



Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

Recreational Accessibility Plan



Overview

The Forest Preserve District of DuPage County is committed to making its facilities accessible to all visitors. Both the 2019 District Master Plan and the 2021 Community Engagement Services Strategic Framework identify the need to create a recreational accessibility plan to meet the District's commitment to accessibility and serve an audience of DuPage County residents with physical or developmental disabilities. In 2021 a work group of seven employees was created to develop a recreational accessibility plan. Through internal and external benchmarking, stakeholder input, and peer agency audits, the work group identified four goals designed to improve access to recreation and program opportunities for all visitors to the DuPage County forest preserves. Information about the recreational accessibility plan audience, development process, external and internal analysis, and goals with associated objectives and tasks is detailed in this document.

Value Statement

The Community Engagement Services 2021 Strategic Framework vision states, "The FPDDC is the go-to-place where DuPage County residents and visitors make relevant and meaningful connections with nature, each other, and their community - where ALL people are welcome and encouraged to explore, play, learn, and improve their well-being."

Need

The need to develop a Districtwide recreational accessibility plan (referred to previously as a special needs recreation plan) was identified during the development of the 2019 Forest Preserve District master plan, which includes the following:

The Forest Preserve District needs to develop a plan for special-needs audiences that includes camps, adventure days, and other opportunities and programs.

Goal 2: Help people cultivate a lifelong enthusiasm for nature by offering meaningful, first-rate outdoor recreation and learning experiences.

Objective 2.3: Complement and expand existing recreational offerings with increasing participation rates and more social interaction.

Tactic 2.3e: Develop a special-needs recreational plan.

The Community Engagement Services 2021 strategic framework also identified the need for a recreational accessibility plan.

Strategy 2: Provide diverse experiences that are accessible and enjoyable by all.

Objective 2.2: Expand program opportunities for audiences of all abilities, income levels, and cultural backgrounds.

Objective 2.3: Complete the master plan initiative to develop a recreational accessibility plan.

Target Audience

DuPage County has a population of 914,269 based on 2020 U.S. Census data. Of that population, 4.8% have identified as people under age 65 with a disability. In addition, 16.1% of DuPage County residents have identified as people over age 65 (seniors). These groups account for approximately 20.9% of the population, or 191,082 potential visitors. The goal of the recreational accessibility plan is to increase access to recreation opportunities for visitors with physical or developmental disabilities and increase engagement with the preserves among these potential visitors and their families.

Process

In 2021 a work group of seven employees created a recreational accessibility plan based on the need identified during the 2019 master plan process. The work group's members (see Appendix I) were from Business Enterprises, Community Engagement Services, and Community Relations. The group met regularly to design the planning process, hold listening meetings with external stakeholders (see Appendix II), audit current accessible offerings, analyze trends, and formulate the plan's final goals, objectives, and tasks.

As part of the planning process the work group sought out feedback from internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders included other visitor-facing staff, staff with a background in accessibility, and an internal advisory group comprised of members of the Executive Office and Human Resources as well as the Director of Community Engagement Services (see Appendix I).

The external stakeholder group was comprised of parents of children with physical or developmental disabilities, occupational therapists, special education teachers, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists, vocational teachers, school administrators, memory care and senior care professionals, adaptive recreation staff and program organizers, and group home administrators (see Appendix II). There were 23 external stakeholders interviewed or emailed interview questions for response.

We received 85 relevant comments around accessible recreation at the Forest Preserve District, and 100% of respondents indicated that they would be interested in participating or having a colleague participate in an external advisory group (see Objective 4.1).

