Do Sufficient Recreational Programs for Disabled Children Exist in Monroe and Ontario Counties?

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Abstract
We live in a country where people, including the handicapped are guaranteed many rights and freedoms. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) ensures that equal opportunities are provided to people with disabilities. There is a large percentage of children in the United States with disabilities. These mental or physical disabilities impair their major life activities. Research shows that both formal and informal activities have proven to be beneficial to children with disabilities. The purpose of Parks and Recreation Departments is to provide physical and non-physical activities to people in the community. A survey of Directors of Parks and Recreation departments will determine if there are sufficient Parks and Recreation programs currently available for children with disabilities in the New York State counties of Monroe and Ontario. If there are not sufficient programs, the study will attempt to determine why. This author believes that there are not sufficient programs due to insufficient funding, high cost of equipment and lack of trained staff.

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Abstract

We live in a country where people, including the handicapped are guaranteed many rights and freedoms. The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) ensures that equal opportunities are provided to people with disabilities. There is a large percentage of children in the United States with disabilities. These mental or physical disabilities impair their major life activities. Research shows that both formal and informal activities have proven to be beneficial to children with disabilities. The purpose of Parks and Recreation Departments is to provide physical and non-physical activities to people in the community. A survey of Directors of Parks and Recreation departments will determine if there are sufficient Parks and Recreation programs currently available for children with disabilities in the New York State counties of Monroe and Ontario. If there are not sufficient programs, the study will attempt to determine why. This author believes that there are not sufficient programs due to insufficient funding, high cost of equipment and lack of trained staff.
Introduction

Formal and informal activities have proven to be beneficial to children with disabilities (Law, King, King, Kertoy, Hurley, Rosenbaum, Young & Hanna, 2006). These activities provide social, emotional and physical benefits (Murphy & Carbone, 2008). Researchers have shown that people with disabilities who are physically active: “(a) are better adjusted and more satisfied with life, (b) report having fewer days of pain, depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, improved vitality, and (c) substantially increase their life expectancy” (Krause & Kjorsvig, 1992 p. 561). Federal and State law mandate equal opportunity for children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). According to Law et al. (2006) it is important to see how community programs can be created to include equal participation for all children and families.

The goal of this research is to determine if the need to be physically active is being provided to children with disabilities through Parks and Recreation programs in the New York State counties of Monroe and Ontario. My research question is:

Are there sufficient Parks and Recreation programs currently available for children with disabilities in the New York State counties of Monroe and Ontario?

Sufficient programming will be based on the perception of the Directors of Parks and Recreation Departments in Monroe and Ontario Counties. For this study the term disabled will refer to children with physical or mental impairments. Children will be defined as males and females under the age of eighteen. If there are not sufficient programs, the study will attempt to determine why.
The findings of this research will help determine if Community Parks and Recreation Departments are providing equal opportunities for children with disabilities as required through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This study will also help the Community Parks and Recreation Departments self evaluate their current programming to verify if they are in fact complying with the regulations of the ADA. If Parks and Recreation Departments are not meeting the needs of the disabled, this study will help them reevaluate their programming and develop an action plan to better facilitate the needs of children with disabilities. This study will make its readers look more closely at the inclusion of children with disabilities not only in Parks and Recreation programs but also in society as a whole. It may lead to further research in inclusive practices of other organizations.

Literature Review

Defining Children with Disabilities

There are a large number of children with disabilities in the United States. In 2010 the United States Census Bureau released data showing that 5.2% of children ages 5-17 had some type of disability (Brault, 2011). A disability is defined as, “a level of functional impairment significant to impair major life activities (Druss, Marcus, Rosenheck, Olfson, Tanielian & Pincus, 2000). In other words a person with disabilities is deficient in their ability to contribute to their well-being or becoming a contributing member of society (Vehmas, 2004). These impairments can be mental or physical. The Census Bureau uses the following categories of disability: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, and self-care difficulty (Brault, 2011). The rights of children with disabilities cannot be ignored. The ADA states, “The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, State and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and
telecommunications.” (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). The National Organization on Disability (NOD) found that when comparing children with disabilities to children without disabilities, children with disabilities are behind in education, entertainment and socialization (NOD, 2002). The result is far fewer disabled children (33%) saying they are very satisfied with their life compared to 67% of their non-disabled peers (NOD, 2002). These children with disabilities are limited in the amount of physical activity in which they can participate (Brown & Gordon, 1987). The goal is to include all children with disabilities in activities, rather than exclude them (Wilson, 2002).

