

Disability Express

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Disability Express!! This is an exciting phrase if you are a person with a disability; or you represent an agency that provides services for disabled travelers; or you are a staff person who promotes independent living behavior for individuals with disability. Happiness in travel is the sense of achieving self-confidence from handling a situation and not being consumed by fear.

Most people experience some type of disability during their lives and about 5-10% of the U.S. population lacks the physical mobility necessary to enjoy personal travel with ease. According to the Health Interview Survey conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics in 1979 (the latest year for which fully tabulated results are available), some 31.5 million Americans, or 14.6% of the non-institutionalized population, are limited in some way by a chronic health condition (DeJong and Lifchez, 1983).

The following are several interesting and relevant statistics (National Council on the Handicapped, 1988): Some 36 million persons, approximately 20% (two out of 11 people) of the population in the U.S., have some type of disability or mobility impairment.

- 6 million are wheelchair-bound; 7 million use walkers
- 65% earn less income than the general population
- of the 2,304,000 in the disabled work force, 663,000 are blind/visually impaired, 950,000 are deaf/hearing impaired, 60,000 are wheelchair-bound, 631,000 have missing or mal-functioning limbs and 100,000 have respiratory ailments.

It has only been within the last ten years that businesses facilitating travel and tourism have begun to more clearly recognize special needs



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of this rather large group of people. This recognition is apparent through the development of sales promotion literature and specialized services; the making of more technologically accessible facilities; and pronounced efforts by the marketing distribution system to pave the way for this segment's desire to enjoy the same rights afforded others.

Robert Zwicky, president of Whole Persons Tours, Inc. and editor of the world's only magazine for disabled travelers, *The Itinerary*, notes "travel is a painless way of letting people with disabilities see other people in similar situations express how independent they can be. Travel can have an overall impact on their lifestyles."

Zwicky's "five favorite easy-to-plan accessible vacations" include Disneyworld, the most accessible attraction in the U.S.A.; the island of Oahu with wheelchair accessibility along the water's edge; most U.S. national parks; Washington, D.C., including the Smithsonian Institute; and the state of California, having the largest population of young, disabled persons (Zwicky, 1988).

Travel as a Treatment Modality

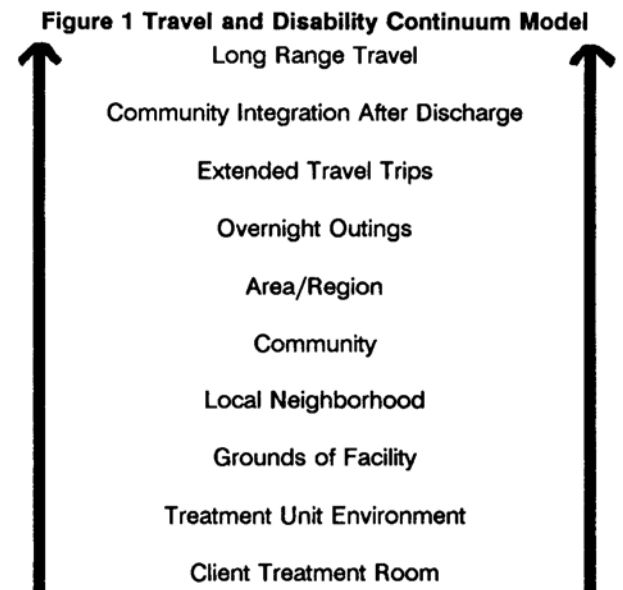
Travel as a rehabilitative or treatment modality is often a part of the therapeutic recreation specialist's approach to treatment and personal development.

Travel trips may be very structured with dependency-oriented features or extremely independent behavior oriented to the self-created style of travel. Amount of structure may depend on whether the client is receiving care in a clinical, residential or community-based environment; treatment stage; the philosophy of the treatment agency and staff; individual differences existing between persons with disability; or whether the disabled consumer has effectively integrated into social environments.

Travel enhances general health, lifestyle development, attitudes and well-being, as well

as affecting other personal characteristics. Travel provides opportunities to test new abilities in meeting the demands and uncertainties of new environments. Personal independence, risk-oriented behavior, social interaction and altering of reinforcing attitudes can be by-products of travel-related experiences.

