhood, and are committed to delivering that opportunity to residents of all abilities.

It began three years ago as a group of committed parents, rec leaders, and advocates meeting to share experiences and explore ways to make Philly's neighborhood rec centers more inclusive. Today, that vision is reflected in Rec for All, our action plan to embed inclusive design practices into all Philadelphia Parks & Recreation sites.

Led by the trusted experts from Carousel Connections, LLC, and with the support of partners like The Special Olympics of Pennsylvania, the Jefferson Center for Autism and Neuro-diversity, and the Mayor's Commission on Disabilities, the path laid out in this plan will help us to make sure all residents are able to take part in our programs, and have the opportunity to become a valued and important part of the rec community.

Sincerely,
Kathryn Ott Lovell



Introduction

Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR) aims to provide all Philadelphians access to high-quality parks, recreation facilities, and programs. For residents with physical disabilities and the neurodiverse, that means making inclusive and adaptive programming available across the city. For PPR, doing this work with integrity means engaging the voice of community members, staff, trusted partners, and experts in the field.

From July 2020 to June 2021, PPR staff engaged Carousel Connections, LLC (a local expert on inclusion) as project lead, and partnered with the Special Olympics of Pennsylvania, the Jefferson Center for Autism and Neuro-diversity, and the Mayor's Commission on Disabilities, to:

- Initiate conversations with community partners and stakeholders
- Produce staff training on inclusive programming and strategies.
- Create an inclusive inventory of resources and “can do” projects at pilot sites that can be replicated across PPR's system.

The result of this work is a series of recommendations and resources to create inclusive services in all neighborhoods. The Rec for All Action Plan is a roadmap to making our recreation centers more welcoming for those with disabilities, and ensuring they are seen as valuable and contributing members in our programs and spaces.



Executive Summary

What

PPR's core mission is to provide enriching experiences for all. This goal is fulfilled at neighborhood recreation centers. Recreation centers serve as hubs where people come together. Recreation centers are places of physical and emotional safety where people can improve their health and connections to others.

Why

The Rec for All Plan looked at how PPR, and its community and professional partners can:

- Increase the quantity and quality of accessible programming.
- Ensure physical accessibility plans reflect users' needs.
- Promote positive, inclusive relationships.

This project looked for ways that PPR can strengthen its communities. Communities grow stronger when all members have the chance to:

- Connect with others.
- Build trust.
- Take part in activities that engage their mind and body.



Executive Summary



Who

Community members, local and national experts, and PPR staff informed this plan. The goal was to help parks and recreation sites:

- Become more inclusive and create true belonging at all centers.
- Promote programming for all ages and abilities.
- Identify resources for community members and recreation leaders.
- Provide high-quality training on universal design for recreation staff.

How

PPR coordinated with a consultant team led by Carousel Connections to:

- Research national best practices.
- Explore resources and neighborhood and individual community members' needs through community conversations.
- Create a training process.
- Pilot programming and spaces that are accessible and valuable to all users.
- Promote the web of partnerships in the city network.





The Plan

In the long-term, this plan seeks to make recreation centers welcoming places for individuals with disabilities and the neurodiverse.

The plan looks to:

- Shift from a model of isolation to inclusion.
- Enhance capacity and connection across PPR's system.
- Provide optimal service for all.
- Support programs and amenities for all, in all neighborhoods.



The planning process explored many complex themes. These included injustice, dignity of opportunity, relationships, and community. The work culminated in the creation of some best practices of inclusion tailor-made for Philadelphians and our recreation landscape.



Inclusion Plan Timeline

Early 2019

- PPR establishes an inclusion working group, tasked with looking at inclusivity in programming, staffing, and other areas.
- Sought to make PPR programs for people with disabilities more relevant and innovative.
 - Visited PPR sites around the city and engaged with the community.
 - Developed a pilot employment project for neurodiverse young adults. This created new jobs at recreation centers featuring developmentally appropriate duties.
 - Assessed staffing needs and created site-specific work plans.
 - Created new programming and events (e.g. inclusive skating).
 - Provided inclusion resources and training to the Recreation Leaders Academy.
 - Trained 200 Recreation Specialty Instructors (RSI) employed by summer camps.

