

# Sara

## Outdoor Play Case Study 1

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Sara is autistic and enjoys playing as much as any child. Mum and dad want her to be free to play, without fear of judgement or discomfort.

Affordability is key for Sara's family and safety is a prime concern. Their local play space isn't an option as it doesn't have a secure boundary, and the planting is thorny or toxic. It would be impossible to keep Sara within sight all of the time.

A bit further away is an inclusive public outdoor play space which is bordered by fencing and toxin-free landscaping. There is just one gated route in and out. Layout of the area is clear and predictable. Sara can survey all the equipment from a distance and engage on her own terms. An enclosed nook allows retreat – still in sight. A mix of vestibular and proprioceptive activities offers calming or active options. Sara loves to run, spin and be as loud as she likes – the higher the climbing frame, the better!

Beyond the structured pathways, in a quiet corner, is a more natural environment – good for loose parts play, sorting items and stimulating the senses. A decorated gazebo offers shade whilst casting shadows with changing shapes.

Sara is fascinated by the water feature here. Each area has seating positioned to give mum and dad uninterrupted views to supervise their daughter in this safe and therapeutic environment. Here Sara can learn and explore through play, improving and developing new skills.

People visiting this park have positive attitudes towards diversity thanks to action by the play space provider. The inclusive aims of the park and what facilities to expect are well advertised. An activity led session, which Sara helped co-design, operates here monthly offering suitable participation options for all abilities together – promoting diversity in every form and enhancing social interaction.

Sara is growing up with a sense of belonging, happily taking part within her local community! And the community is learning new skills too!

# Freddie

## Outdoor Play Case Study 2

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Freddie is quadriplegic and uses a wheelchair. He cannot stand up alone or bear his own weight and has grown too big to be carried. To move safely, out of his wheelchair, he needs to be hoisted. Freddie is clever and sociable but cannot talk, so people who don't know him well assume that he doesn't understand things. This makes him angry and frustrated.

Freddie loves to play just like any other child.

The playground nearest to his home, where his friends and neighbours go, has a smooth surface for his wheelchair to move easily. But he can't take part in this place. None of the swings, slides or play units are designed for use by children who use wheelchairs.

A little further away is a large playground in a country park, which the park providers have described as an "inclusive" playground. Freddie visits to watch the animals in the nearby fields, but he cannot play in this playground either, so it is not inclusive. He remembers he used to be able to use the swing. When he was little, mum could lift him into the specially designed seat which supported his body. He had no other play choices. Sadly, there is only a standard disabled toilet here, which doesn't meet Freddie's needs, so visits have to be short to return home to use the toilet.

If the family drives for about 90 minutes there is a playground which offers Freddie valuable play experiences, rich in choice and with infrastructure to meet his refresh and refuelling needs.

Freddie can access the whole environment. Whilst remaining seated in his chair he can choose to join other children to spin on the roundabout, bounce on the trampoline, or swing independently through the air on the roll-on platform. He loves to feel himself move through the air. It is his favourite thing to do here. There is a pirate ship with ramps up to good wide walkways that a wheelchair can fit on. Dials with handles, ropes with grasp points and some fancy electronic bits and pieces that relate the illusion of water and replicate sounds and smells, can all be easily accessed. If you use a wheelchair like Freddie, there is a raised table, with knee space, for playing with sand and water, which he really enjoys.

With accessible picnic tables and a disabled toilet to 'Changing Places' specification – which means a decent hygienic bed for him to lay down on and a hoist to lift him from his wheelchair – Freddie has exactly what he needs.

# Elaine

## Outdoor Play Case Study 3

Elaine is registered blind with very limited useful vision. She was born with underdeveloped eyes and has light perception in one eye. Elaine explores the world by touch, learns Braille at school and uses a long cane for mobility. A new addition to her family is Ben – her Buddy guide dog.

Going to the playground is a favourite activity. Elaine loves swings and the feeling of wind in her face. However, none of the 10 play spaces in her large town are suited to her needs. Equipment without guard rails can be very dangerous for her and she might wander into the swing area and get knocked over.

The play space Elaine loves is located 30 minutes away by car – but her mum does not drive! They take a bus, then taxi, to get there, taking two hours each way. They usually manage to visit once a month.

A 3D tactile map at the entrance, and tactile markings and surfaces throughout, help Elaine to understand where she is in the park. She likes to try to find play activities on her own and carefully explores equipment, taking time to consider climbing or using the slide.

The plank piano and other musical interactive features are big hits! Elaine is getting older and more adventurous. Mum feels her confidence would be improved if able to take these balanced risks more often.

Ben is welcome in this park and the assistant dog corner with drinking water and a leash tie-up hook is usefully located near the amenity building. Ben is helping Elaine engage with other children. Not seeing others can mean missing a lot of social cues to play.

A local charity which supports blind and visually impaired people has linked with the play space provider and a joint fun day is planned for next month at the playground. Through games and technology, all children will get to experience the space as those with sight loss do. It is already oversubscribed!

Elaine is looking forward to building friendships.

The Children's Play Policy Forum: A collective voice for children's play [www.childrenplaypolicyforum.org.uk](http://www.childrenplaypolicyforum.org.uk)

Play Safety Forum [www.playsafetyforum.org.uk](http://www.playsafetyforum.org.uk)

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