

INCLUSIVE PLAY

A Health Equity Model at Venice Hope Park



Inclusive Play: A Health Equity Model at Venice Hope Park

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Mentor: Dr. Kashia Rosenau

Health Equity Challenge

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Abstract:

In Los Angeles, children with disabilities often face barriers to play due to a lack of accessible playgrounds. Traditional designs exclude those with mobility, sensory, and communication challenges – limiting opportunities for physical activity, social interaction, and development. These inequities are especially pronounced in the community surrounding California Hospital Medical Center (CHMC), where socioeconomic disparities further restrict access to recreational spaces.

In partnership with CHMC and its Hope Street Margolis Family Center, as well as in-kind support from Inclusion Matters by Shane’s Inspiration and the Social District, this project will transform Venice Hope Park into a model of inclusive play. It will establish a universally designed playground foundation co-created with local families through engagement events, surveys, and a Community Ambassador program.

Unlike playgrounds that only meet the minimum standards required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, the playground will feature inclusive equipment that supports developmental health. Examples include a marble panel to promote tactile sensory integration, a mirror panel to encourage visual tracking, and musical instruments to improve auditory processing.

Once completed, inclusive play events will be held to encourage peer interaction between children with and without disabilities and decrease social isolation for the former. Evaluation will assess the playground’s impact on the physical, social, and emotional health of disabled youth, generating data that could inform similar initiatives. Ultimately, this project could offer a replicable model for inclusive play spaces, particularly in community pocket parks, and spark broader conversations about health equity for people with disabilities across the life course.

Problem Statement:

Children with disabilities are often excluded from traditional playgrounds due to physical, sensory, and communication barriers, limiting their opportunities for physical activity and social interaction. Research shows that disabled children experience obesity at twice the rate of their non-disabled peers,¹ and autistic young adults are 66 percent more likely to be bullied and 28 percent more likely to contemplate or attempt suicide.² Despite the clear need for inclusive play, access to such environments remains limited.

In the area surrounding California Hospital Medical Center (CHMC), socioeconomic disparities further restrict access to recreational spaces. Among local families, 34.7 percent with children under five live below the federal poverty line and 42.7 percent of families rely on government assistance.³ For children with disabilities living in poverty, the lack of inclusive recreational space becomes a barrier not just to play, but to equitable development and health.

This project addresses these disparities by transforming Venice Hope Park into a model of inclusive play. What makes this project innovative is its holistic approach within a pocket park – one that combines accessibility with community-driven design and engagement. Many playgrounds only meet the minimum standards required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and inclusive playgrounds are almost non-existent in parks like Venice Hope because of budget and space constraints.⁴ Consequently, this project aims to demonstrate what is possible when strong organizational and community partnerships are formed. The equipment selection process and community engagement events position families as co-creators, allowing for ongoing feedback that shapes an inclusive space that advances not only health equity for disabled youth, but children of all abilities. Though long-term support is in place, the \$50,000 grant is the catalyst – without it, the playground cannot be built and its lasting community impact realized.

Community Partners:

The Hope Street Margolis Family Center (Hope Street), the primary project partner, is a community-based program of CHMC, that provides family-centered health, education, and social services.⁵ Since 1992, Hope Street has supported low-income families facing systemic barriers to healthcare, early childhood education, and recreation.⁵ Approximately 120 children in Hope Street's Head Start program, comprising 25% of its cohort, have disabilities or other functional challenges,⁶ making access to inclusive play spaces essential.

Venice Hope Park, which is owned by CHMC and managed by Hope Street, serves as a public gathering place for local families and a hub for free seasonal community events including Hope Street's Fall and Winter Festivals, family movie nights, and annual summer camp.⁷

Despite its role as a vital community space – heightened by being the only park in the area – Venice Hope Park currently lacks playground equipment, limiting opportunities for children, especially those with disabilities, to engage in active and inclusive play.⁷ This provides a window of opportunity to have inclusive equipment act as the building blocks of the playground, and in turn, ensure that disabled children have a health-promoting play space.

