

kilikili

a playground for ALL children

For a park
of our own

Making Coles Park Accessible



Introduction

Kilikili is a network of parents of children with disabilities, which aims at making parks accessible to all children, regardless of their ability. We believe that children with disabilities have a right to play and interact with all other children and that we, as a community, need to create avenues that make this possible. These interactions will also hold tremendous value for children who may not have any disabilities, and will, over time, help break the imperceptible barriers that keep people with disabilities invisible.

Making Coles Park Universally Accessible

Coles Park, one of Bangalore's most beautiful parks, was chosen as the first park in which modifications would be made. Prior to the designing of the changes, two consultations were held to obtain suggestions from both children with disabilities and from those who work with them.

Objective of the Universally Accessible Playground

To provide a safe space for all children, irrespective of their ability, to play together and learn from each other.

The Consultations

Kilikili believes that children have the capacity to participate in matters that affect their lives and their well-being. Being asked their opinion on what is important to them is not only desirable but is very simply, their basic right. In order to give shape to this fundamental belief, a Consultation was organised with children of all abilities on the 1st of December, 2005 at St. Germain School.

On the following day i.e. 2nd December, 2005; a group of rehabilitation professionals - developmental paediatricians, occupational therapists, special educators etc. - and groups working on disability as well as child rights issues met to look at specific play needs of children of different age groups and of different abilities. They also sought to explore the possible institutional arrangements needed for the maintenance and management of the facilities that are developed.

This report captures the essence of what transpired at both the Consultations. A design team worked with the recommendations and proposed modifications to regular play equipment as well as the physical landscape to make them accessible. This was put together in a proposal and submitted to the Bangalore Mahanagara Palike and the Corporator of Ward 91.



The Children's Consultation

26 children from schools run by the Association of People with Disabilities, Karnataka Welfare Association for the Blind and Sunaad, Institute of Speech and Hearing attended the Consultation representing children who were visually impaired, hearing impaired and mobility impaired. What stood out throughout the Consultation was the essential spirit of the children and their child-like qualities their curiosity, the joy they found in doing various activities and in being with each other, their excitement and their playfulness.

The morning began with an introduction to the project that highlighted the key role that children have to play in the redesign of Coles Park. It was stressed that as users of the park and its play spaces, they had a lot of useful ideas, which need to be explored. That we would have a lot of fun while doing this important work was also stressed.

Objectives of the Children's Consultation

- To help children articulate their experiences in playgrounds and parks
- To explore Coles Park, identifying what factors facilitate and what hinder safe play for children of different abilities
- To help the children develop a vision for and a design for the Park, specifically for play equipment which children of different abilities can use.

Inauguration

The inauguration was done by all the children who were given various materials with which they had to decorate the room. Adults were requested to stay out of the room till the children finished. Within minutes, the children had taken over the room, rushing with flowers and candles, placing them in different corners. Some chose to work with craft paper and scissors and made some lovely cut-outs which were stuck in various parts of the room. The room was a beehive of activity and a sense of festivity pervaded the air. The inaugural activity served to help children feel a sense of ownership over the space as their space.

Why are we here

- To make park accessible
- To make new friends
- To help disabled people
- To know problems of other children with

The fun continued with the introductory session led by Diana Tholoor, a renowned movement expert, whose expertise lay in using movement and theatre with children of all abilities. Diana put the children through a round of movement exercises that helped greatly to defreeze the group, giving adequate exercise to the vocal chords! Children mixed with one another and got to know children with problems different from theirs.

Children's experiences of parks in general

Archana Srivatsava, child rights and disability activist, from Handicap International facilitated a session on helping the children articulate what they liked and what they disliked about parks and playgrounds that they may have visited. Each child was given two cards – one to denote the positives and one to denote the negatives. Once the children had finished writing, they were asked to present it to the group, with two children collecting the cards.



