

Seminar Highlights

**Families that Play Together:
Recreation and Leisure in the
District**

July 18, 1995

D.C. Family Policy Seminar

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Recreation reflects our national character and cultural values as well as can serve as a powerful force in shaping families, neighborhoods, and communities. Recreation is often aimed at individual populations such as children, teens, or seniors, rather than families. Recreation can be a significant player in bringing families of all shapes, sizes, and circumstances closer together. Recreation and leisure is now recognized as an important part of public policy, government, religious groups, businesses, and other organizations all groups which have a role in the development of recreation and a stake in building strong families in the District.

Gordon Braithwaite
**Administrator for the Cultural Activities Branch of the
DC Department of Recreation and Parks**

Main Points:

- Welcomes participants on behalf of the Mayor Marion Barry. Mayor Barry is committed to the children and families of the District as evidenced by the theme of his 1996 budget: Embracing Youth and Families. The Mayor has focused on the development and growth of young people.
- DC Department of Recreation and Parks has a long history encouraging the healthy development of children and their parents. They are dedicated to guiding children through a rich experience of competitive sports and a diverse menu of entertaining and creative venues.

- The transitions in urban living in the past 25 years have taken its toll on children and families. Need to rebuild our deteriorating society so that our children can be familiar with our inalienable rights: live, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That is a lot to ask from recreation.
- Many recreators, are parents, social workers, lawyers, early childhood development, and education. Many of them choose the tools of soccer, Tae Quan Do, the Arts, in order to engage the child in a arena of self esteem and positive social interaction.
- Many programs encourage and depend on parent participation. The parent-child relationship is the backbone of society.
- Have aqua camps, cheerleading camps, environmental, sports, arts, slow pitch softball, soccer, tennis, volleyball. All programs encourage children and families to excel. DC Department has many nationally recognized programs such as Head Start. Many parents are able to take advantage of Head Start for a nominal fee. Therapeutic centers is also nationally recognized.
- Alternatives and options must be available early in an individual's life in order to accommodate a person's best choice of expression in which to realize dreams and goals.
- Has introduced children to creative world. Art can bring instant empowerment to children. Educator, recreator, and parent recognize the importance of developing a creative mind.
- All of DC Departments programs have a cultural component. Constantly learning with collaborations with other cultural institutions, how easily the Arts enhance any and all activities in play and in instruction.
- Teamwork from volunteers, parents, booster clubs, cake sales to carpools make it work.
- Dr. Betty Jo Gaines is newly appointed Acting Director. She was instrumental in developing the Agency's model: Recreation Belongs to Everyone.
- Family is uniquely disparate spiritually, socially, and financially. Need to engage those families while understanding their priorities. These families are admirable when they can leave their bare necessity of struggle and survival to enroll their children into recreation programs. Those mothers and fathers and other relatives and surrogate parents love and nurture their children against great odds. When one visits part of D.C. and understands the struggle of some urban families, must encourage and support these parents and families.

- Recreation has grown in attempt to address the concerns of families—especially those in the inner city. We have had to become educators and nourishes, sociologists, and social workers. We are people who need parents as partners but are willing, in the meantime, to be surrogate parents.
- Recreation belongs to the community. Recreation services are as effective as the community allows.

William Peebles
Vice-President for Human Development at the Marshall Heights Community Development Organization, Inc.

Main Points:

- Marshall Heights is located in Ward 7—east of the river. Ward 7, most organized ward in the city. Active civic organizations, and largest CDC board of directors in the country with 72 members. That board of directors made up of advisory neighborhood council representatives, civic associations, churches, businesses, and others...allows us to get direct input for our operational activities to know what the community wants and needs. Marshall Heights Community Development Organizations, Inc. was primarily an economic development organization designed to develop more businesses and economic opportunity for our families and neighbors. That was not enough. The Board has put together a strategic plan to address all of the youth in a wholistic manner in Ward 7. My job is to look at the human capital in Ward 7 to see if we can enhance that capital and give it greater return on investment. Part of that is recreation.
- Traditional family with a mother, father, and child is not the family in Ward 7. Statistics show that 80% of families in Ward 7 are single-headed households. We also have many grandparents and other relatives taking care of children in our community. We have to design new ways of providing recreation opportunities for this new family.
- In today's world, we have less and less time for recreation. Americans work much harder now than a few years ago. Most families, in Ward 7 are working harder to provide basic needs for their children. Recreational opportunities are limited not only because of the lack of facilities but because of the lack of time.
- Family recreation refers to recreation for different developmental periods in individuals' lives. Are a few "family recreation facilitates that address the needs

of youth and adolescents. Need to adapt recreational programs so families can participate together.

