PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL INCLUSION

The Role of Recreation in Promoting Social Inclusion

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About the Laidlaw Foundation

The Laidlaw Foundation is a private, public-interest foundation that uses its human and financial resources in innovative ways to strengthen civic engagement and social cohesion. The Foundation uses its capital to better the environments and fulfill the capacities of children and youth, to enhance the opportunities for human development and creativity and to sustain healthy communities and ecosystems.

The Foundation supports a diverse portfolio of innovative and often unconventional projects in three program areas: in the arts, in the environment and improving the life prospects for children, youth and families.

Working for social inclusion is a theme that underlies much of the Foundation's activities. The key words in the Foundation's mission — human development, sustainable communities and ecosystems — imply that achievement will rely on the enhancement of capacity and capability. Not only is social inclusion being developed as an emerging funding stream, it is an embedded Laidlaw Foundation value, both structurally and programmatically.

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Foreword:

The Laidlaw Foundation's Perspective on Social Inclusion

The context for social inclusion

Children have risen to the top of government agendas at various times over the past decade, only to fall again whenever there is an economic downturn, a budget deficit, a federal-provincial relations crisis or, most recently, a concern over terrorism and national security. While there have been important achievements in public policy in the past 5 to 10 years, there has not been a sustained government commitment to children nor a significant improvement in the well-being of children and families. In fact, in many areas, children and families have lost ground and social exclusion is emerging as a major issue in Canada. Examples abound and include these facts.

- the over-representation of racial minority families and children among those living in poverty in large cities, and the denial of access to many services by immigrant and refugee families;

- the 43% increase in the number of children in poverty in Canada since 1989, the 130% increase in the number of children in homeless shelters in Toronto, as well as the persistence of one of the highest youth incarceration rates among Commonwealth countries;

- the exclusion of children with disabilities from public policy frameworks (e.g. the National Children's Agenda), from definitions of 'healthy' child development and, all too often, from community life.

These situations provide the context for the Laidlaw Foundation's interest in social inclusion. The Foundation's Children's Agenda program first began exploring social inclusion in 2000 as a way to re-focus child and family policy by:

- re-framing the debate about poverty, vulnerability and the well-being of children in order to highlight the social dimensions of poverty (i.e. the inability to participate fully in the community)

- linking poverty and economic vulnerability with other sources of exclusion such as racism, disability, rejection of difference and historic oppression

- finding common ground among those concerned about the well-being of families with children to help generate greater public and political will to act.

The Foundation commissioned a series of working papers to examine social inclusion from a number of perspectives. Although the authors approach the topic from different starting points and emphasize different aspects of exclusion and inclusion, there are important common threads and conclusions. The working papers draw attention to the new realities and new understandings that must be brought to bear on the development of social policy and the creation of a just and healthy society.

These are:

- Whether the source of exclusion is poverty, racism, fear of differences or lack of political clout, the consequences are the same: a lack of recognition and acceptance; powerlessness and 'voicelessness'; economic vulnerability; and, diminished life experiences and limited life prospects. For society as a whole, the social exclusion of individuals and groups can become a major threat to social cohesion and economic prosperity.

- A rights-based approach is inadequate to address the personal and systemic exclusions experienced by children and adults. People with disabilities are leading the way in calling for approaches based on social inclusion and valued recognition to deliver what human rights claims alone cannot.

- Diversity and difference, whether on the basis of race, disability, religion, culture or gender, must be recognized and valued.

The 'one size fits all approach' is no longer acceptable and has never been effective in advancing the well-being of children and families.

- Public policy must be more closely linked to the lived experiences of children and families, both in terms of the actual programs and in terms of the process for arriving at those policies and programs. This is one of the reasons for the growing focus on cities and communities, as places where inclusion and exclusion happen.

- Universal programs and policies that serve all children and families generally provide a stronger foundation for improving well-being than residual, targeted or segregated approaches. The research and anecdotal evidence for this claim is mounting from the education, child development and population health sectors.

Understanding social inclusion

Social exclusion emerged as an important policy concept in Europe in the 1980s in response to the growing social divides that resulted from new labour market conditions and the inadequacy of existing social welfare provisions to meet the changing needs of more diverse populations. Social inclusion is not, however, just a response to exclusion.

Although many of the working papers use social exclusion as the starting point for their discussions, they share with us the view that social inclusion has value on its own as both a process and a goal. Social inclusion is about making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and

contributing members of society. It is, therefore, a normative (value based) concept - a way of raising the bar and understanding where we want to be and how to get there.

Social inclusion reflects a proactive, human development approach to social well-being that calls for more than the removal of barriers or risks. It requires investments and action to bring about the conditions for inclusion, as the population health and international human development movements have taught us.

Recognizing the importance of difference and diversity has become central to new under-

standings of identity at both a national and community level. Social inclusion goes one step further: it calls for a validation and recognition of diversity as well as a recognition of the commonality of lived experiences and the shared aspirations among people, particularly evident among families with children.

This strongly suggests that social inclusion extends beyond bringing the 'outsiders' in, or notions of the periphery versus the centre. It is about closing physical, social and economic distances separating people, rather than only about eliminating boundaries or barriers between *us* and *them*.

The cornerstones of social inclusion

The working papers process revealed that social inclusion is a complex and challenging concept that cannot be reduced to only one dimension or meaning. The working papers, together with several other initiatives the Foundation sponsored as part of its exploration of social inclusion , have helped us to identify five critical dimensions, or cornerstones, of social inclusion:

Valued recognition– Conferring recognition and respect on individuals and groups. This includes recognizing the differences in children's development and, therefore, not equating disability with pathology; supporting community schools that are sensitive to cultural and gender differences; and extending the notion to recognizing common worth through universal programs such as health care.

Human development – Nurturing the talents, skills, capacities and choices of children and adults to live a life they value and to make a contribution both they and others find worthwhile. Examples include: learning and developmental opportunities for all children and adults; community child care and recreation programs for children that are growth-promoting and challenging rather than merely custodial.

Involvement and engagement – Having the right and the necessary support to make/be involved in decisions affecting oneself, family and community, and to be engaged in community life. Examples include: youth engagement and control of services for youth; parental input into school curriculum or placement decisions affecting their child; citizen engagement in municipal policy decisions; and political participation.

