

The State of the State for Missourians with Disabilities

RECREATION AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

“When people with disabilities are not included in...activities, the activities do not represent the whole community. Everyone suffers when certain parts of a community are excluded because each of us has something of value to share. Real inclusion comes only when programs and individuals welcome and include all persons who wish to participate, recognizing their talents and not their disabilities.”¹

Our Beliefs

The Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities (MPC) believes that persons with disabilities should be given opportunities to make informed choices about where they play, and socialize, and worship. Essentially, they should be able to choose to participate in activities that are meaningful to them, when they want to. Additionally, people should receive individual and family supports which are flexible, based on need, and provided in a culturally sensitive manner.²

What the Research Says

Recreation is defined as the refreshment of the body and mind. Any activities that provide a break from the more mundane aspects of life, in order to foster physical, mental and spiritual wellness, are recreational.

Opportunities to build social capital. Inclusive recreation, in whatever form it takes – sports, worship, dinner and a movie, classes, fishing, coffee with friends- affords people the opportunity to build “social capital”. Social capital is the network of relationships that bind people together in a spirit of trust and cooperation. One avenue for building social capital is through developing social relationships within recreational activities. It is through social recreation that we meet others, explore how we are similar, begin to establish trust, and discover each other’s competencies, talents, and gifts. People then use social capital to help them in finding jobs, additional social opportunities, transportation, and other aspects of life where this network of connections is a valuable tool.

Inclusive Recreation. In 2006, numerous organizations could be located for seemingly every sport in relation to every disability, such as the U.S. Blind Horseshoe Pitchers Association, Waterskiing for the Disabled, and the National Softball Association for the Deaf. However, recreational activities that are inclusive and equal in nature, and provided opportunities to develop social capital, appeared to be less prevalent. Researchers have noted that inclusive recreation achieves the following:⁴

- Encourages and enhances opportunities for people of varying abilities to participate in activities together with dignity in natural settings.
- Builds community capacity.
- Increases awareness of the abilities of persons with special needs.
- Enhances social connections, motivation, and self-esteem.
- Provides more cost-effective recreation for persons with disabilities.

However, there are currently limitations in availability of program options, particularly in the realm of after-school activities and summer programs for children, and lack of inclusive programs for adults with developmental disabilities (DD). Further, it should be noted that while some persons may have access to group recreational outings, they may not be activities that they would prefer, and may not allow individual opportunities to meet people and build social capital.

What Missourians with DD and Their Families Are Saying³ *Statewide Needs Assessment Results*

Recreational Choice

Respondents identified people with DD were *most likely* to use:
(50%) special/segregated recreation and social activities/event
(35%) regular community sponsored recreation and social activities
(15%) accessible community sponsored recreation and social activity

Respondents identified people with DD were *least likely* to use:
(47%) regular community sponsored recreation and social activities
(31%) special/segregated recreation and social activities/events
(22%) accessible community sponsored recreation and social activity

“No transportation to get to what little recreation there is.”

Adequacy of Recreation Options

(72%) rated regular community sponsored recreation *inadequate/fair*
(70%) rated accessible community sponsored recreation *inadequate/fair*
(41%) rated special/segregated recreation *good/excellent*

Availability of Recreational Opportunities

(72%) rated accessible recreation opportunities *somewhat/not available*
(75%) rated social opportunities *somewhat/not available*

NOTE: The Needs Assessment indicates how people with DD may spend their time in recreation, but does not necessarily mean that they chose these activities.

Two recent surveys both found “community participation gaps” between people with and without disabilities.⁵ The rate of participation of persons with disabilities in worship or other group community activity appeared to be affected by mobility, as people who were more mobile participated more in the community.

Importantly, one survey also found that “at every level of mobility limitation, from none through moderate to most severe, **persons who participated more in the community were more likely to be very satisfied with their lives.**” Therefore, outreach from places of worship and other local organizations can enhance both the community participation and life satisfaction of persons with disabilities.⁷

While, overall, people with disabilities report that they are less involved in their communities, they seem to be participating in some specific community activities at similar rates to people without disabilities. Little or no differences exist with respect to participating in community events related to hobbies, participating in volunteer work, attending special community events such as fairs and parades, and attending recreational activities such as sporting events and movies. The largest differences exist between these two groups with regard to involvement in religious services, local politics, cultural events, outdoor activities, and community service organizations.

