

**PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF THERAPEUTIC RECREATION CAMPS FOR YOUNG
ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceived benefits that a Therapeutic Recreation camp offers young adults with disabilities. A total of 12 campers were interviewed with 6 being male and 6 being female. Emerging themes included: (a) Social, (b) New Experiences, (c) Character Building, and (d) Get Away. Findings identified the benefits that young adults receive from attending a Therapeutic Recreation camp program. Attending a Therapeutic Recreation camp program allows for individuals with disabilities to be around friends, to meet new friends, to feel a part of a family, to do things they have never done before, to become more independent, to escape from feeling different, and to simply be themselves. This study provides one rationale for leisure professionals to provide more Therapeutic Recreation camp programs for the young adults with disabilities population. This study also provides practical implications to developing more programming for young adults with disabilities within the field of Therapeutic Recreation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I Introduction	1
Purpose	1
Problem Statement	2
Significance of Study	2
Limitations	3
Delimitations	3
Definitions.....	3
CHAPTER II Literature Review	5
Youth with Disabilities	5
Therapeutic Recreation Camps	6
Benefits of Therapeutic Recreation Camps	7
Camp Koinonia.....	8
Sense of Community Theory.....	9
CHAPTER III Materials and Methods	11
Research Setting.....	11
Research Participants	11
Instrumentation	11
Data Collection	12
Data Analysis	12
CHAPTER IV Perceived Benefits of Therapeutic Recreation Camps for Young Adults with Disabilities	13
Abstract.....	13
Introduction	13
Methods	18
Results	20
Discussion	25
Conclusion	30
REFERENCES	32
APPENDIX	36
VITA	41

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Therapeutic recreation is a service designed to aid an individual towards reaching their highest level of independence in life activities while helping to reduce the activity limitations to participation in life situations that are caused by an illness or a disability (ATRA, What is RT/TR section, para. 1). This service can be provided for people of all ages, for people with all different kinds of disabilities, and can be provided in all kinds of settings. Nursing homes, school systems, hospitals, substance abuse centers, and community centers are just some of the places where therapeutic recreation can be provided. Another setting where therapeutic recreation can be provided and which is the focus of this study is the camp setting. Camp Koinonia, developed in 1977 at Virginia Tech, is a therapeutic recreation based camp for children ages 7-21 who have multiple disabilities. The camp was developed as part of a class with the purpose of providing an experiential learning opportunity for the university students while involving children and young adults in outdoor activities that they would not be able to participate in otherwise (The Camp Koinonia, About Section, para. 1).

Camp Koinonia has over 200 University of Tennessee (UT) students who are the staff members for the camp during a week in April. In the weeks leading up to the actual week of camp, the staff members are attending the camp class and learning about different things such as: the field of therapeutic recreation, information on different disabilities, implementing and adapting camp activities for children with different disabilities present at camp. Camp Koinonia provides UT students with an educational experience and also provides the campers therapeutic recreation activities that are aimed towards improving their independence in everyday life. This study will focus on the perceived benefits that the young adult campers receive from attending a therapeutic recreation camp program like Camp Koinonia.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceived benefits that a Therapeutic Recreation camp offers young adults with disabilities. By interviewing various campers who attend Camp Koinonia, the researcher will be able to identify perceived benefits that the campers receive as a result of their participation. This study will examine the following research questions:

- A) What perceived benefits does Camp Koinonia provide for young adults with disabilities?
- B) In what ways does attending Camp Koinonia help the individual throughout young adulthood?

- C) Do perceived benefits differ when looking at specific demographics (e.g. age, gender, family composition)?

This research study is important because it focuses on the young adult population for whom there is a lack of programming. It is anticipated that this research will help towards determining why a program like Camp Koinonia is beneficial for young adults with disabilities. This study may also show the importance in providing more opportunities like Camp Koinonia for the young adult population.

Problem Statement

After an extensive search, it is apparent that there is a lack of research on the perceived benefits that young adults receive from attending therapeutic recreation based camps. Considering how providing programs for all ages is an attribute of therapeutic recreation, there should be more research on how programs like Camp Koinonia provide different benefits for the young adult population.

