

Community Engagement : Who should be engaged? Who would benefit?

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Introduction:

The community engagement of people with intellectual disabilities (ID) is not as high as their able-bodied counterparts. Social service organizations have been involving partners to support people with ID to take part in community activities as extensively as possible. Since 2003, Wai Ji Christian Service (WJCS), a NGO, has been collaborating with volunteer police officers to create synergy for community health.

This paper presents the outcome of a community project carried out by WJCS and volunteer officers of the Hong Kong Police Force. It is hoped that through this presentation, more community partners and public services can promote community health care.

Purpose of the Project:

The purpose of the project is to organize different kinds of outdoor activities for adults with ID to enhance their quality of life, promote their physical and mental health, facilitate their self development, and build up friendship between the able-bodied volunteers and people with ID.

Material & Methods:

Marketing strategies have been widely adopted by WJCS in this project. The strategies include 4Ps (Promotion, Place, Product and Price) commonly used in marketing, together with 2Ps (Person-centered and Power) adopted by helping professions.

Person-Centered: How to promote the well being of people with ID is the primary concern of this programme. The project was devoted to promoting social, mental and physical health of people with ID, which was well accepted by the volunteers.

Product: The final product promoted by the project is the friendship built up between the able and the disabled.

Promotion: The life stories about the peer support provided by the police officers for people with ID were constantly reported by the mass media. The image of people with ID and of the police officers was enhanced.

Place: The places where the activities held were attractive and diversified.

Price: Owing to the sustainability and success of this project, different funding support has been secured. The funds enabled the participants to only pay a nominal fee in the activities.

Power: The police volunteers were gradually empowered to serve as the leaders of volunteer groups of WJCS and as members of WJCS's local advisory bodies to speak for the interests of people with ID.

Results:

Between 2003 and 2007, more than 700 police officers had organized a total of 144 attractive and challenging outdoor activities for people with ID in Hong Kong, Macau and the Mainland China. One thousand and six hundred head-counts of people with ID were recorded. The peer support offered by the volunteers was highly treasured by the people with ID and their families.

Conclusions:

Not only people with ID benefited from community engagement, the volunteers themselves have had gainful experiences in helping those who were in need. This project was conferred the Star Raft Awards by the Asian Federation of Mental Retardation in November 2007.