**Benefits of Physical Activity**

Being active is a key part of the development of every child (Murphy & Carbone, 2008). Parks and Recreation programs support positive youth development, decrease negative behavior and help them to develop into healthy adults (Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008). Recreational programs provide youth with constructive adult relationships, adult role models and positive peer relationships (Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008). In addition, youth sport can develop character traits such as: motivation, honesty, integrity, responsibility and restraint (Wells & Arthur-Banning, 2008). Murphy and Carbone (2008) stated, “All children benefit from physical activity, and children with disabilities are no exception. Participation of children with disabilities in sports and physical activity programs promotes physical, emotional, and social well-being.” (p. 1060). The families of children with disabilities can also benefit from having their child participate in recreational activities. These benefits include, less marital and sibling strain, improved family communication and the development of a support network (Havens, 2005). Zabriskie, Lundberg & Groff (2005) found that participation in adaptive sports programs had a positive effect on the quality of: life, health, family life and social life. Furthermore participation in physical activity

**Parks and Recreation**

The field of Parks and Recreation began over 100 years ago with a tradition of providing a variety of activities for young and old (Godbey, Caldwell, Floyd, & Payne, 2005). These activities include: arts, music, outdoor aesthetics, play, culture creation, stress-reduction, fitness, sports and physical activity (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005). Henderson & Bialeschki (2005) further stated that, “Parks and recreation are a public good and have been enabled legislatively in virtually all communities across the U.S.” (362). In fact, four out of five U.S. citizens utilize Parks and Recreation programs/facilities (NRPA, 2012). The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) was formed under the guidance of Laurance Rockefeller in 1965 (NRPA, 2012). The NRPA’s mission is to advance parks, recreation, and environmental conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people (NRPA, 2012 p. 1). The NRPA’s foundation is based on three central ideas, or pillars. The first pillar is conservation since parks help preserve natural resources. The second pillar is health and wellness, which promotes improving overall health and protecting against poor nutrition, hunger, obesity and physical inactivity. The third pillar is social equity, which helps assure that everyone in the community has access to the resources and programming of Parks and Recreation agencies (Tulipane, 2012). In the United States, Parks and Recreation agencies are partially funded by state and local government (Godbey, Caldwell, Floyd, & Payne, 2005). Although the majority of funding comes from taxes, some revenue must be gained from fees and charges to participants and support from local business (Godbey, Caldwell, Floyd, & Payne, 2005).
Parks and Recreation Departments are not the only agencies responsible for delivering opportunities to develop youth through recreational activity (Bocarro, Greenwood & Henderson, 2008). Not for profit youth groups, churches and camps also offer these opportunities (Bocarro, Greenwood & Henderson, 2008). All agencies that provide recreation services are bound by the rules and regulations set forth by the ADA. The NRPA (1999) provides a position statement on inclusion:

Diversity is a cornerstone of our society and culture and this should be celebrated. Including people with disabilities in the fabric of society strengthens the community and its individual members. The value of inclusive leisure experiences in enhancing the quality of life for all people, with and without disabilities, cannot be overstated. As we broaden our understanding and acceptance of differences among people through shared leisure experiences, we empower future generations to build a better place for all to live and thrive (p. 94).

Even with the laws of the ADA and the best intentions of the NRPA many with disabilities still experience both physical and program related barriers at Parks and Recreation facilities. They do not have the same opportunities as people without disabilities (Skulski, 2007). In a survey of the administrators of not-profit recreation agencies, 71% of agencies did not employ workers that had the ability to support inclusive practices (Devine & McGovern, 2001). Reasons for this non-inclusion of children with disabilities are outlined in the following section.

**Barriers of Inclusion**

Society has often viewed people with disabilities as less attractive, helpless and needy. These societal attitudes and perceptions have caused people with disabilities to be less likely to partake in Community Recreation Programs (West, 1984; Herbert, 2000). “Lack of participation
does not make you ‘less of a person’ (a common perception of utility measures) as the cause may well be environmental or societal.” (Forsyth & Jarvis, 2002 p. 277). This feeling of inferiority of children with disabilities is one factor that may limit participation in Community Recreation Programs. There is an inconsistency of the inclusion of children with disabilities in Community Recreation Programs due to a host of other barriers (Scholl, Smith & Davison, 2005).

