

Meeting the Health and Wellness Needs of Individuals with Disabilities

Jim MacGregor, Ed.D., CTRS

Deb Risisky, PhD

MaryJo Archambault, Ed.D, CTRS

Southern Connecticut State University

Purpose of the Project

1. To gain an understanding of the inclusive services provided by park and recreation program;
2. To understand the extent to which the health and wellness needs of individuals with disabilities are being met through park and recreation programs;
3. To become familiar with challenges faced by departments in providing inclusive programming; and
4. To gain knowledge of the 'best practices' in inclusive recreation programming, including overcoming challenges.

Value of Inclusive Recreation

- The value of inclusive leisure experiences in enhancing the quality of life for all people, with or without disability, cannot be overstated (NRPA Position Statement on Inclusion, 1997).
- For youth with disabilities, free (non-work) time is of special importance in part because there may be diminished opportunities for participation in the work force as they grow up. through leisure alone that the opportunity will exist to enhance the quality of their lives and bring greater meaning to their days (Austin, Kennedy, and Smith, 2000).

Park & Recreation: Inclusive Programming

- over the past years there have been efforts by park and recreation personnel to increase inclusive recreation opportunities for persons with disabilities, gaps in programming options continue to exist

- In addition, park and recreation directors' are faced with the challenge of providing programs that serve to promote and help meet the overall physical health needs of all community members. The need is especially great for individuals with disabilities.
- obesity rates for youth with disabilities are about 30% higher than youth without disabilities (Kunstler, Thompson & Croke, 2013).

Inclusive & Health Previous Research

Data Collection Process

- Cross sectional study – one time mail questionnaire following Dillman's Tailored Method
- In May 2017, questionnaire mailed out to Recreation Directors in New England
 - N=391
- Three weeks later, a follow up postcard mailed to all
- Four weeks later in June, questionnaire mailed to those who had yet to respond
 - N=279

Questionnaire – Part 1

- Four pages – first page consent form (per IRB)
- Section 1: Inclusion information
 - 10 questions on 4-point Likert Scale about agency
 - 1 question on department's ability to provide inclusive recreation services to individuals with disabilities
- Section 2: Challenges in Inclusive Recreation Opportunities
 - 7 questions on 4-point Likert Scale on types of challenges agency faces
 - 2 open-ended questions:
 - Allowing to address challenges noted above
 - Innovative, best practices agency currently implementing

Questionnaire – Part 2

- Section 3: Health & Wellness, with a focus on obesity
 - 4 questions on obesity and youth with disabilities on 4-point Likert Scale
 - 3 open-ended questions
 - Elaborate on scale questions
 - Challenges faced by agency addressing obesity
 - Other health issues they see among their participants
- Section 4: Professional Development
 - 3 questions addressing training and workforce development with regard working with people with disabilities
- Section 5: Demographic Information

Our Sample: State Response Rates

	Participants		Participants
Total	136 (34.9%)		
		Education*	
State of Residence		Associates	18 (13%)
Connecticut	57	Bachelors	118 (87%)
Maine	16	Master	38 (28%)
Massachusetts	43		
New Hampshire	7	Gender	
Rhode Island	3	Male	62
Vermont	10	Female	73
Years as Director	16 years (1-45)	Average Age	47 years (23-73)

Our Sample: Participants

	Participants		Participants
Total	136 (34.9%)		
		Education*	
State of Residence		Associates	18 (13%)
Connecticut	57	Bachelors	118 (87%)
Maine	16	Master	38 (28%)
Massachusetts	43		
New Hampshire	7	Gender	
Rhode Island	3	Male	62
Vermont	10	Female	73
Years as Director	16 years (1-45)	Average Age	47 years (23-73)

Perceptions of the Provisions of Inclusive Opportunities

Question	New England (n=136)	Connecticut (n=57)	Massachusetts (n=43)
	\bar{x}	\bar{x}	\bar{x}
Inclusion is part of your Department's mission statement	1.73	1.71	1.87
Your department has trained staff that can assist individuals with disabilities	2.25	2.18	2.27
You and/or your staff regularly receive training relative to topics concerning the provision of service to individuals with disabilities	2.56	2.41	2.62
The majority of the recreation facilities meet the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements for accessibility	1.90	1.79	2.14
Your staff follows an inclusive process, such as assessing, planning, implementation and evaluation	2.1	2.02	2.10
Staff's attitudes are an issue to providing inclusive recreation opportunities	2.80	2.82	2.81
The community's attitude is an issue to providing inclusive recreational opportunities	2.77	2.78	2.81
Transportation is provided for individuals with disabilities	2.80	2.70	2.85
Your Department currently provides accommodations/modifications	1.84	1.69	1.93
Communication systems are in place to inform individuals with disabilities about various programs/activities	2.17	2.04	2.19

Provision of Inclusive Recreation Services

How would you rate your department on its ability to provide inclusive recreation services to individuals with disabilities?	1=No Services 4=Completely Inclusive \bar{x}
New England (n=136)	2.65
Connecticut (n=57)	2.75
Maine (n=16)	2.93
Massachusetts (n=43)	2.58
New Hampshire (n=7)	2.29
Rhode Island (n=3)	3.00
Vermont (n=10)	2.22

