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Meagan Ricks

University of Utah, meagan.ricks@utah.edu

Jim Sibthorp

University of Utah, jim.sibthorp@health.utah.edu

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Promising Practices for Creating More Diverse, Equitable, Inclusive, and Racially Just Summertime Programs and Camps

Meagan Ricks
University of Utah

Jim Sibthorp
University of Utah

Abstract

LGBTQ+, racial/ethnic minorities, youth from low-income contexts, and youth with cognitive and/or physical disabilities often face constraints to access and participation based on social and structural inequality. Understanding access and inclusion in summertime recreation program and camp settings for LGBTQ+, racial/ethnic minorities, individuals from low-income contexts, and individuals with disabilities begins with examining promising practices and policies already applied in some of these settings. The purpose of this study is to compile current promising practices implemented by youth-serving summertime recreation programs and camps recognized for their work in diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial justice (DEIRJ). Representatives from national organizations and more localized summertime programs and camps were interviewed to compile current promising practices. The results include general recommendations as well as recommendations aimed at populations of interest.

Keywords: summer camps; diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial justice

Introduction

Marginalized youth often face constraints to access and participation (Agate et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2019; Pinckney et al., 2018). Examples of historically marginalized populations include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth (LGBTQ+); racial and ethnic minority youth; youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds; and youth with cognitive and physical disabilities. These groups may face additional obstacles to full participation in summertime programs and camps. LGBTQ+ youth often face challenges that threaten their physical and emotional safety and impact their access to and experience with out-of-school activities (Caldwell et al., 1998; Johnson, 1999; Kivel & Kleiber, 2000; Lewis & Johnson, 2011; Oakleaf, 2013). Racial and ethnic minority youth are often forced to navigate programs and policies that favor the dominant race and ethnicity and were constructed in a political and social climate that perpetuates systemic racism (Outley & Blyth, 2020). Youth from families with a lower socioeconomic status (SES) require additional assistance in order to fully participate in recreation programs (Brown et al., 2019; Sanderson & Richards, 2010). Youth with cognitive and/or physical disabilities must navigate programs designed for able-bodied individuals and negotiate social stigma (Maxey & Beckert, 2017). While the experiences differ for LGBTQ+ youth, racial and ethnic minority youth, youth from a lower SES, and diversely abled youth, challenges often arise for all of these groups when programs and environments are designed to favor the dominant group. Youth-serving summertime programs and camps can begin implementing changes that help center the marginalized and create an environment in which all youth feel safe and welcomed. This study seeks to create a compilation of established promising practices for youth-serving recreation organizations when working with marginalized populations—specifically, LGBTQ+ individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, individuals from low SES backgrounds, and individuals with disabilities. The recommendations provided may serve as a starting point for youth organizations beginning their journey toward more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and racially just programs.

Background

Some camps have begun to create change by implementing more equitable spaces for marginalized communities. One example includes camps attempting to reach youth from families with lower SES by providing financial assistance to encourage participation. The solution is so widespread, 94% of camps in the US offer some form of need-based assistance and/or discounts to aid families with lower SES (Brown et al., 2019). Additionally, an average of 22% of each camp's population consists of youth on scholarships (Brown et al., 2019). When considering how to best meet the needs of marginalized youth, financial constraints are seen as the most obvious, and perhaps most pressing obstacle but finances are not only barrier to participation.

Other barriers might include transportation, lack of awareness of available programs, discrimination, and social factors (Kraus et al., 2017; Sanderson & Richards, 2010; Stoldolska et al., 2020). Financial assistance allows youth to access the program or camp, but access alone does not lead to a sense of belonging. Considering additional challenges faced by marginalized populations, such as discrimination and social barriers, will help programs address structural and social inequality through implementing socially just policies and practices.

Discrimination and Structural Inequality

Recreation programs and camps have historically excluded certain populations either explicitly or implicitly (Pinckney et al., 2018; Sharaievsha et al., 2010). For many years, laws and policies banned racial minorities from entering swimming pools designated for “Whites only” (Mowatt, 2019). This explicit form of discrimination perpetuated false ideas regarding racial minorities and white individuals recreating together and often relegated racial minorities to lower-quality programs and facilities (Mowatt, 2019). Similarly, since the majority of summertime recreation programs and camps since heteronormative, these environments are not always safe for LGBTQ+ youth (Brown et al., 2019). Deviance from what has been deemed the norm has been associated with physical and emotional harm (Bockting et al., 2013; Caldwell et al., 1998; Lewis & Johnson, 2011). While it is now illegal to ban individual groups from participation based on race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, other forms of discrimination still create barriers to full participation (Belgave & Brevard, 2015). The impact of discrimination has been extensively studied in youth in school settings (Benner & Graham, 2011; Pachter & Garcia Coll, 2009; Smalls et al., 2007; Wong et al.,

2003), but the effects of discrimination extend beyond the academic realm to recreation and camp settings (Dagkas & Armour, 2012; Fernandez & Witt, 2013; Sharaievska et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2022).

