

Promoting Human Well-being at UBC by Hosting the Special Olympics Canada 2014 Summer Games

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Olympics Canada 2014 Summer Games

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Introduction

From UBC Kin 465 Course Blog: From July 8-12 2014, UBC will be hosting the largest Special Olympics Canada Games ever for athletes with intellectual disabilities. This event is connected to UBC's Place and Promise strategic plan that aims to engage in reflection and action to build intercultural understanding, create a strong sense of inclusion, and enrich social life and health. This project involves gaining student and other stakeholder input to investigate opportunities and to recommend how to implement up to 3 effective approaches to making this event one that promotes UBC student involvement and wellbeing pre-, during and post-Games. It is connected to both UBC's campus wellbeing and social sustainability initiatives.

Project goals and rationale:

Krieger (2000) demonstrates the link between human health and discrimination and highlights the negative health impact such situations may have on those feeling the effects of discrimination. As such, our group decided to focus our project on human health and discrimination. We were interested in investigating this issue and collaborated with several UBC staff and community members to create innovative event and programming ideas to target discrimination at the Special Olympic Games our community will be hosting this summer.

We believe there is a lack of knowledge and awareness of the Special Olympics amongst students, staff, and the University community. This lack of information may lead to the creation of stereotypes and prejudices, which produces an inaccurate portrayal of the Special Olympics and their athletes. Moreover, Farrell et al. (2004) highlighted that a key factor in Special Olympian success was rooted in motivation, one of the main categories being social approval. With this in mind, we are hoping to engage the UBC community by bridging the gap between assumptions and the wealth of opportunity and success that is tied to the Special Olympic Games. We are aiming to increase awareness, promote education, and decrease discrimination and stigma associated with the Special Olympics. With this in mind, we have proposed three activities, events, and partnerships. In addition, our fourth recommendation is the creation of a student club, which would serve as a sustainable means of continuing relations and programming between UBC and Special Olympics programs.

This project proposal contains four sections:

1. Thrive Week: Raising Awareness
2. UBC Varsity Basketball Game: Half-Time Activity
3. Connection and collaboration with the University Neighbourhood Association (UNA)
4. Creating a student club to promote sustainable relations with UBC and Special Olympics

1. Thrive Week: Raising Awareness for the Special Olympics

Event date: Wednesday Nov 6, 2013 3-5 PM

Note: this is a pre-existing basketball drop-in session

Event location: SRC Gym

Connection to THRIVE week: With this event, we are hoping to decrease the amount of discrimination towards the Special Olympics and their Olympians, all of which have some form of an intellectual disability. We are hoping to raise awareness across campus to help students see that athletes, and more globally individuals, with intellectual disabilities should be seen as any other person and that they have abilities/strengths in many areas, including sports (as showcased through the Special Olympics). We are hoping that by informing students and the community about the Special Olympics we can help to change the way students see intellectual disabilities and, as a more global projection, methods to improve mental health.

Rationale

There is a very common misconception regarding the differences between intellectual disabilities and mental illness. In the past, intellectual disabilities were called “mental retardation” in both practice and literature. However, the term was officially changed in the mid- to late-2000s to intellectual disability, which is defined as “significant limitations in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills... [with] disability origina[ting] before age 18” (Schalock et al., 2007). However, mental illnesses are “medical condition[s] that disrupt a person’s thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and daily functioning” (NAMI, 2013). The key difference between these terms is that a mental illness is can be treated while an intellectual disability is a life-long condition. Moreover, an individual with an intellectual disability is not ill; they simply require adaptive and different learning methods in their education and training to live integrated in society (Mental Health Europe, 2010).

The nuances between these two commonly confused definitions are something we hope to address and evaluate during this information promotion and gathering event.

Event Information:

We are proposing to run activities during this free basketball drop-in sessions to individuals attending the drop-in session. Activities include games such as 21, bump, and competitions for the most number of free throws in a given time period. The winners and participants in these activities will be rewarded with gift cards and healthy snacks. We would also like to set up a table in the gym with material from Special Olympics (posters, brochures), which drop-in participants could access during breaks. Further our team will approach drop-in participants with information about the games, ways to get involved, etc.

Advertising:

We are advertising that this event through UBC REC, TRIVE, and Special Olympics website.

Event Summary:

We set up a table in the SRC gym with Thrive signs and a poster that said 'Special Olympics Canada 2014 Summer Games'. We had granola bars and juice boxes that we were handing out to student with flyers we printed (an SOBC info graphic from Joanna). We also had students provide their name and email and entered them into a draw to win one of three Subway gift cards (all funded through Thrive).

