

Grant Approval Memo



Grantee: Alaska Jewish Campus
Request Amount: \$150,000.00
Project Title: Alaska Friendship Circle All-Inclusive Early Childhood Indoor Play Center
Grant Term: 3/1/2026 to 02/28/2027
Fund Source: FY26 Partnerships/Designated Grants
Trust Staff: Tina Voelker-Ross

Requested Motion:

The Program and Planning Committee recommends that the Board of Trustees approve a \$150,000 authority grant to the Alaska Jewish Campus for the Alaska Friendship Circle All-Inclusive Early Childhood Indoor Play Center grant. These funds will come from the Partnerships/Designated Grants line of the FY26 budget.

Staff Analysis:

- What does this project do?
This is a capital project to support the building of Phase II of the Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center on the Alaska Jewish Campus. This will be an indoor play space for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities or delays, and/or behavioral health challenges. Once built, this center will provide an inclusive and accessible play environment for children 15 months to 9 years old with disabilities and/or behavioral health challenges as well as a place of connection, support, and resources for families. Trust funds are for capital costs for the adaptive indoor play equipment designed to meet the needs of children with physical, developmental, and sensory disabilities. This specialized equipment—such as sensory panels, a music station, balance stations, wheelchair-accessible tables, and transfer-friendly climbers, ensures that all children can safely engage in active, meaningful play.
- Who is receiving the funds?
The Alaska Jewish Campus (AJC) is a non-profit organization established in 1991 in Anchorage Alaska. In 1993, the campus established a preschool. In the 30 years that it has been in operation, the preschool has become a respected center for early childhood education, community building and family engagement. Fall 2025, AJC successfully completed Phase I of the Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center, an outdoor inclusive and accessible play area for children with disabilities. They anticipate that Phase II of the project will be the heart of the Alaska Friendship Circle and a critical place for parents and families to connect.
- Why is staff recommending this project?
The project directly supports Trust beneficiaries—including children with developmental disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, sensory processing challenges, Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, mental illness, traumatic brain injury or behavioral health needs—by providing a safe, adaptive, and year-round space designed to foster social, emotional, and physical development. Families of Trust beneficiaries will also benefit from opportunities to connect with peers, access supportive resources, and participate in community-based activities without barriers. The Indoor Play Center is key to tackling the issue of social isolation and the lack of tailored opportunities for young children with special needs, predominantly Trust

Grant Approval Memo



beneficiaries, by offering an inclusive setting that supports their social, cognitive, and physical development. The Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center is proudly supported by key community partners whose collaboration and expertise strengthen the long-term impact of this initiative. With the involvement of these partners, Trust beneficiaries will be informed and directed to this resource in the community to ensure utilization by Trust beneficiaries and their families. This capital project also shows strong leveraged funding partners, aligns with early intervention opportunities for children who experience developmental disabilities, and aligns with the comp plan.

- Will this be a multi-year project?

This proposal is for a 12-month capital project that will result in the building of the indoor accessible play area. Once the play area is completed, AJC may submit an additional project proposal for Trust funding which focuses on program implementation of the Alaska Friendship Circle for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. Any additional funding proposal will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees for consideration.

Grant Approval Memo



Trust Five Year Funding History

No Previous Trust Grants

Comp Plan Identification

Area of Focus	Objective	Comments
Area of Focus 1: Early Childhood & Youth	1.2 Ensure accurate identification and support of social-emotional needs for children and their families, congruent with their cultural identification	

Trust Focus Area Connection

Budget Area	Strategy	Comments
Early Childhood & Youth	Early Childhood - Ensure accurate identification and treatment of social-emotional needs for children, youth, and their caregivers	

Project Description (from grant application)

Background:

The Alaska Jewish Campus (AJC) has offered top quality early childhood programs for Anchorage children since the early 1990s with a pre-school program, summer camps and an after-school program. With 30+ years of building skills and experience serving young children of all abilities, we identified young, special needs children and their families as an underserved group. This was confirmed by extensive visits to Anchorage play areas and discussions with parents, leading special needs service providers, and local special education pre-school teachers.

In response, the Alaska Jewish Campus embraced the Friendship Circle concept, an international program for special needs children where children play, make friends, build skills and are mentored by teen volunteers. From these discussions Alaska Friendship Circle was born.

Friendship Circles:

A Friendship Circle is founded upon the belief that within each person is a soul; and that soul is equal and worthy of boundless love and connection. With this inspiration, the lives of the families we serve are enhanced while our volunteers reap the rewards of selfless giving.

Alaska Friendship Circle:

Alaska is the first Friendship Circle in the world to focus on young children, 15 months – 9 years old. Our focus is on young children with special needs because we know these are critical ages when lifelong skills and habits are developed. Early childhood years are incredibly important for physical skills such as balance, coordination, fine motor skills, and strength. Early childhood years are also

Grant Approval Memo



extremely important for building emotional skills such as learning to make friends, working in groups, sharing with others and more. Play is important for young children with special needs, including Trust beneficiaries as play supports brain development, enhances motor and sensory skills, and social-emotional and cognitive abilities through a natural and fun context.

Alaska Friendship Circle All-Inclusive Early Childhood Indoor Play Center:

The Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center is being built in two phases. Phase 1, the Outdoor Play Center is fully funded (\$2,187,020) and construction is now nearing completion. To truly create an inclusive and accessible environment, the Alaska Friendship Circle plans a dedicated indoor space where children who are Trust beneficiaries along with other children, families, caregivers and volunteers can gather, connect, and grow together. Phase 2, the Indoor Play Center is the focus of this grant application. The Indoor Play Center is now in the fundraising (\$2,345,095 goal) and final design stage. The Indoor Play Center will be an extension of our current AJC building, connected to the AJC and adjacent to the Outdoor Play Center.

The Indoor Play Center will serve as the heart of the Alaska Friendship Circle, providing a warm and welcoming space for play, enrichment activities, family programs and essential resources. It will be open all year long, no matter what the weather, offering young children a space for play, art, movement, experience and enrichment. Experience from Friendship Circles in other states tells us that almost 90% of the children served by the Alaska Friendship Circle will have autism, Down syndrome or other intellectual developmental delays.

Partnering with Anchorage's leading early childhood and special needs organizations, the Play Center will ensure that many children — including those with autism, Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, mental illness and other intellectual and developmental disabilities — have access to a program that supports their play, learning, friendship, and developmental growth.

The Indoor Play Center will be welcoming families by including a small kitchen stocked with coffee and snacks, seating for parents and caregivers, a birthday and family celebration area area, a storybook nook and more. Parents and caregivers will find a supportive environment to connect, share resources, swap success stories, make friends and build community. The Indoor Play Center will decrease the sense of isolation for parents, reduce the stigma of having a special needs child and provide parents and caregivers with some much-needed respite. The Play Center will act as a catalyst for inclusion and understanding across the broader Anchorage community.

With support from Anchorage's leading early childhood organizations and special needs resource centers, our Indoor Play Center will attract children with special needs from across Anchorage. Our partners will help to get the word out to parents and caregivers; some will host programs at our Play Center and help to fill the Play Center with the joyous sound of young children at play.

The Indoor Play Center's intentional and thoughtful design prioritizes the needs of children with intellectual developmental disabilities. From sensory-friendly features that are thoughtfully designed for children with intellectual disabilities and delays, nooks and tents for children wanting small spaces and safe boundaries to feel safe and imaginative, play stations that help to develop teamwork and motor skills, every element is crafted to help children with developmental disabilities and delays to fully participate, build essential life skills, and enjoy the transformative power of unstructured, collaborative exploration and play.

Grant Approval Memo



Phase 2: Indoor Play Center Highlights

- *Fort-building, toddler playhouse, a variety of play stations
- *Climbing wall, animal sculptures, sensory panels
- *Flexible activity zones filled with accessible play equipment
- *Spaces for art, dance and music
- *A space for movement, tumbling and games
- *A nook for reading stories and enjoying books
- *A kitchen for hot coffee, snacks, a space for birthday parties and family celebrations
- *Inclusive equipment, play stations, toys and games to promote balance, agility, coordination and problem-solving skills
- *ADA-compliant, child-friendly restrooms and sidewalks

A core focus of the Indoor Play Center is the adaptive indoor play equipment designed to meet the needs of children with physical, developmental, and sensory disabilities. This specialized equipment—such as sensory panels, a music station, balance stations, wheelchair-accessible tables, and transfer-friendly climbers, ensures that all children can safely engage in active, meaningful play. By providing inclusive play opportunities year-round, we help children build strength, coordination, and social skills while promoting emotional well-being and confidence. The assistive environment also supports therapeutic use by partner organizations such as occupational and physical therapists and programs serving children with intellectual and developmental delays.

Our indoor play area will feature a variety of games, toys, and child-sized inclusive accessories that nurture children's physical, emotional, and sensory development—particularly those who are Trust beneficiaries, including children with developmental disabilities, sensory processing disorders, and behavioral health challenges. Each element is designed to build confidence, support regulation, and promote inclusive play experiences. Our planned inclusive accessories will support:

Fine motor skill development: Manipulative and tactile toys such as puzzles, building sets, and bead mazes strengthen coordination and dexterity—key skills for children working toward greater independence in self-care and like skill tasks.

Sensory regulation: Fidget toys, textured materials and sensory tables allow children with autism spectrum disorder or sensory processing difficulties to safely explore touch and movement, helping them stay calm, focused, and engaged and improve problem solving skills.