It is the opinion of the authors that greater emphasis needs to be placed upon the therapeutic values of travel in the total treatment process of clinical residential and community-based treatment environments for the varied populations being served. We recognize that the majority of therapeutic recreation specialists already provide travel experiences as a function of their comprehensive therapeutic recreation or activity therapy program. (See Figure 1.)



Travel related programs may vary from a passive travel-oriented audio-visual production viewing to community-integration outings in local environments to group vacation trips.

Additional activities could be interspersed: travel/trip discussions between client and therapist in the confines of the client's room; use of

the treatment facility's grounds and amenities; out-trips to the neighborhood, local community or region; with some clientele, all-day outings or overnight trips in the form of shopping trips, day camps, outdoor education/recreation activities and attendance at special events or attractions could be planned.

In the United States, many travel trips or vacation programs are available for clientele being served by agencies, particularly the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled. Several of the special recreation districts in Illinois are well-recognized for their vacation travel programs that include ski trips to the mountains of Colorado and camping trips to other state destinations. Kentucky Vacations, Inc. in Owensboro promotes travel opportunities for consumers by utilizing parks in Kentucky plus Tennessee, Alabama and nearby others for base lodging. This agency annually sponsors several cruise ship vacations for developmentally disabled clients.

The general intent of a continuum of travel programs for clientele served is to meet many of their psycho-social, leisure and personal development needs. It is hoped that the carry-over value of these travel programs will have long-term implications toward community integration and long-range lifestyle patterns of clients following their discharge.

Therapeutic recreation specialists are urged to become more familiar with available literature and resource materials that relate to travel and disability. Inquire about existing exemplary travel programs with which your clients are familiar. Look to opportunities of expanding the scope of leisure education/counseling programs to include travel-related content. Examine the travel and disability continuum in terms of potential short- and long-term goals and objectives for impacting upon client needs. Pay attention to progress that is being made in the travel industry and support

services that impact on people with disability at travel. These are suggestions that can assist the therapeutic recreation specialist in becoming an integral part of the travel and disability movement.

Results of Our Research

In the authors' research project on travel and disability at Southwest Missouri State University, we have observed several themes in the literature including:

- patterns and trends in travel by disabled individuals and groups
- advocacy for travel as a component of independent living
- travel industry sales promotion literature for the disabled traveler
- specialized services directed toward the disabled traveler
- accessible characteristics of specific travel destinations
- exemplary efforts directed toward the disabled traveler by the travel destination industry
- travel tips for persons with disability
- information materials of assistance to the travel agent or tour director who serves disabled travelers
- communications information, including toll-free telephone numbers for select resources
- general resource materials and publications on travel and disability
- special travel trip itineraries
- access guides to destinations, attractions and cities
- public transportation system travel tips for disabled consumers
- impact of travel on the lifestyle, health and well-being of the disabled traveler
- incentives initiated by the travel industry to encourage travel by disabled persons
- unique travel experiences for disabled persons

- case studies of successful travel experiences by the disabled
- programming travel trips as a treatment modality function in clinical, residential or community-based settings

In view of the time given to us for this session, our presentation will focus more specifically upon only a few of these topics.

Sales Promotion Literature

Rehabilitation, travel and hospitality industry, natural resource and government tourism organizations today are publishing a multitude of guides (guidebooks and brochures) for the traveler. This literature often contains either information specific to the disabled population or focuses completely upon accessibility for that market segment. Some classic examples include:

- *Access America, U.S.* National Park Service. This is also available in sections. An example is "Access Yosemite National Park: An Atlas & Guide for Visitors with Disabilities."
- *International Hotel Guide*, The International Hotel Association (Paris).
- "Accessible Tokyo," The Japanese Red Cross Language Service Volunteers.
- *Holidays in the British Isles: A Guide for Disabled People*, The Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR). This seems to be one of the most comprehensive guides of its kind in the world. It lists special services, organizers, accommodations, detailed regional descriptions, pubs, transportation systems, available useful related publications, facilities, ideal places to visit.
- *Holidays and Travel Abroad. A Guide for Disabled People*, RADAR.
- "The Handicapped Driver's Mobility Guide," The American Automobile Association.
- *Traveler's Guide for the Disabled*, The Automobile Association (U.K.). This unique publication includes a gazetteer of accommodations, leisure centers, a listing of other useful publications, addresses for assistance places to visit, country parks and picnic sites.
- "The Access Guide to Bermuda for the Handicapped Traveller," Bermuda Department of Tourism.
- "Portugal: Tourist Guide," Portugal Tourist Information Center.
- "SCD Holiday '89," The Scottish Council on Disability.
- "Swiss Hotels for Handicapped Persons," Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Körperbehinderte (SAK).