Their responses include:

What I like in a park

I enjoy playing hide-and-seek

I was happy to see flowers

I like the plants shaped like animals

I like to play with swings

We can play games in a park. Our minds feel fresh, we can get fresh air

I like sliding, swinging, going on the merry-go-round and jungle gym

I enjoy the swing, flowers, plants, green grass

I like swinging, the hanging bar, the slide and also the sheltered areas

I like to play in the park. I can hear birds

We can play outdoor games in the park. We can also see lots of plants which make the park beautiful

I like to see the big trees and the beautiful flowers

There are nice play things like swings, merry-go-rounds, hanging bar

I feel good if the park is in good condition

What I don't like in parks

I don't like slush and stones

There are age limitations for the swing. I don't like that

The watchman scolds us if we play or roll in the grass

I don't like merry-go-round because I feel giddy

I don't like the jungle gym and the hanging bar

When I went to a park, I was not able to climb on the swing because I am a boy who uses a wheelchair.

Other kids do not talk to us, as they can't understand us

There are lots of dogs moving around

I don't like uneven paths

We have a problem using crutches in a park

I felt bad because there were too many holes

I was not able to climb the slide as there were no handles

There should be no stones in the park

If there is rain, water gets logged

Sometimes there is too much of a crowd

People usually put paper and plastic covers in the park, which I do not like.



Visiting Coles Park

The children were then taken to Coles Park where they tried out the existing play equipment and walked around the park.

It was wonderful to see how the children helped one another. The hearing impaired children (who probably had no earlier exposure to children with mobility difficulties), for e.g. fought with each other to push the wheelchairs! At the park, a group of college-going youngsters who were hanging around, volunteered to push the merry-go-round for the children, highlighting the fact that with a little sensitivity and increased interaction, we can all move towards a more inclusive society.

The children enthusiastically made use of all of the equipment in the playground. Two of the children in wheelchairs went on the slide and merry-go-round with some assistance, as did visually impaired children who were assisted by other children or by adults. The equipment most used was the stone slide, the swings and the merry-go-round. The majority of children did not attempt to access the parallel bars, jungle gym or the seesaw.

When they came back, they were asked what they liked and disliked about Coles Park.





What I liked in Coles Park

- Merry-go-round
 - The stone slide as we were able to climb up fairly easily
 - Swing
 - Being at the park
 - Helping each other swing.
-

'I find nothing positive in the park' was a statement made by a child who uses a wheelchair, highlighting the fact that the park could be made more accessible.

What I did not like in Coles Park

Play equipment

- I don't like the steps of the slide as it was difficult for me to climb
- Parallel bars and jungle gym were too high to climb
- I could not use any of the equipment as I use a wheelchair
- The swings were broken
- There was only one swing
- The swing was too low – my legs kept touching the ground
- The see-saw was extremely steep. We were not able to sit on it and balance or push up and down
- There are many playthings, which we cannot play with, or is difficult
- The slides had no railing which made it dangerous for all children and especially for visually impaired children.

Environment

- Since the ground was hard and muddy, the wheelchair could not move easily
- Entry to the park was difficult for children who use wheelchairs as was accessing the play area which had a stone boundary
- When we entered the park, there were many uneven paths. I didn't like that
- I find it difficult to push the wheelchair as there is no ramp.

Maintenance

- The government should take care of the parks but it is not doing so.




Our Dream Park - what we would like to see in Coles Park

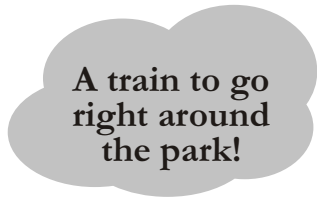
Joy Srinivasan, Chairperson, Makkala Jagriti, an NGO that works on educational issues of underprivileged children, then engaged the children on a discussion on the changes they would like to see in all parks and specifically in Coles Park. On being asked to articulate their Dream Park, the children expressed their boundless creativity by drawing, painting, making clay models and collages. Some of the key elements captured through the discussion and creative expressions include:

Play equipment

- Merry-go-rounds must be designed to accommodate a wheel chair; they should have seats
- There must be play equipment that make sounds so that visually impaired children too can enjoy
- There should be equipment for older children
- Slides must have railing, some slides can also have a ramp
- Slides must have facilities for safe landing with for e.g. more sand at the base, gradual descent etc.
- Must have concrete slide and not a metal slide
- Must have a sand pit
- Will be nice if there is horse riding
- Must have a swimming pool
- Must have water games
- Must have a stage for cultural activities
- Lower the height of parallel bars and jungle gym.
- There should be a gym/ exercise centre.