Some improvements have been made in creating safe spaces for marginalized groups. Youth-serving recreation programs devoted to celebrating particular marginalized groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ youth, found that youth experienced an improved sense of wellbeing and self-worth when in an accepting space surrounded by a welcoming community (Gillig, et al, 2017; Riggs et al., 2010). For example, the creation of a community of LGBTQ+ individuals and allies helps LGBTQ+ youth thrive. LGBTQ+ students at schools with gay-straight alliance clubs (GSAs) feel safer, report less victimization, and feel greater access to adult allies (Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network, 2011; Walls et al., 2009). GSAs and other LGBTQ+-affirming organizations communicate to LGBTQ+ youth that there is a safe community for them and provide them with opportunities to lead (Theriault & Witt, 2014).

The social and structural inequities that feed discrimination can begin to be addressed by implementing equitable policies. The 2018 National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Inclusion Report indicates some organizations have already implemented or planned to implement promising practices, such as creating a formal inclusion policy and partnering with third-party organizations that may help direct DEIRJ efforts with marginalized populations. Unfortunately, the results from the inclusion report demonstrate that many recreation agencies have room for improvement. For example, only 2 in 5 agencies have a formal inclusion policy. Creating a formal inclusion policy may be a first step for many summer programs and camps (Gillig et al., 2017; Theriault & Witt, 2014). Clear policy statements are crucial for creating safe environments for everyone, especially marginalized groups. Previous research indicates LGBTQ+ students at schools with clear and specific anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies feel safer (McGuire et al., 2010; Szalacha, 2003). The sense of safety extended not only to LGBTQ+ students but to all students, whether marginalized or not (Szalacha, 2003). This extension of safety indicates effective anti-harassment and anti-discrimination reach those with multiple identities and those with intersecting marginalized identities.

Social Barriers

Social barriers arise when people compare themselves to others based on perceived markers, such as social or economic status (Kraus et al., 2017; Manstead, 2018). Social comparisons based on social class signals (e.g., appearance, speech, cultural objects) can create interpersonal and psychological barriers (Sanderson & Richards, 2010). Such social comparisons often align with beliefs regarding the superiority or inferiority of a particular race, class, gender, ability, or sexual orientation (Gerbers & Marchand, 2021; Suls et al., 2002).

When considering participation for youth with cognitive and physical disabilities, the first barrier often recognized and addressed is physical. Creating accessible spaces and providing adaptive equipment are certainly key components for designing inclusive programs for individuals with disabilities. However, these are not the only barriers to participation. Like racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with fewer resources, individuals with disabilities experience social barriers as well (Kalymon et al., 2010; McDougall et al., 2004). These social barriers can take a variety of forms, such as an aversion to individuals with disabilities or a tendency to be overly polite and protective (Brown et al., 2011; Devine, 2004; Kalymon et al., 2010). An aversion may manifest in feelings as confusion, fear or other negative attitudes that arise from those with disabilities presenting or behaving in ways that vary from normative social expectations (Hughes & McDonald, 2009; McDougall et al., 2004). In contrast, some are excessively kind and overprotective when interacting with individuals with disabilities, (Fichten et al., 1997). Both responses serve as social barriers for youth with disabilities discouraging or preventing them from participating in programs with individuals without disabilities.

Several researchers have explored ways to improve attitudes toward individuals with disabilities (Devine & O'Brien, 2007; Fort et al., 2017; Kalymon et al., 2010; Papaioannou et al., 2014; Rossetti, 2011). While some attitudes toward individuals with disabilities improved through mere contact, at times contact led to worse attitudes by reinforcing negative stereotypes and hierarchical power structures (Devine & O'Brien, 2007). Intentionally designed recreation programs could be influential in changing negative attitudes through an emphasis on positive youth development. Devine and Wilhite (2000) found that when participants were well acquainted with one another and paired to work together toward mutual achievement, rather than being set against each other in competition, recreation settings provided a space for positive perceptions of individuals with disabilities. Some researchers

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indicate a recreation experience including participants with and without disabilities helped facilitate positive attitudes and conceal a lack of social acceptance (Devine & O'Brien, 2007; Devine & Parr, 2008; Fort et al., 2017).