In interviews with leisure and recreation program personnel, Germ and Schleien (1997) found several barriers to providing programs for the disabled. These include: architectural (accessibility of facilities), attitudinal (staff fears with working with disabled), financial (securing funding for personnel and programs), programmatic (structure and adaptations of programs) and transportation barriers. Securing special equipment and hiring and training additional personnel can prove costly for many Recreational Departments. However, in a study by Suminski and Ding (2012) the financial barrier can be overcome through the support of large and small businesses. Their findings concluded that small businesses support Youth Physical Activity Organizations (YPAO). Almost 90% of small business owners felt that small businesses should support YPAO. Further, half of the small business owners who did not support YPAO’s stated that the major reason for their non-support was that simply were not asked (Suminski & Ding, 2012).

**Method**

This research was exploratory in nature. It attempted to gather data for which there is little or no prior knowledge. Although there have been many studies relating to the benefits of physical activity for children with disabilities, I found no studies or literature pertaining to my research question. My first area of exploration was to determine if Parks and Recreation programs were present throughout Monroe and Ontario Counties for children with disabilities.
My second area of exploration was to determine what barriers exist that prevents these programs from taking place.

Sufficient programming was based on the perception of the Directors of Parks and Recreation Departments in Monroe and Ontario Counties. Specifically, these perceptions were based on such variables as: staff training, adaptive equipment, modified programming and accessibility of facilities. The term disabled referred to children with physical or mental impairments. Children were defined as males and females under the age of eighteen. Directors were the person(s) in charge of town Parks and Recreation Departments. Parks and Recreation Departments were those local entities governed by the NRPA (National Recreation and Park Association) with the purpose of providing a variety of activities for the young and old (Godbey, Caldwell, Floyd, & Payne, 2005). Finally, barriers were reasons that prevented Parks and Recreation programs from being delivered to disabled children. These barriers included: attitudinal (staff fears of working with disabled and societal perception), architectural (accessibility of facilities), financial (securing funding to develop programs, purchase equipment and train staff) and programmatic (developing programs, which are specifically geared for disabled or adapted to include disabled) (Germ & Schleien, 1997). Intervening variables were identified that may have skewed questionnaire results. First, was the bias of Directors. Each Director could have had a distorted view of how they accommodated disabled children. Next, was false reporting. Directors may not have answered questions truthfully to paint a better picture of their programs for children with disabilities. Conversely, some Directors may have painted a bleak picture of their programs in order to secure more funding for disabled programming. Finally, was the failure of all Directors to respond to the questionnaire. Those that
did not respond may have had sufficient programming and did not want to reveal this to the surveyor.

For this study, a cross-sectional survey design was used as the research method. This design was appropriate to quickly and easily gain data of Parks and Recreation programming. The survey design also allowed Directors of Parks and Recreation Departments to easily give their opinion as to how their programs met the needs of children with disabilities and possible reasons as to why more programming is not offered for them. Since many of my survey questions sought out thoughts, opinions and experiences of my participants, my perspective was from the interpretivist point of view (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Although some numerical data was gathered to determine the amount of children and children with disabilities in individual Parks and Recreation programs, most of the data was in the form of statements and opinions based on the viewpoint of the participants (Gratton & Jones, 2010). These statements and opinions from the participants were interpreted by this researcher, which determined if sufficient programming was provided for children with disabilities through local Parks and Recreation Departments. This researcher further attempted to formulate an understanding and reasoning as to why or why not sufficient programming is provided (Gratton & Jones, 2010).

In addition to gathering opinions, experiences and thoughts (qualitative data), I also gathered facts and figures about programs offered (quantitative date). Therefore, my research was from a mixed-method approach.

Sample Qualitative Question: How is your recreation department meeting the needs of children with disabilities?
If yes, explain why and if no, explain why not.

Sample Quantitative Question: Please list the number of programs provided for:
A questionnaire was used for its ease of dissemination and retrieval of data. Qualtrics survey software was used to make and distribute the questionnaire. An invitation was sent out explaining what the research was about and the reason for the research. Attached to the invitation was a link to the questionnaire. After the invitation was sent out, a follow-up email was sent out a couple days later reminding the participants to complete the questionnaire.

The participants in this study were 14 Directors of Parks and Recreation Departments in Monroe and Ontario Counties. The Parks and Recreation Departments in Monroe and Ontario Counties were used for this study since they were in close proximity to where I live and attend school. I also used Directors because past research focuses on children with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities. Using Directors gave me a different perspective to look at. Since this study was done in the area, I received a high rate of participation from the Directors. In addition, these Directors acted as key informants since they have first hand knowledge of the programs they offer. Data that was collected was broken into three categories.

