Baseball 4 All: Providing Inclusive Spaces for Persons with Disabilities

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influenced participation in a community program designed to enhance leisure participation among children and young adults with disabilities. The authors grounded their work in a sport development framework and recent work on inclusive and socially just leisure. The data for this study were obtained through interviews of seven coaches from a baseball league that was designed to deliver sport opportunities for persons with both physical and intellectual disabilities. The results indicated that Inclusiveness and Joy were fundamental at the recruitment stage. Organization Failure, which was the dominant theme throughout the data set, emerged at what should have been the retention stage. The authors discuss implications for providing inclusive leisure spaces for persons with disabilities.

Keywords: disability, inclusion, sport development
**Introduction**

Regular participation in sport and leisure activities offers a number of physical and psychological benefits (Nimrod, 2007; Reiner, Niermann, Jekauc, & Woll, 2013; Tinsley & Eldredge, 1995). There is increasing recognition, however, that persons with power, privilege, and status are more likely to engage in leisure activities and enjoy the ensuing advantages than are members from under-represented groups (Cunningham, 2015). These differences manifest from multilevel factors—that is, those operating at the societal, organizational, group, and individual levels—that make leisure a convivial space for some but not others. As a result, scholars have advocated for a leisure fairness and equity (Henderson, 2014) and have increasingly focused on the opportunities members of under-represented groups have to engage in leisure activities, as well as their experiences while doing so. Scholarship and advocacy in this area includes a concentration on gender (Henderson & Gibson, 2013), race and ethnicity (Spracklen, Long, & Hylton, 2015), social class (Roberts, 2015), age (Toepoel, 2013), and sexual orientation and gender identity (Caudwell & Browne, 2013), among characteristics and identities.

Interestingly, when compared to scholarship in other areas related to diversity, inclusion, sport, and leisure, there is comparatively little attention paid to persons with disabilities. As Aitchison (2009) powerfully noted, “disability, disabled people, and people with impairments have been rendered largely invisible from research” (p. 375; see also Aitchison, 2003). Such an omission is unfortunate when considering that persons with disabilities are less likely than their peers to engage in leisure time physical activity (Cunningham, 2015) and these gaps have grown over time (Liu, 2009). The sport and leisure context can also be ideal for exploring disability, experiences, and opportunities. Bush, Silk, Porter, and Howe (2013), for example, noted in their
analysis of the 2012 Paralympics that academic work is needed that can “understand sport, sporting bodies, and physical activity as important ‘sites’ through which social forces, discourses, institutes, and processes congregate, congeal, and are contested” (p. 632).

The available research in this area points to a number of reasons for these disparities, most of which have focused on the constraints people have to leisure activities (Crawford & Godbey, 1987). For instance, in a study of anglers, Freudenberg and Arlinghaus (2010) observed that while anglers with disabilities were more likely than their able-bodied peers to experience social benefits associated with the activity, they also experienced reliably more constraints to their participation. Similar findings—that persons with disability face unique constraints to engaging in leisure activities—are present for persons seeking to participate in outdoor recreation (Burns & Graefe, 2007), older adults in Australia who seek to be active (Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2014), and children seeking to engage in leisure activity with their peers (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013). Recent work also suggests these constraints are complex and multidimensional (Darcy, Lock, & Taylor, 2017).

Additionally, efforts aimed at offering inclusive sport opportunities can be met with varied success. Kitchin and Howe (2014) note that, when it comes to athletes with disabilities, inclusion usually takes the form of trying to integrate athletes into mainstream sport, but these aims are rarely fully realized (for a discussion of the Paralympics and efforts to increase physical activity among persons with disabilities, see Howe & Silva, 2018; Purdue & Howe, 2012). Instead, in line with Norwich (2007), inclusion takes on a “systematic and social meaning” (p. 19) and can entail changing the processes and delivery of sport to effectively accommodate all skills and abilities.