Camp Koinonia has been positively affecting the lives of young adults with disabilities for many years as evidenced by the campers that continue to return and the increase of campers that attend each year; however, limited outcomes have been established on its benefits for the young adult population. Many of the campers who attend Camp Koinonia return annually and eventually become a part of the young adult population at camp; yet, as soon as they graduate high school, they can no longer attend Camp Koinonia. This is a problem due to the fact that there are limited services for young adults with disabilities in the community once they get to be a certain age. Also, some of the campers who have been attending this camp have been attending for more than ten years. Once they turn 21 and have graduated from high school, they can no longer attend. This means that they are no longer able to receive the benefits that Camp Koinonia has been providing for them for so many years.

Significance of Study

This study is significant due to the lack of research on the perceived benefits that a therapeutic recreation camp provides for the young adult population who have disabilities. This study will provide a better understanding of how a therapeutic recreation camp (Camp Koinonia) benefits the young adult campers who are attending. This could potentially lead to providing information on the rationales for more therapeutic recreation camps for young adults with disabilities.

Limitations

One limitation to this study was the small sample size of participants included in the study. This was due to the criteria that the participants had to fall under to be able to be considered for this study. This study solely focused on the young adult population (18-21 year olds), which limited the researcher to a smaller number of campers attending the camp. Out of the young adult campers at camp, they also had to have attended Camp Koinonia once before and had to have little to no communication difficulties. Camp Koinonia is a camp that typically only accepts campers that have more than one disability. Because of this, there are a select number of campers that have little to no communication difficulties. After the researcher applies each of the criteria to the campers, the number of campers considered for the study ends up being a small number. Another limitation to this study was the time period the researcher had to collect the data. The researcher was limited to only being able to collect data during a five-day period when the campers were at Camp Koinonia.

Delimitations

This study will not focus on those participants who are under the age of 18 nor those attending camp for the first time. Additionally, campers who are non-verbal or those who use an assistive device or struggles to communicate verbally will also not be included.

Definitions

Therapeutic Recreation: a treatment service designed to restore, remediate and rehabilitate a person's level of functioning and independence in life activities, to promote health and wellness as well as reduce or eliminate the activity limitations and restrictions to participation in life situations caused by an illness or disabling condition. (ATRA, What is RT/TR Section, n.d.).

Camp Koinonia: Started in 1977 at Virginia Tech, Camp Koinonia is a therapeutic recreation based camp for children ages 7-21 who have multiple disabilities. The camp was developed as part of a class with the purpose of providing an experiential learning opportunity for the university students while involving children and young adults in outdoor activities that they would not be able to do otherwise (The Camp Koinonia, n.d.).

Activities at Camp: Some of the activities at Camp Koinonia are: canoes, horseback riding, zip line, low ropes course, game shows, cooking, arts and crafts, sensory, yoga, theatre, and sports and games.

Young Adults: This includes individuals who are between the ages of 18 and 21.

Disabilities: This can include but is not limited to: Down syndrome, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Intellectual Disability, ADHD, ADD, Angelman syndrome, hearing or vision impaired.

Sense of Community Theory: Defined by four primary characteristics. Those characteristics are: 1) Membership 2) Influence 3) Integration and fulfillment of needs, and 4) Shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth with Disabilities

