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Institute Brief: Recreation in the Community

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Recreation in the Community

by Maria Paiewowsky and Susan Tufts

“When I think of why my daughter should be included in education and recreation activities in our community, many things come to mind. I know that she will have fun and is motivated by learning from other children. I also feel it is important that she develop ‘broad shoulders’ due to the initial reactions to her disability, which is a skill that will benefit her as an adult. Most importantly, through these experiences, my daughter will be making vital connections within the community by meeting the children who may someday be her neighbors, employers or fellow employees. Becoming linked as children will broaden future opportunities for both my daughter and children without disabilities by allowing their tolerance of differences to grow and fear to fade away.”

-Robin Foley

Making it Happen While Keeping it Fun!

In talking about her eleven-year old daughter, Robin Foley speaks for a number of parents of children with disabilities who want their sons and daughters fully included in school and community activities. For parents, the task of finding integrated recreational options is disheartening, especially if their children have been excluded from community recreation programs in the past. Therefore, it is important for community recreation providers to develop outreach strategies that will assure parents that their programs welcome all children, and will provide accommodations for their participation.

Since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, recreation providers around the country have worked to improve the physical accessibility of recreational facilities for individuals with disabilities. More recently, a number of organizations have adopted a philosophy that makes a commitment to serve the entire community. Many recreation providers have begun to work directly with individuals and families to make their programs more inclusive. The success of these efforts is the result of thoughtful planning, direct and honest communication, on-going collaborations, creative modifications, and identification of successful strategies for future implementation.

This issue of the *Institute Brief* intends to provide information that will increase inclusive recreation opportunities for all by sharing some of the successful strategies already used in several recreation programs. A number of recreation providers were interviewed about strategies to support the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. These providers work in various settings including camps, YMCA programs, Boys and Girls Clubs, after-school programs, health and fitness clubs, and youth-development programs. Although these providers represent a wide variety of programs, all agreed that having a positive attitude is one of the most important factors in ensuring inclusive recreation participation.

The following information was developed by Institute for Community Inclusion staff based on current practices of community recreation providers. The topics to be covered include: outreach and advertising tips, modifications, strategies for staff training, how to keep things positive, cooperative sports and games, and ideas on facilitating friendships. A checklist summarizing key points and a list of resources have also been provided.



Sending the Right Message: Outreach and Advertising

Running a quality recreational program requires on-going communication with families, staff, school personnel, support staff, the general public and, most importantly, individual participants. Information on programs is provided every day over the phone, in brochures, program flyers, and daily conversations. Frequent contact with community members has far-reaching positive consequences, which include developing trust between providers and families, while providing avenues to address problems and celebrate successes. Recreation providers and Institute for Community Inclusion staff have the following suggestions to enhance communication:

With Families...

- ⇒ Expand your advertising efforts to include translations into languages spoken in the community.
- ⇒ Make families feel comfortable to ask questions & offer suggestions (e.g., host a family night, or facilitate a parent discussion group on strategies to improve the program).
- ⇒ Schedule a staff person to be available during drop-off or pick-up times to answer parents' questions.
- ⇒ Encourage families to call, providing the organization's phone number on the application and permission slips.
- ⇒ Ask for feedback on the program (e.g., develop and conduct satisfaction surveys, or keep a suggestion book).
- ⇒ Encourage families to visit during program operation.

With Staff...

- ⇒ Target people with disabilities in outreach activities to let them know they are welcome.
- ⇒ Review the philosophy of the program and provide opportunities for questions and training if needed.
- ⇒ Provide an open environment that will encourage all staff to express concerns and/or make suggestions.
- ⇒ Hold frequent staff meetings and always include time for problem-solving.
- ⇒ Speak respectfully to all participants (e.g., refer to a person first by name, or use descriptions like a 'person with a disability' rather than 'the disabled person').

With Participants...

- ⇒ Make rules clear to all, especially rules concerning safety.
- ⇒ Ask a person with a disability if modifications are needed.
- ⇒ Demonstrate that each participant is valued and respected (e.g., speak directly to the person, not about him, asking for suggestions and checking for preferences).

