

**National Local Government Community Development Conference**  
**“Riding on the Rapids of Change”**  
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<i>Title of Presentation:</i>	Encouraging Community Recreation for Everyone
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<i>Format:</i>	Workshop

## **1. Introduction**

People with disabilities are often isolated and lonely due to physical, emotional or social barriers. This has the two-fold effect of lowering people’s self-esteem and their confidence to interact with others in the general community. Further, there is no gain towards increasing community awareness and acceptance of people with disability.

Community focused recreation is essential for people with disability because it is the most effective way that people can integrate into the community – they are participating in the same activities and lifestyle. Recreation is the great equaliser, it is where people’s abilities are focused on rather than their medical condition or impairment. Community recreation is where everyone has the opportunity to contribute, and where the unique gifts of all people can be recognised, and where people are known as individuals, not by their condition or label.

The main purpose of Recreation Network is to facilitate people with a disability to integrate into community recreation activities. We believe that the concept of free, informed choice is essential in recreation and is very much related to assisting people with disability to develop and realise their aspirations.

That is why we are keen to develop strong links with Local Government – because it has been proven that Local Government can be a very powerful force in increasing the participation of people with a disability in the community.

Ever since the “Building Bridges” conference for local government personnel ten years ago, it has been recognized that it was a requirement to incorporate the needs of people with disability into the planning process for Recreation.

However, this goes much further than the Principles and Objectives of the Disability Services Act (1986) and Local Government Legislation. It goes beyond the requirement for ramps and accessible toilets. It’s about having an “accessible attitude”- to accepting that each person is unique, but has the same right to be involved in the community.

This session is an opportunity to share initiatives and develop creative methods of embracing people with disability into Community Recreation.

## **2. Benefits of Recreation**

We are all aware of the positive benefits of recreation and leisure. Participants are invited to suggest some personal reasons of their own.

Beresford (1997) in “Charting the Future”, clarifies that sport, recreation and leisure provide health, physical, mental, social and economic benefits to the individual and the community. These benefits include:

- Skill Development
- Alleviating isolation, loneliness and boredom;
- Facilitating friendships, social networks and community involvement;
- Acting as an equalizer and as a means of gaining social acceptance;
- Developing competencies in a wide range of areas;
- Coming into contact with people who believe in you;
- Experiencing independence, fun, adventure and friendship
- In a broad sense, the economic benefits of the recreation industry and the indirect economic benefits of increased participation levels,
- In the broadest sense, building communities inclusive of people with disabilities.
- Building self esteem, self-confidence, developing and maintaining friendships, gaining connections to valuable human and physical resources and experiencing a greater sense of belonging to a community. Many people discover through leisure that they:
  - Have certain gifts and talents;
  - Can contribute something to their communities;
  - Are risk takers and enjoy adventure;
  - Have a lot to teach others;
  - Can master a certain skill;
  - Can find some meaning to their life outside work;
  - Can express themselves in a creative way;
  - Feel a sense of being connected to a larger group;
  - Have a feeling of accomplishment.

*(Disability Services Commission: Recreation Review,2000; Australian Sports Commission,1997; Brincat, 1994; DePauw & Gavron,1995; Hutchison & McGill, 1992; Hutchison, 1990; Labonte, 1996; Lynch,1991)*

### **3. Meaning of inclusion**

Nirje (*in Flynn & Nitsch, Eds, 1980*), states that to be included in the community people need to be integrated:

- Physically – to be able to experience normal rhythms of life in ordinary physical environments;
- Functionally – to be able to function in, and have access to, ordinary environments like restaurants, swimming pools, toilets and transport;
- Socially – to be able to develop interpersonal and impersonal social relationships in the community;
- Personally – to be able to have a satisfactory private life with meaningful relationships with relatives, partners or friends;
- Societally – to be able to exercise legal rights and opportunities for self-fulfilment through respected expressions of self-determination; and
- Organizationally – to be supported by organizational forms and administrative structures with generic services as much as possible.

### **4. The role of Local Government in relation to recreation for people with disabilities**

Local government is the major provider of community sport and recreation services in Australia, spending more than a billion dollars per year on sporting and recreational infrastructure. Consequently, local government is in a unique position to influence and resource local communities so that people with disabilities, who comprise approximately 18.2 percent of the

population, can be fully involved in the life of the community. (*Australian Sports Commission, 1997; City of Hawthorn, 1990; Mowbray, 1992; O'Meara, 1993; O'Neill, 1994*)

The document commissioned by Recreation Network in 1997 "Charting the Future", by Marilyn Beresford found that participants in the study believed that it was the responsibility of Local Government to ensure that:

- The widest range of recreation and leisure opportunities and facilities are readily available in their communities;
- Those opportunities represent the best possible level of service for the community;
- Community members are made aware of the benefits of recreation; and
- Community members are provided with information about the recreation and leisure opportunities available in their communities.

