No Special Populations Division? No Excuse!!!

Programming for Special Populations in a Smaller Department

Susan Jenkins - Clayton Parks and Recreation Department

Define Smaller Recreation Departments

- Number of staff
  - Full time and Part-time
- Size of community
  - In City Limits and surrounding area
- Number of Department Facilities
  - Community Centers, Borrowed Facilities, etc.
- Budget

Clayton’s Department

- Staff
  - Full-time: Director, Athletic Supervisor, Program Supervisor, Secretary, 2 Park Maintenance
- Facilities
  - Building first community center
- Size of community
  - 13,000 in Town Limits with over 100,000 within 10 mile radius of Town Limits
Is there a Need in your Community for Special Needs Programming

- Talk with Special Olympics in the surrounding areas.
- Get to know support groups in the community and talk with them about programming ideas.

Finding Special Needs in your Community

- Identify the age group you would like to target.
- Talk with group homes, Special Olympics, work places, local community colleges, etc.
- Get to know parents and get their help with finding participants.

Why Program for Special Needs?

- Special needs are not reached in smaller communities and tend to get overlooked.
- Can start with small programs and expand.
- This population is happy with any type of program and will be extremely appreciative.
- They deserve programs just like anyone else.
Where to start?

- Start small and expand
- Dances work well with this group.
  - Easy to do with today's technology and do not have to pay for DJ.
- Cookouts
  - Luau, summer escape in the winter, etc.
- Prom
  - Most special needs have never been to a prom. Call local business and ask for help.
  - Ask participants and parents.

Day Camps - You Can Do It!

- Staff
  - Use your part-time summer staff. You will be surprised at how well they work with special needs individuals.
  - College Age and High School age are great resources for staff.
  - Use people you know would work well – if you have the opportunity to work with them in other situations such as part-time work, youth councils etc. then you can see their work ethic.
  - Talk with local high school and find out the students that help with the special needs classes.

Prepare Staff

- Meeting with staff and knowledgeable people in the area.
  - Special Olympics Coordinator
  - Group Home Coordinator
  - Local High School Teacher
  - Therapeutic Recreation Staff member of a close Recreation Department
  - A lot of resources to use in the community and the surrounding area
- Try not to scare the staff, but give examples of what they may encounter.
- Let parents of special needs participants talk with staff.
Staff is Ready - Now What to Do?

- Keep Camp Fun and Simple.
- Plan activities for the day with LOTS of backup plans.
  - Have a quick check list of games
  - Do not be afraid to switch games in the middle if the game is not working.
- Keep games simple, easy to explain and make sure to modify rules and games.
  - Music is important: Musical chairs, Freeze dance
  - Duck, Duck, Goose, Silent Ball (not so silent), four corners, 7-up
  - Get them outside - Kickball, relay races
- Arts & Crafts - things they can make and take home that day.
  - Visors they can decorate, bead necklaces and bracelets, tye-dye t-shirts, and many other crafts.

Field Trips - Always Fun and Interesting

- Field trips with special needs are fun, but you have to over prepare.
- Medicals and registration forms should always be with you, just in case.
- Talk with parents before you begin to see how the participants respond to going places.
- Where to go? Keep in mind they do not get to do a lot of things, so anywhere is wonderful.
  - Bowling
  - Movies
  - Putt-Putt
  - Out to eat
Other Plans for Day Camp

- Some suggestions for your camps to keep in mind.
- Last day is good to have a cook-out and let them invite parents to meet staff and their new friends.
- Allow time during camp for staff to talk with participants. The staff are considered new friends for the participants and they would like time to get to know the staff.
- Last day of camp is a good time to have a "Talent Show" and let the participants show off their talents. Also get the staff to do something goofy to end the show. It is a good wrap up to a great week.

Let’s take Special Needs Out of Town!!!

- First of all – Don’t Panic!!!
- Start Planning
  - Plan to go to familiar areas that you know – it makes it easier if you know the area and can suggest places to go for activities.
  - Talk with parents and participants about some of the activities they would like to do.
  - Call visitor’s center.
  - Talk with Chamber of Commerce – get a lot of brochures.
  - Make sure to tell places that you have a group of special needs.
  - Don’t be afraid to ask for donations or discounts from the places you are planning to visit.
  - Ask a couple of parents of participants to do some of the calling and contacting of places – they can get a lot done.

How to “Pick” Your Group?

- We went out of town for the first time with some of the participants from our day camp.
- Make sure the participants can handle going out of town for a couple of days.
- Work with a parent or someone that is familiar with participants and ask for their help with organizing the trip.
- We work with a local nonprofit organization to help with fundraising and organizing activities.
Places to Stay

- Find a community within the area that has houses/condos available to rent.
- Most tourist areas will have rental houses within one community that would be able to work with your group to get several houses close together.
- Chaperones at houses.
  - Parents/guardians that are willing to attend the trip and be at the houses.
  - Staff house - Why it is important to be separate.
  - Staff is in charge of getting meals together and ready for the participants. It is better for the staff to be in one house without participants.
  - Staff needs some down time without participants to be at their best for the activities.

Meals and Social Time

- How to prepare meals
  - All evening meals are prepared at the staff's house so the entire group can come together.
  - Choose meals that are large quantity.
  - Be ready to cook - younger staff has not had a lot of experience cooking. Let them clean.
- Impromptu Talent Shows
  - Special Needs love to showcase their talents, give them a chance.
- Cookout
  - Fun time to get everyone together and end the trip with a cookout and social time.
- Time with Participants
  - Make sure the staff interacts with the participants every chance they can; give them time to just sit and talk with participants.

What Can We Do?

- Choose activities that the participants and the staff can enjoy.
  - Activities such as go karts, putt-putt, shows, fishing, etc. are great places to take the group.
- Do not try to plan every minute of every day.
  - Make sure to allow for some free time for the participants and staff to "hang out."
- Look for free activities.
  - Nature walks, picnics, streams, etc. Things that are out of the ordinary that the group will enjoy because it is different and unique.
- Call places and talk with them on the phone about the group.
  - Tell them what type of group you have - you will be amazed at how willing some places are to work with special needs.
- Call local Parks and Recreation Departments in the area to find unique places.
- Use your friends.
Talk with Participants about what they would like to do.

- Have a meeting and ask the group to give you ideas of some activities they would like to do.
- Get a bunch of brochures and lay them out on the table and let them pick and choose.
- Take the time to listen to them and their reasons.
- Don’t assume that they do not know what type of activities they would like to do. The participants are one of your best resources for activity ideas.

Important Reminders

- Get to know your participants. Take the time to talk with the participants and really get to know them.
- Ask them what they like and design programs around their interests.
- Talk with parents/guardians and find out what they would like to see for their special needs individuals.
- HAVE FUN WITH THIS GROUP!!!! This group is the most appreciative group you will ever meet and once you take the time to interact with them you will have a blast. Don’t be afraid to joke around with them – they love to laugh and have fun. Relax and have fun with the group, you will end up with some great stories after working with this group.

Questions??

- Susan Jenkins
  - Clayton Parks and Recreation Department
  - PO Box 879
  - Clayton, NC 27528

- 919-553-1555
- sjenkins@townofclaytonnc.org