Social Inclusion through Recreation

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There are many social impacts that are affiliated with recreation. These social impacts can change the lives of people who interact and take part in leisure activities in the outside world. Even though people who are disabled work with non-disabled people, there is a lack of social connection between them. Recreation is one thing that can build a stronger connection. My paper focuses primarily on social inclusion for disabled people through recreation.

Experiencing a sense of belonging entails individuals having a valued set of social relationships. These relationships that they have developed are with the people who they have chosen. They choose these certain people because they believe they have something in common, and on the other hand, they have chosen them. People who have a strong social inclusion have a social circle that contains a wide variety of people. Some people have social relationships with only whom they engage with during specific activities and rarely see outside of those grounds. Other people may be seen in a wide assortment of settings. A sense of belonging is also associated with people feeling that they are accepted for whom they are and what they believe in. Individuals with disabilities lack this specific sense of belonging. The truth is that disabled people do not have many opportunities to meet peers with common interests or preferences. “Often they do not see persons with whom they desire to establish social relationships in more than a single context or setting, and face life in a society that, while quite good at pointing out the challenges they face, typically overlooks the gifts they offer.” (Abery)

A sense of presence in the community is also missing for people with disabilities. Participating in the community for activities which you are interested in is best described as being acknowledged in the community. This certain acknowledgement can also be amplified by someone saying hello to you in the hall, or stopping by your spot at work to have a quick chat, or even an invite to lunch break. “Closely observe how persons with disabilities are reacted to in public settings and you will find that people typically do one of three things. In some cases, they
appear to purposefully avert eye contact, possibly hoping that if they don’t acknowledge the person they will not have to interact. In other instances, the acknowledgment is negative as people make disparaging comments or jostle the person with a disability when they don’t move quickly enough through a door or across a street. The third common response is an initial over-zealous greeting, without pursuit of ongoing, deeper interaction.” (Abery) In this quote, Abery is explaining the lack of social inclusion for disabled people. Research shows that people who are disabled have much smaller social circles. Their social circles consist of family members, paid professionals, and associates from work.

When choosing individual recreational activities, people may need to first identify what exactly they like to do. There are a couple of things that you can do to assure yourself that you will have a positive recreational experience. You can make use of informal surveys and interviews. You do this by developing an informal survey that can help to develop an idea of what they like to do based on certain questions. Also, you can see picture of people who are engaging in the same activity that you are thinking about taking part in, and that can do a lot of convincing. You can also take a tour. Taking a tour is often one of the best ways for people with disabilities to identify their personal recreation preferences. Lastly, you could consider previous enjoyable experiences and go with what you know already.

In order to strengthen the relationships for the disabled, recreational activities are going to need to play a huge role. Leisure programs and recreational activities acquire a lot of characteristics that make them a good starting point for the social inclusion of people with disabilities and even for people without disabilities. Some of the characteristics of these settings encourage the skills and attitudes for any person that supports the development of relationships. Recreation and leisure programs help significantly to bring together children and even adults who share a common interest or preference. Most of your own friendships have to do with common interests in recreational activities rather than religious beliefs or occupations.
Another great characteristic of recreational programs is that meeting and interacting with these new people outside of work and your home is extended over a long period of time. These relationships are ongoing, which means you are going to meet more and more people socially through each other. “It is important to note that participants both with and without disabilities in recreation and leisure programs are potentially changed by the experience in ways that support social inclusion. Participants with disabilities have the opportunity develop new capacities and interests and to refine their social skills as they interact with and observe individuals who might typically not play a large part in their lives. Persons without disabilities discover that their peers with disabilities have abilities and gifts; similar interests, goals, and dreams for the future; and the capacity to establish and maintain reciprocal relationships. Through participation in inclusive recreation, the opportunity exists for participants to explore and cast aside myths and misconceptions about persons with disabilities and connect with each other as people who happen to be passionate about similar leisure activities.” (Abery) Abery’s quote explains how the participation in recreational activities benefits both disabled and people who are not and that is the really special part about it.

