

COALITION FOR INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Building Welcoming Recreational and Leisure Opportunities for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

I. Background

We are a group of individuals who are committed to promoting more inclusive recreational and leisure opportunities on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities and/or physical disabilities living in our local communities. We are comprised of parents of individuals with developmental disabilities, individuals with disabilities, individuals representing the YMCA of Snohomish County, the City of Everett Parks and Recreation, and Snohomish County, all of whom continued to meet after a local training on inclusive programming at the YMCA. We recognize that “disability is a natural part of the human experience”¹ and are in agreement that isolation and living a life apart from the community is not inherent to a disability or a particular culture, rather it is a characteristic of the community that can be addressed and changed.

Critical to this commitment is the idea that inclusion of individuals with disabilities is a value of healthy communities and is defined as having three levels.² The first level is that of *physical integration*. This level assures that a person’s right to access is recognized and assured and was mandated by the Architectural Barrier’s Act of 1968 and the American Disabilities Act. This level is a prerequisite to the other two levels of inclusion. The second level, called *functional inclusion*, refers to an individual’s ability to function within a given environment. Staff must have adequate knowledge and resources to appropriately adapt activities in order for this level to occur. Once a community has met the first two levels, the third and highest level of inclusion, *social inclusion*, can then take place. Social inclusion cannot be mandated and must be internally motivated. Social inclusion is defined as “one’s ability to gain social acceptance and/or participate in positive interactions with peers during recreation activities.” (Schleien, et al. 1999, as cited in Nolan, 2005.)

We recognize and acknowledge that organizations and municipalities have mission statements and strategic plans that embrace principles to include people of different abilities and cultures. Our research indicates that a number of municipalities and organizations throughout the nation have taken a similar collaborative approach to inclusive communities. To this end, we are committed to moving forward to seek additional partners in public and private organizations, as well as other community members, who might want to be part of this process of “empowering individuals with developmental disabilities to become valued and active members of their communities through involvement in community-based leisure settings”³ and facilitate meaningful relationships between people with and without disabilities.

¹ Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000/Public Law 106-402 (10/30/2000).

² Nolan, Catherine Veronica. “Best Practices of Inclusion Services: The Value of Inclusion.” Access Today. Winter 2005, Issue 19. National Center on Accessibility. April 27, 2007.
<<http://www.ncaonline.org/monographs/19inclusion.shtml>>.

³ Ibid.

II. Statement of Need

Individuals with significant disabilities need a broad range of opportunities for inclusive recreational and leisure activities within their local community settings. Across Snohomish County, families have clearly indicated their need for more opportunities to access recreation, leisure and other community activities with their family members with disabilities. Adults with disabilities may or may not be employed, or may only work part-time due to their disability. This becomes a hardship for families who must continue to financially support their family member can lead to income loss and destabilization of the home situation. For families with dependents with more significant disabilities, respite from full-time care is a desperate need. Without more community opportunities, these families are at greater risk for crisis and emergency out-of-home placement for their loved ones, which comes at a huge cost to public funding.

Even with “best practices” and a welcoming atmosphere, community programs and organizations may still be perceived as a barrier to an individual with disabilities, and organizations often need assistance in reaching out and providing support to some individuals in order to include them in their programs.

III. What we believe

We believe that all individuals, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, race, culture, or ability have the skills, interests, and talents to enhance their community and have a responsibility to do so.

Community organizations, groups, activities, and places become stronger and more vital when a diverse range of individuals are welcomed and included. With appropriate resources, sensitivity, and support, community organizations can include individuals with disabilities as regular and active participants without the need to create separate and specialized programs.

IV. Strategies and Direction for Action

In their mission and purpose statements, many organizations and local municipalities embrace the idea of inclusion and welcome all people. Our vision is to enhance and build upon those assets that already exist in our communities and to strive to be a partner in actualizing this vision with others.

The vision for this group is:

- to partner, collaborate, and work with community members, including individuals with disabilities and their families to promote and increase inclusive recreational and leisure places and activities throughout Snohomish County;
- to collaborate with other organizations and municipalities and their existing diversity efforts; and
- to combine resources and technical assistance, whenever possible, to assist in the discovery and application process of grants and other funding sources.

For more information contact Tamra Bradford at 425.388.7320 or ddinfo@co.snohomish.wa.us or visit our website at www.snoco.org and search developmental disabilities.