Noise management: Hearing protectors and quiet spaces reduce overstimulation and anxiety for children who are sensitive to sound or large groups, supporting emotional stability and participation.

Calming and self-soothing: Therapy swings, peapods, tents, hideaways provide safe spaces while weighted pillows or wearables provide deep-pressure input that can help children with sensory or behavioral regulation challenges feel grounded and secure.

Grant Approval Memo



Balance and body awareness: Stability tools, soft mats, and adaptive balance equipment improve coordination, strength, and spatial awareness—critical areas for children who experience motor or developmental delays.

Social and emotional growth: By offering adaptive options for every ability, the space promotes inclusive group play, empathy, and peer connection. An example of this is using communication boards which support language and social play.

Together, these inclusive elements create a therapeutic, year-round indoor environment where Trust beneficiaries can develop essential life skills, experience joy and belonging, and build resilience through play.

To ensure the Indoor Play Center remains a safe and well-supervised environment, we will have an on-site, vetted and trained attendant responsible for monitoring access and assisting families during open hours. This staff member will control entry to the space, greet visitors, and maintain an accurate count of children and caregivers inside at any given time. The attendant will also support basic oversight of play areas, help children navigate equipment safely, and provide guidance when needed. This controlled-access approach ensures that children can explore freely while maintaining a secure, safe and welcoming environment for all families.

The Need:

While Anchorage offers several inclusive playgrounds, our Indoor Play Center fills a critical gap by its dedicated focus on very young children, specifically ages 15 months up to 9 years—who are often overlooked in traditional play space design. The Indoor Play Center's features are built to enhance the experience of children who are Trust beneficiaries including those with autism, Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, mental illness, traumatic brain injury and other intellectual disabilities or delays. The Indoor Play Center will be accessible to children and adults with mobility differences. The Indoor Play Center is designed to support and enrich families, provides respite for parents and caregivers and we will train and provide volunteers to guide children.

Most playgrounds cater to school-age children, leaving toddlers and preschoolers with few safe and developmentally appropriate opportunities for inclusive play. At the same time, our Play Center will welcome children ages 6 to 9, ensuring that siblings can play together in a shared space. This family-centered approach means that parents and caregivers don't have to choose between meeting the needs of their youngest or oldest child; they can enjoy a single, inclusive environment where all children are engaged, safe, and supported. By serving both younger children and their slightly older siblings, our Indoor Play Center fosters not only individual growth but also stronger family connections and community bonds.

Serving younger children with intellectual and developmental disabilities requires a different approach, for example, both our Indoor and Outdoor Play Centers provide enclosed space as children with IDD may wander or bolt when they hear a loud noise. A young child at a city playground may run into a parking lot, a baseball game or into a wooded area. At our Play Center children will be at play with other children of similar ages. A young child at an inclusive city playground may find themselves next to a 15-year-old throwing a football, a 20-year-old swinging a baseball bat or a dog on or off leash. None of these situations are safe for young children with intellectual disabilities. The Alaska

Grant Approval Memo



Friendship Circle Play Center creates a safer developmentally appropriate space where children can engage in play with others their own age.

To ensure our project is rooted in actual community needs, AJC hosted open roundtable discussions with local child service and special needs providers to gather input on:

- *Existing services available in Anchorage
- *Current gaps and unmet needs
- *Ideas and possibilities for the new, all-inclusive play center, and
- *Opportunities for partnerships in programming, referrals and family support.

Community Support/ Partners:

The Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center is proudly supported by key community partners whose collaboration and expertise strengthen the long-term impact of this initiative. Our partners all bring decades of experience supporting children and families with diverse needs. Key partners include THREAD Alaska, The Arc of Anchorage, Stone Soup Group, and the Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities. Special Olympics Alaska plans to host its Young Athletes Program at our Play Center. Program for Infants and Children (PIC) is eager to bring groups of young children to experience the Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center as part of their programming. Best Beginnings, Alaska Down syndrome Network and Hearts & Hands of Care have all contributed to our planning process and will enthusiastically invite their families with young children to use the Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center.

The Anchorage Park Foundation, another key partner, invited us to join their Inclusive Play Work Group and offered to include the Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center on their website and in their Anchorage Playground Maps & Inclusive Play Guide. According to their guidelines, an inclusive playground is one that is accessible, offers varying levels of challenge for all children and is, above all, fun. The Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department evaluates each playground based on seven types of physical, sensory, and social play opportunities to ensure meaningful access for all. Inclusion in this guide will draw more families to the Alaska Friendship Circle Indoor Play Center and highlight our play center as part of Anchorage's commitment to equity and inclusive play.

Our Indoor Play Center is much more than a playground. It removes barriers, fosters inclusive relationships, and creates a place where all children grow together through joy and friendship. It will be a safe, fully accessible environment that supports year-round learning, play, and connection—even during Alaska's long winters. The Alaska Friendship Circle will recruit and train teen volunteers to inspire and be role models for young children and, at the same time, to experience the joy of working with children who have special needs. The Play Center will be open to the public and free to access. It is not just a place to play: it's a place to belong.

This Indoor Play Center will provide developmentally appropriate play opportunities and programs that welcome all children, regardless of ability. For children with intellectual disabilities, who already face challenges to inclusion, peer interaction, and support, this space will offer something vital: a place to connect, belong, and thrive. At the same time, it allows typically developing children to build friendships with peers of all abilities—encouraging empathy, friendships, and community values.

Expected Outcomes

Grant Approval Memo



As you can imagine it is difficult to quantify the many positive, unexpected and joyous outcomes from this project.

The Indoor Play Center will provide young children with disabilities the same opportunities to advance in core developmental milestones. Children will learn how to play with others and develop important life skills and social cues. Children also learn to share, take turns and follow directions. These skills will help children in family, community and school settings.

Playing in a safe and appropriate environment is a fun way for children to stay active and establish healthy habits for the future. It is important to teach children healthy habits while they are young. This can set the stage for a life of physical activity, friendships and learning. The Indoor Play Center, with adaptive play equipment, ADA sidewalks, and restrooms and a team of supportive and giving volunteers will help young children to:

- develop motor skills more quickly than others who do not take part,
- build social, emotional growth; parents and teachers report improvements in turn-taking, cooperation, following directions and other peer engagement.
- increase school readiness: Participants demonstrated gains in skills that support learning and classroom participation.
- develop better understanding and acceptance: inclusive play helps children with and without disabilities to better understand and accept others. These friendships have been shown to reduce bullying, a significant issue for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities and start the process of building lifelong friendships.

The Alaska Friendship Indoor Play Center will be a place where connections between people from all walks of life are made, fostering mutual respect, sharing success stories and creating friendships. The Indoor Play Center is key to tackling the issue of social isolation and the lack of tailored opportunities for young children with special needs, predominantly Trust beneficiaries, by offering an inclusive setting that supports their social, cognitive, and physical development. Families in Anchorage struggle to find suitable, age-appropriate activities for their child's unique abilities, leading to feelings of exclusion and isolation. The Indoor Play Center will be a place for parents to share a cup of coffee while their children play, make new friends and build confidence. These secondary beneficiaries experience an increase in hope for their child's future and will decrease their sense of social isolation. Additionally, teen volunteers benefit as they develop empathy and leadership skills while experiencing the joy of working with young children with physical and intellectual disabilities.

Family support and benefits: The Alaska Friendship Circle Indoor Play Center will offer respite and support for families and caregivers, creating a nurturing environment for children, families and caregivers. We will be open to the public and accessible to all families with young children, with a particular focus on inclusivity for young children with physical and intellectual disabilities. Our Indoor Play Center will be available to all families at no charge, ensuring equitable access for all. Our Indoor Play Center will be a place where families can build community and have fun in a safe environment that will help set the foundation for their child's lifelong health, confidence and social connection.

Grant Approval Memo



Performance Measures

How much did you do?

- a. Square footage of accessible indoor/outdoor space completed during the grant term.
- b. Number (#) of new inclusive play zones or programming areas built (e.g., sensory room, art area, quiet retreat zone) during the grant term.

How well did you do it?

- a. Provide a narrative describing the timeline, activities, successes, challenges, and lessons learned during the building of Phase II of the Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center indoor play space. Please provide electronic photographs (in PDF) of the installed adaptive indoor play equipment. Additionally, provide a final list of funders contributing to Phase II of the project.
- b. Percentage (%) of construction milestones completed on time and within budget.
- c. Percentage (%) of universal design and ADA accessibility features achieved compared to the plan.

Sustainability (from grant application)

The Indoor Play Center and Alaska Friendship Circle programming will be permanent additions to the Alaska Jewish Campus' community support offerings, which has proudly maintained educational and community events in Anchorage for more than 30 years. This project directly supports our long-standing mission to empower families, foster inclusion, and create safe, welcoming environments for children of all abilities and backgrounds.

We are pursuing a diversified fundraising strategy to build and support the Indoor Play Center that includes; foundation grants, corporate partnerships, special events and individual donors. Our Board of Directors is actively engaged in fundraising efforts, and we have a strong track record of successfully managing outreach projects. The response of the Anchorage community to support the Indoor Play Center project has been heartwarming.

Funding from the Alaska Mental Health Trust will go a long way toward helping us reach our capital goals. While we do not anticipate returning to AKMHT for additional capital building support, we are exploring potential funding opportunities for Friendship Circle program startup and pilot year operations. With a strong foundation of community partnerships, an experienced project team, and clear plans for sustainable programming, we are confident in the success of this project and its lasting impact on the individuals and families we will serve.

