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INCLUSIVE RECREATION SERVICES

DESCRIPTION:

"Inclusive recreation" is the integration of all people, regardless of age and regardless of functional ability, in leisure and recreational activities that are developed for the general community population. Involvement in meaningful recreation and leisure activities is essential for every individual's physical, psychological, and emotional well-being. The primary goal of using an inclusive approach is to have all people recreate and play in their choice of recreational activities.

Inclusive recreation is one aspect of a "livable community." Across the country, as the momentum to create livable communities is growing, increasing numbers of states, communities, and organizations are using an inclusive approach to recreation and leisure in many, diverse ways— providing adaptations, accommodations, and supports so that every resident can participate and benefit from a typical recreation or leisure experience in the community. For example—

- In New York State, Onondaga County Parks' inclusive approach is reflected in their free rentals of hand-pedaled Amtrykes and wheelchairs, the park's wheelchair-accessible tour Tram, the Nature On Wheels "NOWmobile" that allows older and younger people with limited mobility to experience the park's trails, the playground designed to be accessible for children of all abilities, a concrete ramp allowing everyone direct access to the water's edge, and an accessible pontoon boat for fishing.
- In 2008, the Pennsylvania State University instituted "Inclusive Recreation for Wounded Warriors," a training program for military recreation managers on methods for integrating wounded active-duty military personnel into the Army's existing Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Academy programs through appropriate adaptations and modifications.
- In the Chicago Botanic Garden, the surface areas of pathways and floors are safely useable by people using assistive equipment or whose balance and coordination are impaired. The Garden also includes raised beds, vertical gardens, hanging baskets on pulley systems, and container gardens— to bring the pleasure of gardening to people of all abilities and ages. The Garden's professional development program, Healthcare Garden Design Certificate of Merit, applies research in evidence-based design to achieve specific health outcomes through gardening.

- Project GAIN is funded by the United States Golf Association and the Professional Golfers Association (PGA). According to the National Center on Accessibility, "the purpose of the GAIN project is to provide opportunities for people of all ages with disabilities to become involved in the game of golf . . . and through this community-based program, maximize their opportunities for inclusion into the fabric of the local community."

While the benefits of an integrated, inclusive approach to recreation and leisure—for both individual residents and for communities—are becoming better understood, historically, such opportunities have been very limited. Older adults and younger-aged people with disabilities have often been excluded from community recreation or participated in “special” or “segregated” programs, often with few activity options. This lack of involvement has often led to social isolation, physical inactivity, and depression for both seniors and younger people with disabilities.

Inclusion is not a project, but is a philosophy and an approach that results in the full participation of every person in all aspects of life, including recreation. Inclusion means that all people, regardless of their age or ability, have the same choices, opportunities, and experiences as their peers. Inclusion means that people have equal opportunity to enjoy the same spaces and places as everyone else. In order for people to fully participate in all aspects of recreation and leisure, activities and programs must be physically as well as socially accessible.

Strategies for promoting inclusion at recreation facilities and programs:

- Utilize Universal Design principles to make facilities easier for everyone to use. Be sure that facilities are accessible for people to be able to approach, enter, and use all program and activity areas.
- Mission and vision statements should reflect a commitment to serve people of all ages and abilities.
- Involve people of all ages and abilities when developing new programs or facilities.
- Create programs that serve everyone, rather than designing segregated or “special” services.
- Ask about the need for accommodations on your program registration forms.
- Include images of people of all ages and abilities in all marketing materials.
- Use alternative forms of communication for all media and marketing materials, such as large print, Braille, pictures, and other languages.
- Identify a specific point person at your agency who can address needs and questions about accommodations and services.

- Train all staff and volunteers in disability-awareness as a routine part of orientation. Training should include topics such as accommodations, activity adaptations, adaptive equipment, the use of various forms of communication, and the pros and cons of using Person First Terminology (referring to a person not his/her disability; referring to the person first, the disability second).
- Offer sliding scale fees to include people of varying economic status.
- Provide opportunities for personal care staff to attend free of charge when they are assisting a participant with a disability.

