

## **FACILITATING INTEGRATED LEISURE FOR OLDER ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES**

### **Alison Pedlar, Ph.D.**

Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo  
Waterloo, Ontario

### **Adrienne Gilbert**

Department of Recreation & Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo  
Waterloo, Ontario

### **Lori Gove**

Special Needs Division  
Parks and Recreation Department  
City of Kitchener, Kitchener

### **Introduction**

Over the past decade there has been growing concern regarding availability of community-based recreation and leisure to older adults with disabilities. While considerable attention has been focused on the aging population and services for older adults, only recently have communities become sensitized to the urgency of addressing the aging of those individuals who have a disability, most particularly people with a life-long disability. For many individuals who are approaching retirement age and who have spent much of their daily lives in sheltered vocational situations or day programs, little or no attention has been given to retirement as an option for the future, whether this might amount to the substitution of leisure and recreation for vocational activities, or possibly a combination of both.

A related area of concern and uncertainty arises with respect to the development of senior centers where non-disabled seniors have accessed leisure and recreation activities. There is some debate as to the appropriateness of these centers today, at a time when segregation of services according to certain user characteristics is being questioned. Some suggest that segregating and isolating services from mainstream activities defeats efforts to ensure that people are afforded opportunities to take on valued social roles in integrated settings (Wolfensberger, 1985). Others contend that non-vocational day programs, such as developmental day centers and center-based life skills programs, should be replaced by support for participation in leisure in integrated community settings (Burt Perrin Associates, 1989). At the same time, there is evidence that attitudinal barriers exist in relation to welcoming disabled seniors into senior centers to participate in recreation and social programs alongside non-disabled seniors (Catapano, Levy & Levy, 1985). Other studies suggest, however, that these attitudinal barriers are not impermeable. Based on their national study of generic senior centers across the U.S., Seltzer and Krauss (1987)



concluded that participation in generic programs and activities was increasing, and that as it increased, so too would the level of acceptance and involvement of older adults with disabilities.

Some local communities are now attempting to address this issue as they develop support services for seniors with a disability. Their task is made that much more difficult when they are operating with a considerable number of unknowns and uncertainties. Much of the impetus for this project in fact came from pressures which were being experienced by the municipal recreation special needs division within this community. As they confronted the need to plan and develop services for seniors on a "cross-disability" basis, the following factors became apparent:

- 1) Disabled and non-disabled seniors had been sheltered from contact with each other throughout their lives and so there appeared to be resistance to the integration of seniors with visible disabilities into established programs for non-disabled seniors.
- 2) There were no data available locally on the numbers of people requiring support.
- 3) Criteria for participation in senior day programs discouraged the integration of persons with a disability who needed support in order to participate.
- 4) Support staff were not available during the day to support persons with disabilities living in residential settings.

When these concerns were voiced by the municipal parks and recreation special needs coordinator in discussions with the two researchers, it was determined that this was an issue of mutual concern. Subsequently, a collaborative action research project designed to facilitate integrated recreation for older adults got underway within this south-western Ontario community of 150,000 people.

### *Other Community Experiences*

Based on other community experiences it is evident that integration of older adults with disabilities into community recreation and leisure brings new and different challenges from those that were present when children and younger adults with disabilities were first being introduced into integrated settings (Bullock & Howe, 1991; Howe, 1988; Hutchison & McGill, 1992; Krymow, 1992; Lord & Hutchison, 1979; Schleien & Ray, 1988). However, a number of studies of other community experiences have made significant contributions to our understanding of these challenges and offered suggestions as to how to break down barriers (Bowman, 1992; Hawkins & Kultgen, 1990; LePore & Janicki, 1990; Rancourt, 1989; Riddick & Keller, 1990; Wilhite, Keller & Nicholson, 1990).

