

Impact

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Recreation for Persons with Disabilities

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Gerrie, Alice, and Linda (left to right) are long-time friends who have begun working out together in a wellness program. The program meets their individual fitness needs as women in their middle years, and increases their ability to achieve a variety of recreation and social goals. See story on page 14.

Strengthening Relationships and Bodies: Social Inclusion Through Recreation

by Richard R. Owen

In 1940, at age 12, I contracted polio. Muscles in my legs and torso were paralyzed and then left weakened, and I was no longer able to stand or walk unsupported. Ten months later, and two months after I had begun standing and walking in braces and on crutches, my family went on a vacation into the northern Ontario wilderness. Within a few hours of arriving at Mongoose Lake at Mile 78 on the Algoma Central Railroad, my crutches slipped on a mossy log and I fell into the lake. That immersion was my reintroduction to the wilderness and reinclusion in a favorite family activity. That early return to a challenging physical activity helped me overcome many of the misgivings I had about my “limitations” and more quickly reintegrate into family life, public schools, and society.

Before my disability, I had enjoyed baseball, football, biking, and exploring with other children in the neighborhood. In the early 1940s, there were no organized adapted athletic programs in the schools or in the parks to allow me to continue these physical recreation activities, so until the 1970s my athletic and recreation endeavors consisted of swimming, canoeing, and camping with my family. Between 1946 and 1949, wheelchair sports were introduced in this country largely as a result of World War II and returning veterans who had been injured in the war. The University of Illinois and the Veterans Administration were largely responsible for initiating these

[Owen, continued on page 31]

From the Editors

While recent decades have witnessed a significant increase in the participation of persons with developmental and other disabilities in regular education classrooms and community workplaces, participation and inclusion are not the same thing. Many individuals with disabilities learn, work, and live alongside nondisabled peers, but too often they have little social connection to and few friendships with those around them. This issue of *Impact* proposes that one way to increase social inclusion is for individuals with and without disabilities to play together.

Recreation programs have a number of characteristics that make them ideal places for individuals with disabilities to experience social inclusion and friendship building. The articles in this issue describe those characteristics, strategies for making use of them to enhance the opportunities for meaningful and ongoing social connections between participants with and without disabilities, and barriers to recreation participation that must be addressed.

The opportunity to play with others helps maintain physical, emotional, psychological, and social well-being for us all. Through reading this *Impact* it is our hope that recreation, education, and community services professionals, along with families and individuals with disabilities, will find additional ways in which everyone can experience those benefits.

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Social Inclusion Through Recreation: What's the Connection?

by Brian Abery

Joyce has a large number of social relationships that she has developed at work. She spends time with these individuals 40 hours a week on her job, eats lunch and takes breaks with them, and joins them after work to shop or eat out at local restaurants. When asked to identify those people who comprise her social world, she gave the names of 16 individuals who were not related or paid to provide her with supports. Unfortunately, Joyce reports that she does not experience a strong sense of social inclu-

Recreation and leisure programs possess a number of characteristics that make them good places to start facilitating social inclusion.

sion. When she is out in the community people don't seem to notice her much or they actively avoid getting into conversations. While none of her co-workers has ever refused her when she asks to go along with them after work, explicit invitations for these activities are rare.

Natalie, on the other hand, is able to identify only three individuals, other than family members and support providers, in her social network whom she calls friends and sees regularly. One of these individuals is a woman she identifies as her best friend whom she met in an aerobics class at the "Y." The other two are neighbors whom the residential staff supporting Natalie felt she would connect well with because of similar interests. Natalie reports that while she does not often do anything special with these people, she feels extremely close to them because they sit and talk, go on

walks together or share their mutual interest in doll collecting. Walking in the community with Natalie one gets the impression that everyone knows her. People wave from the other side of the street as they pass by, the cashier at the grocery store chats with her when she makes purchases, and everyone seems to know her at the community center and coffeehouse. When asked, Natalie indicates that she feels a strong sense of belonging and connectedness.

What factors led to the different social inclusion outcomes experienced by Joyce and Natalie? Why does Joyce not experience a sense of inclusion while Natalie does? Because of its highly personal, individualized nature, social inclusion is more complex than the numbers of friends one has or how often they are seen. What we do know about this critical outcome is that those persons who report that they are socially included talk about feeling a sense of belonging, actively participating and experiencing a presence in the community, and being able to engage in activities based upon their personal preferences.

There are a number of differences between Joyce and Natalie's situations that may explain their different social inclusion outcomes. The one that stands out the most, however, is that while Joyce spends little time engaged in recreation and leisure activities within the community, Natalie regularly attends an exercise program at the local "Y" and is supported by residential staff who actively searched for and found persons in the neighborhood who have similar leisure interests with whom she could connect.

Unmet Social Needs

Experiencing a sense of belonging entails individuals having a valued and varied set of social relationships – relationships that they have developed with

persons whom they choose, with whom they believe they have something in common, and who choose them. People who experience social inclusion do not tend to have homogeneous social circles, but rather ones that contain a variety of people. Some individuals may be friends or associates with whom they primarily engage in specific activities and rarely see outside of these endeavors. Others may be seen in a variety of settings and provide the individual with a number of different types of social support. A sense of belonging is also associated with people feeling that they are accepted for who they are with all their faults and shortcomings as opposed to what others would like them to be. Individuals with disabilities of all ages, unfortunately, often do not experience a sense of belonging. In many cases, they have few opportunities to meet peers with common interests or preferences. Often they do not see persons with whom they desire to establish social relationships in more than a single context or setting, and face life in a society that, while quite good at pointing out the challenges they face, typically overlooks the gifts they offer.

A sense of presence in the community is often also missing for persons with disabilities. Participating in and experiencing a presence in the community can best be described as having full access to those activities you desire or prefer and having people acknowledge your presence in a positive manner. An acquaintance waving to you in the hall, stopping by your work space to have a short chat, or merely nodding his or her head when you pass on the street all contribute to feeling that your presence is appreciated and acknowledged. Individuals with disabilities often experience life without being recognized in the community or acknowledged in a positive fashion. Closely observe how persons with disabilities are reacted to in

public settings and you will find that people typically do one of three things. In some cases, they appear to purposefully avert eye contact, possibly hoping that if they don't acknowledge the person they will not have to interact. In other instances, the acknowledgment is negative as people make disparaging comments or jostle the person with a disability when they don't move quickly enough through a door or across a street. The third common response is an initial over-zealous greeting, without pursuit of ongoing, deeper interaction.

Being able to engage in recreation activities that reflect their personal preferences is another component of social inclusion that is absent for many individuals with disabilities. The specific activities one prefers and enjoys may remain stable for many years or change quite frequently over time. The important thing is that they are personally chosen or selected by the individual rather than others and based upon his or her preferences. Persons with disabilities often do not get to participate in community activities on the basis of their personal preferences for a variety of reasons. In some instances, the activities they prefer are simply not available to them because they are not accessible due to transportation difficulties, a lack of funding, or inadequate supports. At other times, the activities in which they engage appear to have been selected by others not on the basis of the personal preferences of the individual with a disability, but rather on the basis of how convenient they are for others (e.g., parents, staff) or because they do not present any "risk" to the person in question.

On the basis of available research, it is quite clear that the social circles of persons with disabilities are often quite different from those of their peers without disabilities. Smaller social circles composed primarily of family and paid professionals are typical at all ages. Relationships developed in one setting often do not generalize to others. As a result, less intimacy or emotional closeness, and greater instability in social relationships, tend to differentiate the social

networks of persons with and without disabilities.

Hindrances to Inclusion in Home, School and Work Settings

Social inclusion is associated with a wide variety of factors including our personal characteristics; where we live, work, and go to school; and what we do in our leisure time. Some residential organizations that serve adults with developmental disabilities have developed programs to enhance the inclusion of the people they serve. Schools are moving toward increased inclusion of children with disabilities within general education settings. More persons with disabilities are finding jobs through inclusive supportive employment programs. Such efforts, however, are often not enough. Children and adults with disabilities, although physically included, remain socially isolated from their peers and fail to experience the sense of inclusion we all desire. School-age children with disabilities, for example, are often included in regular education classes during the school day, and eat lunch and take recess with their peers without disabilities. However, they are often not involved in extra-curricular activities, typically fail to get invited to the sleep-overs and other parties of non-disabled peers, and spend much of their evenings, weekends, and vacations with few opportunities to interact with children without disabilities.

These outcomes should not be surprising given the nature of most residential, school, and employment settings. Residential programs are typically too under-funded and under-staffed to effectively support individualized social inclusion. Residents typically venture out into the community in relatively large groups rather than as individuals who take part in the specific activities that they desire. School and work environments are normally far too structured to support the development of the types of social relationships upon which social inclusion is based. Other than a short lunch period, most middle and high school-age students today have little

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Where to Build Relationships Through Recreation

In every community there is a wide range of informal and formal opportunities for children and adults with disabilities to build relationships with others through shared recreation activities. Here are some of the places where such opportunities can be found and relationships nurtured:

- *Neighborhood yards, play areas, and parks*
- *Community education and recreation programs for youth and adults*
- *Community sports leagues*
- *Faith communities*
- *Interest clubs (such as gardening, bridge, birding, book, and dancing clubs)*
- *Youth organizations (such as Scouting, Campfire, 4-H, church youth groups)*
- *Recreation and fitness center activities and programs*
- *Cultural and ethnic centers*
- *Community arts and theatre organizations*
- *School carnivals and family nights*
- *Open gym and swim times for the community at local schools and colleges*
- *Extracurricular activities in K-12 schools*
- *Early childhood play groups*
- *Community volunteer organizations*
- *Youth drop-in centers*
- *Neighborhood coffeehouses and bars*
- *Workplace sports teams and informal interest groups*
- *Nature centers*
- *Travel/tour groups*
- *Singles groups, parent groups, couple groups, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender groups*

The Meaning of Social Experiences in Recreation Settings

by Donna Goodwin

What do you remember about your summer camp experiences as a youth? The first time you scooted across the water on an inner tube behind a power boat? The anticipation of seeing again someone you met the previous year? Sleeping in a cabin with seven other campers away from the watchful eyes of your parents? Many of these experiences remain in our memories forever. For some of us, however, what we remember about being at camp was the embarrassment of throwing up late at night on another camper's sleeping bag, or tripping and falling in front of a group of campers on the way to the out-house and hearing the snickers for the remainder of the week, or an insensitive comment from a group leader about our ineptness in a canoe. The happy memories created over an entire week can be wiped out in an instant through the unfeeling words of a fellow camper or leader. It is the emotionally sensitive memories that tend to stay with us.

What we experience and give emotional memory to can be so much more than what is evident to those observing from the outside. How we experience a particular environment or activity depends not only on what we are asked to do, but how we are asked to do it, and the response we receive for our efforts. Thoughtful leadership means endeavoring to understand the meaning participants give to their experiences. Effective leaders appear to have the ability to read and interpret inner thoughts, feelings, and desires from indirect cues such as body language, expressions, demeanor, and gestures (Blinde & McCallister, 1998). The impact of the embarrassment, frustration, humour, or exuberance of individuals or groups is within the consciousness of successful leaders. Practiced instructors seem innately able to interpret and gauge the social significance of these experiences for another's

inner life. Moreover, tactful leaders can sense the right thing to do in situations in which action is required.

The recreation environment is one in which participants can come to be known not as a label ("the wheelchair participant" or "the blind kid"), but by name. It would seem an impossibility to understand how a participant is experiencing the recreational setting if they are identified first as a label and only secondly as a person. Recreational settings also provide an opportunity to get to know something about the person that reflects their individuality. An extension of knowing someone is the respect they receive as they hold a place of priority in our day.

The remainder of this article offers a series of reflective questions for recreation providers to ask themselves about their program's activities, and about the interactions between people that take place through the program. These questions can enhance the ability of recreation providers to understand how participants experience recreational settings and the meanings they give their memories.

Will My Assistance Be Self-Supporting or Self-Threatening?

The assistance provided by leaders and fellow participants is one of the ways in which we encourage and support the success of recreation program participants. To offer support successfully requires a shared understanding of the participant's goal and contextual understanding of the task. At all times, interactions with participants in our programs should enhance their sense of self and of personal worth (Graham, 1995). If the participant is determined to be independent in the completion of the task at the expense of running over the time allotted, and the instructor provides un-

wanted help to complete the task within the allotted time, there is tension between the goals of the leader and those of the participant. What is perceived to be a well-planned and successful activity to the leader could be perceived as a threat to independence and self-esteem and result in feelings of inadequacy on the part of the participant.

Help that is perceived *by the participant* to be functional in nature because it assists with mobility needs or the successful completion of a task, or because it positively supports active participation in an activity, is often welcomed. Similarly, help that is offered in a caring manner and at the request of or with permission from the participant can result in a satisfying and mutually rewarding social interchange. When help threatens the participant's independence or self-image, or is provided in a non-caring and potentially harmful way, the social interchange can come to be perceived as invasive and hurtful. The imposition of help when not wanted can undermine and question the person's competence, desire for independence, and yearning to learn new things.

As recreation leaders there are several questions relevant to this area that we should always be asking ourselves:

- Do I know the participant's goal(s) for this activity?
- Will the support I, or my staff, provide be instrumental in assisting the participant to achieve his or her goal(s)?
- Will my assistance threaten the participant's sense of independence, remove an opportunity to demonstrate previously learned skills, inhibit new learning or call into question his or her competence?

Will Opportunities for Choice Be Afforded or Eliminated?

Most individuals tend to be more motivated when they are able to exercise personal control over what they do. In applying this to a recreation setting, we as recreation leaders must ask ourselves if we have provided opportunities for the participants to provide input into the program. Are participation alternatives presented to the participants or is the program scripted and the opportunity for choice minimized? In Western society, our independence, self-worth, and dignity are reflected in our ability and opportunity to make choices about our lives. Exercising choice and making decisions is a life skill that is expected of those who live in the community. To make a decision requires a number of steps, including listing relevant alternatives, identifying the consequences of acting on the alternatives, assessing the probability of the consequence occurring, establishing the value or utility of each consequence, and identifying the most attractive course of action. It is only after alternatives have been identified and their consequences understood that informed choice-making can occur. The alternatives presented to participants must be meaningful for there to be true choice-making; offering an unattractive choice is equivalent to offering no choice at all.

As recreation leaders there are several questions we should ask ourselves:

- What efforts have I made to provide opportunities for, guidance in or support of participant decision-making?
- Are the alternatives I provide meaningful to the participants?
- Are participants permitted to act on their decisions in meaningful ways?

Will the Activities Promote Social Belonging or Social Isolation?

Recreational involvement can contribute in very positive ways to a participant's sense of belonging. The sharing of common experiences, recognition by others, support for participation, and acknowl-

edgment of contributions to the group can provide deep and personal meaningfulness. Conversely, involvement that results in a participant's contribution being devalued by being laughed at, stared at, ignored or seen as an object of curiosity can be very damaging and socially isolating (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000). Preconceived notions about what a participant can do further reinforces the message of rejection.

Listening to the narratives of participants, attending to peer talk, and seeing what is transpiring in our programs can result in tactful responses to issues of acceptance, sharing, helping, acts of exclusion and inclusion, and the like. Moment-to-moment reactions to experiences can be captured through attention to facial expressions, eyes, tone of voice, and gestures. Instantly knowing how to gather, read, interpret, and act on the social environment is truly the sign of an experienced and caring leader.

As recreation leaders we should ask ourselves these questions :

- Do I take the time to talk to the participants about what they are thinking and feeling?
- What other strategies do I use to understand the experiences of the participants?
- What cues do I attend to that will help me understand how the participants are experiencing their involvement?
- How do I use this information in my planning and programming?