Who We Serve (from grant application)

Grant Approval Memo



The Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center will be open and welcoming to all children with a focus on children with special needs, creating an inclusive environment where youth of all abilities can learn, play, and grow together. The project directly supports Trust beneficiaries—including children with developmental disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, sensory processing challenges, Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, mental illness, traumatic brain injury or behavioral health needs—by providing a safe, adaptive, and year-round space designed to foster social, emotional, and physical development.

Families of Trust beneficiaries will also benefit from opportunities to connect with peers, access supportive resources, and participate in community-based activities without barriers. Parents and caregivers will find some respite while children will discover play and joy.

We will actively encourage partnerships with local organizations such as Programs for Infants and Children (PIC), Alaska Down syndrome Network, Stone Soup Group and Special Olympics Alaska to ensure that children and families who can benefit most are aware of and able to participate fully.

By reducing isolation, improving access to enriching activities, and fostering a sense of belonging, this project will help ensure that Trust beneficiaries, their families—and the broader community—are healthier, more connected, and better supported year-round.

Estimated Numbers of Beneficiaries Served Experiencing (from grant application)

Mental Illness:	10
Developmental Disabilities:	470
Traumatic Brain Injuries:	2
Secondary Beneficiaries (family members or caregivers providing support to primary beneficiaries):	650
Number of people to be trained	24

Project Budget (from grant application)

Equipment Costs	\$150,000.00
Equipment Costs (Other Sources)	\$28,080.00
Equipment Narrative	We will use grant funds to purchase inclusive play equipment, games, and toys for the Indoor Play Center that allow children of all abilities to play, explore, and grow together. Planned features include sensory play panels, colorful and engaging activity zones, and a range of accessible equipment such as rubber blocks, balance boards, balls and movement games, puzzles, tents, tunnels, and sensory-rich stations for art, music, and creative expression.
Other Costs	\$0.00

Grant Approval Memo



Other Costs (Other Sources)	\$2,167,015.00
Other Costs Narrative	Construction costs to expand existing building include: Permitting, Site Work, Concrete Slab and ADA sidewalks, Carpentry, Insulation, Doors & Hardware, Interior walls, Impro (easy to clean) Wall Finishes, Fire Extinguishers, Flooring, Kitchen Appliances, Restroom Accessories, Plastic Laminate (easy to clean) Cabinets, Ductwork, Sprinkler Extension, Trenching for Plumbing, Electrical and Lighting, Fire Alarm, and more.

Other Funding Sources (from grant application)

Rasmuson Foundation, pending	\$350,000.00
MJ Murdock Trust, pending	\$307,000.00
Max & Marjorie Fisher & Max & Victoria Dreyfus Foundation, pending	\$141,500.00
Alaska Jewish Gala 2025 (secured) & 2026 pending	\$200,000.00
Richard L & Diane M Block Foundation, pending	\$100,000.00
Demain Family Foundation, Secured	\$50,000.00
Ellsworth Foundation & Manning Foundation, Secured	\$85,000.00
Individual Donors, secured	\$110,500.00
Other Funders Including Corporate Sponsors, Foundations, Individual Donors and Others including potential federal funds (pending)	\$851,095.00
Total Leveraged Funds	\$2,195,095.00



Project Vision,
Mission & Summary

The Alaska Friendship Circle

All-Inclusive Early Childhood Play Center

Phase One - 2025 | Phase Two - 2026



Alaska Friendship Circle



Vision & Mission

Phase 1 & Phase 2

Imagine a place where every child—regardless of ability—can explore, play, and thrive together. A space intentionally designed to break down barriers and foster meaningful connections.

That vision comes to life through the groundbreaking Alaska Friendship Circle: the first all-inclusive early childhood play center in Anchorage, a discovery and exploration outdoor playground & indoor play center for all children, including those with disabilities or developmental differences, creating a legacy of inclusion and joy in our Anchorage community.

Rooted in the mission of Alaska Jewish Campus/Gan Yeladim Early Learning Center, the new all-inclusive indoor & outdoor play center is redefining what play and community engagement can look like. By prioritizing accessibility at every level, the center will ensure that all children—including those with physical, cognitive, or sensory differences—can participate fully, feel valued, and experience the joy of unstructured, collaborative exploration.

As part of this broader vision, we are proud to launch Alaska's first Friendship Circle. The Friendship Circle is a globally recognized program dedicated to building lasting, meaningful connections between children with special needs and their peers through structured friendship, shared experiences, and community support. By focusing on strengths and abilities, we cultivate empathy, acceptance, and a spirit of unity that extends beyond the playground—into classrooms, homes, and the broader community.

Vision & Mission (Con't)

Phase 1 & Phase 2

From Brooklyn to Los Angeles, today there are 80 chapters of Friendship Circle across the United States. Each chapter fosters meaningful friendships and joy in the lives of individuals with special needs and their families, many of whom face social isolation. Friendship Circle, powered by teenaged volunteers, community partners and professionals, promotes an inclusive community that celebrates and supports every individual, regardless of their abilities or challenges.

A Friendship Circle is founded upon the belief that within each person is a soul; and that soul is equal and worthy of boundless love and connection. With this inspiration, the lives of the families we serve are enhanced while the volunteers reap the rewards of selfless giving.

Friendship Circle chapters exist to bring happiness and meaningful relationships to individuals with special needs by celebrating their individuality, as well as bringing energy, support, and peace of mind to their families. To do this the Friendship Circle develops values of altruism, compassion, and acceptance in teen volunteers as the Friendship Circle raises awareness, sensitivity and engagement throughout the broader community thus encouraging a sense of responsibility and involvement.

The Alaska Jewish Campus/Gan Yeladim Early Learning Center has offered a top-quality early childhood education center as well as summer and winter camps for young children since the early 1990s. With 30+ years of building skills and experience serving young children, we have identified special needs children in this age range as an underserved group.



Vision & Mission (Con't)

Phase 1 & Phase 2

Our vision is to create a fully inclusive play environment- outdoor (Phase 1) and indoor (Phase 2) play areas where children with special needs, ages 15 months to 5 years and early education children and their families can thrive year round.

Our innovative outdoor play area, designed by Learning Landscapes Design of Portland, is currently under construction by Bauer Construction of Anchorage.

We are honored to have received grant funding for Phase 1 including \$1.5 million from THREAD Alaska and the State of Alaska Child Care Program Office plus an additional INNOVATION supplement of \$392,020, \$125,000 from the Anchorage Child Care and Early Education (ACCEE) Fund, \$145,000 from the Department of Homeland Security - Nonprofit Security Grant Program for the playground fence, and \$25,000 from the Barney & Rachel Gottstein Charitable Foundation of the Jewish Community Federation & Endowment Fund totaling in \$2,187,020 in support.

With Phase 1 well underway, we are now seeking funding for the critical Phase 2- a thoughtfully designed indoor play space that will transform our Friendship Circle into a year-round resource for young children of all abilities. Bauer Construction has budgeted the indoor space at \$2,345,095.

A growing number of enthusiastic individual donors and family foundations—united by a shared belief in the power of inclusive play—have already committed their support to Phase 2 of the Indoor Play Center. Among them are: \$50,000 from the Demain Family Foundation; \$50,000 from the Ellsworth Foundation; \$20,000 from the M.E. Webber Foundation; \$35,000 from the Manning Family Foundation; \$20,000 from Steve & Olga Zelner; \$20,000 from Jay & Stacia Green; \$20,000 from Steve & Karen Mahoy; \$18,000 from Avi Naider & Debra Klein; and \$12,500 from Bob & Yael Kaufman totaling \$270,500 raised for this project, with an anticipated additional annual \$100,000 from the upcoming Jewish Galas 2025 & 2026 respectively, totaling \$445,500 towards the \$2,345,095 that needs to be raised for the indoor play center. As of now, we are seeking to raise \$1,919,595 for the indoor play center.

Our Center will ensure that play, inclusion and connection are never weather or season-dependent.

Project Overview

Phase 1 & Phase 2

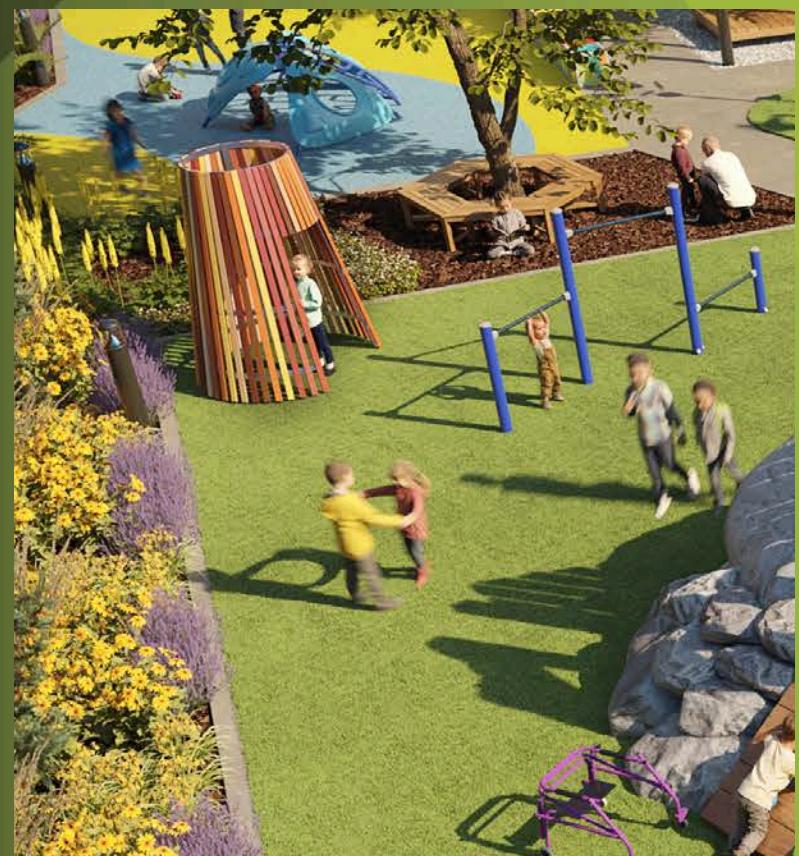
The Alaska Jewish Campus has proudly broken ground on the Outdoor Playground for the Alaska Friendship Circle All-Inclusive Early Childhood Play Center designed to bring children and families of all abilities together in a space of joy, connection, and community.