Similarly, creating spaces for youth from all backgrounds to come together can lessen social barriers. It is also important to remember, participants who come from differing communities have had different experiences. For example, LGBTQ+ youth from areas associated with lower income levels are more likely to have experienced verbal or physical harassment (Kosciw et al., 2009). It is important to remember that an individual with multiple identities may struggle to find a place in multiple communities. Helping participants find multiple communities for their intersecting identities will better meet the diverse needs of participants (Theriault, 2017). It is also important not to assume all marginalized individuals have the same experiences and needs. A shared identity does not equate to shared experience.

While the groups of interest—namely, LGBTQ+ youth, racial and ethnic minority youth, youth from low SES contexts, and youth with cognitive and physical disabilities—may experience summertime programs and camps differently, organizations can implement equitable and inclusive practices that could widely benefit marginalized communities. The purpose of this study was to compile promising practices for creating more equitable, diverse, and inclusive summertime programs and camps for LGBTQ+ youth, racial and ethnic minority youth, youth from low SES contexts, and youth with cognitive and physical disabilities.

Methods

This study examines the promising practices of selected summertime programs and camps that are recognized for their work with youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, LGBTQ+ youth, racial and ethnic minority, and youth with disabilities. Twenty thought leaders from the selected summertime programs participated in semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews occurred online through a video conferencing service.

Thought-Leader Selection

The participating summertime recreation programs were selected based on two of three criteria: 1) the program specializes in working with one or more of the populations of interest; 2) the program was recommended for its promising work with the populations of interest; or 3) the program is a large, national organization with a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. All programs studied are located in the United States.

The selection process began with generating a list of potential programs based on recommendations from national affiliates such as the Girl Scouts of America, the American Camp Association, and the YMCA. The researchers then contacted representatives from the programs on the initial list to 1) explain the scope and aim of the project and evaluate the program's fit for the study and 2) solicit recommendations of other promising programs that may fit the study criteria. Each recommendation was considered and contacted for evaluation of study fit. This process continued until saturation was achieved. Table 1.1 displays participating organizations and their focus areas.

Table 1.1 Study Participants

Organization	Organizational Focus Area*
Y-USA (Three representatives from across the USA)	Large Intermediary
4-H (Three representatives from across the USA)	

Tim Horton Foundation	Low-Income
Cheley Foundation	
Fiver Children's Foundation	
Crossroads for Kids	
Camp Homeward Bound	
Project Morry	
Fresh Air Fund	
Camp Brave Trails	LGBTQ+
Camp Highlight	
Harbor Camps	
Camp for All	Diversely Abled
Camp Twin Lakes	
Clemson U.	Racial/Ethnic Minorities
Camp Kupugani	

*Note: Interviewees often spoke to diversity, equity, inclusion, or racial justice issues beyond the focus area of their organization.

Procedures

The semi-structured interview questions often arose naturally from conversation, but the interviews were instructed to address the following topics: inclusive and appropriate programming; outreach, engagement, or recruitment of populations; equitable enrollment and access; and evaluation efforts. Depending on the summertime program, specific questions regarding the program's population focus were included. For example, programs with experience working with LGBTQ+ youth were asked about the openness of the organization's staff, board, and participating families and how the organization navigates any resistance to inclusion.

Data Analysis

The majority of the semi-structured interviews were conducted with two researchers present. All interviews were recorded and both researchers were able to listen to the full interviews. The interviews were examined for recommendations, policies, and practices as well as any cautions in working with the populations of interest. A list of the findings was compiled, and similar findings were categorized together. The first author was the primary coder, while the second author verified that the results accurately reflected the content of the interviews. Once the results were compiled, they were sent to the interview participants to verify that the results reflected the organization's policies and practices. As a form of member checking, participants were able to add or clarify until all parties agreed with the final results.

Results

The results are categorized into general recommendations and population-specific recommendations. The general recommendations were categorized by their applicability to all populations of interest as well as their potential to improve a program's overall equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts. The results generated from this study are

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summarized in table 1.2 are not meant to be exhaustive; rather, they provide insight into practices current recreation programs and camps are implementing that have been successful in creating inclusive and equitable experiences for marginalized populations.

