The genesis of the proposed *Fircrest Community Activities and Connections* plan is the concern of several parents of current residents and those parents’ observation that the facility has limited opportunities for outdoor recreation and socialization on campus. This plan is being supported and promoted by these parents and the non-profit Shoreline Community Lifelong Learning PTSA, an official PTA unit in Washington State. Shoreline Community Lifelong Learning PTSA members include all Shoreline public schools, Fircrest School, Shoreline Community College and community residents.

Physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle for all people but is often overlooked in people with intellectual disabilities (ID). Motor functioning of individuals with ID has been a neglected area despite the fact that participation in physical activity has been shown to have multiple benefits, including reduction of stereotypic behavior, increase appropriate responding, and the potential for social interaction.

This group is at increased risk for health problems associated with inactivity. Efforts should focus on identifying appropriate leisure and desired activities which promote physical activity. The activity needs to be able to be safely and independently (as much as possible) accessible for the individual. This means that access to these activities may not be dependent on staff in order for the person to engage in a desired physical activity.

In addition to physical activity we are also looking at sensory engagement which may also be a desired leisure activity for the resident. Behaviors such as aggression, self-injury, property destruction and stereotyped movements represent formidable challenges. There is documentation which indicates that “problem behaviors: increase when a person is alone or when the environment contains few opportunities for alternative activities. When challenging behavior occurs under such austere conditions it may represent a form of sensory stimulation or attention getting behavior which may then act to alleviate boredom.” (Jeff Sigafoos, 1994)

Providing opportunities for the person to participate in a variety of alternative and preferred leisure activities may help reduce some of these behaviors.

**Goals**

The overarching goals of this plan are: to provide opportunities for residents to participate in a variety of alternative and preferred leisure activities which:

- Increase the opportunities for active and passive recreation, including social
interaction, for residents living on campus,

- With the opportunity for meaningful and joyful experiences for the residents to choose, we expect to see a decrease in the level of self-injurious behavior which is a concern for many of the residents.
- Activities which residents may access independently while still being in-site by caregivers for safety. Residents will more likely participate in physical activities/movement since access would not be staff dependent. This independent access would; hopefully have a beneficial effect on other aspects of their health (weight control, mood, cardiovascular disease, muscle strength and control, coordination, endurance, social skills, etc.)
- With the availability of universal design equipment, behavior modification programs can utilize a reward/incentive /motivation program to help assist residents in learning.

Features of the Preliminary Plan

Connections

The organizing “spine” of the proposed plan is a Pedestrian Promenade, that is oriented generally north-south and located internally, away from roads. The Pedestrian Promenade links to all existing houses and buildings.

The central focus of the plan and Pedestrian Promenade is a linear plaza offering a range of active, passive and social gathering opportunities that are adjacent to the existing playfield, sensory garden and barbeque patio (repurposed as a basketball area on the plan.) The Promenade is expanded from the central linear plaza, creating a figure 8 system that connects and embraces the existing playfield, sensory garden and proposed features within this large centrally-located open space. The figure 8 pathway could be a “course” for walking, jogging or biking.

The Pedestrian Promenade is recommended to be 8 to 10 feet wide to accommodate groups, residents on bikes, and two wheelchairs side-by-side, as well as individuals. It could incorporate and/or replace current concrete walks, which are generally 5 feet wide. The promenade’s layout and design is intended to create a more visible, graceful and inviting pathway through the community than currently exists.

Accessible sidewalk connections and expanded patios are added at each housing unit. The Pedestrian Promenade also knits together the existing sidewalk system from other buildings, roadways, parking lots and other site features such as sensory gardens. In addition, connecting walks from the North and South Terminus of the Promenade are added or improved to provide controlled, gated access points into the community's interior, and accessible links from the community to existing open space (north end) and proposed urban farm (south end).

Activities

Distributed along the “spine” of the Pedestrian Promenade are schematically shown areas for various activities and features. Not all of these areas need to be developed, and certainly not
all at once. The sizes of developed activity areas vary and are not prescriptive on this schematic plan. (Circles representing activity areas are approximately 12 – 40 feet in diameter.) Instead this plan is intended to be flexible and designed to be completed in phases.

The plan strives to match up potential locations for activities that would be compatible with nearby existing uses (for instance, passive activities opposite residences). The plan promotes the additional goal of evenly distributing the mix of activities and features, throughout the Fircrest Community, to give all residents a range of choices close to home.

**Active Play and Exercise**

The activities include active play (labeled “A”), which may involve play equipment or exercise station apparatus. Equipment would accommodate and promote large motor activities, such as balancing, bouncing, spinning, climbing, swinging and various other motor skills.

Hillside play (labeled “HP”) is located along a stretch of existing hillside bordering the centrally-located sensory garden and playfield. Hillside Play could involve a composite structure with ramps, slides and a variety of other gravity-enhanced play opportunities.

Additional detail on play and exercise equipment and specific designs for Active Play, Exercise Stations and Hillside Play is being provided by Steve Lebwohl, Wildwood Playgrounds.

**Basketball and Court Games**

Located near the proposed Hillside Play area is an existing paved patio area currently used for picnics and barbeques. This patio space is recommended to be repurposed as an active play area specifically for basketball (labeled “BB”). A lower area for additional basketball or other court games and active sports (large circle labeled “A”) could be added northeast of the repurposed patio.

**Passive Activities**

Interspersed between active areas are passive or social gathering areas (labeled “P”). Passive areas could include a variety of seating and/or table arrangements for resting, gathering, board games, solitary contemplation, outdoor learning activities and other social and quiet time endeavors in an outdoor setting.

**Community Gardens**

Areas labeled “G” are for gardening, a therapeutic activity combining aspects of active and passive recreation. Garden areas are envisioned to be well-spaced raised, accessible beds for growing annual vegetables, herbs and flowers, as well as perennial berries such as blueberries and strawberries. Distributed through the community, these beds could be “adopted” by nearby residents and provide fresh produce for community consumption.

Existing and proposed Sensory Garden areas are labeled “SG” on the plan. These areas provide both sensory stimulation and enjoyment as well as beauty and seasonal interest throughout the Fircrest Community. Although not as frequently interspersed as other
amenities, sensory gardens anchor the two ends of the Promenade corridor as well as the central plaza / playfield area. These gardens can act as “gateways” and quiet “rooms” at these key locations.

Urban Farm and Co-housing

Urban farming and co-housing are growing movements in all types of communities. Specifically there is increasing interest in providing long-term co-housing units for people with and without disabilities that are co-located with an urban farm.

At the south east end of the Fircrest Community, removal of military barracks has created several acres of open space. The area extends along the base of an existing west-facing bluff or slope, is flat and sunny, and located away from busy streets.

The plan identifies this area as having potential for phased development of an urban farm with a co-housing component. Urban farm /co-housing development could be accomplished through a partnership of the state of Washington, city of Shoreline and non-profit organizations (such as Seattle Tilth, Just Garden Project, others??.)

Leonard, D. (n.d.). Care in the Community - illusion or reality. (J. Leff, Ed.)