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MANAGING RECREATION SERVICES FOR IMMIGRANTS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEADERS, PROGRAMMERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

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ABSTRACT

The United States and Canada are multicultural societies consisting of populations who find themselves attached to two cultural societies, their ethnic homeland and mainstream society. This attachment is often reflective in the cultural recreational activities and pursuits desired, with these being representative of the ethnic culture or the culture of mainstream society. The challenge thus posed for recreation leaders, programmers and administrators centers around fulfilling diverse recreation needs. This paper presents five recommendations to assist recreation leaders, programmers and administrators in serving and preparing to serve multi-ethnic populations.

INTRODUCTION

The United States and Canada are both multicultural societies consisting of diverse and pluralistic populations. Individuals who are living in each of these respective societies after having immigrated from other countries, often find themselves identifying with two cultures, that of their ethnic

homeland and that of their new country of residence. These individuals find themselves culturally attached to two societies, embracing the values, mores and traditions of two sometimes very different cultures (3, 4). Furthermore, these individuals tend, for the most part, to prefer and participate in the cultural activities of both their ethnic homeland and the host society (6, 8).

Immigration to Canada and the United States is a continuous process. New immigrants are continuously entering these countries, receiving landed immigrant status, and looking to establish social and work relations within the new land of residence. Literature reveals that these newest immigrants, show a strong inclination towards participating in recreation activities representative of their ethnic homeland culture (1, 5). That is, assimilation of ethnic individuals into the host society is limited, at this early stage, with ethnocultural specific recreation contributing to ethnic cultural maintenance (1, 2). This is not to say that recreation involvement is restricted to the activities representative of ethnic culture. It is merely

to say that an attachment continues to exist with ethnic culture and its recreation activities (7).

The task, therefore, for recreation professionals working in multicultural societies is to decide to what extent ethnic individuals desiring recreation can have access to such services. If recreation is a basic human need, it is incumbent upon recreation professionals to take action and strive towards fulfilling the recreation needs of all, including the diverse and pluralistic populations of society. This however is not an easy task to accomplish, particularly when faced with limited resources and services as well as a multiplicity of demands.

In recent years, North America has been hit with an often debilitating recession. Ubiquitous economic restraints in both the United States and Canada have caused cutbacks in recreation programs and services, including the closure of recreation organizations, and other social programs. During times of economic difficulties such as the present, recreation programs, particularly those in the public sector, are often the first to be cut. Yet despite these cutbacks, the desire to experience recreation, more specifically, the need to experience publicly subsidized and operated recreation programs remains or may indeed increase. Americans and Canadians continue to not only demand recreation programs and services, they also expect to have many of these provided by the public sector.

Today, more than ever, it has become difficult to make decision on expanding existing recreation services and developing new ones. It has become increasingly challenging to meet the recreation needs of all members of society through the provision of a wide variety of services. It has become a challenge to identify and serve the basic

recreation needs of the majority, let alone the needs of all. Yet the challenge to serve the recreation needs of all is by no means impossible, but rather posits a new challenge to recreation administrators.

To be a successful recreation administrator today, one has to not only be a qualified leader and an effective motivator, one must also be capable of implementing efficiency, effectiveness and equity in practice. Recreation leaders, programmers and administrators need to be able to stretch limited materials, resources and services to fulfil the recreation desires of the greatest number of individuals possible, including ethnic participants. Meeting the needs of the later requires awareness and sensitivity towards ethno-cultural recreation groups. It also requires the allocation of materials, resources and services to fulfil such needs.

The intent of this paper is to enhance the awareness of recreation leaders, programmers and administrators of the importance of serving the recreation needs of all, including immigrants. To be able to serve the recreation needs of all, recreation leaders, programmers and administrators must be cognizant of the socio-demographic structure of society, including the needs of immigrants to experience recreation. Limited resources may be offered as an excuse, but efforts should be made to exercise administrative skills to accommodate the needs of immigrants.