Industry Analysis

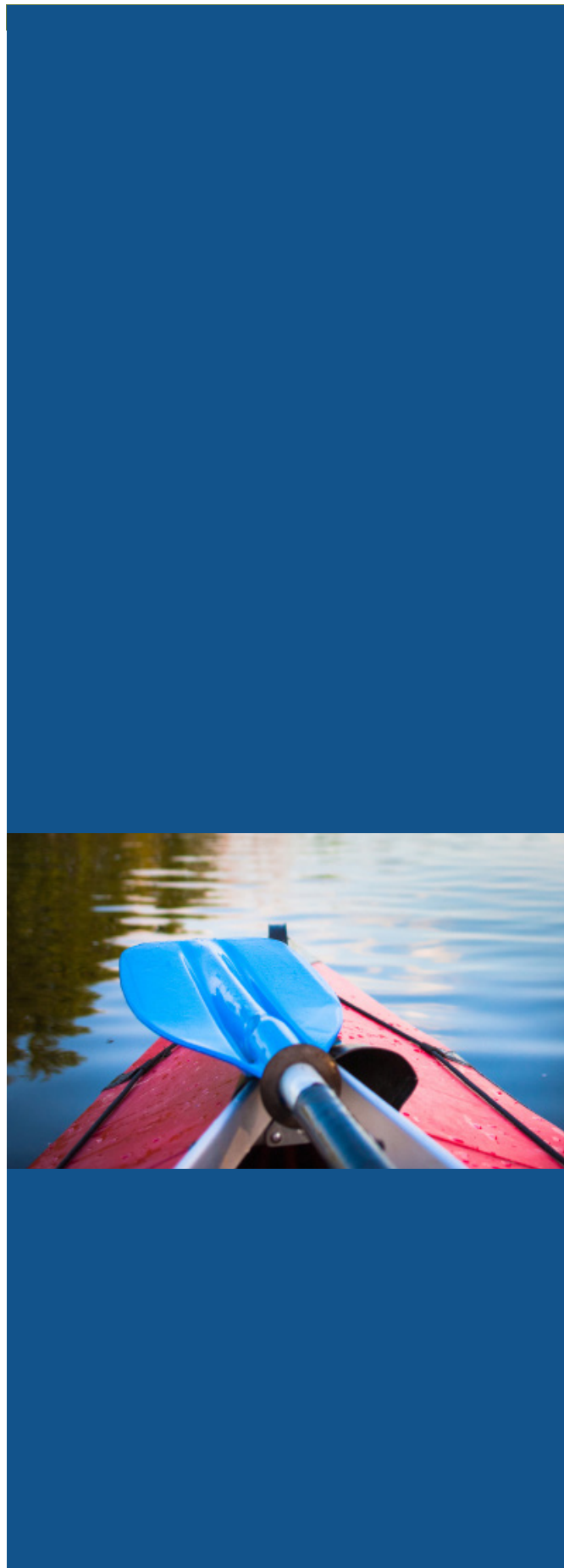
In September 2017 the National Recreation and Park Association surveyed park and recreation professionals across the U.S. to determine how agencies meet the recreational needs of all individuals and groups in their cities, towns, or counties. The association received 497 responses: 32% from metro or urban agencies, 53% from suburban or county agencies, and 15% from rural agencies. The findings below are extracted from this report.

- 40% of park and recreation agencies have a formal inclusion policy or plan that ensures all members of the community can access and enjoy everything the agencies have to offer. These policies or plans include goals, guidelines, and procedures.
- 15% of agencies planned to develop such a policy by the end of 2018.
- 41% of county agencies and 37% of suburban agencies have formal policies that address inclusive recreation.
- A majority of suburban and county agencies design and market programs and activities for different members of their communities.

Programs for people with physical disabilities	Suburban 78%
	County 77%

Programs for people with cognitive disabilities	Suburban 70%
	County 71%

- Common programs designed for and marketed to individuals with physical or developmental disabilities include:
 - 57% Volunteer or employment activities, including opportunities to volunteer or work at park and recreation centers
 - 50% Health and wellness programs
 - 44% Field trips, tours, and vacations
 - 44% Special Olympics and Paralympics
 - 37% Therapy and mentoring services, including swimming and water therapy, art and music therapy, and peer coaching
 - 14% Technology training, including computers
- 90% of park and recreation agencies report they are confronting challenges that prevent their programs from being more inclusive. Many of these challenges stem from a lack of sufficient resources, with insufficient funding a the top of the list (57%) followed by inadequate staffing (46%), a need for greater staff training (25%), and scarce supplies or equipment (9%).
- 23% of agencies indicated that they did not have outreach activities that sufficiently reached their target populations.
- 20% acknowledged they did not fully understand the needs of these communities.



Internal Analysis

In fall 2021 the recreational accessibility plan work group analyzed the Forest Preserve District’s accessible recreation offerings and ease of access by auditing current accessible recreation programs and events, reviewing the accessibility page on dupageforest.org, and talking with staff and external stakeholders.

