

Teddy & Friends Inclusive Playground

Designed by Unlimited Play and Little Tikes Commercial

We invite you to read the stories below from the families in West County, St. Louis, Missouri, who formed a committee to help make the dream of building an inclusive playground at their local park a reality.

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The Stacy Family

Stella was born with a congenital heart defect (CHD) that required open heart surgery when she was 2 days old, 4 months old and 3 years old. She was feeding tube dependent for the first 16 months of her life, and experienced a lot of physical developmental delays due to all the time she spent inpatient as a small child.

Did you know that there are currently 1 million children in the United States living with congenital heart disease? Or that 1 in every 100 babies are born with a CHD, and 25% will need open heart surgery or other procedures in their first year of life? Our story is not uncommon, as CHD is the most common birth defect in the world. But despite its prevalence, there is very little awareness around pediatric heart disease.

Stella has twin siblings who are 20 months older than her, so caring for 3 kids under that age of 2 was instantly a struggle. Play dates at the park were almost impossible because I was constantly worried one of the twins would run away or fall off a slide, I was worried about germs, and I had a child who was medically fragile, on a blood thinner, and who required a lot of equipment to leave the house.

I love the idea of a playground that is safe for all children, no matter their age or ability. Where a mom can find a quiet place to feed their tube dependent child, and educate other children about what makes some kids unique. CHD is a lifelong, chronic illness

with no cure, and despite looking “healthy”, Stella will always have limitations to how physically active she can be. We cannot wait to tell all the area heart families about the inclusive playground where friends can come together to learn and PLAY.



The Gilliam Family

Charlie is our sweet, curly haired, 3-year-old boy. He was born with Koolen de Vries Syndrome, an extremely rare genetic syndrome that affects 1 in 30,000 people. To put that into perspective, there are only 5 known cases in the St. Louis Metro area.

Koolen de Vries Syndrome (KdVS) most commonly presents with developmental delay, moderate intellectual disability, low muscle tone, and epilepsy.

For Charlie, this means he uses a wheelchair, has a feeding tube, and is non-verbal. He frequently has seizures and requires hospitalization for normal childhood illnesses.

Kids with KdVS are affectionately referred to as “Kool Kids” and Charlie is most definitely that! He loves nothing more than being outside with friends and family. Having an inclusive playground nearby will mean that Charlie can enjoy just being a kid and finally be able to be in the center of the action. His parents won’t have to worry about how his equipment will interfere with or limit play. His brothers will have a place to play side by side with Charlie and meet other siblings of special kids.

Every child should have a place to play. Inclusion should be the norm. Wouldn’t that just be the Kooliest?



The Schwetye Family

Owen Schwetye was born in August of 2016. He was the perfect new addition to our family, making us a family of four. His older brother Hank is just 16 months older than him. Owen was a typical, thriving baby until things slowly started to change. It was like the lights turned off for him between 12 and 18 months.

On February 22, 2018, he was diagnosed with autism level 3. This came with many obstacles. He began an intensive program at 21 months old. While Owen has made leaps and bounds, going from nonverbal to speaking at the end of his fourth year. Owen faces obstacles including, physical sensory issues, speech delays, and behavioral struggles.

Bringing Owen to the playgrounds around town has always been a bit of a struggle because I always feel like I must explain to other kids and parents about his behavior, lack of communication skills, or something as simple as not being able to wait in line without a melt down occurring. Not only was it hard for Owen but it was hard for his brother who always had to deal with us leaving early because Owen and mom couldn't handle it.

After meeting Erin Gooch this past year and hearing all about Unlimited Play, I was thrilled. This is an opportunity to work with other families with kids with all sorts of special needs to help create a fully inclusive playground. Having a playground and atmosphere for ALL kids is incredible. Our family feels so lucky to be part of this process and journey to bring an all-inclusive playground to St. Louis's Queeny Park.