The indoor and outdoor play center will be open to the public and accessible to all families with young children, with a particular focus on inclusivity for young children with special needs. The space will be available to the community at no charge, ensuring equitable access for all.

Through Alaska Friendship Circle, our All-Inclusive Early Childhood Play Center will be home to the first Alaska chapter of the globally recognized Friendship Circle program, dedicated to fostering meaningful relationships between children with special needs and their typically developing peers.

Through shared experiences, mentorship, and structured friendship-building, this program nurtures social-emotional growth, empathy, and lifelong connection. Through collaboration with Anchorage's leading early childhood organizations and special needs advocates, the project will ensure that all children—including those with physical, cognitive, or sensory challenges—have equitable access to play, friendship, and developmental growth.

The campus' intentional and thoughtful design prioritizes accessibility at every level. From sensory-friendly features to barrier-free structures, every element will enable children to fully participate, feel valued, and enjoy the transformative power of unstructured, collaborative exploration and play.





Project Overview (Con't)

Phase 1 & Phase 2

Phase 1: Outdoor Play Center Highlights

The outdoor space, currently under construction, will feature dynamic and sensory-rich play areas, including:

- A performance stage and musical play areas
- Fort-building zone
- Accessible playhouse and toddler-friendly equipment
- Climbing walls and turf-covered hills
- Sensory panels and animal sculptures
- Garden and planting spaces

Additional amenities include bike racks, trike storage, LED lighting, ADA-accessible paths, restrooms and parking, parent seating and secure perimeter fencing.

Phase 2: Year Round Indoor Play & Program Space

The indoor center, the focus of this grant request, will offer a cozy and dynamic space for arts, crafts, movement, reading and social programming—ensuring that Alaska's winters and rainy days won't limit the fun. Planned features include:

- Flexible activity zones for art, dance and interactive play
- A space for movement, tumbling and and activities
- A nook for reading stories and enjoying books
- ADA-compliant, child-friendly restrooms
- A kitchen for hot coffee, snacks, programs and family use
- Storage for adaptive play equipment, winter coats and boots

Toddler Play Area



Need of Project

All-Inclusive Outdoor & Indoor Play Center

Anchorage families have long voiced a need for a fully inclusive indoor/outdoor play space, one where young children with and without disabilities can engage in play that fosters physical growth, emotional well-being, and genuine social connection.

Traditional playgrounds often leave some children behind, especially those with mobility challenges, sensory processing differences, or complex communication needs. Though well-intentioned, they are not built to accommodate the full range of childhood experiences and abilities, especially for the very young children at the toddler and preschool age.

While Anchorage offers a wonderful array of inclusive playgrounds for children of all abilities, the Alaska Friendship Circle All-Inclusive Early Childhood Play Center is unique in its specific focus on young children ages 15 months to 5 years—an age group often underserved in public play spaces.

For children with disabilities, who already face disproportionate barriers to inclusion, peer interaction, and early childhood support, this space offers something vital: a chance to connect, to make friends, to belong, and to thrive.

At the same time, the project helps typically developing children build friendships with peers of different abilities—nurturing empathy, curiosity, and a strong sense of community.

By removing barriers and fostering inclusive relationships, the Play Center creates more than a playground—it creates a place where all children grow together in joy and friendship.

Building the indoor component, Phase 2 will strengthen the capacity of the Alaska Jewish Campus/Gan Yeladim Early Learning Center and the broader Anchorage community to serve children of all abilities 12 months of the year.



Need of Project (Con't)

All-Inclusive Outdoor & Indoor Play Center

This inclusive indoor/outdoor environment will provide a safe, fully accessible space that supports learning, play and community connection year-round—even in Alaska's most challenging conditions.

By investing in this project, together we will:

- Extend programming throughout all seasons, regardless of temperature or daylight,
- Reduce logistical barriers for families, especially those with young children who have special needs, and
- Promote long-term sustainability through dedicated, weather-protected areas for active play, sensory exploration, and family-centered gatherings

To ensure the project meets real community needs, AJC has already started hosting open roundtable discussions with local child service providers to gather input on:

- Existing services available in Anchorage
- Current gaps and unmet needs
- Ideas and possibilities for the new, all-inclusive play center, and
- Ways to partner together to best serve the needs of Anchorage's children.

Program Summary



Beyond serving children, the play center will be a welcoming haven for families. Parents and caregivers will find a supportive environment to connect, share resources, and build community.

The center will act as a catalyst for inclusion and understanding across the broader Anchorage community. The center will be staffed by trained professionals and volunteers who coordinate programs that foster meaningful friendships between children with special needs and their peers, further reinforcing our project's mission of inclusion.

Our program is set to become the first in Alaska to join the global Friendship Circle movement—today's fastest-growing organization dedicated to children with special needs. With 88 locations worldwide, Friendship Circle reaches more than 7,500 children annually and has fostered lasting friendships between children with disabilities and more than 14,000 teenage volunteers. This unique model pairs teens and children for meaningful, joyful experiences that empower children while profoundly enriching the lives of those who volunteer.

The vision of the Friendship Circle programming is to create a world in which people with special needs and their families experience acceptance, inclusion and friendship. We aim to create a future where they never again have to suffer the social isolation that has often been so prevalent in society.

This new and unique play center will provide diverse, developmentally appropriate play opportunities and programs that support all children—regardless of ability.

This play center will be open to the public and available at no cost, ensuring that all families—especially those with young children with disabilities—can access a safe, inclusive, and enriching space to play, learn, and connect. Our commitment to accessibility means there will be no entrance fees or membership requirements.

By bringing this inspiring initiative to Anchorage, we're building a more inclusive and connected community—one friendship at a time.

Projected Program Schedules

Open Play Area

For individual families & caregivers – supervised by professionals & volunteers

Monday – Friday	Workday Hours: 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM Evenings: 5:30 PM – 8:00 PM
Sunday	10:00 AM – 6:00 PM

Special Needs Non-Profit Partner Rentals

Options of Play Center Space Areas

Monday – Friday	9:00 AM – 10:30 AM 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM
Sunday	10:00 AM – 6:00 PM



Alaska Friendship Circle Partners

Non-Profit Organizations Serving Children with Special Needs,
Collaborating with our New Play Center

Alaska Friendship Circle is proudly supported by key community partners whose collaboration and expertise strengthen the long-term impact of this initiative. Core partners include THREAD, Alaska's leading child development resource center, Stone Soup Group and The Arc of Anchorage, all of whom bring decades of experience supporting children and families.

Additional collaborators include Special Olympics Alaska, which plans to host its Young Athletes Program at our site; Best Beginnings; Alaska Down Syndrome Network, Hearts & Hands of Care and Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities.

The Anchorage Park Foundation's Inclusive Play Work Group has invited us to join their meetings and offered to include our play center in their Anchorage Playground Maps & Inclusive Play Guide. According to their guidelines, an inclusive playground is one that is accessible, offers varying levels of challenge for all children and is above all, fun. The Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department evaluates each playground based on seven types of physical, sensory, and social play opportunities to ensure meaningful access for all.

Inclusion in this guide will draw more families to the Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center and highlight our play center as part of Anchorage's commitment to equity and inclusive play.

Program for Infants and Children (PIC) is eager to bring young children to experience the Alaska Friendship Circle Play Center as part of their programming.

Together, these partnerships reflect a shared commitment to building a more inclusive, supportive, and joyful community for all families and children in Anchorage.

Alaska Friendship Circle Partners (Con't)

Non-Profit Organizations Serving Children with Special Needs, Collaborating with our New Play Center

THREAD Alaska

111 W 16th Ave Suite 205
Anchorage, AK 99501
Cell (907) 306-8192
Direct (907) 265-3101
Main: (907) 265-3100
Stephanie Berglund, CEO
sberglund@threadalaska.org

Special Olympics Alaska

3200 Mountain View Dr
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 222-7625 ext. 612
Emily Vandergon
Inclusive Health Manager
emily2@specialolympicsalaska.org

Best Beginnings

921 W 6th Ave suite 201
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 297-3300
Amie Collins
Executive Director
acollins@bestbeginningsalaska.org

Arc of Anchorage

2211 Arca Dr
Anchorage, AK 99508
(907) 777-0187
Tracy Faas
Director of Community Living
Services
tfaas@thearcofanchorage.org

Programs for Infants & Children, Inc. (PIC)

161 Klevin St #103
Anchorage, AK 99508
(907) 561-8060
Amy Simpson
Executive Director
asimpson@picak.org

Hearts & Hands of Care, Inc.

