

## Universal Design in a Recreational Setting – Mark Trieglaff



Forest Glen Park, through the collaboration of architects, city planners, citizens and people with disabilities, has been able to not only meet accessibility standards but also exceed them through incorporating Universal Design features throughout the park and playground elements. We examined six park elements as they relate not only to accessibility code, but how they embody Universal Design Principles. The six elements were walkways, playground, playground surface, swings, raised water feature and garden bed, and picnic tables and shelter. The walkways installed throughout the park have a running slope less than 5% to make the park

walkways useful to more people. By incorporating Universal Design Principle One, focusing on the same means of use for all users and Principle Six, minimizing sustained physical effort, the walkways provide easy access to a greater number of people.

To design and install a UD playground is a significant financial commitment. Funding for Forest Glen Park's UD features came through an Access to Recreation grant provided by the Kellogg Foundation. It was determined to go beyond ADA standards to better fit the needs of the children using a wheelchair or mobility device at the elevated part of the playground. The grant allowed for the installation of a ramp system that extends from one end of the elevated play components of the playground to the other, allowing access to 90% of the play components. This design became more inclusive for all children and parents on the playground. There are many UD features of the playground equipment including an open mesh platform and interactive periscope.



The grant funds also allowed for Woodridge Park District to install a rubberized surface instead of the engineered wood fibers. Within the surface additional interactive features were installed including moguls similar to a ski hill. These moguls are placed at different heights and widths, and provide options for challenging children and adults using a wheelchair or mobility device. To assist a person in determining the height and challenge of each mogul, a color-coded system indicates the changing levels. Providing perceptible information by the color code incorporates Universal Design Principle Four. The rubberised surface was also placed under the swings and the swings are located separate from the playground providing a safer play environment. Two accessible seat swings designed for a person with a more severe physical disability in need of additional back and neck support are provided, going beyond the recreation standards.



## Universal Design in a Recreational Setting – Mark Trieglaff



The raised garden bed was designed from the beginning for use within a program for the park district. The Woodridge Park District is part of the South East Association for Special Parks and Recreation that serves people with disabilities in their community. The objective is to offer the teen and young adult program the opportunity to plant and care for the garden. The garden is also part of a horticultural class offered to residents with or without disabilities. The raised garden bed design allows for ease of reach to care for the plants at various heights. So if a person has a bad back, uses a wheelchair, or is shorter in height, they can still participate in the different programs and activities, providing equitable use of Principle One. The ledge along the side of the garden provides a person with limited stamina an area to sit and participate without exerting a great deal of energy. This space and height design provides a more equitable use, and easy spacing for approaching the fountain and raised garden bed, putting into practice the size and approach elements of Universal Design Principle Seven. Many other interactive features of the raised bed and water feature include water fountain, tactile water trough, and brass interactive water sprayers in the shape of native park reptiles.



An important element of the park design is the location of the accessible tables. One accessible table is located under the shelter to allow a person to be out of the sun. The other accessible table is in the sun, incorporating Principle One's dispersion of accessible seating. The close proximity of the picnic tables to the other park features and raised garden allows visitors to enjoy the outdoors and be near the playground, garden and fountain to watch their children and friends. Not only do residents with and without disabilities visit the park, many people from surrounding communities travel to Forest Glen Park to use the playground, interact with the raised garden bed, and enjoy the picnic shelter area.

Many significant contributors to the design, development and funding support were needed to make Forest Glen Park the premier universally designed park it is today. The Kellogg Foundation, DuPage Community Foundation and the Village of Woodridge covered the financing. Hitchcock Design Group, Woodridge Park District, and ACTServices, Inc., along with the community and disability focus groups, worked diligently on design and implementation of the unique features of this park. This collaborative effort has resulted in a treasured addition to the Village of Woodridge and to all the families who use the park regularly.

[The full paper can be downloaded here.](#)

Mark Trieglaff  
ACTServices, Inc. USA (630) 303-3677  
Member of Rights & Inclusion Australia