2019

2020

Fall 2019

PPR hosts the first-ever Inclusion Summit.
The Summit:

- Provided an opportunity for information and resource sharing.
- Was attended by 150 PPR staff and partners.
- Included sessions on creating inclusive recreation centers.
- Provided a toolbox for inclusion.

2020

- PPR issues an RFP for an inclusion plan.
- Carousel Connections is selected to lead inclusion work.
The goals of this plan:
 - Work with PPR and its stakeholders to develop a system-wide approach to inclusive programming.
 - Study the latest research and best practices to create a plan and action steps to serve residents of all abilities.



Vision: Create an inclusive Parks & Recreation system where those of all abilities truly belong.

What is inclusion?

How should PPR think about it and apply it to recreation?

Inclusion is being welcomed in the community as you are.

It is about being part of the “whole.”

Belonging is what happens beyond inclusion. It is about being a valued and contributing member of the community. True inclusion and belonging do not happen by turning on a switch or attending a simple training. True inclusion and belonging require a social and cultural shift.

To help people move from inclusion to belonging, we must:

- Think creatively.
- Act with empathy.
- Listen and learn.
- Establish trust and understanding.
- Share emotional experiences.
- Allow for both physical and social accommodations with understanding and empathy.
- Create respectful and nurturing relationships with programs, recreation centers, our system, and the city.

Belonging also requires a web of interdependent and connected relationships.

Interdependence builds strong relationships. Such relationships allow for give and take. They lead to acceptance, respect, and reciprocity. And they make the community stronger.



Social inclusion is about each person taking part in society. It is about a community that cares for its members, makes them feel welcome, and is willing to adjust to fit their various needs.

(Marino-Francis and WorrallDavies, 2010)



PHILADELPHIA
PARKS &
RECREATION

HOW TO DO IT: Embracing an Inclusive Design Mindset

The city's parks and recreation spaces represent a unique opportunity. In these spaces, people of all economic backgrounds play, exercise, and connect. But people with disabilities or neurodivergence cannot always be part of these opportunities. Thoughtful inclusion and universal design can make these spaces more socially accessible. These improvements do not come at the expense of others. Instead, they can enhance the experience for all.

Sidewalk ramps and automatic doors are an example of this. Designers created these features for people with disabilities. But they benefit everyone: those with strollers, the elderly, and people making deliveries.

In the same way, design can help individuals with sensory needs. Some individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder are more sensitive to distracting stimuli. This may include noises, sounds, and lights. Structured environments help reduce these distractions for those who:

- Are prone to anxiety.
- Are overwhelmed by excessive stimuli.
- Need solitary spaces for a mental retreat or “brain break” (DO-IT, 2019).

Well-designed spaces are accessible, useable, and inclusive. We can maximize the value of public space, support public safety, and benefit every user by:

- Working with neurodiverse populations.
- Following a clear set of design principles. (Fossi, 2020).



**This is about more than making
a site ‘accessible.’
This is inclusive design.**



Statement of Commitment for Inclusive Practice

PPR will:

- Employ a neurodiverse and physically diverse workforce.
- Focus our staff and volunteers on contribution, skill development, and reciprocity.
- Advocate and drive resources to support our parks and recreation spaces to meet ADA standards.
- Create programming and experiences that serve a diverse population.
- Seek input from neuro- and physically diverse community members.
- Creating spaces where people feel safe and experience belonging.
- Infuse trauma-informed care practice into everyday experiences and conversations.
- Build community partnerships that promote the sharing of resources.
- Recognize that there are many stakeholders involved in inclusive practice.
- Educate and train all staff on creating atmospheres of inclusion.
- Address any discrimination or bias.



Action Plan

The plan's Action Steps are divided into five major themes:





Learn and Explore

Continue to explore assets and barriers to inclusion across the system

- Create an Inclusion Committee that consists of:
 - Director of Inclusion.
 - Self Advocates who identify as having a disability.
 - Recreation leaders who demonstrate leadership in inclusive practice.
 - Outside professionals interested in the process.
- Hold quarterly meetings with community stakeholders and partners to
- review Action Plan and next steps.
- Hold monthly team meetings with PPR administration, sub-contractors and collaborators, and Inclusion Committee.