With the General Public...

- ⇒ Document an inclusive philosophy in your mission statement.
- ⇒ Display access symbols throughout your facility and on any written communication such as stationary and brochures.
- ⇒ Have materials available in accessible formats (e.g., Braille, large print, cassette, languages spoken in your community).
- ⇒ Have a TTY (a text telephone system for people with hearing impairments) or make it clear on all your announcements that you can be called through a relay operator.

An Advertising Tip:

Recreation providers have said that they do not often advertise that their programs are inclusive of individuals with disabilities. Your agency may serve people of all abilities and cultures, however, without clearly communicating to the public that your program welcomes people of all abilities and cultures, many people with disabilities and/or their families will assume your program is like others that have consistently turned them away.

Modifying Program Activities

All recreation programs are unique. There are some basic strategies, however, that may be useful within general activities. Providers agreed that successful strategies evolve over time, through trial and error. It is important for program directors to know that they are not alone, and that using a **team** approach to modifying activities yields positive results. Below are some suggestions that were shared by recreation providers when reviewing common activities where accommodations have been used to promote full participation.

Field Trips

- ⇒ Prepare participants with details of the trip.
- ⇒ Provide written communication of events/trips in the person's native language, including braille.
- ⇒ Ensure that the activity site and transportation will be accessible.
- ⇒ Review transportation and community sites.
- ⇒ State rules simply and positively.

Arts and Crafts

- ⇒ Use an assortment of items to modify a craft (e.g., name stamp for a signature, thick paint brushes, pre-cut shapes, pre-drawn outlines for coloring, tape to hold down paper, large beads, or stickers).
- ⇒ Simplify directions by taking one step at a time.
- ⇒ Pair-up participants who can assist one another.
- ⇒ Be prepared to have back-up activities for those who finish more quickly or lose interest.
- ⇒ Match activity roles with participants' interests and talents, especially when working in groups.

Free Time

- ⇒ Make materials available to facilitate interaction and conversation among peers (e.g., games, magazines, computer software).
- ⇒ Allow freedom to participate in activities without direct adult supervision.
- ⇒ Provide semi-structured activities for those students who may need them.
- ⇒ Respect all participants' choices.
- ⇒ Remember to praise students for following the rules during free time.

Arrival/Departure Activities

- ⇒ Take time to preview the schedule of activities.
- ⇒ Remind participants each step that needs to be taken when arriving or leaving the program.
- ⇒ Pair-up participants during transition times as well as during structured activities.
- ⇒ Have impromptu games available to keep participants together during down time.

Homework Time

- ⇒ Clearly state beginning and end of homework time.
- ⇒ Select activities that will reflect what students are studying in school (e.g., if studying geography, a group could design a globe, paint a mural of the world, or ask students to describe the country they are from).
- ⇒ Use volunteers or older students to assist as tutors.
- ⇒ Check to make sure that students with more significant disabilities have homework, be prepared with project-based activities that relate to areas that students are working on in school.

Group Games

- ⇒ Choose games that emphasize cooperation, not competition.
- ⇒ Always have creative variations of games available to participants.
- ⇒ When forming teams, rotate groups frequently so that participants have a chance to make new friends.
- ⇒ Have players come up with modifications for teammates or for themselves.
- ⇒ Remember, the goal is to have fun!



Checklist for Recreation Providers

- Create an application form that clearly invites people of all abilities to join.
- Ask the local school department into what languages your materials should be translated in order to reach all youth in the community.
- Advertise your program in a variety of community organizations (e.g., public and private schools, cultural organizations, church bulletins).
- Hire staff who are committed to a philosophy of working with all youth.
- Add Questions to the job application or during the interview process about including individuals of different abilities into recreation options.

Sample questions may include:

- ✦ Have you had any experience working with individuals who have disabilities?
- ✦ Give an example of how an activity could be changed or modified so that everyone can participate.
- ✦ Give an example of how to lead an activity that would meet the needs of youth with varying abilities.
- ✦ Would you be willing to devote extra time to an individual who may need additional help with an activity?

