



A Playground for Everyone

D R E A M . I N V E S T . B U I L D .



Turtle Lake Elementary Playground Project

2012

Annual Report

“Inclusive play is not about meeting 'special needs' it's about meeting all children's needs in the same place and in a variety of ways” (as cited at www.playlsi.com).

Letter from Chief Playground Officer:

Principal Darin Johnson

In the fall of 2011, an idea developed to consider building an inclusive playground where children are able to play as equals, side-by-side, regardless of mobility challenges. Thanks to a small group of big thinkers, this little idea has grown to encompass a fully and strategically developed plan to realize this vision.

We have an opportunity to do something transformational not only for the Turtle Lake population, but for the greater community as well; a chance to make a positive difference in the lives of children or families who might possess cognitive, sensory or mobility challenges.

Inherent in our plan is the need to generate sufficient financial resources to achieve our goal. That is why we look forward to the next phase of our playground project, during which an unprecedented effort will begin to secure support from foundations, corporations, small businesses and individuals to build “A Playground for Everyone.”

I am optimistic about the vision we share to build a playground for everyone and look forward to the journey ahead of us.

"Do what you can, with what
you have, where you are."
- Theodore Roosevelt



A Playground for Everyone

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OUR STORY

When the PTA was exploring new fundraising opportunities in spring 2011, members highlighted that the playground needed updating. Built in the early 1990s, our playground is currently not meeting the needs of all our students.

- The surface, covered in engineered wood fiber (aka woodchips), is not easily accessible to wheelchairs and can be difficult to navigate by those with mobility challenges.
- The playground includes only two swings for those with accessibility issues and those swings face away from the play area, further isolating the children who use them from their peers.
- A select population has limited selections for recess activity because they cannot access the full playground.
- The entire student population misses opportunities to interact with peers who have accessibility, social and/or sensory challenges which inhibit them from using their playground.

The impetus for an inclusive playground was introduced by Daria Fallgatter as she saw firsthand the value that an inclusive playground provided to her family. Daria and her husband, Krister, have three children: the youngest one, Ian, uses a wheelchair for mobility. This is their story:

Early in their family outings to parks with Ian, Daria was in what she called “self aware” denial. She knew there were huge differences in how Ian would play at a typical playground, but she was determined that he would not know any different because Mom was small and mighty and could take him around to play on different things.

As he grew physically and mentally, Daria realized that she couldn't pretend anymore and that their park/playground visits would no longer be fun for Ian. She could no longer shelter him from the truth that there really was not much he could do independently or with some assistance at a typical playground.

Daria also recognized that when Ian began Kindergarten at Turtle Lake School, he would face a playground like all the others in our community: ADA compliant but short on opportunities for independent play, interaction with peers,

stimulation or just some good fun for those with mobility devices.

In conversation with another mom of a child with mobility challenges at Turtle Lake, Daria asked, “So what did [your child] do out at recess?” She answered, “Well he usually had one or two kids on the black top with him, or he was indoors in the gym playing with one or two kids.”

Obviously, this scenario did not allow for much social interaction. To think that her social, fun little guy would not have the same opportunities to play as the other

students was unsettling to Daria. In addition, recess, which is on both her daughters’ favorite subject list at school, would probably be a time of stress for Ian, not fun. Furthermore, his two sisters, in whom Ian helped instill compassion, empathy and an “everyone is created equal” mindset must now see their brother not having the opportunities for interactive play.

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(Fallgatter story continued)

Kids learn through play; we all know and trust that statement. Ian has said, "I do not want to play at Turtle Lake park, there is nothing for me to do there."

Of course, Daria believes her son is entitled to play on his playground at his elementary school, but it is much more than that! It is about bringing kids of all abilities together to learn from one another. These are life-changing lessons that cannot be learned from a text book.

After visiting an inclusive playground in Red Wing, MN, the Fallgatters experienced firsthand the magic that such a playground can create. Ian and his sisters were able to play side by side in this environment, which provided a ramping system, unitary surfacing, and opportunities for parallel play. The children individually challenged themselves while also sharing a social experience.

