

## 'We All Play' is more than a motto; it's a commitment

By Shari Woodbury  
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This guest column was written by Shari Woodbury, executive director of the Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County, Inc., and Susan Rinne, executive director of Options.

On August 1, the Karst Farm Playscape Spraypark opened to the delight of hundreds of excited children and their families. The park is the culmination of years of work by the Monroe County Access to Recreation Partnership, a diverse group of community members and organizations dedicated to developing a place where everyone can play.

The Playscape began as a dream. Options board member Leo Cook envisioned developing an inclusive recreation area. When he shared this idea with Sophia Travis, then a Monroe County Council member, it proved to be perfect timing.

The county had been looking for ways to enhance a 30-acre section of Karst Park. Representatives from Options and Monroe County Parks and Recreation immediately began plans for the Playscape, and the Community Foundation joined the partnership in 2007. Together, the group leveraged a \$411,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Access to Recreation Initiative.

One might think that an amenity like the Playscape is nice but not an essential for our community. More people than you might realize are affected by how inclusive our built environment is — or isn't. Some facts:

In the greater Monroe County area, there are more than 23,000 people with a disability.

In Monroe County alone, there are more than 800 veterans with disabilities.

Nationally, one in 10 children has a disability that prevents him or her from playing on traditional play structures.

Locally, a survey found that children with disabilities had few options for both playgrounds and water play.

And the most startling fact of all is that one in four people will experience a disability sometime in their lifetime, so maybe the rest of us should think of ourselves as "temporarily able-bodied." The bottom line is, we need environments that welcome everyone. That's why, for this recreation project, our group adopted the motto "We All Play!"

What is an inclusive environment? We use the terms "inclusive," "barrier-free," and "universal." They mean that a building or recreational amenity is usable by as many people as possible regardless of age, ability or situation. Universal design strives to be a broad-spectrum solution that produces environments that are usable and effective for everyone, not just people with disabilities. The important point is that accessibility is not an afterthought; it is built into the design.

The Karst Playscape is a great example of a fully inclusive play area. Its universally accessible playground and water splash pad invites people of all abilities to play. It is simple: When all buildings, recreational facilities, and businesses are available to everyone, then everyone wins.

What is next for the Playscape? The first phase of the project was supported by Monroe County, individual donors, and Options, as well as matching dollars from the WK Kellogg Foundation. It is a great start, but we hope there is much more to come.

The partnership will continue to seek funds to double the size of the playground. There are plans for a nature area, sandbox and another set of play equipment. The endowment at the Community Foundation will help maintain the Playscape and support other projects; donations are accepted today or at any time, and will ensure that "We All Play!" A diverse advisory committee will recommend how grants are awarded to further the cause of inclusive recreation.

In our creative, caring, articulate community, there will surely be additional ideas about how to make the most of this playground. We hope to hear your ideas and would welcome your involvement! You can find out more at [www.weallplay.org](http://www.weallplay.org) or call Options at 332-9615 to help vision and create the expansion of the Playscape.