



Memo

Date: September 10, 2019
To: Park District Oversight Committee
From: Justin Cutler, Recreation Division Director
Brenda Kramer, Manager Specialized Programs Unit
Kyle Bywater, Program Coordinator, Specialized Programs
Subject: Specialized Programs

Requested Committee Action

Briefing for Information Only

Project or Policy Description and Background

In 2019 the Specialized Programs Unit became supported entirely by Park District funds.

Specialized Programs

Specialized Programs, which began in the 60's, has a long history with Parks and Recreation.

The purpose of the Unit is to provide accessible and affordable recreation programs and social activities so people with disabilities are active and engaged. Our unit is organized into three sections, youth, transition, and adults. It is staffed with a Recreation Program Coordinator (supervisor), 6 Recreation Program Specialists, a Recreation Attendant, an Administrative Assistant and many temporary staff. Specialized Programs has its' own Advisory Council, and many of its' members have personal ties to our programs.

A Manager oversees the unit.

Program Description and Background

We partner with Community Centers, Environmental Learning Centers, pools and the athletic field office to offer our classes, drop-in programs and single day events.

Specialized Programs provides access to opportunities for individuals with disabilities to participate in activities specifically designed and implemented by staff trained in adaptive recreation services. Approximately 44,000 individuals with disabilities live in Seattle under the age of 65. In order to sustain our service, we rely on the Metropolitan Park District budget in order to keep program fees affordable and to maintain safe and effective staff/participant ratios.

Adults with disabilities are the County's largest minority group. Compared to those without disabilities, adults with disabilities:

- Have lower income and higher poverty
- Have less formal education
- Are less likely to be employed
- Are less likely to enjoy good health
- Have significant limitation in participation

Through recreation and social activities, we further life skill development that directly impacts the ability of our participants to engage more fully in life and society.

Our program offerings in fall, winter, and spring are very similar. We offer life skills, health and nutrition, social engagement, sports teams, field trips, special events and respite programs. In the summer, we offer 8 weeks of camps; four overnight camps each for youth and adults and four day-camps for youth. This is a very unique program for a public agency to offer considering cost, supervision and medical attention.

Funding and Partnerships

The Metropolitan Park District finances Specialized Programs with an annual budget of **\$1,136,907.00**. This includes staff salaries, contracts for nursing staff, the vehicle fleet and a modest amount of money for operating supplies. We partner with Seattle Adaptive Sports, Friendship Adventures, Deaf Thrive, Sail Sandpoint, Outdoors for All, and the Seattle School District.

Challenges

In Specialized Programs, we generally keep our staff to participant ratio extremely low for safety reasons. We have waitlists for most of our adult day programs and for our youth summer camps.

We see an increasing number of registrations where parents identify a disability and want their children registered in mainstream programs. Our staff train Recreation Attendants, ARC Day Camp Counselors, and Aquatic staff in techniques to achieve a positive recreation experience and to manage behavioral challenges.

Our most valued partners are the Community Centers. We are much like tenants and rely on their staff for space. We are continually looking for ways to maximize unscheduled times, and to create incentives so that our programs are not displaced.

Additional Information

For more information, you can contact Kyle Bywater at Kyle.Bywater@seattle.gov or Brenda Kramer at BrendaKramer@seattle.gov