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FAMILY LEISURE EDUCATION: A MODEL, SOME STRATEGIES AND PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an overview of THE FAMILY THAT PLAYS TOGETHER a San Francisco based leisure education/creative play/community development and training organization. It focuses on the development and implementation of C.L.E.A.R., a comprehensive family leisure education model including a number of values clarification strategies and tools for change. The remainder of the article deals with the ongoing, enterprising, applied work of T.F.T.P.T. including: a) a family leisure education workshop for professionals and lay leaders; b) a variety of family play programs and services including the popular "Family Fun For All" and c) the citywide Fall Family Fun Festival.

The importance of providing family play opportunities is stressed. Strategies and additional resources for success are emphasized, including the linkages between the above programs.

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The family needs support, and parks and recreation professionals have an important role to play. (1, 6, 9, 11, 16, 26, 27)

The purpose of this article is: 1) to briefly suggest the pressing

need for comprehensive family leisure education programs; and, 2) to elaborate on the beginning work of a San Francisco-based play and leisure education enterprise, THE FAMILY THAT PLAYS TOGETHER (T.F.T.P.T.).(25) The article will focus mainly on the development and implementation of: a) C.L.E.A.R.*, a family leisure education model (including a number of values strategies and tools for change); b) a family leisure education workshop for family professionals and lay leaders; and, c) other family play programs and services, including the popular "Family Fun For All." Although the benefits, programming, and marketing aspects of family play are important to the C.L.E.A.R. model, they will be treated only briefly. These aspects have been extensively elaborated upon in other available sources.(16)

Not only does the family remain an important social institution in our culture (12, 15, 24), but recent research confirms that healthy leisure is a central component of strong and happy families.(6, 23) There are also several issues and trends that make the case for comprehensive family programming even more compelling. Consider the following: 1) an extremely high divorce rate (more than 50% of children born now will grow up in 'single' parent families) (12, 14); 2) changes in women's roles (more working, more juggling, considerably less leisure) (14, 29); 3) more two parent working families and latchkey kids (14); 4) an increasingly older population (in a culture that does not put much energy into inter-generational contact or programming (14, 30); 5) changing value structures (greater satisfaction being gained from family and leisure vs. work) (13, 15, 32); 6) the stress of the economy and daily living (increased alcoholism, child and spouse abuse and killing) (12); 7) the changing family itself (different family types, multiple problem families, juvenile delinquency, etc.) (12, 14, 18); 8) cutbacks in family services, and the social-structural, political and economic constraints that impinge upon families; 9) kids of unemployed parents "growing up old" (28); 10) pressures on family adults to succeed and perform (we know that during the "mid-establishment phase" (late 20's to late 30's), there is a "correlation between advancement up the managerial ladder and the sacrifice of personal and family leisure" (13, 19); 11) intimacy, family affection and activity being highly ranked in studies of adult values and interaction (13); 12) pressures on kids to become success-oriented "superbabies" (flash cards at six months, etc.); 13) the family's strong influence on the lifetime play and leisure patterns of its members (10, 13, 15, 30); 14) 90% of family leisure is home based and over two-thirds of it is dominated by mass media (17); and finally, 15) in a recent Edgington and Neal study of parks and recreation organizational goals, "enhancing the family unit" was ranked 74th out of 85 by California directors.(7)

It seems that family programming has traditionally been left up to the churches and Y's. But we believe that is no longer enough. If the above are not good enough reasons for our increased involvement in the provision of family services, then perhaps, we've lost sight of our roots and our mission.

WHY A LEISURE EDUCATION APPROACH?

