



From Accessible Dreams to Enduring Practice.

How the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's
Access to Recreation Initiative has allowed people, institutions,
and communities to change practice and policy in creating
inclusive recreation opportunities for all citizens.



Access to Recreation White Paper
Prepared for Midwest Community Foundations' Ventures
a supporting organization of the Council of Michigan Foundations



“This caused me to wonder what difficulties were in the paths of needy parents who seek help for their children and I resolved to lend what aid I could.”

In 1913 Will Kellogg learned firsthand about the limited options and resources for children and families with special needs. An accident resulting in traumatic brain injury left Mr. Kellogg’s grandson, Kenneth, permanently disabled. “Although I was amply able to pay the medical bills, I found it almost impossible to obtain adequate treatment for him,” Kellogg wrote. “This caused me to wonder what difficulties were in the paths of needy parents who seek help for their children and I resolved to lend what aid I could.” That quest led to the establishment of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 1930 and later the Ann J. Kellogg School in Battle Creek, Michigan. The Kellogg School was among the first in the United States to teach students both with and without disabilities in the same classroom, setting the standard for equal access and opportunity.

The Legacy of **W.K. Kellogg** and the **Power of Access.**

Seventy-five years later, Access to Recreation, a four-year initiative funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, supported community foundations, parks and recreation departments, advocacy groups, and individuals as they worked to provide greater inclusion and access to recreation opportunities, with a focus on people with disabilities. Its successes include creating community awareness, building capacity and expertise, engaging groups often excluded from recreation planning, and creating policy conversation, commitment, and change at the local and state levels surrounding equality of access to recreation facilities and programs.

In April 2010, Access to Recreation was recognized with the Council on Foundations Critical Impact Award, which honors “innovative leadership, bold visions, and significant impact that serves as a model for advancing the common good through effective grantmaking.”

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From “A-ha” Moment to Policy Change.

“This is a change in the way we build things, it’s a change in the way we serve the public, but at its core it’s a change in philosophy.”

Barriers and frustrations interfering with enjoyment of recreation experiences are encountered daily by millions of American families. According to the 2000 census, 8 percent of non-institutionalized children between the ages of 5 and 20 have a disability. These percentages increase dramatically with age. Nineteen percent of American adults between 21 and 64 have a disability. For those 65 and older, the number rises to 42 percent. Figures for Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio mirror these national numbers. Still, one county commissioner first proclaimed after listening to an introductory Access to Recreation presentation: “We don’t have people like that in our community.”

During the past four years, the combined activities of engaged communities, emboldened advocates and families, advisory groups, planning, and fundraising have resulted in the creation of more than forty demonstrations of accessible recreation built on the Principles of Universal Design. Beyond its purpose as a public recreation facility, each trail, park, tree house,

splashpad and beach ramp also serves as an active and eloquent testament to equality in action. This “active advocacy” of Access to Recreation projects is not lost on Bob Sawtelle, park manager of O’Bannon Woods State Park in Indiana:

“This is a change in the way we build things, it’s a change in the way we serve the public, but at its core it’s a change in philosophy. We have learned so much. We’re planning for inclusion now right from the beginning and not as an afterthought. And we’ve become a regional showcase for changing hearts and minds. Hundreds of officials have visited here – from the Department of Natural Resources, other state departments and neighboring states. They walk the Mile Trail and at the end of that mile it’s the ‘a-ha’ moment for them. And they want to talk about it and they make commitments. Because it’s not theoretical anymore. And the people on this trail aren’t theoretical. And the opportunities aren’t theoretical. They’re all real. And when they go back home they will never plan or build things the same way again.”



The Principles of Universal Design

In 1997, a working group of architects, product designers, engineers, and environmental design researchers collaborated to establish the Seven Principles of Universal Design for the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

Universal Design develops spaces that are usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. While all recreation projects must meet minimum ADA requirements,

Access to Recreation projects incorporate the Principles of Universal Design as part of the planning and design process.