About one in six children in the United States had a developmental disability in 2006-2008 ranging from mild disabilities such as speech and language impairments to serious developmental disabilities, such as intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, and autism (Data and Statistics, 2014). While developmental disabilities are fairly common, there are also genetic disorders, chronic illnesses, neurological disorders and others that can affect someone. Any of these disorders or illnesses can be paired with each other or other disabilities. For example, research has shown that certain individuals with Down syndrome also meet diagnostic criteria for an Autism Spectrum Disorder (Warner, G., Moss, J., Smith, P., & Howlin, 2014). It has also been suggested by Hill (2003) that individuals with certain genetic disorders have an increased risk of developing acute Leukemia. The majority of the children who grow up having a disability or a disorder live much different lives than a child who does not have a disability or a disorder. Depending on the disability or disorder, some have “repeated doctor visits, medical treatments, and extended hospital stays that all combine to limit the adolescents exposure to various social situations, which in turn can delay or stunt the individual’s social growth and drastically limit his or her social development” (Bluebond-Langer, Perkel, Gorertzel, Nelson, & McGreary, 1990, p. 116). This social isolation can lead to an increased likelihood of behavioral problems during their adolescence (Hamlett, Pellegrini, & Katz, 1992). By the time they are adolescents, not only can their social development be hindered, but their physical and emotional development can be hindered as well. Some individuals with disabilities cannot participate in the typical every day activities in which someone without a disability can participate in, therefore resulting in limited opportunities to recreate. Emotionally, this might cause an individual to feel left out or not good enough. Physically, this might cause an individual to live a non-active lifestyle because they have been told that they cannot participate in certain activities. However, the field of therapeutic recreation works towards providing programs for individuals with disabilities in hopes of increasing their overall quality of life. One of these particular programs is referred to as a Therapeutic Recreation camp.

Therapeutic Recreation Camps

Therapeutic recreation camps are programs that are held for and designed for people of all ages who have different kinds of special needs including but not limited to: disabilities, illnesses, and or disorders. Pegg and Lord (2008) stated that, “TR is a purposeful form of intervention to assist individuals with disabilities or illnesses to live a more healthy and satisfying life” (as cited in Moxham et. al., 2015, p. 63). People who have any of these diagnoses usually require certain needs and adaptations to daily activities. Therapeutic recreation camps are designed to be able to accommodate for these certain needs and adaptations.

Therapeutic recreation camps are grounded in the TR process. The TR process includes the assessment of client’s strengths and limitations, planning and implementing treatment plans and the evaluation of functional changes made by clients (O’Morrow, 1980). The TR process is also known as APIE. APIE stands for: Assessment, Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation. A study conducted at a TR camp in Utah, called Camp Kostopulos, which is a summer camp for all ages of people who have physical and cognitive impairments compared the impact of using and not using the TR process model during camp and the impact on the camper’s social self-efficacy. In this study, Allsop (2013) explains that the TR process model used in a camp setting includes TR assessments for each participant (assessment), measurable goals and objectives (planning), targeted program plans (implementation), and proper evaluation and documentation of all participants and programs (evaluation). The outcome of the study revealed that the camper’s social performance with peers improved more during the week when the TR process model was utilized as opposed to the week that did not use the TR process but instead used the traditional Camp Kostopulos model.

In another study conducted by Shelton 2011 he/she explained the difference between therapeutic camps and non-therapeutic camps. Therapeutic camps are specifically designed for children who have disabilities that may cause a lack of ability to participate in activities who children without disabilities are able to participate in without adaptations. Attending a therapeutic recreation camp has been shown to provide different benefits for people with disabilities, illnesses, and/or disorders who require them to have certain needs and adaptations.

