

Highland Ave Park Playground

Salamanca, NY

SETTING



Rural

COST



\$350,000

SIZE



0.5 acres

OPEN SINCE

September
2018

GRANTEE

Local
non-profit

An adventurous meeting ground in Seneca Nation

Project Overview

Highland Ave. Park Playground is located in Salamanca, a city of 6,000 people situated on the Seneca Nation territory. More than a quarter of Salamanca residents identify as Native American. The playground project, led by the City of Salamanca Youth Bureau (CSYB) and Rural Revitalization Organization was an opportunity for non-profit, city, and tribal leaders to collaborate.

Today, the playground is a gathering space for Native American and non-native community members, and an essential public offering for kids who otherwise lack safe, convenient play spaces in the area. Moreover, the diverse play features and rich amenities encourage adults and families to enjoy a picnic, visit the nearby corner store, or sneak in a workout on the on-site obstacle course.



PHOTO: CITY OF SALAMANCA YOUTH BUREAU



Salamanca is a lot of things, and Seneca Nation, too – but when there is a project for the kids, it’s amazing how the community will come out – it hasn’t happened before or since in my career.

SANDI BRUNDAGE
CSYB Director & Project Lead



1

“My dad is a turtle and I’m a deer!”

– A kid playing

↑ **Seneca Nation tribal iconography** throughout the play space invites indigenous kids to see themselves in the space, and educates non-native kids on Seneca culture.



2

An accessible zipline is a favorite feature for kids of all abilities.

↑ **The accessible zipline** was inspired by a zipline in nearby Allegany State Park. When the project solicited community input, residents asked for an accessible zip line that kids with mobility impairments could use.



3

↑ **The play space was expanded** after completion thanks to an additional grant by the Wilson Foundation that allowed them to tear down a dilapidated neighboring structure and use the site to build restrooms, a storage shed, and other amenities to service the play space.

Origin story

THE SPARK – A NEED FOR MORE INFORMAL PLAY AREAS AND CULTURAL VISIBILITY

Salamanca had few non-institutional play spaces, and none specifically designed with indigenous families in mind. The mayor was familiar with KABOOM! and initiated conversations with Sandi Brundage and the Rural Revitalization Director about the grant opportunity.



DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION – A COMMUNITY EFFORT

Build Day was an opportunity for a range of youth to get hands-on experience: from a high school football team to local college students. Local political figures helped, too, including the Seneca Nation Marshals, and Salamanca police and fire departments, while local businesses chipped in with food for volunteers. Participants also built playground features like benches, picnic tables, and shade structures.



BOTTOM LEFT AND BOTTOM RIGHT: CITY OF SALAMANCA YOUTH BUREAU

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION – TO CENTER COMMUNITY DESIRES

During the planning process, local kids drew pictures of their dreams for the play space. The CSYB team sent the drawings to KABOOM!, whose play space design specialists drafted three options for community review. On Facebook, community members voted for their favorite design — overwhelmingly supporting a design that elevated kids' ideas from the engagement process.



Lessons learned



OUTCOME

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MEASURED RISK-TAKING.



53%

of kids in a focus group held at Highland Ave. Park said the zip line was their favorite thing about the park.

LESSON

Incorporate challenge and risk-taking features into play space design.

Designing a playground that offers a range of challenging elements can build resilience in kids, encourage healthy competition among teens, and offer physical activity for adults.



OUTCOME

A RURAL REGIONAL DESTINATION.



93%

of kids in a focus group held at Highland Ave. Park felt that the play space was built for kids like them.

LESSON

Ensure local identity and history is visible in the play space design.

Custom play space design that acknowledges context and celebrates community identity can boost sense of ownership and attachment to the space; it can also make the play space an appealing play destination for residents of the wider region, especially in rural settings.



OUTCOME

FOSTERING COMMUNITY PRIDE AND CONNECTION.



“The Seneca Nation and the City intersect on festivals and sporting events... **now, with the playground we see intersection on a regular, consistent basis like we never saw before.**”

– Sandi Brundage

LESSON

Use play space development as an opportunity to bring communities together.

Play is a unique shared priority for parties that might not otherwise collaborate. The process of co-creating a vision for a play space — and if possible, building it together — can seed relationships and build trust across difference.