Proximity – Sharing physical and social spaces to provide opportunities for interactions, if desired, and to reduce social distances between people. This includes shared public spaces such as parks and libraries; mixed income neighbourhoods and housing; and integrated schools and classrooms.

Material well being – Having the material resources to allow children and their parents to participate fully in community life. This includes being safely and securely housed and having an adequate income.

Next steps: Building inclusive cities and communities

Over the next three years, the Children's Agenda program of the Laidlaw Foundation will focus on *Building inclusive cities and communities*. The importance of cities and communities is becoming increasingly recognized because the well-being of children and families is closely tied to where they live, the quality of their neighbourhoods and cities, and the 'social commons' where people interact and share experiences.

The Laidlaw Foundation's vision of a socially inclusive society is grounded in an international movement that aims to advance the well-being of people by improving the health of cities and communities. Realizing this vision is a long-term project to ensure that all members of society participate as equally valued and respected citizens. It is an agenda based on the premise that for our society to be just, healthy and secure, it requires the inclusion of all.

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This series is dedicated to the memory of
Dr. Jennifer Keck who died on June 12, 2002
after a long battle with cancer.

Jennifer was a key member of the editorial committee,
an insightful and passionate reviewer of the working papers,
and an unwavering advocate for
social justice and the social inclusion of all people.

The Role of Recreation in Promoting Social Inclusion

The Role of Recreation in Promoting Social Inclusion

Introduction

Children's lives are spent in three principal, and overlapping, contexts: home and family, school, and play and recreation. Of these three, the latter has received the least research and policy attention. This is surprising, given that play and recreation are widely accepted as fundamental to the health, well-being, and social and physical development of children.

'Good' parents, communities, and schools ensure play and recreational opportunities for their children. When they are not so 'good', other problems often become so great in children's lives that play and recreation tend to disappear from consideration. For example, a number of school boards in the United States have recently abandoned, or are considering abandoning, recess. This scheduled free play time for children is disappearing because administrators are concerned with safety and liability issues, and teachers and students face the time demands of more intensive classroom curricula. Parents with resources and knowledge about child development will ensure that their children receive play experiences, but there is no evidence of *shared responsibility* in this case.

In considering 'the role of recreation in promoting social inclusion', the benefits of participation are a clear starting point. However, such benefits are not automatic, and it is necessary to delineate the circumstances under which social inclusion might be promoted by recreation programmes. Part of the following analysis is based on the assumption that we must be sensitive to the barriers that preclude opportunities to be 'socially included'. Our goal is to define the terms under consideration; review the various contexts, including the barriers to participation, in which the relationship between social inclusion and physical recreation is being considered; and review research on the conditions under which social inclusion might be promoted by physical recreation. We conclude with several specific recommendations for the development of recreation programs to promote social inclusion.

Meanings and Definitions

Diverse meanings have been attached to social inclusion, and to physical recreation (play, exercise, sport and dance). An understanding of the politics of these meanings, and the ways in which meanings and values are developed and attached to social inclusion and physical recreation is a necessary starting point for a project advocating a role for physical recreation in the promotion of social inclusion. In particular, it is necessary to

understand how intended meanings and values may be subverted and co-opted. Attention will also be paid to this issue in defining social inclusion and physical recreation, and offering recommendations.

Social Inclusion

The notion of social inclusion has a long history in sociology. Early interest focused on 'social closure', a concept introduced by Max Weber and subsequently developed by Parkin (1979) who identified a series of characteristics on which social closure might be based (e.g., gender, education, ethnicity, religion, etc.):

> *Closure functions through the twin mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion.... It is based on the power of one group to deny access to reward, or positive life-chances, to another group on the basis of criteria which the former seek to justify... Processes of social closure involve marginalization (or exclusion) on the one hand, and incorporation (inclusion) on the other (Marshall, 1994, 60).*

While the terms social closure and social exclusion are conceptually clear, the use of 'inclusion' here refers to incorporation into an exclusive group, rather than the more democratized sense of ability to participate in the community with which it is intended in this project

Thus, there is some imprecision involved in coining a term in opposition to social exclusion. If exclusion refers to an action by a majority to a minority, or by a dominant group to a subordinate group, then inclusion may carry the same implication -- that it is something being done by a majority for a minority, or a dominant group for a subordinate group. At best, it could have some patronizing implications; at worst, it excludes the minority / subordinate group from agency -- from a part

in determining the forms, content, and meanings of their 'inclusion'. Such lack of agency may not be intended, and definitions may specifically include the notion of agency -- but it is implicit in the term if one asks, 'Who is including whom?'

For our purposes, social inclusion is defined as the social process through which the skills, talents, and capacities of children are developed and enhanced so that all are given the opportunity to realize their full potential, and to fully participate in the social and economic mainstream. Related to this is the notion that social inclusion presupposes the basic rights of citizenship including social, economic, and individual human rights. However, organized programmes of recreation have traditionally been conducted in a paternalistic manner, often, for the purpose of social control. Therefore, it may be necessary to distinguish those programmes and opportunities intended for social control from those that facilitate community development and involvement (see next section). We also recognize that programmes targeted specifically to poor or high risk children may actually have an 'exclusionary' effect, and that an overall policy of recreation accessibility based on need (rather than ability to pay) is more likely to have the effect of 'social inclusion'.

By highlighting these problems, and outlining a precise definition of 'social inclusion', it is possible to avoid falling into the traditional traps of programme provision (e.g., top down, 'expert'-driven systems; subversion of the original progressive intent of programmes, etc.). Therefore, we feel that it is important to recognize a 'power' dimension, in terms of "who has to shift?" for social inclusion to occur. For example, in terms of organized recreation programme provision, to what extent might 'experts' and 'professionals' give up some of their power so that the children and youth who

are the intended beneficiaries of the programme can be involved in planning, design and ongoing implementation?

