

SEATTLE
PLAYGARDEN
A Garden for Everyone

How to Run an Inclusive Summer Camp:

A checklist to shift marketing, registration, and enrollment practices to be more inclusive of children/youth with disabilities in youth programming.

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Welcome! We are glad you are here. You are here because you want to welcome more children and youth with disabilities into your summer camp/ youth programs but likely don't know where to start. One of the best places you can start is with adjusting your **marketing, registration and enrollment practices**.

Why change your current approach? Visual imagery and written language in your marketing materials and in registration forms is often the first touchpoint for a family to learn about your organization. When a parent goes to your website, or calls in to inquire about your programs, they are scanning all the information presented to them to decide if the program looks like a good fit for them and their child.

Context: Despite huge strides towards disability accessibility with the signing of the ADA in 1990, we have a long way to go toward achieving true inclusion of people with disabilities in our community. Children with disabilities are often not represented in marketing materials or on company websites. Disability related accommodations are rarely (or only vaguely) mentioned in child registration forms applications and parents are often left unsure if a given camp program will be a good fit for their child. The parents we have surveyed have expressed unease when it comes to asking if a child's aid can attend and are hesitant to disclose that their child has a disability for fear their child will be excluded based on that information. Sadly, the list of barriers parents face when signing up for something (that should be purely joyful like summer camp) continues.

It is long past time to end disability related exclusion. **It is up to you to make a family feel welcome and invited to participate.**

INCLUSIVE MARKETING & COMMUNICATION

- Conduct an audit of your website and marketing materials.**
 - Visit our lesson on [How to Conduct a Program Assessment](#) for guidance.
**Remember, this is about taking action to shift your marketing so try not to get overwhelmed at needing to shift everything and then do nothing. Use this notion of a more comprehensive program assessment to help you clarify your baseline.
- Apply the ideas of Push vs Pull**
 - What are you as an organization doing that could be pushing families away?**
 - Example: A requirement that states a child must be toilet trained or must be able to walk 3 miles.
 - See workshop slides for more examples.
 - What are you doing that is pulling families in?**
 - Example: A mission statement that states you are a community-based organization and people of all abilities are welcome.
- Representation Matters.**
 - Add visual disability representation to marking materials and websites.
 - Example: [Rooted in Rights WA partnered with Woodland Park Zoo to increase disability representation.](#)
 - Example: [Visit the PlayGarden instagram](#) to see how we demonstrate we welcome kids with disabilities.
- Be explicit about welcoming kids/ youth with disabilities in your communication**
 - Example 1:** From a local dance studio's website, listed on their homage:
“Rainier Dance Center is a dance studio focused on building community. Our goal is to help our students become kind and motivated young people by offering a structured and supportive learning environment. While we strive to create strong, technical dancers, we also **cultivate creativity and individuality**. RDC is committed to providing a safe space and excellent dance education to dancers of all races, ethnicities, cultures, genders, sexual orientations, **abilities**, body sizes, and socioeconomic backgrounds.”
 - Example 2:** “The PlayGarden offers a fully inclusive nature-based summer camp experience for **children with disabilities and their peers**, ages 3.5-21. Camps are Monday-Thursday, from 9:30 am-1:30 pm. With a high staff to camper ratio, we are able to support every child in their quest for adventure and play!”

- Actively Invite**
 - If you are not seeing families of children with disabilities in your programs that means you likely need to change where you are advertising your programs.
 - If you actively invite families by posting in places where they feel represented, safe and in places they trust you are more likely to see them sign up for your programs.

Where to market your programs to reach more families of children/youth with disabilities:

- Parent Groups on Social Media- examples:**
 - Facebook Groups:
 - The Downs Syndrome Community of Puget Sound
 - Special Connections
 - Parent to Parent of WA State
- Special Education Classes at school near you**
 - We get calls from teachers often asking about summer camp options for their students.
- Therapy Offices/ Support Services/Day Program Centers**
 - Open Doors for Multicultural Families
 - Boyer Children's Clinic
 - Seattle Therapy Network
 - WA State Fathers Network
 - Arc of King County
 - For teens/young adults: Tavon, Alyssa Burnett, The Summit Center
- Hospital List Serves**
 - Seattle Children's Hospital Summer Camps List
- Parent Magazines**
 - Parent Map & Seattle Child
- With us!** Word of mouth is EVERYTHING

INCLUSIVE REGISTRATION

- Review registration materials for your youth programs/ summer camp. **Ask yourself: What is the parents/caregivers experience registering for your programs?**
 - Is it clear how to sign up, how/when to submit forms?
 - Is there a contact person a parent can email/call with questions/ talk about their child specifically?
 - Is financial aid offered and clearly stated for how families can apply?