Learn and grow with partner cities.

- Host annual conversation with leaders in partner cities.
- Coordinate with the National Recreation and Park Association's Parks for Inclusion initiative.

Explore external funding sources to support work.

- Research development and funding resources.
- Build partnerships with foundations and nonprofit partners to develop collaborative programming and grant opportunities.





Training and Resources

Continue training for all staff across providers (PPR staff and other professionals coming into PPR “spaces”), including “onboarding” materials for new hires and continued dynamic learning.

- Conduct quarterly review and revision process of onboarding materials for recreation leaders
- Hold monthly training for PPR staff based on the annual training plan. Adapt topics to current needs.
- Provide staff resources and training to build an inclusive vocabulary.
- Add a weekly resource that is available to site leaders in “shared communication.”

Create a collection of organized materials and resources for tools towards inclusion “playbook”.

- Coordinate lending library of diverse literature, social narratives research articles and protocols, and sensory tools.
- Create a rotating library of books and sensory equipment in each program district.
- Develop and share a staff resource guide.





Create and Enhance

Develop and offer inclusive programming opportunities and demonstrate practice of belonging.

- Train new recreation centers on inclusive resources and materials and host community conversations in neighborhoods.
- Hire inclusion ambassadors to support inclusive programming in rec centers.

Explore workforce development initiatives in collaboration with other community stakeholders.

- Continue to hire individuals with disabilities and the neurodiverse within the PPR system, with the possibility of a pilot program that trains individuals to secure full-time positions.
- Hold quarterly meetings with Philadelphia regional Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Developmental Programs to explore internship opportunities and other possibilities.
- Explore new partnerships with different organizations to expand the availability of workforce development opportunities.



Review and Analyze



Continue to review and analyze PPR practices related to inclusive and trauma-informed care practice.

- Conduct quarterly review of:
 - Commitment statement progress
 - All PPR policies and standards in relation to “lessons learned” and inclusive criteria. Revise and add, as needed.
 - Recreation programming with focus on inclusive design.
 - Afterschool and summer camp manuals (registration and medical forms).
- Engage with all stakeholders for feedback, and report lessons learned and next steps to all.

Refine accessibility and accommodation process.

- Hold quarterly conversations with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation’s Capital Division to discuss physical and sensory accessibility in spaces.
- Review Formal Accommodations process (use of an interpreter, etc.) quarterly.





Communicate

Provide communication that is accessible to all for recreation leaders AND the community. Includes social media, newsletter, door to door community outreach.

- Coordinate with PPR Communications and PPR Program staff to ensure all social media and promotional materials are widely accessible. Example: “This PPR program is open to all.”
- Send quarterly updates about the plan to all stakeholders, including:
 - Recreation leaders.
 - Community partners.
 - Leadership team.
- Create inclusive signage, including core boards and photos.



Definitions

Here are definitions for some important words included in this report and related documents.

Disability

A disability is any condition of the body or mind that substantially limits one or more major life activities. The condition makes it more difficult for the person to do certain activities.

Person with a disability/people with disabilities

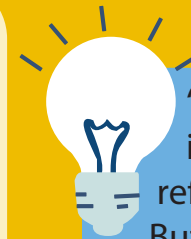
Preferred term used to refer to an individual with a disability or a group of people with multiple or different disabilities.

Belonging

Belonging means a person or people are not just included or integrated, they are part of a community or place.

Inclusion

Inclusion means making sure all individuals have an opportunity to take part in every aspect of life to the best of their abilities and desires. This includes people with physical or intellectual disabilities.



“People with disabilities” is sometimes used to refer to a single population. But this is actually a diverse group of people with a wide range of needs. Two people with the same type of disability can be affected in very different ways. Some disabilities may be hidden or not easy to see.” (CDC)



Definitions

Here are definitions for some important words included in this report and related documents.

Neurodiversity

This approach to learning and disability encourages us to:

- Embrace the natural diversity of human brains and minds.
- Recognize that there are many ways a brain can function.
- Respect neurological differences.

Neurodiverse

Describes a group with different brain types—people whose brains function differently.