Am I Maximizing Participation or Restricting Opportunities?

We seldom restrict involvement in our programs through overt actions. Often, it is our uncertainty about appropriate participation expectations and inexperience with activity adaptations that limit participation. Prejudgments about abilities and assumptions about interests and desires can also unnecessarily restrict participation. Involvement is as much about the participants discovering

and coming to understand their own abilities and who they would like to become as it is about the leaders providing opportunities for participation.

As recreation leaders we can ask:

- What preparation have I done to take participant interest and previous experiences into account?
- Where can I go to gather more information about equipment adaptations, instructional support and expertise, and facility availability?
- What assumptions do I hold about participants with disabilities, are they warranted, and how can I check their validity?
- What new activity opportunities am I providing that may not have been experienced previously?

Conclusion

Once we remove the onerous task of assuming that as recreation leaders we must develop, schedule, and resource our recreational program independent of input from our participants and the social meaning they give to their participation, we open possibilities to explore new opportunities. Providing occasion for input, choice, shared decision-making, creativity in thinking, and the dispelling of previously held assumptions creates a climate of mutual growth, exploration, and self-discovery. The best solutions to challenges before us are often discovered collaboratively.

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Community Recreation Programming to Facilitate Social Inclusion: Rules of Thumb

by Lauren J. Lieberman

Individuals with disabilities have alarmingly high unemployment rates and thus have more free time at their disposal than the general population. Over 70% of individuals with disabilities are unemployed and of the 29% who are employed, many do not work full-time jobs (Harris, 1998). There is a need to fill this abundance of free time with functional, enjoyable, fulfilling activities. A natural way to accomplish this is through recreational and leisure activities.

The term “recreation” refers to activities engaged in when an individual is free of educational, vocational, and daily living responsibilities (Smith, 2002). Recreational pursuits not only provide opportunities for meaningful relaxation and enjoyment, they also promote social involvement and self-determination. Self-determined behavior expresses an individual’s personal preferences and interests, and its exercise through recreation strengthens individual ability to be “acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life and making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence or interference” (Wehmeyer, 1996, p. 24). Through making choices about and participating in recreation activities, individuals with disabilities place themselves in contexts where they can develop social relationships around shared interests. Without these opportunities for social inclusion and the exercise of self-determination through recreation, the range of life choices for individuals with disabilities is limited.

Reasons for engaging in recreational pursuits may vary. Some of the major reasons individuals with disabilities have reported for engaging in recreation are fun, exercise, meeting others, entertainment, challenge, occupying the mind, or a change of environment (Smith, 1994). When individuals are not

engaging in their preferred recreational activities and experiencing these benefits, it’s important to find out why. In recent studies of recreation and individuals with disabilities, the following barriers to participation were found (Lieberman & Stuart, 2002; Lieberman & MacVicar, in press; Tepfer, 2002):

- Perceived perceptions of others.
- Inadequate transportation.
- Lack of self-confidence.
- The disability itself.
- Lack of knowledge.
- Lack of appropriate programming and/or staff.
- Attitudes of people offering activities.
- Communication obstacles.
- Time or money constraints.
- Accessibility problems.
- Unavailability of others with whom to participate.

For individuals with disabilities to have recreation choices and be able to access their preferred activities, these barriers must be addressed. The following rules of thumb will assist parents, recreation providers, and consumers in overcoming these barriers and supporting successful recreational programming that will improve social inclusion.

Accessible Facilities

Accessibility can be viewed from a number of perspectives. A facility must eliminate *physical barriers* through having adequate disability parking spaces, as well as fully accessible entrances, restrooms, activity areas, and so forth. In addition, staff must be able to communicate with persons who have a variety of disabilities, including individuals who are Deaf, and have interpreters available when needed. Staff must be trained so there are no *attitudinal barriers*,

and the environment is emotionally safe; the negative attitude of one or more staff members can impede use for individuals with disabilities. And *systemic barriers* such as membership and participation rules that do not allow participation of individuals with disabilities must be addressed; examples of rules are specific pre-requisite skills in order to participate in judo, the passing of an eye exam for a scuba diving class, or the ability to swim alone.

It is important to be aware of these barriers and, when they are encountered, work to remove them in order to ensure accessibility for all potential participants.

Affordable Registration Costs

One of the major barriers we’ve found through our research is the cost of recreational activities. Many individuals cannot afford the cost of participation, transportation or registration for special events such as tournaments. Realistically, our programs are expensive to run when considering staff, equipment, space, and processing. There are two ways to cut costs: one is to decrease the program expenses and the other is to assist consumers with the charges.

Program costs can be decreased by obtaining donated, discounted or used equipment. Hiring staff for college credit instead of salary is another good method. Often when a program is associated with a university course the cost of the facility is decreased or waived. When it comes to the cost to the consumers there are several ways to access funding. Some individuals will be eligible for services from organizations such as United Way or the Commission for the Blind. These organizations may have mechanisms in place to support members in recreational pursuits. In addition, some programs have scholarship

money to supplement a participant's registration fee where there is financial need. And, there are many service organizations that are more than willing to support recreational programming for individuals with disabilities such as the Lions Clubs, Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club and Knights of Columbus. Many persons with disabilities can also use community services money to support their involvement in recreation activities.

Staff Training

One of the major barriers to including persons with disabilities into community recreational activities is the lack of training of the staff (Lieberman, & MacVicar, in press). Local university professionals, parent groups, local disability support groups, or grantee organizations can train staff in working with recreation participants who have disabilities. This can open many doors for individuals of all abilities.

Major topics that should be covered include but are not limited to specifics of certain disabilities, contraindicated activities associated with specific disabilities, methods of ambulation of specific participants, communication styles of specific participants, and lastly, modifications and adaptations that will benefit all participants. A recent study indicated that even sports that were adapted elicited a high degree of enjoyment and skill attainment by participants with and without disabilities (Kalyvas & Reid, 2003).

Program Variety

Individuals with disabilities are as heterogeneous as the able-bodied population. Recreation programs need to offer a variety of activities. The programs offered in the community do not have to be specifically for individuals with particular disabilities; such individuals can be easily incorporated into activities designed for able-bodied participants.

When including participants with disabilities it is important that modifications are made when necessary. A modi-

fication can be anything from no step in step aerobics to two bounces in a tennis clinic. The most important rule when modifying activities is including the participants with disabilities in planning the intended modifications. By asking them about their specific needs for an activity you are ensuring ease of access and supporting self-determination.

In order for an individual to be self-determined we also need to ensure offering preferred activities when possible. Offering activities of interest will ensure adequate numbers of participants and will also increase attendance during the entire program offered. Along the same lines it is important to offer activities that promote socialization such as dancing, team sports, adventure-based activities, aerobics, crafts, and lifetime leisure activities such as fishing.

When offering new programs it is extremely important to have manageable start and end dates. For example, if Eric is trying karate for the first time and the program is six weeks long and he enjoys it, he will sign up again and feel like he is successful. If Eric does not enjoy the program and it is eighteen weeks long and he stops coming after five weeks due to lack of interest or enthusiasm, he will perceive that he "quit." If programs are kept to six to eight week sessions individuals can "stick them out" and be finished instead of "quitting." If an individual likes it enough they can just sign up for another session that is a reasonable length. Conversely, if one of the goals of a recreation program is to enhance social inclusion, sessions must last long enough for participants to establish relationships.

Transportation

A major barrier that continues to appear in all our research is adequate transportation. There are several solutions to the transportation issue. When setting up programs in which individuals who attend may have limited transportation, try to utilize locations near public transportation, and establish activity times around the days and times that public

transportation is most available. Another option is to assist in setting up carpools. Administrators can take down the names of individuals who need rides and share them with participants who are transporting themselves. In this way, the individuals driving can choose if they want to transport those who have no transportation. A final option is to offer a discounted activity price to a friend of the individual who needs a ride in order to bring them both into the program.

Summary

Access to community recreation programs is desired by many individuals, including those with disabilities. The barriers faced by individuals with disabilities are often multilayered as opposed to singular (Lieberman & Stuart, 2002). By following some of these general rules of thumb, recreation providers may increase access to wonderful experiences for all individuals in the community. It is up to all parties involved to create an environment that fosters participation, self-determination, and social inclusion for everyone.

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Recreation Inclusion Today and Tomorrow: The Role of Policies and Funding

by John N. McGovern

Tomorrow is here. That statement is a cliché, but it is true. Past efforts to create a society more inclusive and welcoming of persons with disabilities have changed our world. Walk into almost any business and see people with and without disabilities working together. Open the newspaper and see ads that feature people with disabilities because the market recognizes this population as an untapped group of customers. And look around in the settings where you engage in recreation and you'll notice increasing numbers of persons with disabilities participating in recreation programs and using recreation facilities. Inclusive recreation is happening for a variety of reasons. Two elements that are almost always present are policies that promote inclusion and funds to support inclusion. I'll talk about both in this article.

Policies That Promote Inclusion

I work for the Northern Suburban Special Recreation Association (NSSRA), a partnership of 12 local governments in Illinois that want to make recreation opportunities available for adults and children with disabilities. These governments didn't come together by accident. They responded to requests from people with disabilities and their families who wanted recreation opportunities for people with disabilities. The association was established in 1970 and was the first such association formed in the country. Today in Illinois there are 25 such governmental partnerships, serving 164 communities. One thing all these associations have in common is policies about service for people with disabilities. Their policies address five key issues that should be addressed by all agencies involved in recreation services: inviting inclusion, supporting choice, offering preferred service for residents, in-

cluding reciprocal agreements, and reinforcing inclusion with their staff.

First, agencies need policies that invite inclusion in all recreation experiences. Such policies require training for employees on how to welcome and support inclusion; assistance from the community of people with disabilities who can tell staff why inclusion is important from the perspective of those who benefit; and public statements in documents, Web sites, speeches, and publications that support and invite inclusion.

That said, a second issue to be addressed in policy is support of choice. Some people prefer to be in a recreation experience with people more like them, while others prefer to enjoy recreation with others who are different than they are. Where I work, we heard families and individuals tell us this in the mid-1990s and today we still encourage choice and provide a range of options.

The third policy area is the issue of preferential service for residents of a community. In my metropolitan area, people choose to live in a variety of communities. Some people want lower property taxes so they choose communities with fewer services. Some people want more service and they recognize that more service translates into higher property tax bills. This is the ultimate choice by a family of a person with a disability: service costs money. It disturbs me to say this, but the leaders of some communities across the country will shirk their responsibility to serve residents with disabilities if those residents can drive into the neighboring town and get service. I have seen this in many states in my travels. One way to address this is to ban nonresident participation, or charge very high nonresident fees, or provide preferential treatment for residents (such as early registration). Nonresident policies require a complex review of federal and state law before implementa-

tion, but with care they can accomplish the primary goal of preserving resources for residents and the secondary goal of kick-starting a neighboring community to do the right thing.

The fourth key policy issue is creation of reciprocal agreements with neighboring communities that have placed an equally high value on recreation services for people with disabilities. Here is how it works. If Town A doesn't have a gymnastics center but Town B does, and if both communities value inclusion, then a Town A resident should be able to enroll in a Town B gymnastics program. This is fair because eventually a Town B resident will seek to register in a Town A program. Reciprocity works when both partners want the same thing, in this instance, inclusion.

The fifth issue is that there must be policies that address human resources at agencies and reinforce staff commitment to inclusion. Do job descriptions include a requirement that the employee support inclusion? Is there employee training in how to support inclusion? Do performance evaluation tools ask whether the employee has supported inclusion? Do job titles represent inclusion? These are small steps that make the people who work at an agency aware that inclusion is indeed the policy of the agency and that it is important.

These are just five key issues that must be addressed. Our association has found it necessary to continually review and revise our inclusion policies. We do so because demand changes from time to time, employees change all the time, and what worked in 2001 does not necessarily work in 2003.

Funds to Support Inclusion

Which came first, the policy or the budget? Money doesn't solve every problem, but without money, few problems get

solved. Our association serves an area with a population of 221,000 people. In 1995, we spent about \$35,000 in full- and part-time wages to support the inclusive recreation choices of 38 individuals. This year, 2003, we will spend almost \$90,000 in full-time salaries and benefits and another \$360,000 in part-time wages to support inclusive recreation choices for about 800 individuals. Where did that money come from?

Some of our local governments increased property taxes to pay for support for inclusion. "Poor homeowner" you are thinking. But don't. In the suburbs in which I work, property taxes on a \$500,000 home increased about \$3.60 a year. Smaller home value? Smaller annual tax cost. I don't live in a \$500,000 home but if I ever do, I promise I won't complain about \$3.60 on my tax bill.

Some of our local governments increased user fees charged to all users (those with and without disabilities) to pay for support for inclusion. One agency receives about 50,000 recreation registrations annually. Add a \$1 surcharge to every fee and *voila*, \$50,000 in funds to support inclusion comes from other program users.

Some of our local governments sought grants to pay for support for inclusion, or we sought the grants on their behalf. This worked well in the early days of our inclusion efforts, but as always happens with soft money, it eventually dries up. This year NSSRA adopted a plan that incorporates our formerly grant-funded inclusion efforts into our regular budget process.

This commitment to funding inclusion in recreation grows out of an appreciation of the positive benefits to communities from including all citizens in community life. The commitment is also consistent with the intent of Congress and the U.S. Department of Justice when the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was under consideration, intent related to the rights of Americans with disabilities to have access to community services and programs. Local governments (parks and recreation departments) are hard pressed to claim

they cannot afford the cost of making accommodations to support inclusion. Only the smallest agencies can argue this point successfully. Parks and recreation agencies are best advised to budget extra funds for inclusion support staff, sign language interpreters, and most importantly, an employee who is skilled in disability issues and can assess the need for inclusion supports. In administrative decisions and in court hearings this is a consistent message.

Trends and Tomorrow

Within NSSRA, inclusion demand continues to rise. However, so does the demand for separate or segregated programs where people with disabilities choose to enjoy organized recreation with others who have disabilities. As long as public parks and recreation agencies support choice, and apply resources to back that policy by offering a variety of recreation options, individuals with disabilities and their families will benefit.

Make it happen. If you, the reader, are a public parks and recreation employee, push for a policy that invites inclusion. Push for training for all employees so they know how to welcome and support inclusion. Push for policies that welcome choice and enable it by having funds follow the choice made by an individual. If you are a person with a disability, tell your parks and recreation agencies that you have high expectations about inclusion. Tell them how you feel when you can choose with whom you enjoy recreation. Tell them that if you need it, you expect support that is appropriate, free to you, and professionally managed.

Inclusion is here to stay. The benefits of inclusion are endless. Celebrate by making an inclusive leisure choice today!

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Advocating for Inclusion: Strategies for Individuals

When individuals with disabilities encounter barriers to social and recreational inclusion within organizations, it may be an occasion for advocacy by the individual and/or others. Below are some steps for effective advocacy:

- 1. Know the Goals.** Understand your goals or those of the individual for whom you're advocating in relation to the barrier.
- 2. Find the Right Level and Right Person.** Identify the level of the organization at which the problem is occurring and the person likely to have the authority to correct the situation at that level. Begin advocacy there.
- 3. Present the Problem.** Approach the person who has authority and present the problem. Ask whether the person is aware of the problem. If unaware, inform them of the history and details of the situation.
- 4. Present Your Goals.** Clearly and briefly express your advocacy goals.
- 5. Respond to Resistance.** If the person seems unsupportive, ask the person to describe the mission and goals of the organization. Point out any ways in which their response to the problem conflicts with the mission and goals. Find out if the person is aware of the rights of individuals with disabilities; if they are unaware, inform them about rights that relate to this situation. Ask again if they have authority to work with you to correct the situation. If they do not, find out who does. Begin again.
- 6. Brainstorm and Implement Solutions.** With the person who has authority, brainstorm possible solutions. After implementation of a solution, monitor the situation to see if it improves.
- 7. Thank Supporters.** After the situation has been resolved, thank those who assisted in its resolution.