There was a good mix of students that approached us to see what we were doing and us reaching out to players who were taking a break, getting ready to leave, etc. to get them to check out what we were doing. We had conversations with approximately 30 students and used these discussions to assess their level of awareness about the Special Olympics. Almost every student that we asked about the Special Olympics either didn't know about it or had the wrong answer. Most students thought the Special Olympics were the Para-Olympics and none of the student knew that the Special Olympics were coming to UBC in the summer.

It was a great learning experience for us and really interesting to hear what the students who were at this basketball drop-in knew about the Special Olympics. In the future, this event would be more effective if we could arrange for a Special Olympian to be present and engage with students. Further, we recognized a student interest in learning more about the games and believe an event, such as the 'Varsity Basketball Competition' would be well received by the UBC student body.

2. Varsity Basketball Competition

Event Date/Location: This event will likely happen in second semester. Ideally this will be completed during the men's basketball playoffs for maximal attendees, but could also be during regular season games.

Proposal:

The aim of this event is to showcase the talent of Special Olympics Athletes while providing them with a positive experience during the halftime break of a varsity basketball home game (Farrell et al., 2004). During halftime, two teams of Special Olympics Basketball players would participate in a free-throw competition for charity. Each team would be playing for one charity and they will have 5 minutes to sink as many free throws as they can. Each completed basket will be equal to a donation (say \$50), up to a maximum of \$1000 for each charity (this could be changed based on the amount of funding secured). In addition, the gym will be divided into two teams for cheering, and the side that does the best cheering will earn an additional \$100 for the charity that they were assigned to. We will not announce the fact that the participants are members

of the Special Olympics Team until after the competition has been completed.

Rational:

The culture experienced by able-bodied individuals is different than the culture experienced by people with disabilities, and this event could serve to bridge that cultural gap using the idea that seeing is believing. We would like to demonstrate that these athletes are just as skilled as any able-bodied counterpart. This idea was derived from our meeting and conversation with UBC's Director of Intercultural Understanding Strategy, Alden Habacon.

There is a separate Disability Culture that is experienced by individuals with disabilities. Peters (2000) discusses different worldviews of disability culture. The first is to see culture as historic or linguistic. Disability culture supports this through the creation of new terms (for example cognitively challenged to replace mentally retarded) and use of unique hand/eye symbols to replace common motions that cannot be performed. There is also a strong historical lineage that can be traced through distinctive disability press, which includes discrimination through protests, arts, and scholarly articles. Several disabilities, such as deafness and Down Syndrome, are genetically linked which may be perceived as a requirement for a distinct culture.

Peters' highlights the disabled-persons movement and illustrates how different values seem to underpin able-bodied society compared to disability culture. To highlight this, Peters' suggests that mainstream American cultures values quantitative expression (money, cars) whereas the disabled culture places value in qualitative expression (relationships, group identity). As such, individual experiences are different for those with disabilities and the value that is assigned to disability.

Many individuals with disability are ashamed of their bodies or minds. However, Hahn (1998) illustrates that in some cultures people disable themselves in order to be deemed beautiful. Hahn argues that just because there is a certain part of one's body they do not like does not suggest the rest of their body is as well.

As such, individuals with disabilities may be viewed as having a separate culture from their able-bodied counterparts. Through this basketball event, we hope to use demonstration as a tool to promote mutual learning and a bridging of cultures across of all those involved.

Warnings:

We are aware that this event has to be carefully staged in a manner that is positive and genuine as there is the potential for this to be a negative experience for both athletes and attendees. As such, the focus of the event will not be on the athletes themselves, but rather on the competition between two charities.

Potential Funders:

- UBC's Vice President's Office (through Alden Habacon)
- Athletic Partners- Mahoneys, Booster Juice, etc.
- Campus Community Members- UNA
- UBC Alumni

3. Partnership with the University's Neighbourhood Association (UNA)

Connecting with the UNA will enable us to promote the Special Olympics outside of the student population and to make our project efforts sustainable in the UBC community. Working with the UNA would provide the opportunity for families, seniors, and residents of the UBC community to be involved with the games and generate interest and awareness of the Special Olympics.

After an initial meeting the Stephanie Nesbitt, the Manager of the Old Barn Community Centre, we know that there is mutual interest and support. Although there are no concrete plans in place, some ideas were to use the monthly movie nights, have athletes come in to talk during youth events/camps, outreach campaigns to raise awareness, and specialty events closer to the Special Olympics Canada 2014 Summer Games.