1. Programming offered to:
   a. Children
   b. Disabled children
   c. Non-disabled integrated with disabled children

2. Directors perceptions of their departments ability to meet the needs of disabled children

3. Reasons for not offering sufficient programming to meet the needs of disabled children (barriers)
Questionnaires were sent to each Director of a Parks and Recreation Department in Monroe and Ontario Counties. To analyze the qualitative data, responses were coded to find themes and categories (open coding). Responses were re-read to search for statements that were not originally included in the coding. New categories needed to be added and regrouped (axial coding). Data analysis for quantitative data consisted of determining how many programs are currently offered for children with disabilities as well as programs that integrate children with disabilities with non-disabled children. The percentage of Parks and Recreation Departments that offer programs for children with disabilities as well as the percentage of Directors who feel their departments sufficiently meet the needs of children with disabilities was determined. I listed and ranked order the reasons the Parks and Recreation Departments gave for not providing sufficient programming for children with disabilities.

This research was based on the Ecological theory. The Ecological theory was developed by a Russian American psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner. His theories impacted the disadvantaged, which include children with disabilities that are refereed to in my thesis. This theory shows that development is influenced by environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These environmental systems included:

1. **Microsystem:** Immediate surrounds of an individual (direct interactions with family, peers, school and neighborhood) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

2. **Mesosystem:** Relations between different microsystems (family and school experiences, school to church experiences and family to peer experiences). For example, children whose parents have rejected them may have difficulty developing positive relations with friends or peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).
3. **Exosystem:** Connection between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role in the individual’s immediate context. For example, a father receives a promotion that requires more travel, which might increase conflict with the wife and affect interaction with the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

4. **Macrosystem:** Culture in which individuals live (socioeconomic status, poverty and ethnicity) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

5. **Chronosystem:** Pattern of environmental events and transitions over an individual’s life. For example, divorce is a transition (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

By applying ecological theory in a broader sense one may determine that there are limitations or barriers to providing sufficient programming to children with disabilities within the Parks and Recreation setting. Based on ecological theory, one single barrier will not be the cause of insufficient programming; rather a combination of barriers will be the cause (Devine & McGovern, 2001). This assumption ties together a variety of barriers including: attitudinal (staff fears of working with disabled and societal perceptions), architectural (accessibility of facilities), financial (securing funding to develop programs, purchase equipment and train staff) and programmatic (developing programs, which are specifically geared for disabled or adapted to include disabled) (Devine & McGovern, 2001). Ecological theory can be applied when explaining the results of this research. Since ecological theory assumes that there is a multitude rather than a singular cause, it will be helpful in explaining the possible need for several systems to work together to provide sufficient programming for disabled children (Devine & McGovern, 2001). For example, there may be the need for better promotion of programming, education to dismiss the stereotype of participating with children with disabilities, provide facilities that are ADA
compliant, secure funding for adaptive equipment and staff training and to develop programs to meet the specific needs of children with disabilities (Devine & McGovern, 2001). This research was conducted to verify if there are sufficient Parks and Recreation programs currently available for children with disabilities in the New York State counties of Monroe and Ontario? If not, what are some of the barriers preventing this?

**Results**

Table 1 represents data from questions 2, 4 and 5 in the survey instrument. It illustrates the approximate number of residents in each of the responding Director’s towns (Population Served). It also shows the number of children, under the age of eighteen that participate in recreational programs on a yearly basis in each of the responding Director’s towns (Child Participants). Accompanied by, in parentheses, the percentage of children participants in relation to the overall population served. The chart finally shows the number of children under the age of eighteen with disabilities that participate in recreational programs on a yearly basis in each of the responding Director’s towns (Child with Disability Participants). Accompanied by, in parentheses, the percentage of children with disabilities in relation to the number of children with participants in recreational programs on a yearly basis within each Director’s towns.
Table 1