1550 E 74th Ave
Anchorage, AK 99507
(907) 929-5826
Janai Lopez
Program Coordinator
janai.lopez@heartsandhandsofcare.com

Anchorage Park Foundation Inclusive Play Work Group

3201 C St #111
Anchorage, AK 99503
(907) 274-1004
Beth Nordlund
Executive Director
beth@anchorageparkfoundation.org
(907) 351-0055
Meredith Gutierrez
Youth Engagement Manager
meredith@anchorageparkfoundation.org

Stone Soup Group

307 E Northern Lights Blvd
#100
Anchorage, AK 99503
(907) 561-3701
Mary Middleton
Executive Director

Alaska Down Syndrome Network

(907) 677-6677
Donna Davidson
Co-Founder & Director
alaskaads@gmail.com

Alaska Association on Developmental Disabilities (AADD)

Kim Champney
Executive Director
director@aaddalaska.org

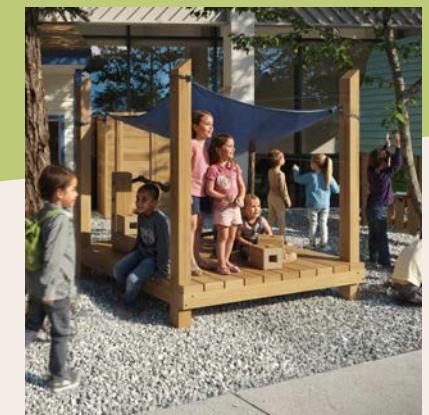
Phase One Overview of Outdoor Play Center Space

Alaska Friendship Circle is more than just a playground and exploration center—it is a transformative space designed to ensure that children of all abilities have equal opportunities for play, learning, and social interaction. Inclusive environments like this are vital to early childhood development, fostering physical, cognitive, and emotional growth by allowing children to explore, engage, and build confidence in a welcoming, barrier-free setting.

At Gan Yeladim's new Alaska Friendship Circle, children with disabilities will have a place to form meaningful friendships with their peers, reducing feelings of isolation and encouraging communication, collaboration, and joy. By integrating adaptive play structures, sensory-rich experiences, and inclusive design, this new space will promote motor skill development, problem-solving, and creative exploration, ensuring that every child, both enrolled Gan Yeladim children and the broader special needs community can participate fully, regardless of ability.

Beyond the children themselves, Alaska Friendship Circle will be a haven for families—a safe, accessible environment where parents and caregivers can connect, share experiences, and support one another. It will also serve as a catalyst for fostering empathy, understanding, and a culture of inclusivity within the broader Anchorage community.

By supporting The Alaska Friendship Circle, we are not just building a playground—we are creating a future where every child belongs, every family feels supported, and our community grows stronger together.



Project Team

Bauer Construction, Inc.

P.O. BOX 875558
Wasilla, AK 99687
(907) 357-3053
Garrett Morris
Project Manager
garrettm@bauerak.com

SALT LLC

645 G Street, Suite 301
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
(907) 279-6563
Natasha Schmidt
nschmidt@salt-ak.com

Earthscape Alaska

329 F St., Ste. 222
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 279-2688
Elise Huggins, FASLA
Landscape Architect
ehuggins@earthscapealaska.com

Learning Landscapes Design

401 NE 19th Ave 200
Portland, OR 97232
(503) 347-4523
Michelle Mathis
Principal Designer
michelle@learninglandscapesdesign.com

ECI Alaska Architecture

821 N St STE 201
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 561-5543
Justin Scanio, AIA
Principal Architect
justins@ecialaska.com

Phase One Outdoor Playground Concept Plan

Toddler Play Area

- ① Large Storage Shed
- ② Open Lawn
- ③ Concrete Paving
- ④ Bike Rack
- ⑤ Raised Garden Bed (x2)
- ⑥ Garden Work Bench
- ⑦ Path Stepping Stones
- ⑧ Insect Hotel
- ⑨ Quiet Retreat Hut
- ⑩ Covered Structure & LED Cafe Lights
- ⑪ Sensory Panel (x2)
- ⑫ Sensory Planting Area
- ⑬ Instruments (x2)
- ⑭ Toddler Play House
- ⑮ Existing Climber
- ⑯ Use Zone
- ⑰ Toddler Swing
- ⑱ PIP Rubber Surfacing
- ⑲ Bench (x2)
- ⑳ Gravel Desk & Seats (x2)
- ㉑ Gravel Station
- ㉒ Gravel Digging Area
- ㉓ Landscape Boulders
- ㉔ Transfer Boulder
- ㉕ Crushed Rock Paving
- ㉖ New Fence and Gates
- ㉗ 10' Easement

Sand & Sensory Garden

- ① Storage Shed
- ② Concrete Paving
- ③ Crushed Rock Paving
- ④ Path Stepping Stones
- ⑤ Quite Small Bench Seating
- ⑥ Sensory Picking Garden
- ⑦ Art Wall- Plexiglass or Chalkboard with Clips
- ⑧ Work Tables with Seating
- ⑨ Accessible Nature Kitchen
- ⑩ Sand Digging Area
- ⑪ Concrete Creek Channel
- ⑫ Landscape Boulders
- ⑬ Wood Bridge
- ⑭ Willow Dome
- ⑮ Warm Water Channel with Splash Tables
- ⑯ Accessible Sand Seat
- ⑰ Sensory Channel Wall
- ⑱ Accessible Sand Table
- ⑲ Concrete Seat Wall w/ Mosaic Finish
- ⑳ Transfer Seat and Handle
- ㉑ Animal Sculptures (x2)
- ㉒ Stamped Animal Tracks
- ㉓ Accessible Sensory Panel
- ㉔ Proposed Exterior Access to Bathroom
- ㉕ Existing Fenced Utility Area
- ㉖ 10' Easement
- ㉗ 5' Easement

Boulder Hill & Physical Play

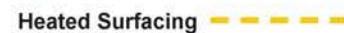
- ① Spinner
- ② Use Zone
- ③ PIP Rubber Surfacing
- ④ Existing Climber with Sensory Panels
- ⑤ Concrete Seat Wall w/ Mosaic Finish
- ⑥ Communication Board
- ⑦ Existing Tree With Tree Bench
- ⑧ Wood Chips Over Root Zone
- ⑨ Artificial Turf Surfacing
- ⑩ Quiet Retreat Hut
- ⑪ Boulder Hill & Climbing Wall
- ⑫ Embankment Roller Slide
- ⑬ Hanging Bars
- ⑭ Planting and Stepping Stones
- ⑮ Existing Paving to Remain

Imaginative Play Zone & Entrance

- ① Stage
- ② Storage Shed
- ③ New Concrete Surfacing
- ④ Fort Building Platform & Posts (x2)
- ⑤ Existing Play House w/ Instruments
- ⑥ Parent Meeting Benches and Planting
- ⑦ Exterior Bike Rack
- ⑧ Welcome Sign
- ⑨ Reconfigured ADA Entrance & Parking

Turf Hills & Trike Track

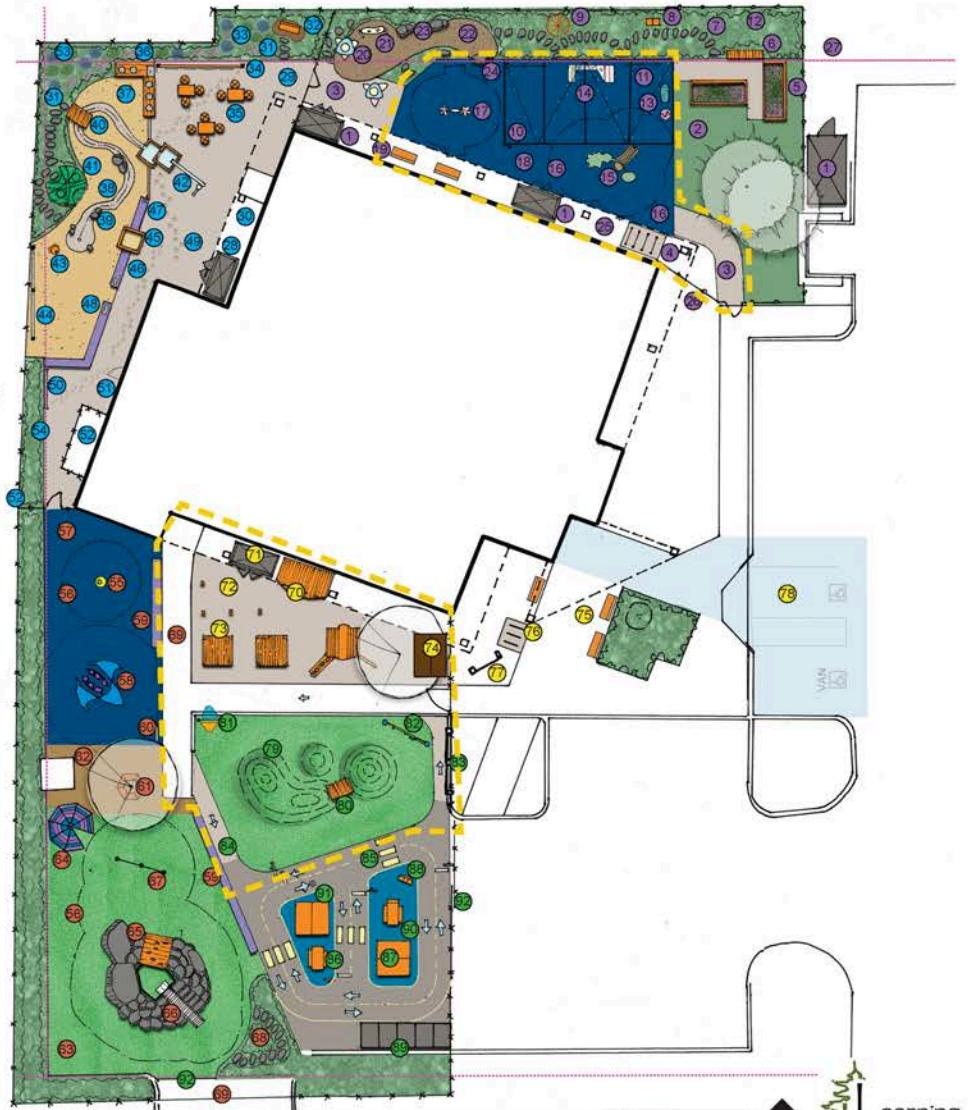
- ① Artificial Turf Hills
- ② Toddler Bridge & Tunnel
- ③ Color Shadow Art Panel
- ④ Ruba Goldberg Sensory Panel
- ⑤ Chalk Board Panel & Scavenger Hunt
- ⑥ Concrete Ramp (x2)
- ⑦ Trike Track Painted Play & Signs
- ⑧ Picnic Tables - Moveable (x2)
- ⑨ Themed Play House - Moveable (x2)
- ⑩ Market Stand - Moveable
- ⑪ Trike Storage
- ⑫ Painted City Activity Areas
- ⑬ Existing Drain and Asphalt Surface - allows for snow mounding from plows
- ⑭ Existing Rolling Gate

