Playgrounds provide opportunities for children to engage in exercise and socialization that contributes to their overall development. Children with disabilities are severely limited in their ability to maintain high levels of physical health when they do not have high quality, accessible playgrounds in the community.

The Ryan Gray Playground for All Children (RGPAC) has been the most accessible playground in Lawrence for 20+ years, and it is in need of renovation. The RGPAC Steering Committee is requesting partnership and support from the City of Lawrence for improvement of the playground in these ways:

- **A contribution of $25,000** for the purchase of new playground equipment; and,
- **Staff support to investigate/develop grant proposals** from funding sources associated with municipalities to support this effort.

**BACKGROUND:** Conceptualized in 1987, the RGPAC was constructed on the grounds of Hillcrest Elementary School (1045 Hilltop Dr.) in 1993 by the RGPAC Steering Committee as a memorial to Ryan Gray. The playground is located on the grounds of Hillcrest Elementary School because it was where Ryan attended school; it is centrally located in town; and, in the community spirit in which the playground was developed, donation of the property was part of the school district’s contribution to this effort. Along with other community individuals and businesses, **the City of Lawrence contributed about $42,000 in in-kind support** to the initial development of the RGPAC.

Although located on a school property, the **RGPAC is a community playground**, and is used by about 400 community members from across town each week. In addition to families playing with their children at the RGPAC, regular activities at the playground include neighborhood association meetings and picnics, Friday night family soccer, birthday parties, and every Saturday a group of families of children with disabilities plays together.

**NEED:** In 1993 Lawrence was ahead of its time by being **home to the first fully accessible playground in Kansas**. In spite of ongoing maintenance and care, the well-loved RGPAC is outdated, weather-damaged, and the equipment provides few options for integrated, accessible play. Moreover, playground manufacturers have developed more accessible play equipment since 1993. **Lawrence families and community members with disabilities have identified the need for an improved and fully accessible, integrated playground in the center of town.** Revitalization of the RGPAC also aligns with research-based recommendations related to community health, physical activity, and youth with disabilities (see *The Guide to Community Prevention Services: What Works to Promote Health*; the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability; and, the U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion).

**GOAL/ACTIVITIES:** The RGPAC Steering Committee was re-formed in fall, 2015 to raise funds to purchase new, higher quality, more integrated equipment for the playground **to renovate the RGPAC by August, 2016.** In addition to raising funds for the play equipment, the RGPAC Steering Committee will lead a public relations campaign and host a grand re-opening event at the playground during disability Awareness Month (October, 2016). We will target families who experience **disability in order to raise awareness and increase usage** of the playground. Replacing the entire playground significantly
enhances the quality and quantity of integrated, accessible play options, and provides a highly accessible playground for Lawrence community members with disabilities, as well as an opportunity for increasing overall health and wellness of all of our citizens.

FUNDING SUPPORT & SPONSORSHIP: The RGPAC Steering Committee is raising $130,000 to replace the play structures which cost $500 - $24,000 each. The RGPAC Steering Committee has implemented a strategic fundraising plan since October, 2015 and, as of May, 2016, has raised $100,000 in grants and donations from within and outside of the Lawrence community. All donations are deposited into and managed by the Lawrence Schools Foundation Ryan Gray Playground fund. Planning and construction of the playground improvements are under the direction of the Lawrence Public Schools. Requested support from the City of Lawrence would solidify overall community support for this initiative, and will help leverage additional support from donors to meet our goal. A pledge to provide support from the 2017 city budget would give us necessary time to include the city in the new playground sign and other sponsorship recognition materials.

Our request supports the vision of the current LPRD Comprehensive Master Plan to: provide essential, high quality, cost effective parks, facilities and programs...[and] seek innovative partnerships to support and add value and equity to core programs and facilities while continuing to develop new sites and services to support a growing community (https://lawrenceks.org/lprd/masterplan) in these ways:

- **Essential** in that a renovated RGPAC will meet the identified accessibility needs of citizens with mobility disabilities – meeting essential needs of all citizens;

- **High quality** in that it will be the most accessible playground in Lawrence (exceeding ADAAG standards) and offer multiple accessible and integrated play structures and surface;

- **Cost effective parks** in that a $25,000 contribution from the city for the new equipment represents about 19% of the overall equipment costs of the RGPAC – a small investment for a large impact, especially considering there are very few accessible parks in Lawrence for people with mobility disabilities;

- **Innovative partnerships** in that a renewed partnership between the City of Lawrence and the RGPAC Steering Committee, a community-based grassroots committee, can collaboratively meet a community need; and,

- **Add value and equity** by supporting the improvement of existing resources to meet the identified needs of a population of Lawrence citizens who currently have only two options for accessible parks in our community.

A contribution to the renovation of the RGPAC can yield fairly immediate results, a significant impact on Lawrence citizens with disabilities, and a lasting effect for a 2+ generations of children. We anticipate this equipment will last for 20 years. As long as the playground is maintained and upgraded, community members will play on it. It would be an honor to include the City of Lawrence, Kansas as a sponsor of this important memorial, highly accessible playground.