Key in-kind secondary community partners include Inclusion Matters by Shane's Inspiration (Inclusion Matters) and the Social District. Inclusion Matters, an international leader in inclusive playground design,⁸ will provide support to Hope Street through design, outreach, and program evaluation. The Social District provides community ambassadors in the neighborhood and community cleanup, including around Venice Hope Park.^{7,9}

CHMC/Hope Street, Inclusion Matters, and the Social District will contribute in-kind support for all project aspects beyond equipment and installation costs, including but not limited to community engagement and evaluation. Security is already provided through CHMC, and the

entire park is covered under the hospital's insurance.⁷ Additionally, per conversations with the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks, no permits will be required for this project. The substantial in-kind contributions (\$32,000/year from CHMC/Hope Street, \$50,000/year from the Social District, and \$25,000 from Inclusion Matters), will allow the \$50,000 award to be allocated toward equipment and the installation, with \$3,000 – \$5,000 reserved for unforeseen expenses. Notably, if the proposal is selected, the Social District will contribute an additional \$25,000 to enhance the playground's development (please see letters of support in Appendix C).

Goals and Objectives:

The primary goal of this project is to create a foundational inclusive playground space that improves physical, social, and emotional health outcomes for children with disabilities in the underserved community surrounding Hope Street and CHMC. By embedding universal design principles and positioning families of disabled children as central decision-makers, the project advances health equity and works to dismantle systemic barriers to play.

Children with disabilities often face exclusion from public spaces not because of individual limitations, but because of environmental design. This proposal aims to reverse that dynamic by co-creating a sensory-friendly playground that reflects the needs, strengths, and lived experiences of disabled children and their families. The long-term vision is to establish a model that can be replicated in other communities, proving that equitable, inclusive play is possible and can improve health outcomes for disabled youth.

To achieve these goals, the project will pursue the following objectives over a 12-month period with the backing of CHMC/Hope Street, Inclusion Matters, and the Social District.

1. Within the first three months, gather feedback from at least 50 local residents, focusing on families raising disabled children, through Play for All Design Days and school outreach. Recruit

and train a team of 7–10 volunteer Community Ambassadors – prioritizing parents of children with disabilities, early childhood educators, and local advocates – who will support outreach, help gather community feedback, and adopt neighborhood liaison roles.

2. Over the next three months, refine and finalize the playground design. Begin site preparation.

3. During months 7-9, install at least three sensory panels – play features that stimulate touch, sound, and sight to support healthy sensory integration and developmental outcomes – along with additional inclusive equipment that promotes well-being for children with disabilities. After the equipment is installed, host an Accessible Build Day, engaging local families in decorating the space to foster ownership and long-term community investment.

4. During months 10-12, hold a grand opening event and subsequently host at least three structured inclusive play events alongside other Hope Street activities to increase interactions between disabled and non-disabled children. In parallel, implement an evaluation framework using surveys and interviews to assess changes in the physical, social, and emotional health of 30 or more children with disabilities. Some of these events may occur post the 12-month timeframe.

Planned Activities:

The proposed project will be implemented in four key phases over the 12-month period, each designed to center the needs and experiences of children with disabilities and build a community-informed, health-promoting, and sustainable inclusive play space.

Phase 1: Community Engagement (Months 1–3)

The first three months will focus on building a strong foundation through community engagement. During this phase, an informational flyer will be developed by Hope Street and Inclusion Matters to raise awareness and encourage participation from parents with disabled children, educators, and additional stakeholders. A central component of this phase will be the

hosting of Play for All Design Days at Venice Hope Park. These community gatherings – planned to be held in conjunction with existing events such as Hope Street’s Park Festivals and neighborhood movie nights – will provide a platform for families with disabled children and other community members to offer feedback on the equipment selection process. Example pieces of equipment include: the Marble Panel to promote tactile sensory integration, the Fun Mirror Panel to encourage visual tracking, the Rhapsody Metallophone to improve auditory processing (Figure 1 in Appendix B), and the Chill Spinner to enhance proprioception awareness (Figure 2 in Appendix B).¹⁰⁻¹²

This early-stage input process will also include outreach to local schools and a survey on the playground design that families will be invited to provide feedback on. These activities will generate valuable data on preferred features and priorities. During this period, the project team will recruit volunteer Community Ambassadors – parents, advocates, and other community leaders – who will serve as liaisons and champions of the project throughout its development. To help ensure recruitment of families with disabled children at Hope Street and within the community, the project will leverage existing relationships with the approximately 120 families in Hope Street’s Head Start program that have children with disabilities or other functional challenges.⁶ Inclusion Matters will also tap into its extensive contact network, which includes individuals and families in the area surrounding CHMC. By centering the voices of families from the outset, this phase ensures that the playground reflects community needs and fosters long-term ownership, engagement, and stewardship.

