

October 23, 2017

City of Calgary

Re: City of Calgary Accessible Playground Implementation Plan

Dear City of Calgary Councillors and Accessibility Advisory Committee Members:

I am writing in support of the draft **Inclusive Playground Implementation Plan/Fall 2017** developed by Matthew Blair, Park Infrastructure Lead for the City of Calgary. As someone who is been working in the field of developing meaningful access for people with disabilities across the built environment for more than 27 years - the last two of which have been as the Vice President of Access and Inclusion for the Rick Hansen Foundation, I was particularly heartened to see the depth of understanding reflected in this review, along with the concrete practical steps for moving forward over the long-term provided. The recognition that playgrounds need be inclusive places - not only for children but also for adults with disabilities, is an important part of developing meaningful access and an area often overlooked in park planning.

Facility planning which accommodates all users – that challenges users at their own developmental level on age appropriate play equipment; planning that includes adults with disabilities accompanying children in the capacity of parent or care-giver, and does it all as part of the core design imperatives of the facility is a critical part of creating recreational properties that built a sense of community and support intergenerational living in a time of rapidly aging populations.

The report identifies the limitations of the existing methodology – in particular the current ‘ad hoc’ approach; a lack of real understand of what ‘accessible’, ‘inclusive’ and ‘usable’ play environments actually mean, and the assumption that simply because play equipment is ‘accessible’, it has play value in terms of interest and/or challenge. This along with identified systemic barriers such as insufficient provincial and/or municipal policies around real accessibility, insufficient standards, and a lack of understanding that disability covers many more facets than just the physical, are common problems cities face as the demographics and the needs of their citizen’s change. To help address this issue nationally, the Rick Hansen Foundation has developed Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification (RHFAC) ratings – a LEED like, national program that assesses the built environment to determine the level of meaningful access provided at a given site, facility, or building and places it on a national universal scale for accessibility. It is our hope that the City of Calgary will embrace the findings and direction of this report, which if implemented, would likely result in an **RHFAC Gold** rating for Calgary city parks – if the City of Calgary wished to participate in our program.

I believe the report reflects a real understanding of the importance of making play experiences accessible for the whole family as part of the long term planning. Further, while I have not had the opportunity to do a detailed review of all aspects of this report, I also agree with Mr. Blair’s recognition of the current state of affairs and applaud his approach to developing meaningful access over the long term. Access is ensuring everyone can *enter* a park. Inclusion is ensuring that everyone can *use* the park. This report represents a first step toward real inclusion.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this discussion. Please let me know if there are ways in which the RHFAC program can help develop this initiative or if we can otherwise support these efforts.

Sincerely,



Brad McCannell, Vice President, Access & Inclusion