Heated Surfacing 

Gan Yeladim

Harmony Inclusive Playscape

Anchorage, AK



November 6th, 2024

0 5 10 20

N

Learning Landscapes

Sand and Sensory Garden & Play Area



Preschool Play Area



RE3D

Imaginative Play Zone & Entrance



The Imaginative Play Zone features a stage, fort-building area, playhouse, instruments, and accessible amenities creating a welcoming environment where children of all abilities can engage, explore, and connect.

Imaginative Play Zone & Entrance (Con't)



A stage encourages self-expression and creativity, allowing children to build confidence through performance and imaginative play. The fort-building area and playhouse promote problem-solving, teamwork, and sensory exploration in an adaptive setting. Instruments provide a multisensory experience, fostering auditory and fine motor skills while making music accessible to all children.

Parent meeting benches offer a comfortable space for caregivers to connect and support one another, enhancing community engagement. An exterior bike rack encourages eco-friendly transportation and accessibility. A welcoming sign sets an inviting tone for all visitors, reinforcing the playground's commitment to inclusivity.

An ADA entrance and parking ensure that children and families with mobility challenges can easily access and enjoy the space, promoting equal participation. Together, these components create a vibrant, inclusive environment where children of all abilities can learn, play, and build lasting friendships.

Turf Hill & Tike Track



The Turf Hill and Tike Track area boasts features like artificial turf hills, a toddler bridge and tunnel, interactive panels, and accessible pathways creates an engaging and supportive environment where children of all abilities can play, learn, and connect.

Turf Hill & Trike Track (Con't)



The artificial turf hills provide a safe and stimulating space for climbing, rolling, and sensory exploration, while the toddler bridge and tunnel encourage early motor skill development and imaginative play. The color shadow art panel, Rube Goldberg sensory panel, and chalkboard panel with scavenger hunt activities promote creativity, problem-solving, and sensory engagement.

Concrete ramps ensure easy navigation for children of all mobility levels, while the trike track with painted play signs and city activity areas encourages active movement and cooperative play. Moveable picnic tables, themed playhouses, and a market stand offer flexible spaces for social interaction and pretend play, fostering creativity and inclusion.

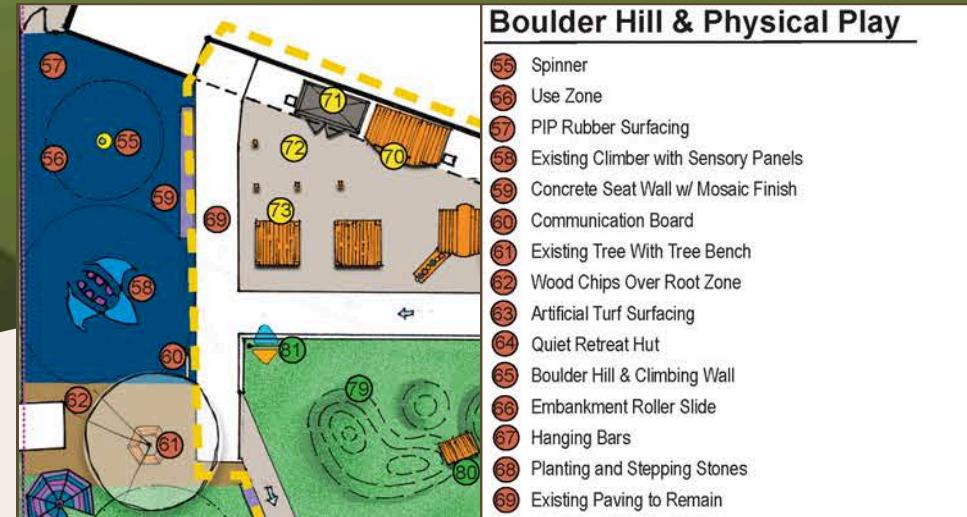
Trike storage provides organization, ensuring easy access to ride-on activities, and the existing drain and asphalt surface allow for year-round use, even accommodating snow mounding in winter. The rolling gate offers security and controlled access, making the space safe and welcoming for all.

Boulder Hill & Climbing Wall



The Boulder Hill and Physical Play area is an inclusive playground designed to promote active movement, sensory engagement, and social interaction in a safe and accessible environment.

Boulder Hill & Climbing Wall (Con't)



The spinner and hanging bars provide opportunities for vestibular and upper-body strength development, while the boulder hill and climbing wall encourage balance, coordination, and confidence building. The embankment roller slide offers a fun, sensory-friendly sliding experience.

Sensory and communication-friendly elements like the sensory panels, communication board, and quiet retreat hut provide spaces for children who may need a break or an alternative way to express themselves. The concrete seat wall with a mosaic finish and the existing tree with a tree bench create natural gathering areas for rest and social interaction.

Nature-inspired play is encouraged through planting areas, steppingstones, and the integration of existing paving, ensuring a seamless and welcoming environment for all children. This thoughtfully designed space fosters physical activity, creativity, and inclusive play for children of all abilities.

Sand and Sensory Play



The Sand and Sensory Play area offers a multi-sensory, nature-based experience that fosters creativity and exploration. Smooth, accessible pathways with stepping stones ensure easy navigation, while seating areas encourage relaxation and social interaction.

Sand and Sensory Play (Con't)



Sand & Sensory Garden

29 Storage Shed	42 Warm Water Channel with Splash Tables
30 Concrete Paving	43 Accessible Sand Seat
31 Crushed Rock Paving	44 Sensory Channel Wall
32 Path Stepping Stones	45 Accessible Sand Table
33 Quite Small Bench Seating	46 Concrete Seat Wall w/ Mosaic Finish
34 Sensory Picking Garden	47 Transfer Seat and Handle
35 Art Wall- Plexiglass or Chalkboard with Clips	48 Animal Sculptures (x2)
36 Work Tables with Seating	49 Stamped Animal Tracks
37 Accessible Nature Kitchen	50 Accessible Sensory Panel
38 Sand Digging Area	51 Proposed Exterior Access to Bathroom
39 Concrete Creek Channel	52 Existing Fenced Utility Area
40 Landscape Boulders	53 10' Easement
41 Wood Bridge	54 5' Easement

Children can engage with interactive sensory features like a picking garden, art wall, and sensory channel wall, exploring textures, colors, and creative expression.

Water and sand elements, including a digging area, creek channel, splash tables, and accessible sand play, support fine motor skills and sensory development, with transfer seats for inclusivity.

Natural play structures like landscape boulders, a wood bridge, and a willow dome create an immersive outdoor environment, blending adventure with accessibility.

Animal sculptures and stamped animal tracks add playful, educational elements that encourage curiosity and storytelling.

Toddler Play Area



The Toddler Play area is designed to foster sensory exploration, creative play, and social interaction for our littlest learners.

A stunning, colorful covered canopy serves as a vibrant focal point, providing shade and shelter while creating a visually stimulating and inspiring play environment.

Toddler Play Area (Con't)



Beyond its beauty, this artistic structure will bring warmth and brightness to the playground, especially during Alaska's dark winters, offering children a space filled with color and joy year-round.

Nature-based play is promoted through raised garden beds, a garden workbench, and a sensory planting area, allowing children to engage in hands-on learning and sensory exploration. Thoughtful details like the insect hotel add an educational element, encouraging curiosity about nature.

Gravel-based features, including gravel desks and seats, a gravel station, and a gravel digging area, provide opportunities for tactile exploration and fine motor skill development. Natural elements like landscape boulders, transfer boulders, and musical instruments add further sensory and movement-based play experiences.

Outdoor Play Center Lighting



Alaska's long, dark winters require thoughtful lighting solutions to ensure year-round access to our all-inclusive outdoor play center, which includes three uniquely designed playground zones.