Benefits received from Therapeutic Recreation Camps

The Benefits Movement began in 1991 and was introduced to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) a few years later. It has developed the intent to assist park and recreation agencies in better communicating the benefits that they offer (Pohlman, 1999). The Benefits Movement addresses three components: Benefits Based Awareness, Benefits Based Management, and Benefits Based Programs. Each of these components were set in place to ensure that Park and Recreation agencies moved towards making others aware of the benefits they provide, making sure their management team is using a benefits based approach, and to make sure the programs were incorporating the benefits. Today in Therapeutic Recreation practices there have been discussions on the benefits based approach and on moving towards evidence-based practice. There have been numerous studies about some of the benefits that a therapeutic recreation camp provides for people with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses. A study by Moxham et al. (2015) examined the outcomes of a pilot Therapeutic Recreation camp for people with a mental illness. This study found that, individuals that engaged in Therapeutic Recreation while at a Recovery Camp left with more of a sense of purpose toward overcoming the obstacles that individuals face when they live with a mental illness. Allsop (2013) states that, “over 2 million adolescents in the United States have a form of chronic illness and frequently have decreased levels of social self-efficacy and social performance. The summer camp industry and the field of TR have been found to have a positive influence upon these social factors” (p. 35). Additional benefits associated with therapeutic camps include positive experiences of enjoyment, interest, relaxation, and freedom of choice or intrinsic motivation (Cotton & Butselaar, 2012; Moxham, 2015; Patterson, 2007). Improvements in self-determination, self-confidence, family relationships, and social life have all increased due to active participation in therapeutic recreation activities within a camp setting as well (Anderson & Heyne, 2012a, 2013; Hebblethwaite, 2013; Moxham, 2015; Pilchak, 2008). Another benefit that has been found is that the engagement in therapeutic recreation activities provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be able to reduce feelings of helplessness by allowing them to have control of their own choices and independence (Moxham et al., 2015; Patterson, 2007).

According to the American Camp Association (2006), campers received benefits in many different ways. They received guidance, and emotional and practical support. They felt physically and emotionally secure. They were faced with opportunities for leadership, and they developed a sense of belonging. In a

study regarding the therapeutic use of community for adults with cerebral palsy, Dawson and Liddicoat (2009) reported that the experience of being at camp gives campers something to do, something to remember, and something to look forward to. For most of the campers who attend therapeutic camps, the experience of the camp is the only opportunity for them to participate in outdoor leisure settings (Dawson, & Liddicoat). While participating in outdoor leisure activities is very common for campers without a disability, for those who have a disability, therapeutic camps provide added enjoyment and lasting memories due to the lack of outdoor leisure participation outside of attending the camps (Dawson & Liddicoat). Therapeutic camps provide many different benefits for individuals with various disabling conditions. The present study is focusing on the benefits that one therapeutic recreation camp, Camp Koinonia, provides for youth campers.

Camp Koinonia

Camp Koinonia is an outdoor therapeutic recreation based camp for individuals ages 7 to 21 with multiple disabilities. Some of the different types of disabilities that are seen among the participants at Camp Koinonia are autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, Angelman's syndrome, and ADHD. Camp Koinonia is held every spring during the month of April. The camp is put on and run by graduate and undergraduate students from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK). Prior to the week of camp, the UTK students attend a weekly course that teaches and instructs them about various disabilities seen at camp and how to adapt and work with them. This course is beneficial for the students because they get to learn about various disabilities and they get to put together everything that they have learned and apply that information during the week of Camp Koinonia. Not only do the students learn about the disabilities but they also learn about the importance of the TR process, also known as APIE. Some of the students are chosen to be the activity leaders and staff during the week of camp and others are assigned to be counselors and head counselors. Prior to camp, the counselors contact the caregiver or parent of the camper they have been paired with. The counselors and activity staff will also learn about different disabilities that they will see at camp and how to adapt an activity according to that disability (assessment). They will then create and plan activities for the campers to participate in during the week of camp (planning). When the week of camp arrives they are able to put their assessing and planning to use and implement the activities they have created (implementation). When the week is over they evaluate how their activities turned out (evaluation). Instructing the staff

members about the TR process and having them carry it out during the week of camp allows the activities to be appropriate and adaptable for someone with a disability, making Camp Koinonia a therapeutic recreation based camp. The study presented examines the perceived benefits that Camp Koinonia provides for the young adults who attend the camp. While there have been many studies on the benefits that therapeutic camps provide for children and youth, this study is focusing on the participants who are embarking of young adulthood.

Sense of Community Theory

One theory that professionals have applied within leisure settings and have found it to be an influential approach towards the impact belonging to a certain community can have on an individual is the Sense of Community theory. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), “a sense of community is defined by four primary characteristics: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, as well as shared emotional connection” (p. 9). This theory goes into detail about what each of its characteristics mean and how they affect an individual’s sense of community. The first characteristic is membership. “Membership is a sense of belonging and identification that involves the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group” (p.9). Attending a therapeutic camp like Camp Koinonia, allows the participants and the staff members to develop a sense of belonging to the program by the time the week of camp is over. Feeling a sense of belonging is related to the type of emotions you feel towards a group of people or a community. When one is with this group or community he/she is able to feel comfortable and is able to feel as if she/she belongs with the group. It is likely that this will occur for people attending as a result of being together and bonding over the shared memories that are experienced.