1. Equitable Use

The design should provide the same means of use for all people, avoiding segregating or stigmatizing any users. The use should be identical, whenever possible, and equivalent when not.

2. Flexibility in Use

The design should accommodate a wide range of individual preferences and abilities, allowing for different methods and pace.

3. Simple and Intuitive Use

Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

4. Perceptible Information

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of the user’s sensory abilities or ambient conditions.

5. Tolerance for Error

The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

6. Low Physical Effort

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue by a wide range of people.

7. Size and Space for Approach and Use

People of all abilities can approach, reach, manipulate and use all features regardless of the user’s body size, whether user is seated or standing, or using assistive devices.

For more information:

<http://tinyurl.com/A2R-Design>

A quick review of policy, implemented and pending, speaks to the transformative power of this work. In Michigan, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (MDNRE) spearheaded this change, including:

- Change in the MDNRE mission statement to incorporate the word “accessible”:
“The Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment is committed to the conservation, protection, management, accessible use and enjoyment of the State’s natural resources for current and future generations.”
- Incorporation of access goals into the MDNRE Parks and Recreation Division long-term strategic plan: “To provide universal access to state parks, boating facilities and programs.”
- Establishment of the MDNRE Accessibility Advisory Council as the single source of strategy for accessibility guidelines and standards.
- Changes to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant guidelines and criteria, altering the scoring system for proposals from local units of government to provide an incentive for incorporating the Principles of Universal Design into project planning. The Trust Fund is funded by oil and gas leases issued by the state. Auctions in May 2010 resulted in an additional \$150 million available to the fund.
- Special hunting dates opened to disabled military veterans, rules governing use of crossbows and other adaptive hunting equipment for other people with disabilities, and new guidelines for the use of personal mobility devices.

In other Access to Recreation states, policy has addressed accessibility and inclusion on numerous fronts at local and county levels. Among other statewide activities:

In Ohio, an updated “Access for All” guidebook including outdoor areas has been created, as have toolkits addressing accessibility in the K–12 curriculum. In addition, collaboration with the Safe Routes to School program has begun.

In Illinois, there now is statewide training for parks professionals and a recommendation for the creation of additional special recreation associations, which would allow municipalities to raise dedicated funds for accessible recreation.

In Indiana, the Department of Natural Resources’ Five Year Master Plan contains considerable guidance on Universal Design and minimum accessibility expectations for municipalities. Additionally, new trail development guidelines and a report card for recreation accessibility are under way.

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Background:

From **Playgrounds** to Inclusion **Revolution.**

The Access to Recreation initiative began as a natural successor to Able to Play, a 2005 W.K. Kellogg Foundation 75th Anniversary Legacy Project. When children of all abilities can play together, they develop social skills and habits of acceptance that last a lifetime. They also acquire the cognitive abilities that only play can help develop. In recognition of that fact, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation helped fund an effort to build barrier-free play spaces throughout Michigan. These playgrounds, built in partnership with local communities, provided a place for all children to play together. These spaces have opened hearts and minds, initiated conversations about access and acceptance, and transformed communities. But there was more work to be done.

Access to Recreation broadened the vision of Able to Play to provide increased access to recreation in a four-state region including Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio.

Recreation is more than a luxury – it provides important benefits for child development, health and wellness, social cohesion, intergenerational connectedness, and just plain fun. A 2005 study by California State Parks, “Health and Social Benefits of Recreation,” documented the benefits of recreation in our society, concluding that recreation “strengthens communities, promotes social bonds and improves physical and mental health.”

Not surprisingly, it also found that individuals with disabilities receive all of the very same benefits from participating in recreational activities. However, lack of opportunities often prevents them and their families from being active.

In 2006, grants were awarded to five community foundations in Michigan. The Michigan Recreation and Park Association Foundation received funding to use for grants to local parks and recreation departments, and for education and training. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources received funding for state park and state recreation projects and to use as matching funds for Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grants to promote access.

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During 2007, three additional community foundations in Michigan received awards. At the same time, \$4.5 million was designated for community foundations in Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio, allowing an additional 14 projects to engage communities in these surrounding states.