Table 1.2 Summarized Results for Promising DEIRJ Practices

Category	Theme	Description
	Clear and Transparent Policy	Create a detailed policy including all possible grounds for discrimination
General Recommendations		Widely publicize anti-discrimination policy
	Community Involvement	Meet with local community groups
		Offer community groups free use of facility
	Open Communication	Establish open lines of communication with families and youth and recognize their expertise regarding their children
	Empower Youth	Create a platform for youth to provide input
		Implement youth input if possible
	Empower Staff	Invite staff into discussions regarding DEIRJ
		Be cautious not to place DEIRJ work solely on staff who represent marginalized populations
	Evaluation	Adjust evaluation questions to better gauge the experience of marginalized campers
		Elevate youth voices through evaluations
Staff Interview Process	Utilize the interview process to establish focus on DEIRJ	
	Share gender pronouns in interview and ask questions that highlight the interviewee's perception of DEIRJ	
LGBTQ+ Youth	Remove Gender Specifications	De-gender activities by using classifications other than "boys" and "girls" (e.g., "high-energy" and "chill")
	Confidentiality	Do not reveal the sexual orientation or gender identity of youth to other staff, campers, or families if the youth choose not to disclose this information
	De-Sexualize Sexual Orientation	Do not equate sexual orientation with sex or sexuality
Allow staff and campers to share their sexual orientation with others		
Racial and Ethnic Minority Youth	Demonstrate Cultural Competency	Learn to communicate and interact with people from differing backgrounds
	Examine Demographics	Examine the surrounding communities' demographics and compare them with the program's participant demographics
	Facilitate Discussions	Create space for youth and leaders to discuss topics of racial inequality
		Focus on ideas of empathy, openness, and treating others with respect

Youth from Low-Income Communities	Reframe Thinking	Measure youth by opportunity for growth, not by what they lack
	Financial Assistance	Take inventory of every participant's supplies to provide missing materials
		Simplify the scholarship application process
Intentional Programming	Question assumptions and implications of schedules and programming for participants and their families	
Youth with Cognitive and Physical Disabilities	Comprehensive Application Process	Include phone calls with parents and other involved parties to learn how best to help youth
	Provide Options	Provide activity options for youth and let them decide how they want to participate
	Predetermine Camp's Capacity	Prior to youth arriving at camp, determine capacity and the type of experience the youth will have at camp

General Recommendations

Clear and Transparent Policy

Throughout the interviews, thought leaders regularly stated that the first step toward fostering a more equitable and welcoming environment is creating a clear anti-discrimination policy. One representative described beginning employment at their organization by reviewing the existing anti-discrimination policy. They found the policy did not specifically name sexual orientation and gender expression as protected identities. A detailed policy that includes all possible grounds for discrimination helps programs address parents' concerns as well as communicate to program participants that they are welcome. One representative emphasized communicating the policy to parents to address parents' pushback against the program's transgender policy. The policy was widely publicized and clearly explained to parents at the program orientation, so if a parent did express concern over sleeping arrangements, the program could stand by its policy without reservation.

Community Involvement

Several interviewees spoke about community involvement as a key component of understanding marginalized groups. For example, one interviewee recounted this experience:

"There is a large Burmese population not too far from us, and we met with their local community center.... They said that if you think that you are going to come in and change or put your brochure in a different language it's not going to do it. It takes time for them to really understand who you are and trust you and instead of always asking people to come to you, you need to start going to them, so they start to get to know you as an organization. So we're trying to be more involved in the different communities. We've offered days to the community center to use our facilities for free, so they can come in and get to know us a little bit. Or we've gone to their park days where we go to an event and just represent the camp so we can be there, and they can see us."

Open Communication

Open communication refers to the amount and quality of communication that camp leadership and staff have with participants and their caregivers. This includes asking caregivers about the participants' previous experience and any concerns that staff should be aware of to help participants have the best possible experiences. One interviewee recounts an experience early in their career working with a participant with autism. The representative wrongfully assumed they knew everything they needed to know about the participant, without consulting with the participant's parents. The first year of camp was a challenge for the staff trying to understand the participant's needs. The following

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year, the representative spoke with the family and realized that many of the challenging behaviors were more easily understood with the background knowledge the family provided. For example, the participant struggled taking showers; upon speaking with the family, the interviewee realized the participant had never before taken a shower, let alone a shower on their own. The youth and their families are their own experts when it comes to participants' needs.

Empower Youth

Youth often recognize equity gaps before program leadership does. One interviewee provided the example of youth suggesting renaming “boys camp” and “girls camp” with more gender-neutral terms to help their fellow participants who were in the process of transitioning from one gender to another. The program created a platform for the youth to provide feedback and implemented the feedback to create positive change. One interviewee spoke of amplifying youth voice by establishing a youth council that is not merely a token but an influential factor in the decision-making process.