The next characteristic of the sense of community theory is influence. Influence refers to the member feeling as if they matter to the group and that the group matters to its members. At Camp Koinonia, every camper receives an award at the end of the week. The awards range from, “Best Helper” to “Most likely to brighten your day.” Providing every camper with an award at the end of the week allows Camp Koinonia to show the campers that each one of them matters to the Camp Koinonia Community. Another characteristic of the Sense of Community Theory is integration and fulfillment of needs. This relates to the members being able to feel that their needs will be met through the resources that the group

provides. The majority of campers who attend Camp Koinonia have needs related to activities of daily living. Activities of daily living refer to actions like eating, brushing teeth, dressing, and lifting and transferring. The campers who have these needs are able to come to camp and know that the staff are going to help them fulfill these needs. The last characteristic of the Sense of Community Theory is shared emotional connection. This refers to the members sharing history, time together, and similar experiences. During the week of Camp Koinonia, participants and staff are participating in daily activities, eating meals together, and sleeping in the same rooms. Spending this amount of time together allows the campers and staff at Camp Koinonia to form life-long lasting memories.

To the researchers knowledge, a study by Dawson and Liddicoat (2009) about the therapeutic use of community for adults with cerebral palsy is the first attempt at applying the sense of community theory in a summer camp setting. These scholars focused on understanding the experiences and memories that the participants had from attending a summer camp. One of the emerging themes was “being a respected member of a community”(p. 16). The article states that, “the role of community in camps that serve individuals with a disability is a promising concept with high potential for the future practice of therapeutic recreation and providing future paths for camp research” (p.23). Based on this study’s findings of the importance of community within a therapeutic camp setting, the sense of community theory fits well with the current study.

This study focuses on the benefits that the young adult population receives from attending Camp Koinonia. The researcher will be working towards determining exactly what those benefits are and how Camp Koionia has helped the individuals throughout their young adulthood. Also, if this study were to discover a significant amount of benefits from attending Camp Koinonia, then it would reinforce the importance of providing more therapeutic recreation camps for the young adult population.

CHAPTER III MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Setting

The camp program utilized in the study takes place at a facility located in Crossville, TN. The camp is held at the Clyde M. York 4-H Center and is part of The University of Tennessee Extension Agency. The facility is an outdoor center that holds numerous different camps throughout the year. All different kinds of schools, clubs, teams, and programs are held at the 4-H Center.

The camp program used in the research is called Camp Koinonia. Camp Koinonia has been in existence since 1977 and provides therapeutic recreation programming for children with multiple disabilities between the ages of 7 to 21. Different kinds of disabilities that may be encountered at camp include but are not limited to: autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, ADHD, Angelman's syndrome, and intellectual disability.

Research Participants

Participants include individuals between the ages of 18-21, who have attended the camp one or more times, and who have little to no communicating difficulties. There are 12 participants included in the study. There is an even ratio of females to males with 6 of the participants being females and 6 being males. The disabilities among the participants vary from Down syndrome, ID, cerebral palsy, autism, and ADHD. All of the participants chosen to be in the study will have attended Camp Koinonia before so it is hoped that they will be more comfortable answering the questions about the camp and have a better understanding of the perceived benefits derived from camp.

Instrumentation

The present study employs a qualitative research design, which aims to discover the perceived benefits a therapeutic recreation camp provides for the young adults with disabilities. For the purposes of data collection, a qualitative semi-structured interview was utilized. The semi-structured format for the interview was used to help the interview process be more relaxed and flexible (See Appendix A). The interview questions were posed in an effort to answer the following questions: What perceived benefits does Camp Koinonia provide for young adults with disabilities? In what ways does attending Camp Koinonia help the individual throughout young adulthood (ages 18-21)? Do perceived benefits differ when looking at specific demographics (e.g.-age, gender, family composition)?