The projects funded through the Access to Recreation initiative were diverse and imaginative – from playgrounds and nature trails to sleeping cabins and a tree house. All share one critical feature: Access to Recreation projects incorporate the Principles of Universal Design, as set forth by the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University. Universal Design uses this set of principles, rather than regulations, to create places enjoyed in the same manner by as many people as possible.

Access to Recreation projects seek to avoid unintended “separate-but-equal” consequences of ADA and other regulations, instead creating an inclusive “equality of experience.”

Active and empowered advisory committees were essential to each project’s success. Committees provided valuable input on the types of recreation opportunities that were needed by the community; identified barriers that prevented facilities from being fully utilized by people of all abilities; and designed features that would overcome those barriers.

Snapshot:

When **Warriors Return** to an **Unequal World.**

Without warning, a routine day in Iraq suddenly turned into hell for Army Sergeant Rob Wentworth as a suicide bomber exploded a car bomb near the facility he was guarding. Wentworth survived, with back, knee, and ankle injuries, as well as traumatic brain injury. Before he left for service, Sergeant Wentworth was an avid hunter. When he came home to Michigan in 2007, his injuries allowed him to sit in a deer stand, but without the strength to pull back a bow. A simple solution would be to shoot with a crossbow. However, hunting laws prohibited their use because of the perception that crossbows provide an unfair advantage.

Sergeant Wentworth is one of hundreds of thousands of veterans who return from service with temporary or permanent disabilities. Servicemen and women returning from combat overseas add to the totals daily. A 2008 report from the RAND Corporation estimated that 320,000 of the 1.64 million veterans of Iraq or Afghanistan suffered a traumatic head injury during deployment. These men and women come home hoping to return to the simple, collegial pleasures they left behind: To be outdoors with their families, to enjoy a stroll in the woods, to hunt or fish, to play with their children. And too often, these opportunities are denied.



As journalist and Emmy and Peabody Award-winning broadcaster John Hockenberry (himself a wheelchair user) noted in his remarks at the Able to Play convening in 2006: “We will bring home from Iraq a new generation of returning soldiers. Thousands will be saved because our medical technology is extraordinary. These are soldiers that would not have returned from previous wars. But they will return with myriad disabilities that we have not yet fully comprehended yet alone provided for. They will return to a society that will systematically shut them out of many of the everyday opportunities they enjoyed before they fought for us. Their pursuit of happiness will be exponentially diminished.”

Since Sergeant Wentworth’s return in 2007, new legislation brought about as a result of the DNR Accessibility Council transferred primary oversight responsibility related to crossbow permitting for persons with disabilities from the

Legislature to the Natural Resources Commission (NRC). This empowers the NRC to issue orders related to the use of crossbows in hunting by persons with disabilities, allowing greater flexibility in establishing policy.

Rick Briggs, Veteran Affairs Consultant with the Brain Injury Association of Michigan, believes it’s hard to overstate the value of therapeutic recreation for returning veterans. “For anybody who’s enjoyed things like hunting or fishing, all the stresses of life seem to take a back seat when they get out in nature.”

Sergeant Wentworth agrees. “There’s not a lot of woods and water in Iraq or Afghanistan, and coming back and not having to worry about a roadside bomb or a sniper, and just being able to chill out with some guys fishing or hunting – you know, it’s huge,” he said.

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Snapshot:

A Level Ground for Learning.

A letter received from an Illinois physical therapist who resides and works near an Access to Recreation project, Longfellow Park, illustrates the value of inclusive play for children with disabilities and their families:

“I am a physical therapist who treats kids in the area thru the Early Intervention Program (which encourages us to see kids in a natural environment in places where typically developing kids hang out). I often see my kids at the park. I’ve been calling Longfellow my new office and the families love it. I tease that buried deep under the park is some kind of happy magic as the kids play happily and I’ve never seen pushing, fussing or fighting there! Tallulah has made oodles of progress navigating the equipment and her mom was thrilled to show me how she can now hang from the rings!

