

UMC GUIDE RECREATION PARKS & LEISURE

University of Missouri-Columbia Extension Division

Community Recreation Mainstreaming: The Inclusion of Handicapped Individuals in Regular Recreation Programs

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This guide probes the methods of removing barriers to handicapped individuals and the benefits of that process. Any individual or group interested in improving the quality of life in their community should find this guide useful.

Leisure opportunities are essential to personal development and creating these opportunities is often the responsibility of local government and community agencies. To varying degrees most communities provide recreational opportunities through parks and planned leisure activities. In many cases the programs are designed directly for the enhancement of personal growth and development. Unfortunately, activities provided by local agencies have not addressed all populations. Traditionally, most recreation programs served youth and specialized adult male populations. More recently, senior citizens and adult females have been included; however, handicapped individuals have sometimes been denied an equal opportunity to participate in recreational programs. *Mainstreaming* is an attempt to correct that.

MAINSTREAMING: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Simply stated, mainstreaming means bringing handicapped individuals into the "mainstream" of the community. Public education and all community services, including recreation, are part of the "stream." It is an equality ideal with a new emphasis: the special populations. Citizens with mental or physical disabilities should have *equal opportunity* to participate in community activities. Providing this opportunity may involve:

- Adding specialized recreation programs
- Adapting existing programs to enable handicapped persons to participate,
- Providing training or special equipment to the handicapped to facilitate their participation.

DEFINITIONS OF MAINSTREAMING

At least two definitions of mainstreaming are used, reflecting the special needs and philosophies of the populations affected.

Mainstreaming is the process of individuals interacting with each other and experiencing growth and satisfaction, irrespective of age, sex, race, creed, or ability, and consistent with safety. This equality concept stresses participation and involvement of handicapped individuals in the least restrictive environment.

Mainstreaming involves a placement procedure for exceptional individuals based on the conviction that each person should be able to participate in the least restrictive environment in which their needs and interests can be satisfactorily met.

The growth and acceptance of mainstreaming can be attributed to the following three developments:

1. The awareness of the general population that the handicapped individual is a person who has needs similar to other persons.
2. The joining of a traditional American belief that all individuals be allowed the opportunity to pursue productive lives with dignity regardless of disabling conditions.
3. Legislative mandates related to the needs of the handicapped.

LEGISLATIVE MANDATES

Of greatest impact to the implementation of mainstreaming are two mandates: Public Law 94:142 of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the 1978 amendments. Implicit in P.L. 94:142—every handicapped child from ages 3-21 must be guaranteed a free and appropriate education within the "least restrictive environment." Within P.L. 94:142, recreation is identified as a related need. This provides the opportunity for the child to receive recreational services, if the

parents and the educational team believe it to be vital to the child's individualized education program.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states:

"No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States . . . shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in or be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. That seems to indicate that any public agency receiving federal assistance must provide necessary services to the handicapped or run the risk of losing federal funding. Obviously, this provision has a direct effect on community agencies providing recreational services or programs to the public. It means that the recreation agencies receiving federal monies should be actively involved with a plan that provides for including handicapped individuals in specialized or regular recreational programs.

ORIENTATION TO MAINSTREAMING IN COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

An exciting trend has been established in our nation's school systems in mainstreaming youngsters with special needs into regular classroom and school activities. Providers of programs for youth and other groups are beginning to extend the concept from the school to the rest of the community.

Park and Recreation departments are responsible for providing services to all members of the community in both specialized and regular programs. Specialized programs for the handicapped serve a valuable need. However, these programs must not be viewed as an end in themselves. Many handicapped persons have the interest, skills and potential to interact in regular programs.

Handicapped individuals, like everyone else, have a wide variety of personal needs and abilities. They participate in a continuum of levels, ranging from a highly specialized, segregated program to a highly integrated program (see Figure 1). The goal is to help them move toward the most independent level of functioning in the community.