- Invite families to visit the program.
- Review the philosophy of inclusive recreation with staff.
- Communicate rules in a variety of formats and languages, especially safety rules (e.g., evacuation plan using pictures and large print).
- Set aside funding in the program budget for providing accommodations.



Checklist for Recreation Providers

- Remember that fun is the most important goal.
- When creating activities, develop instructions for different learning styles.
- Promote cooperative learning groups that will naturally facilitate teamwork, cooperative play, positive social interactions, and group achievement.
- Consult with program staff to identify materials needed to modify activities.
- Consider all students when planning transportation for field trips.
- Evaluate supports and possible modifications for all program activities.
- Prepare for unexpected free time with impromptu games or activities.
- Match participants to activities they choose and respect those choices.
- Make rules simple and direct for kids, especially safety rules.
- Evaluate how activities are being presented and how they can be improved.
- Provide staff with a consistent time and a comfortable environment to express concerns or problems, and to brainstorm solutions.
- Seek support from the participants, parents, siblings, friends and teachers.
- Provide appropriate and on-going training to staff (including sub-contractors).
- Teach staff to recognize natural opportunities that can foster relationships.

Training Recreation Program Staff

As community recreation programs reach out to include individuals of all abilities, program directors and coaches agree that training is critical for both new staff orientation and in-service training. The following strategies were recommended for training community program staff:

Who should be involved in training?

- ⇒ All program staff
- ⇒ All sub-contracted staff (e.g., karate instructors, lifeguards, coaches, child care professionals)
- ⇒ Support staff
- ⇒ Parents
- ⇒ People with disabilities
- ⇒ Activity participants

What topics need to be covered?

- ⇒ How to develop activities all youth can enjoy
- ⇒ How to be an effective leader
- ⇒ Cooperative activities versus competitive games
- ⇒ Positive behavior strategies
- ⇒ Team problem-solving
- ⇒ Confidentiality

Who can effectively train staff?

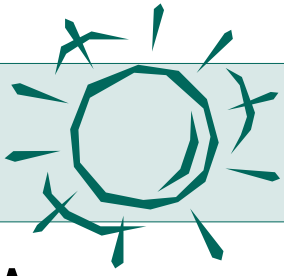
- ⇒ Participants with different abilities
- ⇒ Recreation providers with experience in inclusion
- ⇒ Community liaisons or leaders
- ⇒ Parents
- ⇒ Educators with experience in modifying curriculum and activities

How can we follow-up staff training?

- ⇒ Provide time at all staff meetings to discuss issues.
- ⇒ Visit similar programs to observe their strategies.
- ⇒ Encourage staff, families, and participants to suggest future training topics.
- ⇒ Request that all participants complete satisfaction surveys.
- ⇒ Invite parents and staff to brainstorm in a problem-solving session.

More Tips for Training Recreation Providers...

- 🎯 **Always provide an interactive training. Role play or an actual activity that needs to be modified for a participant may be helpful for staff to apply what they have learned.**
- 🎯 **There is no magic recipe for inclusive recreation – the best way to make your program fun for everyone is to be open-minded and committed to the process of making recreation accessible for everyone.**
- 🎯 **Review the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations – understand why these regulations exist and review physical and programmatic access in your own program.**



Keeping Things Positive

A common concern expressed by staff from recreation, afterschool, and sports programs is how to effectively include individuals with challenging behaviors. Frequently heard frustrations include coping with youth who ignore directions, who wander away from activities, who do not participate in activities, or who disrespect peers and activity leaders. Here are some strategies which providers can implement to ensure that all participants are supported in a positive, proactive manner.

Respect all Participants

Recognize and explore preferences. Present instructions and information in ways that each participant can understand. Pay attention to individual responses to activities. Recognize cultural and religious diversity within your program and create ways to acknowledge and accommodate all customs and beliefs. Encourage respect for peers and instructors at all times.