We are proposing marketing techniques that highlight the proximity of event locations and address any intercultural barriers such as cultural perceptions of intellectual disabilities and languages. In addition, we believe that the monthly family movie nights could be an excellent platform to raise awareness of what the Special Olympics is all about. A special movie that revolves around the Special Olympics could be aired. In addition, it would be beneficial to have a guest speaker come in and talk about their experiences as an athlete or do a talk that would aim to decrease discrimination by raising awareness. If the space and/or weather allowed, having a demonstration where audience members were either taught a short rhythmic gymnastics routine or allowed to play bocce ball could be excellent ways to incorporate physical activity. At the start of the presentation, we would also suggest that people turn to someone around them and introduce themselves. This could help build community and encourage people to interact with people they would normally not.

Other possible suggestions:

- Youth outreach program/workshop during the summer with UNA and Special Olympics BC
- Utilize existing programs in the area and incorporate the Special Olympics
- Collaborate with Faculty of Education in developing particular workshop(s)
- Incorporate community members into the club (Proposal 3)
- Promote the basketball game (Proposal 1) to community members.
- Utilize the large youth base as volunteers

Rationale:

Different cultures perceive intellectual disability in diverse ways. In many cultures, it is recognized that intellectual disabilities are not the same as mental illness; however this is not always the case (Allison & Styrdom, 2009). For example, Latino-American mothers of children with an intellectual disability receive higher ratings of depressions and lower ratings for morale than their Anglo-American counterparts (Blacher & McIntyre, 2006). Despite this, Latino-American mothers will also self-report more positive parenting impacts from their children than the Anglo-American mothers (Blacher & McIntyre, 2006). Thus it is apparent how attitudes to care-giving are culturally dependent.

In general, more western, individualistic societies see care giving as a job of the state, resulting in institutionalization approach (Allison & Styrdom, 2009). In addition, whether the cause is internal or external plays a role in cultural understandings of intellectual disabilities. Internal causes are perceived to be within the individual's ability to control and as a result, may result in scapegoating or isolation for the affected individual. External causes, on the other hand, are a result of something outside of the individual's control. Allison and Styrdom (2009) use the example of certain South African cultures which believe intellectual disability to be a result of witchcraft, but less paranormal reasons can be categorized as external as well. In these cases, there may be more acceptance of the individual with the disability, but their parents may be ostracized (Allison and Styrdom, 2009).

Through the creation of culturally-relevant and translated advertising and workshops, individuals from different cultures may be able to overcome some of these cultural barriers and see the athletes as they truly are: athletes who have trained hard and are proud of their skills and what they can do.

4. Student Club (for the promotion of sustainable relations between UBC and BC Special Olympics)

An important component of the Special Olympics summer games is creating and promoting sustainability with a hope that these games will leave a, "positive long-term legacy in human and ecological well-being for Games participants, stakeholders, and the community." To address this goal of social sustainability we are proposing to form an AMS student club focused on increasing student and community awareness and inclusivity of intellectual disabilities through sport and physical activity. Broadening the target population to include individuals with physical disabilities in order to promote the paralympic movement is also a possibility.

This club will aim to promote interculturalism and human well-being to keep the positive legacy created by the games alive. As well as promoting sustainable relations

with the BC Special Olympics, this club will ensure that all the hard work put into the various initiatives and events supporting the games can continue to develop within the student body. We will work to create lasting partnerships with various disability organizations in British Columbia including BC Special Olympics to increase student involvement within their programs and to bring more physical activity programs such as children's camps to UBC campus.

There are a few other clubs on campus connecting students and community members to individuals with disabilities yet none that do so through physical activity. We recognize the existing AMS club "Best Buddies," the national charitable organization dedicated to building one-on-one friendships between students and individuals with intellectual disabilities. We hope that we can create a partnership with this club and organization to help us build toward our own goals of connecting these two cultures.

There are a number of potential benefits that this club can provide to the UBC community. Intellectual disabilities as well as Autism, Down Syndrome, etc. may be present in the increasing number of families residing in the UBC community. The programs and events we hope to run through this club may help to bring this community together and increase their wellbeing by engaging in physical activity. Individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities, especially children, will directly benefit from such programs by engaging in social and physical activities. Students in areas such as psychology, education, and kinesiology may encounter these disabilities in their future professions. With this in mind, this student club will provide them with relational experience, educational resources, and opportunities to get involved. Overall this club will strive to change attitudes towards disability by challenging misconceptions through inclusive sport programs and events.

For the creation of this club we will seek further input from:

- The UBC- Community Learning Initiative
- Access and Diversity
- AMS
- Disability organizations in BC
- Musqueam First Nations Band
- Various other campus and community stakeholders

Conclusion

Through these events and the creation of a student club, we hope to promote human well-being at the Special Olympics Canada 2014 Summer Games hosted at UBC. The creation of these event proposals were created with an intercultural lens and focus on decreasing discrimination towards the Special Olympics by engaging the UBC community in events that raise awareness and break down barriers.

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