

LC 14: Increasing IDD Accessibility and Community Engagement through Cincinnati Parks

Introduction and overview

As social beings, humans seek out activities that promote connection to community and the formation of relationships. As research has shown, adults diagnosed with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) unsurprisingly prefer such “Community and Relationship Building” activities, with special emphasis placed on activities in this domain that take place at entertainment locations and attractions.¹ However, despite both intuitive and data-backed awareness of this importance and preference for social contact and support in the lives of participants with IDD, significant barriers remain for optimal community engagement.

Data analysis and community impact

This social barrier was made evident through the results of our previous work with the participants St. Joseph Home (SJH), a day program for individuals with IDD. Using a semi-quantitative survey rating the overall and domain-specific (e.g., parking, bathrooms, social support, and sensory accommodations) accessibility of twelve community engagement and entertainment locations, we found that although all locations met baseline requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) as required by law there is still significant need in order to optimize public accessibility and increase community engagement for those with IDD. Specifically, our survey found that community locations scored approximately 70% on average in overall accessibility. This shows that there is still work to be done across the city to improve the social engagement of individuals with IDD. For this project, we are proposing to specifically optimize community parks due to their ubiquitous presence throughout Cincinnati neighborhoods, potential to improve community engagement, and practicality for public policy change.

Policy Analysis and Recommendations

Our policy research shows a solid foundation to improve accessibility by working through our parks system. The City of Cincinnati Parks Department currently offers qualified individuals with disabilities the opportunity to request special accommodation and appropriate aid upon completion of an online form. Furthermore, the city of Cincinnati Park Department website also aims to be transparent with community members regarding their approach to enforcing ADA guidelines. The Cincinnati Accessibility Board of Advisors (CABA) is composed of residents with disabilities, family members, and disability advocates. They currently meet once a month and their meetings are open to the public.

Our analysis shows an existing effective civil policy to promote a progressive increase in accessibility among our city's parks. Building on this solid foundation, we think there is room for improvement by increasing community interaction and engagement in public parks, with an emphasis on welcoming the IDD community and addressing the gap of optimal community engagement.

Advocacy Strategy

As social integration is a very important part of accessibility, we propose that the Cincinnati Parks Department and CABA advocate for further accessibility by implementing regularly scheduled events to bring communities together with a focus on inviting and celebrating individuals with IDD. This will allow people to gain access to social spaces and also can increase visibility of what CABA has already accomplished.

References

1. Hankle ZJ, Bluestone DC, Kramer JK, Bassi P, Goreczny AJ. What activities individuals with intellectual disabilities do for fun: exploration into self-care. *Int J Dev Disabil*. 2022;68(5):712-722. doi:10.1080/20473869.2021.1884788
2. "Enforcing the ADA: A Report on the Five-Year Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act." *U.S. Department of Justice*, 1995, archive.ada.gov/5yearadarpt/ii_enforcing_pt2.htm. Accessed 15 Oct. 2024.