

Discussion Guide

Magical Bridge

KIND BY DESIGN



WHEN A MOM TURNS A
PLAYGROUND INTO A MOVEMENT



A DOCUMENTARY BY **SPLICER FILMS**

SPLICER FILMS PRESENTS **MAGICAL BRIDGE: KIND BY DESIGN** EXECUTIVE PRODUCER **THE SCHMIDT FAMILY FOUNDATION** DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER **ANNETTE M. KING** DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND EDITOR **JULE HERMANN** CO-EDITOR **JACKSON GEACH** POST PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR **MELANIE MENKITI** MUSIC SUPERVISOR **MULANG ZHU** COLORIST **KEYHAN BAYEGAN** SOUND DESIGNER **LUNA FRANCO**

[MAGICALBRIDGE.ORG/FILM](https://magicalbridge.org/film)



Thank you for experiencing our documentary

Magical Bridge

KIND BY DESIGN

We hope you have been inspired by the world of Magical Bridge. Please share your story, thoughts, and ideas with us. Visit magicalbridge.org/film to share your impressions.

As you witnessed, everyone is a part of the disability community — whether it's you, a friend, a family member, or a neighbor. Join us in designing public spaces with everyone in mind.

Inclusive Means Everyone.





About the Film

A mom’s mission to build a playground where both her daughters can thrive becomes a global movement to design inclusive spaces for everyone. The film shares how inclusive playgrounds transform communities while inspiring viewers to imagine a world designed for everyone.

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Magical Bridge Creating innovative multigenerational playgrounds, parks, and programs for more inclusive communities.

Founded in 2016, Magical Bridge is a non-profit organization that designs innovative playgrounds and programs where people of all ages and abilities can play together. When founder Olenka Villarreal couldn't find a public playground where both of her daughters could play, she set out to create joyful, accessible space that welcome everyone.

The first Magical Bridge opened in Palo Alto, California in 2015 and—supported by a grant from the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors—soon expanded to other cities across the Bay Area. Since then, Magical Bridge has opened 12 playgrounds in public parks, schools, museums, and residential developments in the US, Singapore, and New Zealand, with many more in development worldwide.

Magical Bridge playgrounds exceed accessibility standards with universally designed equipment, sensory-rich and creative play elements, and quiet retreat areas for those who become overstimulated. The foundation's Kindness Ambassador program builds community by empowering volunteers of all ages and abilities to promote acceptance and belonging on and off the playground. Through this unique combination of thoughtful design, community engagement, and multigenerational programming, Magical Bridge truly brings communities together, improving the health and wellbeing of everyone.

Play, Build, and Support us at magicalbridge.org

SPLICER FILMS

Splicer Films Creating stories of purpose and impact.

Splicer Films is an independent production company with a mission to tell stories of purpose and impact that inspire audiences to create a better world. Recent productions include *Finding Ubuntu*, *Fear Not*, *A Divine Journey*, *Universal Love*, *Critter Encounters: A Forever Home* and the film featured here: *Magical Bridge: Kind By Design*. Each documentary spotlights unseen heroes who are leading social causes to address issues of marginalization.

Meet the Filmmakers



Annette King, Director and Producer

Annette King is an award-winning Producer and Director focused on spotlighting underrepresented stories. She is an Executive Producer, filmmaker, startup founder, and entrepreneur. She founded Splicer Films to tell impactful stories that inspire and spark meaningful change in the world. Her production company focuses on purpose-driven films that employ journalistic principles to objectively document character-driven stories to inform and open hearts and minds.



Jule Hermann, Director of Photography and Lead Editor

Jule Hermann's journey with Splicer Films began as the co-producer and co-editor of the acclaimed docuseries *A Divine Journey*—an experience that defined her hands-on approach to storytelling. Today, as Impact Production Lead, Jule finds her greatest fulfillment in being deeply embedded in every stage of a project's production cycle. This versatility is central to her work on films like *Critter Encounters* and *Magical Bridge*, where she served as both Director of Photography and Lead Editor. Beyond Splicer, Jule has collaborated with the *Los Angeles Times* and KTF Films, and she continues to volunteer with #MakeitBay. Whether exploring healthcare, the environment, or women's issues, Jule is guided by the belief that purposeful visual storytelling is a powerful tool for sparking empathy and genuine change.