There is a clear politics of meaning associated with the concept of social inclusion. It is necessary to continually interrogate the concept -- to adapt, modify, and (re)define social inclusion. For example, social inclusion might include the creation of exclusive 'niches' in which individuals feel comfortable,[1] in addition to the creation of communal space and opportunities. In the first place, though, inclusion is an access issue. It is necessary for opportunities to participate in physical recreation to be available before it is possible to examine any of the circumstances in which physical recreation might promote social inclusion. This makes it important to delineate the terms of those opportunities. As Coakley has noted, with regard to child development:

> *At the risk of oversimplifying an impressive array of research and theory on youth and youth development,. . . positive transitions from childhood to adolescence to adulthood are most likely when young people live in a context in which they are: (1) physically safe; (2) personally valued; (3) socially connected; (4) morally and economically supported; (5) personally and politically empowered; and (6) hopeful about the future. To the extent that sport programs serve these needs, we can expect them to contribute to the positive development of participants (Coakley, 2002, p. 25).*

If physical recreation is to be involved in the process of social inclusion, these are exactly the kind of structural and cultural characteristics that should be found in recreation programmes.

Physical Recreation

This paper focuses primarily on physical recreation and sport rather than, for example, music, and arts and crafts (albeit also important to social inclusion), since our expertise lies in those areas. Physical recreation includes all forms of recreational physical activity, from gardening and hiking to exercise, dance, and sports. It also involves both formal and informal, organized and casual aspects of participation. However, the majority of the research deals with organized programmes, and the more casual forms of recreation are much more difficult to measure.

The realm of physical culture that includes sport and physical recreation may be thought of as an ideological chameleon. The socially constructed nature of these cultural forms has produced not only an infinite variety of ways of moving, playing, exercising and competing, but also a range of values and meanings attached to such activities. For example, sports and physical activities have been used to support the most divisive and regressive forms of nationalism, and the most humanitarian forms of internationalism. They can involve the most regimented forms of collective, mechanical action (e.g., mass gymnastics, and marching displays) and the most creative forms of individual action (e.g., dance). The ability to carry such diverse meanings and values has, of course, resulted in political uses of sport and physical recreation in education, the military, and industry, and for purposes such as the promotion of nationalism and national identity.

Currently, we find a wide range of meanings and values attached to physical recreation in the developed nations of the West. Perhaps the dominant meaning is associated with the personalization of health, and involves the moral imperative to exercise in order to be fit and attractive, to take personal responsibility for one's health, and to save health care costs to the state. Similarly the liberal democratic val-

ues of teamwork and competitiveness are mod-eled in team sports. However, throughout the 20th century there was a third ideological strand, particularly in immigrant and liberal democratic societies such as Canada and the United States. This involved the use of recreation for children and youth (together with education) in the development of citizenship and as a tool of assimilation -- both, as is argued subsequently, elements of social inclusion.

Our point here is to indicate that, although there are widely reported benefits from participation in physical recreation, participation does not have any automatic consequences, and a wide range of meanings may be attached to involvement. In the case of children and youth, participants can be exploited, abused, bullied or dominated in many ways in organized activity programmes; they can be taught 'poor' values, and inappropriate or dangerous (i.e., injury producing) skills; they can be made to feel alienated, isolated, humiliated. But, the opposite may also be the case (see section below on Benefits of Participation).

Context

In order to fully consider the circumstances under which physical recreation may be used to promote social inclusion, it is necessary to examine the various contexts in which such a process may occur.   The following considers the historical, the present-day (benefits and barriers), and the ideological contexts in which social inclusion and physical recreation might be associated.

Historical Context: Assimilation and Social Control

In the previous section we outlined the ways in which physical recreation carries various meanings and values. The development of urban recreation, particularly in the case of parks and playgrounds and recreation programs, was carried out with a specific set of instrumental goals in mind, namely: assimilation and social control.

Early analyses suggested that middle class reformers, in the latter part of the 19th century, saw the plight of urban youth and began to develop parks and playgrounds for their recreation. Subsequently, more critical analyses (e.g., Goodman, 1979), proposed that provi-sion had more than a degree of self-interest in that recreation spaces and programmes involved regulation and supervision[2] - social control at a time when urban youth were first beginning to be defined as a social problem. More recent evidence (Hardy and Ingham, 1983) suggests that working class parents actively lobbied for recreational provision for their children, but that such provision was only made when the benefit to the self-interest of the middle and upper classes became apparent. Social control was the price working class parents paid -- they gave their children up to the double-edged sword of rational recreation and supervision in order to achieve the possibility of recreation. More overt evidence of physical recreation as social control derives from the specific use of physical activity in youth detention centres, and the efforts of organizations such as the Police Athletic League in the United States (cf., Donnelly, 1981).

However, as Coakley (2002) notes in his thorough critique of social control motives:

> *Before everyone who has ever used the "get-kids-off-the-street-and-keep-*

them-out-of-trouble" argument gets defensive, let me say that I realize the importance of any programmes that provide young people with safe contexts in which they can develop competence and come to understand that they are valued members of the community. My point here is that…. this argument …. ties right into the 'social control and deficit reduction' dream that many [powerful] people have when they think about how sports might be used to solve [social problems] (p. 20).

Similarly, one of the (anonymous) reviewers of an earlier draft of this paper argued persuasively that, "it is conceivable that some identifiable / excluded populations (perhaps youth suffering from undiagnosed depression, or youth suffering from ADD/ADHD) may indeed benefit significantly from social control motivated initiatives, but would never take advantage of them were they not paternalistically introduced in the first place." Social control motivated programmes are by no means ideal. They may be a necessary starting point for some populations, and some children may benefit in significant ways. But it is not enough in an exploration of social inclusion and recreation to suggest that they are 'better than nothing', and even programmes that start with paternalistic and controlling motives should ideally shift to a more inclusive orientation.

Urban recreation programmes in North America (along with public education) were also often developed specifically with the intent of assimilation of immigrant children (cf., Goodman, 1979; Hardy, 1982; Rosenberg, 2000; Rosenzweig, 1985). The double-edged sword of recreation provision is also evident here, with the achievement of recreation space and programmes being won at the cost of cultural loss (something, it should be pointed out, that has been embraced by many immigrant parents, especially in previous generations, who

wanted their children to be 'Canadian' or 'American').