Phase 2: Playground Design and Planning (Months 4–6)

Building on community feedback, the next phase will focus on design refinement and logistical planning. Updated plans will be shared with families and other relevant parties to

gather final input and build consensus. Collaboration with Inclusion Matters will be key to finalizing accessibility features and ensuring adherence to universal design standards that accommodate children of all abilities. This inclusive approach, combined with proactive planning, will help avoid delays and ensure a smooth construction process. The result will be a finalized, community-informed playground design that reflects shared values and priorities, setting the stage for successful implementation and long-term impact. Site preparation will begin concurrently with these efforts.

Phase 3: Playground Installation and Build Days (Months 7–9)

Once designs are finalized and the site is prepared, installation of the sensory play equipment will begin. After the equipment is installed, Hope Street will host an Accessible Build Day, inviting families and community volunteers to participate in hands-on activities such as decorating the playground area with stencils. These events will deepen community investment by transforming the playground into a shared space co-created by its users. Moreover, to ensure the sustainability of inclusive play for the community, a community ambassador from the Social District (separate from the 7-10 Community Ambassadors that will help ensure the community's perspectives shape the project) will be in the park during opening hours to provide an additional layer of oversight and act as a friendly informational resource for families. CHMC will continue to provide security and park maintenance as they currently do.

Phase 4: Community Launch and Evaluation (Months 10–12)

The final phase will culminate in a grand opening event that celebrates the shared achievement of inclusive play and a space where all families in the community are welcome. Post-launch, Hope Street and Inclusion Matters will continue to host inclusive play events at the park where children of all abilities can interact meaningfully. Additionally, 30 or more families

with disabled children will be asked to participate in a survey, developed by Hope Street and Inclusion Matters, and/or interview. This data will provide insight into the playground's accessibility and overall impact on the physical, emotional, and social health of the youth.

Anticipated Challenges and Solutions:

One anticipated challenge is the possibility that families may express interest in sensory equipment that exceeds the project's budget. To address this, Inclusion Matters will provide at least three design mockups (Figure 3 in Appendix B) for community members to provide feedback on. This approach ensures meaningful input while keeping the project financially feasible (Table 1 in Appendix B).

Another potential challenge is recruiting Community Ambassadors for the playground. While strong interest is expected, if challenges arise in the short term, Hope Street has a mothers' group which could help fill this gap and reach out to parents in the community who have disabled children.⁷ Finally, weather or installation related delays are also a risk. However, early site preparation and working closely with experienced partners will help mitigate these issues.

Expected Outcomes and Impact:

In the short-term (approximately 6 months), the project will focus on immediate, community-driven engagement. Families will be invited to provide feedback during the design process, ensuring that the equipment reflects their children's needs and lived experiences. The Community Ambassador program will also be launched, and collaborations between Hope Street, Inclusion Matters, and key partners will be strengthened to support effective planning, implementation, and sustainability.

In the long term, the completed playground will offer a safe, inclusive space. Increased access to high-quality, sensory-friendly play is expected to improve the physical, social, and

emotional health of local disabled youth. Moreover, access to a free, inclusive physical environment that supports their children's growth will encourage sustained family and community engagement, helping ensure the playground's continued development over time.

Regarding evaluation, the surveys and interviews are expected to generate valuable data that will help assess progress toward the project's goals. This evidence, alongside a replicable framework for community engagement and data collection – including adaptable outreach strategies, inclusive participation methods, and qualitative evaluation tools – can guide other communities interested in pursuing similar efforts. Notably, if project outcomes are strong, Inclusion Matters's long-standing relationship with the Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks could help expand this model to pocket parks in other underserved communities. The project could also draw the attention of policymakers and highlight the broader lack of support for disabled adolescents and adults, sparking critical conversations about developing and enhancing inclusive recreation opportunities beyond childhood.