We want swings that can accommodate a wheel chair.



A train to go right around the park!

Play Space

- More space around the play area
- More seating around the play area.

**There
should be
no tickets.**

Environment

- Pathways should be smooth, with no stones, over which children who cannot see can trip
- Pathways should allow easy movement of wheelchairs
- There should be some system of warning like an alarm - for guiding visually impaired children and protecting them
- More greenery, flowers, birds and butterflies
- Drinking water, toilets and first aid facilities should be provided
- There should be a ramp at the large gate entrance
- There should be grass in one area to be able to walk and sit on
- There should be more seating space for us to talk with friends
- Should have hedges shaped like animals
- There should be no rotating gate
- There should be no dogs
- There should be no drunkards
- There should be snack counters
- There should be a shelter in case of rains.



Maintenance

- Parks should be clean – plastic etc. should not be thrown
- There should be a watchman/ gardener to assist children
- There should be more dustbins
- No smoking or drinking should be allowed
- More lights at night
- Equipment should be maintained well to ensure safety e.g. broken swings should be repaired immediately
- Government should maintain parks.

Others

- The government should have awareness programmes so that people are more sensitive to children who may have some problems.

Visitors

Mrs. Afsa Begum, Assistant Commissioner for Disabilities, Government of Karnataka along with one of her officers visited the venue and observed the children's work. She was amazed at the clarity with which children were able to put forth their views. She

promised all cooperation and agreed to approach the Bangalore Mahanagar Palike (BMP) from her office requesting that Coles Park be made accessible.



Nithila Bhaskaran from Action Aid; Fr. Reno, Principal St. Germain School as well as many of the school children came and observed the children and their activities. Some members of the media were also present, with one photographer being completely bowled over by the drawing of the visually impaired children.



Concluding the children's consultation

As part of the Concluding session, the children were briefed about what lay ahead. They were told that their inputs would be put together and alongwith the inputs to be generated the following day by their teachers and others who work with them, would be presented to the BMP.

Technical Consultation

The Technical Consultation held on the 2nd of December, 2005 at St. Germain School saw the participation of a diverse group of professionals including occupational therapists, special educators, teachers, parents and representatives of organisations working on disability as well as child rights issues.

The meeting began with an introduction to the Coles Park project. Kavitha from Kilikili stressed that this is a parents' initiative, born from the observation that children with disabilities are almost never seen in public parks. Since the parents' group was a small and informal one, she appealed to participants to support the initiatives in whatever way they could.

Following an introduction by all participants, Archana Shrivatsav, facilitator of the Children's Consultation was requested to take the group through the Children's Consultation process. She highlighted the fact that children had, as always, displayed some remarkable insights and had made some very valuable suggestions. Their creative

expressions as well as their discussions were displayed across the room. She then introduced members of the Children's Committee who were present and requested them to sum up what they had done the previous day.

The children talked about all their experiences - of having fun, meeting other children, learning about their problems, enjoying themselves at Coles Park, doing the creative activities and making concrete suggestions of the improvement of Coles Park. They were brimming with energy and seemed full of the responsibility of being leaders.

Visit to Coles Park

The group then visited Coles Park and made observations on the kind of changes that would be needed to make it more accessible.

Group discussions

Two sub groups were formed. The rehabilitation professionals such as OTs, special educators and architects discussed design changes and modifications to be made to the Park. The second group, comprised mainly of heads of organisations working on disability or child rights issues, looked at the institutional mechanisms to be put in place for management of the park once it is made accessible.





The recommendations from the Design group include:

Overall environment and physical space

- All barricades and obstacles to be removed
- Embossed and tactile signages at significant points
- Pavement design should incorporate guide blocks
- Well planned railings at entrance and exit points to act as guides, in addition to the paving
- Entrance gate not to open directly onto the road; provide a proper barricade along the road
- Reduce entrances to 2, both should be fully accessible
- Guiding alarms for visually impaired people
- Attractive colours to be used as much as possible.