Thus, urban physical recreation was provided, and won, with the cost of external regulation and assimilation. In present-day Canada the costs of assimilation are well documented in our multicultural society (e.g., residential schools, loss of language and culture even among 'founding nations'), and recreation programmes designed to promote social inclusion need to keep principles of multiculturalism in mind (cf., Paraschak, 1982). Similarly, current ideas of empowerment and self-determination suggest that participants become involved in designing their programmes. And programmes designed with a view to social control are now becoming recognized as short term, partial solutions to serious social structural problems (cf., Pitter & Andrews, 1997).

Present Day Context: Benefits of Participation

The reported benefits of participation in sport and physical recreation have been exhaustively catalogued (cf., the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's Benefits Book). A recent review of literature (Donnelly, McCloy, Petherick and Safai, 2000) indicates the consistency of findings, across cultures, of benefits in the areas of childhood and lifelong *health*; in the area of *learning* and *academic achievement*; in the areas of citizenship and democratic access; and in the areas of l*eadership* and *motivation*. For example, in physical recreation activities children can learn valuable skills related to quality of life: intra-personal and inter-personal communications, determination, perseverance, confidence, leadership, citizenship, goal-orientation, motivation, and personal satisfaction.[3] Participation has also been given an economic rationale in recent years: at a recent presentation at the World Summit on Physical Education, Kidd (1999) noted that "failure to provide physical education was significantly

more costly, for society and governments, than providing it," and pointed to the foolishness of failing to provide such opportunities. In fact, Health Canada estimates that for each $1 invested in physical activity there is a long term saving of $11 in health care costs.

The benefits are particularly important for children, since physical recreation is crucial to physical, social, motor and emotional development. In fact, Offord, Hanna and Hoult (1992) note that children who fall behind in physical and motor development may find it difficult to catch up. Relevant research has rarely focused on socially excluded populations, although there are reasons to suspect that such children may benefit even more from participation. Thus, the relationship between recreation and social inclusion must be implied. For example, Ross and Roberts (1999) note:

> *Participation in recreational activities can... contribute to an improved level of quality of life. Participating in sports, joining clubs or groups, and taking music, dance or art lessons are examples of ways in which young people can participate in their community, learn new skills, and socialize beyond their family boundaries (cited by Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) 2001).*

Similarly, Ewing, Seefeldt and Brown (1996) note that: "early play experiences with parents, for example, teach physical control, skill and social competence. A supportive coach or supervisor in a recreational setting can also provide children with similar benefits vis-a-vis skill development, competence and self-esteem (cited by CCSD, 2001).

(A later section will examine in detail the research on the relationship between physical recreation and social inclusion.)

Present-Day Context: Structural Barriers to Participation[4]

Donnelly and Harvey (1996) provide an in-depth analysis of structural barriers to participation in physical recreation in Canada. A model was developed recognizing three types of barriers: <u>infra-structural</u>, <u>super-structural</u>, and <u>procedural</u>, and two types of access – <u>participational</u> and <u>representational</u>. This model has the advantage of easily identifying concrete actions to be taken in order to overcome systemic barriers to access to physical recreation (a number of these are outlined in the recommendations at the conclusion of this paper). However, such a model tends to give the impression that each of these proposed actions are of equal importance. Hence, Donnelly and Harvey emphasized two points with regard to structural barriers to access.

First, among all of the major population segments considered (social class, disability, ethno-cultural heritage, age, and gender) <u>social class</u> appears to be the major variable to consider – both as a distinct segment, and in relation to all of the other population segments. The model identifies social class as the primary socio-economic determinant which creates substantive inequalities. This point is consistent with population health research (e.g., Evans, 1994). Therefore, the increasing inequity in the distribution of wealth among Canadians -- particularly during the last decade -- may constitute the single most important barrier to access to physical recreation, and may undermine most of the proposed initiatives to overcome other barriers.

The evidence to support this point is overwhelming, and supports a consistent finding in the sociology of sport regarding the linear relationship between income and participation. For example, CCSD's 2001 analyses of the Statistics Canada National Longitudinal

Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) (for 1994 and 1996) have looked at children's recreation participation above and below the low-income cut off (LICO), and by family income quintiles. For example:

By low income cut-off (LICO):
- participation in sports with a coach one or more times a week – above LICO (59.1 %); below LICO (37.1%)

- participation in dance / gymnastics one or more times a week – above LICO (31.5%); below LICO (21.1%)

- attendance at overnight camp – above LICO (22.8%); below LICO (17.6%) and day camp -- above LICO (34.5%); below LICO (21.8%)

By quintiles:
- participation in sports with a coach one or more times a week – lowest (36%), fourth (45.8%), middle (52.3%), second (59%), highest (71.5%)

- participation in dance / gymnastics one or more times a week – lowest (20.8%), highest (37.1%)

- attendance at overnight camp – lowest (16.4%), highest (29.2%); and day camp – lowest (20.6%), highest (44.1%)

Preliminary analyses of the 1998 NLSCY (Statistics Canada, 2001) show no significant change in these findings:
- younger children in the lowest income quartile were three times more likely to have never participated in organized activities (sports, music, arts or clubs) than children in the highest quartile;

- younger children whose parents had less than a high school education were more than twice as likely to have never participated in organized activities than were those children whose parents had higher education.

These general survey findings are also confirmed by more focused community studies (e.g., Hughes & Griffiths, 1992; Offord, Lipman & Duku, 1998). When straightforward measures of income and education are combined with issues such as family and organizational constraints, or combined with other categories of social exclusion (gender, ethnocultural heritage, etc.), the impact on participation becomes even more significant.

Second, Donnelly and Harvey note that in order to achieve access to physical recreation, many initiatives have to be undertaken whose impact is broader than physical recreation per se. Ball has recently pointed out that health care is only part of the answer to improving the health and well-being of Canadians.

> *There is strong and growing evidence that much more could be achieved if greater effort was put into improving other factors that have an important impact on population health, such as living and working conditions. In short, the health of Canadians would improve significantly if more attention was paid to underlying factors affecting health and well-being, rather than just treating disease" (1995, 5).*

Of course, physical recreation is among these underlying factors, but initiatives that attempt to increase access to physical recreation without taking into account the overall living and working conditions of the target populations are unlikely to be successful. The need for such broadly based initiatives is being recognized in a number of areas. For example, with reference to youth-at-risk, John Hagan notes that, "Social problems -- poverty, racism and deprived neighbourhoods -- are interrelated. Social agencies must concentrate not on individual problems and programs but rather on combining their efforts and their expertise. Comprehensive integrated approaches are

needed to reduce the exposure of children and adolescents to high-risk settings" (cited by Cusack, 1995, 17).

