

IMAGINE INCLUSION!

After submitting January's column about supporting others, especially those with disabilities, I started paying attention to the people and environment around me, hoping to understand the relationship our community has with people who are living with disabilities. Considering the idea that it is environment that results in disability, not the person, I wanted to know if our community was actively supporting full access and rights for people with disabilities. I don't think we are failing, however, I do think that we, all of society, do have a great deal of work left to do.

In honor of March being Disability Awareness Month, multiple events were held supporting and enhancing the general public's understanding of disabilities and how a person's life is affected. Governor Mead signed a proclamation designating March as Disability Awareness Month on March 6 and Mayor Kaysen signed a proclamation on March 11. The Wyoming Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities hosted an awareness luncheon on March 19. Then, on March 25 the Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities held a public meeting, launching public awareness regarding the Universally Accessible Playground. March 28, was a huge success when Magic City Enterprises hosted the annual Disability Awareness Walk at Frontier Mall. Fun education was had by all!

Outside of Cheyenne, there were other events in the past few months that lead to the belief that we are making progress towards including all people into the community. Remember the Lincoln Middle School basketball team who stood up for the bullied cheerleader with Down's syndrome. Tony Harris, who has Multiple Sclerosis (MS), used the worst flare up that he had experienced to change his life and career and is now a physical trainer-an employed physical trainer who has MS, imagine. In Idaho, Pocatello Elks Lodge 674 not only elected a man with blindness as a Trustee-but also named him Elk Member of the Year as a result of his organizing the golf tournament and other significant community events.

So many other events occurred, more than can be mentioned-all with the goal of helping us recognize that a disability is not a bad thing-just a different circumstance for different people. How wonderful that we are recognizing people because of abilities, not shunning because of the disability! We have come a long ways, but still have work to do.

There are two forward thinking efforts towards changing our environment taking place in Cheyenne right now-the Children's Museum and the Universally Accessible Playground. The development of these two projects will enhance the lives, knowledge and acceptance of those who are considered different as well as all the non-disabled children and adults experiencing the inclusive interactions. The promotion of the Children's Museum and the Universally Accessible Playground supports current research showing that inclusive play benefits all!

There is a significant amount of research available that proves that inclusive play and interactions benefit all children. This provides the opportunity to see there are differences in people. Skills such as tolerance, appreciating differences and opening minds to different perspectives and attitudes are a result of inclusion. Increased communication as well as increased self-esteem and a positive sense of self are outcomes of inclusive play. Finally, the understanding of social skills and the world is a trait that we want to instill in our future leaders! If our children are gaining this benefit that means that we adults are learning and growing too. A win for everyone!

The above points give us significant reasons to support the Children's Museum and Universally Accessible Playground. Imagine an environment where all children and adults can experience the above benefits and take those lessons and skills to the greater community. Imagine a community that is a leader in creating an environment that results in all people being equals because the support and access is available with no limitations. We can make this happen in Cheyenne by supporting the Children's Museum and the Universally Accessible Playground.

You can find more information about the Children's Museum through the website at <http://www.childrensmuseumofcheyenne.org> or contacting any of the Board of Directors. For more information about the Universally Accessible Playground, contact options includes: Friendship Playground Fund Volunteers at FriendshipPlayground@gmail.com, The Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities Chairperson, Anne Picot (307-287-6310) or the City of Cheyenne Parks Planner, Teresa Moore (307-638-4375).

With the success of these two projects, the lives of many, disabled and non-disabled will be greatly enhanced and Cheyenne will be closer to the prize of inclusion!

Carol Busbee

Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities

Mission

The MCPD's mission is to serve as a network, catalyst, and referral organization that will enhance equality and self-advocacy for people regardless of their disability.

For more information, view the [Mayor's Council for People with Disabilities Website](http://www.cheyennecity.org/MCDP) at www.cheyennecity.org/MCDP