It was also acknowledged that one of the fundamental roles of local government is to ensure that people with disabilities are able to enjoy the recreation and leisure opportunities available to others in the community.

Strategies suggested by the participants in the study to achieve this outcome include:

- Identification of the recreation needs of individuals with disabilities and ensuring that they are able to access the services and programs;
- Having staff who are welcoming of people with disabilities;
- Training of both local government and private providers of recreation and leisure;
- Ensuring that all local government services are used to best advantage for people with disabilities involving spreading their focus more widely, for example, utilizing an existing local government transport service to assist people having difficulties getting to a particular group of activity;
- Determining numbers of people with disabilities using recreation and leisure facilities;
- Ensuring that buildings are accessible at the building stage, taking note of advice from agencies already working with people with disabilities;
- Progressive correction of existing physical access problems;
- Encouragement of private organisations to make sure buildings and programs are designed to be accessible for people with disabilities;
- Lifting the profile of people with disabilities
- Employment/contracting of or consulting recreation advisers with expertise in the area of supporting people with disabilities
- Employment/contracting of support workers on site for those people with disabilities who have high support needs and find it difficult to recreate without support;
- Working cooperatively with disability agencies to gain specialist advice and support from staff, and in gaining support workers for people with high support needs;
- Assisting local community groups to gain funds to assist people with disabilities to be aware of, and to access, recreation and leisure services;
- Providing information to local recreation groups on how to assist people with disabilities to participate;
- Leading the private sector by example and setting best practice principles in relation to inclusion of people with disabilities in recreation and leisure services;
- When contracting out recreation and leisure services, retaining a role on the management committee and developing contracts that require inclusion of people with disabilities;
- Encouragement of a cultural change in local government so that council staff work and think differently ensuring they consider the recreation and leisure needs of all community members as a matter of course.

*Appendix 1 of "Charting the Future" lists the participants of the study, and includes Local Government Authority representatives, Recreation Network staff and people with disabilities. "Charting the Future" will be available at the workshop session.*

## **5. Disability Standards**

In Western Australia, disability services provided or funded by the Disability Services Commission are required to meet the Disability Service Standards, although local government authorities are not required to meet those eight standards.

However, in line with those Disability Service Standards, Beresford,(1997) identified that each person with a disability has the same rights as others in the community to:

- Access recreation and leisure services;
- Receive services which meet his or her individual needs or personal goals;
- Participate and be involved in the life of the community;
- Develop and maintain skills and participate in activities that enable him or her to achieve a valued place in the community; and
- Raise, and have resolved, any complaints or disputes he or she may have regarding recreation and leisure services.

## **6. Legislation**

As stated in "Charting the Future" (Beresford, 1997), planning for the social inclusion of people with disabilities involves recognition of their physical, social and personal needs.

It also involves recognition by councils of the need to review all organizational processes so that they ensure inclusion.

The work of Local government in this area is underpinned by legislation. Local government authorities are now legislatively required to ensure that people with disabilities receive the same rights as other residents and be included in existing services available to the community. A great deal has been done in the area of local government to assist people with disabilities to access their right to recreation and leisure options.

Developing outcomes for people with disabilities in their local communities has been given added impetus by the Local Government Act, 1995, with its moves to decentralize planning to the local level and shift accountability more towards the communities served by councils.

A range of strategies have been developed by different local government authorities to facilitate the inclusion of people with disabilities.

One of these strategies was the introduction in March 1997 of a joint Recreation Network/Eastern Metropolitan Local Authorities Group Recreation Service which aims to support the Shire of Swan and City of Belmont in their provision of an integrated approach to recreation provision for people with disabilities.

## **7. Barriers to participation**

The Disability Services Commission's Recreation Review identified barriers as intrinsic and environmental. As stated in the Commission's literature review, Smith et al (1996) describe intrinsic barriers as arising from an individual's own limitations. This can include a lack of knowledge, health issues, physical or psychological problems and poorly developed social interaction skills. Environmental barriers are external to the individual, and include attitudes of service providers and participants, access issues, transportation difficulties, economic barriers, availability of services and lack of information.

The Review identified a number of “external barriers” or issues, which continue to restrict or impede the full participation by people with disabilities in recreational activities.

### **7.1 Demand and Unmet Need**

Feedback from written submissions and forums facilitated by the Disability Services Commission as part of the review clearly identified a number of areas of unmet need, including the lack of services in country regions and the lack of services for specific disability groups.

### **7.2 Staff and Volunteer Training and Recruitment**

It is vitally important for there to be qualified, competent and positive assistance to support people with disabilities to be included in recreational activities. This applies to both salaried staff as well as volunteers.

### **7.3 Transport**

Many people with disabilities have difficulties in accessing public transport. Services are infrequent especially in the outer metropolitan areas. A recommendation to overcome this is to ensure that all local government services are used to the best advantage for people with disabilities. For example, spreading the focus of transport services to include assistance to people with disabilities in accessing their recreation activities.

