



The new Dru Point All Abilities Playground encourages children with a disability to play equal alongside their able-bodied friends and siblings

Fun for all

Alice Hansen reports on the first All Abilities Playground to open in Tasmania

The new Dru Point All Abilities Playground is the first of its kind to open in Tasmania.

Located in Margate, the playground allows safe access and equipment for children and adults with a range of disabilities.

Opening in May this year, the playground has been well received as a facility that caters for all children and their families within the community. With a number of similar playgrounds present on the mainland, there is an emerging trend to ensure that playgrounds are accessible to all abilities across Australia.

'I felt there was a need to create a playground where a child confined to a wheelchair, for instance, can play equally alongside their able-bodied friends and siblings,' said Mrs. Kelleher, Centre Coordinator for the Kingston Community Health Centre.

Ms Kelleher has worked diligently since presenting her original concept for the playground to the Kingborough Council in 2002.

'A great deal of thought went into not only creating a safe environment suitable for all, but also a playground that engaged the children's imagination,' explained Ms

Kelleher. 'We wanted to take the children on a journey.'

The creative playground takes children on a 'voyage' by way of a boat that caters for wheelchair access.

The boat carries children past a range of theme-based stops representing various 'rooms' for the children to visit. In time, the planted hedges which separate the various stations will grow high enough to represent walls to the 'rooms'.

Once on board the central boat, a child has the opportunity to visit any room they wish. One room represents a musical station where children can play outdoor percussion instruments arranged in a way that does not favour left- or right-handed visitors.

'We tried to incorporate concepts and play stations that get a reaction to an action,' said Ms Kelleher. 'Children love to create noise and the musical room has been quite a hit.'


Other stations include an obstacle course and a funnel ball court with the final pit stop offering a swing room containing the state's only wheelchair swing. For some Tasmanian children, this offers their first sensation of riding on a swing.

'My daughter, who has Angelman Syndrome,

particularly enjoys the abacus and the distortion mirrors, but her favourite is the wheelchair swing because she can have a really big swing in her chair, which she has never been able to have before,' explained a happy parent.

Financial assistance to redevelop the playground was offered by the State Government by way of a \$230,000 grant as well as a \$30,000 grant from the Tasmanian Community Fund. In addition to the funding, various community businesses were supportive in supplying materials and community clubs played a significant role.

'The children move from one exciting activity to another. This wonderful playground stimulates the imagination and delights the senses. When other playgrounds are becoming so uniform suddenly here is one full of surprises,' said a Hazelwood Special School teacher. 'Musical mushrooms, distortion mirrors, animal sculptures – there are wonderful imaginative delights all through this area.'

As currently the only playground in Tasmania catering for all abilities, it is hoped that this community resource of statewide significance can be replicated in other parts of the state. 

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