Advancing health equity for disabled children means ensuring access to spaces where they can thrive. Stories like Dorian's highlight the profound impact of inclusive play. Born with a rare genetic disorder and significant mobility challenges, Dorian struggled to connect with peers – until his family discovered an accessible playground.¹³ When his parents found a place where he could truly participate and connect with other children, it changed everything.¹³ According to Dorian's dad: "It was amazing to have a space that was built with him in mind...him being able to interact and make friends. I always thought that would be a huge barrier for him."¹³ As Dorian's story illustrates, this project can help to ensure that no child in the community is left on the sidelines due to ability, and in turn, create a foundation for good health, connection, and a future where every child has a place to belong and thrive.

Appendix A:

References:

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Appendix B:

Figure 1: Rhapsody Metallophone ¹¹



Figure 2: Chill Spinner ¹²



Figure 3: One example of an equipment design mockup (stencils will be provided in-kind by Inclusion Matters) that families will be able to provide feedback on during the Play for All Design Days. The total cost of the equipment in the design, including the installation, sales tax, and freight, is approximately \$47,000 (Table 1 provides an estimate for the equipment in this specific mockup and related costs). The roughly \$3,000 in remaining funds (from the \$50,000) will be utilized for any unexpected expenses.

Note: Other equipment options, such as the Imagination Table, Optigear Panel, Sign Language Panel, and Communication Board, also support various developmental health outcomes.¹⁰

Appendix B (continued):

Table 1:	
Project Total	\$50,000
Equipment in Example Design Mockup (Figure 3 in Appendix B)	\$29,540.00
Installation	\$11,400.00
Sales Tax	\$3,027.85
Freight	\$2,850.00
Contingency Fund	\$3,182.15
Project In-Kind Contributions for Project Activities, Support, and Evaluation	
CHMC/Hope Street	\$32,000/year
The Social District	\$50,000/year
Inclusion Matters	\$25,000
Matching Funds Contingent Upon \$50,000 Being Awarded	
The Social District	\$25,000

Table 1: Detailed budget breakdown of equipment in the Figure 3 example design mockup (and the associated installation, sales tax, and freight costs). Estimates provided courtesy of Landscape Structures: Playground Equipment and Designs. For this design, the contingency fund would be \$3,182.15, resulting in a project total of \$50,000. If awarded, the \$50,000 would be accepted by the CHMC Foundation on behalf of Hope Street.

Note: Also included are the secured project in-kind contributions for project activities, support, and evaluation, as well as \$25,000 in matching funds that the Social District will provide if the proposal is selected.



1401 South Grand Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90015
direct 213.748.2411

April 9, 2025

UCLA Health Equity Challenge Program
Attn: Independent Review Committee

It is with great enthusiasm that I write to express California Hospital Medical Center's support for Taylor Carty's proposed inclusive playground project at our Venice Hope Park.

Hope Street Margolis Family Center, a community program of California Hospital Medical Center (CHMC), is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children and families. Our work is guided by a philosophy of compassion, a family-centered approach, and an understanding of the broader social determinants of health. Through our education programs, home visiting services, mental health resources, and recreational initiatives, we have become a community cornerstone and a trusted partner to thousands of families.

Located in an underserved area of Los Angeles, Hope Street serves a population facing significant social and economic barriers. Additionally, approximately 25 percent of children in our Head Start program have a disability or other functional challenge, such as speech and language impairments, learning disabilities, autism, and mobility or sensory differences. For these children, safe and accessible play is not just beneficial – it is essential for healthy development. This project offers a rare opportunity to transform one of the few green spaces in our neighborhood into an inclusive play environment for local families.

In alignment with Hope Street's mission to educate children, strengthen families, and transform the community, CHMC is prepared to provide in-kind project support totaling around \$32,000 annually. This includes facilitating outreach and community engagement, feedback sessions and community events in the park. Our team will assist with the Accessible Build Day activities and post-installation programming to help bring the playground to life as an inclusive community space, and collaborate with Inclusion Matters for program evaluation (surveys/interviews). CHMC will also continue to provide security, maintenance, and insurance coverage for the park. Our ability to contribute extensive in-kind support will help ensure that the majority of the \$50,000 award could be used to acquire and install high-quality, sensory-friendly equipment – maximizing the impact and sustainability of the project.

