

# Healthier Play for Everyone

## THE HEALTH & WELLNESS BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR PLAY



There has never been a more important time for families, healthcare professionals and educators to make outdoor play a priority for everyone in the community. It is one of the best things that we can do for the health and well-being of every citizen.

Magical Bridge Playground, located in the heart of Silicon Valley, is heralded as the nation's most innovative and inclusive playground, designed so everyone can play together. Since opening to the public in April 2015, this remarkable playground attracts visitors from around the world.

### Investing in the health and well being of a community

Play in the United States over the last century has gone from being almost exclusively an outdoor activity to one that is often situated indoors in front of televisions and computers. Children are spending increasingly less time playing outdoors. Research shows that children who play outdoors regularly are happier, healthier, and stronger — and this leads to happier, healthier, and stronger adults.

Magical Bridge Foundation is dedicated to providing inspiring play experiences that improve the physical, social, emotional and mental health of everyone in the community, including our youth, our aging population, the most vulnerable, and the disabled. At Magical Bridge, everyone can experience the benefits of outdoor play, which:

- Increases physical activity
- Improves cardiovascular and gross motor skills
- Promotes increased blood flow to the brain, leading to cognitive development
- Improves concentration
- Nurtures self discipline
- Reduces symptoms of ADHD and ADD
- Improves and teaches vocabulary
- Enhances negotiation skills
- Reduces anxiety and improving mood
- Improves concentration and focus
- Enhances imaginative and creative play
- Promotes problem solving
- Develops stronger immune systems
- Builds self-esteem and confidence

Outdoor play provides rich and diverse learning opportunities that lead to success and self esteem. It influences thinking, reasoning, and brain development. A child's first classroom, the playground teaches the signals needed for successful interaction with others, develops language and manipulative skills, and leads to enhanced means of discovery and creativity. Designed for everyone, a Magical Bridge Playground gives everybody in the community the opportunity to experience the profound benefits of play as never before.

# The Magic of a Magical Bridge Playground

## SWINGING

Swinging is one of the most critical ways to develop a sense of balance — the motion creates vestibular stimulation, activating the inner fluids in our ear canal which are critical to maintaining body posture and equilibrium. Swinging can be serious therapy for people with various autism spectrum disorders as it helps to process the stimuli from our senses. Swinging restores balance to the vestibular system, provides proprioceptive input (deep pressure), and creates a feeling of being “in balance.” The motion also soothes, relaxes and increases concentration.

## SPINNING

Rotary vestibular input, caused from spinning, is the most powerful form of sensory input that the brain can process. Just 15 minutes of vestibular input can have a 6-8 hour impact on the brain. Because of this, spinning needs to be controlled, supervised, and monitored for those who have sensory differences. The equipment at Magical Bridge Playground enables visitors to spin in prone extension (on tummy) to help the brain learn to register the feeling of rotary input.

## SLIDING AND CLIMBING

Sliding and climbing activates our vestibular systems, which contribute to our sense of balance and spatial orientation. Vestibular input coordinates movement of our eyes, head and body, which affects our body's balance, muscle tone, visual-spatial perception, auditory-language perception and emotional security. Since this input is how we balance and move, all children require it for growth and development. At Magical Bridge Playground, children of varying abilities can climb, slide and the enjoy the feeling of being high above the ground. All of our slides have top transfer decks for wheelchair users.

## KINDNESS CORNER

The heart of Magical Bridge Playground, the Kindness Corner is a gathering place for reflection, compassion and education. Magical Bridge offers a dedicated section of the playground to help spark conversations and lessons about making friends with someone who is “different”, model positive behavior, encourage kids to be up-standers, and address the issues of bullying.

# Partnering to build stronger, healthier communities

Sedentary lifestyles have become the norm in the United States, with children spending more time in front of the screen than reading books, playing outside or engaging in extracurricular activities. Spending LESS time playing outdoors is linked to:

- Obesity
- Depression
- Type II diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Anxiety disorders
- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
- Drug abuse and smoking
- Bullying
- Low self esteem
- Stress

Not just for children, regular exercise and play for the aging population helps to:

- Prevent falls and fractures
- Improve coordination and balance
- Reduce the risk of strokes, heart disease, and some cancers
- Lessen cognitive decline
- Control obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure

Magical Bridge provides extraordinary family-centered recreation accessible to the entire community. We are pleased to work closely with a diverse set of community organizations and local nonprofits to ensure the continued improvement of the health of communities everywhere.