Three trends suggest a broader role in family service provision for parks and recreation professionals than the traditional centralized, direct-provider approach. 1) In recent years, we have seen increased human service provision and interagency cooperation at parks and recreation agencies. For example, the 1983 Fall Family Fun Festival was a joint effort of the Pacifica, California, Parks, Beaches and Recreation Department and the Youth Service Bureau (not to mention numerous community organizations). Although problems have many origins, the family is still a vital mediating place and a forum for affirming the positive attributes of its members. National programs like "Tough Love" exemplify this. Family leisure education is but one part of a total family support system. We need to ask how we can jointly plan and share, i.e., counseling and/or leisure expertise, resources, etc., to help address the needs of families in our communities. 2) The reality is that 90% of family leisure is home based and two-thirds of it is media dominated. This year the average amount of home television viewing climbed again to well over seven hours per day, and it is likely to increase. 3) The third trend indicates positive movement. Because of budget cutbacks, creative marketing approaches, better use of technology and a slow but sure proliferation of leisure education ideas, more leisure professionals are quite successfully integrating enabling, empowering aspects into their programs. Dade County, Florida's, cable video programming and Oakland, California's, FUNN phone are but two examples. (16)

This emphasis on empowerment is a vital aspect of a leisure education perspective. The point is that our professional role should be viewed as part of a total system that seeks to empower people with the independent ability to integrate and actualize leisure in their lives, whether that means developing skills, providing resources and information, or any number of other options available to use.

Two other important premises related to family leisure education that have been elaborated on in another article are worth mentioning. (16) The first is that we're talking about all kinds of families and secondly, family leisure education does not mean just planned programming for the total family together (although this is an area where there is a dearth of programs.) We need to look at all the possible interaction patterns, and maintain a broad systemwide perspective.

C.L.E.A.R.: A BEGINNING COMMUNITY BASED MODEL

There have been a number of leisure education models (e.g., Mundy, McDowell, etc.), each slicing reality a little bit differently. The components of C.L.E.A.R. are neither exhaustive, exclusive nor prioritized. They do, however, represent an attempt to comprehensively address family leisure service needs. C.L.E.A.R. stands for Community

Leisure Education and Resources, and its components are: 1) Counseling, 2) Leadership, 3) Education (in fact, each element of the model has leisure education potential), 4) Activities (which include skill and social interaction development), and 5) Resources. (16, 25)

Counseling

Many still believe that this is beyond the purview of park and recreation departments. However, diverse, often 'traditional' groups are getting involved in family wellness. For example, the Aid Association for Lutherans publishes a "Family Wellness Kit" that encourages and enables family members to assess their communication, leisure and other health patterns, as well as providing hints on stress reduction and other issues. (9) The counseling aspect of any program need not have a heavy psychological bent. Perhaps, a program called "Finding Family Fun" that combined family activities with values clarification exercises and community resource information would do the trick. Or a mini-class? Or low key 'counseling' as a component of a regular program? Or a "parent play effectiveness" program that is tied in with the local child care operation. There are a number of successfully tested values tools and strategies available. They include: 1) Barriers to Family Fun (and how to overcome them; 2) Guided Imagery (exploring the qualities of successful and not so successful family events; 3) a family weekly leisure review (what, when, with whom, etc.); 4) a "closeness" and contact time scale; 5) an exercise that helps family members identify what they like to do as individuals, as couples, as extended family, as mother-son, etc.; 6) a goal setting and planning activity; 7) a 'resources in our home and community' exercise, and many more.

These tools can also be adapted quite easily for children using pictures, paste-ons, etc., and they can be adapted for computer technology. The important thing to remember, however, is that leisure education is a process - it is ongoing development, and care must be taken to establish an atmosphere of comfort, trust, communication and sharing if effective values clarification is to occur. This suggests the importance of the second component.

Leadership

If there is one truth, it is that leadership will make or break your family programs. It is essential that the leadership be: 1) attuned to group process, values clarification and inter-generational programming principles; 2) able to create a supportive, communicative, fun atmosphere, and willing to share leadership with the members of the family groups; 3) able to work with other agencies (e.g., counseling, etc.); and 4) COMMITTED TO THE FAMILY CONCEPT. If they don't have these skills, train them.

Education

The whole process is education. That is, how do we educate families to become more adept at 'leisuring'? In at least two ways. The first way is at the micro- or program level. There are a number of ideas that quickly come to mind; (a) provide the schools or our afterschool programs with leisure 'value' worksheets. How about a "Homework Fun Club?" (b) make our programming expertise available to the schools or other agencies; (c) offer a wide variety of family oriented leisure activity skills programs (whether they be cross-generational sports, arts, outings, or whatever); (d) get into the adult education family oriented minicourse business (e.g., video games for parents, play effectiveness training, bargains in your town, low cost family adventures, etc.) . . .