GUIDELINES TO COMMUNITY MAINSTREAMING

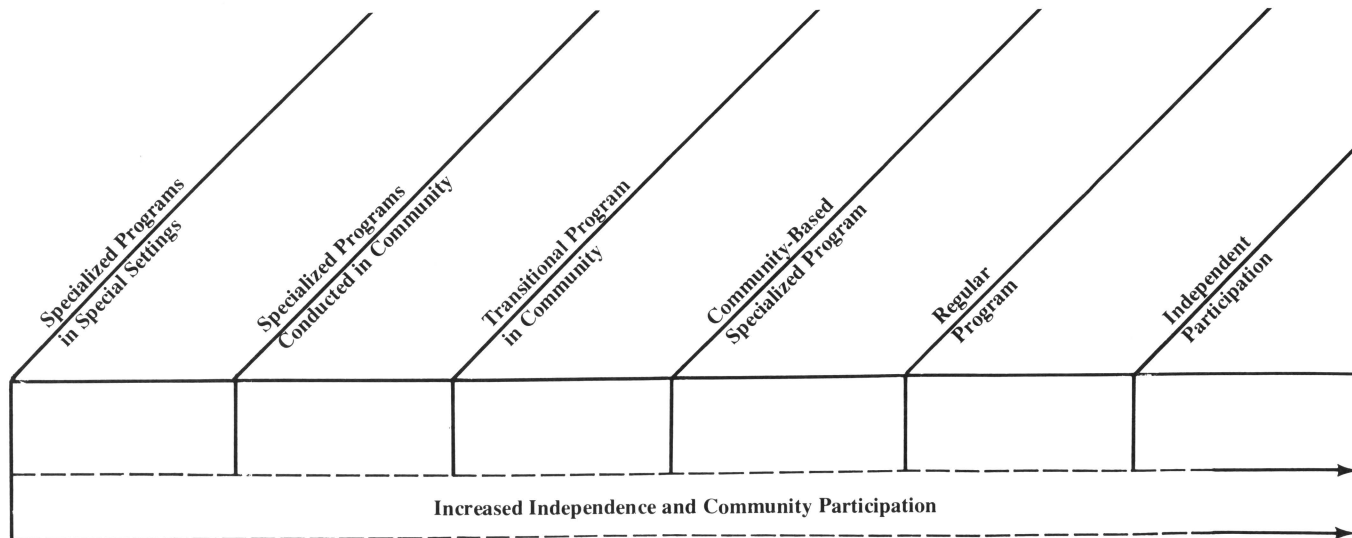
In establishing an agency-oriented or community-based mainstreaming plan, one must recognize the need for initiating change. The idea of change may be applied to the individual, the agency, and the community. Attitudes toward the handicapped and toward dealing with disability must often be altered, whether the individual is a handicapped consumer, parent, youth leader, community park and recreation specialist, city administrator or civic leader.

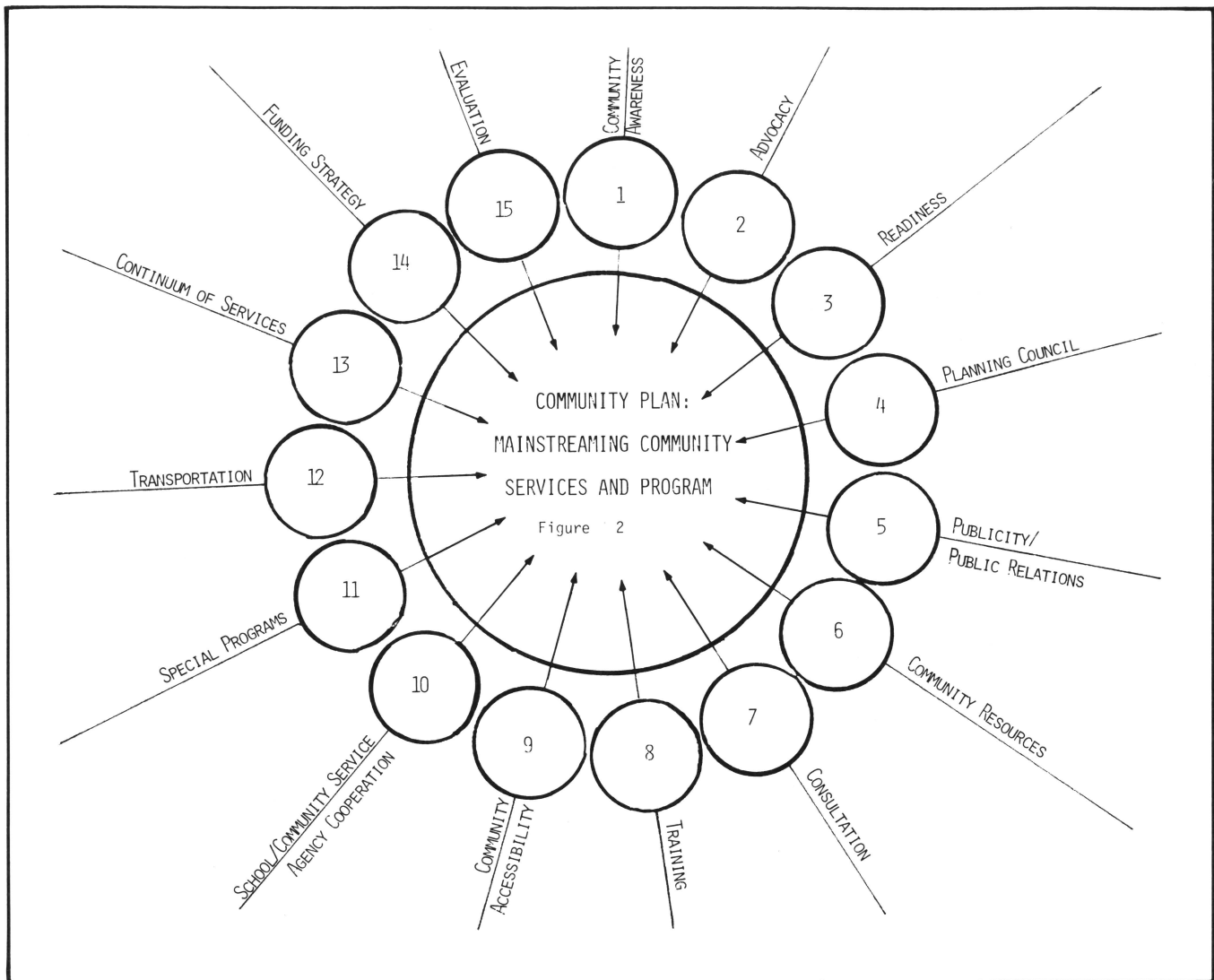
Agencies also must change. Once agencies identify mainstreaming as a program philosophy, agency roles should broaden to establish an atmosphere receptive to individuals with special needs in specialized and regular programs. Naturally, an agency plan directed toward achieving this expanded role can initiate change within the agency itself.