“And Niya would only come to stand by pulling up to a surface till she discovered the waterpad – I left there with a big head of frizz, but so proud of my pal’s accomplishments! It’s made my treatment sessions go by quickly and the moms feel supported by the other moms at the park – I’m sure the other moms are curious

who the bossy aunt is challenging these kids, as we don’t wear signs announcing therapy in session! Anyway, I just wanted to tell you how grateful I am as well as the families I serve.”

It is widely acknowledged that peer inclusion and play are critical in child development. In Kentucky, a recent report from the Council for Better Education and the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence identified students with disabilities as a group that remains caught in disturbing achievement gaps, scoring lower than nearly all other student groups and improving too slowly to reach state proficiency goals.

Of all regular classroom middle-school student groups that fell behind the 2009 statewide Kentucky average for their classmates, students with disabilities lagged a disappointing 30 points behind.

“The disability gaps remain painful,” said Daviess County Superintendent Tom Shelton, president of the Council for Better Education. “Although we have been able to improve results for this group over the last two years, we need to improve even faster to prepare them for adult success in a competitive global economy.”



Building Projects. Changing Minds.

Access to Recreation supported collaboration at many levels, beginning with Midwest Community Foundations' Ventures (MCFV), formed by regional associations in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio as a supporting organization of the Council of Michigan Foundations.

The message of inclusion has extended beyond the initial recreation projects into a mindset of inclusion for many communities. Several community foundations involved in Access to Recreation report that they now require all grant-funded projects to provide access beyond ADA mandates.

“Just having conversations about accessibility to recreation or anything else, it became very quickly such a no-brainer,” said Steve Gilliland, executive director of the Harrison County (Indiana) Community Foundation. “And it’s carrying over to other grants we’re making. I was delighted recently when one of my grants committee people asked, ‘Well, is this thing accessible?’ It was like almost natural for someone to ask that question.”



Access to Recreation has also expanded understanding of the scope of the population being addressed. People with disabilities include those who use wheelchairs or walkers, people with visual or hearing disabilities, and those with cognitive disorders, among others. In fact, nearly everyone at some time will experience a permanent or temporary disability.

“Accessibility is an issue for a lot of seniors,” says Gilliland. “You know, grannies and grandpas who want to take their kids to the state park have trouble getting around. Soldiers old and young. It is a community issue, because, sooner or later, God willing, we will all get to that point where getting around is a little tougher.”

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In Ohio, the Dayton Foundation partnered with the City of Kettering and others on a new environmental learning center. In a process replicated by all grant recipients, the foundation went about ensuring that the center would be accessible to everyone by involving a wide group of citizens with varying disabilities. “We involved eight different organizations who were service providers, and also made sure we included individuals who were served by those organizations,” says Joe Baldasare, vice president of development for the Dayton Foundation. “We wanted to make sure we got ideas and input from the organizations, but most importantly, we wanted input from people with disabilities.”

The Kettering project leaders discovered something else: By bringing diverse segments of the community into a discussion, opponents can be converted to allies. Baldasare recalls that the change in atmosphere from the first public meeting to the second was remarkable, with the first meeting marked by expressions of hesitation from neighbors of the proposed project. “When you say ‘disability,’ people conjure up various kinds of scenarios without knowing we’re all only temporarily able-bodied. We talked to them about their elderly parents who were now using a cane or a walker. And quickly it started to click for them.” One initially vocal opponent of the project became an enthusiastic advocate and was added to the advisory committee.

The value of this approach goes far beyond the project itself. “Our particular project allows us as a community, together, to offer new recreational opportunities we otherwise wouldn’t be able to offer,” said Dayton Foundation President Michael Parks. “Beyond that, the project is very collaborative and has brought lots of organizations together. In addition, the leverage in bringing new resources to our community has been wonderful.”

In the end, Access to Recreation is less about building playgrounds and more about changing communities. Joe Baldasare looks forward to a time when inclusion for all will not be an issue. “I still look at one sign in the middle of our downtown that rubs me the wrong way,” he says. “It says, ‘Handicap accessible. Enter through the garage.’ I look forward to the day when there’s no need for any of those signs.”