- The Forest Preserve District offers a variety of accessible recreational, volunteer, and program opportunities, which are developed and offered by individual departments and not captured or promoted collectively. Many of these programs are by-request and not easy to find via common methods (website, the *Conservationist*, etc.).

Current Forest Preserve District Accessible Recreation Opportunities and Accommodations

Accommodation	Team	Availability
ADA Grievance Coordinator	HR	Evergreen
ADA Coordinator	CES	Evergreen
ASL Interpreters	External	By Request
Sighted Guides	External	By Request
Inclusion Services	External	By Request
Braille documents	HR	By Request
Accessibility landing page	CR	Evergreen
TTY	HR	Evergreen
District Diversity and Inclusion statement	HR	Evergreen
Special Needs Outdoor Education Day	CES	As scheduled
Special Needs Adventure Day	CES	As scheduled
Visitor’s Guide accessibility Chart	CES	Evergreen
Accessible volunteer opportunities	HR	As scheduled
Senior safety video	CES	Evergreen
Accessible kayak launch at BLW	Site Ops	Evergreen
Hand rail to attach to piers	Site Ops	By Request
Accessible metal ramp	DAN	By Request
Adaptive archery equipment	Site Ops	By Request
Accessible walking path through DAN gardens	DAN	Evergreen
Adaptable field trip programs to meet accessibility needs	CES	By Request
Use of tactile props	CES	By Request
ELL/ESL loan box + loan box program	CES	By Request
“Accommodation Station” and touch screen computer tour & digital resources	MYL	By Request
ADA golf cart	Golf	By Request
Adaptive golf clubs	Golf	By Request
Accessible campsites at BLW family campground	Site Ops	Evergreen

- When asked about barriers to visiting the preserves and ways to improve access for their communities or groups, external stakeholders indicated a high need for more communication about accessible recreational programs, followed by additional accommodations or programs targeted at their community or group, disability-specific staff training, volunteer opportunities, safety, other, and cost.
- Below is the breakdown of comments from interviews with 23 individual stakeholders or stakeholder groups (see Appendix II):
 - 42% “Knowing what’s available” or communication
 - 32% Accommodations or programs specific to a group or community
 - 7% Disability-specific training for staff
 - 6% Volunteer opportunities
 - 6% Safety
 - 5% Other
 - 2% Cost as a barrier
- Public-facing staff at the Forest Preserve District are enthusiastic about improving access to recreational opportunities but feel they lack the training to develop or implement disability-specific programs, as well as a centralized way to communicate and find current accessible District offerings or accommodations.

The recreational accessibility plan work group also did an audit of peer agency websites for availability of accessibility information to the public. The work group determined whether it was easy or difficult to find information in 15 different categories. Of the counties audited, Cook County had the easiest access to information (rated easy in 14 of 15 categories), followed by Lake (12 of 15), DuPage and Kane (both 7 of 15), and Will (5 of 15) (see Appendix III).



Recreational Accessibility Goals

Based on industry analysis, an analysis of current offerings, and conversations with staff, external community advisors, and partner organizations, the Forest Preserve District recreational accessibility plan work group recommends the following set of goals and associated objectives and tasks.