Establishing a general community mainstreaming plan will facilitate change in the community. When implemented one could expect *everyone* to be conscious of the needs of handicapped persons. Such a plan would involve close interagency cooperation in using the many resources within the community to establish a continuum of services to meet a continuum of needs of handicapped persons.

This type of change places heavy emphasis on the blending of community resources; interweaving of agency functions; and intensive cooperation and communication among the voluntary, private, and public sectors of the community. Public responsibility is highly stressed with this aspect of change. Figure 2 illustrates the many components that blend together in a community (or agency) plan.

FIGURE 1: Integration Continuum





Keep three things in mind when considering agency or community mainstreaming:

- All handicapped persons cannot be mainstreamed.
- Mainstreaming should occur at different participation or skill levels. A continuum approach is most successful.
- Those who cannot fit into higher levels of the continuum should be given the opportunity to receive training to enable them to participate more successfully at a lower level.

STEPS TO COMMUNITY MAINSTREAMING

Integrating handicapped individuals in regular programs is not a single event but a process with a number of identifiable steps. Figure 3 illustrates eight steps of a community mainstreaming process.

Step 1—Awareness: The first step in community mainstreaming is establishing a higher level of awareness by providers of community programs and services, local government officials, civic leaders, parents of handicapped youth, handicapped consumers, leaders

of educational and rehabilitation systems, and interested citizens.