This research has collectively demonstrated that (a) persons with disabilities encounter
sundry and varied constraints in seeking to participate in leisure activities, and (b) efforts to increase participation among people with disabilities are met with mixed success. The purpose of this research was to examine what factors are impacting participation in an integrated (disabled and able-bodied) sport program. Through utilizing a sport development lens understanding these factors can help ensure persons with disabilities could be active and enjoy the benefits of leisure participation. More fully explicated in subsequent sections, these efforts coalesced around an integrated baseball league—which we describe as Baseball 4 All, or B4A—designed for children with physical and mental disabilities to participate alongside their able-bodied peers (know as buddies). By drawing upon sport development (Green, 2005; Sotiriadou, Shilbury, & Quick, 2008) and inclusive sport (Misener & Darcy, 2014) literatures to provide the theoretical underpinnings of our work, we identify factors that influenced participation in programs designed for individuals with disabilities so that insight into improving organizational structure, strategy, and processes can be gained.

**Theoretical Framework**

In recent years, more scholars have become interested in sport development. Notably Green’s (2005) and Sotiriadou et al.’s (2008) work identified the importance of sport development and both put forth a theoretical framework. Historically, sport development research has operated from the pyramid metaphor, which demonstrates a wide base of participants at the bottom and eventually narrows towards elite participants at the top and apex of the triangle. Shilbury, Sotiriadou and Green (2008) pointed out that the pyramid metaphor does not account for the interrelationship, processes, and pathways for athletes to progress vertical or laterally through a sport system. Green (2005) put forth a conceptual sport development model that highlighted athlete recruitment, athlete retention, and athlete transitions. She noted:
Recruitment requires the assistance of significant others, as well as the proliferation of many smaller, local-level sport programs. Retention requires a focus on motivation, socialization, and commitment. Advancement requires that programs be linked vertically and that athletes be aided in processes of locating and socializing into new levels of involvement. (p. 233)

Sotiriadou and colleagues’ (2008) empirical work advanced Green’s model and devised an almost identical sport development framework that include the attraction, retention/transition, and nurturing processes. As Shilbury et al. (2008) pointed out, “Sotiriadou et al. remains as one of the limited number of studies that endeavours to empirically examine player pathways, systems and practices. Therefore, an opportunity exists for innovative research around this theme” (p. 220).

Since 2008, several researchers have heeded this advice and utilized this sport development framework in exploring tennis (Brouwers, De Bosscher, & Sotiriadou, 2012), golf (Sotiriadou, 2013), triathlon (Newland & Kellett, 2012; Phillips & Newland, 2014), and even refereeing (Warner, Tingle, & Kellett, 2013). The wide use of the framework highlights the value of considering the various systems and pathways of athlete and referee development. The researchers used the sport development framework to ensure all stages of recruitment, retention, and advancement were considered as they examined systems and processes. This research also illustrated that most of the sport development scholarship has focused on high performance levels of sport. And, while important to develop these pathways, it is also possible to adopt a sport development model to consider how sport can be structured and delivered for (a) persons who want to engage in sport but might not do so at a high level of competition and (b) those who might have otherwise been dismissed or overlooked in other sport and leisure activities. Therein
lies the importance of considering how to deliver sport and leisure with a justice orientation and inclusive mindset (Henderson, 2014; Misener & Darcy, 2014). A focus on sport provision for all is also consistent with calls from Zeigler (2007) and Cunningham (2014) for research and practice aimed at ensuring all people, irrespective of their background or ability, have the opportunity to be active. In summation, the sport development model will serve as the overarching guide for this study. That is, it will be used as a theoretical lens that will inform the method and data analysis (Shaw, 2016). As result, a focus will be placed on athlete recruitment, athlete retention, and athlete transitions as well as exploring the pathways for all in sport.