The second way of viewing our educative role is at the macro- or marketing level. That is, how do we best educate the public about the importance of family play? This might include: (a) a family leisure faire in the shopping mall; (b) a family 'play tip of the week' column in the local paper (or on cable TV); (c) the creation of a family play support network (e.g. childcare, tennis partners, etc.); (d) a family leisure conference day, which combines activities, education, the 'latest' in outdoor equipment, and resource lists; (e) a toy and play equipment rummage sale, or (f) any number of program vehicles, gimmicks, special events, etc., all of which help raise the public's consciousness about healthy family play.(16)

Activities

In another paper, we have listed very specific sound family programming principles and over 50 broad-based family activity ideas.(16) All activities should be presented in the context of a fun atmosphere that emphasizes physical and psychological safety. They may be 'just for fun' and/or highlight skills development, individual challenge, social interaction, etc. Also, look for crossgenerational opportunities and ideas and skills that can carry over to the home.

Try a variety of formats (classes, clinics, special events) and themes. Some examples are: 1) Fun nights (e.g., gym and swim, international or dessert night, 'multimedia happenings' (i.e., a film, a game, and an art experience); 2) Family: A Fairs (e.g., flea markets, leisure consumer faire, etc.); 3) Family Adventures (e.g., orienteering, mystery car rides, etc.); 4) Family Clubs (with discounts and special programs); 5) Workshops and Playshops; and 6) other general family activities around various themes (youngster-oldster, you have to be accompanied by an adult, etc.).

Resources

This aspect of the model is critical. Throughout this article we have emphasized the need for empowerment and networking and moving beyond the direct provision of services if leisure education is to be effective. Old and new 'resource' ideas include: 1) The N.R.P.A. Life Be In It Family Fun Books and Garden Grove, California's, Familyopoly coloring books which suggest a number of things the family can do together; 2) the library concept where you lend or rent toys and games, picnic baskets, leaders, resource materials, sports equipment, etc.; and 3) community resource dissemination through: (a) activity hotlines like Oakland, California's F.U.N.N. phone; (b) calendars, posters, placemats given out at your local family restaurant, etc.; and (c) lists of community programs, facilities, hours, etc. (not just the recreation department's programs) provided to the public.

All of the elements of C.L.E.A.R. are essential for a comprehensive community based family leisure education program. Often family oriented programming requires little or no new money - only a shift in focus. Or one might start with just one small aspect of the C.L.E.A.R. model and gradually add bits and pieces as you work toward comprehensive family leisure services. Being an effective change agent is possible, but a well thought out strategy is needed.

THE FAMILY THAT PLAYS TOGETHER was primarily formed as a change agent. That is, our purpose was to foster positive high quality family interaction. We set out with strong beliefs and a very deliberate strategy that would enable us to accomplish that goal. To that end developed multi-level linking programs and services that emphasize empowerment. A brief overview of that development may serve as one model for family leisure service development in local communities. That is, how can communities provide exciting family special events, network with and train people doing family support work, and provide ongoing programs and resources?

IN THE TRENCHES - T.F.T.P.T. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT - CASE STUDIES

Life imitates games. Life, it seems, was patterned after Rummy; you hold onto the cards that give the greatest number of options and pay attention to what cards your partner likes. Perceiving this to be the operant pattern of the local universe, T.F.T.P.T. decided to play along with the game by following good Rummy strategy. Our strategy was to outreach to families through as many channels as we effectively could and always keep in mind the behavior patterns of our partner, "the family".

The Family Funforall

A Family Funforall sponsored by the Community Therapy Program of Marin was typical of our 'basic' program. A funforall is a two hour play

session (usually followed by a potluck meal) that is designed to maximize family involvement and interaction. Activities were selected and structured to allow for age group specific as well as multi-generational participation. We mixed "soft" competition and cooperation to build family and group spirit. We closed with a large group game and cheer.

Funforalls are a direct family play activity that provide a positive experience of being together, and a model, through the activities, for high level interaction and effective teamwork. Contrast this with the low level attention that so many families give to each other while sitting around the electronic hearth (TV).