Numerous travel industry newsletters focusing on destinations, accessible attractions, restaurants and lodging are also being published.

Specialist Services

The most noted specialized service organization in the U.S. is The Traveling Nurse's Network with headquarters in Vancouver, Washington. It provides a pool of registered companion nurses prepared for any disabled traveler's trip, regardless of the disability—diabetes, dialysis, cardiology, respiratory illness, spinal cord injury, vision and hearing impaired, psychiatric (Nieman, 1989).

Organizations are appearing that provide companion guide services suitable for the pace of the handicapped. Take-A-Guide Ltd. in London is just one example ("Take-A-Guide," 1989).

Exemplary Efforts: More Accessible Facilities

In the past and even today, one of the greatest complaints has been the lack of accessible facilities. Handicapped travelers make up a segment of the travel market that is growing and is deservedly receiving greater consideration in

the physical design of tourism facilities (Mill and Morrison, 1985).

While it seems that the wheelchair-bound person is still frequently barred from expressing adventuresome or exotic taste in travel, more governments at different levels are passing laws requiring that facilities be accessible at least to the physically impaired. For private facilities, this is especially true where the public has made some tax dollar investment.

Although the job may never be complete, it is becoming far less difficult to locate accessible rest rooms, telephones, food concessions, vending machines, drinking fountains, motor vehicle parking and building entrances. Today, many public natural resource recreation areas visited by tourists, such as parks, recreation areas and forests have braille trails, paved trails or concrete walks, wheelchair-accessible fishing docks and camping facilities.

The association to which all airport managers belong in the U.S. has set forth airport design criteria. Major airline carriers generally have wheelchairs available at all locations. Most airlines have narrow-aisle wheelchairs for passengers who are totally incapacitated (Airport Operators Council International, 1985). Wheelchairs can often be checked with luggage on airline flights, but one risks damaging the equipment in the process. At airline flight entry gates, wheelchair travelers and other passengers requiring extra boarding time are typically "pre-boarded to provide maximum comfort." This may not always provide maximum comfort, but it may help one "beat the rush." Major airline carriers often have jetways or special equipment to board passengers who cannot - or should not - climb stairs.

Airline reservations personnel will assist with information and order a wheelchair at both point of departure and destination. However, information about this service is generally not published

or promoted in air travel brochures. Such service often requires the completion of a special form by the passenger's physician, which must then be routed through a travel agent to airline personnel.

Many airlines offer a special toll-free telephone reservation service (TDD) for those persons with a hearing or speech impairment. Airline attendants will often lend personal assistance. Flight attendants will usually explain emergency procedures as well as aircraft surroundings to those with restricted vision. Qualified guide dogs accompanying passengers will generally be welcomed on board most aircraft at no additional charge. There is not usually a limitation to the number of blind passengers on a particular airline flight, although they may not be seated in emergency rows. In the event of an emergency situation, a "buddy" system should be used to assist the blind.

Rental hand-controlled motor vehicles have been improved over the past 20 years, although they are not made available by all rental car companies everywhere. They are usually installed in larger two-door autos. In many cases, there is no extra charge for such vehicles. However, an additional deposit (about \$25) is usually required in addition to advance reservation notice. Usually cars equipped with hand controls must be returned to their location of origin. Many rental car companies also provide the toll-free telephone (TDD) reservation service for the hearing and speech impaired.

Practically all trains and most stations in the U.S. provide barrier-free access. The AMTRAK Superliners are equipped with specially-designed sleeping accommodations as well as coach seats and loading ramps for those who have difficulty with steps. Many of the older coaches and sleeping cars have been upgraded to incorporate accessible accommodations and rest rooms. A seeing-eye dog accompanying a

visually-impaired person is permitted in passenger cars at no charge. Amtrak also has a tollfree (TOD) telephone reservation number. The company will provide assistance for oxygen-carrying passengers (Amtrak, 1988).