Empower Staff

The need for staff who better reflected the programs' populations was a recurring theme for almost every representative interviewed. While there is a need for more diverse staff in general, programs can begin to create change by empowering the voices of existing staff members. One interviewee explained how their program's upper management invited staff into discussions regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion. However, programs should be cautious of placing the work of DEIRJ solely on staff who represent marginalized populations.

Evaluation

Evaluating the outcomes and impact of camp can be a valuable tool in identifying areas for improvement. Several of the interviewees adjusted the evaluation questions to better gauge the experience of marginalized campers and, consequentially, to help improve the camp experience for all attendees. Simply asking, “Did you enjoy camp?” does little to tease out more nuanced experiences of marginalized populations. The camp instead began to ask questions such as, “Did you feel emotionally safe at camp? Did you experience bullying? Did you witness anyone else get bullied?” Questions such as these can help assess what types of experiences youth are having at camp and if experiences differ for marginalized populations.

Staff Interview Process

Hiring staff who understand the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion work helps propel the camp in a positive direction. Several interviewees utilized the interview process as a place to establish the camp's values and expectations as well as assess the camp communicated its culture potential staff's attitudes toward diversity, equity, and inclusion. One by introducing the interviewer's pronouns and asking the interviewee's preferred gender pronouns. This simple act demonstrated the camp's acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals and began to set a culture for the potential staff. Another interviewee offered the following explanation:

“When we hire staff, I ask, ‘Why are people poor?’ And if they give me the answer that they don't work hard enough or their parents or any of those types of things, they're out. I also want them to understand that systemic racism is to me a fact, and for our organization, it is a fact.”

For more information regarding the general recommendations listed in these findings, see: Forde et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2021; Pryor & Outley 2014; Roberts et al., 2010; Weybright et al., 2017.

LGBTQ+ Youth

Remove Gender Specifications

Removing gender specifications could be mistakenly construed as removing gender identification altogether; that is not the case. For some interviewees, removing gender specifications meant de-gendering activities and rethinking programming approaches with all interests and abilities in mind.

“There is this idea that in any activity block we have to have something for girls and we have to have something for boys so like we have to arts and crafts and a sport.... Our thinking was along that line until we had to deconstruct it and ask what is it that we are trying to say. Well, we are trying to say we need an activity that is a little bit more sedentary and something that is a little bit more active. That is the way that we define those boxes now, red active to sedentary green.”

The thought leader found that reinforcing gender stereotypes regarding interests and abilities isolates and others youth who do not fit a gender mold, whether they are transgender, non-binary, or cisgender. By removing the notion of gendered activities, the thought leader and their staff were able to be more intentional in their programming and name exactly what the programming block aimed to accomplish.

Confidentiality

Interviewees consistently stated the importance of maintaining confidentiality for LGBTQ+ youth. The choice to reveal sexual orientation or gender identity should belong to the youth. Several interviewees spoke about youth declaring different gender identities than their caregivers reported on their applications. The discrepancy was often due to unsupportive care givers or caregivers who were unaware of their children’s identities. The interviewees emphasized the importance of maintaining the child’s confidentiality, even with the youth’s caregivers. For many interviewees, this meant reassigning participants to the cabin that better fit their gender identity without informing or asking permission from their families. Confidentiality also includes not revealing a participant’s sexual orientation or gender identity to other participants or staff unless the participant chooses to reveal their identity.

De-sexualize Sexual Orientation

It is not uncommon for sexual orientation to be equated with sexuality. One interviewee emphasized the importance of de-sexualizing sexual orientation. Some interviewees expressed the importance of allowing staff to express their sexual orientation. As one interviewee explained, “We say to all of our staff that you are allowed to share who you are but not what you do. That drew a very distinct line that you are allowed to come out and have those discussions and be who you are.” Allowing staff and youth to express their sexual orientation and gender identity de-stigmatizes LGBTQ+ identities and communicates safe spaces for youth to express and explore who they are.

For more information regarding LGBTQ+ youth, see Gillig & Bighash, 2021; Gillig & Bighash, 2019; Harvey et al., 2022; Litwiller, 2018; Mitten 2012; Russell et al., 2003; Theriault 2017; and Wilson & Lewis 2012.

Racialized and Ethnicized Youth

Demonstrate Cultural Competency

Cultural competency refers to the ability to understand as well as communicate and interact with people from differing backgrounds. Several interviewees emphasized the importance of an organization developing a level of cultural competence for the populations they wish to serve. For many of the interviewees, speaking directly with the communities begins the process of developing cultural competency. One example of demonstrating cultural

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competency is providing time and space for Muslim camp participants to pray. The specific cultural needs will depend on the populations that the camp serves or wishes to serve.