Adapted with permission from *Yes I Can: A Social Inclusion Curriculum for Students With and Without Disabilities* (1997). By Brian Abery et al. Published by the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota.

Ideas for Encouraging Children's Friendships Through Recreation

by Linda A. Heyne, Stuart J. Schleien, and Leo H. McAvoy

Families, school personnel, and community recreation staff all play a role in encouraging the growth of friendships between children with and without disabilities. The following recommendations from members of all three groups address some of the ways that friendships can be promoted through recreation activities in homes, neighborhoods, schools, and community recreation programs.

What Families Can Do

Families can take many positive steps to influence friendship building between children with and without disabilities through recreation activities. Recognizing that friendships for their children will generally not occur by themselves, parents recommend to other families the following approaches for encouraging friendships:

- **Make friendship development a family priority.** If friendships are to develop and thrive for children, parents must make friendship development a family priority. Given the many demands on a family's time, the only way that friendships for children can be given the attention they deserve is to rank friendship development as one of the family's foremost values.
- **Become acquainted with other families.** To identify neighborhood peers who can potentially be friends with their children, parents must become acquainted with other families in their neighborhoods. An ideal way to get to know other families is to meet them through school functions and at community recreation centers.
- **Schedule children's times together.** If children's friendships are to grow, children need frequent and ongoing opportunities to play together and interact. Parents must play an active role in making certain these opportunities take place. For example, families can request each other's phone numbers and addresses. Also, parents can take the initiative to call other parents or teach their children to use the telephone to arrange times for friends to see each other.
- **Invite children into homes and on outings.** As children themselves have told us, an indication that classmates have become friends is that they play together outside of school. Children might stop off at a friend's house after school, be invited to a birthday party, ride bikes together on the weekend, go to a movie, or simply "hang out" together in the neighborhood. Parents can take an active role in suggesting these or similar activities to their children and in making arrangements for their friends to join them. Or, if children themselves ask to play with a friend, parents can respond by making arrangements for the activity.
- **Learn about individual needs of children.** To feel comfortable assuming responsibility for children with special needs in their homes, parents of nondisabled children need to learn about the individual needs of friends with disabilities and how to meet them. For example, more information may be required about mobility, communication, managing inappropriate behaviors, or personal care needs. Discussing these needs with a parent of a child with a disability – or if a parent grants permission, a school teacher – can help assuage questions and fears, and open up new opportunities for informal play between children with and without disabilities.
- **Discuss children's friendships at home.** Parents can support their children's relationships by discussing them at home. Parents can talk with their children about what it means to be a friend and have one. They can ask their children questions related to a particular friend. Or they can find out if there are any classmates in school or peers in the neighborhood that their children might like to get to know better.
- **Encourage positive social interactions.** To facilitate friendships between children with and without disabilities when they visit in homes, parents must learn some basic techniques to encourage positive communication and interaction between the children. Techniques developed in the area of inclusive recreation, such as arranging for cooperative play and teaching friendship skills, can be extremely valuable for parents who attempt to facilitate home play for their children.
- **Learn about community recreation resources.** As a means of seeking opportunities for children with and without disabilities to share experiences, families can explore neighborhood recreation resources, such as neighborhood parks, recreation centers, nature centers, and shopping malls, as well as organized leisure programs through organizations such as YMCA/YWCAs, scouting, and Jewish Community Centers. Children with and without disabilities might enroll in an activity class together, take part in a community event, play at a playground, or shop together. Through building a shared history of experiences in the community, the bonds of friendship can be strengthened.

What School Staff Can Do

Along with families, school personnel can play an important part in encouraging friendships between students with and without disabilities. Here are recommendations that have been offered for facilitating and supporting friendships through recreation activities during the school day:

- **Include social and recreation skills in curricula.** Providing opportunities for students to learn social interaction and recreation skills along with academics can help students to gain self-confidence, learn how to get along with and respect others, build enduring relationships and friendships, assume responsibility, solve problems, and make decisions. These goals can be achieved by involving children with and without disabilities in small group, cooperative activities at regular periods throughout the school week. Within these groups children can be taught, and be given frequent opportunities to practice such skills as greeting each other, listening to each other respectfully, taking turns, initiating and engaging in conversations, brainstorming ideas, expressing opinions, and solving problems when they arise.
- **Assign friends to the same classroom.** Children tend to make friends with other children who are in their same classroom. If friends who were in the same class one year are not assigned to the same class the following year, they will have fewer opportunities to spend time together and, as a result, their friendship might not continue. Teachers can pay special attention to friendships that develop between children with and without disabilities, make arrangements so those children can be in the same classrooms from year to year, and support those friendships by arranging times for children to play and work together on a regular basis.
- **Provide opportunities for families to become acquainted.** If chil-

dren with varying abilities are to become friends, their parents need to have opportunities to meet each other, become acquainted, and mutually support the relationships. Schools can serve as common, non-threatening bases for parents to get to know each other. Schools can provide these opportunities by sponsoring school open houses, potluck dinners, open swim or gym times, family nights, community education classes, PTA meetings, and family focus groups.

- **Include friendship and recreation goals in the IEPs.** Every child who receives special education services has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that is reviewed annually. Recreation has been identified in several federal laws as a “related service” that parents can request to be included on the IEP. Including recreation, friendship, or social interaction goals and objectives on an IEP will ensure that the skills related to these goals will be taught, monitored, and evaluated regularly.
- **Train school personnel on children’s friendships.** Teachers and other school staff whose training may have emphasized academic skills may need supplementary training in the importance of teaching social interaction, friendship, and recreation skills, and in techniques to support and maintain children’s relationships and friendships.
- **Offer disability awareness training to parents and nondisabled children.** In order to eliminate stereotypes about individuals with disabilities, children and parents need to receive accurate information about disabilities and individuals who have them. Schools can sponsor educational sessions about people with disabilities, presenting information through puppetry, testimonials by individuals with disabilities and/or their parents, books, pictures, and displays of specialized equipment

[Heyne, continued on page 34]

How to Set the Stage for Building Relationships

There are a number of things that recreation professionals, families, and individuals with disabilities can do to support the building of friendships and other social relationships through recreation. Below are some ideas:

- **Contact:** People are more likely to develop social relationships if they have regular, frequent contact with others. Look for programs or activities that meet at least once a week over a long period of time. This will allow both the person with a disability and other participants sufficient time to get to know one another and build upon their common interests.
- **Common Interests and Fun:** Friendships develop when people who have interests in common get together and have fun. It is therefore critical that individuals with disabilities choose their own recreation and leisure activities. It is also important that once they begin to take part in recreation activities, they are given the opportunity to share information about their interests with others. Hanging around after an activity to share a snack or arriving a few minutes early both provide such social opportunities.
- **Interaction as a Priority:** Some activities are structured to support social interaction and inclusion. This is especially true of those that are cooperative and allow for ongoing conversation. Seek out such activities. Others are structured in a way that minimizes social connections; in such cases, brainstorm about how the activity could be modified to allow for greater social interaction.
- **Disability Awareness:** Make sure that recreation participants with disabilities are aware of their strengths, skills, and needs in relation to participation in an activity. Ensure that program leaders are aware of and able to fulfill the support needs of participating individuals with disabilities, and that information about disabilities is available to other participants.

Supporting Social and Recreational Choice-Making By Adults With Disabilities

by Brian Abery and Matt Ziegler

How can professionals and family members who provide supports to an adult with developmental disabilities facilitate the individual's involvement in community recreation activities that are fun for the individual, based on his or her preferences, and provide opportunities to make friends? Over the past 15 years, staff from the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, have worked with adults with disabilities to discover ways that social inclu-

sion through recreation can be supported. The insights gained through this work do not fit for all persons with developmental disabilities, but can be viewed as a helpful starting point for exploring what may work with specific individuals.

Planning Participation

It is important to remember that persons with developmental disabilities must be intimately involved in any planning that focuses on developing inclusive recreational and social opportunities. Although individuals may need varying degrees of support, their participation is essential for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, individuals

Surveys and Checklists

with disabilities are the ones most likely to know what types of activities they enjoy. In addition, they are likely to be able to play important roles in developing needed accommodations. Finally, having control over the activities in which they engage is likely to make them more motivated to participate.

When working to enhance inclusion, one must remember that many people with disabilities have experienced a limited number of recreational opportunities and may have a difficult time deciding what they want to do. Interest surveys and recreation checklists, whether administered verbally or through an alternative format (e.g., showing an individual pictures of various recreational activities), can be quite valuable in narrowing down the scope of alternatives from which persons will select. Staff or family members can create such surveys, taking into account what they already know about the person's recreation preferences and activities available in the immediate area. Creating a "recreation resource log" is an additional way to increase the likelihood that persons will access activities they enjoy. Individuals can create such a log themselves or together with family members and/or professionals. The log need not be complex and could include the types of activities in which a person currently takes part, how often these take place and last, costs, necessary supports, accessibility, opportunities available for the development of social relationships, and the extent activities are enjoyed. A log of this nature can be used in the future to help figure out new activities a person might enjoy and to successfully plan for them.

Roles for Family and Professionals

Closely tied to the participation of persons with developmental disabilities in recreation activities is the involvement of professionals and family members who support this outcome. Organizations that provide supports to individuals with disabilities must make sure that their staff are trained to function adequately in the role of bridgebuilders. This means not only taking advantage of available recreation opportunities, but also creating opportunities where none exist and knowing how to facilitate the initiation of social interactions in the context of recreation settings. Family members must develop a knowledge of the individual's strengths as well as support needs and be both willing and able to honestly communicate these to program staff prior to their family member beginning a program. Both staff and family must reconsider the idea that their primary role is to "protect" the person whom they support. This "protection" often results in individuals with disabilities not being allowed to face *any* risks or challenges, inadvertently serving as a barrier to participation.

Service Plans

One of the most critical things that must be considered when attempting to enhance recreational inclusion is to make sure that goals and objectives for recreation and inclusion have been included in any individualized plan the person may have (e.g., Individualized Service/Habilitation Plan, Individualized Education Program) and that methods for achieving these goals are developed and implemented. This makes inclusion just as important a piece of a person's overall supports as any other and increases the likelihood that resources will be available.

How can professionals and family members who provide supports to an adult with developmental disabilities facilitate the individual's involvement in community recreation activities?

Likes and Dislikes

People tend to be more likely to become friends with persons who are enjoying what they are doing. When considering the types of recreational activities in which individuals desire to take part, it is important that persons with developmental disabilities be supported to think carefully about what they like to do before joining a program. Individuals will have a better time and be more likely to make friends when engaging in activities that they find interesting. It's especially important to make sure that people don't fear things that they may have never done to such an extent that they always select the familiar. Unless individuals have tried an activity, it's difficult to tell if they will like it. Most recreation programs don't expect new members to be experts at an activity and allow individuals to take part in or observe what they do without the need to first join. This enables people to get an idea as to what an activity is all about.

Thinking Broadly

It's all too frequent that persons supporting individuals with disabilities reach the conclusion that there are few if any opportunities available for inclusive recreation within their community, or that the resources are not available to support it. In most areas, however, there are a wealth of recreation opportunities that are under-utilized. Professionals and families can draw on existing community resources to find appropriate avenues for recreational inclusion. The Arc, People First, associations for blind and visually impaired persons, and Centers for Independent Living all have newsletters and/or compilations of programs and services in the areas they serve. Contacting the local parks and recreation board or community education agency and asking them what programs they offer, which community organizations are most active, and if they are equipped to serve individuals who may need support takes no more than a few telephone calls and has the potential to pay large dividends. For persons who

are participating in the Medicaid Waiver program, investigating whether funding is available to defray the costs associated with recreational supports is well worth pursuing as is the recruitment of volunteers if staff are not available to provide supports.

When people think about recreation, they often think of nothing beyond competitive sports. But there are many activities out there for people who are not interested in competition. If individuals like the theatre, joining a community playhouse can provide them with an opportunity to meet people with similar interests even if they don't act themselves. Helping out painting scenery or building props will bring persons into contact with others who have similar interests. If individuals are interested in singing, joining a church or community choir can put them into regular contact with persons who get enjoyment out of this activity. If people have an interest in an activity but need to learn more about it, community education classes can be an excellent way to accomplish this as well as meet people. Such courses are offered on a wide variety of topics ranging from bird watching to kayaking to building your own snowshoes.

Joining a community or volunteer group, such as a local Jaycees or Kiwanis Club, and serving as a volunteer for community activities is another excellent way to meet new people. Community organizations are always looking for new members and are especially pleased to have individuals interested in working to make their community a better place. Faith communities are also often overlooked as places to recreate and meet new people. Religious organizations often have singles groups, social action committees, environmental groups as well as many other opportunities for members to get together outside of services.

Regular Participation

If recreational pursuits are going to help people make friends, it's critical that such activities take place on a regular

[Abery/Ziegler, continued on page 33]

Identifying Individual Recreation Interests

When choosing recreation activities, children, youth and adults with disabilities may need to first spend some time identifying what it is they would like to do. Here are some things to consider to increase the likelihood that an individual will have a positive recreation experience:

- **Make Use of Informal Surveys/Interviews.** *Based upon what you know about a person, develop an informal interview/survey you can use with them that will provide you with information with respect to the types of recreational activities they might like to try. For persons who have only emerging communication skills, a set of pictures of people engaging in various recreation activities that requires only a pointing response or eye gaze can be used.*
- **Take a Tour.** *Often the best way to support persons with disabilities in identifying their recreational preferences is to assist them to actually engage in programs in which they might be interested for a short "trial" period. Taking individuals on a "tour" of programs in which they have already indicated some interest and allowing them to experience the program, setting, and other participants is one avenue through which this can be accomplished.*
- **Develop a Person-Centered Plan.** *Bring together the child or adult with a disability, those individuals who are part of his or her "circle of support," and a professional who is capable of facilitating a person-centered plan. As part of the planning process you will learn a host of things about the focus person that will be valuable in helping to find a recreational experience that reflects their interests and meets their needs.*
- **Consider Previous Enjoyable Experiences.** *But don't stop there. Consider entirely new things, as well.*

Aging With Developmental Disabilities: Meeting Social and Recreation Needs

by Erin Simunds and Sonja McGill

Alice, Gerrie and Linda are three middle-aged friends with developmental disabilities who have known each other since childhood, when they lived together in foster care. Today, they share an apartment, and are often looking for places and activities where they can all go to have fun. Participation in regular exercise has afforded them the opportunity not only to spend time together working out at a local wellness center, but also to stay fit enough to enjoy a variety of activities together and with their other friends.

People with disabilities are likely to experience some of the effects of aging decades earlier than the general population.

Supporting Lifelong Wellness

In 2001, Courage St. Croix, a rehabilitation center in Stillwater, Minnesota, that is part of Courage Center, began taking steps to design a wellness center that would allow people with disabilities the opportunity to exercise regularly. The center's staff asked individuals with disabilities who were currently using Courage services to define barriers for exercise and identify the components of a wellness center that would help them sustain an ongoing program of exercise. Input from focus groups produced a list of common barriers to lifelong exercise for persons with disabilities:

- Fear of injury or re-injury.
- Presence of pain.
- Reduced level of energy.

- Lack of transportation.
- Intimidating atmosphere of most exercise clubs.
- Lack of staff knowledge on how to tailor exercise with respect to disabilities.
- Inaccessible equipment (e.g., lowest weight is too high, difficult transfers).
- Lack of support for participation (e.g., training, dressing assist).