We are excited about the opportunity to collaborate on this transformative effort and believe this proposal presents a strong, community-driven approach to decreasing health inequities for disabled youth. If selected, we look forward to making Ms. Carty's vision a reality for all neighborhood children and families, as the primary community partner for this project. Please reach out to me at 213-742-5662 or susan.shum@commonspirit.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Susan Shum".

Susan Shum
Chief Philanthropy Officer

April 4, 2025

UCLA Health Equity Challenge Program
Attn: Independent Review Committee

To Whom It May Concern,

We are honored to be a committed in-kind partner
in support of Taylor Carty's vision and submission

for the UCLA Health Equity Challenge Program grant. Our organization, established in 1998, is dedicated to creating inclusive playgrounds and education programs that unite children of all abilities. We currently have designed and developed 80 inclusive playgrounds on 5 continents, with an education program in 250 Los Angeles schools (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CX5RuM3L1lc&t=12s>), with a curriculum program distributed to educators in 67 countries.

If the proposal is selected, our role would be as follows:

- Project development and management support
- Creation of three design mockups for families to provide feedback on during "Play for All Design Days" at Venice Hope Park
- Community directed design facilitation by a certified Landscape Architect
- Vendor coordination
- Outreach and support for grand opening and on-going program facilitation

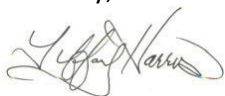
Our services, donated at no cost to the project, are estimated at \$25K. There are no fees or permits required for this project, per the LA Recreation and Parks Dept.

Taylor has maximized and leveraged the \$50K budget for this inclusive play space through partnerships, as well as in-kind donations of services and products. The play engagement opportunities will be expanded through a commitment that Taylor secured from California Hospital Medical Center and its Hope Street Margolis Family Center that will allow her to stencil the sidewalks throughout the park with permanent paint. These stencils will be chosen by the community and donated to the project through our organization and will feature kindergarten readiness and cooperative play engagement opportunities. If the proposal is selected, these will be implemented on the Accessible Build Day.

We have been very impressed with Taylor Carty's leadership of this important project on behalf of the children and families in this lower resourced community. She is thorough, with respectful and consistent follow through, and her ability to inspire commitments from key community partners and stakeholders will ensure that the project is efficiently and sustainably executed. Taylor's wholistic partnership approach from community outreach, to playground design and development, and programming that will ensure on-going impact, is inspiring.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have. We look forward to the possibility of supporting Taylor's vision of transforming the Venice Hope Park into an impactful and meaningful inclusive play space for the families served in this deserving community.

Sincerely,



Tiffany Harris, Co-Founder/CEO - Inclusion Matters by Shane's Inspiration

Creating play, dignity, and social equity for children with disabilities through inclusive playgrounds and education programs that unite children of all abilities.

@ShanesPlay | #InclusionMatters | InclusionMatters.org



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11 April 2025

Subject: UCLA Health Equity Challenge Program
Attn: Independent Review Committee

On behalf of the Social District, I am pleased to offer our strong support for Taylor Carty's inclusive playground proposal at Venice Hope Park (1521 S Hope St, Los Angeles, CA 90015).

As an organization committed to maintaining a safe, clean, and welcoming environment throughout the South Park neighborhood, our safety and hospitality ambassadors are on the ground seven days a week. We remove over 30,000 pounds of trash and 2,000 square feet of graffiti weekly, maintain and improve public amenities, and serve as a first point of contact for non-emergency concerns. Our ambassadors provide neighborhood patrols, respond to incidents such as trespassing or loitering, and offer walking escorts to ensure families feel safe in the neighborhood.

As part of our in-kind support for this project, the South Park BID will help provide community facing ambassadors at Venice Hope Park to ensure a welcoming, safe, and open environment for residents. We estimate this to be at least \$50,000 of in-kind support per year. Additionally, if this grant is successful, we are willing to provide \$25,000 in additional matching funds for the play structure and park area. Our team is excited to contribute to the helping ensure the park is accessible for all children and families, particularly those with disabilities.

This project aligns with our mission to enhance public spaces and support efforts that promote equity, inclusion, and quality of life for residents and visitors alike. We believe this inclusive playground would be a valuable and lasting addition to the neighborhood, and we would be proud to contribute to its success if the proposal is selected.

Sincerely,



Nolan A. Marshall III
President and CEO
The Social District