Use the term neurodivergent to describe an individual.

Do not use neurodiverse to refer to an individual person (e.g. don't say 'a neurodiverse child').

Neurodivergent

Refers to an individual person whose brain functions in ways that are not 'typical.' This includes people with developmental, individual, psychiatric, or learning disabilities.

Neurotypical

Refers to an individual whose brain develops and functions in a typical way. You can use the term as an adjective or noun. Neurotypical is the opposite of neurodivergent.

Which Word should you use?

- Use the term **neurodiversity** when describing the natural diversity of human brains.
- Use the terms **neurotypical** or **neurodivergent** when describing an individual person.
- Use the term **neurodiverse** when referring to a group of people.



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Municipal partners

- Philadelphia Parks & Recreation leadership and staff including: Commissioner Kathryn Ott Lovell, Bill Salvatore, Grace Cannon, Patrick Morgan
- Philadelphia Parks & Recreation pilot site leaders: Oktavia Cherry, Lisa Summers, Walt Mulholland, Erica Young
- The Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Inclusion Committee
- Mayor's Commissioner on Disability Rights: Amy Millar, Director
- Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services: Christopher Florence

Project leads

- Carousel Connections Self Advocates: Tierra Daniels, Sarah Immerman, Owen Ahearn-Browning, Josh Hecht, and Emmett Abdo
- Carousel Connections Team Members included Alexa Reynolds, Dr. Patty Flaherty-Fischette, Leah Pitt, Lanae Jones, and Semhar Samuel.

Citywide Stakeholders

- The Eagles Autism Foundation
- Jefferson Center for Autism and Neurodiversity: Dr. Wendy Ross, Sabra Townsend, Alex Fossi
- PHMC: Sara Molina-Robinson
- Parent advocate and PPR Inclusion Committee Chair: Anna Perng
- The Philadelphia Autism Project: Disha Uppal
- Special Olympics of Philadelphia: Chase Trimmer
- Temple University Institute on Disabilities: Alanna Raffel
- Thomas Jefferson University, Department of Occupational Therapy: Kimberly Mollo



Appendix A: General Research

The consultants took a two-part approach to determine the action steps outlined in this report.

- They hosted conversations and made observations. These helped provide:
 - Perspective.
 - Empowered narrative.
 - Information about current practices.
 - An understanding of priorities within the system.
- The consultants also looked at research related to national best practice methods. View their research.

Research assisted in designing details in the pilotsite inventory to a national scan of inclusive practice in parks and recreation systems.

Inclusion for people with disabilities and the neurodiverse is important. We cannot and should not “guess” what may work.

Instead, we can use resources that include:

- Past experiences of local residents.
- Scholarly research.
- Recommendations from self-advocates.

This analysis allows us to:

- Produce evidence-based practice and policies.
- Establish measurable goals for moving forward.
- Improve the success of the process.



National Best Practices

The consultants looked at inclusive practices at other parks and recreation systems. Two in five parks and recreation agencies have a formal inclusion policy. These policies have a common goal. They seek to provide access to programs for all members of the community.

The consultants found that the greatest challenges to achieving this goal are:

- Insufficient funding.
- Facility space shortages.
- Lack of staff training.

Most parks and rec systems focus on traditional targeted programming. This programming is separate and “specialized and designated for disabilities.”

The systems continue to struggle with offering outcomes that are actionable and measurable. They do not work beyond integration and forward into inclusion and belonging.



Social Inclusion

The following definitions represent the elements of social inclusion used in the planning of this project:

Social inclusion is about each person taking part in society. It is about a community that cares for its members, makes them feel welcome, and is willing to adjust to fit their various needs (Marino-Francis and Worrall-Davies, 2010).

A virtuous circle of improved rights of access to the social and economic world, new opportunities that create reciprocal relationships, recovery of status and impact, and reduced impact of disability (Sayce, 2001).

It is crucial to recognize how inclusion has evolved from exclusion to segregation to integration to inclusion.

Research shows that to prevent exclusion, tailored, coordinated actions are needed. These actions must address barriers to inclusion. And they must ease the potential negative outcomes (Toro-Hernandez, 2020).

