

SUNDAY NEWS

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Daniel's Den

Children share their ideas on what should be included in this project, the playground will be designed with accessibility in mind.

Gotta have a pirate ship with lots of ropes and ladders and lookouts, one first-grader called out.

Ramps.

Swings with back supports.

Twisting slides.

Bridges.

Monkey bars

Tunnels and more.

Want to plan a playground for children of all abilities?

Just go to the experts.

That's exactly what the planners for Daniel's Den Playground did. They went to kindergarten-through-sixth-grade children and asked them what they would like in a new playground that would be shared by kids with and without significant physical limitations.

"Having special, secluded playgrounds for children with disabilities is so yesterday. Inclusion is the way to go," said Denise Haldeman, Lancaster, mother of 4-year-old Daniel, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair.

Haldeman had visited a park in Harrisburg, called Possibility Place, and knew that's the kind of environment she wanted for her son and all children — a park where they could have fun together in a safe, well-planned space with ramps and other design features that would make play more accessible.

So, she started to get the word out; and, before she knew it, she had more than 24 volunteers, including a group of Millersville University education majors, ready to make the dream of Daniel's Den a reality.

The big step forward was the generous offer by Manor Church, at 530 Central Manor Road, south of Mountville, for the land to build the park.

"That has been an incredible help to us," said Haldeman. "Now we have to raise the money we need to build it and get it planned."

To raise the estimated \$275,000 needed for the project, the playground committee is working to obtain the funds through grants and donations from individual, corporate and private donors. The project has been accepted, for example, by the Foundation for Enhancing Communities, a nationally recognized charitable organization based in Harrisburg.

As Haldeman noted, "We have only just started. We still have a long way to go and need all the help we can get."

Much of that help has come from the children themselves. Haldeman met with children Monday, May 7, at Centerville Elementary School; then, the next day, she and park planner Dennis Wiley, of Leathers & Associates, met with youngsters at Central Manor Elementary School. Wiley's firm has designed and built more than 1,600 playgrounds. But he gives credit where credit is due: "Who's better at planning a playground than kids?" he asked. "They are the ones who will use it."

Just as he expected, the children at Central Manor had lots of ideas. Wiley used those suggestions to draw up a tentative plan that was unveiled at what was billed as Daniel's Den Design Day celebration, held later that day, at Manor Church.

Some of the kids' requests could not be accommodated in his plans. There will be no elevator to take kids into outer space, for example. Over budget.

The trampoline that would allow children to bounce from one end of the playground to the other — or a flying trapeze with no net?! Sorry, safety issues.

And the real Darth Vader can't be a part of the playground plan, nor can a weeping willow tree, a conveyor belt to transport children, a ladder that goes up to the sky, a real boat in a real lake, palm trees and a full-size basketball court.

First-grader Jacob Watts presented the idea of a roller coaster. It could take children all over the playground, he imagined, and everyone could use it.

"We would need ramps for children in wheelchairs," said 6-year-old Allison Lowe, remembering a key concept of this new playground-in-planning. "And things that are lower so they can reach them."

"Ramps would be good," agreed first-grader Matthew Marquette, "and we could help push the children in their wheelchairs, just like I push my grandpa."

The next steps in the playground planning involve fine-tuning, funding and getting it constructed. Volunteers will build the playground over a five- to six-day period in April 2008.

Current committee volunteers include Theresa Louie, who is co-chair with Haldeman, and Brian Funk, Ben Newton, Kim Olson, Lora Amerman, Nina Beecher, Janis Creason, Jen Creason, Ken Hussar, Janiece Seldomridge and Barbara Spencer, all of Lancaster; Bryan Gerlach and Lisa Seaman, both of Mountville; Mark Hackenburg, Brownstown; Lynn Jones-Hoats, Allentown; and Millersville University students Lindsay Montague, Katie Romagnoli, Nicole Malloy and Danielle Gross.

"But," said Haldeman, "we need many, many more [volunteers] to make this happen."

For more information, or to make a donation of money, materials or muscle, see www.danielsdenplayground.org.