**Research Context**

Despite their seemingly innocuous missions, sport program designed for individuals with disabilities have been criticized for promoting segregation and reinforcing stereotypes (e.g., Counsell & Agran, 2013; Storey, 2008). Thus, many believed a more integrated recreational program, where individuals with and without disabilities compete together, would better serve individuals with disabilities. Perhaps in response to criticism, the Special Olympics established Unified Sports in 1989. Unified Sports is a global program that joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team (MacLean, 2008). Unified Sports has steadily grown in participation, and approximately 19% of the Special Olympians compete in the unified programs (Special Olympics, 2015). The Unified Sports program has been developed with research and theory, and continues to be evaluated and modified accordingly (Coakley, 2015; Dowling, McConkey, Hassan, & Menke, 2010). Similar to Unified Sports, B4A, the program context of our study, is an integrated sport program that represents a sport model focused on serving all.

Empirical research continues to support the value of such integrated programs. For example comparison of unified (integrated) and segregated programs indicate unified sports...
participants with intellectual disabilities increased social competence, friendships (Özer et al., 2012), athletic skills and performance (Baran et al., 2013; Ninot, Bilard, & Delignieres, 2005), while decreasing problem behaviors (Özer et al., 2012). Even more encouraging, individuals without intellectual disabilities benefit through an increased social awareness (Baran, Top, Aktop, & Nalbant, 2011; Grandisson, Tétreault, & Freeman, 2012; Hassan, Dowling, McConkey, & Menke, 2012). Overall, the research points towards unified sport programing aiding in better assimilating individuals with intellectual disabilities into society.

**Current Study**

In the current study, we seek to integrate the aforementioned literature such that we utilize a sport development framework (Green, 2005; Sotiriadou et al., 2008) to explore various factors that influence participation in an integrated/unified sport for development program. The program, for which we use the pseudonym Baseball 4 All (B4A), was designed to deliver sport opportunities for persons with both physical and intellectual disabilities. B4A was founded in 1989 and takes place in communities around the world. The league is designed for persons age 4 to 18, though there are cases where people up to age 22 can compete if they are still enrolled in high school. The larger coordinating body estimates 30,000 children participate in over 900 B4A divisions around the world.

In terms of funding, B4A is a mixed model. Players are charged nominal fees ($25 for the season), and these largely help offset the cost of uniforms. Local businesses also made donations to cover the other costs of uniforms and refreshments. The league had a partnership with the city for free use of the baseball fields once a week. Finally, all administrators and coaches volunteered their time.

Leisure and sport opportunities in B4A are delivered with a focus on the player
enjoyment and development. Illustrative of the cooperative nature of the league, no score is kept, and every player is able to take a turn batting each inning. Balls and strikes are not counted, and as such some players might receive 20 pitches before hitting the ball. Other players used tees instead of hitting the ball thrown by the pitcher (i.e., the coach). Consistent with the principal of unified sports, B4A also includes buddies. These individuals are able-bodied youth who support the players throughout the game. This includes, but is not limited to, running with the players around the bases and playing catch with them in the field.

In the current study, we conduct a case study of B4A in one community. As we describe in the following section, this organization was ideal because one of the authors was a coach in the league for several years prior to the study, thereby serving as a participant observer and insider researcher (Munhall, 2007). In addition, B4A was the only league in the community focusing on inclusion of athletes with disabilities. In drawing from the sport development framework (Green, 2005; Sotiriadou et al., 2008), we were guided by a primary research question: what are factors influencing participation in B4A? As we detail more in the following section, we focused on participant/coach involvement in B4A, outcomes of participation, and the culture and processes of the league—all factors that can be shaped by a sport organization’s processes, strategy, and structure (Sharpe, 2006). Thus, participant (i.e., coach) insights can speak to the effectiveness of the league in reaching athletes with disabilities. As we explain in the following section, we focus on the coaches’ perceptions to address this question.