Play Equipment

- Age-specific equipment
- Equipment for sensorial, vestibular and motor stimulation to be provided
- Children to be exposed to different textures – touching as well as walking
- Shallow water pools with pebbles to be provided
- Sand pits and sand tables to be provided
- Swings – suspended tyres, that move sideways also to be provided
- Different levels of see-saw and slides
- Low mound as a slide for wheelchair users, with speed breakers
- Textured pathways for bare feet movement.



Facilities

- Toilets and drinking water fountains that are barrier free.

Management and Maintenance

- Timings to be regulated
- Police rounds necessary to control vandalism
- Provide accommodation for person to maintain the space.

Others

- Devise strategies for involving the local community
- APD to take the initiative in making children with disabilities more visible in parks.

The recommendations from the Institutional Mechanisms group include:

Principles

- No privatisation
- No entry fees
- Should be managed in partnership with the BMP and Citizens' Committee the partnership should not be a tokenistic one but the Citizens' Committee must have a say in decisions making
- Children should be involved at all stages.

Institutional mechanisms

- Form a Committee of parents, children, residents, senior citizens, NGOs, park users, eminent citizens in the local community, representatives of schools etc.
- Form two groups - a strategic, vision building group that raises issues, monitors the project etc. and a management group that facilitates day-to-day implementation in coordination with the BMP staff. Mechanisms of accountability and transparency to be ensured
- Form a Maintenance Committee to help BMP staff - MEG could be approached for this since this is also a Freedom Fighters' Memorial park
- Work with the gardeners and watchmen, sensitising them to issues of disability, and enrol them in the process
- Enrol local community groups and institutions as well as community leaders
- Register Kilikili.



Funding

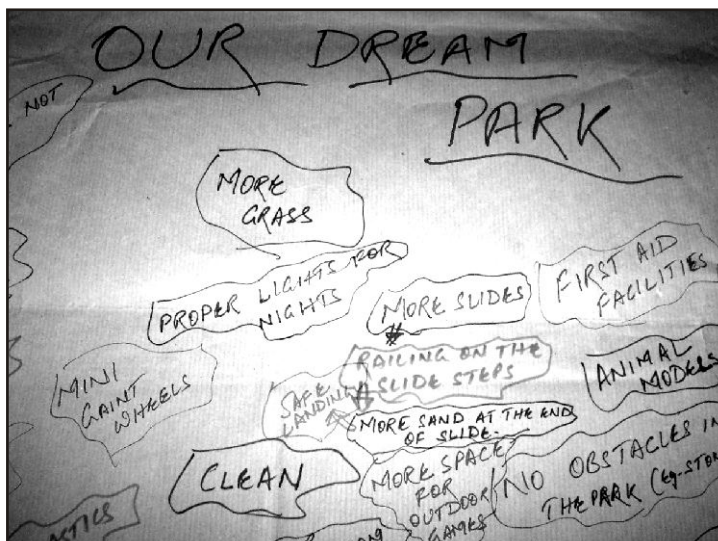
We could approach:

- Corporator/ MLA/ MP
- Corporate companies
- Philanthropic groups like Rotary, Lions etc.

Design

- Should be durable, low maintenance
- Have equipment for older children also
- Have age-appropriate play areas
- Indoor buildings (of Bal Bhavan) could be used as Recreational spaces
- Should have educational material such as pamphlets and posters on how the equipment should be used, its benefits etc.





Limitations of the Consultations

- The Children's Consultation did not have representatives of children with autism, mental retardation and other mental disabilities. As a consequence their play and recreational needs have not been articulated. This gap will be sought to be filled in the future.

