



# National Recreation and Park Association

## **Parks: Return & Restore Case Studies – Reno, Nevada**

Reno, Nevada is a haven for outdoor sports enthusiasts. With the year round beauty of mountains and lakes, Reno has endless possibilities for people of all abilities who love to ski and snowboard in the winter, and swim, hike, bike and kayak in the summer.

The City of Reno, Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department places great importance on meeting the needs of people with disabilities in therapeutic recreation and this is demonstrated in everything they do. Their program is led by Therapeutic Recreation Specialist April Wolfe and includes one additional staff member.

Like other programs across the nation in the last two years the program has seen its share of ups and downs including the program being heavily impacted by budget reductions and a struggle with its outreach to injured veterans in the area. According to Ms. Wolfe "We have had a lot of challenges this last couple of years and like many park and recreation programs nationwide, we have developed new methods, realigned our priorities and forged new alliances to meet our goals."

Over the years, Reno has been able to remodel and design new buildings with accessibility and functionality in mind. There is universal fitness equipment at one of the gyms; the municipal golf course has single-rider accessible golf carts, an adaptive hitting chair and an automatic tee for practice; parks have accessible playgrounds with 'poured in place' surfacing, transfer stations and low play components that have been added; and ramped access is available at the Truckee Whitewater Park.

The Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department also provides a creative solution by offering an equipment rental program for people to try out and use sporting wheelchairs and other equipment often needed for adaptive recreational activities. Leagues, classes and sporting camps are also provided throughout the year to people of all ages. Also, Reno leverages its partnerships with the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and adaptive sports programs to improve its service to people with disabilities.

Connecting with the local Veterans Administration as an active community partner has taken effort to understand the process. Ms. Wolfe continues "We learned that it takes time and perseverance to access the right people within the Veterans Administration system. But once we did, the VA was excited to work together to get more injured veterans involved in city programs." The VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System now provides the adaptive recreation newsletter in veteran registration packets, is assisting with recruitment for the upcoming Military Sports Camp, and the city is

participating in the VA's Welcome Home Events. This partnership has been key in expanding the City's program.

**Other Lessons Learned:**

- Be persistent and patient in developing partnerships.
- Fundraising makes additional staff time possible to develop effective outreach and partnerships.
- Network with other park and recreation agencies with adaptive and therapeutic recreation departments either through NRPA or USOC. By collaborating you can learn best practices and energize each other to expand programming.