**Method**

**Research Overview**

A case study approach is often ideal for achieving an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Yin (2009) described this approach as “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary
phenomenon (e.g., a ‘case’), set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). This approach allows for a variety of data collection methods and more importantly, well done case research can impact practice (Cutler, 2004). Moreover, Siggelkow (2007) asserted, “A single case can be a very powerful example” (p. 20). Siggelkow then highlighted that case research can be used to motivate new research questions, inspire new ideas by identifying gaps in theory, and make a conceptual contribution through illustration. Consequently, a case study approach utilizing both participant observation and semi-structures interviews was employed to explore the factors influencing participation in a unified sport program.

The primary researcher served as a participant observer and insider-researcher who coached in the league for a number of years prior to the study. Participant observers gather information through fieldwork and interviews and typically are outsiders (Munhall, 2007). However in this case, the primary researcher was an insider who has been involved as a volunteer coach with the organization for four years. Insider-researchers, who choose to study a group to which they belong, have the advantage of understanding the culture, being undistruptive to social interaction, and having established relationships which can led to more authentic conversations (Unluer, 2012). While this often results in rich data that may be otherwise inaccessible to outsiders, it can also result in loss of objectivity (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002). In an effort to overcome any potential biases, a second researcher unfamiliar with the program or participants being studied was added to the research team. This researcher with expertise in qualitative inquiry was charged with independently analyzing the interview data and complying the results. Having both an insider and outsider perspective on the research team helped ensure the credibility of the emergent themes (Tingle, Warner, & Sartore-Baldwin, 2014).
Participants

B4A coaches \((n = 7)\) served as the interview participants, and thus, we were able to gather information from at least one coach of each of the teams in the league. All of the coaches were women, one of whom identified as Hispanic and the remaining six identified as White. Three of the coaches (i.e., Betty, Lucy, and Mary) were mothers of children who played in the league, while the remaining coaches did not have family members who were players. The coaches ranged in age from 27 to 55, and had been affiliated with the league from 4 to 19 years.

While the research question focused on factors influencing people’s participation in B4A, we focused on coaches’ responses for a number of reasons. Players’ ages ranged from 4 to 18 years, and many of the players had intellectual disabilities. Some of the players also had speech-related disabilities. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, these characteristics mean the B4A players were members of a vulnerable population (see http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/archive/irb/irb_chapter6.htm). The coaches, on the other hand, were not members of a vulnerable population and had years of experience in working with the players and the league. Thus, the coaches were uniquely suited to identify the various factors associated with league participation.

Procedure

Following the season, the coaches were asked about their willingness to participate in the research project. All agreed and provided signed, written consent to participate. The interviews, which lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, took place in a location of the coach’s choosing. The insider researcher conducted all of the interviews, which were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Instrument
Participants took part in semi-structured interviews. In addition to collecting basic demographic information, following the sport development framing the participants responded to questions pertaining to their recruitment and continued involvement in the league. Sample guiding questions included: “Can you tell me about why decided to get involved in B4A?” “Why do you believe the participants and parents continue to stay involved?, “Why do you come back?” The researcher then followed the conversation to gain additional insight on the culture and organization of the league.

**Data Analysis**

After the insider researcher conducted the interviews, the outside researcher—who had with specific training in qualitative methods and was unfamiliar with the research context—individually reviewed the transcripts. Using open-coding and with the aid of NVIVO 10 software, the researcher began line-by-line to assign labels or codes to the data with the initial goal of generating as many codes as possible. Codes, or labeled segments of text, were developed with the intent to providing mean to the data (Creswell, 2003). These first level codes were generated by inductively labeling substantial text to describe what is happening in the data (Munhall, 2007). These codes were then grouped into abstract categories or themes that represented at a descriptive level the salient characteristics that influenced participation with B4A. Then following the sport development model, the themes were grouped by whether they were related to recruitment, retention, or advancement.

Several steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the data. First, each participant was sent the transcripts to review, edit, and clarify her comments, as needed. Second, a member check was conducted with the primary researcher, who as previously stated was an active participant with an insider view of the program (Munhall, 2007). The insider
researcher’s observations were utilized to ensure accuracy and confirm the results. The themes were validated, and 100% agreement was met on the salient themes (Creswell, 2003). Third, we shared the emergent themes with two of the coaches, who both confirmed our interpretations and conclusions.

