

# **Report on Accessible Playgrounds Survey– October 26, 2016**

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## **Background**

The Accessibility Advisory Committee (ACCAC), with the help of City staff in Communications and Environmental and Parks Planning, designed a survey on Accessible Playgrounds. The goal of the survey was to gather information from parents of children with disabilities, or with a disability themselves, about their experience of existing City of London playgrounds. We wanted to collect input on what works and what needs improvement. This information will be used in planning future accessible playground projects.

An e-mail was sent on May 28, 2016, to 18 organizations within the London accessibility network, to announce the survey launch and how to access it via the City of London website. The survey was closed on October 24, 2016.

Signs were also posted in 19 District Parks across the City, to inform park users of the survey.

## **Survey Participation**

In total, we received 15 responses to the survey. However, only 6 responses were filled out by our target audience of parents of a child with a disability. Some of these answers were incomplete and one did not specify a location.

We also received one e-mail from a parent of a child with special needs who saw the sign in a park.

## **Survey Results**

Our goal was to get input from children with disabilities and their parents, rather than the general public. The statements below are taken only from the 6 responses from this target audience:

- Parks visited included Springbank, Gibbons, Thames Park, Basil Grover, and Greenway.
- Half the people visited the playground with 2 children aged 5-12. One person with more than 2 children, one under 5 and one over 12; one person with more than 2 children under 5; and one with only one child, between the ages of 5 to 12.

- All respondents stated that their child had a disability affecting their ability to play at the playground and all checked mobility. Most respondents reported that their child used a wheelchair as an assistive device. Some mentioned using a manual wheelchair and some a power wheelchair.
- All respondents stated that their child required the support of a person during their play experience.
- Only one of the respondent had a disability themselves.
- Respondents rated the access from the street to the park as Easy or OK.
- They rated the access to the play component within the park as Difficult, OK or Easy (for Springbank Park only).
- Children found the play structure or components to be either 'Not interesting' (3 responses – Springbank and Gibbons) or 'OK' (2 responses – Gibbons and Thames/ Basil Grover/ Greenway). Only one respondent chose 'Fun' but no location or play element was provided.
- When asked what elements of the playground were most fun to play at, respondents answered:
  - Fresh air
  - Swings
  - Going up the ramp, musical pieces, aero-glider, rubber surfacing
  - Spray pad
  - Most aspects with help of parent, but that is a lot of work
- All respondents but one indicated that they experienced accessibility challenges at the park or playground and those included:
  - No wheelchair accessible swing
  - Most components require the help of an adult
  - Ramp leads nowhere
  - Ground cover is terrible and no ramps throughout
- When asked how many features at the playground was your child able to play with and enjoy, most respondents answered 'Few to None', one 'Some' and one 'Most'.
- Three respondents would recommend the playground they visited to others, and two would not recommend it.
- Some of the other comments received include:
  - More things for a child in a wheelchair to be able to use such as merry-go-round or swings
  - A barrier would be helpful around the sand pit / digger to prevent falling in
  - The accessible swing seat is beside the baby swings and prevents interactions with peers of similar age
  - Saucer swings are not functional for child with low tone, paralysis, or function of their limbs and torso
  - The rubber surfacing is amazing

- Climbing structure design need more input from kids who use assisting devices
- One goal/desire is to have children with mobility issues play independently, this is not the case for most parks in the City of London

Finally, the person who sent comments via e-mail also suggested:

- More playgrounds
- Multi-fixture playgrounds, with a mix of static (slide) and non-static fixtures (swings, seesaws)
- More shade
- Sand base or sandbox
- More artificial hills for winter activities
- Only example of excellence is the newly renovated Springbank playground

## Survey Interpretation

Since the response rate was low and only a portion of responses was filled out by our target audience, these results are not significant. However, they show some trends and bring up some questions that may be worth investigating further, such as:

- It is very difficult to reach our target audience of children with disabilities or parents who have a disability themselves. It is possible that they are currently not using the parks. **How can we get in contact with our target audience?**
- Mobility issues seem to be the most important in terms of affecting your ability to play at the playground. **Maybe other disabilities do not affect the play experience as much and do not provide as big of a barrier?**
- There is a strong desire for kids with mobility issues to play independently and with other kids when at the playground. This is currently not the case in our existing playgrounds as help from a person, usually a parent, is required to participate. **What type of play opportunity would allow children with mobility issues to play independently, by themselves and with others kids?**
- Most children with disabilities do not find that the play components are 'fun' to play with. Most are perceived as 'not interesting' or just 'OK'. **What type of play opportunity would be fun for kids with mobility issues?**
- The use of rubber safety surfacing greatly improves the ability for children in a wheelchair to move around independently through the play space, while woodchips create a challenge in terms of accessibility. **How can the City of London build more playgrounds with rubber safety surfacing?**

## **Next steps**

A new contact was added to our accessibility network list: Thames Valley Children's Centre. One suggestion is to do a focus group with them and visit a few playgrounds in the Spring / Summer of 2017. Test sites could be located in London or in other municipalities. We will be looking for directions from ACACC on how to proceed.

## **Conclusion**

With its low participation rate, the Accessible Playground Survey did not meet our expectations in terms of providing valuable input into planning future accessible playgrounds. However, it did show some trends and raised questions on how to better provide an enjoyable park experience, especially for children with mobility issues. Most importantly, we need to find a better way to reach our target audience.

## **List of Attached Documents**

### **Appendix A**

1. E-mail / poster sent and list of organizations
2. Sign and list of parks
3. Accessible Playground Survey page on City website
4. E-mail from S. Volodarsky

### **Appendix B**

5. Full survey responses – overview

### **Appendix C**

6. Full survey responses – individual responses