Benefits:

For older adults and people with disabilities:

- Recreation provides opportunities for:
 - Physical activity:
 - Improving and maintaining physical fitness and health status
 - Developing strength, flexibility, agility, and coordination
 - Increasing physical skills needed for recreation activities
 - Strengthening and establishing friendships with a variety of community members, both with and without disabilities
 - Increasing self-expression and self-development
 - Developing new recreation interests and activities:
 - Learning new activities
 - Expanding recreation involvement
 - Enhancing self-concept / self-esteem / self-reliance / self-respect
 - Improving or maintaining cognitive skills:
 - Learning new skills needed for recreation activities
 - Decision making
 - Planning
- Research has shown that people *without* disabilities also benefit from shared recreation experiences with people who do have disabilities:
 - Increased appreciation and acceptance of individual differences
 - Increased understanding and acceptance of diversity
 - Developing respect for all people

For communities:

- Inclusive recreation and leisure opportunities increase participation in exercise, fitness, and social activities by population groups who often do not do so because of social and physical barriers. Such lack of exercise and social involvement is associated with poor physical fitness and declining physical and mental health. Greater participation through an inclusive approach has a positive impact on physical and mental health and, as a consequence, a positive impact on a community's health and long-term care expenditures.
- An inclusive approach fosters greater communication, understanding, and respect among various resident groups, thereby strengthening a "sense of community," building social capital, and stabilizing the resident population by

encouraging residents to remain living in the community rather than moving to other locations.

- Incorporating inclusive recreation in a community's design gives everyone the same opportunities and choices, thereby increasing that community's "livability" status.

Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:

- Physically inaccessible recreation program areas can exclude seniors and people with disabilities from being able to utilize recreation facilities. Spaces should be developed using Universal Design principles and ideals.
- Many recreation providers are unfamiliar with the principles of inclusive recreation and lack the skills to provide inclusive recreation opportunities.
- Staff are often not trained in disability-awareness, or are not knowledgeable about program and activity accommodations and the use of adaptive equipment.
- Negative attitudes, stereotypes, and preconceived notions about people with disabilities or elderly people can: (1) result in community members without disabilities declining to participate in activities and locations that include people with frailties or impairments; (2) result in community leaders continuing with traditional approaches and refusing to consider alternative ways; or (3) result in people with disabilities experiencing negative social responses, unequal treatment or expectations, lack of acceptance, paternalism, etc.
- Many people lack on-going experience or interaction with people with frailties or disabilities, leading to a level of uncertainty and discomfort about how to communicate with or relate to these individuals.
- Many policies, procedures, and funding sources still do not reflect inclusive philosophies and principles, which has a negative impact on the ability or willingness of organizations and communities to adopt inclusive approaches.

Resources—examples:

- New York State Inclusive Recreation Resource Center (NYSIRRC), *Explore Recreation in New York!*—to learn about the accessibility of the recreation resources in 11 regions of New York State; for each recreation amenity listed, a trained Certified Inclusivity Assessor has collected information about its physical and social accessibility. NYSIRRC: <http://nysirrc.org/>. *Explore Recreation in New York!*: <http://acs7.cortland.edu/irrc/>. *Stories of Successful Inclusion*: <http://nysirrc.org/recref-success.html>.
- Project GAIN, chosen by the National Center on Accessibility as a model for best practices in Inclusive Recreation Programs: <http://www.ncaonline.org/index.php?q=node/733>.
- Chicago Botanic Garden: <http://www.chicagobotanic.org/therapy/index.php>.

- Award-winning inclusive Onondaga County Park system: Onondaga County Parks, 106 Lake Drive, Liverpool, NY, 13088, (315) 451-7275, parks@ongov.net; <http://onondagacountyparks.com/>.
- Inclusive Recreation for Wounded Warriors, Pennsylvania State University and the Army: <http://www.nowpublic.com/health/warrior-care-penn-state-army-create-inclusive-recreation-training-0>.
- Cincinnati Recreation Commission has implemented several programs to ensure the full inclusion of all its citizens in community recreation events and activities. Read two of their success stories included on the National Center on Physical Activity and Disability's website: http://www.ncpad.org/fun/fact_sheet.php?sheet=66§ion=504&PHPSESSID=0.
- The Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation provides funding to mainstream community organizations, such as the Boy Scouts, Girls Clubs, and 4-H, to help them fully integrate people with disabilities into their programs. Their website has a link to many inclusion success stories: <http://www.meaf.org/grants-success.php>.