**Results**

After analyzing the data, it became clear that the data fit into two distinct phases of participation, both of which were congruent with Green’s (2005) and Sotiriadou et al.’s (2008) work. Based on participant feedback, two themes related to the initial entry or recruitment into B4A emerged: Inclusiveness and Joy. As the participants continued in program and moved into the retention stage, as defined by the sport development framework, only one dominant theme emerged, Organizational Failure. Thus, the themes will be presented in a chronological fashion as the B4A participants’ experienced them and categorized by phase of participation (i.e., recruitment and retention). While not all participants’ comments can presented, the quotes that were most representative of the entire sample are highlighted (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

**Recruitment Stage**

As participants and volunteers initially take part in sport program, there are certain features or characteristics of the program that are initial attractors. These are discovered as participants enter into the program. Often significant others identify the incentives and reinforcements at the recruitment stage (cf. Green, 2005). In the case of B4A, the study’s participants exclusively identified the themes of Inclusiveness and Joy, and these themes served as features that drew them into the program.

**Inclusiveness.** One of the most salient features at the recruitment stage of B4A was the Inclusiveness. As illustrated in the data, participants conceived Inclusiveness as a welcoming of
an individual regardless of ability. For example, Mary described the “acceptance,” while Betty offered the idea that, “everyone is included.” Betty then went on and spoke of the impact this Inclusiveness has on participants and parents of participants.

They are playing ball like their siblings, I know one of my players -- his brother plays varsity baseball, so it lets him play too! . . . The parents say ‘wow, I didn't know my kid could do that!’ Sometimes, they've seen their kids be excluded, and again, we [B4A] include everybody!

Here, Betty notes that B4A allows the players to participate together in a sport context where they are otherwise normally excluded.

When inquiring about the benefits of B4A, Missy and Susan both relayed the importance of Inclusiveness through belonging to a team:

I love the idea of a league specifically designed to allow all abilities to play. . . The participants are able to be on a real team. Several players have siblings who play on sport teams. Our players go and watch their siblings play sports and cheer them on. B4A allows our players to be part of a team, get to hear the cheering, and have a uniform like others. (Missy)

I think that the inclusion and being part of a team, it's fulfilling. Having someone cheer for them, working for something and being involved, having friends and familiar coaches -- People that are there for them consistently [is a key benefit]. (Susan)

It was clear from the data that Inclusiveness is a fundamental component of B4A that clearly aids at the recruitment or entry phase into program for both participants and volunteers.

**Joy.** Another salient features at the recruitment stage was a theme labeled Joy, which captured the candid happiness and delight that was expressed by the participants as they took
part in B4A. Mary explained the importance of this, “I think seeing their kids happy, seeing them grow and be successful. Any time we see our kids succeed, it's a sense of joy -- especially when we see them smiling.” Other participants also reiterated this Joy, through also describing the children’s smiles:

I've seen one little girl start at 5 and just sit and play in the dirt, and over the next years to developed a love for the game. And loves to throw the ball. Seeing the smiles on the kid's faces and when they get to hit the ball and do something. (Betty)

For me, it is getting to see the kids smiling. Take the awards ceremony. We handed out trophies to everyone, and one of our players took the trophy and ran all around the bases holding it high in the air. He was so excited, on top of the world. That makes it worth it. Even if it is just one kid, then it will be worth it. (Lucy)

Once you get there, you see the smiles on their faces. . . When you get there, all the worries float away. . . Just enjoying the kids and seeing them grow. And it's a nice outlet, a nice stress release. It's just something; to me it's relaxing. I don't know why. Just not having a care, the kids are having a good time. (Kathy)

It was clear from the data that the Joy experienced was a fundamental part of B4A, Jana explained:

I would have to say the people involved, and of course the players. They just have such a positive attitude and the players are so excited to be there. I really felt love, that's a good way to put it, from the children and the players. . . . Well, like I said they always look forward to it every week and they're always happy and excited.
The theme, Joy emerged from the data and distinctly served as one of the two attractors to B4A. The data suggested that this along with the Inclusiveness were fundamental components at the recruitment stage.

