

Long/Extended Abstract:

Title: *Experiences of Volunteers and Individuals with Complex Communication Needs: Perspectives Across Settings of Active Recreation*

The first author discloses a non-financial relationship in objects or entities mentioned in this paper. Prior to conducting the research study, the first author worked as a speech-language pathologist for the parent organization that independently operates an adaptive ski program in which the first author recruited three volunteers for the interview study. The first author no longer works at the parent organization and did not work at the parent organization during the time of participant recruitment or data collection. The second author discloses no financial or other interest in objects or entities mentioned in this paper.

This presentation will report on the results of two research studies that will integrate and share perspectives of both community based volunteers and people with CCN who engage in active recreation. Although attention has been paid to school participation and employment, less attention has been given to community engagement beyond these areas for individuals with complex communication needs (CCN)(Balandin, 2011; Miranda, 2014). Consideration of recreation and leisure activities for individuals with disabilities and CCN is critical since employment outcomes for individuals with severe disabilities remains poor and there is still work to be done related to inclusion.

Previous research has investigated the benefits of recreation and outdoor experiences for individuals with disabilities (Dattilo, Estrella, Estrella, Light, McNaughton, & Seabury, 2008; Lundberg, Bennet & Smith, 2011; Potvin, Prelock & Snider, 2008). These activities provide opportunities for participants to learn new skills, increase community engagement, and build extended social networks (Dattilo, et al., 2008). Other benefits include, increasing independence and autonomy as individuals develop feelings of self-competence and self-determination (Dattilo, Kleiber & Williams, 1998). Dattilo et al. (2008), also reported on barriers to recreation for individuals with cerebral palsy such as lack of facilitator skills and knowledge and negative societal attitudes.

In the first study, adaptive skiing and horseback riding programs were selected as settings to recruit experienced volunteers for semi-structured interviews. The volunteers had a minimum of three years of experience supporting individuals with disabilities and CCN in either adaptive skiing or therapeutic horseback riding. Upon analysis of the interview data, five primary themes emerged; (a) benefits of volunteering; (b) why individuals volunteer; (c) barriers and challenges of volunteering; (d) program supports; (e) characteristics and skills of skiers and riders. The results of this study support the findings that experienced volunteers have skills and knowledge to reduce participation barriers and enhance opportunities for building meaningful relationships and social interactions for people with CCN. Furthermore, findings revealed that volunteers have an orientation to be critical supports for not just physical access, but communication and broader participation as well. The results will be discussed using the framework of the social exchange theory (Nye, 1979) in

collaboration with the volunteers' accumulated knowledge, skills and keen observations of unmet communication needs.

The findings from the first research study indicate that volunteers are in an ideal position to enhance opportunities for communication, reduce barriers of participation and maximize enjoyment for people with CCN who participate in active recreation. The second study focused on the perspectives of people with CCN as a result of acquired neurological conditions. Activities of recreation and sport can have many benefits for individuals with acquired conditions and can provide a setting to support communicative competence, improve quality of life and encourage community engagement (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013). Recreational experiences assist individuals to discover their strengths and enhance their possibilities and readiness for career exploration in a reciprocal way (Hartung, 2002). As a result of acquired neurological conditions, meaningful participation in society may become challenging due to disinterest, changes in social roles and learning new methods for communication (Beukelman, Fager, Ball & Dietz, 2007). The loss or difficulty of spoken communication in addition to other aspects of a patient's neurological condition can have a profound impact on participation patterns including a reduction or loss of employment and a restriction of social networks (Beukelman et al., 2007).

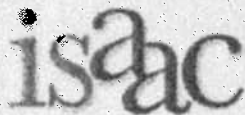
In the second study, adults with acquired neurological conditions who use AAC engaged in an on-line focus group to share perspectives related to participation in active recreation. The goal of this research was to investigate how and why individuals with acquired neurological conditions who use AAC, participate in adaptive sport and active recreation. Using an online forum, the primary investigator served as the moderator of a discussion with five adults who use AAC systems to communicate. Over the course of the discussion group, different topics were presented in the areas of: specific recreational pursuits, barriers and supports, communication, impact on psychosocial skills, and benefits of participation. Data collection is currently in progress and results will be presented on the following areas: (a) why people with CCN engage in active recreation and continue to participate; (b) how participation in active recreation impacts communication and social interactions for people with CCN; (c) key supports and barriers in active recreation; and (d) how participants share and use the experience to support psychosocial skills and communicative competence.

The proposed platform presentation will include a brief overview of the two studies. In addition, primary themes will be shared in order to inform the audience about activities of adaptive sport and recreation from the perspectives of community based volunteers and people who use AAC. The qualitative data provided by volunteers and people with CCN may also be shared in the form of short quotations, which will be associated with individual and integrated thematic areas. The dual perspectives from volunteers and participants will be presented to balance the discussion and to determine successful components and features related to the unique relationships that develop across settings of active recreation. The proposed platform session will be the first opportunity for the investigators to share the focus group data and integrate the results with perspectives from volunteers. The presenters are also interested in gaining the

perspectives from attendees at the presentation who have either participated in active recreation or have supported individuals with CCN in activities of recreation and/or adaptive sport.

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Program Planner/Instructional Personnel's Name: David J. Hajjar

Course Title: Experiences of Volunteers and Individuals with Complex Communication Needs: Perspectives Across Settings of Active Recreation

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Date 13-Oct-2015

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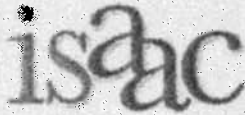
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- Volunteer employment
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Program Planner/Instructional Personnel's Name: John W. McCarthy

Course Title: *Experiences of Volunteers and Individuals with Complex Communication Needs: Perspectives Across Settings of Active Recreation*

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Signature *John W. McCarthy*

Date 13-Oct-2015