In certain stations along Japan's Shinkansen Bullet Train Line, wheelchair passengers can receive assistance in getting on and off the train. Such assistance must be requested in advance, either by telephone or in person, at an appropriate station master's office. On one route, a train is designed so that the wheelchair passenger can enter the car in the wheelchair. The car is equipped with a rest room for wheelchair users (Japan National Tourist Organization, 1989).

The Oakland-San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system perhaps has done more to accommodate the physically handicapped than any other rapid transit system in the world. All categories of handicapped persons, as defined by the American Standards Association, can move about the system with relative ease, thanks to a \$10 million program for construction of barrier-free architecture and facilities (Bay Area Rapid Transit District, 1989).

A number of cruise ships now accommodate handicapped travelers with special cabins which have wider doors that allow the passage of wheelchairs as well as larger bathrooms with tubs and railings that facilitate the handicapped. New cruise ships are being built without the ledges in cabin and other doorways. However, it is still suggested that a handicapped cruise ship passenger have a traveling companion.

European canal barges, though rarely ramped for boarding, provide a uniquely free travel experience for the wheelchair-bound passenger. Once hoisted aboard by the crew, one is able to move about the deck, obtain meals, sleep on board and see many beautiful sites without ever leaving the barge (Floating

Through Europe, 1989). Pontoon boats provide a similar experience, but for short daytime trips. Hotels are now installing more wide swinging or sliding doors. Ramps lead to most new hotel restaurants or lounges. Drinking fountains and telephones are lowered to standard height. Access to new hotel public rest rooms is typically through a series of buffer partitions rather than doors. Generally, accessible guestrooms are being located convenient to the ground floor, elevators and public space. Room layout is modified somewhat to provide adequate space for movement. Standard criteria for a fully-accessible guestroom include wider entrance and interior doors with levers instead of knobs for handles. Closets are without doors. Bathrooms include convenient grab bars located near tubs and water closets. A larger tub allows for wheelchair maneuverability, and a portable seat is available for bathing. The sink counter is higher and towel racks lower. There are hand-held shower heads. Such design criteria have been set forth by the American Hotel and Motel Association in *Design for Hospitality. Planning for Accessible Hotels and Motels*. Many chain hotel companies around the world will provide a special list of their properties showing the accessibility of each (Davies and Beasley, 1988).

One of the most unique examples of a hotel property in the U.S. adapted to the hearing impaired is the Holiday Inn Main Gate East in Kissimmee, Florida, near Walt Disney World. Five of its 512 rooms are outfitted with visual alert smoke alarms, telephones and televisions with amplifiers, and closed-caption television programming. The hotel's front desk provides guests with a device that sets off a strobe light if the telephone rings, if there is a knock on the door or if a fire alarm is sounded. The front office has its own TOD keyboard to communicate by telephone with a deaf guest in his/her room who

has brought along a personal TDD (Mann, 1988).

Many tourist attractions have worked diligently to host the person with disability. The Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in the District of Columbia hosts "very special arts" programs, has a specially-priced ticket program for disabled patrons, a TTY (teletypewriter) system and a wireless listening system (Sennheiser Headphone Listening Infrared System) for the hearing impaired (Palomares, 1984).

All theme park rides at Disney World in Florida are now accessible to the handicapped. Kings Island in Ohio publishes a special brochure listing various levels of accessibility of its different rides. The park has also developed a special system of symbols to warn patrons with specific disabilities against riding on certain rides (Kings Island, 1989). Hersheypark in Pennsylvania has constructed two "wheelchair cars" on its park tour ride (Tulli, 1989). Hearst Castle in San Simeon furnishes a private escort for wheelchair-bound persons touring its completely accessible buildings and grounds (Blades, 1989).

Efforts by the Travel Industry Marketing Distribution System

The travel and hospitality industry is a complex and multi-faceted group of often unrelated businesses. Even those companies in the marketing distribution system have very little association except during transactions they generate for each other. Suppliers (vendors) of travel and hospitality are mentioned above - airlines, cruise ships, national parks, hotels, trains, rental cars and barges. On a different level, tour operators arrange, market and conduct group tours of the products distributed by suppliers. On a third level, travel wholesalers "package" trips which usually include only transportation and lodging, sometimes at a reduced price.

