

Inclusive Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

By: Rachel Goldstein

The official start of summer is almost here, and while I'm sure it will be a hot one, it also brings more opportunities for outdoor activities amongst families, friends and neighbors. Remember running around the playground when you were a child? Remember the games and competitions you would make up with friends at the park? Remember the feeling of achieving your personal best during a workout?

Recreation and active leisure pursuits are vital to improving health and wellness and promoting healthier lifestyles and a sense of community for all individuals involved. The ability to develop and implement recreation programs, meeting that meet the needs of all citizens is the ultimate measure of success. Across the country, playgrounds and fitness areas are being transformed beyond just ADA compliant and accessible into truly inclusive and "boundless" models. Inclusive playgrounds and fitness areas take into account not just the physical equipment and structure, but incorporate the emotional, social and psychological benefits of play. It embraces the philosophy that children and adults of all abilities benefit immensely from being able to play and interact together, alongside family, friends, or any other person.

Federal accessibility guidelines have been around since the 1990's, but in recent years there has been a bigger push by parents, advocates, and designers, for an inclusive play and fitness movement. "Boundless Playgrounds" are being constructed to help communities create a place where all children and adults, with or without disabilities, can develop essential skills for life as they learn together through play. Playgrounds such as "Casey's Clubhouse" in Dove Park, Grapevine, TX, include features that address physical, cognitive, sensory, and emotional needs of all children including misting dolphins, a universally accessible clubhouse and 'living trees.' Further, Miami's own Concord Park (3301 SW 114 Ave., Miami) opened a new Fitness Zone® exercise area consisting of ten fitness stations with strength training and cardio exercise equipment, with several machines allowing individuals using wheelchairs to use the machines while remaining in their wheelchair.

Inclusive recreation opportunities benefit everyone. It is exciting to see the action taken around us to increase inclusive outdoor recreation opportunities. We all can play a part in ensuring that such opportunities increase throughout our community and as you participate in more outdoor activities this summer, I hope you make sure to encourage the inclusion of children and adults with disabilities into all such activities.