- Marshall Heights Community Development Organization is working with the National Parks Association to convert an ice skating rink into a multicultural, multiuse center for families, children, and the community.
- Need to start accentuating the positive so that families and children feel better about themselves. We accentuate the negative too much. Boys and Girls Clubs in Ward 7 are overflowing. We need more facilities to meet the needs of children.
- Ward 7 is not on par with the recreational opportunities in other Wards. Ward 6, 7, and 8 have more children than the other wards. These wards need more education, recreation, and employment opportunities.
- Families and children are not doing recreation together. Today, because we have single-headed households, this is more difficult. Recreation facilities can start designing programs with the youth in mind giving them some authority and decision making powers for their recreation projects. Youth will create more opportunities for themselves rather than getting involved in anti-social behavior, gangs, etc. If you empower youth in planning recreation activities, they will more likely participate more.
- Neighborhoods have to participate more. At River Terrace, we had a River Terrace Day for members of the entire community to recreate together. Block parties and house parties can also help bring communities together.
- Have three largest depositories of youth and families are presently not greatly involved in recreational activities: schools, churches, and places of employment. These three entities need to work together to foster the development of recreational programs for children and families in their communities.
- Recreational opportunities need to involve skills that will enhance the quality of life and the contributions to our neighborhoods and our families.
- Policymakers need to understand our families as they are not as how we want them to be so that we can better help families deal with the situations they currently are facing.

Christen Smith

Executive Director for the American Association for Leisure and Recreation

Main Points:

- **Families that Play Together: Stay Together is true.**
- **Family Recreation is anything that a family does together. It can be things as simple as going on picnics, going to a museum, the zoo, watching television together, visiting extended family, holiday celebrations, sporting activities, hiking, biking, going on vacation—anything that you can do together as a family.**
- **Family recreation brings families together and teaches children how to use leisure time constructively. Learning leisure skills and interests.**
- **A report by the Carnegie Council contends that families are the most important element in child development--teaching them values, and to use their time in a positive way.**
- **Research shows that 70% of our recreational interests are learned before the age of 12 and half of those are learned from our parents. So, the recreational activities that we do when we are young are really very important.**
- **Playing together helps families stay together. When families play together there is a cohesiveness that ensues. When families have problems they can take their positive recreational experiences to help them get through the negative times. Recreation increased family cohesiveness. The more time spent together the better. When parents are involved in a wide range of activities, their children are often involved in a wide range of recreation activities as well.**
- **Teaching children to use their time well is important for our children because they have a great deal of leisure time. Children have up to 40% of their time is discretionary non-school hours. During weekends, holidays and vacations, that time increases even more. Free time carries the potential for both opportunity and risk. It is vital that parents are teaching their children to make good choices about the use of that time. Although research has not yet documented that structured recreational programs prevent juvenile delinquency, it is generally accepted that recreation is a primarily element in prevention. While recreation is not the only medium for intervention, there is sufficient evidence that participation in recreational activities can play a role in prevention of marginally deviant and anti-social behavior. A recent Detroit study found that anti-social activities not only can fill up youths leisure time but were fulfill the same kinds of needs that recreational programs such as risk, high adventure, sense of mastery, glamour, and acceptance among peers—the same things that can be satisfied with a recreational experience. It is important that youth are provided with the information to choose positive recreation. Youth involved in recreational programs are much less likely to be involved in anti-social activities. Providing recreation services can decrease the need for law enforcement, social**

services, and justice services. Recreational services are a much better investment. The cost of providing recreational services is significantly less.