Conclusion

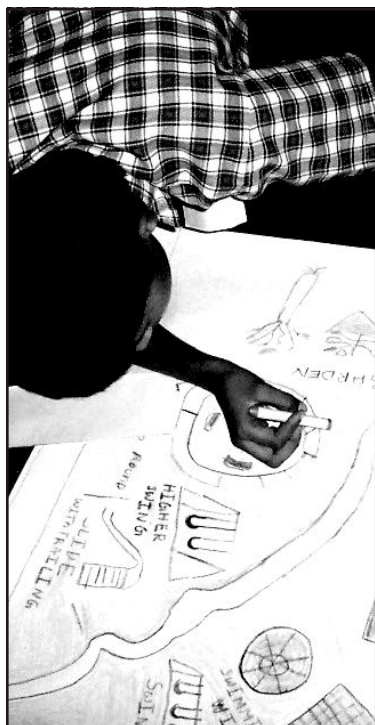
Following the presentation of the two groups, a discussion was held on immediate steps to be taken. It was felt that we need to identify short-term goals and then build on their achievement. The immediate need was to build a larger community – including the immediate, local community and enrol them into the vision of the project. We would also need to detail the proposal (along with the proposed modifications) to be submitted to the BMP.

Some initial initiatives may be started in Coles Park to make ourselves more visible and to help generate support for the project. The Consultation ended with Kavitha from Kilikili thanking the group for their contribution and promising to take the process forward. She also requested the group to offer support in whatever way was possible.

Taking the process forward

Designing the modifications

Following the Consultations, a small Design group was constituted of people who expressed a willingness to engage with the project. Meena Jain, special educator and Dr. Chitra Sankar provided the technical inputs. This was refined by Chitra Vishwanath and Anne Rupprecht (both architects) and a final plan was prepared. The plan included physical modifications required to make the park accessible. In addition, research was carried out on the modifications necessary to regular play equipment such that the needs of children with disabilities would be served. Three designs were created for equipment that would specifically serve the needs of the children with disabilities.



Partnership with the Bangalore Mahanagar Palike

Simultaneously processes were also initiated with the Bangalore Mahanagar Palike for seeking permission. We were pleasantly surprised with the speed with which the BMP acted and gave us the required permission. The BMP Commissioner Mr K Jairaj has been extremely enthusiastic about the project and wants to make at least one park in each Zone in Bangalore fully accessible. This is indeed a welcome step.

The local Corporator, Mr A R Zakir was also extremely co-operative and promised Kilikili all support in doing the desired modifications.

In the discussions with the BMP and the Corporator, it was decided that the BMP would carry out the required civil works, including

pathways in the play area and the construction of play equipment. Kilikili took on the responsibility of providing the modified play equipment.

Fund raising - a challenge

The most challenging part of this project was securing funds. While the costs of the Consultations were supported by Action Aid, securing funds for the play equipment proved to be more challenging than we had anticipated.

None of the companies we approached were willing to support, either because they were already committed elsewhere or because disability did not fall into causes they supported. Two-thirds of the funding for the project was secured from individuals, many of whom were from families who had children with disabilities. Funds were raised through the sale of coupons. A significant breakthrough came with one corporate donation that met about one-third of the play equipment cost.

However, the fact that no institutional funding was initially secured had its own benefits: we reached out to so many more individuals, many of whom became aware of the project and why it was being undertaken. This would not have been otherwise possible.

Breaking myths

In our opinion, the perception that play and recreation are not 'serious issues' was probably a reason for many companies or institutions refusing support. However, there is enough research the world over that stresses the importance of play in early childhood development. Play, for young children, is serious business and an extremely important aid for development. Through play, the young brain receives immense stimulation – touch, sound, sight, smell, taste, body orientation – which helps in making the neural connections that will eventually make the child an optimally functioning person. We realise that we need to do far more work on helping people see the developmental value of play for young children.

The other reason why we found it difficult to secure institutional funding was perhaps because Coles Park is seen as being located in an up-market area, with the assumption being made that only children of economically better-off classes would use the park. Our experience over the last one year however shows us that it is mostly children from the middle and lower income groups who use public parks. Often one sees children, stopping by to play on their way back home from school. Youth who may not be able to afford gyms use the park, in the evenings.

Going forward

We believe that the installing of the modified play equipment and the physical changes in the park signals the completion of the first phase of the project. Kilikili will work towards using the play space as a space for integration and inclusion of all children. Programmes will be developed for children from schools and institutions around the area, covering children of all abilities and backgrounds.

The space will also be used to reach out to parents of children with disabilities. Meeting at the park on designated times will enable parents to network with each other and offer mutual support.