Respondents also indicated that a variety of program options needed to be offered including independent exercise, group activities, fitness assistance, and personal training. This list became the guiding principles for designing a wellness center that would meet the needs of people with disabilities.

A pilot project, supported by the Bayport Foundation, began at Courage St. Croix in May of 2001 to develop a wellness center. Center programming included accessible weight machines, stationary aerobic equipment, a circuit training class, and a fitness assistant class for persons who have experienced a stroke. Evaluation of the project showed that participants experienced improvement in their physical abilities as well as gains toward achieving their personal fitness and recreation goals. Information on this pilot project found its way to the doorstep of Alice, Gerrie, and Linda, who were interested in getting into shape for personal reasons. Alice wanted to go on a vacation with Search Beyond Adventures, a company that provides escorted vacations for travelers with disabilities, but felt as if she did not have enough energy or endurance to walk around sightseeing. Gerrie had difficulty keeping up with Linda and Alice when they walked together in the community, and wanted to improve in that area. And Linda wanted to have the stamina to visit friends in various settings around the community.

The three began working out together at the wellness center twice a week in the summer of 2001. They participated in open gym where they used weight machines and stationary aerobic equipment that specifically fit their needs and goals. Within a few months they saw improvements in their physical condition, and this led to greater ability to participate in social activities with friends. For instance, last year Alice was able to take a vacation to San Francisco and walk up and down the hills sightseeing with the group without any difficulty. Gerrie has found that working out on the treadmill has allowed her to walk faster and keep up with Linda and Alice when they walk around the community. And Linda has been able to visit a friend with a broken leg in a local nursing home located on a steep hill – parking the car, and walking up the hill to visit without even thinking twice about it.

Aging, Disability, and Exercise

Anyone who watches television, reads magazines, or listens to radio for even a short time will encounter our society's obsession with defying the aging process, and its glorification of youthfulness. In the midst of this frenzy to resist aging, it is important to search through the hype, biases, and stereotypes to truly understand and accept the natural aging process and its effects on us all.

Those who study aging define it as the natural progression of biological, psychological, and social functioning after the point of maximum development (Birren & Schaie, 1985). Research has found the following benchmarks of this progression (Kailes, 2003):

- The peak of biological functioning – when our bodies are the strongest and most limber – is around 25 years of age. After this, our bodies lose

strength, flexibility, and organ capacity at a rate of about 1% yearly. Despite this early decline, a person usually does not experience physical illnesses related to aging until after age 70 because the body is resilient.

- Psychological maturity occurs at approximately age 35 and is defined by cognitive skills of learning, coping, creativity, and memory. After this peak, it becomes more difficult to process and recall new information. Aging in this area occurs much more slowly as people find compensatory strategies to replace lost abilities.
- The peak for social functioning is around 55 years of age, a point in life where people have reached a pinnacle in their careers, social roles, community participation, and personal relationships. After this peak, life events such as retirement and the deaths of friends disrupt individuals' social networks. In addition, the loss of physical skills may influence ability to drive independently and perform usual recreational activities.

People with disabilities are likely to experience some of the effects of aging decades earlier than the general population. In addition, people with disabilities are more likely to have higher rates of certain health problems such as obesity, hypertension, high cholesterol, heart disease, diabetes, respiratory infections, and osteoporosis than their age-matched peers without disabilities. Many of these conditions or factors can lead to secondary health problems such as pain, fractures, and loss of balance. These secondary conditions add to the overall complexity of well-being and make it more difficult for someone with a disability to remain healthy and independent (Kailes, 2003).

Addressing the physical, psychological, and social dimensions of aging is important for all of us as we grow older, including individuals with disabilities. One of the best options available for maintaining well-being is exercise. Regular exercise increases and maintains muscle strength and flexibility, keeps

bones solid, improves heart functioning, and assists in weight control. In addition, exercise has been shown to be valuable in improving mental health and sharpening cognitive abilities. It can be a social activity, especially if frequently done with the same group of people, and it can sustain the physical ability to engage in other social and recreation activities. Research on the importance of exercise for persons with disabilities is just beginning, but preliminary findings indicate that even mild physical activity can prevent secondary conditions and will address most of the issues encountered with aging (Snow, 2001).

Meeting Needs of Older Adults

It sounds easy. Just exercise and you will have a good life as you get older! However, we all know that finding the opportunity and motivation to exercise regularly is just not that simple. Recreation programs can offer options for aging adults with disabilities to exercise and socialize by doing the following:

- Ensuring that fitness staff are trained in the characteristics and fitness needs of aging individuals with a variety of disabilities, and knowledgeable about adapting fitness activities to enhance participation of such individuals. In addition, programs should have equipment and activities suitable for the needs of older adults with disabilities, such as weight equipment that targets the larger muscle groups of the legs, which are important for walking independently without a cane or crutches.
- Performing an initial screening of physical abilities and personal goals for individuals. This will insure that the exercise routine designed is motivating to the individual and tailored to maximize physical skills without the possibility of injury.
- Encouraging a fitness center culture where members represent a wide range of abilities, body types, and ages. This will allow camaraderie between members who have similar

experiences and prevent members from feeling intimidated or excluded.

And as far as staying personally motivated to exercise, Linda, Alice, and Gerrie had these responses when asked what keeps them coming back. Linda said, "We come here to see the other people and staff. They are a fun group. It does not feel like working out, it feels like this is another family for us." Alice added, "We even had a potluck dinner one night after working out. Another member had been taking a cooking class so he could live in an apartment independently and he needed to practice. We all made a dish and brought it to share." And Gerrie said that she notices when one of the members does not come on a regularly scheduled day, and she will tell the member they "skipped" the next time she sees them. Everyone tries to keep the commitment to exercise and looks out for one another.

Conclusion

In addition to continuing their regular workouts with each other, Alice, Gerrie, and Linda have some new fitness-related goals. Alice and Linda would like to lose weight and they plan to join a nutrition group when it is offered this fall. And Gerrie is working toward walking on the treadmill without holding the rails. If she can do this for five minutes, she will win a bet with a staff member and get a fitness center t-shirt as her winnings.

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Solving Organizational Barriers to Inclusion Using Education, Creativity, and Teamwork

by Linda A. Heyne

Barriers to Inclusion

At Ithaca College, I teach a course on inclusive community leisure services in which we devote one full week to a discussion of potential organizational barriers to inclusion and how to overcome them. I begin the lesson by informing the class that barriers to inclusion tend to fall in one of four categories: attitudinal, administrative, architectural, and programmatic. I then ask the students to work in small groups to enumerate all the potential obstacles to inclusion they can imagine. Together, we generate long lists of possible barriers. What follows are the most prevalent ones found in agencies:

- **Attitudinal barriers.** Inclusion is a frame of mind as much as a matter of practice, thus attitudinal barriers may be the most difficult to overcome. Attitudinal blocks may take the form of misconceptions, stereotypes, or labeling. A tradition of segregated recreation programs can set a pattern that perpetuates isolation. If staff have little exposure to people with disabilities, fear of the unknown may cause them to resist inclusive services. Further, staff may not understand the concept of inclusion and what it represents in terms of people's rights and opportunities.
- **Administrative barriers.** Agencies may lack outreach networks, staff trained in inclusive practices, adequate transportation, and funding for coordinated services and individual supports. Boards of directors and administrators may not understand inclusion well enough to support it. Administrators may also mistakenly presume that inclusion means complicated and expensive liability arrangements.
- **Architectural barriers.** Curb cuts, ramps, automatic door openers,

elevators, braille signage, telecommunication devices, and similar accommodations (or the lack thereof) send a message that people with disabilities are or are not welcome. While social inclusion is difficult when facilities are physically inaccessible, it can be accomplished, and architectural barriers should never be used as an excuse to deny participation.

- **Programmatic barriers.** Serving people with varying abilities may also raise programmatic concerns. There may be no single point of contact for inclusive services. Program staff may not have accurate information about disabilities nor experience teaching people with differing abilities. Staff may not know how to provide inclusion supports such as individual needs assessments, environmental inventories, behavioral teaching techniques, adaptations, or specialized equipment. And the activities offered may not be a good match for persons with some types of disabilities.

Creative Solutions

After my students identify potential barriers to inclusion, I again ask them to work in small groups to brainstorm potential solutions. These young adults preparing for careers in leisure services and therapeutic recreation prove time and time again their creativity in generating fresh solutions to problems that have impeded the progress of inclusion for decades. Below are some of their ideas in relation to the four categories of barriers:

- **Attitudinal solutions.** When it comes to changing attitudes, one person can make a difference; when a recreation staff member has inclusive attitudes and behaviors, other staff as well as participants will fol-

low. Among effective ways to demonstrate inclusive attitudes are challenging stereotypes by speaking up when someone uses derogatory language toward a person with a disability or persists in having low expectations, using "person first" language (e.g. "people with disabilities" rather than "disabled people"), and knowing and showing appropriate ways to interact with people with varying abilities. Attitudinal change also comes about when individuals participate in inclusive recreation programs from an early age; inclusion then becomes a natural part of life for participants.

- **Administrative solutions.** Employing individuals with disabilities in administrative roles can be an important step toward removing administrative barriers to inclusion. Educating staff and boards of directors about the meaning and practices of inclusion, and enlisting their commitment to inclusive practices, is also necessary. An advisory council can be organized to guide and monitor inclusion, and recreation agencies can network with local disability advocacy groups to publicize recreation programs and learn about supportive services and funding opportunities.
- **Architectural solutions.** When designing facilities, agencies should plan in advance for use by people with mixed abilities, recognizing that universal access supports use by all people (e.g. a ramp is handy for those pushing baby strollers, hauling items, or wanting to take it easy on their joints). Persons with disabilities should be involved in designing architectural modifications to an existing structure to ensure that accommodations are functional. Agencies can submit grant proposals to fund accommodations such as eleva-

tors, ramps, paved pathways and lifts to bring an old building up to code.

- **Programmatic solutions.** Hiring a certified therapeutic recreation specialist or certified park and recreation professional provides a trained recreation professional on staff who knows how to facilitate inclusion. Training staff about disabilities and inclusion techniques, conducting personalized assessments, and offering individualized instruction and accommodations for participants also help remove programmatic barriers. Participants with disabilities, or parents of children with disabilities, can suggest accommodations and provide information on communication, positioning, behavior, and similar concerns.

How Agencies Can Support Inclusion

The positive results of this group work, and my own experience as an inclusion facilitator and researcher, give credibility to the idea that agency personnel can apply a similar problem-solving approach to the removal of inclusion barriers. With this in mind, I propose a five-step approach that agencies can take to support inclusion:

- **Step One: Believe in inclusion.** Understanding inclusion as a heartfelt value is foremost in providing services that truly welcome all members of the community. Inclusion implies that all people deserve respect, appreciation, and acceptance. Inclusion also means everyone has the opportunity to take part in community social and recreational offerings.
- **Step Two: Educate yourself about inclusion practices.** Many excellent materials on inclusive recreation are available today. In addition to purchasing materials, agencies can invite an inclusion specialist to provide training on inclusion principles and practices. Effective social inclusion techniques include disability awareness orientations, peer partners, and cooperative learning.

- **Step Three: Identify inclusion barriers.** Each community's circumstances are unique, so it is important that people name the local barriers that stand in the way of inclusion. An advisory council of participants, parents, community members, and agency staff would be well-qualified to identify and prioritize obstacles.
- **Step Four: Take a creative, problem-solving approach to generate inclusion solutions.** Approach each obstacle through a brainstorming technique. Think creatively about potential solutions, and initially refrain from criticizing anyone's suggestion. Involve people with diverse perspectives, and focus on possibilities. Consider how networking, teamwork, and collaboration can move your initiative forward.
- **Step Five: Choose a solution and persevere until the barrier is removed.** Select the most effective and realistic solution to each barrier, and develop a plan to implement it. Document your plan in writing, set a timeframe, and identify the people responsible for getting tasks done. Identifying specific outcomes – for example, scheduling staff training, building a ramp, securing funding for interpreters, or paving pathways at camp – will help you track successes.

Conclusion

The effort devoted to the removal of organizational barriers will be rewarded many times over as people work together to support inclusion. People with varying abilities will gain opportunities to live to their fullest potential, and each member of the community will find a greater sense of understanding, value, and belonging.

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Checking Program Social Inclusion Potential

To offer meaningful and rewarding recreation activities that support social inclusion for participants with disabilities, recreation programs must attend to several features:

- **Accessibility.** Accessibility involves far more than whether a ramp is available to enter a building or restrooms are physically accessible. Accessible programs are affordable and allow persons with a variety of disabilities full access to all aspects of the physical and social environment. They encourage full participation by persons with varying abilities and provide supports and accommodations (e.g., ASL interpreters, Braille instructions).
- **Cross-Cultural Competence.** People with disabilities come from all cultural and ethnic groups. Programs that demonstrate an appreciation of cultural diversity and offer activities that take into account the differing cultural values of participants with respect to disability, inclusion, and recreational participation are a good bet for fostering inclusive relationships.
- **Socially Valued by Peers.** If a recreational program is to be effective in enhancing social inclusion, it must be based upon a set of activities that are valued by individuals' cultural and peer groups. Activities that are rarely engaged in by same-age peers are a poor choice if one's goal is inclusion.
- **Support of Social Connections.** Programs and activities that facilitate inclusion are structured in ways that support social interaction. Activities that are cooperative/collaborative, emphasize teamwork, and offer individuals a chance to share information about themselves provide a starting point for the development of social relationships. If such opportunities are not available during program participation, it is important to know whether they are available either immediately prior to or following program activities.

Quality Indicators of Inclusive Recreation Programs: A National Youth Service Example

by Kimberly D. Miller, Antoinette Frisoli, Anna Smythe, and Stuart J. Schleien

Inclusive recreation programming is slowly, but steadily, becoming a more prominent feature of our local communities. But not every community recreation program adheres to the philosophical underpinnings of inclusive recreation and, therefore, may lack the qualities necessary for the successful inclusion (physical and social) of individuals with disabilities. Physical accessibility and physical integration do not ensure that individuals with disabilities will feel welcomed and accommodated, the salient characteristics of inclusion. What are the qualities that identify a program as both physically and socially inclusive? Outlined here are quality indicators, embedded within the context of an inclusive community volunteer program, that can be used to evaluate a recreation system's level of commitment to social inclusion. These indicators include 1) administrative support, 2) nature of the program, 3) nature of the activities, 4) environmental/logistical considerations, and 5) programming techniques and methods.

These quality indicators are illustrated in this article through profiling a volunteer program recently implemented through a collaborative partnership of the Volunteer Center of Greensboro (North Carolina); Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro; Guilford County Schools; Greensboro Department of Parks and Recreation; and Partnership F.I.V.E. (Fostering Inclusive Volunteer Efforts), a three-year U.S. Department of Education grant initiative.

Day of Service Event

The program under study was a "day of service" event held at a local park for high school students in conjunction with National Youth Service Day (NYSD).

This event was viewed as an opportunity to expose youth of varying abilities to volunteering with the hopes of encouraging them to become active, ongoing volunteers for community agencies. While the development of ongoing social relationships was not the key focus of this recreation event, through the event participants were encouraged to become volunteers in their communities in settings where social relationships could develop. Also, social inclusion through ongoing contributions in the community could occur as participants volunteered throughout the year.