Donnelly and Harvey's research was carried out for the Fitness Branch of Health Canada, and was concerned with the use of physical recreation in population health initiatives. If, as this paper argues, inclusion is, in the first instance, an access issue, there are clear implications for the promotion of social inclusion through physical recreation.

Ideological Context: The Right to Participate

The second half of the twentieth century was characterized by concern for human rights, and the first declarations of access to sport and physical activity as a human right were developed as 'the right to participate' in the 1970s. European nations were particularly influenced by the 1975 European Sport for All Charter[5] (www.culture.coe. fr/ Infocentre /txt/eng /espchart2.html>), the first Article of which stated that: *Every individual shall have the right to participate in sport.*

This was followed shortly by the 1978 International Charter of Physical Education and Sport, adopted by UNESCO in November 1978 (www.unesco.org/youth/charter.htm>). The first Article states that: *The practice of physical education and sport is a fundamental right for all.*

Specific United Nations charters also began to advocate the right to participate. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) explicitly addresses sport and physical activity, as does the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).[6]

Most recently, Jean Harvey (2000) has characterized the right to participate in physical recreation as one of the rights of full citizenship, and has applied that argument to the Canadian case for Sport for All. However, we have on the one hand an ideological climate in which there is widespread concern for human rights, and in which Canada is a signatory to international documents proclaiming the right to participation in physical activity; and on the other hand an ideological climate characterized by user fees, privatization, and the ongoing reduction of physical recreation opportunities in communities, and in school sport and physical education. Kidd and Donnelly (2000) have argued the need to monitor, and challenge, Canada's compliance as a signatory to UN Charters advocating the right to participate. If inclusion starts as an access issue, this a good place to start.

Social Inclusion and recreation: A Review of the Literature

In this section, we consider a number of research studies and policy recommendations that shed light on the relationship between social inclusion and physical recreation, and the circumstances under which physical recreation may promote social inclusion. In general terms the benefits of socially inclusive sport and recreation programmes are maximized if they are organized to provide participants with the following:

1. A safe environment. This is especially important among participants who have survived everyday threats to their physical well being by withdrawing from social

settings or utilizing defensive violence. This also highlights the need for programmes to emphasize a philosophy of nonviolence, even when they involve physical contact sports.

3. Opportunities to develop and display competence. This is especially important among participants who are members of groups that experience social and cultural marginalization in society at large. This also highlights the need for programmes to be integrated into the community in ways that allow participants to convert self esteem in an athletic or recreational context into a sense of moral worth in the community at large.

4. Social networks. This is especially important among participants who regularly face conflict and adversity in their everyday lives. This also highlights the need for programmes to facilitate connections with peers, nurture supportive friendships, and promote communication and conflict resolution skills.

5. Moral and economic support. This is important among participants who lack access to advocates and adult 'hook-ups' in their lives. This also highlights the need for programmes to go beyond traditional calls for role models and to provide direct support and guidance to participants as they make moral and economic decisions in their everyday lives.

6. Autonomy and control in the structures in which their experiences occur. This is especially important among participants who have few experiences showing them that they can control their lives and the contexts in which they live. This also highlights the need for programmes to include systematic opportunities for participants to be involved in decision-mak-

ing processes (see below).

7. Hope for the future. This is especially important among participants who have a seriously constricted sense of possibilities because they have seldom, if ever, seen adults with the resources needed to provide for themselves and deal successfully with challenges in their lives. This highlights the need for programmes to intentionally expose participants to a wide range of possibilities and visions for their lives.

Of course, these are general conclusions based on a range of studies on social development, and this is a daunting list for anyone considering the establishment of a programme of physical recreation. However, if physical recreation programmes are to have a positive impact on the lives of young people, especially those living in communities characterized by economic need and social problems, "unless these needs can be met, [recreation] programs will never be a viable form of social intervention" (Coakley, 2002, 28).

No studies have been found which specifically test the ability of recreation to promote social inclusion, or which examine projects purporting to have this aim. In the case of the ongoing British experiment in eradicating social exclusion, there is clear skepticism (noted below) about the possibility of such a relationship becoming a key element of policy, at least in the case of competitive sport. Our starting point is the extent to which participants are involved in the decision making processes, surely a key element in socially inclusive activities.

Frisby, Crawford and Dorer (1997) carried out a study of a project that characterizes agency on the part of the participants, and the need to take account of the life circumstances of the participants. This modified 'bottom up'

project in British Columbia targeted "women living below the poverty line who were interested in increasing their opportunities for participation in physical activity" (19). We say 'modified' because members of the target population were in partnership with a large group of middle class individuals and agencies (e.g., university researchers, Parks and Recreation Department, Family Services, Health Unit, etc.). As the physical activity program was being developed by the partnership, the target group, who identified themselves as "low income women," immediately expanded the activity group to include their children. They "did not separate their needs from those of their immediate families [and] stated that 'their children came first,' and they would sacrifice their own involvement to ensure their children's needs were met" (19).

The women were empowered to not only name themselves, but also to change the project itself to meet the needs of the women and their children. Without their intervention, the provision of the programme only for the women (i.e., one that did not take into account their whole living circumstances, which included children) would have been a failure. The researchers and programme providers had focused on a specific population without taking into account the inability of those individuals to afford childcare for their dependents. Without the partnership the 'experts' would probably have blamed the intransigence of the victims for not taking the opportunities provided. Even with their involvement, the researchers realized that the women were already self-selecting: they "were white, had preschool children, and were ready to reduce the social isolation they were experiencing" (20). Among other "women living below the poverty line" they had failed "to reach the most marginalized low-income women in the community (e.g., visible minority women, women isolated by abuse, and older low-income

women)" (20). The project took steps to overcome the barriers to involvement that were identified by the women involved by establishing a parallel physical activity and day care program for the children. Approximately 70 women and 150 children attended regularly. As Frisby et al note, "the women felt ownership for the programs because they had the freedom to choose whether to get involved and their voices were taken into account during the project" (1997, 20).