- Goal 1 Improve internal and external communication of current accessible recreation opportunities, program offerings, and accommodations.
 - Objective 1.1 Create a centralized database of accessible recreation opportunities, program offerings, accommodations, and preserve accessibility for access to all staff via the intranet.
 - Task 1.1a Determine a process with Community Relations for communication about new accessible recreation opportunities and work with ADA coordinator to update the database.
 - Objective 1.2 Improve access to information about accessible recreation on the website.
 - Task 1.2a Add a link to the accessibility page under “Places To Go” on the homepage.
 - Task 1.2b Add information on accessibility on individual preserve pages to address accessibility features at each location and link to details on how to request additional accommodations.
 - Task 1.2c Update trail maps to include accessible features such as bathrooms, parking, and evergreen adaptive recreation opportunities.
 - Task 1.2d Revise the Visitor Guide accessibility chart to include more detailed information, such as wheelchair-friendly, paved paths; accessible bathrooms or adult changing tables; number of handicap parking spots; and adaptive recreation opportunities (see Appendix IV).
 - Task 1.2e Update and clarify available field trip accommodations on teacher landing pages.
 - Objective 1.3 Create an accessibility play list on YouTube or other social media channels and link to the accessibility page on website.
 - Task 1.3a Film videos on accessibility for popular forest preserves and upload to social channels.
 - Objective 1.4 Improve accessibility communications at Forest Preserve District sites and preserves.
 - Task 1.4a Create online, downloadable social stories for Fullersburg Woods, Kline Creek Farm, Mayslake Peabody Estate, Danada Equestrian Center, St. James Farm, and Willowbrook Wildlife Center. (See Appendix V).
 - Task 1.4b Audit signage at Forest Preserve District sites, and update with relevant accessibility information.
 - Task 1.4c Assess need for access to alternative printed materials at sites such as large print, Braille, etc.
 - Objective 1.5 Indicate accessible programs on visitor-facing communications, including the website, the Conservationist, etc.
 - Objective 1.6 Draft a more robust statement of the Forest Preserve District’s commitment to accessibility to add to the website.
- Goal 2 Equip Forest Preserve District staff and volunteers with the training and tools they need to provide high-quality, accessible recreational experiences for visitors of all abilities.
 - Objective 2.1 Audit current trainings and tools to determine additional training needs.
 - Objective 2.2 Provide training for all visitor-facing staff and volunteers on best practices for communicating with visitors with disabilities.
 - Task 2.2a Identify potential community partners to provide a comprehensive disability training.
 - Task 2.2b Integrate disability training into the on-boarding process for newly hired staff, volunteers, and seasonal staff.
 - Objective 2.3 Identify and provide additional disability-specific training to select staff and volunteers, including dementia-friendly training, sighted-guide training, engagement with the autism community, human-centered program design, and use of adaptive recreation equipment or technology.
 - Task 2.3a Identify and provide accessibility coordination professional-development opportunities for ADA coordinators.
 - Objective 2.4 Identify additional staff roles needed to close inclusion gaps and provide ongoing support for inclusion services, accommodations, and implementation of this plan.

- Goal 3 Increase accessible recreation opportunities.
 - Objective 3.1 Increase adaptive equipment available for check out and program delivery.
 - Task 3.1a Identify adaptive equipment for purchase, including adaptive kayak seats and paddles, adaptive fishing equipment, all-terrain wheelchairs, adaptive archery equipment, etc.
 - Task 3.1b Pilot an all-terrain wheelchair lending program at high-volume forest preserve sites.
 - Task 3.1c Train staff on the use of adaptive equipment or technologies so they can then instruct visitors and deliver programs.
 - Objective 3.2 Increase available accommodations for current recreational program opportunities.
 - Task 3.2a Audit process for requesting aides, guides, and interpreters, and update to accurately reflect lead time, availability, etc.
 - Task 3.2b Assess need for additional communication tools for in-person programs, including tablets, images, etc.
 - Task 3.2c Create and prototype sensory-friendly kits for check out at sites (see Appendix VI).
 - Task 3.2d Identify outstanding inclusion gaps. Source support services or develop internal accommodations.
 - Objective 3.3 Increase disability-specific programs and opportunities.
 - Task 3.3a Develop and pilot self-guided programs for specific disability communities.
 - Task 3.3b Develop and pilot guided programs, such as limited-mobility programs using golf carts, accessible equine programs, sensory-friendly programming, Special Olympics coaching, and memory-loss programs and resources.
 - Task 3.3c Identify and pilot new volunteer opportunities for volunteers with disabilities.
 - Task 3.3d Assess opportunities for accessible summer camps, including partner camp opportunities and disability-specific camps.
- Goal 4 Increase community engagement and outreach around accessible recreation at the Forest Preserve District.
 - Objective 4.1 Build an external advisory group.
 - Task 4.1a Create advisory group structure, goals, and meeting schedule.
 - Task 4.1b Use an external advisory group to identify opportunities for new programming and accessible recreation activities for future implementation.
 - Task 4.1c Identify people to participate in external prototyping group to test and provide feedback on Forest Preserve District accommodations and new accessible experiences.
 - Objective 4.2 Develop accessible recreation opportunities with external partners.
 - Task 4.2a Assess need and audience for partner programming.
 - Task 4.2b Identify and engage potential partners.