**Retention Stage**

The retention stage represents when participants actively choose to stay in a program, and the reinforcements and supports that facilitate this continued participation (Green, 2005). Unfortunately, at this stage it became evident that reinforcements and supports did not exist. Rather the overarching theme that emerged was Organizational Failure.

**Organizational Failure.** The most salient theme throughout the entire data set was the Organizational Failure. This theme was comprised of elements related to the disorder, communication breakdowns, and lack of strong leadership. Susan aptly explained and summarized this importance of this theme: “You're gonna have to get a system in place -- it'll crumble if not.” The data clearly indicated that Organizational Failure was a significant component that was impacting participant retention. Jana explained:

I want to be there for the kids, but the stress that we are having to go through as far as being blamed for stuff, and being criticized and told “we are doing things wrong” -- I just don't wanna be around that anymore. . . . I think a lot of people of change their mind about participating in this program, which is very sad to me because it's not as enjoyable as it used to be for that reason. We still love the kids and we're trying to figure out what to do next. . . . We have actually talked about dissolving the program and restarting it to where there is more structure, and making sure that everyone has a role that we can stick to it and no one can go around the rules. Just make it better, more organized.
Kathy then expanded on how the Organizational Failure was a negative for B4A, especially when a new well-intentioned volunteer joined the program.

All her ideas and suggestions were very good, it's just the way she went about it. Kind of rubbed people the wrong way. . . . She didn't ask any questions to the people that oversee everything -- she just took charge without finding out how it's been done in the past. She just did it. Her intentions are good. The method wasn't good. I don't think the players saw any of it. At least I hope not. The coaches -- it has had a huge effect. I don't think some of us are coming back.

Without strong leadership, it was easy for one volunteer to quickly negatively impact others within B4A. This was also true for the negative impact a coach could have, especially when the coach engaged in behaviors that signaled a lack of commitment. As Mary explained:

We showed up to probably three to four games with no coach and no notification, no anything. There just wasn't anybody, so my husband jumped in and coached. . . . When we don't have that kind of commitment from coaches, if the kids don't know who their coach is, and they're not going to be dedicated-- it doesn't make it very fun. If it's not well organized, I think it gets to be a hassle. Our kind of children really depend on routine. One person not being there can really throw a child to the point where they don't want to play. I don't think that the commitment is where it needs to be. There's not a board, not a lot of coaches who are really committed to being there. I think that hurts us.

Susan, who ran another volunteer-driven organization, further highlighted the Organizational Failure:

In other organizations they would have orientations, getting there early, having a name badge. A lot of other organizations keep people coming in by offering a sense of
community and appreciation for their work. . . . We don't necessarily ever speak with the parents. Another [thing] would be the lack of communication between leaders -- not having certain responsibilities assigned to certain people, so that when issues come up, there's no leadership and direction on how to solve a problem. Different people have different opinions and then there's no leadership.

The participants offered numerous examples of the positive aspects related to B4A at the Recruitment Stage. However, there were none of the expected reinforcements and supports to aid in continued participation at what should have been the Retention Stage. Rather, the Organizational Failure was the most prominent feature throughout the data.

