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Camp Shriver – A Free Inclusive Summer Sports Camp for Children with and without Disabilities

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Summary

Camp Shriver at UMass Boston is in its 9th year, providing a free and fully inclusive summer recreational program for children in the communities of Boston and Quincy.

Having served almost 1,000 campers, Camp Shriver at UMass Boston reaches out to children and families who have few opportunities, particularly families of children with disabilities.

Goals

Camp Shriver's goal is to bring children with and without disabilities together to:

1. Foster positive peer relationships
2. Provide opportunities for social and motor skill development



Approaches and Methods

The unique inclusive experience of Camp Shriver brings over 100 children together each summer: Camp Shriver campers are 8-12 years old and 50% have a learning disability, an intellectual disability, or are on the Autism spectrum.

To ensure that all children can learn and play as equals, Camp Shriver implements:

- 1) A supportive **Team Model** with a 4:1 camper-to-staff ratio, and an equal balance of ages, genders, and disability status
- 2) **Inclusive Sport Instruction** in swimming, soccer, basketball, and more.

The Team Model provides a supportive environment that promotes equal status among campers. Inclusive Sport Instruction promotes the development of motor skills in the context of sports and games and allows all campers to engage successfully in every activity.

Learning Lab, a summer psychology course, integrates experiential learning with child development theory, enabling UMass Boston students to apply knowledge gained in class to their work with campers and counselors at Camp Shriver.



Need

Camp Shriver is needed by the community:

- There is a lack of affordable summer programming that is welcoming to children in low-income urban areas.
- Too few recreational programs emphasize social inclusion: bringing children with and without disabilities together as equals

Impact

- 1) Camp Shriver leads to the development of positive peer relationships
 - 96% of all campers were named as a friend at camp
 - 70% of the friendships made at camp were between children with and without a disability
- 2) Camp Shriver facilitates the development of sports skills and social skills
 - Over half of all campers said they improved in swimming, soccer, and basketball; this was echoed by parents with almost two-thirds (60%) reporting their child improved in swimming skills by the end of camp
 - Almost all campers improved in their social skills, with counselors reporting improvements in making new friends, encouraging/cheering on campers, and inviting other campers to participate