Data Collection

Once the researcher gained IRB approval, individual participant's interview time were scheduled during participants period so as to not infringe on participation in the camp programs. On the first day of camp, the researcher gave the participant and the participant's counselor a sheet of paper stating the date, time, and place of the interview. The interviews took approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. The researcher conducted all of the interviews. Informed consent was obtained from each camper's parent/guardian prior to camp. Prior to each interview, an assent form was read aloud to each participant before starting the interview.

Data Analysis

Interview data was transcribed verbatim after collection using Dragon Speak Software. QDA Minor software was used to organize the data collected and code for themes. The researcher used the open-coding procedure which entailed, "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to discover predetermined codes. The predetermined codes were used to group data into themes. An external researcher also read and coded the data to account for inter-rater reliability. The two researchers independently read through and coded the data multiple times to identify themes related to benefits that a Therapeutic Recreation camp provides for the young adult population it serves. After initial coding was complete, the two researchers met to discuss their coding, new codes were added to the existing codebook and the data was analyzed one more time by each of the researchers. The two copies were then merged and compared for inter-rater reliability. An inter-rater reliability score of 87.5% was reported. To protect the identity of the participants in the study, pseudonyms were assigned by the researcher.

CHAPTER IV

PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF THERAPEUTIC RECREATION CAMPS FOR YOUNG ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceived benefits that a Therapeutic Recreation camp offers young adults with disabilities. A total of 12 campers were interviewed with 6 being male and 6 being female. Emerging themes included: (a) Social, (b) New Experiences, (c) Character Building, and (d) Get Away. Findings identified the benefits that young adults receive from attending a Therapeutic Recreation camp program. Attending a Therapeutic Recreation camp program allows for individuals with disabilities to be around friends, to meet new friends, to feel a part of a family, to do things they have never done before, to become more independent, to escape from feeling different, and to simply be themselves. This study provides the rationale towards leisure professionals providing more Therapeutic Recreation camp programs for the young adults with disabilities population. This study also provides practical implications to developing more programming for young adults with disabilities within the field of Therapeutic Recreation.

Introduction

Therapeutic recreation is a service designed to aid an individual towards reaching their highest level of independence in life activities while helping to reduce the activity limitations to participation in life situations that are caused by an illness or a disability (ATRA, What is RT/TR section, para.1). This service can be provided for people of all ages, for people with all different kinds of disabilities, and can be provided in all kinds of settings. One setting in particular where therapeutic recreation can be provided and which is also the focus of this study is the camp setting. Camp Koinonia, developed in 1977 at Virginia Tech, is a Therapeutic Recreation based camp for children ages 7-21 who have multiple disabilities. The camp was developed as part of a class with the purpose of providing an experiential learning opportunity for the university students while involving children and young adults in outdoor activities that they would not be able to participate in otherwise (The Camp Koinonia, About Section, para. 1).

Camp Koinonia has over 200 University of Tennessee (UT) students who are the staff members for the camp during a week in April. In the weeks leading up to the actual week of camp, the staff members are involved in a class course where they learn about different things such as: the field of Therapeutic

Recreation, information on different disabilities, and implementing and adapting camp activities for children with different disabilities present at camp. Camp Koinonia provides UT students with an educational experience and also provides the campers Therapeutic Recreation activities that are aimed towards improving their independence in everyday life.

This study will focus on the perceived benefits that the young adult campers receive from attending a Therapeutic Recreation camp program like Camp Koinonia.

Purpose and Relevance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceived benefits that a Therapeutic Recreation camp offers young adults with disabilities. By interviewing various campers who attended Camp Koinonia, the researcher was able to identify perceived benefits that the campers received as a result of their participation. This study examined the following research questions:

- A) What perceived benefits does Camp Koinonia provide for young adults with disabilities?
- B) In what ways does attending Camp Koinonia help the individual throughout young adulthood?
- C) Do perceived benefits differ when looking at specific demographics (e.g. age, gender, family composition)?