The project described by Frisby et al was about excluded adult women and their children. Agency for children is a more difficult concept, and lies at the root of the basic concerns and problems regarding social inclusion for children and youth. Can children be trusted with decision-making powers when all of the systems are set up in terms of 'provision' (by adults and/or experts, for children)? Voyle's (1989) work on 'Adolescent administration of a leisure centre,' also presents a successful model of participant agency. She studied a "predominantly teenage committee that founded and now runs a community leisure centre" (31) in New Zealand in order to address questions such as: What motivates adolescents to participate in community organizations?; What helps to maintain their participation?; and What advantages and/or disadvantages are there in power sharing between adults and adolescents for the organization? Voyle problematizes a key element of the authoritarian leadership style in many sports organizations: "Adult monopoly of power leaves adolescents with a choice between two alternatives: to comply with adult authority; or to choose not to participate" (31).

As Chalip (1980) notes: "Existing sporting institutions may, at worst, be squeezing out the very athletes who would ultimately be the most successful..." (80). In the largely successful case described by Voyle, she is able to offer a recipe for success (33):

- be willing to share power with teenagers

- maximize opportunities for teenagers to assume significant roles

- make provision for adolescents' social needs

- have realistic expectations

As Voyle notes: "What matters most to teenagers is being allowed the chance to do something for themselves. Adults can help by offering guidance, support and access to resources" (34).

Coakley and White (1992) identified similar concerns with agency in their study showing how adolescent, mostly working class youths in England make decisions about participation. Their study described a number of class and gender barriers to participation, and they found that decisions about participation in physical recreation activities were based on concerns about becoming adults and about personal competence; and reflected:

- constraints related to money, parents, and opposite-sex friends

- support and encouragement from significant others

- past experiences in school sport and physical education classes

In cases such as the ones described here, where physical recreation ceased to be meaningful to female adolescents who are beginning to define themselves as adults, the introduction of programmes that do not involve the participants, and do not take such concerns into account, is likely to be unsuccessful.

In two additional reports from their study of English adolescents, Coakley and White (1994) critiqued a social marketing campaign ("Ever Thought of Sport?") for its top down

assumptions, and for failing to take into account the reality of young people's lives and social contexts; and in their overall report (White & Coakley, 1986) they provide over 30 recommendations for leisure centre administrators and supervisors. Implementation of their recommendations would go a long way towards realizing greater involvement of young people in physical recreation, and promoting social inclusion.

The majority of projects reviewed have focused on recreation for 'at risk' youth with a view to having a positive effect on behaviour. Our assumption in reviewing these studies is that, although there is little evidence of agency or shared decision making, dropout and 'deviant' behaviour is more likely to lead to social exclusion. McKay, Reid, Tremblay and Pelletier (1996) and Reid, Tremblay, Pelletier and McKay (1994), noting the relationship between 'leisure boredom' and a number of negative behaviours, found that 'appropriate' recreation activities decrease 'leisure boredom' and the negative behaviours. These recreation activities "can have a positive impact on family-related, peer-related, and school-related issues and these impacts can significantly influence children and youth's social development and transition to adulthood" (cited by CCSD, 2001). Similarly, Mahoney and Cairns (1997) found a negative relationship between recreation participation and school dropout rate, and advocate participation in recreation as a means to develop a positive connection to school.

Two of the best-known Canadian studies (Offord & Jones, 1983; Browne, Byrne, Roberts & Gafni, 1998) were also intended to reduce 'behaviour problems'. Offord's Ottawa study was designed to give low income children a similar quality of life to middle class children, and involved supported participation in recreational activities. A one year programme of non-school skill development involved all chil-

dren aged 5-15 living in a public housing complex. The apparent effect of recreation participation/ skill development on improved school performance and home behaviour was marginal. However, overall levels of skill development and self-esteem were believed to have improved, and there was a clear effect on the reduction of anti-social behaviour. In fact, in terms of cost-effectiveness, the savings in terms of vandalism and reduced police and fire costs were far more than the cost of the program. Offord's work on this project led him to start the Christie Lake project for children in Hamilton.

Also in the Hamilton area, Gina Browne led a research team which created an experimental group of children with single parents on welfare. For two years they were provided with a range of health and social services, and the children received subsidized quality childcare and recreation. The overall behaviour of the children improved in comparison to a control group, and those children who had been diagnosed with a behaviour disorder prior to the experiment achieved a level of competence similar to children without behaviour disorders.[7] In both of these studies there are reasons to be concerned about the lasting effects of the interventions. In fact, Offord suggests that benefits cannot be expected to last for more than a year or so.[8]

In the United States, Witt and Crompton (1996a, 1996b) reviewed a series of studies evaluating physical recreation programs for 'youth at risk'. As they note in their introduction: "The public debate in 1994 over the thrust of the [U.S.] Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act exposed serious divisions among policymakers, legislators and advocates over effective strategies to address the rise of youth crime in America" (1996b, 1). As with the Canadian studies noted above, for the most part the studies reviewed fall into the 'social control' category, as do a number of studies in

a special issue of Quest (1997) on the theme of "Serving underserved youth through physical activity." The studies of these programmes are frequently psychologically oriented, and methodologically flawed. They are often funded by agencies with a vested interest in discovering the benefits of physical recreation for resolving social problems.

For example, it is widely believed in recreation circles in the United States that one of the easiest ways to raise money for recreation is to start a program for 'youth at risk' (e.g., midnight basketball). The reasons lie in the fact that it is much easier, and cheaper, to occupy the time of young people identified as 'at risk' than it is to deal with the real problems of poverty, impoverished neighbourhoods, lack of role models, poor education, and other issues. These programmes are funded precisely because they are inexpensive, and perhaps because the middle classes who cannot afford to live in gated communities may sleep better at night knowing that the 'dangerous' populations are playing basketball (cf., Pitter & Andrews 1997; Coakley 2002).

But there have been some creative programs, and they are not entirely without benefit. As noted previously, we consider recreation programs motivated by social control to be something of a double-edged sword. While the absence of a programme of physical recreation is unlikely to create the capacity for social inclusion, it is worthwhile remembering Voyle's (1989) caution that "adult monopoly of power leaves adolescents with a choice between two alternatives: to comply with adult authority; or to choose not to participate" (31).