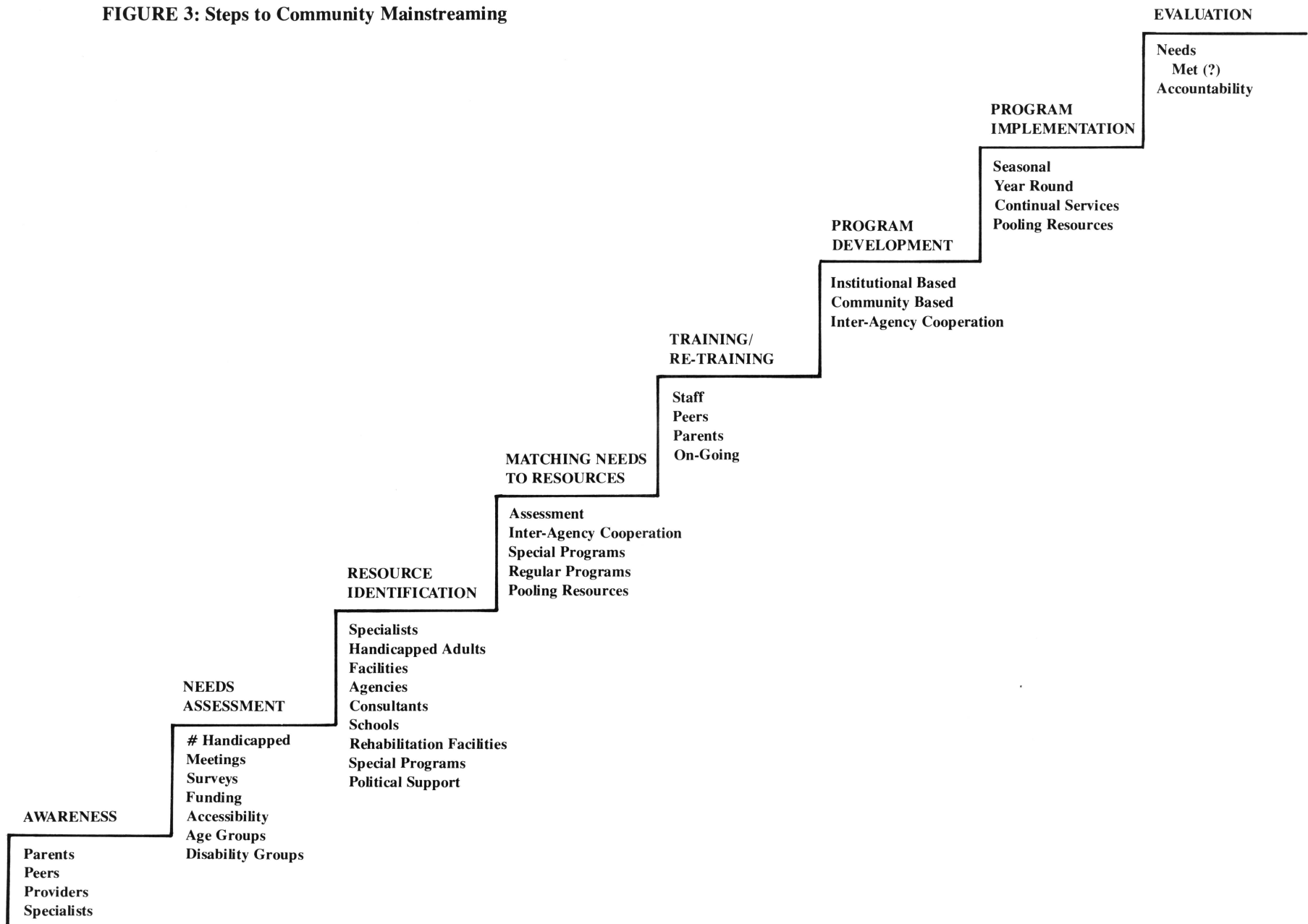
Step 2—Needs Assessment: A needs assessment strategy is required to:

- Identify the number of handicapped persons in the community and their specific needs, the types of disability groups, and age differences.
- Evaluate the accessibility of community areas and facilities. Accessibility might also refer to the prevalent attitudes in existing programs. Open and accepting attitudes are also important accessibility factors.
- Enumerate current offerings in specialized and regular programs.

This information may be gathered from public meetings, census information, surveys, or perhaps from agencies that provide programs for the handicapped.

Step 3—Resource Identification: Most needs of the handicapped can be met by better using personnel, facilities, agencies, and other community assets and support systems. Knowledge of special programs for the handicapped is critical in assessing the potential for

FIGURE 3: Steps to Community Mainstreaming



a transition into regular programs. Call on specialists for assistance, consultation, and guidance in mainstreaming. Or contact the area university extension office for additional assistance.

Transportation needs may be eased by joint use of such vehicles as taxis, school buses, vans operated by private agencies, and mass transit systems. Parents can help by providing transportation for other children as well as their own.

Pooling financial resources in the community is essential. It will facilitate both the specialized and integrated programming for handicapped persons. Active pursuit of available city, county, state, federal, and private sources of funding has met with success in some communities (e.g. city/county revenue sharing, county tax levies, developmental disabilities funding, and state monies provided in the compliance of Public Law 94:142 Education for All Handicapped Children Act).

Step 4—Matching Needs to Resources: Once community resources have been identified, needs assessment information can be matched with those available. Here resources can be pooled to determine what programs do or could exist. A continuum of services strategy can be established with a linking of community efforts.

Step 5—Program Development: Program development means matching the needs with available resources and establishing a realistic continuum-of-services strategy. It is critical that the continuum of services include institutions serving the handicapped, community-based specialized programs, community-based regular programs, and special interest groups. The success of mainstreaming efforts may relate directly to the quality of existing specialized programs.

Step 7—Program Implementation: With the building of a solid program plan, implementation may evolve into seasonal or year-round events; special events and programs; or sequential or year-round programs spon-

sored by an agency(ies), a public or private group, or an individual.