### **The Project**

In order to determine what concerns existed within this community relative to the perceptions of the service providers, the project's first task was to survey local human service agencies which served older adults and people with disabilities. From this survey we were able to determine the level of interest within the local community in terms of joining together to develop strategies for integrated recreation. Interested service providers and users were subsequently invited to an active discussion day where participants articulated what they perceived to be both the major barriers to integration as well as action strategies



designed to respond to those barriers. It was a strategy of the project to have the community of service providers and users of these services take ownership of the integration initiative. Accordingly, it was critical that the community identify what they perceived to be the problems with older adult integrated recreation, as well as possible solutions that they would find feasible. These are summarized below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Community Barriers and Action Strategies**

<b>BARRIERS</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills of staff and volunteers</li> <li>• Need to access broader range of opportunities</li> <li>• Knowledge and understanding of service philosophy</li> <li>• Recruitment of wider pool of volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperative training workshops</li> <li>• Raising levels of informal and formal supports</li> <li>• Communication and coordination between services</li> <li>• Raising level of awareness in community as a whole.</li> </ul>

By the end of the discussion day, the participants agreed that an advisory committee comprising key stakeholders in the community should join with the project for ongoing consultation, coordination and communication.

### **The Integration Process**

Since it was recognized that the project should be designed to be maximally responsive to individual preferences and community experiences, only a small group of people were invited to participate in the integration initiative. Therefore, interested people were contacted via service agencies and facilities that had representation on the Advisory Committee. Two of the people who indicated an interest had developmental disabilities, two were receiving community mental health services and the other two participants had physical impairments and were living in a total-care facility for older adults. All six came forward expressing interest in exploring leisure and recreation opportunities in the community and becoming part of the integration project. One of the individuals who received support from community mental health services temporarily left the area shortly after the process got underway and did not choose to become involved on his return. The other five participants have remained and continue their involvement in community recreation.

The process of integration essentially followed the scheme outlined in Figure 2. Field work staff for the project consisted of one half-time leisure integration facilitator and one research assistant who was responsible for documenting each stage of the integration process. This involved recording the data gathered during assessments, recording field observations, as well as gathering the following information: participants' responses to



integrated recreation, ways in which staff and program convenors related to the participant, and the interaction between non-disabled and disabled older adults in the recreation setting.

### **Figure 2. The Integration Process**

- Participant Referral
- Leisure Lifestyle Assessment
- Participant Training Module
- Participant Selection of Community Leisure Opportunity
- Staff and Volunteer Training for Leisure Setting
- Participant Placement and Welcoming into Leisure Setting
- Support, Evaluation, and Modification
- Documentation – Ongoing

### **The Participants**

#### *Helen*

Helen is 62 years old and lives in a residential care facility for seniors. She has ongoing psychiatric struggles. When she moved into the residential facility she believed that community recreation would no longer be available to her and no one had advised her otherwise. However, she liked social activities and crafts, and was keen to stay physically active. She responded very positively to the opportunity presented to her through the integration project. She had clear leisure preferences and identified crafts and line dancing as activities she wanted to pursue. Program fees and transportation were initial barriers that had to be overcome. Line dancing proved to be very successful and by her third visit, a fellow participant came forward as a natural support providing transportation for Helen.

#### *Jack*

Jack is a 73 year old resident of the same facility that Helen lives in. He had a stroke in 1988 that affected his mobility. He had been widowed several months prior to our contact with him. He was a master boat builder, sailor, draftsman and musician. He wanted assistance in linking up with a woodworking program. Again, fees and transportation were issues for Jack. However, with fee assistance and parallel transit in place, he was able to become involved in a volunteer run cooperative workshop coordinated by retired woodworkers. This proved to be a very supportive environment and Jack rapidly became a valued participant.

#### *Doris*

Doris is in her mid-sixties and lives in a home with 20 other adults who have psychiatric disabilities. She is very independent and is a regular user of local transit. Trust was a major issue for her and she required ongoing reassurance from project personnel. She was a little uncertain as to the activities she might wish to pursue, but did identify swimming and reading as potential interests. The areas that required attention for Doris and staff were



fee assistance, working within the requirements of the rules governing her residence, confidentiality and establishing trusting relationships. Swimming proved to be a bridge to recreation involvement for Doris. Becoming a full participant in an aquatics program was a very gradual process, however, and required staff to function with spontaneity and flexibility. Staff accompanied Doris initially and demonstrated unconditional acceptance of her. She was ultimately able to participate fully and independently.