Recreational activities can help to strengthen the body. At age 12, a boy named Richard was diagnosed with polio which led to his legs being paralyzed. His legs were extremely weak and he was unable to stand up on his own strength. A few months later he received crutches and braces on his legs. His family ventured to Ontario wilderness. It had only been an hour or so after arriving at Mongoose Lake when this boy slipped on the moss with his crutches and fell into the water. The boy refers to falling into the water as his “immersion” and “reintroduction” into the wilderness and his “re-inclusion” to his favorite family activity. He states, “That early return to a challenging physical activity helped me overcome many of the misgivings I had about my “limitations” and more quickly reintegrate into family life, public schools, and society.” (Owen) The activity of swimming allowed Richard to be socially accepted by his family and that is a huge social impact of recreation.
Before children are paralyzed they play all types of sports such as baseball and basketball. They would also enjoy biking and adventuring with his friends in the neighborhood. After being paralyzed, children realize that the schools and parks back in the 1940’s had no organized programs to allow them to participate in these recreational activities. This limited paralyzed children to very few activities that consisted of swimming and canoeing.

Between 1946 and 1949 there was an extremely large emergence of wheelchair sports. This sudden emergence was accounted for largely by the injured war veterans that fought in World War II. The University of Illinois had a huge hand in helping with the coming out of wheelchair athletics. However, it was Great Britain who was responsible for the international recognition. Wheelchair athletics helps to teach balance, coordination, strength training, and teamwork. “The community recreational wheelchair sports program can be made available to people with a wider variety of abilities and disabilities than formally sponsored organized teams.” (Owen) This quote helps to show how this recreational activity is emerging and not only limited to one type of disability, or ability.

Another activity that helps to socially include disabled people is the Wilderness Inquiry. The Wilderness Inquiry was created in 1978. The organization believed that people of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of ability, could experience outdoor activities in the wilderness with appropriate staffing. The activities that took place on the Wilderness Inquiry included a campfire. Once the campfire was lit, everyone would sit around and introduce themselves, stating their name and a little bit about themselves. They would then give a word or two on what to expect from the outing. The participants would then go to bed inside of a tent with people they have never met before and this was a good way to socially meet people and get to know them. The next morning they would go canoeing together at the Yellowstone National Park. This activity built up strength and relationships. One of the biggest deals during the camping trip was the social connection that was gained for the participants and the concern that each person had for another while setting up camp, preparing for meals, cleaning up, loading canoes, and talking.
around the campfire cultivated strong social connections. “We shared his thrill. At our final meal together, we talked once more about what our expectations had been. We had canoed together for seven days. We had seen everything we had hoped for and more. Beyond our expectations, we shared the magical sense of achieving affection for one another. The Wilderness Inquiry mission was fulfilled. That success has been repeated on numerous occasions since then for us.” This quote demonstrates the appreciation that this particular person had for the outdoors and is a prime example of social inclusion through recreation.

One of the most popular recreational programs for making possibilities for people with disabilities is called Challenge Aspen. Challenge Aspen is a year round, non-profit organization that provides recreational and cultural experiences for individuals who have mental or physical disabilities. Challenge Aspen works with other companies to provide the children with the necessities and equipment for skiing, whitewater rafting, horseback riding, and fishing. Challenge Aspen also has camps for rock climbing, and music groups. Challenge Aspen is located in Snowmass Village and has access to four major mountains which is very helpful for skiing. “Challenge Aspen embraces social inclusion in many ways. While Challenge Aspen was initially created as a physical activity program for individuals with disabilities, we have found that the peer interaction between persons with and without disabilities has proven to strengthen our program as a whole. Challenge Aspen has the philosophy that the social inclusion process can be very successful, even though it is not the primary focus of our programs. We implement this process in a discreet manner, to ensure Challenge Aspen follows the mission of making possibilities for persons with disabilities. Not only has Challenge Aspen benefited from the social inclusion process, but the various families from around the United States that visit our program have also benefited.” (Degen and Barthomaus) This quote shows Degen and Barthomaus’ ability to view the social impacts of the recreational activities.
There is a great deal of places for people to build relationships through shared recreation activities. Here is a long list of activities that children and adults can partake in to socially build relationships through recreation.