There is an urgency for capacity building among different stakeholders to:

1. Build disability awareness
2. Understand issues of inclusive development

Approximately 17 percent of Philadelphia residents identify as having a disability. There are incredible barriers at the system, community, interpersonal, and personal levels. PPR has the opportunity to develop inclusive practices and strategies. This can serve as a model for other cities and push the evolution towards belonging.



Belonging

Belonging is an intrinsic part of Wilcock's(2006) occupational hypothesis of health. Doing, being, becoming and belonging are the means to survival and health (p. 209).

This hypothesis requires three elements to facilitate health and wellbeing:

- Doing—engaging in a meaningful activity.
- Being—having self-regard and esteem.
- Becoming—building skills and self-efficacy.
- Belonging—having acceptance and interpersonal connection

A “just right” environment for belonging includes the following conditions:

- Affirmation.
- Element of choice and self-determination.
- Provision of both private and community space.
- An environment that is physically and emotionally safe.

Philadelphia Parks & Recreation staff noted the following statements to identify belonging:

- When I have a meaningful role and relationships that have common interests
- Not feeling or falling short, defensive or uncomfortable
- A place where I am happiest, greeted, and invited “in”
- Freeing yourself to speak honestly and openly, feeling appreciated
- I can be my complete self.

This project's recommendations and goals are based on these conditions of belonging at every recreation center, park, and playground in the city.



Appendix B: Outreach Findings

Community Partner Gatherings

During the year, community partners and stakeholders met quarterly to discuss and share. An agenda was shared in advance with topics that included:

- Project phases and outcome.
- Collective commitments with focus on neuro-diverse settings.
- Networking.
- “Wish list” planning and resources for financial development.
- Universal design themes.
- Research and resource sharing.
- Engaging with universities and potential interns

These meetings involved content and updates with regard to the project phases, as well as ample time to brainstorm and share in conversation. These meetings also emphasized how PPR is taking steps towards more inclusive practice and the commitment to long-term planning.

Resource Conversations

The City of Philadelphia has amazing resources that are working towards inclusive practice. The resources this project engaged included :

- Universities and research organizations.
- Non-profit organizations with missions towards community engagement.
- Social service-based organizations (government-funded and grant-based).
- Service providers

The PPR strategy team met weekly with Special Olympics of Philadelphia, Jefferson Center for Autism and Neurodiversity, and Common Space.



Community Conversations

Beyond the who lives near such facilities, park and recreation agencies also need to understand what residents need in terms of park and recreation offerings. Most agencies have a variety of methods to engage the public when they are planning and designing their inclusive program offerings.

All communities possess unique opportunities, connections, resources, and relationships. Members within each community are the experts on the challenges that are most pressing, the solutions that are most viable, the strategies that will work best, and the most effective ways to enlist others in support of change.

Any group of community members who come together—no matter how well-connected each individual already is—will learn about new resources, connections, and ideas by interacting with others who share different viewpoints and have different life experiences.

Real change that lasts is most likely to come when ideas are based on locally-feasible strategies and approaches. As part of this project, we hosted four community conversations in each of our pilot sites. A “community conversation” is a way to bring a diverse set of community members together to collectively brainstorm strategies and resources that can be used to address a challenge facing the community. In short, it provided a fun and creative way to find local solutions and new partners to address issues that matter most in a community.

Community conversations were held across city regions at the following Philadelphia recreation centers: **Athletic, Finnegan, Tarken, and Carousel House.**

Each neighborhood conversation took on unique themes related to inclusive and accessible programming. We discussed accessibility in relation to physical space and accommodations, “invitation” and inter-personal experiences, and sensory experiences.



- The Athletic conversation focused on how to provide more accessible programming in a larger building that is not currently physically accessible. Community members discussed:
 - Providing dignity within an experience.
 - What to do if a community member who requires a ramp or elevator would like to participate.
 - What roles community members can play in their diverse programming.
- The Finnegan conversation emphasized the barriers of safety -- both physical and emotional safety - for their community members.
 - How can they create more pride in the neighborhood that will result in caring for the outdoor space?
 - What resources might help to beautify the outdoor space to be more inviting for all? Is there a way to provide technology to provide additional tools and access?
- The Tarken conversation emphasized promoting and sharing with community members the programming that is currently happening.
 - How can they let families and neighbors know that they offer inclusive programming.
 - How do they include programming that is unified and inclusive, and programming that is disability-specific?
- Carousel House is a recreation center that is specific to people with disabilities. This site offers programming that:
 - Is physically accessible to all abilities.
 - Caters to a diverse age range.
 - Includes athletics, summer programming, recreational and social opportunities.
 - Serves individuals with disabilities and the neurodiverse from across the city.
 - Serves service providers who seek programs and activities.