Challenges To Providing Inclusive Opportunities

Question	New England (n=136)	Connecticut (n=57)	Massachusetts (n=43)
	\bar{x}	\bar{x}	\bar{x}
Additional expenses	1.88	1.84	1.88
Increases in administrative costs	2.39	2.25	2.52
Lack of training for providing inclusive recreation	2.16	2.30	2.10
Fear that non-disabled individuals will behave inappropriately	3.25	3.19	3.29
Legal issues	2.89	2.75	3.00
Ability to provide quality recreation for all participants	2.48	2.48	2.44
Additional full time staff commitment	2.12	1.98	2.44

Additional Challenges/Concerns

- Budget/financial constraints
- Lack of staff – human resources
- Lack of information from parents
- Lack of training/training opportunities
- Poor communication with school system

Specific Comments re: Challenges

- “A major problem we have is that often times individuals with disabilities do not let us know in advance so they sign up for a program and issues occur and they expect support. It’s challenging finding the staff, providing the training and finding the funding when it’s dropped in our laps. We say please give us 2-3 weeks notice, but that rarely occurs.” (CT)
- “The expense for part-time staff for support. The majority of our services/programs are full cost recovery, yet we are unable to charge additional fees for support.” (CT)
- “One of the recurring challenges we face is having parents withhold information about their child’s disability at the time of registration. Often we don’t learn facts about a diagnosis, medications, or treatment plans until the child is experiencing difficulties in our program.” (ME)
- “As a Recreation Department with only 3 full-time employees, we are limited as to what we can do for all residents. At the risk of sounding insensitive – I am not sure that devoting more of our program resources would be equitable to all residents, i.e. elderly, adults, etc.” (MA)
- “Lack of communication between department, school system and parents.” (NH)

Most Proud Of.....

“We are collaborating with several regions to offer additional programs for child and youth with disabilities to participate in.” (MA)

“Connect with our key stakeholders which is the school department. For example, our department collaborated with the local school district to facilitate activities during Autism Awareness month. Activities included sensory play, modified sports nights and various other inclusive activities.” (MA)

“Establishment of assessment protocols, policy sheets, and parent materials. Changing in-house attitudes about people with disabilities through education and training. Having some behavior specialists on staff. Improved working relationships with schools and case management agencies. Children with disabilities recognized for accomplishments (Mayor of camp). Collaborated with school department on extended school year (ESY) camp program for children with ASD.” (ME)

“The department hosts an annual ADA celebration walk an roll, includes a mile walk, info. booths , live band concert and free ice cream to celebrate the passage of the ADA.” (CT)

Obesity: Park & Recreation Departments

Question	New England (n=136)	Connecticut (n=57)	Massachusetts (n=43)
	\bar{x}	\bar{x}	\bar{x}
Obesity/overweight is an issue in the <u>total youth</u> population served by my Department.	2.26	2.21	2.41
Obesity/overweight is an issue in the <u>youth with disabilities population</u> served by my Department.	2.40	2.45	2.38
The Department feels pressure to respond to the obesity/overweight issue for youth, including those with disabilities.	2.73	2.80	2.79
The Department is responding well to this health concern for youth, including those with disabilities.	2.16	2.13	2.26

Addressing Obesity in the Community

- Four common themes :
- Many noted they don't see this as biggest issue in their community
- With limited services/funding, they rely on collaborations with others
 - Health departments, schools, and other youth-serving agencies
- Physical Activity: Cornerstone to the services provided for most P&R Departments
- Trying to encourage and facilitate healthy eating
 - Providing healthy meals/snacks, including summer meals when school out
 - Ridding soda/vending at programs
 - Educating and encouraging families to make healthy food for kids

Challenges to Providing Obesity Reduction Services to Youth

- Budget/Resources: to provide enough services, to access/market to kids, and providing healthy food
- Facilities/space to hold programs – many communities limited
- Having enough demand for services by youth with disabilities in the community
- Being able to hire quality staff with proper training (especially if funding challenging)
- TECHNOLOGY! Getting kids off the phones, tablets, and to where they want to move

Non-Obesity Health Concerns Seen

- Three main categories:
 - Personal Health of Youth
 - Health Behaviors by Youth
 - Family/Social Environment

Personal Health of Individual Youth

- Diabetes
- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Asthma
- Food allergies

Health Behaviors by Youth

- Mental Health and related: suicide prevention, bullying
- Technology use
- Smoking and Alcohol
- Drugs: Opioid Use

Family/Social Networks Impact

- Poverty: leading to hunger and malnutrition
- Life Fatigue:
 - Kids are over-scheduled (as are parents)
- Over-protection by parents
 - Not being allowed to try – or fail
 - Not letting “kids be kids”
- Gangs in communities

Influences of Experiences on Service Provision

Question	New England (n=136)	Connecticut (n=57)	Massachusetts (n=43)
<i>To what extent have your professional experiences (training, workshops, formal education) and/or personal experiences with persons with disabilities impacted your work relative to...</i>	\bar{x}	\bar{x}	\bar{x}
Inclusive recreation	1.85	1.80	1.93
Health and wellness with youth	1.70	1.71	1.79
Health and wellness with youth with disabilities	2.08	2.18	2.10

Best Practices - 1

Best Practices - 2

Best Practices - 3

Future Steps: Providing Inclusive Services