Specialty channelers include non-traditional distributors of travel such as incentive travel firms, business meeting and convention planners, corporate travel offices and voluntary association executives. Incentive travel firms provide luxury employee affinity group travel experiences for top performers in businesses that use travel experiences as rewards and incentives for future performance. Business meeting and convention planners make all of the arrangements for such meetings or conventions including travel and lodging. Corporate travel offices arrange travel for employees who travel for sales, conventions or meetings. Sometimes employees can purchase personal travel through these offices. Voluntary association executives often make arrangements for the same in addition to making arrangements for the association's conventions and meetings (McIntosh & Goeldner, 1986).

Affinity groups also include individuals who share some non-work interest or environment. Clubs, fraternities, churches, retirement communities, group homes, TR agencies and condominiums are some examples. Leaders, voluntary or paid, of these groups frequently arrange travel and lodging for their constituents, thus becoming distribution channel members.

Although one is not compelled to employ them, on still another level, travel agents are self-appointed retailers of all forms of travel and hospitality services. They are a kind of "counselor" who should be trained and skilled enough to assist the customer in the wise purchase of available products.

It is very encouraging to find regularly published articles and columns appearing in many travel and hospitality industry trade publications circulated to the above groups - *Travel Agent*, *Travel Weekly*, *Travel Trade and Tour and Travel News*, *Meeting News*, *Meetings and Conventions*, *Successful Meetings*, *The Meeting Manag-*

er and Special Events. It is evident through this literature that industry groups are actually beginning to plan for persons with disability. Planning by those most visible in the travel distribution system is also apparent by the display of specialized brochures for tourists with disability.

Numerous tour operators, most with some disability themselves, are creating conducted tours for the handicapped. Uniglobe Action Travel in St. Louis, Missouri, packages some 25 such vacations. One example is their "Caribbean Breathe" program for those with breathing disorders. This is a 7-day cruise aboard Royal Caribbean's Song of America, accompanied by a respiratory therapist. HOMEDCO provides oxygen, respiratory equipment and wheelchairs at no charge (Uniglobe Action Travel, 1989).

Sunstar designs special individual tours across Europe for families and small groups from the U.S. This company builds its own vehicles that range from 12-seat minibuses to 57-seat motorcoaches. These are equipped with lifts at the rear for wheelchairs, which can be clamped to the floor to prevent movement. Accompanying drivers and nurses are trained to handle the rigors of handicapped travel. They use 4-star hotels that must meet standards (ramps, 28-inch doorways, large bathrooms with handrails) (Fairlie, 1988).

Some operators offer frequent traveler discounts. Some will only use select airlines. Others travel with a limited ratio of as few as one staff member to three tourists. One company annually offers as many as 44 different itineraries.

Ostensibly, though there are improvements yet to be made, many fine examples of progress by the travel industry can be cited.

A Challenge

While there is an abundance of literature available on the subject of disability and travel - books, newsletters, guidebooks, maps and so

forth, we are unable to locate a center where information from all sources is continuously collected. There seems to be no singular information source which the disabled traveler or therapeutic recreation specialist can consult when the need arises. It is, in part, our purpose to form such a Center* at Southwest Missouri State University.

Summary

Improvements have been made in the quantity and quality of travel industry sales promotion literature with regard to its consideration of the handicapped. Specialized services have been developed to assist the handicapped traveler first-hand. Many facilities have become more accessible. Finally, the travel industry marketing distribution system members have developed more travel opportunities specifically for those persons with disability.

While it is true that the picture is not yet perfect, substantial progress has been and is being made on behalf of the traveler with disability. One of our purposes is to meet a remaining challenge to create a Travel and Disability Center for the dissemination of all information resources. Linking the provider of travel services and disabled consumers with these informational materials is an achievable goal.

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** A complete list of references acquired to date by the authors as well as their Travel and Disability Resources Directory may be obtained by addressing a request to: Recreation & Leisure Studies, Southwest Missouri State University, 901 S. National Ave., Springfield, MO 65804. Attention: Southwest Missouri Center for Leisure Studies. Telephone: 1+417+836-5411.*

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