The Carousel House community conversation noted that the personnel welcome all and these resources promote belonging. There is an awareness and commitment in supporting individuals with disabilities and the neurodiverse that include physical tools, person-centered language, and empowering conversations for self-determination.

Each conversation was inspiring and productive with a follow up list of action steps.



Pilot Sites (Tarken, Finnegan, Athletic)

Inclusive practice continues to evolve and requires training, modeling, and concrete steps for engagement. Working directly in settings to allow for modeling and conversation is critical to inclusive change. Three pilot sites were identified to work intentionally for individualized training and resource sharing, each with diverse skill sets and community needs. These sites worked with a facilitator on a monthly basis to design and create an inventory for inclusive practice that can be replicated in all sites. Evidence/research based activities or tasks within the inventory were set to be manageable and feasible across recreation settings in that they do not require expansive budgets, can be transferred if there are changes in personnel and staffing, and demonstrate the brilliance and uniqueness in community contributions.

The inventory list includes: green space (from raised beds to potted plants to a full community garden), sensory space and accessible toolbox, defining spaces for a variety of sensory experiences, an introduction to self-regulation curriculum that includes Social Thinking and Zones of Regulation, creation of visual schedules and routines, creation of a diverse library of books that represent the community, a volunteer schedule, video tour, community board with “go to” resources, exploration for workforce development possibilities, and expanding inclusive programming opportunities.



Trainings

During this process, site leaders engaged and noted an appreciation for continued growth. Relevant monthly training sessions were held to provide content, strategies, and facilitation strategies while building community. These topics included:

- Fall Trainings
 - Initial Launch into Inclusion: An overview of disability and communication preferences/needs in coordination with the vision of inclusion within the parks and recreation system
- Winter Trainings
 - Self Care and Compassion Fatigue: Recognizing compassion fatigue and effective strategies to manage self-care
 - Supporting Ways for Better Days: Understanding the benefits of trauma informed care practice
- Spring Trainings
 - Creating Community (and Recognizing the What If): Building community through inclusive programming and strategizing for repair
 - Supporting children with communication and behavior-based needs (red zone moments)
 - Sports, Community, and More: Resources to create unified/inclusive sports team in coordination with Special Olympics

Trainings were facilitated by professionals with diverse backgrounds and expertise. These included:

- A developmental pediatrician/physician.
- Clinical social worker.
- Occupational therapists.
- Educators with a focus on disability process and studies.
- Self advocates

This diversity allowed the trainings to be as person-centered and responsive as possible (given the limitations of virtual trainings on Zoom) with ample time for conversation, questions, and feedback.

Feedback from recreation leaders noted that training was relevant and effective. There is a need for continuation to move the learning into everyday practice. This takes trust, time, modeling, and continued experiential learning.

In thinking about future needs, recreation leaders noted the following reflection in a final survey at the conclusion of the year:

1. Need more staff to run programming
2. Need more diverse programming overall, not only for sports
3. Need more volunteers and committed participants
4. Incentives, such as “comp time” for attending professional development that involves inclusive practice and an audience
5. that include people with disabilities and the neurodiverse.
6. Always ready for more acceptance and inclusion.



Accessibility Features

Throughout the year, recreation center leaders and community partners noted a variety of accessible features to encourage inclusive spaces. We reviewed a variety of accommodations that included features for physical and sensory based needs in both new construction and buildings working through the redesign process with Rebuild.

During a conversation with Athletic's recreation center leader, this was shared: "We had the right intentions, but never asked if the person with a disability was okay with carrying the wheelchair (in reference to helping them enter the building). Including all individuals who are neuro-typical and neuro-diverse is the main goal, but we need to make sure it is within their comfort level."