Conclusion

There is a demonstrated need to move forward with implementation of the goals, objectives, and tasks outlined in this document. Pending endorsement of this plan by District leadership and the Board of Commissioners, the recreational accessibility plan work group will become the recreational accessibility plan implementation group and will expand to include members from all divisions. This group will meet quarterly to prioritize objectives, communicate accessible recreation opportunities, and work together to implement the tasks laid out in the recreational accessibility plan. We anticipate that this plan will take approximately five years to fully implement. The implementation group will identify checkpoints to share back progress to stakeholders and seek feedback from user groups. By implementing this plan, the Forest Preserve District will truly become a place where all people are welcome and encouraged to explore, play, and learn outdoors.

Appendix

Appendix I

Internal Work Groups

Recreational accessibility plan Work Group

Work Group Leads

Jay Johnson, Heritage Site Logistics Manager

Katie Schweiger, Visitor Engagement Services Manager

Work Group Members

Shannon Burns, Education Program Coordinator

Brad Doweidt, Equestrian Program Coordinator

Jamie Nieto, Golf Services Supervisor

Beth Schirott, Digital Communications Specialist

Jennifer Rydzewski, Environmental Interpreter

Executive Advisory Group

Anamari Dorgan, Community Engagement Services Director

Jessica Ortega, Manager of Strategic Plans and Initiatives

Ed Stevenson, Executive Advisor

Christina Watson, Human Resources Manager



Appendix II External Stakeholders

Between Dec. 1, 2021, and Feb.10, 2022, the work group held listening meetings with the following external stakeholders:

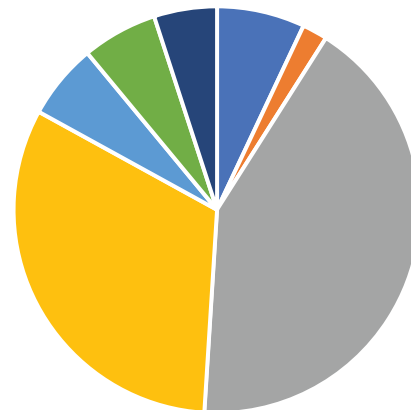
Megan Altic, STEM Teacher, Lisle Elementary School and parent to a child with a disability
 Tony Anicich, Vocational Teacher, Giant Steps
 Richard Burns, Occupational Therapist, School Association for Special Education in DuPage
 Catherine Campos, Director of Community Family Support Services, Ray Graham Association
 Peg Chaidez, Co-founder of Dream Build Play, parent to a child with a physical disability
 Peggy Delaney, PTA Parent Liaison, Building Bridges PTA Group
 Phil Eide, Adaptive Athletics Manager, Western DuPage Special Recreation Association
 Megan Gittler, BCBA Behaviorist, School District 200
 Heather Headmark, Transition Teacher, Philip J. Rock Center and School
 Michelle Healy, Occupational Therapist, School District 200
 Bonnie Jordan, Philip J. Rock Center and School
 Megan Kaleta, formerly from Mysericordia and other group homes
 Lisa Kirchner, Naperville Dementia Friendly Task Force
 Rich Laren, Vocational Teacher, School Association for Special Education in DuPage
 Cathy Morava, South East Association for Special Parks and Recreation
 Traci Tracey, Teacher of Visually Impaired, School Association for Special Education in DuPage
 Margarita Maria Rosas, parent to a child with a disability
 Charlie Rowe, Founder, Adaptability
 Monica Small, Physical Therapist, School District 200
 Jessica Stewart, Assistant Superintendent for Special Services & Homeless Liaison, Downers Grove Grade School District #58
 Suzanne Trotter, Inclusion Facilitator, Lisle Elementary School
 Greg Zbrzezny, Program Director, Adaptive Adventures
 Sue Zikuda, Regional Special Education Programs Manager, School Association for Special Education in DuPage

External Stakeholder Questions

1. What is your experience regarding communities with special needs?
2. What adaptive recreation accommodations are of interest to your group?
3. What general accommodations would be helpful?
4. What accommodations can we provide to make programs appeal to more diverse groups?
5. What do you see as barriers to accessing preserves or programs?
6. We are putting together an external advisory group. Would you be interested in participating?