*The 24-string laser harp, designed by Jen Levin, is featured in our Music Zone at Mitchell Park in Palo Alto, CA. Children and adults of all abilities gather under the arch to magically create an orchestra of sounds.*



*The slides in our Slide Zone are designed for two, enabling children and adults of all abilities to experience the joy of sliding. Wheelchair users cross a gentle sway bridge from the top of our two-story playhouse to join their friends at the top of the slide mound.*

## A meaningful and sustainable investment in community

The opportunity for play helps maintain physical, emotional, psychological, and social well being for us all. By giving children with and without disabilities a chance to play together, inclusive spaces serve as joyful incubator of a more tolerant and kind society, in which children with disabilities can participate equally and enjoy equal opportunities to flourish.

Magical Bridge Playground encourages positive relationships between children and adults, and reinforces tolerance of diversity and acceptance of others' perspectives. When you design for true inclusion, no one stands out, and everyone can play.

Inclusive play develops a true understanding of the world, encourages appreciation of the differences between people, and more importantly, recognizes the similarities that underlie them.

## MUSIC

Scientists have found that music stimulates more parts of the brain than any other human function. In children, it motivates interaction, facilitates socialization and improves social skills. The brain processes music in a different area than speech and language, therefore, for those who have difficulty communicating verbally, music provides a way to express themselves in a non-verbal and non-threatening manner. Visitors to Magical Bridge Playground create their own music with a 24-string laser harp, designed by artist Jen Levin.

## PRETEND PLAY

There is no better way to explore and develop important life skills than through pretend-play inside a playhouse designed for all, or acting out a skit on an inviting play stage. Audiences at Magical Bridge gather at the stage for impromptu performances or for those planned and organized by community members. Through pretend-play, children learn about relationships with peers, significant adults, and the world around them. They experience the full range of their senses and feelings, how their bodies move through space, and how their imaginations can create alternate worlds of existence.

Since 1987, Barbara Butler Artist-BUILDER, Inc. has created over 600 unique play structures using all natural redwood and non-toxic tung oil wood stains — and their first wheelchair-accessible, two-story playhouse was designed and built especially for Magical Bridge. Our playhouse, including the upper story, is fully accessible for everyone via carefully considered ramps and bridges. Full of artful details and surprises in every corner, the Playhouse is a wonderful meeting place for everyone in the community.



# Aligning with Community Health Initiatives

There is no question that creating inclusive play spaces is morally right, and studies have shown that building a caring, healthy and accepting community benefits everyone. At Magical Bridge, we feel a playground is the perfect place to start.

## Designing outdoor play for everyone

Children with special needs have special challenges, and only 10% of those with disabilities are physically affected; autism, sensory challenges, cognitive and developmental issues, and many other differences make up the other 90%. Getting *all* children outdoors for playtime offers excellent physical, mental, and social benefits:

### Physical Benefits

Playing outside, whether it's directed play or independent play, offers significant physical benefits to children with special needs including improvements in flexibility, muscle strength, and coordination. Getting active outdoors also helps to improve cardiovascular health and exercise endurance, which may help increase life expectancy. Regular outdoor play also helps children to improve body awareness, motor skills, and balance. Being out in the sun also provides children with vitamin D, and since many children with disabilities suffer from vitamin D deficiencies, regular exposure to the sun can be helpful.

### Mental Benefits

Outdoor play provides special needs children with mental benefits, most especially, a boost in self-esteem. As children overcome obstacles and improve physical skills, it increases their self-confidence. They have the chance to experience personal satisfaction and accomplishment, which can improve their confidence in every area of life. Playing outdoors can also increase attention span. Kids learn to solve problems and collaborate when playing outdoors, building important mental skills. Outdoor play helps reduce stress, reducing a child's risk for stress related issues, such as anxiety and depression.

### Social Benefits

Children with special needs often have problems with social skills, and the social benefits of outdoor play can help address some of these problems. Playing outdoors often results in improved behavior, making it easier for children to build friendships with others. On the playground, children learn how to share, how to deal with conflict, and how to work in groups, all while having fun in a low-stress, outdoor environment. Outdoor play helps children overcome challenges and learn new skills, which promotes self-advocacy, resiliency, and self-confidence giving them the potential to build healthier relationships with others.



*It all starts on the playground!*

#### Our Mission

Magical Bridge Foundation ignites and supports the global movement that advocates for and achieves a new foundation for truly inclusive play.

[www.magicalbridge.org](http://www.magicalbridge.org)



We are currently seeking partners to help fund Magical Bridge Playgrounds in targeted communities. Please contact us for partnership opportunities.

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