*Town Population and the Number of Children Participating in Recreational Programs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Population Served</th>
<th>Child Participants</th>
<th>Child with Disability Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director 1</td>
<td>42,000</td>
<td>5,000 (12%)</td>
<td>200 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 2</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>5,186 (17%)</td>
<td>Less than 50 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 3</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>1,500-2,000 (12%)</td>
<td>75-100 (5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 4</td>
<td>47,000</td>
<td>To many to count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 5</td>
<td>9,500</td>
<td>1,020 (11%)</td>
<td>20 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 6</td>
<td>29,275</td>
<td>3,000 (10%)</td>
<td>25 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 8</td>
<td>18,000</td>
<td>2,500 (14%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 9</td>
<td>208,000</td>
<td>20,000 (10%)</td>
<td>300 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 10</td>
<td>38,000</td>
<td>9,000 (24%)</td>
<td>100 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 11</td>
<td>15,600</td>
<td>4,000 (26%)</td>
<td>50 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 12</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>800 (1%)</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 represents data from questions 3, 6, 7 and 10 in the survey instrument. It illustrates the number of programs available for children under the age of eighteen (Number of Programs for Children). It also illustrates the number of recreational programs open to all children, with or without a disability (Number of Programs open to all Children). Accompanied by, in parenthesis, the percentage of recreational programs open to all children in comparison to the total number of recreational programs offered to children under the age of eighteen. Question ten was asked as a way to reaffirm how many recreational programs are not inclusive for disabled children under the age of eighteen.

The chart finally shows the number of programs that are specially designed and open to children with disabilities (Number of Programs Solely for Children with Disabilities).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Number of Programs for Children</th>
<th>Number of Programs open to all Children</th>
<th>Number of programs not inclusive for Children with Disabilities</th>
<th>Number of Programs Solely for Children with Disabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director 1</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300 (100%)</td>
<td>Most are with an aid</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 2</td>
<td>Over 200</td>
<td>200 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 3</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 4</td>
<td>Numerous</td>
<td>Numerous</td>
<td>Very few</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 5</td>
<td>60-70</td>
<td>60-70 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 6</td>
<td>350</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 7</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>150 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 8</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>120 (75%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 9</td>
<td>100’s</td>
<td>100’s (100%)</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 10</td>
<td>300 +</td>
<td>175 (58%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 11</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 12</td>
<td>75 +</td>
<td>75 + (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Graph one represents data from question 8 in the survey instrument. It illustrates the number of Director’s who feel their programs sufficiently meets the needs of children with disabilities.

**Graph 1**

*Number of Director’s Who Feel Their Programs Sufficiently Meets the Needs of Children With Disabilities*

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Meeting the needs of Children with Disabilities

Not Meeting the needs of Children with Disabilities
Question 9 required respondents to utilize a text response. Ten Directors responded to question 9. This data was coded into three key themes.

**Theme One:** Recreational programs are open to all children (children with disabilities and children without disabilities). All ten Directors stated that most or all of their programs are open to all children. One of the Directors stated, “Disabled children are encouraged to participate in any of the programs.” Another Director stated, “All of our programs are open to anyone.”

**Theme Two:** Programs are adapted/modified to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Six of the Director’s acknowledged that there were program modifications made to accommodate children with disabilities. As stated by one Director, “We find ways to adapt the programs to individuals needs.” Another Director goes on to say, “If there is a child with specific needs and accommodations, we work to make the experience enjoyable.”

**Theme Three:** Directors seek assistance from outside organizations. Five of the Director’s listed specific instances where they sought help to accommodate the needs of children with disabilities. Some examples from the Director’s responses were: The use of interpreters for the hearing impaired, working with partners to provide programs for those with mobility and other challenges, using school personnel in guiding for the right accommodations and attending forums for children with differing abilities.
The graph below represents data from question 11 in the survey instrument. It illustrates the degree to which barriers are limiting the Director’s Recreation Departments. These barriers are attitudinal, architectural, financial and programmatic.

**Graph 2**

*Degree to Which Barriers are Limiting the Director’s Recreation Departments*

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**Question twelve required respondents to utilize a text response. Ten Directors responded to question twelve. This question was coded into four key themes.**

**Theme One:** Attitudinal (staff fears and apprehension of working with disabled children and societal perceptions). Two Directors commented on attitude of staff being a barrier. One Director stated, “I think you will always find young staff that are not always comfortable working with children with special needs, but we work with the staff and help them make the needed adjustments.”
Theme Two: Architectural (accessibility of facilities). Three Directors listed architectural barriers as a limiting factor in their department’s ability to provide programs for children with disabilities. “Facilities are not fully accessible” said one Director who further stated that, “Some facilities are out-dated.” Other architectural barriers included, a temperamental elevator, thresholds that make it difficult for wheelchairs and a playground site that is not handicap accessible.