Respect Choices

Pay attention to participant likes and dislikes. Respect the choice not to participate in some activities. Explore ways to make involvement easier, such as encouraging small steps toward involvement in activities that initially may seem difficult or confusing.

Keep Rules Simple

Keep rules clear and simple and communicate them in a manner everyone can understand. Illustrate, discuss, and demonstrate how the rules can be followed. If children help you create the rules for an activity, they will usually respect them more. Remind participants that they are expected to follow the rules everywhere (e.g., at the program facility, in the community, on field trips, and at the playground).

Make Expectations Clear

Review the schedule of activities at the beginning of the program. Remember that everyone needs to be informed when schedule changes have to be made. Communicate expectations for each activity or project.

Be Consistent

Be consistent with all participants regarding expectations. Do not excuse inappropriate behavior because an individual has a disability. As the program progresses, you may learn more effective ways to keep participation positive, but try to stick to the same basic rules and expectations.

Be Fair

When activities are planned, keep all participants in mind. Consider how everyone can participate at least partially in games, events, or programs. Keep in mind that effective instructors facilitate all types of learners in reaching their highest potential.

Maintain Dignity

Respect the dignity of all participants. Behavioral issues and personal hygiene issues should be addressed privately. Concerns and fears should be taken seriously and discussed confidentially with students.

Tune-in to Feelings

Recognize participant and staff feelings. Help individuals to identify and communicate feelings before a conflict occurs. Try to identify antecedent behaviors, anything that may lead to inappropriate behavior, and do what you can to prevent it. Demonstrate ways to appropriately resolve differences. Be honest with yourself. If you are feeling at a loss, or feel you are losing patience, ask for help from other staff or outside resources.



The Sports Page

One of the challenges recreation providers face is the reality of **competition**. Recreation staff may be concerned that an individual with disabilities is unable to compete with or against their peers. Providers worry about safety, and question their qualifications as coaches to instruct a person with a disability. Keep in mind that most people join a team or participate in sports to have fun and that most modifications for sports are simple and inexpensive. Although accommodations should be made on an individual basis, here are some basic tips to make popular sports more inclusive.

Basketball

- ⇒ Ask participants to develop rules everyone can follow.
- ⇒ Lower the hoop or replace it with a waste basket.
- ⇒ Allow extra time to pass or shoot the ball.
- ⇒ Rotate so that every player takes a shot.
- ⇒ Have each player touch the ball before shooting.
- ⇒ Assign partners for each player.

Kickball

- ⇒ Use different sized balls (e.g., an earth ball).
- ⇒ Allow sitting in a chair while kicking.
- ⇒ Offer the choice of being a kicker or a runner.
- ⇒ Allow a partner to catch or throw ball.
- ⇒ Use carpet squares to mark bases.
- ⇒ Use partners for running bases.
- ⇒ Pass three times before tagging runner out.
- ⇒ Mark outfielder positions.

Swimming

- ⇒ Consider being flexible with skill levels (e.g., a person with a physical disability has difficulty floating on his own, his peers play games in deeper water. If the situation is safe, allow him to wear a floatation device).
- ⇒ Use the shallow end for instruction.
- ⇒ Use flotation devices with supervision.
- ⇒ Modify or eliminate diving starts.
- ⇒ Use songs or rhymes for stroke instruction.
- ⇒ Use fins or floats for slower swimmers during games.

Volleyball

- ⇒ Use different sized balls (e.g., beach ball or balloons.)
- ⇒ Lower the net.
- ⇒ Allow players to stand closer to the net.
- ⇒ Allow some participants to toss ball rather than hit it.
- ⇒ Have each player touch the ball before it goes to the other side.

*Cooperative T-Ball

- ⇒ Have all players in the field except for one batter and one person “on deck.”
- ⇒ Allow the batter to swing until s/he gets a hit and to run down either foul line.
- ⇒ Place five small cones every 10 yards along foul lines.
- ⇒ Score points for each cone the batter reaches as the ball is moving.
- ⇒ Have the runner take field position and rotate a new person “on deck.”