Accessible features were organized in the following categories:

- Building accessibility recommendations.
- Programmatic "must haves."
- Programmatic ideals/wish list.



Appendix C: Research Summaries

These research articles focus on the layers of the Inclusion Design and Delivery project.

Volunteer to paid employment

Postsecondary Education Employment and Independent Living Outcomes of Persons with Autism and Intellectual Disability describes employment and lifespan outcomes of a college support program that provides housing, access to college courses, internships, and volunteer opportunities, finding that a structured program including volunteer work and professional training led to higher levels of independent living and higher likelihood of employment.

Project SEARCH for Youth With Autism Spectrum Disorders: Increasing Competitive Employment On Transition From High School Describes a specific program which provides progressive series of internships to participants along with creating collaborations between school contacts and service providers, encouraging participants to set employment goals, and providing communication and job skills as well as creating individualized work routines and structures. Includes two case studies using this method.

Competitive Employment for Transition-Aged Youth with Significant Impact from Autism: A Multi-site Randomized Clinical Trial Randomized clinical trial of the efficacy of a transition-to-work high school program that provides vocational skills training and volunteer/internship opportunities to individuals with autism. 73% of participants in the program were employed within a year of graduation compared with 17% of the non-participants. Participants averaged 21.2 hours of work per week, indicating a high prevalence of part-time work, and average hourly wage was \$9.61. The methodology of this study is fairly compelling compared to the observational approach used by most researchers.

Young Adults on the Autism Spectrum and Early Employment-Related Experiences: Aspirations and Obstacles Series of interviews about employment experiences, employment goals, and barriers to employment with young autistic adults and parents, identifying themes of barriers to finding and keeping suitable employment, significant differences between parental and young adult views, and clear employment goals and feelings of potential. Related article “Parents’ and young adults’ perspectives on transition outcomes for young adults with autism” discusses how parents and young adults may not agree on what the desired outcomes are with regards to employment and service goals.

Trends in Employment for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder: a Review of the Research Literature Review of literature on various programs aimed to boost employment among autistic individuals, citing a number of employment outcomes and including programs such as vocational skills training, volunteer opportunities, supported employment, transition services, and assistive technology in the workplace. Uses national datasets to achieve a large sample size.



Research related to efficacy of social narratives (may need to look up Carol Gray and social stories)

A Comprehensive Review and Meta-Analysis of the Social Stories Literature

Systematic review of the literature on social stories, finding that there is not sufficient evidence in the literature to consider the use of social stories an evidence-based practice (note that this is not the same as saying they are ineffective—just that the current evidence is not compelling enough). Reviewers encourage teachers, support staff, and professional coaches to use judgment with individual cases to determine who social stories are appropriate for and in which cases.

The Effects of Social Stories on the Social Engagement of Children with Autism Study in children finding that social engagement and social skills improved in a small group of children suggesting that social stories yield at least short-term improvement in socialization.

Using Social Stories to Improve the Social Behavior of Children With Asperger Syndrome Study finding that social stories yielded increases in social behavior immediately following the use of social stories, but that those increases were not maintained and did not exist for all participants. Indicates more research is needed and that social stories may be appropriate for some individuals but not others.

Efficacy of Zones of Regulation in inclusive settings

Effectiveness of Components of the Zones of Regulation on Student Behaviors Recent thesis incorporating Zones of Regulation in an educational setting for children with disabilities, finding positive effects during the intervention delivery but a lack of evidence for lasting benefits. However, observations from researchers and teachers indicated a reduction in negative behaviors and cases of students retaining and using the acquired skills in the classroom, indicating that at least the use of the concept is feasibly learned and employed.

The Effects of Implementing a Zones of Regulation Curriculum in a Third Grade Classroom Similar study finding inconsistent results but that students felt that they were learning useful skills and appreciated a framework to categorize their feelings. While no improvement in behavioral patterns was observed, there seemed to be some value to the involved students.