**Discussion**

Despite the noted importance of having socially just, inclusive spaces for people to engage in leisure activities (Henderson, 2014), persons with disabilities and their advocates have frequently been left out of such discussions (Aitchison, 2003, 2009). Of the research that does exist in this area, there is consistent evidence that persons with disabilities face a number of barriers and constraints to their full leisure participation (Burns & Graefe, 2007; Darcy, Lock, & Taylor, 2017; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2013; Freudenberg & Arlinghaus, 2010; Sotiriadou & Wicker, 2014). The purpose of this study, therefore, was to conduct a single case study of an organization, B4A, devoted to overcoming those barriers and providing sport and leisure opportunities for children with disabilities. In adopting a sport development approach (Green, 2005; Sotiriadou et al., 2008), we focused on the recruitment, retention, and transition of the athletes with disabilities into the program. Results indicate that, while the recruitment phase was largely successful, organizational dysfunction served to ultimately undermine the retention of the
athletes in the league. In the following space, we provide an overview of the main findings, discussion implications, and then highlight limitations and areas for future research.

**Inclusiveness**

The findings related to Inclusiveness are encouraging and support the primacy of leisure inclusion for persons with disabilities (Aitchison, 2003, 2009; Misener & Darcy, 2014). For example, Siperstein, Glick, and Parker (2009) found that both children with and without disabilities formed positive social relationship while attending a 4-week recreational sport program, which was based on the principles outlined in Unified Sports programming (Special Olympics International, 2003). Although more inclusive settings are now available to individuals with intellectual disabilities, social isolation and rejection remain problematic (Siperstein et al., 2009; Siperstein, Parker, Bardon, & Widaman, 2007). The results related to Inclusiveness, however, suggest that unified sport program may be a viable and noteworthy solution.

Recent work has highlighted that sport can be especially well suited for overcoming this isolation and fostering a sense of community (Warner, 2016; Warner, Dixon, & Chalip, 2012; Warner & Dixon, 2011), which may further explain why Inclusiveness emerged as a primary theme at the recruitment stage. Warner and Leierer's (2015) work demonstrated that adolescent reported increase sense of community after participating in a 3-week sports camp. Interestingly, similar results have been found for both sport volunteers (Kerwin, Warner, Walker, & Stevens, 2015) and youth sport parents (Warner, Dixon, & Leierer, 2015). This further alludes to the fact that although our study participants were volunteer coaches and/or parents, the Inclusiveness is likely fundamental for all stakeholders of programs designed to enhance the sport and leisure participation among persons with disabilities.

**Joy**
Research has demonstrated that persons with and without disabilities largely espy similar benefits associated with leisure activities, but there are exceptions, as the pleasure derived from social interactions is particularly germane for persons with disabilities (Aitchison, 2000). We observed as much in our research, as Joy emerged as a theme at the initial recruitment stage. Enjoyment has been frequently cited as a motive for physical activity participation (Cunningham, 2007), young athletes (Scanlan, Carpenter, Lobel, & Simons, 1993; Scanlan & Simons, 1992), and specifically, athletes who participate in youth disabled sports (Darcy & Dowse, 2013; Martin, 2006). This finding is also supported by Berg, Warner, and Das (2014), who noted that hedonic rewards—that is, the “the personal satisfaction and pleasure the participants described as a benefit they seek in sport and other leisure-time physical activities” (p. 25)—are an important, albeit often overlooked, component of leisure activities.

While Joy was important for the children associated with B4A, it also played a role in attracting the adult volunteers. This is important because, in addition to coaching, the adults provide social supports for the children (Martin, 2006). In a recent study, “the child’s experience” emerged as the most important element for building community among youth sport parents (Warner et al., 2015). Thus, whether it be a parent, coach, or volunteer, the Joy observed from the athletes within B4A has a significant impact on the functioning of the entire program. Joy was an evident attractor to B4A and one benefit that can be better capitalized upon.

Organizational Failure

Through a sport development lens at the retention stage, one would expect strategies and pathways that would promote a greater commitment and involvement. In the case of B4A, this study’s participants offered no insight into the factors that might have encouraged them to be retained and hence sustain the program. Instead the participants emphasized the Organizational
Failure. In many respects, sport is expected to be organized and when it is not, it can have a negative impact on the experience (Warner et al., 2015; Warner & Dixon, 2013). As one participant noted, this may be especially true for programs aimed at serving people with disabilities.

