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Exploring Accessibility and Social Inclusion for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in Residential Camps through the Occupational Therapy Lens

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EXPLORING ACCESSIBILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING CHILDREN IN RESIDENTIAL CAMPS THROUGH THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY LENS

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BACKGROUND

Children engage in various play, leisure, and social participation activities to enhance the development of life skills, independence, and social skills (*iD Tech*, n.d.). Residential camps provide children a structured opportunity to engage in leisure activities while learning to become independent and self-confident when socializing and making new friends (*iD Tech*, n.d.). Attending camp can be a fun and engaging environment to help accelerate growth in key developmental outcomes, such as positive identity, social skills, physical skills, positive values, and spirituality (Bialeschki et. al., 2007).

PROBLEM

Camp counselors lack the confidence and training needed when working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children within residential camps.

PURPOSE

This capstone project worked to address the social and environmental needs in a residential camp to meet the physical and social needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children.

“Inclusion means that everyone gets to take part in the experience that is camp, no matter what differences they might have”
-Survey Participant C

METHODS

Surveys were used to gather information about current accessibility options and social inclusion strategies available within camps. The surveys gathered counselor experience, perspectives and comfort level when working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. Survey questions were based on the occupational model of PEOP (person, environment, occupation, and performance). Data from the survey was used to help identify possible gaps in the understanding of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing culture and staff training in residential camps.

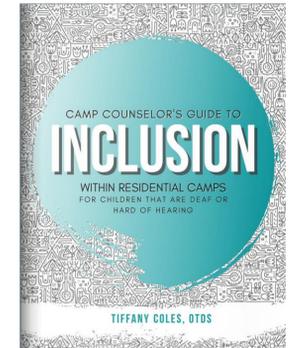


RESULTS AND THEMES

Results of this study found that camp staff are not comfortable or adequately trained on working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing campers within the residential camp setting. Additional staff education on various types of disabilities are needed to provide a truly inclusive camp experience.

THEMES	DESCRIPTION OF THEMES
<i>Motivation to become a counselor</i>	Counselors enjoyed giving the children a chance to explore the outdoors, learn new skills, and teach the children about our natural environment and how to be responsible for it.
<i>Campers model their behaviors off the counselor's actions</i>	Counselor sets the precedent for the next generation by showing them how to serve others with inclusion and respect, work hard, and develop leadership skills.
<i>Accommodations are needed for Deaf and Hard of Hearing campers</i>	Inclusive practices mean that counselors provide every camper with the opportunity to play and excel in every activity, while anticipating differences and planning for inclusion (The Impact of a Camp Counselor, 2017).
<i>Counselors require additional training to work with this population</i>	Additional staff education on various types of disabilities may prove to be beneficial in providing a truly inclusive camp.

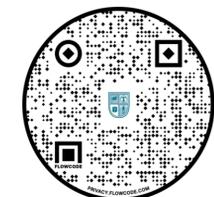
GUIDEBOOK



(<https://www.flipsnack.com/TColesUSA/inclusion-guidebook/full-view.html>)

The guidebook is presented in a digital format to incorporate videos, pop-in information and links to valuable resources. Developed under the ideas of the PEOP model, it addresses how the different factors of the camp environment (ex: accessibility provided), the occupations (ex: camp activities), and the person (the campers and camp staff) influence the performance of inclusion. By incorporating inclusionary strategies within each of these contexts, both the campers and the staff can develop inclusive mindsets and social skills that can be applied within their daily lives. Throughout the guidebook are tips and tricks of inclusion from the occupational therapy lens, in addition to relevant data from this research study. The guidebook is then broken down into seven chapters that range from learning the basics about hearing impairment, the camp environment, inclusion strategies, and American Sign Language education.

REFERENCES



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