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**Date:** 2021-08-10

**From:** Zach Carson, Facilities Coordinator

**Subject:** OPS2021-35

**Report:** Installation of Families for Autism Grey Bruce Communication Boards

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## Recommendation

That report OPS2021-35, be received and Township staff is directed to continue collaborating with Families for Autism Grey Bruce and install communication boards at Shallow Lake Community Centre and Sarawak Family Park as well as other locations as staff see fit.

## Background

On April 14, 2021, Stephanie Serenko of [Families for Autism Grey Bruce](#) made a [presentation to Council](#) looking for support from the Township to install communication boards at playgrounds in Georgian Bluffs. Families for Autism Grey-Bruce is a local non-profit in support of kids and adults as well as their families, who are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). They have been approaching local municipalities and have already installed communication boards at several parks across Grey and Bruce Counties. As stated in their presentation the purpose of the communication boards is to “allow nonverbal or limitedly verbal people to point at the images that represent what they want to communicate such as ‘I want’, ‘help’, ‘bathroom’, ‘slide’ and ‘stop.’ It is one accessible way for neurodiverse communicators to develop autonomy.” The communication boards, also known as a picture exchange communication system (PECS) has widely been used in schools and private settings but have seen a limited use in public places including playgrounds. Following Ms. Serenko’s presentation at Council’s meeting on April 21, 2021 Council supported the installation of the communication boards and directed staff to work with the organization as well as consult with the Grey County Joint Accessibility Committee as part of the process.

## Analysis

Three locations were specifically chosen to have communication boards installed. The playgrounds at Shallow Lake Community Centre (two to be installed at this location) and Sarawak Family Park are ready for installation immediately. A third location at the future playground located in new development in Kilsyth (behind Derby Community Centre)

can be included in the plans for this park when it is ready to be constructed. Staff can continue to collaborate with the group for adding communication boards at other locations as we see fit. The boards will be installed in a manner to allow all to make use of them including height and specific location to ensure unobstructed access.

## Financial Impact

The financial impact for installing the communication boards is minimal. Families for Autism is donating picture-based communication boards for the identified locations. Some staff time and supplies (cement, hardware, lumber, etc.) will be required for their installation but can be covered by the operational budget.

## Strategic Priorities

### **4. Increase Available Community, Recreational and Social Opportunities**

The Township of Georgian Bluffs is committed to building community through investment in recreation and community centres, and flexible use of community centres and playgrounds.

#### **Objectives:**

- 4.1 Provide enhanced recreational opportunities for residents
- (d) Continually improve public/open spaces to ensure accessibility and safety.

## Conclusion

Staff has presented in this report some background and next steps in support of Families for Autism Grey Bruce's communication board installation program. Council has previously provided support for the program and directed staff to collaborate with the group and consult with the County's Accessibility Committee.

## Supporting Documentation

- i. Shallow Lake Sign 1 for 5-12 years playground
- ii. Shallow Lake Sign 2 for 18 month to 5 years playground
- iii. Sarawak Family Park Sign

Respectfully Submitted:

Zach Carson, Facilities Coordinator