Comments and Comment Category Definitions

The work group placed comments from questions two, three, and four into categories based on the type of accommodation or opportunity suggested.



- Training 7%
- Cost 2%
- Communication 42%
- Accommodations 32%
- Volunteer Opportunities 6%
- Safety 6%
- Other 5%

Training – Any comment referring to specially trained Forest Preserve District staff, opportunities for disability-specific staff training, lack of staff training as a barrier to access, or a preference for programs and opportunities designed and delivered by specially trained staff.

Cost – Any comment referring to cost as a barrier to access, or any comment referring to reducing program and activity fees as an opportunity.

Communication – Any comment referring to improving external communication about available opportunities, lack of external communication about opportunities as a barrier, missing or difficult to find information as a barrier, ways to improve ease of access to information, or specific signage or other information that would increase access.

Accommodations – Any comment referring to a specific tool, method, or change to a program or recreation activity designed to improve access such as (but not limited to) adaptive technologies, touch-based tours, or reduced-length guided walks.

Volunteer Opportunities – Any comment referring to opportunities for the target audience to help, assist, work, or volunteer at the Forest Preserve District.

Safety – Any comment referring to safety concerns as a barrier or suggestions for improved safety to increase access.

Other – Any comment that did not fit in one of the aforementioned categories and was not mentioned more than one time throughout the external conversation process.

Appendix III Peer Agency Audit

In February 2022 the work group audited peer agency websites to benchmark the communication of accessible offerings to the public. The findings below are the results from that audit. A dot indicates the item was present on the website and easy to find by the auditor.

	DuPage	Cook	Kane	Lake	Will
Accessibility Webpage	•	•	•	•	•
List of Accessible Locations	•	•		•	
Accessible Recreation Opportunities		•			
Accessible Program Opportunities					
ADA Language	•	•	•	•	•
Request Accommodation Procedure	•	•	•	•	•
Grievance Procedure	•	•	•	•	•
Mobility Device Policy		•	•	•	
Service Animal Policy		•		•	
Nondiscrimination Policy/Statement		•		•	
Reasonable Accommodation Policy		•		•	
Link on Homepage Banner		•	•	•	
Link on Homepage Footer	•	•		•	•
Commitment Statement	•	•	•	•	
Accessibility Info on Events Page		•			

Appendix IV Example Accessibility Information

Below is an excerpt from the Forest Preserve District of Cook County’s website, fpdcc.com/things-to-do/fishing/#accessible, showing information on accessible fishing areas.

Accessible Fishing Areas

Accessible fishing areas include accessible parking, a paved path to the shoreline, a hard surface along the shoreline, and railings along portions, or all, of the hard-surfaced shoreline. Some areas have access to accessible bathrooms for all or part of the year.

[Beaubien Woods](#)

W Doty Ave S, southeast of E 130th St & S Ellis Ave
Chicago, IL 60827 ([view web map](#))

- Distance to accessible parking: 390 ft
- Distance to accessible portable bathroom: 296 ft

[Busse Forest-West](#)

E Higgins Rd/Rte 72, east of I-290/Hwy 53
Cook County, IL 60007 ([view web map](#))
(near Elk Grove Village)

- Distance to accessible parking: 189 ft
- Distance to accessible indoor bathroom: 314 ft

Appendix V

Example Social Story

Social stories use words or images to explain specific occurrences, behaviors, social interactions, concepts, or skills. They are designed to benefit people who have difficulties with comprehension. They are also useful for parents of young children as a tool to set clear expectations around new experiences. Below is an excerpt of a social story from the California Academy of Sciences website.

I am going to visit the California Academy of Sciences!



A pre-visit social story for young guests



The museum is made of glass and gray concrete.
This door is where I'll start.

My friends and I will get to explore the Academy and
do some fun activities while we are there...



When we get to the museum we will be greeted at the entrance by the friendly staff.
At the door, we can share a joke and have a laugh.

Appendix VI

Example Sensory Kit

Sensory kits can be a helpful tool for visitors in need of extra sensory support. Kits include sensory-friendly backpacks, adjustable headphones or earmuffs, sunglasses, and an assortment of tactile and fidget toys. Items specific to the sensory needs at different sites could be added or made available upon request. Below is an example of a sensory kit from the California Academy of Sciences.