- Can families use DDA (Developmental Disabilities Administration) funds to pay for camp?

Example from the PlayGarden Camp Registration Form:

FINANCIAL AID AND DDA RESPITE FUNDS

The PlayGarden is here for EVERY child who wants to play! No family is turned away, because of financial restrictions and we need your help to make that happen. Therefore, our program fees operate on a sliding scale, with a full and reduced rate. **Summer camp fees are posted on the application.**

1. **We offer financial aid to families.** This is done by submitting a short explanation of your financial circumstances and what amount you can contribute to the camp fee. Please see the application for details.
2. **We accept DDA respite funds.** When filling out the application, please fill in the appropriate line with your child's case manager's information.

- Do you state on your registration forms what types of support your program can offer to kids with disabilities?
 - Example on our Summer Camp webpage. “At the PlayGarden we have a high staff to camper ratio, we are able to support every child in their quest for adventure and play!”
- Read the following excerpt from the [Thinking Guide to Inclusive Child Care, Conversation Guide by Mark Sweet, PhD.](#)

What information do you need to be successful?

- **What is usable information about a child?** What do you think is essential information? For example, at the time of enrollment, are there any essential reasons parents should disclose that a child has Down syndrome?
- Do the questions you usually ask suggest a possible line between including or rejecting a child? How could you frame questions to convey a commitment to supporting a child well and nurturing growth?
- Think about the purpose and context of your relationships with children in order to define some reasonable boundaries. What information do childcare workers need given the nature and context of their relationships with children? For example, does a childcare worker need the same information as a healthcare worker? No, but enough to be attentive to relevant matters of good health and safety.

Follow these 5 registration guidelines:

1. Use an open enrollment period, not first come first serve. Open enrollment is more equitable than first-come first serve.
2. Include a clear statement of inclusivity toward kids/youth with disabilities in your registration materials.
3. Allow families to contact a staff person directly about signing up for camp.
4. Offer clear financial aid and accept DDA funds
5. Increase your age requirements to be broader so that siblings are able to attend together.

INCLUSIVE ENROLLMENT

Though registration and enrollment can seem like the same thing (and in some places they are), when thinking about how to increase equity in your programs and serve more children with disabilities in your programs there are some shifts in enrollment practices that can help you achieve that goal.

Set equitable enrollment criteria.

- Work collaboratively between administrators, Executive Leadership and Camp Director to:
 - Review what worked and didn't work from the previous summer.
 - Define the total number of campers you can support in a given week.
- Considering your staffing needs. Don't let this stop you from saying yes to a child that may need more support. Instead, think creatively about how your organization can offer that support.
 - “Commonly asked but poorly thought out questions about inclusion include: can this child do what we do in our room? Will s/he fit? **An inclusive attitude does not start with decisions about which children cannot be served.**”- Mark Sweet, PhD. Thinking Guide to Inclusive Child Care.
- Similar to setting goals to serve families from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, where a program sets aside spots for children who may need scholarships, you can use that enrollment approach to hold/ensure space for children and youth with disabilities. Children with disabilities are often excluded from extracurricular activities. By holding space, you are breaking down systemic segregation and centering equity in your enrollment.
 - At the PlayGarden we reserve 70% of camp spots for children with disabilities. We use the information that parents share on registration

forms to determine this information.

Other enrollment criteria you may consider:

- Is this a new or returning family?** New campers can broaden your reach in the community, returning campers can help children build community and friendships year to year. Both have value, this can be decided on based on what you as an organization value most.
- At the PlayGarden we are interested in building a community and investing in our community all the way from when children are toddlers to adulthood, so we often place value on enrolling returning campers.

Enroll with the whole family in mind.

- Oftentimes in a family where one child has a disability and one does not, families are forced to send their children to different summer camps. This is not inclusive.
- Alternatively, you can enroll siblings with and without disabilities together in a camp program.
- Add families that are not immediately accepted onto a waitlist of the week of their top preference.
- Once families are enrolled, you can think about what information you can share with families to help them have a successful experience in your camp.

Make a Welcome Packet that includes:

- A welcome letter to families
- A collage of your staff so children know who to expect
- A picture schedule of your camp day so campers know what to expect

"I met my best friend at summer camp"
- Elle



LET'S RECAP

- Did you market with kids with disabilities in mind and to the disability community?
- Is your registration process quick, easy and clear for families? Do you clearly state that children with disabilities are welcome?
- Did you enroll your camp programs with equitable enrollment criteria?
- Great! You can get excited for super fun summer programs with diverse participants!