Theme Three: Financial (securing funding to develop programs, purchase equipment and train staff). Two Directors listed financial barriers. One Director commented that they could not hire extra staff within their budget and sometimes used volunteers.

Theme Four: Programmatic (developing programs which are specifically geared for disabled children or adapted to include disabled children). Six Directors pointed out that they face programmatic barriers. One Director stated, “Our department should take a more proactive approach to not only understand the needs of the disabled population, but to actually produce programs that benefit them recreationally.” Another Director went on to say, “The limited number of programs the staff has provided is more related to the unfamiliarity to the type of programs that should be offered/provided.”

Question thirteen required respondents to utilize a text response. Six Directors responded to question thirteen. This question was coded into two key themes. This question asked Directors to list barriers not included in question twelve that limit their Department from providing recreational programs for children with disabilities.
Theme One: Knowledge/expertise. Two Directors expressed that their Department does not have the knowledge or expertise regarding children with disabilities. One Director stated, “We do not have the expertise. I would have to contract services out to people more qualified.”

Theme Two: Awareness (the parents of children with disabilities are not familiar with Recreational Departments ability to accommodate their child). One Director said, “Just getting parents to come to us and ask to allow their children to attend and let us provide the inclusion of the children.”

Discussion/Conclusion

A survey was sent out to 14 Directors of Parks and Recreation Departments in Monroe and Ontario Counties. A very high response rate was received, as 12 of the Directors responded. This provides a reliable representation of whether or not the needs of children with disabilities are met through local Parks and Recreation programming.

Table 1 illustrates that less than 2% of children participating in reporting town’s Parks and Recreation Programs have disabilities. That percentage is low, given that over 5% of children ages 5 – 17 have some type of disability (Brault, 2011). The low percentage of participation raises concern considering the number of benefits the Parks and Recreation Programs can provide. Murphy and Carbone (2008) stated, “All children benefit from physical activity, and children with disabilities are no exception. Participation of children with disabilities in sports and physical activity programs promotes physical, emotional, and social well-being.” (p. 1060).

According to Directors surveyed, over 90% of Parks and Recreation programs offered to children under the age of 18 in Monroe and Ontario Counties are open to all
children, both disabled and non-disabled. When asked a similar question later in the survey, Directors reported similar data. This reaffirmed that nearly all Parks and Recreation programs are inclusive to children with disabilities. Eight Directors responded that all of their programs are inclusive, one Director stated that very few are not inclusive, and another said that most are inclusive with an aid (Table 2). These results endorse the National Recreation and Park Association’s (NRPA) third pillar, social equity, that everyone in the community has access to the resources and programming of Parks and recreation agencies (Tulipane, 2012). Although local Parks and Recreation programs are inclusive to children with disabilities, there are very few programs solely for these children. Directors revealed that there are over 1,500 recreational programs for children, but only seven of those were listed as being solely for children with disabilities (Table 2). Even with the laws of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the best intentions of the NRPA, many with disabilities still experience both physical and program barriers at Parks and Recreation facilities. They do not have the same opportunities as people without disabilities (Skulski, 2007).

When asked if their programs sufficiently meet the needs of children with disabilities, the opinions of Directors were split. As graph 1 illustrates, six Directors either agreed or somewhat agreed that their programs are sufficiently meeting the needs of children with disabilities and five disagreed or somewhat disagreed that their programs are sufficiently meeting the needs of children with disabilities. In a related survey question, Directors were asked how their departments were meeting the needs of children with disabilities. Responses were categorized into three themes. Ten Directors responded to this survey question and all 10 responded that their recreational programs are open to all
children (Theme 1). Six of the ten Directors stated that their programs were adapted or modified to meet the needs of children with disabilities (Theme 2). Five of the ten Directors responded that their departments utilized assistance from outside sources to meet the needs of children with disabilities (Theme 3). These statements from the Directors align with the NRPA’s (1999) position statement on inclusion:

> Including people with disabilities in the fabric of society strengthens the community and its individual members. The value of inclusive leisure experiences in enhancing the quality of life for all people, with or without disabilities cannot be overstated (p 94).