That day may arrive soon, thanks to the advisory councils that were established to provide guidance on the recreation projects and remain in place to advise on distribution of the endowments that were established by each of the community foundations that received Access to Recreation funding. And this changed mindset has expanded – to county boards, mayors, parks boards, school boards, city and state departments, and in the hearts and minds of just plain folks.

“We knew we couldn’t afford to do everything at once, but we wanted a plan that we could grow into over time. We will never build things the same again.”



The Whitley County Community Foundation advisory council in Indiana is an example of a group that convened to provide input on one project – an accessible splashpad – and have stayed together to make recommendations for future accessibility improvements. They range from poured-in-place surfacing around playground equipment to creating a new buddy league baseball team that allows children with and without disabilities to play side-by-side. Executive Director September McConnell calls the splashpad the defining moment for Columbia City. “I think this community is going to go on to do some really great things and I believe this was a catalyst.”

The Sandusky, Ohio, vision is one that can provide inspiration for communities everywhere. As part of its Access to Recreation work, the community developed a master plan that included the greenhouse campus, updated and renovated to provide access for all, and three adjacent parcels of land. According to Barb Hanck, executive director of the Sandusky/Erie County Community Foundation, “We knew we couldn’t afford to do everything at once, but we wanted a plan that we could grow into over time. We will never build things the same again.”

As part of that plan, the City of Sandusky allocated \$125,000 in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to build an accessible splashpad. Future plans are to install new playground equipment, with additional CDBG funds and volunteer labor. “We haven’t calculated an exact dollar figure for the in-kind support that the City has provided to the Access to Recreation project, but it is many, many hours and without their help, we could not have done this project.”

The in-kind support and cash investments in the greenhouse campus and now extending over to Huron Ave. Park total more than \$1,000,000. The master plan for the Huron Ave. Park includes a children’s garden, a skateboard park, a new basketball court, and picnic area. “Our goal is to make this a first-class urban park, with something for everyone, and fully accessible for everyone,” adds Hanck. “After all, it’s everyone’s park.”

In Springfield, Illinois, an 80-acre cornfield has been transformed into a community destination that will serve as a national example of inclusive design for both indoor and outdoor recreation. Along with Erin’s Pavilion, a 15,000-square-foot community center, Southwind Park includes an urban trail system, fishing piers, play areas, and more, all built to the Principles of Universal Design.



“This park has allowed the entire community to revisit the issue Lincoln taught us – that all men are created equal but they’re not necessarily treated equally.”

Diane Mathis, director of development for the Springfield Park District, reflects on this Access to Recreation project: “Springfield is on the map for a lot of different reasons. One of them is the tall guy with the stovepipe hat. This park has allowed the entire community to revisit the issue Lincoln taught us – that all men are created equal but they’re not necessarily treated equally. That’s why Southwind Park is so important to us. Before we built this park, individuals with any type or level of disability weren’t really treated equally.

“We now have a wonderful place that not only welcomes everyone but at the same time makes this powerful statement. This is a venue that will actually modify human behavior, allowing us to all see the world through Lincoln’s eyes and to become aware of what the true meaning of inclusion is.”

Access to Recreation has left an indelible mark on communities, philanthropy, and policy across four Midwestern states. It has brought people together to recognize and celebrate their common humanness. It has helped build participatory monuments to inclusion and justice. It has awakened new groups of donors to community foundations. It has moved state and local policy toward a deeper view of access for all citizens. And the work moves forward – as each community foundation, parks department, association, advisory committee, community, and department of natural resources engaged in the initiative realizes new opportunities, ideas, and ways to build on the simple and profound concepts of Universal Design. This work is replicable. Indeed, it is already being replicated as workshops, seminars, visits, and discussions create new advocates, raising the call for accessible recreation for people of all ages and all abilities.



Midwest Community
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a supporting organization of the
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