Below is a list of recommendations which may help recreation leaders, programmers and administrators better serve the recreation needs of immigrants. These recommendations are based on the recognition that both the United States and Canada continue to evolve as multi-ethnic societies, thus presenting a growing need for ethno-cultural specific recreation activities.

Recreation leaders, programmers and administrators will be called upon to take action such that Americans and Canadians of ethnic-descent have the same basic recreational-opportunities as available to members of mainstream society. To assist recreation leaders, programmers and administrators in serving and preparing to serve multi-ethnic populations, the following recommendations are presented.

Recommendation 1: Become cognizant of immigrants as recreation participants and potential recreation participants.

Recreation leaders, programmers and administrators have to become more aware that immigrants need recreation just as much as anyone else. All humans have the need to experience recreation. This need may be fulfilled in a variety of different ways, nevertheless it exists, and immigrants are no exception. A first step in any administrative planning process is awareness. That is, recognizing the population base of participants or prospective participants in your organization and community. Most residential areas in the United States and Canada have multiethnic populations. As a recreation leader, programmer or administrator one must be aware of this, and acknowledge these individuals as prospective participants.

Recommendation 2: Realize that the recreation needs of immigrants may differ from those of mainstream society.

Recreation needs are based on values, beliefs and traditions. Immigrants have brought their values, beliefs and traditions with them from their respective ethnic homelands. By understanding what these are, recreation leaders, programmers and administrations not only become more sensitive towards diversity, they also learn

to realize that different values, beliefs and traditions are closely associated with different recreation desires.

Recommendation 3: Become aware of and understand the notion "cultural exchange"

Recreation leaders, programmers and administrators have to understand that through recreation, harmony and understanding can be passed between diverse facets of society. Recreation can be used as a form of cultural exchange to help promote harmony and unity within society, while battling prejudice, discrimination, and negative feelings toward others. Cultural exchange refers to the understanding, appreciation, and sensitivity which results when individuals possessing different cultural characteristics interact in recreation activities.

Recommendation 4: Focus on programming "with", rather than programming "for".

The best means to program services for immigrants, is to incorporate their efforts in the decision-making process. Input from immigrants who are recreation participants or prospective recreation participants should be welcomed at all times. By leaving the door open to input, and by encouraging immigrants to come forward with opinions, a greater understanding will be reached in regards to what is needed, and how it could be provided.

Recommendation 5: Encourage colleagues to become cognizant of the importance of serving the recreation needs of immigrants.

Recreation leaders, programmers and administrators are directly responsible for serving the needs of a multicultural population, and, as professionals, should also engage in making sure that their

colleagues do the same. It is a leadership role of the recreation administrator to act as educators to fellow administrators, employers and employees within their organizations. Administrators should act as leaders in teaching colleagues about the importance of addressing the recreation needs of immigrants. Furthermore, recreation administrators should act as leaders encouraging and promoting understanding, appreciation and sensitivity towards the recreation needs of immigrants.

CONCLUSION

By referring to the above recommendations, recreation leaders, programmers and administrators in all types of recreation organizations should be better prepared to embark upon fulfilling the recreation needs of immigrants. In multicultural societies such as the United States and Canada which are made up of multi-ethnic populations, recreation leaders, programmers and administrators, particularly those employed in public recreation services, have, of necessity, to be capable of serving diverse and pluralistic populations.

This paper has attempted to enhance the awareness of recreation leaders, programmers and administrators of the diverse and pluralistic nature of the populations of the United States and Canada. Moreover, the focus has been on encouraging recreation leaders, programmers and administrators to take the initiative in trying to serve the recreation needs of all people in society, including immigrants. It is now the time for recreation leaders, programmers and administrators to acknowledge the growing individual and group differences in the communities they serve, and to take a lead role in attempting to fulfill the expressed recreation desires of all individuals.

The challenge is thus posed to all recreation leaders, programmers and administrators in multicultural societies to become aware of diversity and pluralism, and to strive to fulfill the wide variety of recreation needs that exist. If recreation is indeed a basic human need and an acknowledged right of all, recreation leaders, programmers and administrators should take action in making sure that recreation services are distributed with equity and address the needs of all.

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