

Introduction

Some families of children with developmental disabilities (DD), such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), are hesitant to participate in community activities, such as visiting zoos and museums, due to barriers that include negative emotions, feelings of judgment, and a lack of empathy from the general public and staff. Individuals with DD deserve to experience the same community opportunities as their peers. Community inclusion is a right and a responsibility of community organizations to be active partners in promoting inclusion that benefits all. Families of children with DD seek “typical family outings” that are meaningful, enjoyable, interesting to their children, and provide a sense of community. The Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden (CZBG) is working to make their facility more accessible and inclusive to meet the needs of the community.

Purpose

The Aims of the Study:

- To identify potential supports to visiting CZBG from families of individuals with DD
- To identify potential barriers to visiting CZBG from families of individuals with DD
- To share results of focus groups with CZBG staff to assist in developing training programs and increase participation in community programs

Method

Focus Groups:

- 3 focus groups containing 6 to 8 non-paid primary caregivers of a child, adolescent, or adult with DD were conducted

- Groups were divided based on age: 2 to 10 years old, 10 years and up, and a mixture of ages

Data Analysis:

Data obtained was transcribed and qualitatively examined using a frequency count to identify universal themes and recommendations

Universal Themes



Recommendations

2 to 10 Years	10 Years & Up	Mixed Ages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security of Physical Space • Staff Training on Disabilities • Improvements to Nursing Station • Calming Space • Disability Friendly Events • Inclusive Camps • Additional Family Bathrooms • Sensory Friendly Bathrooms • Identification System 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Training on Disabilities • Sensory Maps & Kits • Renaming of Nursing Station • Calming Space • Accessible Bathroom Equipment • Developmentally Appropriate Camps • Membership Accommodations • Disability Friendly Events • Entrance Flow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating Staff on the Challenges of Caring for a Child with a Disability • Accessibility to Playground • Disability Attendant • Calming Space • Accessible Viewing Options • Accessible Bathroom Equipment • Membership Accommodations • Interactive Technological Resources • Employment Opportunities

Discussion

- Feedback for the zoo was overwhelmingly positive across all 3 groups, and it should be noted that data were only analyzed regarding improvements to the zoo
- **Universal themes included:** facility improvements, programming improvements, safety concerns, aids & supports, and staff training
- **Themes identified by the 2-10 year old group included:** security of physical space, calming space, and identification system
- **Themes identified by the 10 and up group included:** staff training on disabilities, sensory maps & kits, and developmentally appropriate camps
- **Themes identified by the mixed ages group included:** accessibility to playground, employment opportunities, and accessible bathroom equipment
- **Differences identified between age groups included:** younger-aged groups discussed safety concerns, while the older groups focused more on accessibility and employment
- **Next steps include:** providing CZBG with information from focus groups, working with CZBG to identify next steps in implementing change, and providing surveys to families who could not attend the focus groups

Acknowledgements

This project is funded by Maternal and Child Health Bureau Grant T73MC00032.

We would like to thank the families who dedicated their time to participate in our study, as well as our partners at the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden.