Of the 125 student volunteers, 61 had disabilities. Their disabilities included visual impairments, mental retardation, cerebral palsy, autism, bipolar disorder, and learning disabilities. After an opening ceremony, the student volunteers were divided into smaller, inclusive teams of approximately 15 participants. These groups participated in a variety of team-building activities such as the human knot and hoop pass. Following these warm-ups the teams worked cooperatively on the following service projects benefiting local non-profit and public agencies:

- Volunteers assisted the American Red Cross in folding, labeling, and collating a bulk mailing.
- Youth designed cards and letters to be distributed with groceries delivered to homebound individuals by The Servant Center.
- Letters were written to active duty soldiers overseas.
- Volunteers painted birdhouses for distribution to group homes by the Mental Health Association.
- Information packets were assembled for a parks and recreation day camp.
- Volunteers prepared a 1,000-piece mailing for the Volunteer Center.

Using these activities and the day of service event as an example, we turn now to the five quality indicators for inclusion in recreation programs.

Indicator 1: Administrative Support

Administrative support of a diverse participant base is essential for inclusive recreation to be successful. Quality indicators in this area include:

- **Mission and philosophy reflect inclusive approach.** Welcoming statements of mission and philosophy appear in all agency literature. For example, "We invite individuals of all ability levels and backgrounds to access our services and programs." These statements should not be full of legalese and unfriendly language.
- **Adherence to laws regarding serving persons with disabilities in typical recreation programs.** Guidelines set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, are adhered to. These laws call for more than mere physical accessibility and integration; they call for programmatic accessibility and social inclusion in the least restrictive environment.
- **Staff training emphasizes innovations and techniques in inclusion, use of on-site community inclusion consultants, etc.** Ongoing staff training helps staff to facilitate inclusive programs and demonstrates to staff the level of importance the agency places on inclusive services long term.
- **Documentation of socially inclusive services – interventions and effects.** Is the recreation agency simply keeping track of how many participants with disabilities attend their

programs (physical integration) through frequency counts? If this is the sole focus of evaluation, there will be little evidence of the quality of the social experience for participants with and without disabilities.

National Youth Service Day's mission was to recruit the next generation of volunteers and educate the public about the contributions of young people as community leaders. The collaborative planning group ensured that all facilities were physically accessible and in compliance with the guidelines of the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The atmosphere was socially and programmatically accessible to all participants. Prior to the event, training was provided to event planners and staff on disability awareness, strategies for barrier removal, and social inclusion. Volunteers were asked to complete a NYSD evaluation, inquiring about the quality of the volunteer activities, their enjoyment levels, and whether they felt included by peers.

Indicator 2: Nature of the Program

Recreation programs must be conducive to individuals succeeding in their participation and reaping multiple benefits beyond winning and losing. The quality indicators in this area include:

- **Program goals reflect an inclusion emphasis.** Program goals address ongoing opportunities to participate, skill development, and/or socialization, rather than competition and high-level proficiency in the targeted activity. For socialization goals to be maximized, participants of varying abilities need frequent and regular opportunities to interact in a positive manner. Typically, for social relationships to develop, volunteers will need to spend time together in volunteer and other activities beyond the one-day event.
- **Programs allow for modifications and partial participation, if needed.** The program's objective is not to have each individual partici-

pate in the same manner, but rather for every individual to participate at his or her own successful level. Adaptive equipment is available to help meet individual needs. Rules of the program are flexible and allow for individual modifications that enhance participation. People should have the opportunity to engage in activities to the maximum extent possible, which sometimes will only resemble the standard activity.

Program goals for NYSD were for high school students with and without disabilities to have the opportunity to volunteer in an inclusive atmosphere. In this manner, volunteers could demonstrate that everyone has a contribution to make in their community regardless of ability level. Emphasis was placed on every team member contributing to the volunteer activities in which they were engaged. For example, the goal of the American Red Cross mailing activity was for every student to play a role in the folding and labeling process, not the completion of a certain number of mail pieces. Despite the emphasis on social inclusion versus productivity, the student volunteers completed this task in less time than the nonprofit agency had anticipated.

The NYSD planning group discussed the notion of "flexible" and adaptable programming prior to the event. When it was discovered that a student who could not read or write and had limited verbal communication was mistakenly placed in a group that was writing letters for soldiers, this student was inconspicuously reassigned to a group preparing a bulk mailing, where she successfully folded letters.

Indicator 3: Nature of the Activities

Participants with and without disabilities need access to activities and programs that are considered appropriate for their peer group, as well as consistent with their personal preferences. Quality indicators include:

- **Activities are age-appropriate, functional, and have lifelong learning potential.** Teenagers participate in popular teen activities rather than elementary-level ones regardless of their level of cognitive functioning. Participants engaging in activities that are not age-appropriate will become socially isolated from their peers.
- **Activities occur in many places and during different times of the day.** This increases the likelihood that skills developed during recreation participation will generalize to other settings. It is necessary for people to learn a broad range of social, motor, cognitive, and leisure skills that their peers use in various environments. In this way, one will become better prepared to deal with the various leisure opportunities he or she has throughout the day.
- **Activities allow for personal challenge and participant choice.** Participants with disabilities are allowed dignity of risk, the opportunity to challenge oneself, instead of only having access to contrived environments that allow for minimal risk or chance for failure. Participant choice is provided to help individuals acquire skills that they may choose to pursue when they have free time.

According to national statistics, 59% of American teenagers (ages 12 to 17) volunteer their time to improve their communities (Hamilton & Hussain, 1998), and thus volunteering is a popular activity for teens across our nation. All service projects offered at NYSD were typical of volunteer activities offered to teenagers in local nonprofit agencies. The opportunity for students to participate in volunteer activities outside of their schools encouraged them to learn new skills in novel community settings.

[Miller, continued on page 35]

Social Inclusion Through Recreation: The Wilderness Inquiry Approach

by Greg Lais

I went to “commune” with nature and kept waiting for that inspiration. The true communing occurred between participants. Our shared goals gave us an opportunity to bond – for some a bond that may extend beyond the trip, for others, one that has created beautiful memories.” – Sandy, trip participant

Wilderness Inquiry (WI) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing together people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities – including people with disabilities and chronic illness – through integrated outdoor and environmental learning experiences. Incorporated in



1978, WI provides experiences that present a highly effective method of achieving a mission of promoting healthy lifestyles, integrating people into the community, and developing a sense of stewardship for the environment. These experiences are a cost-effective alternative to traditional integration, rehabilitation, and intervention programs.

Wilderness Inquiry inspires people to solve problems by discovering new strengths. Rather than tell people they need to change, WI offers appealing experiences designed to facilitate a process of integration and self-discovery. People come to WI for the adventure, but they go home with deep understanding and respect for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. By emphasizing

abilities and the power of collectively applying those abilities toward common goals, WI has a lasting impact on the thousands of people it serves annually.

For 25 years WI has pioneered integrated outdoor programs, setting best practice standards and serving more than 100,000 people with and without disabilities from throughout the United States. It also enjoys dozens of partnerships with organizations, including federal and state land management agencies, local and national nonprofit organizations, universities, K-12 schools, environmental groups, and health care organizations.

Needs Addressed by WI Programs

As a society we have learned that physical integration – putting people with differences together in one place – is not enough. While we will always need laws to prohibit the most egregious forms of discrimination, we will never be able to force people to respect and accept each other. Wilderness Inquiry recognizes this and uses a unique approach to promote social inclusion within a community. Its formula for inclusion is simple, but it requires that we think more broadly than traditional “special” or “minority population” approaches to inclusion. Briefly, WI’s approach to integration is:

- 1) Select a popular, voluntary, cooperative venue that has inherent challenges.
- 2) Provide support so that everyone can participate without changing the fundamental nature of the experience.
- 3) Actively recruit people from diverse backgrounds and ability levels.
- 4) Facilitate the process to optimize opportunities for social integration to occur.

- 5) Provide financial assistance to keep the program within reach of people from all socio-economic backgrounds.

WI has carefully refined its program to seamlessly serve people with disabilities and others who are neither disabled nor associated with other “minority” communities. It is the only program serving people with disabilities and chronic illness in the United States that regularly attracts people who would never consider personally participating in a program for “special populations.” In short, WI has developed a highly effective approach to facilitating social integration – it reaches people from all walks of life, opens their minds and changes their attitudes.

Specific Activities

In 2003, Wilderness Inquiry will conduct 145 multi-day wilderness adventures serving 1,250 people and 20 one-day urban adventures serving 9,000 people. It will also train thousands of recreational professionals and others on how to make these program activities more inclusive. Program offerings range from 1-10 days and include activities such as canoeing, kayaking, rock climbing, and dogsledding in our nation’s national parks and wilderness areas, as well as skills training workshops in urban areas. Financial support is directed toward people in financial need for trips and activities that are eight days or less. Proceeds from international trips and expeditions are used to subsidize entry-level activities.

WI’s inclusive recreational experiences work by socially integrating people with and without disabilities in enjoyable outdoor activities. These interactions are best achieved through shared experiences between equals – not between “helpers” and “helpless,” “volun-

teers” and “handicapped,” etc. As stated by a WI participant:

The trip was one of the first opportunities I had to have close and concentrated contact with persons with disabilities – so I learned a lot – primarily not to give in to the urge to do everything for them but to allow them to do all they can do.



Wilderness environments provide an excellent context for social integration because they force people to work together to meet basic group needs. In this context, the wilderness tends to neutralize issues of social status based upon physical characteristics. It provides a level “playing field” where participants can develop new relationships without the bias of stereotypes. In WI programs, people realize that their common human needs far outweigh their physical differences.

Who is Served

In 2003, WI will serve 10,350 people on multi-day kayak, canoe, and horse pack trips and in one-day skills training workshops conducted in urban areas. Each activity is integrated to include a mix of people with and without disabilities. A typical integrated group includes two people who use wheelchairs, two who are blind or deaf, two who have some other disability, five nondisabled participants, one or two people serving in the role of personal assistants, and three staff. Each group also includes people of varying ages and from widely diverse social, cultural, and racial backgrounds.

A distinguishing feature of WI is that

it serves people with a variety of physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities participating alongside those without disabilities. In addition to serving people with chronic illness and disabling conditions, WI serves many others traditionally excluded from outdoor pursuits, including disadvantaged youth who would otherwise not have the experience because of lack of financial resources and/or lack of opportunity; families, including single-parent and other “non-traditional families,” and families with members who have disabilities or chronic medical conditions, who want to recreate together regardless of ability; and people of color who, as a result of WI’s urban outreach efforts, participate in WI at far above the average levels of racial minority participation in outdoor programs.

Impact of Activities

Wilderness Inquiry’s socially integrated programs have an impact upon participants in many ways. The chief, most immediate, and long-lasting impact is that WI experiences really do change attitudes. They change the attitudes of people without disabilities by reducing the fear, condescension, and lowered expectations that limit opportunities for persons with disabilities. They also empower people with disabilities to reach beyond self-imposed limitations and achieve things that they never thought possible. This shift in attitude has a large ripple effect as people move back into their jobs and communities.

The WI experience has an impact on individuals in three primary ways:

- Increased personal health. Outdoor activities have physical and mental health benefits, such as enhanced confidence, physical development and coordination, emotional adjustment, and the acquisition of social interaction skills. By providing convenient, low-cost, quality opportunities, WI encourages individuals and families to have more active lifestyles.
- Increased community integration by

people with disabilities and others. Wilderness Inquiry experiences affect positive, long-term changes in the attitudes of people who participate. They accomplish goals of building lasting understanding, respect, and compassion toward people with physical differences.

- Stewardship of the environment. Wilderness Inquiry experiences instill understanding of and respect for our natural resources, effectively reaching people with disabilities, those who are economically disadvantaged, youth, and others who are critical in helping to preserve and protect our precious outdoor resources.

Wilderness Inquiry’s approach to integrated outdoor recreation is unique because it facilitates the development of



deep, meaningful relationships on a level that is not easily accomplished through other means. In short, WI accomplishes what so many civil rights initiatives can only attempt – it changes people’s attitudes toward each other by opening their minds and reaching their hearts, and it does this through shared recreation experiences.

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Making Possibilities for People with Disabilities: Challenge Aspen

by Stacey Degen and Allison Bartholomaus

Challenge Aspen is a year-around program that provides recreational and cultural experiences for individuals who have mental or physical disabilities, their families, and their friends. A non-profit organization, it was formed in 1995 when it took over the 25-year-old adaptive ski program from Aspen Skiing Company. Challenge Aspen continues to work closely with Aspen Skiing Company, and also with local outfitters, to offer a variety of daily activities such as

For community settings such as Challenge Aspen an inclusive approach involves actively promoting general programs to people with and without disabilities, and planning ahead for their integrated participation.

skiing, whitewater rafting, horseback riding, and fishing. We also host a number of camps throughout the year, including a mono-ski camp and a rock climbing camp for paraplegics and amputees, a ski festival for persons with visual impairments, and children's art and music camps. Based in Snowmass Village with access to the area's four ski mountains, Challenge Aspen currently serves approximately 400 participants each year, with over 2100 participant days (one person participating one day equals one participant day). With a full-time staff of eight, a volunteer force of more than 100 and a volunteer board of

directors, Challenge Aspen is the only organization in the Aspen area that offers such a broad spectrum of recreation opportunities to people with disabilities.

At Challenge Aspen we believe that all people have the same essential needs and that realizing one's ability leads to fulfillment of needs. The result of participating in our program is often an improved self-image and greater self-confidence. The Challenge Aspen experience often gives participants the courage to achieve personal goals in all areas of their lives. Knowing that we can make a difference in the life of an adult, child, or family is the reason that Challenge Aspen pursues its mission of "possibilities for people with disabilities."

At Challenge Aspen we believe in the philosophy of social inclusion. Social inclusion refers to people with and without disabilities working together to reach a common goal. The philosophy of social inclusion goes well beyond non-discrimination and takes a proactive approach to encompass people of all abilities. For community settings such as Challenge Aspen an inclusive approach involves actively promoting general programs to people with and without disabilities, and planning ahead for their integrated participation. In addition to the benefits to those with disabilities, inclusive programs help everyone to become more sensitive to individual differences. This awareness of and sensitivity to individual differences will lead to attitudes of acceptance, which will carry over to all areas of life.

An example of our most successful camp with regards to the philosophy of social inclusion is a program called The Magic of Music and Dance. Camp registration is exclusive to kids with disabilities, although a large pool of volunteers, with and without disabilities, become excellent peers to the camp participants with disabilities and an integral part of

the camp as a whole. Friendships are made each year among the group. The social inclusion philosophy becomes evident as these friendships are formed. Appropriate social skills, aspirations for higher levels of physical fitness, and overall increased self-esteem are benefits that have been demonstrated from this interaction. Volunteers may participate one-on-one as a buddy to one of the participants with a disability, help out with set designs and costumes, and assist with food and beverage preparation. The disabilities of volunteers have included Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy, stroke, and minor brain injuries. Depending on the level of disability, a staff member or another volunteer may supervise them while performing their responsibilities, or they may handle their responsibilities on their own. Because the environment is supportive and supervised by staff members, the social inclusion concept is very successful.

During the winter, Challenge Aspen acts as the adaptive ski school for the Aspen Skiing Company. Due to the various levels of disabilities in our program, Challenge Aspen offers a variety of services. One of the programs that Challenge Aspen offers that demonstrates social inclusion is our group ski lessons that bring together children with mild to moderate disabilities and non-disabled children. In order to help facilitate this integration process, Challenge Aspen provides a qualified volunteer to support each child with a disability who needs additional assistance in the group setting. This volunteer helps to ensure a safe and supportive environment while the child learns social interaction and skiing skills. In addition to the benefits to the child with a disability, the others benefit through increased disability awareness.

