



Where everyBODY can play.

**2012 Leadership Greater Nashua
Universally Accessible Playground
Case for Support**

Leadership Greater Nashua (LGN) is a year-long professional development program administered through the Greater Nashua Chamber of Commerce for community leaders in the Nashua area. Its goal is to educate community leaders, promoting economic, social, and civic vitality. An important part of the LGN experience is the planning and implementation of a project to benefit the Greater Nashua community.

The Class of 2012 is comprised of twenty-three individuals representing organizations large and small. They are educators, bankers, nonprofit professionals, entrepreneurs, elected officials, emergency personnel, engineers, attorneys and business professionals. Through their participation in LGN, the class came to appreciate the power that the collective investment of time, talent and treasure would have in leaving a lasting legacy and adding to the quality of life for the people in the Greater Nashua community. The Class of 2012 arrived at its project, the construction of a universally accessible playground, after considering the region's diverse population and the abundance of needs uncovered through exposure to the various sectors in the community.

“Play takes many forms, but the heart of play is pleasure - an important component in learning” (Perry, 2001). According to Brett, Moore, and Provenzo, play consists of two elements: a social dimension and a context dimension (1993). The social dimension focuses on collaboration skills while the context dimension can be broken into sensory motor play, symbolic play and games with rules. Both contribute to the overall ability of children and adults to socialize and integrate with one another allowing them to be to be a part of a community.

People with disabilities face numerous obstacles which restrict their social interaction and limit opportunities for physical development. Statewide, 9.1% of New Hampshire's population lives with a disability¹ and, according to the 2000 U.S. census, of the 86,183 residents in Nashua, 16.4% of the population has some form of disability² whether emotional, physical or mental. In Nashua, just one playground is classified as handicapped accessible (Roby Park in South Nashua) and only

¹ <http://www.disabilitycompendium.org/pdf/Compendium2011.pdf>

² <http://www.americantowns.com/nh/nashua-information>

the Nashua River Rail Trail is wheelchair accessible. Although both playgrounds are considered accessible and meet ADA standards they do not meet the needs of most individuals with disabilities in the Greater Nashua community. Families of disabled individuals want the ability to play, interact and integrate within the greater Nashua community.

“Our family enjoys spending time doing things outdoors but, as my son has grown it has become increasingly difficult to take him out of his wheelchair. This makes it very challenging to engage in outdoor activities such as using playgrounds together as a family. An accessible playground would enable not just my wife and I, but our other children as well, to interact with our son as they would with any other typical child while simply at play.”

Eric Brand, Greater Nashua resident

Universally accessible playgrounds offer children and adults of all abilities a place to congregate, play, communicate, learn and develop. Ideally, playgrounds are designed for social and physical interaction however the typical playground design often precludes people with disabilities. Specialized accessible playground equipment and structures strategically placed at a park within the City of Nashua will provide a common area for all people, including individuals with disabilities.

In general, playgrounds are suitable for most children and adults, but are not designed to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. While all playgrounds are required to meet the standards set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act, those standards are not strict enough to create universal accessibility to a playground. True accessibility requires planners to go beyond what is deemed ADA compliant to provide a safe play space that is accessible for all Nashua residents now and in the future. The principles of Universal Design ensure that when built, a structure will provide:

- Equitable use for all people;
- Flexibility in use to accommodate a wide range of individual abilities;
- A simple, intuitive, and effective design that easily conveys its use and minimizes hazards;
- Opportunities for comfortable use by all people maximizing the size and space for all to use regardless of body size, posture or mobility level.

The Universal Design concept ensures that each playground is usable by as many people as possible, including those with disabilities. Handicap accessible structures such as ramps and transfer points are integrated into a more comprehensive design that provides play access to people with the broadest range of abilities. Universal Design affords access by everyone including parents with strollers, grandparents, toddlers, and people with temporary or permanent disabilities. This will allow all of our citizens to interact with others regardless of their abilities.

Robin Carlson, author of *Inspiring Communities* writes, "Our society is steadily acknowledging that people with disabilities are part of our cultural fabric." She goes on to say that it is a change of mindset and attitude which will be the next frontier which will permanently change our acceptance of all people from a wide range of diverse intellectual, physical and mental perspectives. An example of this change of mindset in New Hampshire can be found in the installation of an accessible playground built in the community of Concord at Beaver Meadow School. This playground is a prime example of how the community's parents, teachers and children came together with the ultimate goal of building a barrier free playground. "We're moving away from structures and toward making a safe zone for all kids," said parent Karen Knowles (Concord Monitor, 2006).

There is a growing population of people whose lives are affected by some form of disability – whether their own or that of a family member or friend. Play is fundamental in *every* child's emotional, physical and social development and it is imperative that our community fosters the resources for *every* child to thrive by ensuring that people of all abilities have access to the amenities which make our community a rich place to live, work and play. The Leadership Greater Nashua Class of 2012 will, upon approval by the Board of Alderman, construct an accessible playground at an existing park in the City of Nashua. It will be a meeting place for local citizens to congregate, socialize and play with the added benefit of attracting people from all over the region. Its accessible design will ensure that this playground can be used by everyone.

Please consider investing in our community by pledging your support of the construction of a universally accessible playground in Nashua. Together, we will ensure that aging grandparents can play with their grandchildren, that siblings and playmates of *all* abilities can play together and that parents of the disabled can freely play with their children. This will be our legacy.