The participants noted that disorder, communication breakdowns, and lack of strong leadership all contributed to the perceived organizational failure. These findings are consistent with other research focusing on non-profit organizations seeking to provide sport and leisure services. For instance, in a study of leisure service departments, Frisby, Thibault, and Kikulis (2007) found that partnerships suffered because of a lack of clear guidelines, poor training, and a lack of coordination. In another analysis, Vureton and Frisby (2011) observed that competing values served to undermine the effectiveness of recreation and leisure provisions. These shortcomings, which ended up contributing to low poor performance, are consistent with the type of failures we observed in our research. As another example, Van Bussell and Doherty (2015) observed that poor communications can contribute to discord and conflict among volunteers.

Welty Peachey, Damon, Zhou, and Burton (2015), in their extensive review of the literature, note the role leadership can have on the motives of both participants and stakeholders, such as volunteers. Finally, Wicker and Breuer (2013) conducted a large-scale study of non-profit sport clubs in Germany and observed that important role of organizational resources and structures in ensuring the recruitment and retention of volunteers. Collectively, results from this study, coupled with the recent research in this area, point to the primacy of effective organizational resources, processes, and structures in ensuring the retention of sport volunteers. In order to better retain sport volunteers, effective organizations provide clear direction, acknowledge the contribution being made, and foster a supportive culture for volunteers (Warner, Newland, &
Green, 2011). Clearly, the importance of this along with providing guidelines and training was overlooked (Frisby et al., 2007; Warner et al., 2011).

**Implications**

Results point to several implications. Practically, community programs designed to enhance the leisure services for persons with disabilities should ensure participants realize many benefits associated with their involvement (Green, 2005). Programs that emphasize and then leverage the benefits that they offer are most likely to succeed; however, the first step is understanding what assets a program can offer. In this case, B4A would want to emphasize the joy and inclusiveness in any marketing and recruiting efforts and learn how to leverage this with other program or community resources (cf. Sparvero & Chalip, 2007). For example, B4A could plan events in conjunction with the local Little League to increase program awareness.

On a related noted, it is possible that some of the organizational failures B4A experienced could be alleviated by partnering with the more established entity, like Little League. The latter organization is well established and has a long history of effective recruitment and retention of participants and volunteers. Thus, in addition to possibly increasing awareness, this partnership would potentially allow for the standardization and professionalization of structures and processes needed for a volunteer sport organization to maintain its viability (for similar arguments, see Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2006).

The results of this study also highlight the importance of the benefits achieved extending beyond just the athlete. In this case, the benefits related to Joy and Inclusiveness were highlighted by the volunteer coaches that were interviewed. As with previous research on inclusive sport and leisure activities, it is not just the athletes that benefit from sport programming (Hassan et al., 2012; Henderson, 2014; Warner et al., 2015). In the case of B4A, it
was clear that the coaches, volunteers, and parents were also beneficiaries of the program. Thus, sport for development program should always keep in mind the potential benefits to stakeholders beyond the targeted population. This case suggested that opportunities that encourage diverse participants to interact in sport together could be mutually beneficial, and these interactions might be key to realizing inclusive and socially just leisure.

**Post Script**

Once the study was completed, the first author continued to be involved with the program as a coach. While Inclusiveness and Joy continued to bring coaches, volunteers, and players to the league, ultimately, Organizational Failure was too strong. In fact, two seasons after the study was completed, the season was canceled because of a lack of organization among the organizers. The league organizer believed notices were sent to league stakeholders about the upcoming season, but they were never distributed. Only after realizing this mistake—three weeks before the public schools released for summer—did the organizer cancel the season.

The first author shared the results of the study with the participants and league officials. On multiple occasions, he offered alternative organizational strategies, and he also spoke informally with Little League officials in the community about the possibility of establishing a formal relationship. Despite these efforts, league organizers—parents who had long run the league—were resistant to change efforts.
References


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