The Splicer Team | Executive Producer: The Schmidt Family Foundation

Producers + Directors

Annette M. King

Jule Hermann

Nick Biddle

Cole Campbell

Adeola Kofo-Abayomi

Lucien Marcus

Rachel Martin

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Production Assistants

Anat Goldstein

Audrey Haas

Lucien Marcus

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Priscilla Ratone

Post-Production

Melanie Menkiti

Jule Hermann

Diego Barraz

Keyhan Bayegan

Gabriella Bebawy

Luna Franco

Marlene Gaeta

Jackson Geach

Matt Nardone

Eva Petrossian

Ryan Wang

Mulang Zhu



Meet the People in the Film

The Founder and Inspiration



Olenka Villarreal, Magical Bridge Founder

Olenka Villarreal founded Magical Bridge after realizing “accessible” playgrounds didn’t meet her two daughters’ very different needs. She organized volunteers to build a truly inclusive playground for the whole community—regardless of age or ability.

That personal mission grew into a global movement: Magical Bridge playgrounds are hailed as models of intentional, universal design and were featured at the 2019 World Economic Forum. Olenka remains a leading visionary and advocate, creating playgrounds and programs that promote inclusion worldwide.



Emma and Ava Villarreal, Inspiring Sisters

Sisters Emma and Ava Villarreal, who grew up with different abilities, experienced firsthand how many public spaces—especially playgrounds—exclude families like theirs. What should have been joyful became separating, and their story sparked the Magical Bridge Foundation. The foundation builds inclusive, multigenerational playgrounds and programs where everyone can play and belong. At age nine, Emma suggested the name “Magical Bridge” to capture a place so magical that anyone who arrives feels included.

The Kindness Ambassadors



Philip Dworkin, Kindness Ambassador

Philip Dworkin is a 21-year-old autistic man who serves as a Kindness Ambassador for the Magical Bridge Foundation, a role he grew into after years of visiting the park. His personal journey highlights a story of gaining self-confidence and stepping into a leadership position through his involvement at Magical Bridge. As a Kindness Ambassador, he is a social and interactive leader, and his story shows how a quiet kid who had trouble with socialization found his place within the Magical Bridge community.



Izzy Grimmer, Kindness Ambassador and Founder of Magical Bridge Kindness Club

Izzy Grimmer is a passionate social advocate and a dedicated Kindness Ambassador for the Magical Bridge Foundation. An active and visible leader on the playground, she embodies the foundation's mission by engaging with visitors, handing out "kindness stickers," and ensuring that every child feels included. In recognition of her broader impact, Izzy was awarded the LWVP's 2024 Civics in Action Award for her leadership across a variety of social initiatives. She founded the Magical Bridge Kindness Club to give neurodiverse young adults a fun place to socialize and make friends.



Sophia Stavrakos and Ava Randall, Kindness Ambassadors and Founders of Magical Tennis

Sophia Stavrakos and Ava Randall are Magical Bridge Kindness Ambassadors and co-founders of Magical Tennis, an inclusive program for kids and teens with disabilities. As Los Altos High students, they used childhood memories of Magical Bridge to combine their love of sports with creating connections for those often excluded. They design training materials, run summer camps, and mentor volunteer coaches to keep sessions welcoming and fun. They also launched a Magical Bridge Kindness Club at their school and now advise others starting similar clubs, extending their ambassador work to promote inclusion.

We have no doubt of the continued kindness and magical advocacy efforts by our teens as Izzy heads to Stanford, Ava to University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB) and Sophia to University of California Los Angeles (UCLA).