Four barriers were presented to Directors that potentially limited their Department’s ability to provide sufficient programming for children with disabilities. The four barriers included attitudinal, architectural, financial and programmatic. The majority of Directors disagreed or somewhat disagreed that barriers were not a limiting factor for providing programming for children with disabilities. Nine of eleven Directors reported that attitudinal barriers were not a limiting factor, eight of eleven reported that architectural barriers were not a limiting factor and six of eleven reported that financial barriers were not a limiting factor (Graph 2). This contradicts an earlier study that says there is an inconsistency of the inclusion of children with disabilities in Community Recreation Programs due to a host of barriers (Scholl, Smith & Davison, 2005). However, some Directors agreed or somewhat agreed that barriers do limit their ability for providing sufficient programming. Three Directors reported that both architectural and financial barriers were limiting factors in their Department. Four Directors somewhat agreed that there were programmatic barriers (Graph 2). It is concerning that some Directors found
that architectural barriers were limiting their Department’s ability to provide
programming for children with disabilities since the ADA prohibits discrimination for the
disabled in public accommodations and commercial facilities (U.S. Department of Justice,
2009). When asked for other barriers that their Departments encounter, Directors listed
the following:

1. Knowledge and expertise regarding children with disabilities.
2. Awareness that parents of children with disabilities are not familiar with
   recreational Departments ability to accommodate their children.

Several limitations arose as questionnaire data was reviewed. Some of the Directors
used words and phrases rather than whole numbers for answers. For example, when asked
how many children participated in recreational programs on a yearly basis, one Director
responded, “Too many to count.” Other answers included terms such as; numerous, all,
very few, and ??. In addition some Directors used a range of numbers, rather than a specific
quantity. This made it very difficult to calculate averages and accurately analyze date. Also,
several Directors left one or more questions blank. Another item that could not be
controlled was the time it took Directors to complete their questionnaire. The time it took
varied greatly, between five and twenty minutes. One would have to question whether
some of the answers were inaccurate due to the short amount of time it took to complete
the questionnaire. There were however, elements of this study that were controllable. One
element was the sample the questionnaire was sent to. Perhaps a larger sample in a
broader area would have yielded different results or could have reaffirmed what was
found. Another element that could have been controlled was the wording of the questions
in the questionnaire. For example, to get a whole number response a phrase could have been added to the question asking to list the answer as a whole number.

This research was based off of the Ecological Theory that shows that development is influenced by environmental systems (Devine & McGovern, 2011). When applying this theory to my research, environmental systems represent barriers or limitations to providing sufficient programming. One single barrier may not be the cause of insufficient programming, rather a combination of barriers. Several systems may need to work together to provide sufficient programming for children with disabilities (Devine & McGovern, 2011).

Although the Directors revealed that nearly all of their programs are inclusive to children with disabilities, nearly half of those directors have reported that their programs do not sufficiently meet the needs of children with disabilities. These Directors listed several reasons for this. The reasons include barriers such as attitudinal, architectural, financial, programmatic, knowledge/expertise and awareness of programs. The other half of local Parks and Recreation Directors feel their programs are meeting the needs of children with disabilities because they state that all programs can be adapted or modified. Yet, very few children with disabilities are participating in these recreational programs.

Additional studies would be helpful to determine why children with disabilities are not more involved in Parks and Recreation programs. Surveying parents of children with disabilities as to why they are not utilizing Parks and Recreation programs for their children would be beneficial. Directors might further seek information from parents of children with disabilities regarding what programs would be most beneficial for these children. New knowledge was gained from Directors. They listed two additional barriers
that limit their Department from providing programming for children with disabilities. One such barrier was that parents are unaware that Parks and Recreation programs offered are inclusive to children with disabilities. Parks and Recreation Departments can be more specific in their promotion of their programs by making it clear that their programs are inclusive to all children, disabled or non-disabled. They should also make it clear that their programs can be modified/adapted to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Media and social media can play a key role in providing this information. A second barrier that Directors listed as a limiting factor in providing programming for children with disabilities was lack of knowledge and expertise of dealing with children with disabilities. Directors could seek out seminars and training for their staff to further prepare them for working with children with disabilities.
References


**Appendices**

**Appendix 1**

Invitation to Survey

Subject: Victor Parks and Recreation Intern needs your help.

Director of Parks and Recreation,

I am completing my undergraduate degree in Sport Management at St. John Fisher College and currently interning with the Victor Parks and Recreation Department. As part of my undergraduate study, I am examining programs available for disabled children within community Parks and Recreation departments as part of my senior thesis.
Your knowledge of your departments programming is of great importance to the successful completion of my study. Participation in this study will help community Parks and Recreation departments evaluate their current programming for disabled children. The findings of this study will make its readers look more closely at the inclusion of disabled children not only in Parks and Recreation programs but also in society as a whole.