### *Frank*

Frank is a 65 year old man with a developmental disability. He had always been involved in a sheltered work setting and more recently had become involved in a segregated day program for seniors with developmental handicaps. He did not travel independently in the community, and had some difficulty identifying leisure interests or preferences. However, with the support of his residential staff, music was noted as an interest. He was subsequently linked with a music program at a downtown church. Since it has not yet proved possible to connect him with a volunteer, project staff accompany him on local transit and support him during the program. A goal remains to replace staff with informal support from the music program.

### *Ann*

Ann is in her early sixties and is developmentally disabled. She has always worked in a sheltered workshop and resides in a group home. Ann did not indicate interest in any leisure activities and, unlike Frank's situation, staff at her home did not provide support in identifying leisure interests or encouraging involvement in the integration project. Sheltered workshop staff, however, had indicated a greater willingness to assist and project personnel are linking with the work setting. Music has emerged as a possible avenue for connecting Ann to a leisure activity.

As part of their mandate, the local municipal parks and recreation special needs division is continuing to work with the five project participants. As suggested by the five profiles, there are significant differences among the processes involved for these individuals. These differences have been very important to the project in terms of allowing us to identify issues that recreation support services must address if integrated recreation is to become more widely accepted. In addition, through the course of the project a number of important factors have emerged. Here are some that might be helpful to others concerned with broadening the range of leisure opportunities available to older adults in their communities:

### **Factors**

*The value base and training of staff really does make the difference.*

Within two months of the commencement of the integration process, it became evident that the primary staff person involved in the front line integration work did not have a full understanding or value base which allowed for a commitment to integration. Although the language of staff may indicate an appropriate value base and understanding, action does indeed speak louder than words. Although evidence from discussion and language used by staff suggested a thorough understanding of integration, when observed in action, it was



clear that staff was not equipped to work within the integration paradigm and did not understand the relevance of individual capacities and strengths in relation to the contribution they can make to the leisure experience. The individual staff member involved worked with Helen, Jack and Doris. During this two month period little progress was made. Time was spent attempting to have people complete standard leisure assessment tools. Not allowing for people's strengths and self-awareness in terms of leisure preferences proved to be frustrating and aggravating to participants. Rather than struggling to ensure people complete leisure activity inventories, for instance, it became evident, with the arrival of a new facilitator, that far more was learned about people's interests and capabilities by simply inviting them to talk about who they were and what interested them. While this approach would not have been helpful for all participants, this demonstrates that staff must not lose sight of the significance of individual differences and strengths and must be sufficiently flexible to ensure that the process is adapted to respond to these differences. It also suggests that effectiveness of interventions cannot be evaluated strictly in terms of what can be documented on standard instruments.

#### *The issue of confidentiality and information flow is very thorny*

There was resistance on the part of some facilities to divulge assessment information on a particular individual to community-based leisure integration facilitators. This relates to concerns around confidentiality. However, this is problematic for several reasons since community-based staff see it as a "safety" issue. This flow of information can reduce frustration on the part of the individual, as well as on the part of staff where commitment of time to "reinventing the wheel" may be an expensive and unconstructive exercise. At the same time, facility personnel may have an understanding of the person which pertains to institutional life. Staff need to be cognizant of this fact and ask themselves how much carry-over there is likely to be from the segregated to integrated setting. Clearly, all parties can benefit considerably from learning important information concerning social histories and leisure preferences or interests. However, this data alone cannot be assumed to determine a person's leisure preferences and direction in the broader context of community recreation. If they do, staff may be trying to fit square pegs into round holes.

#### *Attention to every little detail pays big dividends*

The significance of paying attention to the smallest details of supporting a person as they embark on the pursuit of integrated recreation cannot be minimized. For instance, the most successful outcomes in terms of the leisure experience for all participants occurred when the integration facilitator worked closely with host settings to ensure that program convenors were able to provide a welcoming atmosphere without trumpeting the arrival of a new member "with a special need". As well, attention to details around fees and care in negotiating fee subsidies and transportation were as critical as facilitating the development of informal support, by not taking "ownership" of the individual and playing a less obtrusive role in the actual leisure setting. These all required a particular set of human relations skills on the part of the facilitator. Again, this reflected the importance of the value base and commitment of the staff person involved.