Efficacy of Zones of Regulation in inclusive settings

Social Thinking® Methodology: Evidence-Based or Empirically Supported? Defines social thinking and responds to criticisms of its methodology, including discussion of what constitutes an evidence-based practice (EBP) or an empirically supported therapy (EST). Winner argues that this criteria require an overly restrictive standard of evidence for a complex and adaptable methodology like ST; that is, ST is an assortment of valuable strategies that can be chosen between for specific scenarios, an approach that does not lend itself to the development of clear and universal best practices. She posits that ST is a set of therapeutic frameworks designed to be used in different ways with diverse populations and is therefore not readily evaluated by the type of research that creates EBPs or ESTs.

Social Thinking Science, Pseudoscience, or Antiscience The criticism being replied to in Winner's piece; this argues that ST is a pseudoscience not backed by data. In a sense, this and Winner's response are talking past each other; she argues that ST is a framework that can be adapted for use in a variety of scenarios and then evaluated on an individual basis, and this argues that ST has not successfully produced larger-scale data proving the universal value of the methodology. Both of these positions can be accurate, and the takeaway is that ST is not in and of itself a proven approach, but if the toolset it provides seems likely to be valuable, then there may be merit in using it to create programs that individual experts feel are likely to be effective and then should evaluate those programs on their own.

Unified sports and activities

Unified Sports www.specialolympics.org/our-work/sports/unified-sports Special Olympics page on unified sports, social inclusion, resources, and existing unified sports programs. Special Olympics Research Overview Comprehensive overview of SO research on sports with a lengthy section on unified sports. Benefits cited include increased social involvement, increased community participation, reduction in problem behaviors. Participants report increased self-esteem and quality of life; peers and partner organizations reported that this was a way to better understand those with intellectual disabilities and that the experience was valuable to all involved. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/23134807/> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22672339/> These are two studies cited in the SO overview--they discuss the evaluation of outcomes after unified sports activities and have more concrete data. However, they are paywalled--if we need them Alex can request through the Jefferson library.



Inclusive garden/planting opportunities

Enabling occupational participation and social inclusion for people recovering from mental ill-health through community gardening
Study of the creation of a supported community garden among people with mental health disorders, finding that it helped foster a learning environment and social inclusion among participants. Researchers highlighted the possibility of creating hybrid programs that included both social activities and occupational therapy in future efforts.

Gardening and Belonging: Reflections on How Social and Therapeutic Horticulture May Facilitate Health, Wellbeing and Inclusion
Review of a garden project in London termed a “social and therapeutic horticulture” project. This project worked with disabled individuals and vulnerable populations and the authors felt that participants demonstrated pride in creating a shared narrative for the garden and felt a sense of belonging, improving health, wellbeing, and social inclusion. Shared control over the environment let participants not only feel physically safe in the space but also emotionally protected within the group’s shared work on the garden. Identifies a number of specific activities and ways in which those contributed to the success of the garden at fostering individual skills and social connections. Horticultural therapy: the ‘healing garden’ and gardening in rehabilitation measures at Danderyd hospital rehabilitation clinic, Sweden
Reviews the literature on horticultural therapy and discusses a specific project in Sweden that worked with individuals that had suffered brain damage. Covers ways in which this therapy contributes to emotional and cognitive development or recovery, increases social participation, and improves quality of life although this piece acknowledges a lack of clear outcome measures beyond observed or self-reported factors. Effects of video modeling with video feedback on vocational skills of adults with autism spectrum disorder
Study of three autistic individuals who were provided with video instruction on gardening procedures, video feedback and instructional videos for users to refer to. Detailed description of how each task in the garden was taught and discusses barriers that some users may face.

Building esteem through book or visual representation (having books in the library that represent the community)

Representation of Culture in Children’s Picture Books

Older (1993) article on the portrayal of other cultures in picture books, finding that only a very small percentage of picture books at the time depicted other cultures. Discusses the value of representation, of seeing other cultures in books from an early age, validation of personal backgrounds created by multicultural depictions, and the risks associated with stereotypical or negative depictions especially in the absence of positive counterparts.

Representation Matters: Integrating Books With Characters With Autism in the Classroom

Discussion of how to select books that promote positive representations of autism, lists of selected works that are considered to be strong examples, characteristics of representation that is effective for both building esteem of autistic individuals and understanding among peers, and how to build these books into a classroom curriculum.