Examine Demographics

Several interviewees explained the importance of examining the surrounding communities' demographics and comparing the camp's participant demographics to the larger population's demographics. If a camp wishes to be more reflective of their community, they must first identify areas for improvement.

Facilitate Discussions

Creating space for youth and leaders to discuss topics of racial inequality can help youth contribute meaningfully to their own development and help establish an antiracist camp climate. One interviewee explained how their camp helped facilitate conversations about racial inequality by programming time for youth to discuss topics of their choosing. A staff member was present to guide the conversation, but the youth helped to generate the topic. This particular camp has an intentionally diverse group of campers, which helps naturally guide the discussion to topics of inequality. In addition, several interviewees suggested that if the camp's board does not support discussions regarding systemic racism, implicit bias, privilege, and other topics deemed political open conversations can still be had around the topics of empathy, openness, and treating others with respect.

For more information regarding race and ethnicity, see: Arai & Kivel, 2009; Fernandez & Witt, 2013; Makopondo, 2006; Outley & Blyth, Outley & Witt, 2006; Pinckney et al.; Rose & Paisley, 2012; Sharaievska et al., 2010; Stodolska 2018; and Theriault & Rasul, 2020.

Youth from Low-Income Communities

Reframe thinking

Several interviewees identified the ways in which camps label youth from low-income communities as problematic.

"It's appreciating that a lot of the metrics that we have for our kids is based on systemic racism, so everything that my kids are measured against is lack. They don't have this, they don't have that.... There is nothing about the conversation, it's what language that makes you feel good who you are and what you do." It's including them in the conversation its, what language should we be using? It's how should we measure you? What are the things you want to be measured on so you have a fighting shot at this? Because right now everything is centered on there is a need because of a deficit as opposed to there is need because there is an opportunity."

Measuring the youth by what they lack unfairly places them at a disadvantage. Instead of measuring youth from low-income communities by what they lack, the thought leader suggested, measure their opportunities for growth.

Financial Assistance

The more obvious component of serving youth from low-income communities is providing financial assistance. Many camps use scholarships as a means of creating access to camps. Tuition scholarships are crucial; however, they may not be sufficient. Several interviewees explained that covering the costs of tuition does not meet the needs of youth who lack necessary supplies. Several interviewees reported initiatives to provide supplies to all campers who lacked material goods.

One thought leader was deliberate about mitigating the potential shame the youth might feel by providing materials without questions. The thought leader directed the staff to not ask, "Why don't you have this?" Rather they

were to provide whatever was lacking without question. This same thought leader took an inventory of incoming campers' supplies in order to identify campers in need of supplies. The camp staff informed the youth that the inventory was to ensure the camper's supplies remained accounted for the campers were unaware that the inventory also allowed the camp to identify needs. Several interviewees provided surplus supplies for all campers, regardless of income, so as not to single out campers. Some interviewees advertised the additional material aid in order to ease the families' worries, while others did not advertise the additional aid.

Another component to financial assistance is the application process. Several interviewees opted to ease the scholarship process by no longer requiring income verification and social security numbers. The camps choose to believe the families when they expressed need and to provide assistance based on how much the families stated they were able to afford. Some interviewees also provided transportation to and from camp for the youth who were unable to provide their own transportation.

Intentional Programming

Several interviewees expressed the importance of intentional programming. The camps that practiced programming would pause and ask what ramifications current or planned schedules and programming decisions might have on youth and their families. Who might be adversely affected by any potential changes and how? Intentional programming demonstrates an awareness of the camp's impact on the youth and their families. For example, as one interviewee explained,

“The camp keeps moving back the dates for when staff needs to apply, when campers need to apply by, and when things need to be reserved by. And we know how it's well- resourced families with free time that can schedule things ahead of time and can plan thisfar ahead of time and plan their money and be able to do that. I can name a specific example of a teenager who has had a lot of success at camp, but then one year when we moved the deadline, her mom, who was a single mother who worked a lot, missed the deadline.”

For more information on youth from low-income communities, see Fortune & Oncescu, 2022; Gerbers & Marchand, 2021; Oncesu & Loewen, 2020; and Sikorcin, 2003.

Youth with Cognitive and Physical Disabilities

Comprehensive Application Process

Several interviewees indicated their camps prepare for youth with disabilities by providing a comprehensive application process. The application process includes not only an online component but multiple phone calls to parents and involved parties. For example, one interviewee spoke with the youth's parents and teachers when designing programs for youth.