In 1999, Challenge Aspen implemented a program that combines dis-

ability awareness and volunteer service. A six-week curriculum was designed and implemented into the 7th grade classrooms within the Roaring Fork Valley. This program was created with the goal in mind of not only teaching disability awareness to the students, but also of encouraging the students to volunteer their time working with people with disabilities in recreation settings. This program has proven to be very successful in that it has increased the volume of students who are now committed volunteers to our program. Because of the success of this mentorship program, Challenge Aspen has branched out to high school students and offered a shorter and more specific mentorship experience. The Colorado Rocky Mountain School (CRMS, a local private high school) and Challenge Aspen have collaborated to provide a unique experiential learning process. Challenge Aspen

provides intensive training to the 10 CRMS students for four days on how to be skiing guides for persons with vision loss. The CRMS students are then joined by 10 students with vision loss, allowing them to put their newly acquired skills into practice. One CRMS student and one blind student are paired up to work together on the ski hill. The three days are spent learning new skiing skills, exploring new terrain, and developing relationships. The social inclusion process occurs as students acquire these skills.

Challenge Aspen embraces social inclusion in many ways. While Challenge Aspen was initially created as a physical activity program for individuals with disabilities, we have found that the peer interaction between persons with and without disabilities has proven to strengthen our program as a whole. Challenge Aspen has the philosophy that the social inclusion process can be

very successful, even though it is not the primary focus of our programs. We implement this process in a discreet manner, to ensure Challenge Aspen follows the mission of making possibilities for persons with disabilities. Not only has Challenge Aspen benefited from the social inclusion process, but the various families from around the United States that visit our program have also benefited.

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From Participant to Intern: Katie's Story

When I was two years old I suffered a stroke, which in turn left me paralyzed on my entire left side. I now have what is called Dystonia which is classified as a movement disorder. Living with a physical disability is very diffi-

cult and frustrating at times. It can be hard sometimes, especially socially. I have experienced social exclusion all my life. Whether it is involved with making friends, participating in sports, or something as simple as going shopping. However, this is where Challenge Aspen has changed my life. My first encounter with Challenge Aspen was about six years ago when I was a participant at one of their many summer camps. It was simply incredible. I made friends with other campers, volunteers, and staff immediately. It was a special bond because all the campers are different from the rest of the world, but at this camp only for people with disabilities we are for once the majority! This camp has given me so much. The people with Challenge Aspen have taught me that just because I'm different does not mean that I should be excluded in any way. Because of the way Challenge Aspen has designed their programs, many people with disabilities including myself have learned how to snow ski,

whitewater raft, and even perform on stage. I never feel left out or that I cannot do these activities anymore. There are so many things that people never thought I could do and I'm doing them! Now that I am nineteen, I will be an intern for Challenge Aspen for one month this summer. I will learn the business side of the organization and receive training to understand the professional and community aspects of Challenge Aspen. In this way, I will understand all areas of this business and the fun stuff in which I have been experiencing for the last six years. I can't wait to learn more about how they run this beautiful organization.

Contributed by Katie Andreis, McKinny, Texas

One District's Success with Inclusion and Recreation: "Yes I Can" in Santa Clarita

by Emily Iland

One of the most devastating consequences of having an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the social isolation that can often result. Witnessing this first hand with my teenage son with Asperger Syndrome, I felt I had to do something to help. I helped bring the Yes I Can Social and Recreation Inclusion Program to our school district, and continue to support and expand it.

Autism is a developmental disorder that affects 1 in 250 people. The term Autism Spectrum Disorder is used to suggest the individuality and variation among people with ASD. Yet, in all

forms, the same core features are present: significant impairments in communication and socialization, and restrictive or repetitive interests.

Some people with ASD may appear to understand more than they do. Yet there can be a significant gap in both language comprehension and social understanding. Many people with ASD do not "see" the social and emotional meaning behind facial expressions and body language. They may not know the meanings of many common words, and as a result can miss out on important information. People with ASD also may not "see" the unwritten social rules that the rest of us live by.

The "restrictive and repetitive interests" of this disorder tend to isolate people with ASD and impair socializa-

tion. A person with ASD may become an expert in a particular subject or activity, spending a lot of time learning about a favorite topic or doing particular things over and over. In contrast, most people know a little bit about a lot of different things, and have a fairly wide range of interests and activities to share with others. Unless the person with ASD can find a person who also likes their special interest or activity, they may find they do not have much in common with their peers. This limited range of interests and activities has an impact on conversation and interaction with others. As a result, persons with ASD may easily be left out of most social interactions.

As each year passes, people with ASD often find themselves having less in common with their classmates, and less conversation and interaction with them. Consequently, persons with ASD may not acquire the skills to fit into the group, and social marginalization can result. People with ASD who do not have friends with whom to have fun are often painfully aware of this fact.

In the case of my son Tom, I was very aware that he was feeling isolated. He had learned social and communication skills, but a social gap still existed. I realized that Tom's success would be closely linked to the attitudes of his high school peer group. This inspired me to search for a program that would help the peers get to know, understand, accept and befriend Tom, and other kids like him. Tom needed same-age peers to help him learn "how to fit in" and belong, an important quality-of-life issue.

Through my research, I found the Yes I Can Social and Recreation Inclusion Program, developed at the University of Minnesota's Institute on Community Integration. It helps junior high and high school students with disabilities and non-disabled peers get to know one another, develop friendships, and enjoy

common interests. The program can be offered as an elective class for credit, integrated into an existing class, or run as a campus or community club. Through the program's 20 classroom lessons, students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers learn about relationship skills and a variety of disabilities and related issues. In addition, students with and without disabilities who are socially adept are trained to serve as "bridge-builders," working with their classmates who may be socially isolated to remove barriers to social inclusion. Friendship and social skills are developed in an age-appropriate way, and "homework" outside of class includes pairs or small groups of students engaging in recreation activities in broader school and community settings, identifying and working to remove specific barriers to social inclusion.

I was convinced that Yes I Can would be an excellent program for my son and for our local schools. To get started, I contacted administrators and teachers in the William S. Hart Union High School District who understood the need for the Yes I Can program. The Hart District includes all the junior high and high schools in the Santa Clarita Valley of California, a community of 150,000 people northwest of Los Angeles. Leaders included Marty Lieberman, the Director of Special Education, and Leslie Crunelle, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services, who felt that this program would benefit "all the kids." We contacted the Institute on Community Integration and made a commitment to start the program. After training, Yes I Can began as a pilot program for academic credit at two schools. It has now expanded to several other school sites in a variety of formats. The district was awarded a Community Service Grant for \$10,000 from the City of Santa Clarita to support the program,

funding social and recreation activities to promote inclusion.

Happily, many of the anticipated benefits of Yes I Can are now being realized. All of the participating students have learned about disability issues and about themselves. They have formed friendships that last today, and that include time together outside the classroom. The program is now integrated into two classrooms of students with ASD that meet once a week for a full class period combined with the lunch period. Yes I Can is considered an essential element of the social progress of these students. One class is run by a psychologist with two counseling interns from California State University, Northridge. The second class is run by a special educator, and an educational assistant who changed school districts so that she could be part of the program at La Mesa Junior High School.

There are inspiring success stories from the program:

- One withdrawn student with ASD met a wonderful friend through the Yes I Can program. Everyone who knows him can clearly see the dramatic improvement in his communication, behavior, and learning, and his positive attitude, thanks to the friendship he formed with a bridgebuilder student.
- Prior to the program many of the students with ASD had little experience navigating the campus social scene. As they participated in Yes I Can, they were delighted to have their bridgebuilders include them in the “eighth grade only” lunch area, and to see familiar friends in their elective classes.
- One young man who was serving as a bridgebuilder learned about ADA issues in the Yes I Can class. He was astonished to find out that his friend from the program who used a wheelchair had to go to the nurse’s office to get a drink of water. Thanks to this young man’s efforts, the entire Yes I Can class proudly attended the ribbon cutting ceremony when two

accessible water fountains were installed on the school campus.

- My son, Tom, has also developed a lasting friendship with a young man he met through Yes I Can, and they continue to get together for movies and other activities a year after completing the class.

One challenge in getting the program going in our district was finding a way to “make it work” on different campuses. The Yes I Can model is flexible and can be an elective on its own or integrated into other electives. The class at Saugus High is taught five days a week for a full year by a resource specialist, and supported by a speech and language pathologist who offers instruction in social communication that benefits all the students. At Canyon High School, Yes I Can is part of the Peer Counseling Class. It is run by an English teacher and the school psychologist. After meeting five days a week for an entire academic year, the students have formed strong friendships. They recently relied upon each other for support during the tragic loss of a classmate. There is a waiting list to be part of this group that has learned so much and mean so much to one another. At Rio Norte, a new junior high opening this fall, team leaders are exploring integrating Yes I Can into the Yearbook or Student Government electives. This would enable students with disabilities to provide community service and participate in some high-profile, fun activities on campus, while their non-disabled peers would learn about disability issues and inclusion.

One of the most pressing needs for the students in Yes I Can is to have a way to have fun and expand their social lives outside of school. One solution we came up with is enrolling Yes I Can program participants together in the city’s Parks and Recreation activities. Students paired up or went in groups to classes of mutual interest such as neon bowling, ceramics, extreme sports training, and ice skating. The City along with the Women’s Council of Realtors provided funds so that Yes I Can participants

could attend the classes at no charge. The Parks and Recreation enhancement to Yes I Can is a highlight for the students because they have a specific social activity to look forward to every week. They enjoy having a friendly face to help them to feel comfortable. The City staff and the class instructors have been positive, welcoming, and accommodating to all the students.

Another community recreation activity in which Yes I Can participants have taken part was a special one-time event for students in the Saugus High School program – a trip to Universal Studios Hollywood. It was the first time that several of the students had ever gone to an amusement park, and the first time that many had gone with their peers instead of their parents. It was an exciting and memorable day for everyone.

In only two years, Yes I Can has achieved many positive outcomes in Santa Clarita. Students with disabilities have had more opportunities for socialization and community recreation because their bridgebuilder partners have helped to facilitate their inclusion. Bridgebuilders have had fun while helping other teenage community members learn to include and befriend persons with disabilities. The teachers are proud of the progress that has been made, and parents are pleased to see the students enjoy their friendships and have fun together. Supporters of the program are happy to see the positive impact the Yes I Can program has in our community, and we anticipate more growth and success in the coming year.

Photo: Tom Iland (left) and another Yes I Can participant on a school trip to Universal Studios Hollywood.

Emily Iland of Santa Clarita is the California State Representative of the Yes I Can Program. She can be reached at 661/297-4033 or by email at emilyiland@social.rr.com. Emily is co-author of the book, ASD From A to Z: Autism Spectrum Disorders, What to Know, What to Do. For more information on the Yes I Can program, contact its developer Brian Abery, at the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 612/625-5592.

Building Recreation Skills to Support Inclusion: Camp Abilities

By Lauren J. Lieberman and Janet MacVicar

Children who are blind, deaf-blind and have multiple physical impairments have great difficulty in being physically active due to a lack of programs in their communities. Children with visual impairments often face isolation and lack socialization opportunities compared to their sighted peers (Robinson, 2002; Kalloniatis & Johnston, 1994). In addition, though children with sensory impairments are increasingly included in physical education classes with their sighted peers, they are often unable to

The focus of camp is to provide participants with exposure to, and experience in, sport and recreational activities that they can readily access successfully in their schools, communities, and neighborhoods.

participate because their teachers have not been trained to work with youth with sensory impairments (Lieberman, Houston-Wilson, & Kozub, 2002). In response to the need for improvement in the recreation experiences of these young people, Camp Abilities was established in 1996.

Camp Abilities, a developmental sports camp for youth who are blind and visually impaired, is offered for one week each summer at the State University of New York College at Brockport (approximately 15 miles west of Rochester, New York). Among the goals of Camp Abilities are to increase the self-confidence and skills in physical activities of youth with sensory impairments.

The activities offered at Camp Abilities are all completely accessible to youth who are visually impaired, blind, and deaf-blind. The camp provides exposure to and experience in sport and recreational activities that they can readily access successfully in their schools, communities, and neighborhoods.

The activities offered are specific to an individual's experience in public school and for the future after graduation. Those offered daily – swimming, tandem biking, and track and field – are activities that can be accessed in their schools on sport teams, intramural sports, or on community teams. These are also popular sports offered by the United States Association for Blind Athletes (USABA). The more they know about their ability in these sports the more likely they would be to participate on an after-school team. The activities offered every other day are judo, goal ball, beep baseball, and gymnastics. They experience these activities three times during the week, which allows them to learn the sport, see improvement, and know how to play successfully. These are activities offered by the USABA, and will be options for recreation or competition in their future. Without this experience, competing in the USABA would not be an option.

Each night we offer different recreational activities in order to expose the participants to a variety of things their same-age peers are doing. These activities are horseback riding, canoeing, archery, kayaking, rollerblading, rock climbing, and basketball. The participants have an opportunity to experience these activities at least once, and then can make informed choices about participating when the opportunity arises or when they are looking for recreational activities in their future. Through these experiences they can then be more likely to become self-determined adults.

In addition to the goal of improving the self-confidence and recreation skills of youth with sensory impairments, the camp seeks to educate undergraduate and graduate students working as counselors in the camp about the skills and abilities of children with visual impairments. They learn unique teaching and feedback strategies to instill success in children with visual impairments. We annually have 80-100 volunteer counselors with a least a 1:1 match of campers to volunteers. Those campers who are deaf-blind and/or have multiple disabilities require two or three counselors a day. The majority of our counselors are undergraduate and graduate students from adapted physical education, teachers of the visually impaired, or special education programs across the country who gain first-hand experience in working with youth with visual impairments while at the camp. This knowledge will assist them in being better teachers and recreation leaders upon graduation.

The following are some activities offered at camp and how they are made accessible for children with visual impairments:

- **Swimming:** Prior to camp each parent fills out a swim skills checklist so each camper is placed in the appropriate grouping. Because we offer a 1:1 ratio between campers and staff, each participant is taught skills to their specific level of ability. The camper's checklist is used to assess their improvements and show progress throughout the week. Swimming is also assessed in number of laps swum each day. The specialist for the pool gives the participants 15 minutes at the beginning of each pool session to swim as many laps as possible. These laps are added up and put on a poster to show off the number of laps each participant swam during the week. Orientation

and mobility skills are practiced throughout the swim program through daily living skill activities such as locating their locker, changing, showering, and walking out to the pool deck.

- **Tandem bicycling:** Tandem bicycling is also on the camper's assessment checklist and is assessed both by the ability to get on the bike and by the number of laps the camper can ride around the track. Very little needs to be adapted for participants to tandem bike because the sport was created so the participant with a visual impairment can ride independently on the back with a sighted guide in front. Verbal cues are used to signal starting, stopping, turning and number of laps accomplished. The specialists running the activity give verbal encouragement (cheering, clapping, and whistling) for each lap so the participant also knows when they have accomplished each lap. Participants keep track of the number of laps they ride throughout the week and add them up at the end. Many campers ride their bikes miles and miles during the week!
- **Track and field:** Track and field can be broken up into two components: the track component and the field component. Track consists of distance running and sprints. Each participant is shown six different ways to be guided by a guide runner if they need one. These guide-running techniques include use of a tether, guide wire, sighted guide, caller or circular running. Research has shown that participants may choose different guide running techniques for different distances, genders and surfaces (Lieberman, Butcher, & Moak, 2001). By teaching the participants about the different ways to use guide runners and guiding techniques we are empowering them to make choices and be independent. Instructional techniques used which have shown to improve a camper's self-efficacy in a skill (O'Connell, 2000) are descrip-

tion, modeling, tactile modeling, and physical guidance. By using these techniques the participant improves their technique and distance in each skill.