Health Benefits. Research on the health benefits of recreation for people with disabilities is increasing. According to the Surgeon General’s Report on Physical Activity and Health, all persons of all ages, *including those with disabilities*, experience an enhanced quality of life through regular moderate physical activity.⁸ Further, the national health initiative, Healthy People 2010, also promotes health and an improved quality of life for persons with disabilities, noting that people with disabilities tend to have lower rates of physical activity and higher rates of obesity.⁹ Researchers note that inactivity in persons with disabilities can lead to deteriorating health, increased dependence on others, a decrease in social interactions, and other secondary complications.¹⁰

Barriers to Inclusive Recreation. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) safeguards the rights of people with disabilities to participate in inclusive recreation, individuals face limited access to a range of activities, programs, and services. The major barriers that all people face when trying to increase physical activity are similar to the obstacles that people with disabilities face such as lack of access to convenient facilities, and lack of safe environments in which to be active.¹¹

“The schools don’t bother to include you. The basketball flyers don’t even come home.”⁶

The State of the State in Recreation

Inclusive Recreation. Within Missouri there appears to be an increasing number of recreation programs for persons with disabilities, particularly within urban areas; however many of these programs remain non-inclusive in nature. There is also a lack of research regarding the need for and presence of inclusive recreational opportunities for Missourians with disabilities.

Some Missouri urban counties offer supports for inclusion within Parks and Recreation programs. Others offer opportunities to attend classes in an integrated environment. Several counties offer informational resources for residents regarding available recreation and leisure opportunities. Yet, the limited number of programs available can in no way accommodate the number of persons with DD that could benefit from inclusive recreational programming, especially in rural areas.

Barriers to Inclusive Missouri Recreation. Comments from the Statewide Needs Assessment clearly indicate that accessibility is an area of need. However, there are no comprehensive studies of the accessibility of Missouri recreation for persons with disabilities, at least in regard to physical and worship activities, based on a review of existing research.

Community activities are not always available for individuals with disabilities, particularly within smaller rural communities. While some respondents commented that the majority of recreational activities are separate from others in the community, others worried that there weren’t enough programs specifically for individuals with disabilities. Transportation for recreation seemed to be available to persons living in group homes; however, it was a problem for other persons. Even for those in group homes, transportation may not be available to activities that are of individual interest, versus group activities. Affordability of recreational activities was frequently mentioned.

Many organizations that support recreation for persons with disabilities appear to rely on volunteers as support personnel. Reliance on volunteers, while reducing program cost, may create difficulty in stability of support provision. State Needs Assessment comments indicated a general lack of available supports, particularly within rural areas.

What We Recommend

- Advocate that individuals be supported to participate in the social and recreational opportunities afforded in the communities where they live and promote choice as the guiding value when assisting them to participate in leisure or recreational activities.

- Encourage individuals with developmental disabilities, families, service providers, policymakers, and recreational providers to recognize the importance of recreation and social opportunities in developing social capital and its effects on an individual's ability to be included in the community.
- Encourage communities to include people with disabilities in inclusive social and recreational activities and acknowledge the community's success where this is being done. Individuals with disabilities and their families should be included in community planning activities and the development of inclusive social and recreational opportunities.
- Encourage flexibility in participation requirements should be adopted by recreation providers as a value which would allow individual to participate in activities in spite of age, skill level, or ability to pay.

RECREATION ENDNOTES

"Shattering Myths". (2005). Missouri Developmental Disabilities Network and People First of Missouri. Accessed at <http://www.mpcdd.com/>

² The Missouri Customer Leadership Initiative. (1998). *Show Me Change: Building a Participant-Driven System for Missourians with Developmental Disabilities*. Retrieved 01/07, from <http://www.mpcdd.com/pdfs/LeadershipInitiativeFinalReport.pdf>

³ Rinck, C., Graybill, T., Berg, R., Horn, W. (2006). "The Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities Statewide Needs Assessment"

⁴ "The Recreation Access Project" University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Center for Recreation and Disability Studies. Retrieved on 12/15/06 from <http://www.unc.edu/depts/recreate/rap/index.html>

⁵ Hendershot, G. (2003). "Community Participation and Life Satisfaction". Washington, D.C.: The National Organization on Disability. Retrieved on 2/13/07 from www.nod.org

⁶ Rinck, C., Graybill, T., Berg, R., Horn, W. (2006).

⁷ Hendershot, G. (2003).

⁸ "Physical Activity and Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, Executive Summary". (1996). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved on 12/16/06 from <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/sgr/sgr.htm>

⁹ "Health People 2010: A Systematic Approach to Health Improvement". U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Retrieved on 12/17/06 from <http://www.healthypeople.gov>

¹⁰ Durstine, J.Larry, et al. (2000). Physical activity for the chronically ill and disabled. *Sports Medicine*, 30(3): 207-219. Retrieved on 12/16/06 from www.ncpad.org/research

¹¹ "Health People 2010: A Systematic Approach to Health Improvement". U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Retrieved on 12/17/06 from <http://www.healthypeople.gov>