

Final Paper

For decades, American children have embraced the tradition of continuing their education during the summertime in a setting that encourages fidgeting, jumping, yelling, laughing, and most other activities that are taboo in a classroom setting. Summer camps provide children with an informal education that incorporates athletics, recreation, and teambuilding.

However, for students with disabilities, a traditional summer camping experience may seem impossible, due to the many obstacles that seem to come between the child and the camp activities. However, there are many solutions to this problem, and this paper will outline the ways that camps have overcome and can overcome barriers for campers with disabilities. The ideal summer camp for inclusion or disabled children would have the following facilities: an adaptive waterfront, adaptive playground equipment, building access, and ultimately an assistive technology lab to teach children about the resources available to them.

The waterfront is always one of the highlights for children at camp. There is nothing better than taking a swim in a lake or a pool after a long day in the heat. However, the waterfront can be one of the most dangerous areas of a camp, and therefore extra caution must be exercised. In addition, a pool or lake can benefit campers with mobility impairments. ABLEDATA's December 1992 report points out, "Swimming and other water activities are used in rehabilitation and physical therapy to promote good muscle tone, lung capacity, flexibility, and overall fitness without causing undue pressure on joints or bones (ABLEDATE 1).

Many products are available to allow for pool access for people with mobility impairments. These products fall into two categories: those that allow for access to enter a pool or lake and also products that allow for stabilization of the body during floatation.

The National Center on Accessibility provides information about adaptive products for use in recreation parks and tourism. They have a wide array of pool lifts designed for easy access entering and exiting a pool. For instance, the IGAT180 meets ADA recommendations and is powered by water power. The device can lift up to 400 pounds and is portable (NCA).

The Danmar Corporation specializes in designing assistive technology. They have designed a line of floatation devices that stabilize the body. For instance, the Combination Head Float and Mini Stabilizer Bar has been designed with the specific purpose of avoiding tipping. “When working with persons who may hyper-extend, tipping backwards or sideways, this combination Head Float & Mini Stabilizer Bar may help to keep the face out of the water. When someone is in a near vertical position, rotation and tipping doesn't usually present a problem” (Danmar).

Another area that causes particular barriers for disabled campers is the playground. Playground equipment often requires crawling, climbing, and walking along rough terrain. However, many city playgrounds, camps, and schools have turned to adaptive playground equipment to make sure that all children can enjoy the fun.

Boundless Playgrounds works with park designers, schools, and other organizations to assure that the playgrounds built can be enjoyed by children with disabilities. There are a few main principles of playground design that directly affect children with mobility disabilities.

First of all, the terrain of the playground must be smooth enough that the wheels of a wheelchair will not get stuck. “Some play-useful surfaces should be selected to maximize accessibility for children using walkers and wheelchairs. Other surfaces should be selected to minimize the severity of the impact of a fall” (Boundless Playgrounds).

Next, an important principle of inclusive playground design is to allow children of all abilities to gather and play together. “A gathering space can be at ground level beneath a play structure with unitary surfacing, or on an elevated platform that is accessible for children using a wheelchair or other support device” (Boundless Playgrounds).

Swings seem as if they are one of the simplest pieces of playground equipment to use. However, swinging can be difficult for children with limited use of their legs. Boundless Playgrounds points out, “Within every play environment there should be swings for everyone with the accommodation of high back support, arm rests, and unitary rubber surfacing below the swing.”

Additional concerns apply to playground design. Including that of giving children many choices for both travel within playground pieces and around playground pieces. For instance if a rope bridge connects two pieces of equipment, a ramp should also be available for transfer between the same two pieces. In addition, points of transfer allow children in wheelchairs to easily get in and out of wheelchairs at the tops and bottoms of slides. (Boundless Playgrounds).

Clearly, it is vital that all buildings have ramps for wheelchair and walker accessibility. Shorter water fountains should be available for those in wheelchairs. Additionally, bathroom facilities should be equipped for easy transfer from a wheelchair and also low sinks.

While camp is an important place to play and create social interactions and relationships, camp is important for education as well. Ideally a camp that includes or focuses on special needs children would incorporate an aspect of educating those children about the resources that can help them throughout their lives.

An assistive technology lab should be implemented in the camp, if anything else to allow children to see the “cool” tools that they could use to do new things. Depending on the age group and ability, these tools can vary, but if the children were middle-high school age with a variety of disabilities, the lab should include a variety of equipment.

First of all, children with vision impairments may experience issues with arts and crafts or other activities. For that reason, a fairly low-tech closed caption television magnifier like the Genie Pro would allow students to complete tasks such as art and writing while learning about the new technology.

In addition, children with vision impairments should have the ability to gain experiences with a Braille and the Braille language in general. Many of them may be transitioning from low-vision to blindness and could learn the new language in a friendly setting among other children who may be experiencing similar problems. Various software should be included in the lab, including a dictation system such as the Dragon Naturally Speaking dictation system or the Kurzweil program for scanning and listening.

Camp Lighthouse Technology Camp in the DC area offer Camp Lighthouse Technology Camp. The camp is two weeks long, and the goal of the camp is to prepare blind or visually impaired students for school, college, and the workplace. “Students learn assistive technologies, office applications, PowerPoint, and basic web page

development” (Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind). The camp also features field trips and guest speakers.

In addition to the lab housing equipment for professional development in an office setting, the lab could feature different kinds of assistive technology for recreation activities that the campers may not have been exposed to in the past. For instance, the National Center on Accessibility catalog offers products such as a wheelchair accessible tent and a fishing rod specifically designed for use by people in wheelchairs.

However, no matter what the facilities of a camp may hold, and no matter how many assistive technology devices the camp director purchases, ultimately the camp is made by the people rather than the place. A caring and compassionate staff is necessary to make any summer camp successful, not to mention one in which campers with special needs are accommodated.

For a safe and effective summer for all campers, the staff must be well trained and well prepared for the physical, social, and emotional issues that may be pertinent to special needs campers. Staff must also be committed to increasing self esteem and encouraging relationship building among all ability groups.

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