The previous descriptions are only some of the sports offered at Camp Abilities that increase opportunities for social inclusion following camp. The sports, modifications, and assessments are a few of the techniques that make this camp experience so successful. Evaluations completed by the campers and their parents over the past eight years have overwhelmingly indicated that the participating youth leave the camp with increased confidence, self-esteem, independence, and social skills, better preparing them to participate in recreation with peers in their home communities and schools.

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Feeling Good and Having Fun: Ben's Story

My name is Ben McClure. I've been to Camp Abilities twice before. I've had a fun time with the sports activities there. I've had the chance to do things there that I usually don't get to do. Things like gymnastics, tandem biking, judo, swimming without a float, goal ball, and beep baseball. When I'm at Camp Abilities I feel good about what I am doing. The coaches and counselors are nice and encourage me to try new things and do my best. They are also fun to hang out with and play with.

Some of the things I've learned from Camp Abilities I can use at gym class now. Before I went to Camp Abilities, I didn't go to gym. But Dr. Lieberman encouraged my mom to talk with my school so that I would participate in gym. She wrote a book about including kids with disabilities in all kinds of recreation. She even put me on the cover. My mom showed it to all my teachers and the adaptive PE teachers. Now, I'm enjoying all kinds of sports like lacrosse, basketball, flag football, and square dancing. In my last gym class, I learned all about how to check in lacrosse. After seeing how wildly I swing the lacrosse stick though, my lacrosse coach wasn't sure I should check. I almost took his nose off!

I'm looking forward to Camp Abilities this year because it is an important influence for me and lots of other kids.

Contributed by Benjamin D. McClure, Penfield, New York

Supporting Inclusion in Community Recreation: Perkins School for the Blind

by Mike Pecorella

Individuals who are deafblind are often not included in recreational activities. The Perkins School for the Blind's Deafblind Program gives deafblind students the knowledge and skills to be included into community recreation programs and be able to participate in activities with their same-age peers. Benefits of this participation include social experiences in the community, an increase in awareness of recreational opportunities within the community, a feeling of community involvement, and an increase in the level of perceived self-confidence and self-worth. When individuals with disabilities participate in the same activities and routines as their age peers, they gain a sense of normalization. And every time a student with a disability walks or rolls into a community center and independently uses the facility just like everyone else, it breaks down some barriers about what people with disabilities can do. These are just some of the goals the founding parents of Perkins envisioned for program participants when the Deafblind Program was founded in the 1880s.

Setting Up the Community Recreation Program

Though the roots of the deafblind program go back many years, the modern program works with individuals with varying degrees of vision and/or hearing loss. The program's mission is to help our students reach their greatest potential using their existing vision or hearing. To fulfill this mission, Perkins employs the services of a very diverse and dedicated group of professionals. This interdisciplinary team includes classroom teachers; houseparents; program aids; vocational and independent living specialists; computer, low vision and mobility teachers; health services

staff; psychologists; social workers; behavioral and educational specialists; speech, physical and occupational therapists; audiologists; adapted physical education teachers; and parents. It was the hope of program designers that the students would learn and benefit from the experience and continue using what they learned in the program after they graduated from Perkins. We wanted to teach our students in the community recreation program all the necessary skills, confidence, and self-esteem to successfully participate for a lifetime.

One of the first steps to setting up the program was to set up a meeting with all relevant parties. The meeting involved the community recreation facility director, fitness director, aquatics director, and sports and recreation director, as well our adapted physical education staff. With many topics on the agenda, communication was imperative so that the desired outcomes were easily attainable. We discussed the need for inservice training for community facility staff. A large majority of their staff had never seen or worked with the unique population that would be coming to their facility. Elements of the inservice included discussions on behavioral issues, modification of activities, communication strategies, disability awareness, and disability sensitivity training.

When talking to community recreation facility staff about our students it was necessary to protect student confidentiality. Anyone interested in starting a program of this nature must contact students' legal guardians prior to disclosing names, identifying features, and any medical, behavioral or emotional problems of particular students. We found it necessary to talk about some of the unique characteristics that recreation staff would see. The rationale for this was to insure the safety of our stu-

dents and recreation facility staff, as well any other community members that might be in contact with students.

Medical Considerations

There were many medical considerations that needed to be discussed and planned for prior to implementation of the deafblind community recreation program. They included the following medical considerations, which can sometimes be overwhelming for community recreation staff if not explained appropriately:

- Shunts
- Joint instability
- Axio Atlantal instability (very common in students with Down syndrome)
- Muscular conditions
- Eye conditions
- Orthopedic impairments
- Heart/lung abnormalities
- Self-injurious behaviors

Because of their seriousness and potential for injury it was necessary to discuss self-injurious behaviors in detail. Self-injurious behaviors can be very difficult for staff to understand, especially if the student has limited cognitive or communication skills. The onset can be from any number of reasons, including fear of a new environment; lack of ability to express discomfort, likes, or dislikes; or for no apparent reason. Self-injurious behaviors can range from pinching or slapping themselves to hitting their heads on objects. It was imperative that the safety of the student be a priority, so action plans were put in place on how to handle any situation that might arise. We recommended that any individual working with a student that exhibits these types of behaviors

take a certified CPPI (crisis prevention and physical intervention) program.

Strategies Used

One of the best strategies for supporting successful recreation participation is knowledge. We have found that knowing students' unique needs is imperative. By understanding student needs, as well as likes and dislikes, the environment can be shaped to help facilitate a positive experience. A few examples are:

- Knowing what type of environmental factors will result in a negative experience for a student, and minimizing exposure to them. For instance, knowing that bright lights may cause discomfort for a student who is sensitive to sunlight, or that too many people around a child who is easily over-stimulated can trigger undesirable behaviors, is useful in selecting workout areas.
- Using familiar staff during transition from one activity to another.
- Having a "relax" area for de-escalation of undesirable behaviors.

We have also found that the modification of activities is very useful in successfully including our students into a community recreational setting. Modifications include:

- Increasing or decreasing the time for a given activity.
- Changing the rules to make them easier to follow or more developmentally appropriate.
- Modifying the space needed to participate in different activities.
- Including different textured, colored, or sized equipment.
- Changing the location of the activity to limit external distractions.

The use of a total communication system within the program has also been very beneficial to the students. A total communication system can include the use of gestures, sign language, tactile sign language, Mayor Johnson pictures, symbols, verbal communication as well

as expressive communication. Any of the above mentioned communication methods can be used independently or combined as long as the student gains an understanding for what's expected.

The use of peer tutoring within the inclusive environment has also been a very valuable tool for successful inclusion. Training peers in the community to work with our students helps both the student and peer in increasing skill, and increases acceptance and inclusion.

Facilitating Transitions Between Settings

It is important to do everything possible to help increase students' positive feelings about activities in new environments. There are many different strategies that we use to help facilitate successful transition between settings. This transition process starts in our own facility where we try to simulate the new environment in a setting that fosters success and helps ease the anxiety of students. We start by making the routines as similar as possible to the recreation environment prior to participation in the new environment. For example, we have students change clothes in a different but controlled environment, or have them use the same equipment that they will be using in the new facility. We may also use the same order of activities as they'll experience in the recreation facility, such as walking, then a sitting water break, then to the next activity.

We have found it very helpful to our students as well as recreation staff to have a few "dry runs." Our students get ready to go to the recreation facility, then go through all the routines that they would normally do in the community facility. We walk through the facility showing them where everything is, have them meet the facility staff, walk them into where they will change, show them the pool, bathroom, climbing wall, etc. They really benefit from walking through and tactually touching and exploring each piece of new equipment that they will be using. Making tactile maps also helps facilitate independence within the new

environment. These tactile maps can be simple with glued yarn on the back of cardboard, or very elaborate with braille, pictures, and symbols. The more comfortable the student is in the new environment, the better the chances of success.

Program Activities

The majority of students in the recreation program are transition age and soon will be leaving Perkins, so we teach them the skills to participate in recreation activities in their adult lives in a variety of settings. We start our students in activities matched to their present level of fitness and recreation experience, and gradually increase the level of difficulty. For many, this means beginning with a flexibility program, then moving on to using the treadmills, stairmasters, and recumbent bikes. After the students feel comfortable using some of the fitness equipment, we move on to using resistance equipment. We start using one or two machines that we know our students understand how to use. After they gain a mastery over the machines, we make sure that each subsequent piece used is a little bit more challenging, but never to a point that they feel discouraged or frustrated. We also expose students to the aquatics center and the indoor rock-climbing wall.

Conclusion

Through the Perkins Deafblind Program, we have found that everyone benefits when individuals with disabilities are included into community recreation programs. With positive energy and persistence, all students with disabilities can and will reap the benefits from recreation participation.

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Resources for Further Information

- **The Inclusion Notebook: Recreational Opportunities Issue** (Winter 2003). A 12-page newsletter issue focusing on involving children with disabilities in recreational activities. Includes pull-out page on how to make accommodations for children with disabilities in recreational activities. Available from the A.J. Pappanikou Center for Developmental Disabilities, University of Connecticut, www.uconned.org or 860/679-1500.
- **National Center on Accessibility (www.indiana.edu/~nca)**. A collaborative program of Indiana University and the National Park Service, the center promotes access for people with disabilities to recreation through offering technical assistance, resources, and training. Online resources include full-text monographs on topics such as activity adaptation, and making trails and campgrounds accessible.
- **Institute Brief: Recreation in the Community** (vol 1, no. 1, 1999). A publication in the Institute Brief series from the Institute for Community Inclusion (UCEDD), Boston. This brief shares successful strategies used by community recreation providers to increase inclusive recreation opportunities for all. It includes checklists on outreach and advertising, activity modification, staff training, challenging behaviors, and encouraging friendships, among other topics. Available online at www.communityinclusion.org/publications/text/ib12text.html.
- **North Carolina Office on Disability and Health Web Site (www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh)**. The site promotes the health and wellness of people with disabilities, and offers a range of publications on topics including strategies to make health clubs and fitness facilities more accessible, and a step-by-step guide for individuals with disabilities to use in making personal recreation plans.
- **National Center on Physical Activity and Disability Web Site (www.ncpad.org)**. The center, a collaborative effort of the University of Illinois at Chicago, the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, and the Indiana University National Center on Accessibility, believes “exercise is for EVERY body.” The Web site provides resources that support people with disabilities becoming as physically active as they wish. It includes stories, articles, resources, monographs, and a monthly e-mail newsletter.
- **Yes I Can Social Inclusion Program** (1997). By B. Abery et al. A 20-module curriculum fostering the social inclusion of junior and senior high school students with disabilities through shared classroom and recreation activities with peers. Available from the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota, 612/624-4512, <http://ici.umn.edu>.
- **Barriers to Inclusion of Volunteers with Developmental Disabilities** (2003). By K. D. Miller, S.J. Schleien, and L.A. Bedini. *Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 21(1), 25-30. An article presenting results of a national study exploring the prevalence of volunteers with developmental disabilities in nonprofit agencies, and the perceived barriers to and benefits of their inclusion from the perspective of volunteer coordinators. Proactive strategies are proposed for improving the inclusion of volunteers with disabilities.
- **A Community for ALL Children: A Guide to Inclusion for Out-of-School Time** (2000). By K.D. Miller and S. J. Schleien. A guide providing an overview of inclusion and practical strategies for including children with disabilities in out-of-school time activities. It is useful for family members, teachers, recreation professionals, and community agencies. Published by the North Carolina Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities Section and North Carolina Division of Child Development. Available online at <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fourh/sacc/communityforall1.pdf>
- **Camp Abilities Web Site (campabilities.org)**. The Web site of Camp Abilities, a developmental sports camp for children who are blind, deaf-blind or multi-handicapped, includes extensive information on how to teach children with visual impairments in physical education settings.
- **Project INSPIRE Web Site (www.twu.edu/INSPIRE)**. The Web site of this project at Texas Women’s University includes teacher-to-teacher suggestions for teaching physical activities such as volleyball, gymnastics, soccer, basketball, dance, and weight training to K-12 students with disabilities, along with extensive disability-specific descriptions of aquatic activities .
- **Strategies for Inclusion** (2002). By L. Lieberman and C. Houston-Wilson. A book describing how to include children with disabilities in inclusive physical education classes. It includes modifications and assessments for 38 units of instruction in the inclusive environment. Available from Human Kinetics, 800/747-4457, www.humankinetics.com.
- **How to Select an Age-Friendly Fitness Facility (www.icaa.cc/checklist.htm)**. The International Council on Active Aging has created a comprehensive checklist to help seniors compare and rate fitness facilities and choose ones that meet their needs.
- **American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance Web Site (www.aahperd.org)**. The site includes wide-ranging resources related to recreation for persons with and without disabilities.

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programs, and the Stoke Mandeville Games in Great Britain drew international attention to wheelchair athletics. Wheelchair athletics opened opportunities for recreation and social connection for me before I needed to use the wheelchair for everyday mobility. Drawing on my professional experience as a rehabilitation medicine physician, starting in 1970 I served as an examiner and classifier of wheelchair athletes who were competing. Then in 1972 I became a competitor as well as classifier. I learned a valuable lesson in my first wheelchair track competition in 1974 at The Quad City Games in Iowa. In the 100-yard dash, I was in third place approaching the finish line. I raised my arms as a victory sign. As I did so, two racers passed me. I finished fifth. One of my teammates on the Rolling Gophers shouted, "Hey Doc, don't celebrate until you cross the finish line." I have not made that mistake again. I went on to compete in wheelchair basketball and wheelchair softball.

Wheelchair athletics teaches balance, coordination, strength training, and teamwork. There are a number of entry levels. For instance, in wheelchair basketball, there is recreational basketball as well as nationally competitive teams, and a number of universities have wheelchair basketball programs that encourage young athletes. Wheelchair games facilitate social integration at all levels of disability. The community recreational wheelchair sports program can be made available to people with a wider variety of abilities and disabilities than formally sponsored organized teams. In Eden Prairie, Minnesota, we started a wheelchair basketball program in the Parks and Recreation Department managed by the Adaptive Recreation Specialists. The direct supervisor is a high school student with an interest in adaptive recreation. The exercise is excellent. It is fun to have a workout that includes maintaining skills. I would like to have more sports chairs available for able-bodied individuals to further expand the circle of inclusiveness.

In 1990, I was invited to join the

board of directors of Wilderness Inquiry. This organization had been created 12 years earlier with the idea that people of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of ability – including people with disabilities and chronic illness – could experience outdoor activities in wilderness areas with proper planning and staffing. The group experience in a wilderness setting was designed to achieve a special feeling of camaraderie for the participants, who were integrated groups of persons with and without disabilities. Wilderness Inquiry had staff training that was as wide ranging in its content as the participants were diverse in their ages, skills, and levels of ability. The mission statement sounded worthy. My professional involvement in rehabilitation medicine, my physical disability, and our family's love of nature and camping seemed a good fit with this organization, so I joined the board.