### *Partnerships maximize a community's resources and help keep all parties on track*

The involvement of the research team from the university provided a mechanism for both support and monitoring of the process. A critical aspect of their involvement was to act as mediators in a community of service providers and users in which they had no vested interest. The combination of practitioners and academic researchers meant that the former were able to provide the first hand practical knowledge and links with the community, while the latter provided the research skill, administration and "constant inquiry" that kept the process on track.

### **Conclusion**

The integration project has allowed for this community to address its needs and capabilities in relation to supporting older adults with disabilities in community based leisure and recreation. It has also allowed for recognition of the need for ongoing developmental work if the goal of a fully inclusive community is to be realized. The work of the project is still in progress with follow-up support being provided to the five older adults who chose to be pioneers in this community in relation to integrated recreation. It is also important to note that in order for this type of service to continue, the community as a whole, including agencies that serve people with disabilities, will need to address fee assistance, volunteer coordination, and transportation. These are among the issues which the integration project will be focused upon as it embarks on the next phase of its work.

### **References**

- Bowman, P. (1992). Community integration of older people with mental retardation. NAMRP Quarterly, 23(2), 12-13,25).
- Bullock, C. & Howe, C. (1991). A model therapeutic recreation program for the reintegration of persons with disabilities into the community. Therapeutic Recreation Journal, 25(1), 7-17.
- Burt Perrin Associates. (1989). Leisure: A key to community integration. Toronto. (Presented to Services for Disabled Persons Branch, OMCSS).
- Catapano, P., Levy, J. & Levy, P. (1985). Day activity and vocational program services. In M. Janicki & H. Wisniewski (Eds.), Aging & developmental disabilities: Issues and approaches, (pp.304-316). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- Hawkins, B. & Kultgen, P. (1990). Activities and innovations to serve aging adults with developmental disabilities. Activities. Adaptation & Aging, 15(1-2), 5-18.
- Howe, C. (1988). Selected social gerontology theories and older adult leisure involvement: A review of the literature. The Journal of Applied Gerontology, 6(4), 448-486.
- Hutchison, P. & McGill, J. (1992). Leisure, integration and community. Toronto: Leisurability Publications.
- Krymow, V. (1992). Leisure-time opportunities and the community. NAMRP Quarterly, 23(2), 21-24.
- LePore, P. & Janicki, M. (1990). The wit to win: How to integrate older persons with developmental disabilities into community aging programs. Albany, NY: New York State Office for the Aging.



- Lord, J. & Hutchison, P. (1979). Recreation integration. Toronto: Leisurability Publications.
- Rancourt, A. (1989) Older adults with developmental disabilities/mental retardation: Implications for professional services. Therapeutic Recreation Journal, 23(1), 47-57.
- Riddick, C. & Keller, M. (1990). Developing recreation services to assist elders who are developmentally disabled. Activities, Adaptation & Aging, 15(1-2), 19-34.
- Schleien, S. & Ray, M. (1988). Community recreation and persons with disabilities: Strategies for integration. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- Seltzer, M. & Krauss, M. (1987). Aging and mental retardation: Extending the continuum. Washington, DC: American Association on Mental Retardation.
- Wilhite, B., Keller, M. & Nicholson, L. (1990). Integrating older persons with developmental disabilities into community recreation: Theory to practice. Activities, Adaptation & Aging, 15(1-2), 111-129.
- Wolfensberger, W. (1985). Social role valorization and elderly mentally retarded persons. In M. Janicki & H. Wisniewski (Eds.). Aging and developmental disabilities: Issues & Approaches (pp.61-76). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

The authors wish to acknowledge the contribution made to this project by Lee Lovo, Integration Facility, Special Needs Division, Kitchener, and Sherry Dupuis, Research Assistant, formerly of the University of Waterloo.

This project was supported by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Recreation, Participation Development Grant.

Pedlar, Gilbert & Gove

GLOBAL THERAPEUTIC RECREATION III • 27

Global Therapeutic Recreation III

Selected papers from the 3rd International Symposium on Therapeutic Recreation

© Curators University of Missouri 1994

[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

**SECTION 4 OF 20**

[NEXT SECTION](#)



*Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>*