I am asking for your assistance by completing a short survey regarding your department’s recreational programming. This survey will take between 8-10 minutes to complete. Please click on the link below or copy and paste the link into your browser to complete the survey by **April 9th, 2013**.

(Insert Link to survey)

This research and survey has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at St. John Fisher College.

Thank you very much for your assistance with my research. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at lab05140@sjfc.edu.

Sincerely,

Lauren Bauerlein                      Dr. Katharine Burakowski
St. John Fisher College               St. John Fisher College
Sport Management student              Assistant Professor of Sport Management
Lab05140@sjfc.edu                     kburakowski@sjfc.edu
Appendix 2

Reminder/Follow-up email

Director of Parks and Recreation,

I recently sent you an email asking for your response to a brief survey about recreational programs for disabled children. If you have already completed the survey, please recognize my sincere thanks. If you have not, please click on the link below to complete the survey. It will take 8-10 minutes to complete. I am extremely grateful for your help. Your input will help make this research meaningful and helpful to others in your field.

(Insert survey link)

If you cannot reach the survey using this link or you have any further questions please email me. Thank you again for your help completing this survey.

Sincerely,

Lauren Bauerlein                          Dr. Katharine Burakowski
St. John Fisher College                  St. John Fisher College
Sport Management student                 Assistant Professor of Sport Management
Lab05140@sjfc.edu                         kburakowski@sjfc.edu
Appendix 3

Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions.

Q13  Informed Consent

Project Title: Sufficient Programming for Disabled Children  
Researcher: Lauren Bauerlein  
Advisor: Dr. Katharine Burzowski  
Email: lab5416@sjfc.edu

This study is for the purpose of research leading to the completion of my senior thesis. This research is to examine programs available for disabled children within community Parks and Recreation departments. Participation in this study will help your Parks and Recreation department evaluate your current programming for disabled children. The findings of this study will draw conclusions about what is available for disabled children throughout Monroe and Ontario Counties.

Your participation involves completing the survey to follow. It should take between 5 and 10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research has little or no-risk. However, it may cause you to question if your department provides adequate programming for disabled children. Participation is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions and may withdraw from completing the survey at any time. No personally identifiable information will be associated with your responses in any published or reported results of this study.

If you have questions about this research please contact me, Lauren Bauerlein at lab5416@sjfc.edu. If you have any questions about your rights or research-related injury contact Dr. Katharine Burzowski at kburzowski@sjfc.edu, the Office of Academic Affairs at (585) 385-8554 or the Wellness Center at (585) 385-8280.

Click agree if you wish to partake in the survey or click disagree if you wish to exit the survey.

☐ Agree  
☐ Disagree

If Agree is selected, then skip to What is the approximate population of...
If Disagree is selected, then skip to End of Survey

Q1  What is the approximate population of the area your Parks and Recreation Department serves?

[ ]

Q2  How many recreational programs are available for children under the age of eighteen?

[ ]

Q3  Approximately how many children under the age of eighteen participate in your department’s recreational programs on a yearly basis (count children who participated in multiple programs once)?

[ ]

Q4  Approximately how many disabled children (physically or mentally impaired) under the age of eighteen participate in your department’s recreational programs on a yearly basis (count children who participated in multiple programs once)?

[ ]

Q5  How many recreational programs are open for all children under the age of eighteen?

[ ]
### Q6
How many recreational programs are specifically designed only for disabled children under the age of eighteen?

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### Q7
How many recreational programs are not inclusive for disabled children under the age of eighteen?

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### Q8
Our town's recreational programs sufficiently meet the needs of disabled children.  

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<th>Disagree</th>
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<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
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### Q9
How is your recreation department meeting the needs of disabled children?

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### Q10
To what degree do you agree that your recreation department is limited by the following barriers?

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<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<td>Attitudinal (Staff fears and apprehension of working with disabled children and societal perceptions)</td>
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<td>Architectural (accessibility of facilities)</td>
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<td>Financial (securing funding to develop programs, purchase equipment and train staff)</td>
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<td>Programmatic (developing programs, which are specifically geared for disabled children or adapted to include disabled children)</td>
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### Q11
Please explain why and how your recreation department's top rated barriers limit programming for disabled children.

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### Q12
Please list other barriers, if any that prevent your recreation department from providing programming for disabled children and to what degree are they limiting the ability to meet the needs of disabled children?

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