



Salt Lake County Park and Recreation Case Study

Parks: Return & Restore

Communication is not always easy, especially when you are working with partner organizations to reach shared goals. This was the challenge that faced Salt Lake County Park and Recreation as they are building their program for injured veterans as part of their adaptive recreation department.

After informing their partners on the services and assistance they could provide, the doctors and V. A. staff who work with injured veterans daily still had a difficult time seeing the adaptive recreation program as anything but single event programming. According to Therapeutic Recreational Specialist and program director, Jeff Burley, “it was difficult for them to think of us as a continuous program they could access at any time. It doesn’t have to be one-time events or single activities.” Outreach is always difficult, but it may be even more of a challenge when your partners perceive you only as one type of program.

To overcome this challenge, Burley and his staff set up regular meetings with V.A. staff to let them know the scope of workshops, events, and group lessons. “It finally clicked that they could tell us their needs and their schedule instead of waiting for us to organize events.” Continues Burley, “so many organizations are working under such great constraints that they forget to ask or communicate a need.” Program needs to expand outreach and high quality programming included transportation for individuals who required lift vans, basic supplies for different sessions and access to shared equipment.

A new energy has now been established between the two partners and they are starting to plan long-term interrelated goals together. This is more beneficial for both agencies and veterans creating sustainable recreation and fitness programs that can be utilized during and after their treatment is complete. Spending the time to work with each therapist and learning about their individual function within the V.A. has led to a breakthrough. It has aided us in how the adaptive recreation and park department could be a continuous resource and led to additional referrals.

Burley suggested to aid communication, create a list of resources that your organization can utilize or share with partners. Second, ask your partner organization to create a wish list. It may need to be edited to stay within your resources and mission, but it is a place to start increasing communication. “Be sure to be honest with your partner organization of what is within possibilities. Too much outside of our normal function and it really doesn’t benefit forward progress.”



Now that some of the programs are established Burley states, “it is a great feeling when I hear about V.A. staff and veterans taking part in park and recreation programming at our different facilities outside of the adaptive recreation department. It shows a higher level of inclusion is being attained.” The goal of many adaptive recreation programs is to have individuals feel included and welcome in equal or equivalent programming throughout the entire park and recreation department every day.

Lessons Learned:

- Create list of possible offerings for partner organizations
- Ask partners for the needs of the clients
- Spend the time developing relationships with each staff member of partnership