Not all U.S. programs fall into the social control model. In fact, Martinek and Hellison, have carried out a series of studies that are beginning to transform U.S. university physical education programmes. They describe how programmes of physical recreation can be

involved in individual and community development (e.g., Martinek & Hellison, 1997), and the way in which recreation programmes appear to foster resiliency in young people living in poor urban neighbourhoods. Such resiliency is evident when children and youth develop autonomy, optimism, positive skills, social competence and hope.

Also in the U.S., Lawson and Anderson-Butcher (2000) have taken a novel, policy-oriented approach to the issue of accessible physical recreation and its potential for promoting social inclusion in their advocacy of a social work model for sport and recreation provision. They note that:

> *The social work of sport is of paramount importance in today's world. [We draw our] meaning [from] the profession of social work, especially its theories of action and its firm commitments to serving oppressed and-marginalized populations, chief among them vulnerable children, youth, and families. We argue that sport leaders have much to gain by understanding and incorporating the profession of social work's perspectives and action theories; and that sport leaders need to collaborate more effectively with social workers (1-2).*

There is now at least one case, in the U.K., of a policy of this type where a government has combined ideas of social control with social work and community building in its recent policy initiatives.

The language and philosophy of social inclusion have become key elements in Tony Blair's New Labour administration in the U.K., a commitment that extends to physical recreation. White and Rowe (2000) note:

> *[T]he commitment of the government to sport as a means to achieve wider social policy objectives has never been so focused and*

received such a high profile... [T]he Policy Action Team on Sport and the Arts… concluded that: "Participation in the arts and sport has a beneficial social impact. Arts and sport are inclusive [emphasis added] and can contribute to neighbourhood renewal. They can build confidence and encourage strong community groups... and make a real difference to health, crime, employment, and education in deprived communities."

> *The outcome… is an action plan… to ensure that sport and the arts maximize their contribution towards reducing social exclusion and contributing towards neighbourhood renewal....All the initiatives are socially inclusive and aim to redress current inequities in sports participation (6-7).*

However, there is no evident plan to work explicitly on social inclusion. Inclusion is seen only as an access issue - access to be non-discriminatory, wheelchair accessible, etc. Inclusion is assumed from participation.

Researchers involved specifically in sport policy issues are deeply suspicious of the potential of organized sport (as opposed to other forms of physical recreation) to promote social inclusion. They have seen little evidence to support the idea that sport is an ideal solution to social exclusion, although most could point to some programmes that are organized on a socially inclusive basis. They note that organized sport, by its very nature, involves competition, and most organized sports occur in hierarchical and competitive structures (e.g., leagues). An emphasis on competitive success, over-conformity to the norms of the sport ethic as a basis for identity reaffirmation, moving up as an individual to the next level, etc., all combine to make exclusion and marginalization a normative part of the sport experience. Also, sports pit one group against another, and there are numerous examples of such groups being

formed along lines (e.g., ethno-cultural affiliation) that may not promote social inclusion. It is important to take these traditional aspects of

organized sport programmes into account when establishing activities to promote the principles of social inclusion.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Donnelly (1993) has noted that: "We have long held, although with little evidence, that sport participation has the capacity to transform the character of individuals" (428).

When individuals are able to become involved in creating, and transforming, the meaning of their physical activities, the transformative effects could reach beyond health and quality of life issues: "It is possible that the struggle to achieve a fully democratized sport and leisure [one in which the participants determine the form, circumstances, and meaning of their participation] might result in the capacity to transform communities. People could learn initiative, community endeavour, collective rather than individual values, self determination, etc., that could permit them to begin to take charge of their own lives and communities" (Donnelly, 1993, p. 428). Frisby et al (1997) found that the Women's Action Project took steps in this direction: "[The project] demonstrated how the process can result in a more inclusive local sport system and, at the same time, provide a rich setting for examining organizational dynamics including collaborative decision-making, community partnerships, power imbalances, resource control, resistance to change, and nonhierarchical structures" (8).

The following points are offered in conclusion:
1. **Defining and measuring social inclusion:** Social inclusion remains an elusive concept in this analysis of physical recreation research. It is evident that recreation has the potential to combat social

exclusion, but far too often inclusion is assumed as a consequence of participation. The emphases in this paper have been on: (a) access, without which the inclusive work of recreation cannot occur; and (b) the structural and cultural conditions of physical recreation programmes that may promote social inclusion. At this time, our understanding of the former – the barriers to access to physical recreation (see (3) below) – is more complete than our understanding of the process of social inclusion.

This process raises several questions:

- How might we measure inclusion, and when it occurs? Is inclusion limited to the period of participation? Far too many evidently successful programmes of physical recreation (e.g., Browne et al.; Offord, et al.) have been organized as a part of research projects based on short term funding, and without the capacity for before and after assessments and long term monitoring and tracking of outcomes. Such long-term studies and assessments are necessary in order to determine the effects on individuals and communities; and such studies would also assist in the development of appropriate and reliable assessment tools for the measurement of social inclusion. The definition of social inclusion must be continually revisited and revised in the light of such research.

- To what extent does inclusion occur in social control oriented programmes of recreation? Have they already established a form of social exclusion with imposed codes of conduct? As we have noted in our analysis, social control oriented programmes may already have some exclusive elements. However, there are circumstances in which such exclusions and controls may be necessary in order to promote the longer term goal of inclusion. And, given appropriate leadership (see (2) below) and certain structural and cultural conditions, there can be real benefits deriving even from social control motivated programmes.

  - To what extent might inclusion occur in competitive sport programmes, that seem by their very nature to practice social exclusion? Again, there are real potential benefits from such programmes given that leadership and structural conditions such as league regulations (and their enforcement) will determine whether such programmes are, for example, process oriented or outcome oriented.

2. Leadership: The real benefits of involvement in physical recreation seem to derive from the potentials that are released in children and youth with 'good', educated and sincere leadership. It seems that almost any type of well-intentioned programme works with the 'right' people in charge. So, in addition to knowing what works, it is necessary to know how to find, or educate, the 'right' people. We may need to train a corps of idealistic young people (cf., Katimavik) who are prepared to develop socially inclusive programmes of physical recreation. Bruce Kidd's Canadian Sport Leadership Corps, and Olympic Aid's 'Coach-to-Coach' programme in refugee camps are steps in this direction. Helping to resolve the current plight of Innu children in Labrador by developing well-planned (by community and participants, as well as recreation leaders) and sustained programmes of physical recreation would be an ideal starting point.

