



Inclusion Tools for After School Professionals

brought to you by the San Francisco Special Needs Inclusion/Mental Health Consultation Collaborative
The Special Needs Inclusion Project, Instituto Familiar de la Raza & Edgewood Center

SNIPPET #3: Creating an Inclusive Program

Welcome all children in programs.

OST staff can develop mission statements that explicitly state an agency's intention and ability to serve persons with varying abilities.

Brochures and news releases that advertise programs should invite participation by individuals with disabilities, and clearly indicate who to contact if an individual needs accommodations in order to participate in a program. In this way, an agency can make a public statement that children and youth with disabilities are welcome and will be served inclusively.

Ensure architectural accessibility.

OST staff should be certain that their facilities, parking lots, and playgrounds are physically accessible for individuals with disabilities. For example, ramps, elevators, curb cuts, reserved parking spots, and accessible drinking fountains and rest rooms should all be in place and operative to accommodate individuals who need them.

Ensure program accessibility.

Participants who register for OST programs need assurance that their special needs can be met in those programs. After school agencies need to be prepared to meet individual needs by adapting . The activities or equipment, providing one-to-one assistance, educating nondisabled participants about disabilities, and managing

behaviors.

Include social and recreation skills in your program.

Providing opportunities for students to learn social interaction and recreation skills can help students to gain self-confidence learn how to get along with and respect others, build enduring relationships and friendships, assume responsibility, solve problems, and make decisions. These goals can be achieved by involving children with and without disabilities in small group activities at regular periods throughout the week. Within these groups children can be taught, and be given frequent opportunities to practice such skills as greeting each other, listening to each other respectfully, taking turns, initiating and engaging in conversations, brainstorming ideas, expressing opinions, and solving problems when they arise.

Educate staff to meet individual needs.

If program leaders lack knowledge and experience in working with individuals with disabilities, they may feel reluctant or unqualified to serve them. Agencies should take responsibility to educate their staff in disability issues and up-to-date strategies for including participants with disabilities in recreation programs. Through education and experiences, recreation staff can change their attitudes about inclusion, and gain confidence and expertise in meeting participants' individual needs.

Provide cooperative activities that promote positive peer interactions.

After school staff may need to re-evaluate their programs to ensure that inclusive activities can become a reality. They might ask themselves: Can all participants be involved in programs to their full potential? Do programs emphasize competition and individual achievement at the expense of cooperation, social interaction, group learning goals, and relationship building and friendship? Providing opportunities for children to play together in cooperative groups reinforces inclusion, socialization, interdependence, and an awareness and appreciation of others.

Help kids build friendships. OST staff can play a significant role in encouraging the growth of friendships between children with and without disabilities by:

- **Including social and recreation skills in your program.** Providing opportunities for students to learn social interaction and recreation skills can help students to gain self-confidence learn how to get along with and respect others, build enduring relationships and friendships, assume responsibility, solve problems, and make decisions. These goals can be achieved by involving children with and without disabilities in small group activities at regular periods throughout the week. Within these groups children can be taught, and be given frequent opportunities to practice such skills as greeting each other, listening to each other respectfully, taking turns, initiating and engaging in conversations, brainstorming ideas, expressing opinions, and solving problems when they arise.
- **Telling parents when friendships develop.** Because parents rarely have opportunities to observe their children during the day, they may have no idea that their children have friends at school or after school. Lack of knowledge about their children's friendships can contribute to parents believing that their children cannot make friends. When staff informs parents of budding relationships between children with and without disabilities, parents learn that such relationships are possible for their children, and can then take an active role in nurturing them.

Conclusion

Each of the above steps are an important part of creating an inclusive environment where all children - with and without disabilities - can thrive, build friendships and develop a strong sense of community.

From: <http://www.ici.umn.edu/products/impact/162/over6.html>, by Linda A. Heyne, Stuart J. Schleien, and Leo H. McAvoy

Gaylord, V., Lieberman, L., Abery, B. & Lais, G. (Eds.). (2003). *Impact: Feature Issue on Social Inclusion Through Recreation for Persons with Disabilities*, 16(2) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration. Available from <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/162>.

Contributed by: Julie Dalesio, MA, Clinician, Afterschool Consulting Team, Edgewood Center for Children and Families San Francisco, CA



The Special Needs Inclusion/Mental Health Collaborative is funded by the San Francisco Department of Children Youth and their Families.