



Statement for The City of Palo Alto Human Resources Commission Board Retreat (June 14, 2019)

My name is Rika Yamamoto/Adriana Suvaiala and I am speaking on behalf of the Palo Alto Community Advisory Committee for Special Education.

We are a volunteer organization, founded 30 years ago, to advocate for children with disabilities in PAUSD. The CAC brings awareness to the need for appropriate education and inclusion in our community. Our comments today center on the City of Palo Alto's year-round and summer Recreational Program. As families with special needs who live and play in Palo Alto, recreational services which are accessible to ALL ensure we are included, and help reduce the social isolation that we, as parents, and our children with disabilities experience.

Since the Human Relations Commission's mission is to ensure that all individuals and groups enjoy fully in our community's public resources and opportunities, like our city's fantastic recreation programs, we would like to recommend that for the coming year that the Commission work jointly with the Parks and Recreation Commission and City Recreation Services to ensure that our recreation programs are accessible to all children, including those with specific needs:

Here are some ideas and ways the city can make its programs more inclusive and accessible:

- Children with disabilities are usually delayed in their development. Use of chronological age rather than developmental age as an enrollment criteria excludes our kids from many activities where they could be successfully included. By 7th or 8th grade some of our kids have no recreational camps to attend. Being **flexible** with regards to age will allow increased inclusion and participation in the City's programs.
- Children with disabilities may require caregiver assistance in bathroom changing facilities at older ages. Building family bathrooms increases accessibility for special needs families. Removal of any structural **barriers** (for example at the Rinconada Pool) provides equal access to programs and services offered to the public. Please ADD a story about how there are kids who were turned away from using our public pools in Palo Alto last summer and there has been no action to correct it, forcing Palo Alto families to go to pools outside of Palo Alto and how that is unacceptable. This was a very powerful story I heard.

- Children with disabilities may require more assistance for behavioral, safety and self help. Continuing to allow and encourage personal aides, or to even provide and train recreational **aides or buddies**, increases the accessibility of City programs and creates valuable mentoring experiences. We point to successes like the Magical Bridge Ambassadors, Stanford Kids with Dreams, Bay Area Friendship Circle and High School Best Buddies. These programs build one-to-one friendships between people with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities, offering social mentoring while improving the quality of life for kids that are often isolated and excluded.
- The City of Santa Clara has a robust Therapeutic Recreation Program. We suggest the City use inclusion facilitators to develop and implement its practices. We find that Palo Alto has service providers who are receptive, but lack knowledge, training or scale to accommodate people with disabilities. **Coaching** and public workshops on creatively modifying programs and brainstorming activities, could help the City and other providers in our community include and serve more people. We recommend SF Inclusion Networks (<http://www.sfinclusion.org>) or the Santa Clara County Inclusion Collaborative (<http://www.inclusioncollaborative.org>)
- Finally, we ask if you will work with our school district to increase **service learning** for our Futures certificate-track students. For these teenage citizens with special needs to experience a sense of belonging, be accepted for who they are, and to ultimately have **valued** roles in our community, they need to be actively participating. The City can play a leading role in their inclusion.

We believe that the HRC (Human Relations Commission) has a critical role in partnering with other stakeholders in our community to ensure their respective programs and activities are as inclusive and accessible as possible. Over the last two years, this commission has earned a reputation for being strong and bold advocates for our community. We know that you will listen closely to our concerns and will take swift action to make these suggested improvements. We hope you include these among your priorities in this year's work plan.

Thank you for hearing us, we hope to continue this discussion.

On behalf of the Palo Alto CAC for Special Education
Adriana Suvaiala and Rika Yamamoto