According to Daria, "An inclusive playground at our children's school would provide Ian with barrier-free opportunities to play, while building his confidence as he interacts and learns alongside his peers through the universal language of play." We would like to bring this magic to Turtle Lake Elementary and the surrounding community!

"Ian, what would it mean to you to have a playground at your school that you can use?" asks Mom.

Ian ponders for a thoughtful moment and then answers, "It would be like a vacation."



The Fallgatters at the Let's Play 5K along with Grandma Jo.

OUR MISSION

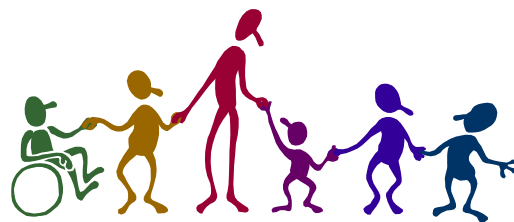
Turtle Lake Elementary PTA is a 501(c)(3) volunteer-run organization operating in Shoreview, MN since 1990. Our mission includes advocating for the education and well-being of every child at Turtle Lake Elementary. As part of the National PTA and Minnesota PTA, it is also our mission to develop united efforts between educators and the general public to secure for all children and youth the highest advantages in physical, mental, and social education.

Guided by these missions, we plan to update the aging playground at Turtle Lake Elementary, which does not meet the needs of all students. “A Playground for Everyone” will maximize accessibility for all children, their families, and members of our community, regardless of their physical and intellectual capacity.

OUR VISION

Inclusive play is the idea that children and caregivers of all abilities are allowed the opportunity to play side-by-side. Inclusive playgrounds address the needs of children with cognitive, visual, sensory, auditory and physical challenges as well as providing challenging and enriching opportunities for able-bodied children.

Our organization wants to create a place that will expand the inclusion found in classrooms to the playground. This playground will allow children of all abilities to play together and will teach our children the fundamentals of full inclusion, an important example.



MAKING THE VISION A REALITY

Sharing the Dream

A dedicated and skilled group of volunteers has connected to bring the power of inclusive play to our community. In June 2012, we gave the community a glimpse of inclusive play at Turtle Lake Elementary's first annual Let's Play 5K sponsored by Kids Abilities, Alan B. Montgomery Orthodontics, Karvonen-Montgomery Basketball, Eggert Family Dentistry, Fresh and Natural Foods, and identitystores.com. Our vision has been shared with numerous community, business and civic leaders and has been received with extraordinary enthusiasm.



Turtle Lake staff participants at the Let's Play 5K!

Building the Dream

During 2012, our committee developed the necessary infrastructure to support building “A Playground for Everyone.” In conferring with members of other schools and park commissions who brought inclusive playgrounds to their communities, we gained an understanding of the processes, challenges, and resources needed to facilitate a successful project of this nature. Examples of this work include the development of a strategic plan, the research and defining of design and surfacing elements, the recruitment of ambassadors, and establishing the framework for supporting a campaign.

2012 afforded us the opportunity to meet and brief most of the stakeholders of the playground project. These visits, meetings and presentations are just the beginning of the relationships we have built and will continue to build throughout the project. We established relationships with local mayors, city councils, home owners' associations and the Mounds View Schools leadership.

Investing in the Dream

We have invested countless hours planning, researching, and executing the beginning of the plan that will culminate in securing the necessary resources to build “A Playground for Everyone.”

We are pleased to report that we have raised \$46,000 to date. Although this reflects a small percentage of our overall goal, it is noteworthy that these funds were committed in advance of any overt fundraising. We are optimistic that as we begin to implement our development plan, we are positioned to secure significant philanthropic support.

We agree with those who have described our plan as ambitious; this is an unprecedented undertaking for Turtle Lake and the surrounding community. However, we believe that we are positioned to achieve our goal. We look forward to harnessing our passion and providing everyone the opportunity to support this dream by participating in the campaign.

In 2012, we have dreamed, researched and planned. As we share our dream with the community, we anticipate broad and generous philanthropic investments that will create a place where all can play without boundaries – “A Playground for Everyone.”



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