Provide Options

Determining that the only option is for youth to watch from the sidelines is unacceptable. Interviews spoke of the ways in which they worked to ensure equal participation in camp activities. Adaptations may be required, which may necessitate forethought and preparation. One interviewee explained that:

“Part of universal programming is that we don't tell a camper how to participate. We give them options, and they get to choose. That allows them to choose and be successful not be successful based on how they choose to do it. It's not that different people climb a climbing wall. There are people who are going to make it to the top, and there are typically developing people who are going to freeze in the middle and then come down.”

Predetermine Camp's Capacity

Several interviewees expressed the importance of determining the camp's capacity prior to being confronted with individual cases. For some camps, this means that camp leadership must assess the physical capacity of the camp for youth with mobility concerns, as well as the staff's ability to serve youth with cognitive impairments. The camp might determine it is not yet accessible for youth in wheelchairs but would like to make necessary alterations. These camps could consult with other camps specializing in youth with disabilities or with members of the community they wish to reach. In preparing to serve youth with particular disabilities, the camp could consider the type of experience the youth might have.

"If you have somebody who is hard of hearing, do you have a staff who is hard of hearing? That is going to be an important piece for the communication, and then are you going to add a sign language class to your program because part of camp is that socialization? If you have one staff that can only speak sign language and the camper can only speak through them, that's going to make it difficult for them to be socialized. On the other hand, if you have five or six campers that speak sign language, they're going to be in a click to themselves and so then how are we making sure that everybody is connected and learning from each other?"

Predetermining and discussing capacity allows the camp to advertise to targeted groups. If the camp determines it is not suited to meet the needs of a particular camper, it could help the camper find a situation better suited to their needs. One interviewee even reported providing financial assistance to the youth if the referred camp has a price associated with it.

For more information regarding youth with cognitive and physical disabilities see Dillenschneider, 2007; Havens, 1992; Holman & McAvoy, 2005; Lais, 2001; Schleien et al., 1993; and Zeller et al., 2006.

Discussion

The recommendations provided within this study may help provide direction for youth-serving summer recreation organizations seeking to become more equitable. As mentioned previously, establishing clear policies may be the first step toward addressing social and structural inequality. Part of an effective policy is the implementation. Harassment and bullying must be addressed when such incidents occur. Policy without practice negates the effectiveness of the policy (Allison, 1999). One way programs can be proactive about policy implementation is to consider scenarios beforehand and prepare staff to react appropriately (Gillard et al., 2014). One scenario important to consider is how a camp will meet the needs of transgender campers when it comes to bathrooms and sleeping arrangements. Restrooms, changing rooms, and sleeping arrangements are spaces of distress both personally and interpersonally for transgender individuals (Browne et al, 2019; Gillard et al., 2014). When policies and procedures are not established prior to a LGBTQ+ participant arriving, unnecessary negative attention and criticism could be given to that participant as staff attempt to find in-the-moment solutions (Gillard et al., 2014). Prior consideration concerning policy also allows time for programs to appropriately train staff, which can ensure consistent treatment (Gillard et al., 2014).

Anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policies should do more than simply bolster a camp's image or create positive publicity otherwise they do more harm than good. Policies should create actual change and represent shifts away from the standard of inequality and toward an approach that centers and protects individuals with one or more marginalized identities. A policy that specifically names all protected identities allows individuals to see each of their identities as valued or, at the very least, safeguarded. Implementing an anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policy may be the initial step in dismantling structural inequality and power dynamics, though a policy alone is not sufficient.

Community Involvement

In addition to creating clear policies and effectively implementing those policies, working with families and communities was a notable finding across all populations of interest. Program participants come from differing communities and have differing experiences. While summer camp staff will not have a complete understanding of

campers' home communities, considering the communities of origin will help foster understanding and help build a safe program and camp community (Gillard et al., 2014). Building a safe program and camp community begins with integrating parents and caregivers in preparation for the program or camp. Communicating with parents and caregivers before and during the program will help programs better understand the experiences and needs of their participants. Program leadership could develop relationships with the families so that families feel confident their child will not be overlooked.

One way to reassure families is to maintain continued communication throughout the program and camp experience (Fields et al., 2018; National PTA Diversity, Inclusion and Outreach Committee; Simpkins et al., 2017). Staff can create a two-way, ongoing communication in which the families can speak with staff throughout the summer and staff can share children's success stories. When communicating with families, staff could consider the cultural, language, and literacy levels of each family and tailor communication to meet specific needs (National PTA Diversity, Inclusion and Outreach Committee, 2016; Simpkins et al., 2017). Inviting families into the camp process fosters greater participation and could encourage continued success for the youth.