Resources—written and web:

- L. Anderson and C. Kress (2003). *Inclusion: Including people with disabilities in parks and recreation opportunities*. State College, PA: Venture Publishing: <http://www.venturepublish.com/product.php?id=67>.
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3903/is_200604/ai_n17177497/.
- Center for Assistive Technology and Environmental Access (CATEA)— provides information about adaptive equipment and technology. CATEA, College of Architecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, 490 Tenth Street, Atlanta, GA, 30332; (404) 894-4960 (v/tty), 1-800-726-9119, catea@coa.gatech.edu; <http://www.catea.gatech.edu/>; to find products, by related activity or task: http://assistivetech.net/search/products_for_activities.php.
- Disability Funders Network— provides links to funding opportunities. Disability Funders Network, 14241 Midlothian Turnpike, #151, Midlothian, VA, 23113; (703) 795-9646; info@disabilityfunders.org; <http://www.disabilityfunders.org>.
- K. Miller, A. Frisoli, A. Smythe, and S. Schleien, "Quality Indicators of Inclusive Recreation Programs: A National Youth Service Example," *Impact Newsletter*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development. <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/162/over10.html>.
- National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), 22377 Belmont Ridge Road, Ashburn, VA, 20148; 1-800-626-6772: <http://www.nrpa.org/>.
 - NRPA Pyxis Online Learning Center—to train and educate professionals, part-time employees, volunteers and citizen advocates, anytime, anywhere, at a low cost: <http://www.nrpa.org/pyxis/>.

- Professional Certification Programs:
<http://www.nrpa.org/Content.aspx?id=410> .
- Agency and Academic Accreditation Programs:
<http://www.nrpa.org/Content.aspx?id=393>.
- DisabilityInfo.gov—an online Resource for People with Disabilities on governmental services for people with disabilities, managed by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), in partnership with 21 other federal agencies: <https://www.disability.gov/>.
- Mayors Wellness Campaign, Pennington, NJ (on line August 16, 2012), *Tool Box*:
 - "Seniors in Motion":
<http://www.mayorswellnesscampaign.org/images/stories/toolbox/seniors-toolbox.pdf>.
 - "Communities in Motion":
<http://www.mayorswellnesscampaign.org/images/stories/toolbox/community/CommunityinMotion.pdf>
- Kellie Ellerbusch, Shirley Dean, and Mark Smith (nd), *Fun4 All: An Inclusion Initiative for Youth with Disabilities*, a guide for youth group leaders to support meaningful participation for youth with disabilities. Omaha, NE: Munroe Meyer Institute at the University of Nebraska Medical Center; and Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska.
<http://www.unmc.edu/media/mmi/pdf/disabilityinclusionmanual.pdf>.
- The Inclusion Network, 47 Indian Trail, Toronto, ON, Canada; (416) 658-5363; inclusionpress@inclusion.com— works to increase awareness of inclusion, recognize exemplary inclusive efforts, provide technical assistance, and link individuals with and without disabilities:
<http://www.inclusion.com/inclusionnetwork.html>.
- Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc., *Independent Living Centers (ILC) in New York*— for a list of 40 ILCs across New York State, which provide information, services, training, and technical assistance relating to people with disabilities. Many have loan closets that include recreation equipment:
<http://www.nls.org/ilc.htm>.
- National Center on Accessibility, Bloomington, IL: Indiana University, Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism Studies, School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation— promotes access and inclusion in recreation:
<http://www.ncaonline.org/>.
- National Training Center on Inclusion, Kids Included Together (KIT), 2820 Roosevelt Road, San Diego, CA, 92106; (858) 225-5680; info@kitonline.org. Provides training, technical assistance, and resources on inclusion:
<http://www.kitonline.org/>.
 - KIT Training: <http://www.kitonline.org/html/training.html>.

- *Paths to Inclusion* : A resource guide for fully including youth of ALL abilities in community life. Arlington, VA: Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation, 1560 Wilson Blvd., 22209. <http://www.meaf.org/docs/PathsToInclusion.pdf>.
- Self Advocacy Association of New York State, Inc., 500 Balltown Road, Bldg 5C, Schenectady, NY, 12304; (518) 382-1454; sanys@sanys.org. Provides support and presentations about inclusion. <http://sanys.org/>.
Contact information for seven regional offices:
http://www.sanys.org/contact_us.htm.
- United Cerebral Palsy, 1660 L Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20036; 1-800-872-5827, (202) 776-0406; info@ucp.org. Website provides products, services, education, and training materials for working with people with disabilities:
http://www.ucp.org/ucp_generaldoc.cfm/1/6619/6621/6621-6621/399.

Resource—technical assistance and contact names:

- ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Recreation Facilities
<http://www.access-board.gov/recreation/final.htm>
1-800-872-2253 (voice); 1-800-993-2822 (TTY)
Weekdays: 10:00 am - 5:30 pm, EST; Wednesday: 10:00 am – 2:00 pm
ta@access-board.gov
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