Acknowledgements

This project has been made possible by the efforts of many people. Kilikili would like to express its deepest appreciation for the following individuals and institutions, for contributing to making Coles Park the first public play space in India to be made accessible:

Mr. K Jairaj, Municipal Commissioner, Bangalore Mahanagar Palike for his commitment to the project and the cause, and most of all for his assurance that this project will be replicated in at least one park in each zone in the city

Mr Udupidi, Deputy Conservator of Forests for his promptness in action, **Mr Narayanaswamy**, Chief Horticultural Officer and **Mr Bishekappa**, Engineer for their support in implementation

Taegutec for its financial support that covered about one-third of the costs of the play equipment

Actionaid for supporting the Consultations

Our patron, **Bombay Jayshri**, for mobilising goodwill and financial support

Chitra Vishwanath and **Anne Rottrecht**, for their professionalism and sheer common sense

Meena Jain, for her untiring enthusiasm and readiness to take the project forward

Mahesh C for invaluable inputs

Trustees, well-wishers, family and friends without whose support none of this would have been possible.

Kilikili would like to acknowledge with gratitude the following individuals and institutions without whom the **Consultations** could not have taken place.

the **children**, who continue to inspire us with their resilience, their courage and their sheer capacity to live life fully

the **teachers** who accompanied the children: **Shanti** and Sr. **Sheela**: Sunaad, **Satish**: Association for People with Disability and **Geetha**: KWAB

the institutions: **Association for People with Disability**, **Karnataka Welfare Association for the Blind and Sunaad**, **Institute of Speech and Hearing**

the **facilitators**:
Archana, Joy, Diana, Indira

the **volunteers**:
Meenakshi and her daughter **Amrita** who painstakingly made the name tags; **Sharada, Gayatri**
Lakshman for all the running around and the continuous chatter
Fr. Jerome Reno for allowing us the use of the hall, free of charge
Alvito for staying up almost half the night ensuring the banners are made
the **support staff of St. Germain School** for their co-operation.

List of participants

Children's Consultation

Karnataka Welfare Association for the Blind

1. Cheluraj
2. Ganapathy
3. Karthik
4. Prabhu
5. Puneet Kumar
6. Shivagami M T
7. Geeta – Teacher

Shradanjali Integrated School, Association for People with Disabilities

8. Bebi Ayesha
9. Deepak
10. Deepti
11. Durga
12. Guna Shekar
13. Mujahid
14. Nandini
15. R Baby
16. Roopesh
17. Sandeep
18. Shafeek
19. Steven
20. Tabrez
21. V Babu Roa
22. Yassin
23. Satish – Teacher

Sunaad, Institute of Speech and Hearing

24. Gerald
25. Imtiaz
26. Ravi
27. Shubha
28. Sunil
29. Shanti R – Teacher
30. Sister Sheela – Teacher

Technical Consultation

Name of Participant Organisation

1. Basavaraj – Association for People with Disabilities
2. Usha – Association for People with Disabilities
3. Lakshapathy – Association for Promoting Social Action (APSA)
4. Savita B S – Bangalore Children's Hospital
5. Diana Tholoor – Chrysalis
6. Pramila Martin – KPAMRC
7. Geeta – KWAB
8. Meena Jain – M B Psycho-educational Consultant Services
9. Rashmi K – MAYA
10. Gopal – Mobility India
11. Mahesh C – Mobility India
12. Priya Rao – Spastics Society of Karnataka
13. Rabindran Issac – Spastics Society of Karnataka
14. Vijay Kant – Special Olympics, KPAMRC
15. Amba Prabhala – Voices
16. Chitra Vishwanath – Architect
17. Pooja – Architect
18. Pradeep Kumar – Former Additional Commissioner, Disabilities, GoK
19. Shubha Ananth – Parent

Facilitators

1. Diana Tholoor – Chrysalis
2. Archana Shrivastava – Handicap International
3. Joy Srinivasan – Makkala Jagriti
4. Indira Arun – Special educator
5. Kavitha K – Kilikili

Volunteers

1. Gayatri – Makkala Jagriti
2. Lakshman
3. Meenakshi
4. Sharada



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