To ensure these outdoor spaces remain safe, welcoming, and fully accessible during the darker months, our design plan provides for special LED lighting which will allow children and families of all abilities to enjoy the playground safely—extending playtime, supporting visibility, and promoting inclusive use of the space regardless of season or daylight hours.

Outdoor Play Center Fencing



The new all-inclusive play center shares a campus with Gan Yeladim Early Learning Center, a Jewish educational organization serving young children and families.

To ensure the safety of all children, families, and educators on site, the play center will include secure perimeter fencing as part of its design. This durable metal fence will feature custom artistic panels, serving not only as a safety measure but also as a welcoming and uplifting visual element. These panels will reflect the creativity, diversity, and spirit of inclusion that define Alaska Friendship Circle.

Accessibility

Bringing together all these thoughtfully designed components, this all-inclusive Alaska Jewish Campus/Gan Yeladim ELC new play and exploration center will be a vibrant, dynamic space where children of all abilities can play, learn, and grow together. By integrating sensory-rich elements, nature-based exploration, and accessible play structures, the playground fosters an environment that supports physical, cognitive, and social development in a fun and engaging way.

The combination of climbing walls, embankment slides, spinners, swings, and open play areas encourages movement, strength-building, and confidence, while quiet retreat huts, sensory panels, and communication boards provide safe, calming spaces for children who need a break. Water channels, sand tables, art walls, and interactive musical instruments add layers of creativity and sensory engagement, ensuring that every child, both Gan Yeladim enrolled children and the broader special needs community can find activities that resonate with their interests and abilities.

The accessible pathways, ramps, transfer seats, and ADA-compliant entrances guarantee that children with mobility challenges can fully participate, while the Alaska Friendship Circle and shared-use programs, foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity. Thoughtful additions such as benches, picnic tables, and community gathering areas make the space welcoming for families and caregivers.

By blending adventure, creativity, nature, and accessibility, this playground will celebrate the beauty of inclusivity, ensuring that every child, regardless of ability, can experience the magic of play in a safe, supportive, and inspiring environment.

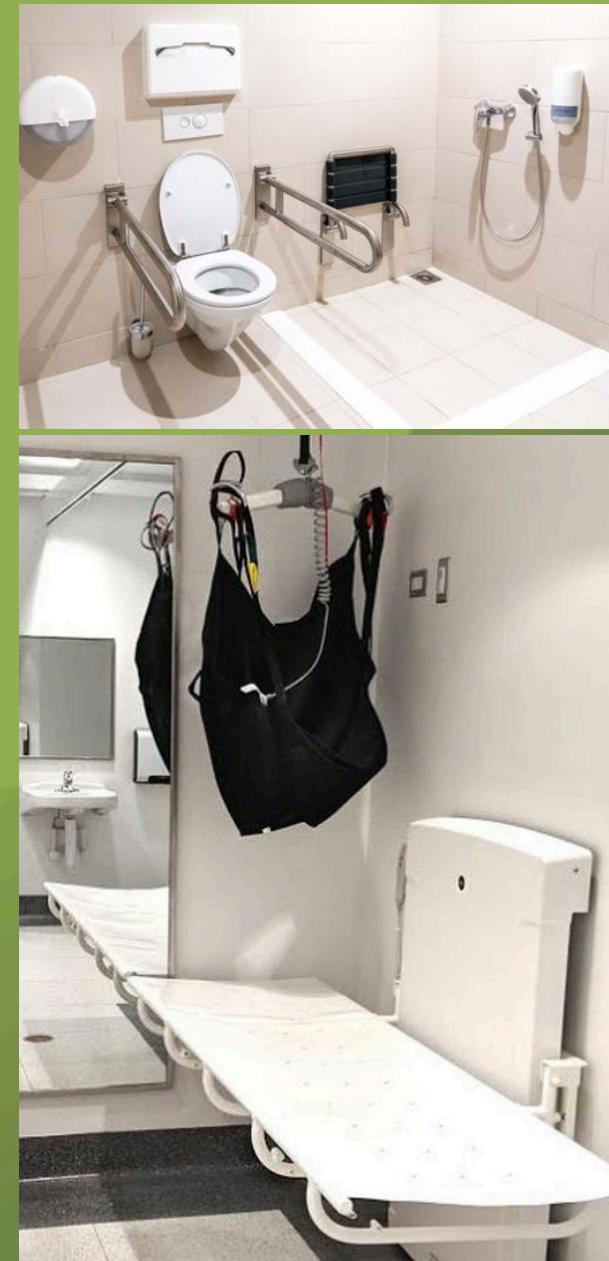


Accessibility: ADA Family Restrooms

An ADA bathroom is essential for our inclusive playground because it ensures that all children, caregivers, and visitors—regardless of ability—have a comfortable and dignified restroom experience. Without it, families with special needs children may struggle to spend extended time at the playground. Providing an accessible restroom, by renovating the current Alaska Jewish Campus bathrooms with direct playground access, reinforces the Gan Yeladim playground's commitment to inclusivity, making it a truly welcoming and accommodating space for everyone.

Key features of an ADA bathroom include:

- Wider doorways and clear floor space for easy wheelchair access and maneuverability.
- Grab bars near toilets and sinks for support and Stability.
- Lower sink heights and accessible faucets for individuals using wheelchairs or with limited reach.
- Automatic or easy-to-use doors to accommodate those with mobility impairments.
- Non-slip flooring and proper lighting for safety.



Accessibility: ADA Sidewalk

An accessible sidewalk is essential for making the playground truly inclusive and welcoming. It ensures that all children—regardless of physical ability—can enter, explore, and enjoy the playground without difficulty, reinforcing the idea that play should be available to everyone. Without it, individuals using wheelchairs, walkers, strollers, or those with mobility challenges may struggle to reach the playground, limiting their ability to fully participate in play and social interactions.

Key features of an ADA sidewalk include:

- Smooth, even surfaces to prevent tripping hazards and allow for easy wheelchair movement.
- Gentle slopes and ramps (max 5% grade) to accommodate those who cannot navigate stairs or steep inclines.
- Adequate width (at least 36 inches) for mobility devices and side-by-side walking.
- Tactile warning strips at crossings to assist individuals with visual impairments.
- Clear, unobstructed pathways free from barriers like curbs or uneven surfaces.



Accessibility: ADA Parking

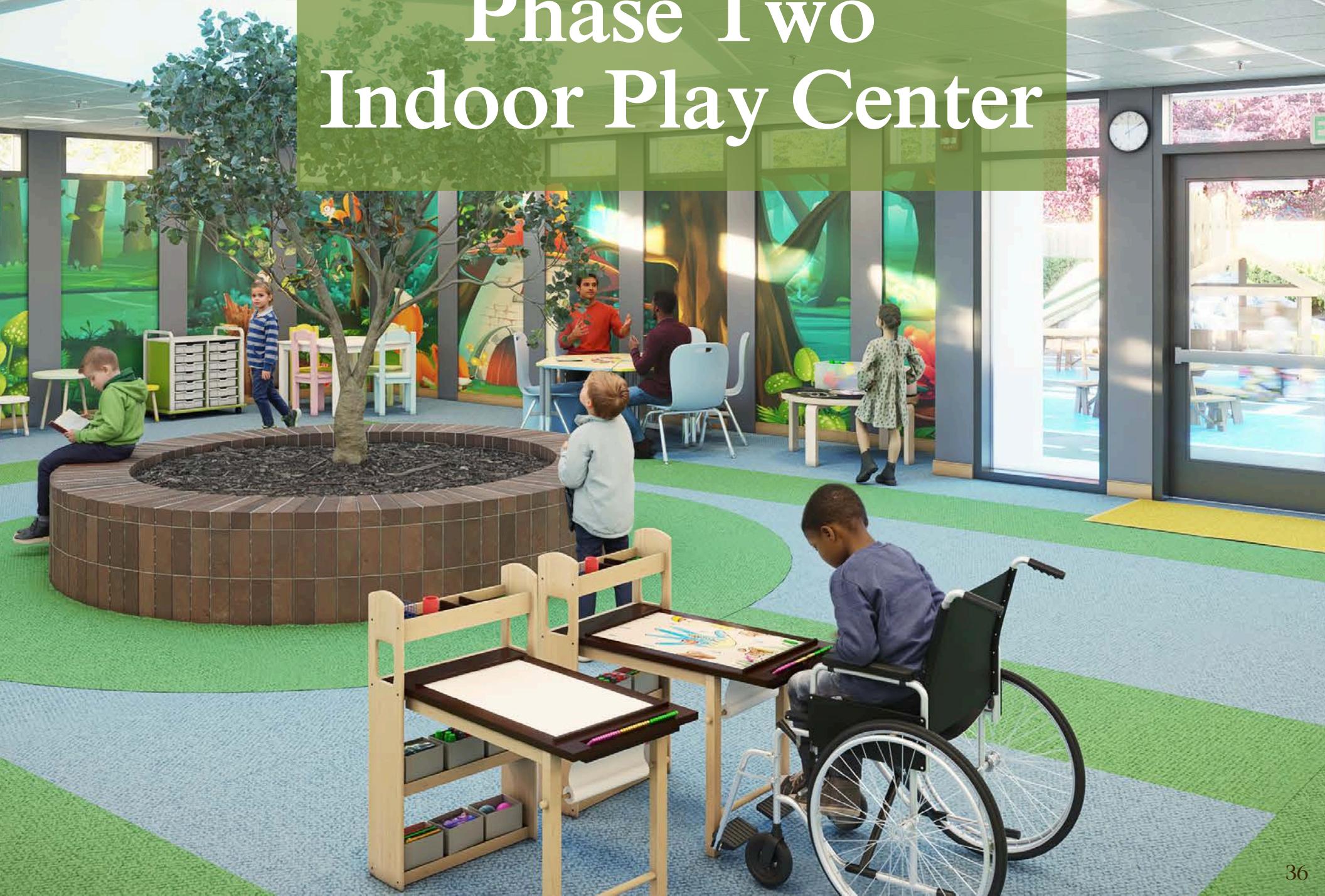
An ADA-compliant parking lot is essential for an inclusive play center as it ensures that all visitors, including those with mobility challenges, can safely and conveniently access the play space. Without accessible parking, individuals using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids may struggle to reach the play center, creating unnecessary barriers to participation.