The Advocates and Experts



Alicia Nicho-Ogue, Magical Bridge Project Ambassador

Alicia Nicho-Ogue is a dedicated advocate for children with special needs and a key figure in the effort to bring Magical Bridge to Marin County. With a BA in Liberal Studies and a focus in Early Childhood Education, Alicia's career in preschool education took a new direction after her oldest daughter was diagnosed with Autism. This personal journey led her to become a passionate advocate for inclusive communities, and she now focuses on community outreach, chairing the annual Benefit Car Raffle for the Dedication to Special Education (DSE) Executive Board, which she joined in 2017.

In 2018, Alicia started a Special Needs Ministry at her local church, pairing volunteers with children with special needs to foster a more inclusive environment. After driving over 50 miles so her three daughters could play together at a Magical Bridge playground, she has made it her mission to bring one to her own community in Marin.



Dr. Aya Mouallem, Researcher, Stanford University

Aya Mouallem is a Knight-Hennessy Scholar who received her PhD in electrical engineering and master's degree in education from Stanford University. Her research focuses on the intersection of human-centered design, education, and accessibility, with the goal of creating more joyful and inclusive learning experiences for all. Aya's work is deeply rooted in community engagement and bridging the gap between academic theory and real-world application.

Through a class at Stanford, Aya connected with the Magical Bridge Foundation, which inspired her to co-design a project to define "joyful learning" and develop accessible tools for school playgrounds. Through a grant from the Stanford Accelerator for Learning Together, she is excited to share her findings about the correlation between spaces like Magical Bridge and joyful learning and is a powerful voice in the conversation around universal design and accessibility.



Key Terms Found in the Discussion Guide

Autism: A developmental condition that can affect a person's ability to communicate and interact with others, and how they experience the world around them.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): A U.S. civil rights law passed in 1990 that prohibits discrimination based on disability and sets minimum standards for accessibility in public spaces.

Community: A group of people connected by shared experience and a sense of belonging, who actively support and look out for one another.

Disability: A physical or mental condition that may limit a person's movements, senses, or activities, encompassing a wide spectrum of human experiences.

Inclusive Design: A thoughtful approach to design that considers the full range of human diversity, creating environments that are usable by and welcoming to all people, regardless of their age, ability, or background. Also known as universal design.

Kindness Ambassador: A volunteer at a Magical Bridge playground who champions inclusion, models compassionate behavior, and ensures everyone feels welcome and supported.

Loneliness Epidemic: A modern public health crisis where a lack of social connection leads to widespread isolation, impacting both mental and physical well-being.

Social Advocacy: The organized effort to influence public policy, raise awareness, and mobilize communities to address social injustices and improve wellbeing for marginalized or affected groups.

Let's Discuss — Inclusive Design

What is inclusive (or universal) design?

Discuss the difference between a space that is merely accessible (compliant with ADA standards) versus one that is truly inclusive and welcoming for everyone.

Beyond the Physical: Explore how inclusive design addresses more than just physical mobility, and considers sensory experiences (sound, touch, sight), emotional safety, and cognitive differences.

Designing for Dignity: Discuss how thoughtful design can empower individuals to be independent and self-sufficient, rather than simply “accommodating” them as an afterthought.

The “Curb-Cut Effect”: Analyze how features originally designed for a specific group of people with disabilities often end up benefiting a much wider range of users (e.g., parents with strollers, elderly individuals, delivery workers).

QUESTIONS

Think about a time you felt excluded or uncomfortable in a public space. What was it about the design that made you feel that way?

The film shows how intentional design can foster social interaction. Think of a piece of equipment at the playground: how would you adjust it so it can also be used by someone with a disability?

How can you advocate for more inclusive design in your own community, whether it's at your local park, school, or workplace?

YOUR NOTES

Let's Discuss — Combating Loneliness

How can inclusive public spaces combat loneliness?

The Architecture of Connection: Discuss how the physical layout of a space can either encourage or discourage spontaneous social interaction.