### **7.4 Cost**

For many consumers their sole source of income is a pension. For people with disabilities there are not only the costs associated with accessing recreation, but also the entrance fees for their support person.

### **7.5 Access**

Although there have been significant moves towards improving physical access, it remains an issue for many people with disabilities. Despite intensive input and major improvements in recent years, access is still being identified as a primary barrier.

### **7.6 Community Education**

One of the identified barriers in accessing recreational opportunities for many people with disabilities was the perception that there was a lack of acceptance of people with disabilities in the general community.

### **7.7 Information**

Another common theme was the need for better and more up-to-date information on recreation services. Consumers and service providers indicated that they required regular updates and wanted a centralised point where they could readily access information.

It was suggested that all recreation information that is available to people with disabilities needs to focus on whether the facility is accessible, it can be reached using public transport and whether people with disabilities will be welcomed.

## **8. Strategies for change**

Some strategies, as suggested by Beresford (1997) include:- better marketing of council services, the need to ensure that all staff have access to disability awareness training, and the need to improve consultation processes. Specific strategies for change are detailed in the “Charting the Future” document.

Participants will be invited to discuss and detail their strategies for inclusion.

## **9. Local Government initiatives in the last 10 years**

According to Beresford (1997), a number of significant initiatives have occurred in Western Australia to assist people with disabilities to participate in the recreation and leisure options of their choice. Under the Western Australian Disability Services Act, 1993, local government authorities have been required to develop and submit Disability Service Plans to the Western Australian Disability Services Commission. Some Councils have enhanced their Disability Service Plans through the development of additional material and new services.

These include:

- South East Metropolitan Local Authorities Group “Improving Recreation Opportunities for people with Disabilities in the South East Metropolitan Region” (1992)
- City of Cockburn and Melville – Recreation Access Project (O’Meara,1993)
- The City of Canning’s Community Inclusion Project Resource Kit (1995)
- Recreation Network Inc and the City of Wanneroo Disability Awareness Project (1995)
- Shire of Roebourne’s Leisure Buddy Program (1996)
- Eastern Metropolitan Local Authorities Group (EMLAG) and Recreation Network Inc’s Joint Recreation Advisory Service (1997)

There are other programs and initiatives that have been and are being developed by Local Government Authorities which are hoped will be revealed in this session at the conference.

## **10. Model of best practice - Recreation Network**

Recreation Network uses a few service delivery types:

- One-to-one leisure counselling service which assists individuals to determine their goals and aspirations in leisure, examine their skills and limitations, identify their local resources and become involved;
- Leisure education which is usually a structured program to teach the individual to try new recreation experiences and assess their suitability; and
- The Leisure Buddy program which attempts to pair a person with a disability with someone from their community who is willing to share their recreation involvement – both volunteer and paid buddies are being trailed at present.

Recreation Network believes that the challenge for disability service providers is to encourage the generic facilities and services to include people with disabilities directly without intervention from the specialists.

Beresford (1997) recognized that the community inclusion process faces many challenges, not least of which is the personal disconnectedness experienced by many people with disabilities. Friendship plays a critical role in the lives of people with disabilities just as it does in the lives of people in the community. There are rich opportunities for expanding relationships where people are participating in shared activities and interests. (*Hutchison, 1990*)

The ongoing limitation with the leisure buddy scheme is that it is dependent on volunteers, and recruitment has many issues, not the least is the lack of people willing to make the commitment. With 2001 being the International Year of the Volunteer, this issue has been highlighted, and there are many promotional opportunities available through government departments and the media.

## **11. Building Bridges**

In March, 1990 a conference entitled “Building Bridges” was presented for local government recreation personnel. A common theme throughout the conference was recognition of the requirement to incorporate the needs of people with disabilities into the planning process. A requested outcome of the Conference was a further opportunity for local government personnel to learn more about the Act and its implications to their services. The resulting seminar, held in September, 1990 “The Disability Services Act (1996) and Local Government Recreation Provision”, was organised by Recreation Network Inc, the Institute of Recreation (WA) and the South West Local Authorities Management Group.

The findings of this seminar were that:

- There needs to be a much better marketing of the Disability Services Act
- More information and resources to Local Government personnel are required in order to access funds and develop initiatives at the local level.
- There is a strong need for better networking between Local Government Authorities and Specialist service providers

It is now more than 10 years later, and the question needs to be asked – have these things happened?

## **12. Workshop Outcomes**

The outcomes of today’s workshop depends on the participants initiative to plan and incorporate people with disabilities into local government resources and facilities.

Participants will be divided into groups of service providers, local government representatives and individuals. Each group will be asked to address the same four questions that were asked at the Local Government seminar in 1990, along with the additional question of whether the findings of the 1990 seminar have been furthered.

*Questions:*

1. What are the needs of people with disabilities?
2. What exists in your community?
3. What strategies are available to ensure that the recreation needs of people with disabilities are addressed?
4. What strategies will you adopt and implement to ensure the needs of people with disabilities in your area are met?

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