Step 8—Evaluation: An ongoing evaluation of each step is the key to successful efforts. However, a periodic and formal evaluation process, such as an annual review, would be helpful to determine minor and major changes in direction and procedure and to reassess efforts. Matching identifiable needs to available resources is critical to success.

The following chart identifies potential community barriers to mainstreaming, the means to overcome them, and benefits to the community from reducing or eliminating the barriers.

SUMMARY

Excellent opportunities exist for community service agencies, including city park and recreation departments, to be catalysts in including handicapped children, youth, and adults in regular activity programs. Not only will the recipients of the program benefit, but the providers of the programs as well. For, by establishing a philosophy of mainstreaming, agencies and organizations can more easily reach the goal of meeting the needs of *ALL* citizens. By so doing, providers of programs will more fully gain the support of the community by contributing to the productive development of the community's most valuable resource: its people.

For additional information and educational materials, contact the University of Missouri, Department of Recreation and Park Administration-Extension, 605 Clark Hall, Columbia, MO 65211. Available upon request is an educational packet that contains:

- Training modules and materials
- Select articles
- Bibliography
- Leadership techniques and guidelines
- Audiovisual list

BARRIERS	MEANS TO OVERCOME BARRIERS	BENEFITS
AWARENESS		
Inappropriate attitudes	Utilize media resources	Better informed public
Lack of exposure to handicaps	Provide handicapped awareness programs	Enhanced knowledge of needs of the handicapped
Lack of understanding of disabilities	Dissemination of educational materials	Community acknowledge its responsibility to handicapped
Outdated service delivery roles	Awareness and training/re-training sessions for parents and community service delivery personnel	Greater understanding of potential progressive community service delivery roles and professional role change possibilities
NEEDS ASSESSMENT		
Information and data collection	Survey ongoing programs and services	Accurate assessment of handicapped needs in community
Confidentiality of handicapped individuals	Ensure confidentiality in collection of information and data	Development of accurate data base
Resistance of change by organizations	Identify positive aspects of change	Agency identification of goals in dealing with handicaps
Lack of community involvement	Involve community agencies in process	Increased cooperation of community agencies

BARRIERS	MEANS TO OVERCOME BARRIERS	BENEFITS
RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION		
Lack of awareness of community recreation education service	Survey available resources	Identify the available community resources
Limited communication among agencies having resources	Establish a community planning council	Development of a forum for a community information exchange
Lack of cooperation among agencies	Identify existing/potential positive relationships among community agencies	Increased cooperation among agencies
Lack of cooperation among the social, political, cultural, and education systems of the community.	Dissemination resource identification material to all systems.	Increased awareness of community resources by service organizations
MATCHING NEEDS TO RESOURCES		
Obtaining agency commitment	Awareness of legal mandates	Adherence to legal mandates
Obtaining inter-agency cooperation	Participation of agencies in planning council	Comprehensive program for the handicapped
Linking consumers with providers	Encourage involvement of consumers in action plan	Needs of handicapped will be addressed by plan
Lack of funding	Pooling resources, application for grants, revenue sharing development, disability funding	Financial resources made available according to needs
TRAINING/RE-TRAINING		
Lack of acknowledgement that training is a need	Survey the training needs of individuals and agencies within community	Identification of training needs
Unwillingness to recognize that a multi-disciplinary approach is needed	Utilization of community planning council to implement appropriate training program	Well trained personnel
Assembling potential trainers	Recruit from local and state organizations and agencies	Obtaining best available trainers for training/re-training programs
Assembling trainees	Include: consumers, parents, community service personnel in training program	Those concerned with or involved in the delivery of services will be appropriately trained
PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION		
Coping with frustrations caused by agencies	Re-assess capability, methods, techniques employed, policy of agencies	Better matching of available community resources to agencies
Coping with frustration caused by individuals	Re-assess abilities, skills, interests, desires of individuals	Better matching of individual needs to resources
Breakdowns of communications, consistency and program continuity	Assess problems through community planning council	Identification of delivery problems
Need for support services	Identify what support systems are needed	Resources are identified which will improve service delivery
EVALUATION		
Decide on method of evaluation	How the resources will be utilized in the program	Re-assess program for redirection if needed
Accountability	Measuring results against established criteria/goals	Determine to what degree goals are met
Record keeping	Develop an all-encompassing system of data recording re: individual of agency programs	Determine to what degree goals are met
Decide method of evaluating individuals	Written statement with goals and objectives to be achieved within a certain program and time frame	Determine to what degree goals are met
Decide on method of evaluating programs	Written statement with goals and objectives to be achieved within a certain program and time frame	Determine to what degree goals are met

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