Caregiver Isolation: Focus on the specific experience of parents and caregivers, who often face their own form of social isolation while supporting their loved ones.

Shared Purpose: Explore how having a shared, positive space like Magical Bridge gives people an easy, low-stakes reason to connect with their neighbors.

QUESTIONS

Olenka Villarreal says that Magical Bridge was built to “end the social isolation that happens on the playground.” In what ways does the film show the park achieving this goal?

Beyond physical spaces, what are some other ways we can create a more connected and less lonely society?

Who in your own life might be feeling isolated? What is one small action you could take this week to reach out and make a connection?

YOUR NOTES

Let's Discuss — Building Community

How can inclusive public spaces strengthen a community?

Intergenerational Play: Analyze the importance of creating spaces where people of all ages—from toddlers to seniors—can interact and learn from one another.

Programmed vs. Organic Interaction: Debate the balance between structured programs (like Magical Tennis) and the unstructured, spontaneous connections that happen naturally in a well-designed space.

A Sense of Ownership: Discuss how involving the community in the design, funding, and maintenance of a public space fosters a powerful sense of pride and collective ownership.

QUESTIONS

What makes Magical Bridge more than just a playground? How does it function as a center for the community?

Think about the most vibrant community spaces in your own town. What makes them successful and well-loved?

What is one idea you have for a project or event that could help build a stronger sense of community in your neighborhood?

YOUR NOTES

Let's Discuss — Inspiring Kindness

How does Magical Bridge inspire kindness?

Modeling Behavior: Discuss how seeing kindness in action—whether from a designated Kindness Ambassador or another park visitor—creates a positive ripple effect.

The Structure of Kindness: Explore how a structured volunteer program can make the act of being kind and inclusive a deliberate and teachable practice.

Kindness as a Skill: Debate whether kindness is an innate trait or a skill that can be developed through practice and conscious effort, as seen in the film.

QUESTIONS

What were some of the most powerful examples of kindness you saw in the film, both big and small?

The film suggests that kindness can be taught and practiced. How can we cultivate a culture of kindness in our families, schools, and workplaces?

How can you be a “Kindness Ambassador” in your own daily life? What does that look like in practice?

YOUR NOTES

Let's Discuss — Benefits of Inclusion

What is the impact of inclusion on a community?

Developing Empathy: Analyze how direct, positive interaction between people of different abilities in a play-based setting is a powerful tool for building empathy.

Redefining Normal: Discuss how inclusive spaces challenge and expand society's often-narrow definition of a "normal" body, mind, or family structure.

Economic and Social ROI: Explore the argument that investing in inclusive design for public spaces provides a significant return on investment through improved public health, stronger communities, and increased civic engagement.

QUESTIONS

In the film, how did you see people without disabilities benefiting from the inclusive environment of Magical Bridge?

How does the film challenge or change our preconceived notions about disability and ability?

Can you think of another example in society where designing for a specific need has resulted in a solution that is better for everyone?

YOUR NOTES

Let's Discuss — Social Advocacy

How does social advocacy affect change?

The Power of a Personal Story: Discuss why a compelling, personal narrative is often more effective at inspiring action and winning support than abstract data or statistics.

Building a Coalition: Analyze the importance of building alliances with a diverse group of stakeholders, including parents, city officials, designers, donors, and community leaders.

Persistence and Resilience: Explore the emotional and logistical challenges of long-term advocacy work and the strategies the advocates in the film used to stay motivated and overcome setbacks.

QUESTIONS

What qualities did the advocates in the film possess that made them effective leaders for their cause?

What were the biggest obstacles the Magical Bridge founders faced, and how did they overcome them?

What is one issue in your own community that you are passionate about? What is the very first step you could take to start advocating for change?

YOUR NOTES



Thank you from Magical Bridge. Please contact us to share your thoughts and feedback or to explore bringing Magical Bridge to your community.

If you have an impact story to tell, please contact Annette King at Splicer Films.



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