- There are challenges to providing recreational services. There are financial strains in Washington and around the country. Budget shortfalls are going to continue in the foreseeable future. Programs, facilities, and staff are being cut.
- We have to look at alternative ways of providing recreational services. We need cooperatives, collaborations, and partnerships with other organizations in the community to help deliver services in the community. We have to consider alternative scheduling of programs and hours of operation of facilities, and consider alternative staffing and volunteers. We can look to schools, colleges and universities, non-profit organizations, service organizations, corporations, local, state, and local professional organizations, and private foundations. We can try to get sponsorships, grants, volunteers, and asking for gifts.
- Other cities are experiencing similar cut backs to DC. Los Angeles has had significant cutbacks in the last fifteen years, yet they have been able to continue to provide recreation for the residents of the city through partnerships with local corporations and organizations, grass-root organizations.
- There is no model family recreation program in the United States. Canada has a program, "Together is Better"---sponsored by the National Canadian Parks and Recreation Association. "Together is Better" is a national effort to promote family recreation to educate about the value of recreation. Canadians have endorsed the program because they believe it can enhance the quality of life of families.
- The American Association for Leisure and Recreation was recently awarded a family recreation grant. We are going to be working on advocacy efforts for community park and recreation organizations. We will be working with individual cities across the country.

Catherine Hogan-Lewis
Manager of Outreach for Bell Atlantic of Washington

Main Points:

- Bell Atlantic has a strong commitment to Washington, DC. They are determined that this commitment will not be affected by what is going on in the market place.
- I take proposals and requests from various organizations and determine if there is a match with Bell Atlantic's strengths and interests.

- Bell Atlantic helps organizations financially. In D.C., they participated in the development of a Wish List. When an office upgraded their computers, D.C. Recreation and Parks was able to accept them.
- Bell Atlantic is also very strong in volunteering. The President Bill Freedman is a strong advocate for volunteering and encourages employees to volunteer during business hours. They often provide volunteers for one-time activities and prolonged volunteers such as mentoring programs.
- Telephone Pioneers is a program to encourage volunteering. It includes: employees who have retired, their spouses, siblings, and children.
- In terms of recreation, we have given equipment but we also are involved in a variety of programs. One program is the Beat Ball Program where we provide intramural opportunities for children who are hearing impaired. We also helped expose hearing impaired children to the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus.
- Bell Atlantic is supportive of the Department of Recreation and Parks. Do seek opportunities. The only requirement is that the activity is clearly defined, the target population is clearly defined, and the financial assistance and other assistance is clearly defined.

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Discussion and Community Announcements

The D.C. Family Policy Seminar graciously acknowledges the generous space and facilities offered by the Martin Luther King Memorial Library.

(1) Need to Incorporate Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention into Recreation Programs:

Raymond Whitfield, Washington Area Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse: Recreation providers across the District should not forget drug and alcohol prevention in their recreation programs. Programs can be creative and fun while incorporating ways to encourage youth and families to not use alcohol excessively or not at all.

Response:

William Peebles: Marshall Heights does have a Substance and Alcohol Abuse Division which is integrated with our economic development and human development activities. We look at the whole person and the whole community and try to treat each situation in that way. We treat that person holistically and systematically. I also have been an alcohol and substance abuse counselor in the reserves and recognize that recreation can play a role in prevention. The more recreation a person is involved in the less likely it is that a person will turn to mind-altering substances.

(2) Absence of Youth Participation in Planning of Recreation

David Holmes, Policy and Evaluation Department of the Mayor's Office: Time and time again, adults are speaking *about* youth without speaking *with* youth about what types of recreation programs they would like provided in the District. Every neighborhood should have recreational facilities that are open, affordable, accessible to youth especially necessary for children whose parents are not always home.

Response:

Gordon Braithwaite: We need to educate about recreation opportunities. We are in business to give youth and families access to recreation. We fight for pools to be open despite financial adversity. We still need more and need more pools in better condition. We need to work with youth in order to better serve them.

William Peebles: We have a lot of parents who lack parental skills. Parents need to learn about the many recreational opportunities there are available for their children in their community. I would propose that all parents in the D.C. school system be given a list of recreational activities and other important parental information that they must sign. We can't depend on the churches, but

we can depend on the schools because the parents of children in the schools do live in the Ward.

