



National Recreation and Park Association

Parks: Return & Restore Case Studies – Colorado Springs, Colorado

Colorado Springs, Colorado, is a community that understands sports, healthy lifestyles, and the importance of being active outdoors. With the United States Olympic Committee headquarters and training facility in the community, the Fort Carson Army Base nearby, and the beautiful Pikes Peak in the background, this is a community where active living is the norm, not the exception. This includes children and adults who are living with a disability who participate in community based park and recreation programs with the Therapeutic Recreation Program.

The department serves over 1 million people annually with programming for all ages including specific programming for those with developmental and/or physical disabilities. The three staff members oversee programming including aquatic and ice activities, adult and youth sports, community centers, therapeutic recreation and activities adapting programs and services to meet the needs of the people in Colorado Springs. Also, the program is a Paralympic Sports Club with the United States Olympic Committee and works closely with the Fort Carson Warrior Transition Battalion (WTB).

What makes this program successful? According to Therapeutic Recreation Specialist Diane Ridderhoff, “Funding that provided an additional staff member to focus on developing partnerships including the Fort Carson WTB. We had been working with them in the past with a part time focus, but having one dedicated staff position to focus on incorporating injured service members in sport and recreation has made a huge difference.”

What are the best practices for working with a Warrior Transition Unit or Battalion? “Establish a positive relationship with face-to-face meetings. Also, outline specifically the service your agency can provide and how your programs can enhance and compliment the services that they already provide,” Ridderhoff continues. “We also had a good experience by providing experiential programming demonstrations for the Commander, staff and soldiers to introduce the program.”

Other Lessons Learned:

- Increase exposure and awareness of local programming opportunities in local media, partnerships, and with stakeholders.
- If working with a military unit, develop the backing of commanding officers. Also, invite commanders to workout with participants.
- Continuous communication with partners; emails, phone calls and in-person meetings to develop long term plans that work for all involved.
- Fundraising makes additional staff time possible to develop effective outreach and partnerships.