Staff and Staff Trainings

Study participants consistently indicated the importance of staff in creating equitable and inclusive summer recreation programs and camps. Staff can serve either to reinforce power dynamics or to empower youth (Niblett, 2017); staff must be aware of their influence and seek to amplify every camper's voice. Staff can show clear and vocal appreciation for every youth as well as be aware of their tone and speech (National PTA Diversity, Inclusion and Outreach Committee, 2016). Youth should never feel belittled or demeaned.

Staff come with their own biases and beliefs regarding certain issues, due to their cultural, religious, and family upbringing. Effective training helps staff recognize their positions on a variety of topics, such as systemic racism and LGBTQ+ rights, and invites them to examine their biases. Inviting staff on an introspective journey should not be done with an intent to shame; rather, staff should feel encouraged to consider other perspectives with the aim of creating a safe environment for all. Trainings should include a discussion of how all young people have the right to feel safe, as well as, the potential risks to that safety (Sadowski, 2010). One way to help reduce bias, prejudice, and discrimination is to increase positive exposure to LGBTQ+ individuals, individuals with disabilities, and racial and ethnic minorities in a trusting environment (Horn & Romeo, 2010; Fort et al., 2017). Trainings should encourage ongoing dialogue about difficult topics and should be followed up with more trainings on the subject of diversity and inclusion (Payne & Smith, 2010). Continued dialogue and trainings demonstrate the camp's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Another way in which programs can emphasize diversity and inclusion is to create active roles for camp leadership in the trainings. When leadership participate in trainings, it communicates to staff the commitment the camp has to fostering an inclusive environment (Cunningham, 2015). Leadership should also be aware of how a task-oriented approach to diversity might limit inclusivity (Doherty et al., 2010). When diversity training is perceived as merely a task to be completed, the necessary change is not likely to occur. Additionally, inclusivity is not the responsibility of one employee who belongs to the marginalized group seeking inclusivity. All staff must be actively engaged and assume the responsibility in creating an inclusive environment and becoming positive role models for all youth, regardless of their identities (Allison & Hibbler, 2004; Capper & Young, 2014).

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to identify promising practices that might help summertime recreation programs and camps improve their DEIRJ efforts for marginalized populations, such as LGBTQ+ individuals, racial and ethnic minorities, youth from low-income contexts, and youth with cognitive and physical disabilities. Many of those recommendations acknowledge and address the structural inequities that have favored dominant groups and work to dismantle discriminatory structures.

As mentioned previously, these results are not meant to be exhaustive. The knowledge generated from this study centers on the experiences of the selected sample. While the study participants have extensive knowledge of the populations of interest, the details of working with more specific sub-populations were omitted from the broader

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results of this study. Further work would be required to understand and implement promising practices for more specific sub- populations. The results from this study were intended to proffer broader recommendations for creating a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive camp environment.

Conclusion

The results of this study are meant to assist recreation programs and camps with their efforts based on where they are in their DEIRJ journey. Determining which promising practice to implement and when is best determined by each program's specific situation and needs. A program's needs can often be determined by comparing the population the program is currently serving to the population it hopes to serve. Staff and participants can also help inform the program's DEIRJ priorities if they are afforded influence. Newer staff members are often able to see patterns, barriers, and less overt cultural insensitivities, which might have invisible to entrenched staff. Empowering these staff members can highlight racial disparities that the program or camp could begin to address by implementing more equitable practices and policies.

Even the most well-intentioned summertime program and camp might experience challenges when implementing equitable practices. Program leadership must be prepared for resistance both from within the program and from without. Despite shifts in societal perceptions and improved legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals against discrimination, addressing LGBTQ+ inclusivity through policy and practice is still vulnerable to resistance. Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is not passive work. Leadership must evaluate their programs' levels of preparedness for meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ youth, racial and ethnic minorities, youth from lower SESs, and youth with cognitive and physical disabilities. Undertaking changes before the program is prepared to do so might cause greater harm to these populations than good. Change might need to occur more gradually than desired in order to promote the wellbeing of marginalized participants. With that said, the difficulty of engaging in equitable practices is not an excuse to forego efforts. Fostering diversity, equity, inclusion, and racial justice is an ongoing process and requires commitment, but it remains necessary to allow all youth to access and enjoy the benefits of summer recreational programs.

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