Because Funforalls are only a few hours in length, free or low cost, and flexible in design, they can be scheduled for an evening or weekend afternoon in a wide variety of settings. This makes for greater local access and focus. The Community Therapy program for example, was able to sponsor the Funforall for the staff and client families at a very minimal charge to the participants (far less than what it would cost to go to the movies). Other Funforalls have been sponsored by schools, as company picnics, or as organizational fundraisers.

In any case, what makes the Funforall work is effective leadership, well-designed activities, careful organization and lots of enthusiasm. Effective leaders can also transform a Funforall from a fun short-term 'entertainment' and interaction into a learning experience that sparks further family interest in longer (half to full day) or different family programs, such as the Get a Family Feeling Playday.

PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS AND THE FALL FAMILY FUN FESTIVAL

As another approach to reaching families via recreation, TFTPT has designed a Family Play Workshop for professionals and lay leaders. The training addresses three areas: 1) Family awareness - it establishes the needs, constraints, and patterns of the family in regard to recreation; 2) C.L.E.A.R.* Program Dimensions - the focus here is on areas of need such as leisure counseling and program effectiveness through 'activity' design, values clarification and effective leadership; 3) Marketing - that is, how to use all available channels to reach families.

By training recreation and other professionals, we are able to expand the geographical reach of our family program experience outside the areas where it would be financially feasible for us to work and deepen the public awareness of the need for, and availability of family programs. Within our local area, we are able to network with a wider range of 'family folks' and act as a catalyst and clearinghouse for new ideas that often lead to future programs and cooperative efforts. There are other steps beyond training programs and direct services that are models for change. TFTPT has also acted as a consultant for special events and program development. For example, we helped facilitate the 1983 Pacifica, California, Fall Family Fun Festival - conceptualizing, planning, organizing and supervising the event itself. The FFFF was the brainchild of Lia Anisgard, a counselor at the Pacifica Youth Service

Bureau, an organization serving troubled youth. Her vision was to create an event that would heighten community awareness of YSB services and, at the same time, reduce the need for those services by supporting positive family interaction. Six months of effort by an almost entirely volunteer group of community members paid off in a festive day that brought together hundreds of families from diverse ethnic and cultural groups in the town. The festival itself featured a fun run, a swap meet, family games, food and information booths sponsored by various community groups such as Parents Without Partners, and a wide variety of other activities, including a Filipino ethnic dance troupe, puppet shows, and an aerobics demonstration-participation.

An important empowering effect of this event was the fact that the local citizens who led the family activities at the Festival were trained in a weekend long training, giving the community an ongoing resource of family recreation leaders. A large scale family event such as the Family Fun Festival has numerous payoffs far beyond the value of the program itself for the participants. At the event, participants are made aware of family resources by the booths and demonstrations. Newspaper articles and other pre-event publicity added to the general consciousness of family programs and issues. Organizing the event engendered a networking process among family oriented organizations that built communication and positive interaction. And mailing lists for future family activities were gathered. The model for this began at the first planning meeting when the Youth Service Bureau and Department of Parks, Beaches and Recreation agreed to co-sponsor the Festival. This cooperative attitude between public and private agencies leads directly to greater benefit for families, since neither organization could have produced such an event independently.

There are several other projects on the burner for TFTP, such as a Family Play Book and a Full Day Family Playshop for family members. These will add to the range and depth of impact that the program has. Most recently, we have begun to act as a clearinghouse for family play program ideas. We are compiling lists of ideas and disseminating them to our contributors.

The programs highlighted here demonstrate some important principles of outreach for anyone interested in family programming, and are one model for making change that might be adapted by local communities. First, have a means for easy entry to family involvement such as the Funforalls and Family Festivals. Have the means to reach both specific groups (Funforalls) and the mass audience (Festivals). After the initial contact, identify followup resources for ongoing and in-depth family programs that might be available. Utilize the C.L.E.A.R.* model and the resources in this bibliography for suggestions. What can you help provide? How can you network with and train people to build mutual support? How can you build a comprehensive system of family leisure and support services?

The time is now. The need is there. Families are important. We have an opportunity and an obligation.

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