Key features of an ADA parking lot include:

- Designated accessible parking spaces that are wider to accommodate wheelchair users and those needing extra room to enter and exit vehicles.
- Van-accessible spaces with an access aisle for vehicles equipped with wheelchair lifts or ramps.
- Clearly marked signage indicating ADA parking spots for easy identification.
- Smooth, slip-resistant surfaces with no cracks or obstructions that could pose hazards.
- A direct, ADA-compliant pathway (without steps or steep inclines) leading from the parking area to the play center entrance.
- A handrail designed for both adults and children to provide additional support, especially during icy and snowy Alaska months.



Phase Two Indoor Play Center



Phase 2

Overview of Indoor Play Center Space



Phase 2

Overview of Indoor Play Center Space



To truly create an inclusive and accessible environment, Alaska Friendship Circle needs more than just an adaptive playground—it needs a dedicated indoor space where children of all abilities, their families, and volunteers can gather, connect, and grow together. The Indoor Play Center will serve as the heart of Alaska Friendship Circle, providing a warm and welcoming space for activities, family programs, and essential resources.

This facility will enhance accessibility and inclusion by offering:

- A Safe & Supportive Gathering Space – Families of children with disabilities often face barriers to participation in community events. The Indoor Play Center will provide a comfortable, weather-protected space for support groups, educational workshops, and family events, ensuring every child and parent feels welcome and included.

Phase 2 (Con't)

Overview of Indoor Play Center Space



- Storage for Adaptive Play Materials & Equipment – Many children with disabilities rely on specialized tools, toys, and mobility aids to fully engage in play. Having dedicated storage ensures that these materials are easily accessible when needed.
- A Workspace for The Alaska Friendship Circle – As the local chapter of this national organization, The Friendship Circle will use this space to coordinate programs that foster meaningful friendships between children with special needs and their peers, further reinforcing the project's mission of inclusion.
- A Small Kitchen for Family Gatherings – Shared meals and celebrations bring people together. A kitchen will allow families to host inclusive events, sensory-friendly gatherings, and cultural celebrations that might otherwise be inaccessible.

Phase 2 (Con't)

Overview of Indoor Play Center Space

INDOOR PLAY CENTER
TOTAL COST:

\$2,345,095



- Seasonal Storage for Coats & Gear – Anchorage's winters can be harsh, and children need a warm, dry place to store their outdoor gear while they play and participate in activities.

Additionally, while Alaska Friendship Circle will feature ADA-compliant parking and sidewalks, The Friendship Center wing will extend that accessibility beyond play, offering an indoor space where all children can engage in structured activities, build friendships, and experience a true sense of belonging.

How It Enhances Alaska Friendship Circle Mission:

The Indoor Play Center is more than just a structure—it reinforces Alaska Friendship Circle's commitment to inclusivity, accessibility, and community support. It transforms the play center into a full-service space where children of all abilities and their families can not only play but also connect, learn, and grow together in a welcoming and accommodating environment.

Phase 1 - Outdoor Play Center

Fully Funded

SOA Child Care Program Office & Thread Alaska Community Innovation Grant	\$1,500,000	Received
SOA Child Care Program Office & Thread Alaska Community Innovation Supplement	\$392,020	Received
MOA Anchorage Child Care & Early Education Fund Capital Project Grant	\$125,000	Approved
Department of Homeland Security -Nonprofit Security Grant Program from the Department of Homeland Security for the playground fence	\$145,000	Approved
Barney and Rachel Gottstein Charitable Foundation of the Jewish Community Federation and Endowment Fund	\$25,000	Received
Total	\$2,187,020	

Phase 2 - Indoor Play Center

Construction Budget

Project Name: Alaska Friendship Circle - Indoor and Outdoor Play Center, Phase 2, the Indoor Play Center		
General conditions	site work, permitting, consumables, demo	\$727,180
Concrete	slab, sidewalk, foundation	\$142,854
Furnishings	plastic laminate upper & lower walls	\$25,200
Carpentry	glue-lam beams, framing	\$241,852
Electrical & Plumbing	electrical, lighting, kitchen & restroom plumbing	\$334,653
Finishes, doors & hardware	painting, flooring, restroom ADA accessories	\$307,064
Insulation	roofing, facade painting, parapet, vapor barrier	\$264,394
Equipment	adaptive play equipment	\$178,080
Specialties	fire extinguisher, appliances	\$12,146
	Subtotal	\$2,233,423
	Contingency	\$111,671
Total		\$2,345,095
*Source Bauer Construction		

Phase 2 - Indoor Play Center

Funders as of October 2025



Demain Family Foundation	\$50,000	Received
Ellsworth Foundation	\$50,000	Received
The Manning Family Foundation	\$35,000	Received
ME Webber Foundation	\$20,000	Received
Steve & Olga Zelner	\$20,000	Received
Jay & Stacia Green	\$20,000	Received
Steve & Karen Mahoy	\$20,000	Received
Avi Naider & Debra Klein	\$18,000	Received
Bob & Yael Kaufman	\$12,500	Received
Alaska Jewish Gala 2025, many individuals donors and corporate sponsors	\$100,000	Received
Alaska Jewish Gala 2026, many individuals donors and corporate sponsors	\$100,000	Anticipated
Total	\$445,500	

Project Impact on Anchorage Community

The new Alaska Friendship Circle All-Inclusive Early Childhood Play Center will profoundly impact our Anchorage community by creating a fully inclusive, accessible, and engaging outdoor and indoor play center that benefits children of all abilities, their families, and the broader Anchorage community.

This project goes beyond traditional play center by fostering inclusion, connection, and support, making it a transformative addition to our area.

How Alaska Friendship Circle Benefits Our Community:

- **Inclusive Play & Socialization** – Children of all abilities can play together, building friendships, understanding, and acceptance.
- **Support for Families** – Provides a safe, accessible space where families of children with special needs can connect and find relief.
- **The Alaska Friendship Center** – A year-round space for inclusion, education, and advocacy, extending beyond outdoor play.
- **Year-Round Accessibility** – ADA pathways, bathrooms, inclusive play equipment, and heated amenities ensure usability in all seasons.
- **Community Engagement** – A gathering space with a small event areas, a small kitchen, and meeting rooms to foster connection and advocacy.
- **Educational & Sensory Play** – Features like sensory gardens, musical instruments, and interactive panels promote creativity and learning.

Alaska Friendship Circle will set a new standard for inclusive play, ensuring no child is left out. With the new all-inclusive center, it becomes more than a play center—it's a place where families in the Anchorage community can build lasting support networks and friendships.

Conclusion

The Alaska Jewish Campus/Gan Yeladim Early Learning Center's new all-inclusive play center is more than just a playground and indoor playcenter— it is a commitment to inclusion, accessibility, and community connection. By creating a space where all children, regardless of ability, can play, learn, and grow together, we are shaping a future built on acceptance, opportunity, and joy. This project represents a shared vision for a more inclusive Anchorage — one where every child and family feels welcomed, valued, and supported.

With \$2,612,520 already secured, we are well on our way to bringing this dream to life! The challenge remains raising the remaining \$1,919,595 to fully realize our vision. With your support we will create a fully accessible indoor play center. This new indoor place will bridge the gap between basic accessibility and true inclusivity, making this a transformative space for children, families, and the broader community.

This is more than a project; it is a movement toward a more compassionate and connected world. We invite you to join us in this mission — to help build a space where every child belongs and every family has the resources they need to thrive. Together, we can make Alaska Friendship Circle a lasting legacy of inclusion, play, and possibility for generations to come.

Invitation

We invite you to be part of an extraordinary initiative that will transform the lives of children and families across Anchorage. Join us as we bring Alaska Friendship Circle to life—an all-inclusive outdoor and indoor discovery and exploration center designed for children of all abilities!

This innovative project will serve as a welcoming, inclusive, and accessible space for children of all abilities, particularly those ages 15 months to 5 years—while fostering community, equity, and joy.

The funding that we have received so far has made it possible for us to build the outdoor playground, which are now under construction and are scheduled to be completed by December 2025.

However, to fully realize our vision of a truly inclusive and welcoming space, we are seeking support to help us create the Indoor Play Center – A warm, communal indoor space that will serve as the heart of our Alaska Friendship Circle, fostering connection, creativity, and inclusion.

With your support, together we can complete Phase 2 of the project, creating a year-round indoor facility that is free and open to the public.

Your partnership will help bridge the gap between basic accessibility and full inclusion, ensuring that every child—regardless of ability—can play, grow, and belong in a safe, enriching environment.

Together, we can create a lasting legacy of inclusion, connection, and joy for generations of Anchorage families.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to help build a more inclusive future for Alaska's families!



Partner with us in
creating a legacy of
inclusion and joy in
our Anchorage
community!