My disability by then was becoming more of a handicap and I was using my wheelchair more for travel as well as recreation. The first Wilderness Inquiry trip that I took, in which my wife also participated, was to Lake Yellowstone in 1993. The trip leaders were two young people trained by Wilderness Inquiry. The 11 participants ranged in age from 10 to 68 years of age and came from New York, New Jersey, Ontario, Wyoming, and Minnesota. We gathered around a campfire at Grant Village on the first night in Yellowstone National Park. We were asked to introduce ourselves and give one or more expectations we might have for the eventual outcomes of the trip into the Yellowstone back country. Our focuses for outcomes were mainly in the areas of safety, fun, nature, and traveling in this magnificent park. As we paddled out into Lake Yellowstone in the voyager canoes the next day, we quickly learned of the cooperative effort involved, the pleasure in getting to know people, and the great skill of our Wilderness Inquiry trip leaders. Our first wilderness campsite was in a lovely setting in a burned out area with wildflowers, lush vegetation and fallen trees. It was delightful as a shared experience

to wake up the next morning, on July 21, 1993, to frozen water in the water jugs and a reluctant camp stove. The weather, the area, and nature's varied wonders were awe-inspiring. Underlying all of the fun, excitement, and challenge was the growing sense of community within our group. Shared concern for one another in the daily activities of setting up camp, preparing meals, cleaning up, loading and launching canoes, and talking around the campfire fostered strong social connections with our new friends. One exciting evening after dinner, we watched some of our group members fish for cutthroat trout. Hummingbirds visited the camp. Two otters



swam by slowly with their heads and shoulders out of the water looking amused. Two mule deer walked into the campsite. A 10-year-old boy from Brooklyn said, "This is too much. I don't know where to look first." We shared his thrill. At our final meal together, we talked once more about what our expectations had been. We had canoed together for seven days. We had seen everything we had hoped for and more. Beyond our expectations, we shared the magical sense of achieving affection for one another. The Wilderness Inquiry mission was fulfilled. That success has been repeated on numerous occasions since then for us.

Social inclusion through recreation has for me been interesting and rewarding. Exercise incidental to recreational activity builds muscles, increases balance and skills, and burns calories. It provides the pleasure of meeting a variety of people from all backgrounds yet with shared values and interests. My family's ability to reach wilderness areas

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and share the beauty and the adventure wilderness offers has provided us with the opportunity to continue our lifetime love of nature, camping, and canoeing. Sharing campsites, camp meals, and campfires with a diverse group of individuals is an extraordinary way to achieve social integration. This is enhanced by a staff trained in group dynamics, teamwork, assistive devices, negotiated assistance when necessary, and wilderness lore and responsibility. Today, our Wilderness Inquiry adventures continue to enrich the lives of myself and my wife with friendships, memories, pictures, and anticipation of future wilderness experiences.

Photo: Richard Owen (front right) on a recent kayaking trip.

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opportunity to socially interact with their peers. What settings are available to effectively support the social inclusion of persons with disabilities? One group of settings that have only recently been tapped for enhancing social inclusion are recreation programs.

Finding Inclusion in Recreation

Recreation and leisure programs possess a number of characteristics that make them good places to start facilitating the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. Some of the characteristics of these settings encourage the development of skills and attitudes/beliefs on the part of persons with and without disabilities that promote the development of social relationships. Others provide opportunities for the development of relationships, opportunities that may be missing or severely limited in other aspects of the lives of persons with disabilities.

First and foremost, recreation and leisure programs bring together children or adults who have similar interests or preferences, one of the main factors in

the selection of friends. One takes part in a canoeing and kayaking program because one likes canoeing and kayaking or participates in a soccer league because soccer holds special interest. Think about your own social circle and what brought you and your friends together. If you are like most people, you have common interests and in many cases these have more to do with recreation and leisure preferences than political or religious beliefs, socioeconomic status, work roles, or any other set of factors. In addition, recreational programs are contexts into which most people voluntarily enter for fun and enjoyment as opposed to fulfilling obligations (e.g., financial). This creates a mind-set that is much more conducive to the establishment of a wide variety of social relationships than school or employment situations. Recreational participation also allows for the development of interests that may not have previously existed. If one hasn't had the opportunity to experience rock climbing, horseback riding or kayaking, then it is difficult to determine whether these activities are preferred by the individual. Taking part in a variety of recreation and leisure endeavors allows a person to "experiment" and develop an interest in one or more activities in which they share a passion with others.

A second characteristic of many recreation programs that supports the development of social relationships is that they are ongoing, allowing persons to meet and interact with each other over an extended period of time. One rarely develops social relationships with individuals with whom they interact on only one occasion. But when interactions take place over a prolonged period they provide an opportunity for those involved to discover commonalities and what each can bring to a potential relationship. This is especially important for many persons without disabilities when they interact with persons with disabilities. The lack of knowledge about disabilities characteristic of most members of the general population make it unlikely that they will initiate social in-

teraction when in the presence of persons with disabling conditions. One common misconception about individuals with disabilities regardless of age, for example, is that they do not have similar interests as persons without disabilities. While this couldn't be further from the truth, it nevertheless inhibits individuals from viewing peers with disabilities as potential friends and acquaintances. Ongoing social interaction within the context of recreation programs in which participants both with and without disabilities express high levels of interest does much to dispel this notion.

Participation in recreation and leisure programs also possesses the potential to facilitate participants developing personal capacities, attitudes, and beliefs that support inclusion. The cooperative nature of outdoor recreation programs and the collaboration necessary to play on a successful softball, soccer, or basketball team, for example, assist participants in acquiring and refining skills such as teamwork that support inclusion. Participation in recreation and leisure programs also allows persons to challenge themselves within a relatively safe environment to an extent that they may not have experienced before. Such challenges, which involve taking some risks, support the development of self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the ability to effectively advocate for oneself. All of these outcomes play a potential role in an individual successfully developing and maintaining the type of social circle that engenders feelings of social inclusion.

It is important to note that participants both with and without disabilities in recreation and leisure programs are potentially changed by the experience in ways that support social inclusion. Participants with disabilities have the opportunity develop new capacities and interests and to refine their social skills as they interact with and observe individuals who might typically not play a large part in their lives. Persons without disabilities discover that their peers with disabilities have abilities and gifts; similar interests, goals, and dreams for

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the future; and the capacity to establish and maintain reciprocal relationships. Through participation in inclusive recreation, the opportunity exists for participants to explore and cast aside myths and misconceptions about persons with disabilities and connect with each other as people who happen to be passionate about similar leisure activities.

It should be remembered, however, that while all recreation and leisure programs have the potential to facilitate social inclusion, not all necessarily fulfill this promise. Organizational attitudes and beliefs supportive of inclusion and the right of persons with disabilities to access the same programs as their peers without disabilities are a prerequisite. Direct service staff who have a knowledge of and experience working with persons with disabilities as well as a passion for inclusion are also a necessity. The ability and willingness of staff to make necessary accommodations and adaptations are a direct result of this knowledge, experience, and passion. Parents, families, and guardians also play a role as they must accept the fact that persons with disabilities need to be able to select the specific recreation and leisure activities in which they want to become engaged themselves and that involvement in just about any program carries with it some risk.

While representing only a part of the “inclusion puzzle,” recreational programs carried out by organizations that truly understand what social inclusion entails, provide adequate supports and accommodations, and are staffed by individuals who accept and celebrate diversity in all of its forms provide an opportunity for persons with disabilities to take a step closer to fulfilling their dreams of full inclusion within the communities in which they live.

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basis. It is therefore important to consider how often a program or activity meets before a person decides to join. If a program meets two to three times a week or even once a week over a longer period of time, persons with disabilities will get a chance to know other people and others will get an opportunity to know the individual. This will make it much easier to establish friendships. Activities that take place on a more infrequent basis or are short-term, while valuable from a purely recreational standpoint, are unlikely to lead to an enhanced social inclusion.

Supports and Adaptations

Once one has decided on a recreation program in which to take part, it is important to ensure that program staff know what supports or adaptations, if any, are needed and how the person with a disability prefers them to be provided. This is information that should be provided to recreation staff before starting the program. If one is able to meet prior to beginning a program, it is also a good time to ask what participants need to bring with them and the skills they are expected to have.

Social Interaction

After starting a recreational activity, it is important for persons with disabilities to introduce themselves to others who are taking part. Exchanging information about interests goes a long way in helping to establish relationships. Sometimes, this can be done by the individual with developmental disabilities. In other cases, however, those supporting individuals with disabilities may need to assist them in introducing themselves and exchanging information about areas of interest. Discussions about similar areas of interest can occur while taking part in the program, such as when canoeing with a partner. Some recreational activities, however, don't provide a chance for this activity. In these cases, inviting fellow participants to have a cup of coffee or a pop immediately after the activity

might be necessary in order to get to know them better.

Making New Opportunities

Making the best use of available resources, providing ongoing opportunities for participation, and supporting persons in selecting activities most likely to lead to social relationships all have the potential to enhance inclusion. In some situations, however, it is possible that nothing of interest to the person is available, schedules do not mesh, or other barriers prevent the use of existing resources. Situations such as this, however, are not a reason to give up. In the movie *Field of Dreams*, the main character, upon questioning the feasibility of building a baseball field on his farm, hears the phrase, “If you build it, they will come.” He listens to this message, builds the ballpark and is amazed at how it draws people from all over the country. In a similar manner, if few opportunities exist for recreational inclusion, families and staff need to create them. Scheduling an open-house for a residential program, organizing a block party, or hosting a holiday gathering or Super Bowl party are just a few activities that have the potential to bring persons with and without disabilities together. Although creating opportunities for inclusion where none have existed before is not easy work, in a manner similar to that experienced in the movie, you are almost sure to find that “if you build it they will come.”

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such as hearing aids, braces, or communication devices. Local chapters of advocacy organizations, such as Arc, United Cerebral Palsy, or the Epilepsy Foundation can also be used as resources for information about people with particular disabilities.

- **Tell parents when friendships develop.** Because parents rarely have opportunities to observe their children during the school day, they may have no idea that their children have friends at school. Lack of knowledge about their children's friendships can contribute to parents believing that their children cannot make friends. When teachers inform parents of budding relationships between children with and without disabilities, parents learn that such relationships are possible for their children, and can then take an active role in nurturing them.

What Community Recreation Staff Can Do

Community recreation personnel can create many ideal opportunities for children with and without disabilities to meet, get to know each other, and become friends through participation in a variety of recreation activities. Community recreation agencies, which already include individuals with varying abilities in their regular recreation programming, have offered us the following recommendations for ensuring inclusive recreation that encourages the development of children's relationships:

- **Welcome all children in recreation programs.** Community recreation staff can develop mission statements that explicitly state an agency's intention and ability to serve persons with varying abilities. Brochures and news releases that advertise programs should invite participation by individuals with disabilities, and clearly indicate who to contact if an individual needs accommodations in order to participate in a program. In this way, an agency can make a pub-

lic statement that individuals with disabilities are welcome and will be served inclusively.

- **Ensure architectural accessibility.** Community recreation staff should be certain that their facilities, parking lots, and playgrounds are physically accessible for individuals with disabilities. For example, ramps, elevators, curb cuts, reserved parking spots, and accessible drinking fountains and rest rooms should all be in place and operative to accommodate individuals who need them.
- **Ensure program accessibility.** Participants who register for community recreation programs need assurance that their special needs can be met in those programs. Community recreation agencies need to be prepared to meet individual needs by adapting activities or equipment, providing one-to-one assistance, educating nondisabled participants about disabilities, and managing behaviors.
- **Educate staff to meet individual needs.** If program leaders lack knowledge and experience in working with individuals with disabilities, they may feel reluctant or unqualified to serve them. Agencies should take responsibility to educate their staff in disability issues and up-to-date strategies for including participants with disabilities in recreation programs. Through education and experiences, recreation staff can change their attitudes about inclusion, and gain confidence and expertise in meeting participants' individual needs.
- **Provide cooperative activities that promote positive peer interactions.** Community recreation staff may need to re-evaluate their programs to ensure that inclusive activities can become a reality. They might ask themselves: Can all participants be involved in programs to their full potential? do programs emphasize competition and individual achievement at the expense of cooperation, social interaction, group learning goals, and relationship building and

friendship? Providing opportunities for children to play together in cooperative groups reinforces inclusion, socialization, interdependence, and an awareness and appreciation of others.

- **Coordinate after-school activities and school schedules.** Because of a shortage of school buses or funds to pay drivers, in many communities bus drivers need to stop at more than one school to drive children home. Consequently, school days may end at various times within one community. Because of this situation, community recreation staff should pay close attention to school dismissal times and coordinate schedules for after-school programs so that children with and without disabilities can attend them.

Conclusion

For children with and without disabilities to become friends, they must have opportunities to be together as peers in recreation activities. Parents, school personnel, and community recreation staff all play an essential role in creating and shaping these opportunities.

Adapted and reprinted with permission from "How to Encourage Friendships: Strategies for Use in Home, School and Community", in Heyne, L.A., Schleien, S. J. & McAvoy, L.H. (1996). Making Friends: Using Recreation Activities to Promote Friendship Between Children With and Without Disabilities, published by the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. Linda Heyne is currently Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Therapeutic Recreation and Leisure Studies, Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York. Stuart J. Schleien is Professor and Department Head with the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism, University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Leo McAvoy is Professor and Head with the Division of Recreation and Sport Studies, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

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Indicator 4: Environmental/Logistical Considerations

A well-planned inclusive program is dependent on several factors, including its ability to accommodate a wide range of people and alterations to plans. Quality indicators in this area are:

- Program is physically accessible, affordable, and easily modifiable. The recreation agency has completed a survey that assesses the physical accessibility of its facilities and programs. A written plan is developed to address any accessibility issues noted, and funds are allocated appropriately. Sponsorships or scholarships are available so that individuals on limited incomes, which often include individuals with disabilities, are not excluded.

Through grants, sponsorships, and donations, the NYSD event was implemented at no cost to the participants. In addition, the school system provided student transportation to the event. The modifiability of the program was clearly demonstrated when inclement weather forced the cancellation of outdoor volunteer activities. Since the entire park where the event was held was architecturally accessible, activities were easily moved from an outdoor shelter into an indoor facility.

Indicator 5: Programming Techniques

Programmers must sometimes alter their teaching and facilitation strategies to help participants have successful experiences. Quality indicators include:

- **Ongoing assessments are conducted of participants' recreation needs, preferences, abilities, relationships, and enjoyment levels.** Individual needs, preferences, and abilities change and, therefore, should be continually assessed. Communication and collaboration between administrators, programmers, participants, family members, and care providers is essential to ensure

that necessary adaptations and modifications can be made as needed.

- **Inclusion techniques, such as cooperative learning, task analysis, and companionship training are used regularly.** Cooperatively structured activities – those requiring every member of the group to contribute to the best of their ability toward the desired goal in order for the group to succeed – are emphasized over competitive and solitary ones. Activities that are cooperatively structured are more welcoming to all participants, whether they have a disability or not. Task analysis is used to outline all of the essential skills and steps to successfully participate in an activity. The task analysis is also used to “flag” needed supports for the individual. Companionship training is used to prepare individuals to be accepting of and interact socially with others.
- **Appropriate involvement of unpaid (volunteer) or paid partners is available.** Volunteer partners/trainer advocates are recruited to provide supports so that all individuals are successful in programs. When volunteers cannot be readily recruited, the hiring of paid trainer advocates is an option. However, not all individuals with disabilities will require a peer partner to be successful.

The implementation of the NYSD event required the collaboration of several key players. Program planners teamed with teachers, parents, students, nonprofit organizations, a volunteer center, a parks and recreation department, inclusion facilitators, and disability advocacy groups in order to implement the successful inclusive event. All activities for NYSD were cooperatively structured. Students were placed into small groups to complete assigned tasks. For example, students formed cooperative groups to write letters to American troops in Iraq. The students who did not feel comfortable writing gave ideas to their partners who then completed the letters. An inclusion facilitator

noticed that a student with a visual impairment was in close proximity to a nondisabled student, but was working with her teacher to complete the birdhouse painting task. The facilitator asked both students if they would work together. The students were observed interacting and painting the birdhouses together for the next 30 minutes, as the student with a disability was holding the paintbrush while the other student guided her hand.

Summary

Recreation programs should be assessed using the quality indicators discussed above. It is when all recreation programs, including one-day events such as the National Youth Service Day, are held to these standards that socially inclusive programming will become the norm rather than the exception. The event described in this article was planned with these quality indicators in mind, and staff and participants alike attributed the success of the event to adherence to many of these qualities.

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