**Cooperative Games

- ⇒ Always have one team playing at a time, the object is to improve past scores, not to win.
- ⇒ Take the fun and challenging skills in a competitive version of a sport and try to preserve them.
- ⇒ Play against a clock allowing time outs.
- ⇒ Create rules that allow for a range of athletic ability on the same team.
- ⇒ Stress teamwork and cooperation.

These modifications are based on experience of Institute staff with sports programs and coaches, not as a result of interviews.

**Cooperative T-Ball rules adapted from David Munsey-Kano*

***Cooperative Games rules adapted from Cooperation in Sports, Inc.*

Encourage and Support Friendships

Participating in recreation and social activities is a natural and fun way for people to meet and develop friendships. Learning a new sport or game, going to clubs, and hanging out are even more fun when you can share the experience with friends. For some people, developing friendships does not come naturally even if they participate in a lot of activities. Relationships can evolve slowly—sometimes leading to loneliness. Some barriers to making friends are a communication or behavior difficulty, shyness, lack of confidence, or discomfort with a particular activity, and the appearance of being “different.” Recreation providers are naturally in a position to facilitate and promote friendships among participants in their programs. The following guidelines may assist recreation providers in encouraging and supporting friendships:

- ⇒ Create an environment in which everyone feels accepted, valued, and respected.
- ⇒ Use staff orientation and meetings to emphasize valuing differences and respecting others.
- ⇒ Train staff to recognize natural opportunities that can foster relationships.
- ⇒ Choose games and group activities that enable kids to discover common interests (e.g., favorite song or band, favorite clothing store, favorite foods, movies and video games, cultural traditions, favorite athletes and celebrities).
- ⇒ Keep *all* activities varied and interesting.
- ⇒ Coordinate activities so that all participants are engaged in age-appropriate activities.
- ⇒ Survey youth to ensure that activities are appealing.
- ⇒ Create opportunities for participants to interact with same-age peers, regardless of ability.
- ⇒ Encourage participants to take the lead in modifying activities.
- ⇒ Kids may be able to figure-out how to relate to each other and feel more confident to act naturally without an adult nearby. It is important for adults to recognize when their presence is not needed, or may even interfere with friendship development!

Cooperative learning activities encourage participants to talk to each other, and also to discuss ideas, make team decisions, and work toward a common goal. Some cooperative activities may include:

- Learning a new sport
- Designing and constructing a group art project, such as a mural or team T-shirt
- Creating a newsletter
- Planning a field trip
- Organizing fund-raising activities such as a car wash
- Planning a dance

Resources

Recreation Access in the 90's

277 S. Quincy St. Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22206-2204
703/820-4940 (Voice) 703/578-5559 (TTY)
A newsletter from the National Recreation & Parks.
www.nrpa.org

National Parks Service: Office on Accessibility

P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127
202/343-3674 (Voice) and 202/343-3679 (TTY)
Oversees access issues and provides technical assistance and training on inclusion issues to national parks.

Very Special Arts

1300 Connecticut Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20036
202/628-2800 (Voice) & 202/737-0645 (TTY)
Works with providers in the field of creative arts.
www.vsarts.org/

United Sports Center for the Disabled

263 Alden Street
Springfield, MA 01106
413/748-3095 (Voice)
Adaptive/competitive sports, recreation, & education.

SPORTIME

1 Sport Time Way
Atlanta, GA 30340
800/444-5700
Adapted equipment for recreation.
www.sportime.com

Don't Forget the Fun - A Guide about Inclusive Recreation!



This guide provides individuals with general ideas on advocating for, providing, and participating in inclusive community recreation. Topics covered include understanding differences, building local teams to promote community recreation, addressing common issues and concerns, accommodation strategies, activity modifications, finding or developing necessary supports, and developing volunteer support. A guide to national resources is also included.

**To order,
call (617) 355-6506, (617) 355-6956 (TTY)
or send a check/money order for \$25.00 (made
payable to Children's Hospital) to the ICI address.**

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