3. Structural barriers: Since inclusion is, in the first place, an access issue, it is worth considering how access might be achieved by overcoming the structural / systemic barriers that prevent participation. Donnelly and Harvey (1996) developed a series of recommendations for overcoming infra-structural, super-structural, and procedural barriers to involvement in physical recreation, and several of the key recommendations are reiterated here:

Infrastructure

- Affordable, if not free-of-charge programmes with accessible and inexpensive transportation: The most at-risk groups generally represent the lowest income Canadians.

- Timing and scheduling: Events, activities and programmes must take into account the time constraints and availability of the targeted populations, on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis.

- Facilities: Should be welcoming with regard to their physical aspects (ramps, spacious hallways and washrooms, accessible switches, counters, automatic doors, etc.), and with regard to the atmosphere (music, decoration, hosting that is sensitive to particular situations and needs).

Superstructure

- Policies regarding equity, violence and harassment have to be designed, implemented, and respected.

- Nature of activities: must be designed appropriately to involve, accommodate and invite targeted populations, and must respect cultural mores.

- Leaders (professional or volunteer): must have appropriate social awareness, cultural sensitivity, child development, and technical training; must play a key role in advocating the development of policies and programmes that reduce barriers to access.

- Maximizing equal opportunities through dialogue: individual members, and their groups and communities must voice their concerns, be heard, and act in concert to overcome barriers together.

Procedures

- Hierarchical structures must give way to widespread consultation, equal representation, positive and community based action, empowering people to make their own choices and keep control of programmes.

- Social support should be provided or facilitated for isolated groups or individuals needing help to be able to participate.

- Targeted populations must be made aware of their rights, and of resources that may be made available to them.

  We cannot over-emphasize the point that these recommendations will have a much larger positive impact if implemented in conjunction with a broad population approach dealing with major determinants of social inequality and social exclusion.

4. **Agency:** We must recognize those circumstances in which programmes of physical recreation acknowledge the agency of the participants -- in which par-

ticipants are able to determine (within guidelines of safety, and appropriate to their level of development) "the forms, circumstances, and meanings of their participation" (Donnelly, 1993). Such democratized participation seems likely to be best suited for furthering the development of citizenship and social inclusion.

The main support for inclusion processes is found in settings where young people are part of a club structure that is non-hierarchical, and where activities are not exclusively based on power and performance models [of competitive sports] (Coakley, 2001); where pleasure and participation sports are the dominant activities; and where age integration (as opposed to age segregation) is common. Coakley's 2002 summary of the research with respect to youth development in physical recreation is especially relevant for the promotion of social inclusion, and is worth repeating here:

> *At the risk of oversimplifying an impressive array of research and theory on youth and youth development, . . . positive transitions from childhood to adolescence to adulthood are most likely when young people live in a context in which they are: (1) physically safe; (2) personally valued; (3) socially connected; (4) morally and economically supported; (5) personally and politically empowered; and (6) hopeful about the future.*

To the extent that sport [and recreation] programs serve these needs, we can expect them to contribute to the positive development of participants (p. 25). Social inclusion is implicit in programmes that are run along these lines, not only because they are intended for all, but also because the aims of inclusion are evident in all six needs. Such is the depth of need in many communities -- "a dangerous mix of malnutrition, inadequate health care, poor housing, under-funded schools, homeless-

ness, HIV and AIDS, dangerous and polluted environments, drug use, teen pregnancy, police brutality, gangs, assaults, murders, and parental unemployment" (Coakley, 2002, p. 25) -- almost any well-intentioned programme of recreation is better than no programme. However, such programmes should only be seen as 'life preservers', as a step in the progression toward programmes that address the six needs outlined above, and which are much more likely to result in community transformation based on social inclusion.

Endnotes

1. As various 'mainstreaming' programmes have discovered, one size does not necessarily fit all. In the case of certain disabilities, or ethno-cultural and religious traditions, special provisions need to be made in order to ensure a level of comfort in participation, or even to ensure that participation is possible (e.g., the case of certain Moslem women who must engage in physical activity out of the sight of men).

2. A story in Hamilton, Ontario (which may be apocryphal) captures the essence of concern for social control and supervision that led to the establishment of urban recreation. At the turn of the last century, a group of working class children playing on some waste ground were play acting / recreating a particularly gruesome murder that had recently occurred in Hamilton. A passing group of middle class women were so horrified at this form of play that they subsequently formed the Hamilton Playgrounds Association to raise funds for the first playground in the city.

3. The anecdotal evidence to support such findings is overwhelming, as is the research data. However, although the research data show consistent relationships between participation in physical activity and positive outcomes, it has not been possible to carry out studies, especially with regard to the non-biological effects, which determine whether participation caused the outcomes. [In fact, one of the only accurate ways to determine such causality would be to unethically deprive interested students of participation.] Thus, it is not possible, with complete certainty, to rule out a selection effect whereby those participating already have the potential for positive outcomes. However, the overwhelming weight of evidence across a range of studies and cultures, supplemented by the weight of anecdotal evidence, suggests there are likely to be such positive outcomes as a result of participation in. Thus, the data supporting the benefits of investing in childhood physical recreation provide strong evidence for the educational, social, and health outcomes enhanced through participation.

4. At the presentations and in the summary papers, a number of the Laidlaw social inclusion project authors noted such barriers with specific reference to physical recreation -- e.g., Phipps & Curtis; Goldberg & Kerstetter; Jenson & Stroick; and Hoy, Matthews & Garcia.

5. In most statements of 'sport as a right', the term 'sport' is intended in its broadest possible sense to include all forms of recreational physical activity.

6. Agencies such as Olympic Aid for children and the International Working Group on Women and Sport use the United Nations Conventions as a starting point for their activities.

7. The health and economic circumstances of the parents also improved, and there was a measurable reduction in expenditure for use of health and social services.

8. Donnelly (1981) made a similar argument with regard to the 'life-altering' claims of those who had attended Outward Bound courses.

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