(3) Recreation and Preventing Drop-Outs

Karen Mackey, D.C. Public Schools, Chapter 1 Program: Chapter 1 program attempts to provide comprehensive intervention services for children and youth in danger of dropping out of school. D.C. Public Schools has recently established an "In-School Suspension Program," that incorporates a therapeutic component to prevent children from dropping out of school. I encourage recreational providers to take part in our effort and our Drop-Out Coalition. I am convinced that if it were not for recreation activities, more children and youth would have dropped out of school. Participating in recreation has enabled a number of students to become peer leaders.

Response:

Catherine Hogan-Lewis: Bell Atlantic has a program called "Choices." Individuals from Bell Atlantic would go into 7th and 8th grade classes for a two-day seminar to talk with students about the "choices" for youth in the business community. We explained to them that as they increase their education, then their career opportunities expand, and therefore their lifestyle opportunities increase. Is a very successful program in turning back children at risk.

(4) Recreation as a Tool

Edgar Reese, Executive Director of Montana Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington: Boys and Girls Club of the Greater Washington Area provides services for 15, 000 children. We use recreation as a tool to get families in the door of our facilities. Once inside, we provide more than just recreation. We provide GED classes, provide job training, and tutoring. We have a program called Keystone for youth 14-17 to provide service to the community. The group recently developed an Adopt a Senior Citizen program. There seem to be a lapse between different professions. We need to work together and provide more information to children and families in the District.

(5) Problem of the Lack of Centralized Information on Recreational Programs

Janet Wood, Information Service Martin Luther King Memorial Library, Youth Link: Youth Link is an information sharing organizations for professions who serve youth to come together to talk and network. I have found that finding information about programs for youth was very difficult. Some organizations were even hesitant about giving out information about their programs. The few programs that responded to a survey were programs that charged a significant fee. We need more information about recreational programs that are available in the District. Parents also need this information in early spring so that they have adequate time to enroll their children into various summer programs—when there is the greatest demand for recreational services. I also had difficulty

reaching the pools in the District. There seems to be a problem accessing recreational facilities in the District. Also, many organizations and recreational providers change their telephone numbers without notifying their constituents.

Response:

Catherine Hogan-Lewis: Were some mass changes in telephone numbers in April. In addition, pools are often staffed by only one person so the person who is the lifeguard also must man the pool house and may be unable to answer phones.

Gordon Braithwaite: The D.C. Department of Recreation and Parks published a newspaper in cooperation with *Washington Times* listing all of the programs the District offers this summer. In addition, thousands were sent and distributed across the District. If anyone has any problems or questions, they should not hesitate to call me (202) 673-7663.

Christen Smith: The problem with speaking with one another about recreation services is not unique to Washington. The Carnegie Foundation put together a task force on how communities could network better and take care of youth who are falling through the cracks. The two-year study examined organizations in many communities and how they can better work together. Call the Carnegie Foundation to receive an executive summary with the Task Force's recommendations.

(6) Critics of the District's Youth

June Johnson, Early Childhood Development Services: I am disturbed that individuals are often critical of our young people. Children across the District are not getting the opportunity to participate in good recreation programs. My organization is trying to put together a directory of parenting classes in the District. If you would like a copy of the listings please call me at (202) 727-1839.

The new curfew in the District, although it may be necessary, does penalize some children. It prevents some youth from having the freedom to pursue their own interests when they want to. We can't continue to create juvenile delinquents. Recreation could play a role in accentuating the positive of youths.

Response:

William Peebles: The Marshall Heights Development Origination works with Barbara Kamara. The Annie E. Casey Foundation recently gave money to a community rebuilding effort--3.5 million dollars over 5 years to plan and execute community rebuilding. Part of that will include mapping out all of the needs of children and families and resources needed for recreation.

How do we get information out? I am hoping the new technology will aid in the process. Marshall Heights is working on getting the community on the internet to take advantage of its great resources. We also need to expand our parental

educational programs with collaboration with Barbara Kamara's office and others.