- Neighborhood yards, play areas, and parks
- Community education and recreation programs for youth and adults
- Community sports leagues
- Faith communities
- Interest clubs (such as gardening, bridge, birding, book, and dancing clubs)
- Youth organizations (such as Scouting, Campfire, 4-H, church youth groups)
- Recreation and fitness center activities and programs
- Cultural and ethnic centers
- Community arts and theatre organizations
- School carnivals and family nights
- Open gym and swim times for the community at local schools and colleges
- Extracurricular activities in K-12 schools
- Early childhood play groups
- Community volunteer organizations
- Youth drop-in centers
- Neighborhood coffeehouses and bars
- Workplace sports teams and informal interest groups
- Nature centers

There are many ideas for encouraging children’s friendships through recreation. The first thing that a family can do is make friendship development a family priority in your household. By ranking friendship development high in family values, it allows children to have an urge to develop relationships with other children. Another thing parents should do is
become acquainted with other families. By doing this you are building a relationship for your children. You can become acquainted with other family members through schools functions and community recreation centers. Parents should also schedule their children’s time together. One of the biggest things that parents can do is to invite other children on family outings. There is nothing more bonding than taking another child camping with you to the mountains or on a skiing trip. This helps to build a strong relationship and to give the friend a sense of comfort. “As a means of seeking opportunities for children with and without disabilities to share experiences, families can explore neighborhood recreation resources, such as neighborhood parks, recreation centers, nature centers, and shopping malls, as well as organized leisure programs through organizations such as YMCA/YWCAs, scouting, and Jewish Community Centers. Children with and without disabilities might enroll in an activity class together, take part in a community event, play at a playground, or shop together.

Through building a shared history of experiences in the community, the bonds of friendship can be strengthened.” (McAvoy). That is what the parents can do to help children build friendships. There is also a large role for the recreation staff in the community to fulfill. The recreation staff can help out by welcoming all children in their recreation programs. The recreation staff can also lend a hand by ensuring architectural accessibility and program accessibility. Lastly, the staff can help by organizing a lot of after school functions. For children with and without disabilities to become friends, they must have opportunities to be together in recreation activities. Parents and community recreation staff all play an important role in creating such opportunities. The recreational activities also help tremendously with the deaf and blind. In order to involve the deaf and blind into social events, there were many medical considerations that needed to be taken into consideration. The considerations included shunts, joint instability, muscular conditions, eye conditions, orthopedic impairments, head and lung abnormalities, and self-injurious behaviors. Self injurious behaviors had to be considered the most. Reasons being that there can be a fear of the new
environment, the lack of ability to express their discomfort. The effects of self injurious behaviors range from pinching themselves to hitting their heads on objects. The Perkins-Deaf Blind school is extremely helpful to teaching their students how to interact in different situations. Their teachings lead to children who would never be expected to participate in recreational activities, to do so. By them taking part in recreational activities, it allows them to build strong relationships with children who are the same, and even with children who are not. Once again, recreation is helping the social lives of people needing friendship.

Today, there are many funds and charity events that take place to help fund recreational events for disabled people. The Northern Suburban Recreation Association (NSRA) is a partnership consisting of twelve governments. It is located in Illinois and its goal is to make recreation opportunities available for children and adults with disabilities. It was established in 1970 and is now serving over 160 communities. This association was created by governments responding to disabled families asking for more recreational opportunities. This association consists of five main issues. The first issue calls for the inclusion of everybody in recreational activities. This requires training for the staff members. The second issue is support of choice. This means that you can choose whether you are participating with disabled people or without. The third policy is asking for preferential service for residents of a community. The fourth is the agreement for communities with disabled children to place a high value for their children. Finally, there must be policies that address human resources at agencies and reinforce staff commitment to inclusion.

The NSRA has started a fund which was started to help aid communities in starting recreational activities for the children. NSRA has increased their numbers significantly as the years go by and have made many changes to many communities and have helped many families that were in need of help for their children. The NSRA is still working today to help disabled children be included in recreational activities.
The inclusion of recreation helps to bring strong social relationships to not only disabled people. All of the activities discussed can also aid people who do not have disabilities. It is both helpful and fun to explore the outside world and not only limit you to your home, office, or school. By these children interacting in the outdoors, it gives them a chance to feel like the other children which blocks out all of the negative feelings that they have for themselves. By interacting in everyday recreational events they feel alive and just like any other person.

Works Cited
