

## Plewis Automotive Group Inclusive Park

### CONTACT

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Year awarded: 2024

Project timeline: November 2021 – September 2023

Project video: <https://youtu.be/ccY6uTApmn0?si=PbPqfVsXidnFAMFe>

### THE PRACTICE

#### *What was the issue?*

The city of Swift Current, along with surrounding rural municipalities, supports a population of 18,000 residents. The city is committed to enhancing the quality of life for everyone in the community, which includes providing access to essential services like safety, housing, water, and food, as well as recreational and cultural facilities that promote strong, healthy communities.

In 2019 community consultations took place as part of the Recreation, Parks, and Culture Master Plan. Accessibility emerged as a key area for improvement. In response, the city began designing a dedicated accessibility park to meet the diverse needs of the community.

#### *What was the project?*

Prior to the development of the Plewis Automotive Group Accessible Park, the city lacked any recreational facilities—indoor or outdoor—that were truly inclusive for all community members. To create this park, the city consulted with professionals in health, therapy, inclusivity, and child development to ensure a thoughtful design. Additionally, a comprehensive public consultation was held to gather input and ensure transparency, allowing the city to effectively address the needs of families and community members.

### THE PROCESS

The project has been evolving for over a decade through persistent community advocacy and learning. In 2012 the city aimed to improve accessibility by renovating an existing playground to provide accessibility opportunities for recreation. However, this project did not fully meet the community's needs. In 2019, during the development of the city's Recreation, Parks and Culture Master Plan, accessibility to recreation facilities also came forward as a barrier to participation for community members. City administration remained committed to creating a truly accessible space by continuing to gather insights and best practices from other communities, and discussions with

residents. This decade-long effort from 2012 to 2022 highlights the city's dedication to understanding and addressing the diverse accessibility needs of its residents.

Several resources were required to ensure the success of the project including the vacant land, the parks' structure and design elements including the playground, pour and play surface, walking spaces, shade tents, and inclusive washrooms with the city's first adult change table. Human resources were instrumental in the design and construction of the playground and park space. The project created 2.5 full-time jobs during its construction period.

Many community groups played a key role during the design phase of the project. This included Saskatchewan Health Authority staff, private businesses in recreation therapy, Saskatchewan Abilities Council, and multiple local members of the community who have experiences working with different levels of abilities. They were engaged in providing insight to ensure the park was truly developed with inclusivity for all.

### *Challenges Faced:*

Like many large-scale projects, the timeline for construction posed challenges, particularly in aligning with the grant period. With the grant not being approved until April, the process of community consultation and finalizing the playground design delayed construction past the initial goal of fall 2022. Through lobbying efforts with the federal government, the project received an extension of grant funding, extending the deadline from March 2023 to the fall of 2023. This extension was crucial in allowing the city to prioritize the value of the project, ensuring that construction wasn't rushed, and potential quality issues were avoided in the future.

## THE RESULTS

The result is a truly inclusive park that adheres to the seven design principles of Universal Play. It features the community's first inclusive washrooms, and the only adult change tables in southwest Saskatchewan. Notably, it is also home to the province's first wheelchair swing, the We-Go-Swing.

The park includes a variety of accessible amenities such as symbol communication boards, double-wide ramps, roller slides with exit transfer stations, the Sway Fun Wheelchair glider, braille panels, the Disc Net Climber, the We-Go-Round, and sensory areas equipped with musical instruments and a sensory play center. There are multiple swings, including the oodles swing, wheelchair-accessible bucket swing, tandem swing, and child swing all accessible on the pour and play surface and sidewalks.

The success of this project has fostered a deep sense of belonging and pride within the community. The grand opening, attended by over 500 people, was a powerful reflection of the community's enthusiasm and support for the initiative. The park has become a vibrant hub of inclusion, with daily visits from program staff and clients of Southwest Homes, Saskatchewan Abilities, and the Chinook School Division, underscoring its role in serving diverse needs. The weekly trips organized by the school division as part of their inclusive programming demonstrate the park's ongoing value for youth and children of all abilities.

This space stands as a welcoming and inclusive environment for individuals of all ages, reinforcing the community's commitment to accessibility and participation for all. The park has created an environment where the entire community can play together in this safe and accessible space, free from barriers.

### *Evaluation Results:*

A qualitative evaluation was done after the completion of the park with members of the community consultation team. A few new elements have been discussed for phase two and three of the park including accessible walking trails, a trampoline, and an inclusive spray park.

Some quantitative social media data shows the community uptake on the Grand Opening of the Plewis Automotive Group Inclusive Park. On Facebook, there were 46 new followers following the event, and posts reached over 120,900 accounts in September, a nearly 60% increase from the previous month. On Instagram 38 followers were gained and posts reached 47,130 accounts in September, an 85% increase from the previous month. The highly shared reel of the Plewis Automotive Group Inclusive Park grand opening reached over 2.2K on Instagram alone early in the month. This reflects that the content published being of high public interest.

### **LESSONS LEARNED**

The most valuable lesson learned from this project is the importance of thorough research and planning before getting started. Engaging in meaningful community consultations is crucial, not only for securing support and sponsorship but also for ensuring that the final product truly addresses the needs of the community. Patience and persistence are essential, as challenges—like funding timelines and construction delays—are inevitable, but staying committed to the project's quality and vision pays off in the long run.