

Pointers For Parents

For Children With Disabilities, Play's The Thing

(NAPSA)—As the dreams get bigger, the differences between the dreamers get smaller. That's increasingly true for children with disabilities, many of whom are finding that they can accomplish anything they set their minds to.

That's because more and more communities and organizations are making efforts to turn one of childhood's *raisons d'être*—play—into an activity that unites youngsters, rather than serving as a barrier between those who can and those who can't.

It all starts on the playground, a place where many early friendships are formed. The key is both design and playground equipment that can be catered to kids of all abilities. Even if a community decides to build a handicap-accessible playground, it is up to the manufacturers to provide the slides, climbers and swings that make the place run and jump.

One manufacturer, Little Tikes Commercial, has teamed up with Hadley's Park, a nonprofit organization, to create playgrounds for kids of all abilities. With a large range of play components that stimulate the senses, strengthen the body and encourage interaction among children, "inclusive play" is now a reality. While developing playgrounds for kids of all abilities is a challenge, Little Tikes and Hadley's Park have been successful through:

- Pioneering the use of picture communication symbols to include children with a broad range of abilities;
- Enhancing cognitive devel-



Playgrounds that are designed to be used by children with disabilities are a great way to break down barriers.

opment through a wide variety of theme products; and

- Providing fun, ADA-compliant ramped access onto the play area.

Little Tikes' constructions stem from research with children with disabilities, as designers learn first-hand how to appeal to a child's sense of wonder—and accommodate various levels of capability. In addition, the equipment is designed to be installed wherever children may play—schoolyards, parks, etc. A playground need not be expensive to be fun for everyone.

Some children dream of flying, other kids dream of playing in the park. With visually stimulating designs and equipment constructed to be fun for *every* child, a playground can truly be the model community it's meant to be.

To learn more about inclusive play, call 1-301-770-2144 or visit Hadley's Park at www.hadleyspark.org or Little Tikes Commercial at www.LTCPS.com.