This research study is important because it focuses on the young adult population for whom there is a lack of programming. It is anticipated that this research will help towards determining why a program like Camp Koinonia is beneficial for young adults with disabilities. This study may also show the importance in providing more opportunities like Camp Koinonia for the young adult population.

Literature Review

Youth with Disabilities

About 1 in 6 children in the US had a developmental disability in 2006-2008 ranging from mild disabilities such as speech and language impairments to serious developmental disabilities, such as intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, and autism (Data and Statistics, 2014). The majority of the children that grow up having a disability or a disorder live much different lives than a child that does not have a disability or a disorder. Depending on the disability or disorder, some have “repeated doctor visits, medical treatments, and extended hospital stays that all combine to limit the adolescent’s exposure to various social situations, which in turn can delay or stunt the individual’s social growth and drastically limit his or her

social development” (Bluebond-Langer, Perkel, Gorertzel, Nelson, & McGreary, 1990, p. 116). This social isolation can lead to an increased likelihood of behavioral problems during their adolescence (Hamlett, Pellegrini, & Katz, 1992). By the time they are adolescent’s, not only can their social development be hindered, but their physical and emotional development can be hindered as well. Some individuals with disabilities cannot participate in the typical every day activities in which someone without a disability can participate in therefore resulting in limited opportunities to recreate. However, the field of Therapeutic Recreation works towards providing programs for individuals with disabilities in hopes of increasing their overall quality of life. One of these particular programs is referred to as a Therapeutic Recreation camp.

Therapeutic Recreation Camps

Therapeutic Recreation camps are programs that are held for and designed for people of all ages who have different kinds of special needs including but not limited to: disabilities, illnesses, and or disorders. Pegg and Lord (2008) stated that, “TR is a purposeful form of intervention to assist individuals with disabilities or illnesses to live a more healthy and satisfying life” (as cited in Moxham et. al., 2015, p. 63). People that have any of these diagnoses usually require certain needs and adaptations to daily activities. Therapeutic Recreation camps are designed to be able to accommodate for these certain needs and adaptations.

In a study entitled *Therapeutic Camps as Respite Care Providers*, Shelton (2011) explained that the difference between therapeutic camps and non-therapeutic camps is that such camps are specifically designed for children who have disabilities that may cause a lack of ability to participate in activities who children without disabilities are able to participate in without adaptations. Attending a Therapeutic Recreation camp has been shown to provide different benefits for people with disabilities, illnesses, and/or disorders who require them to have certain needs and adaptations.

Benefits received from Therapeutic Recreation Camps

The Benefits Movement began in 1991 and was introduced to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) a few years later. It has developed the intent to assist park and recreation agencies in better communicating the benefits that they offer (Pohlman, 1999). The Benefits Movement addresses three components: Benefits Based Awareness, Benefits Based Management, and Benefits Based Programs. Each of these components were set in place to ensure that Park and Recreation agencies moved towards making

others aware of the benefits they provide, making sure their management team is using a benefits based approach, and to make sure the programs were incorporating the benefits. Today in Therapeutic Recreation practices there have been discussions on the benefits based approach and on moving towards evidence-based practice. There have been numerous studies about some of the benefits that a Therapeutic Recreation camp provides for people with disabilities and/or chronic illnesses. A study by Moxham et al. (2015) examined the outcomes of a pilot Therapeutic Recreation camp for people with a mental illness. This study found that, “overall, engagement in Therapeutic Recreation as experienced during Recovery Camp facilitated a sense of purpose toward overcoming challenges brought about by living with a mental illness”. Allsop (2013) states that, “over 2 million adolescents in the United States have a form of chronic illness and frequently have decreased levels of social self-efficacy and social performance. The summer camp industry and the field of TR have been found to have a positive influence upon these social factors” (p. 35). Additional benefits associated with therapeutic camps include positive experiences of enjoyment, interest, relaxation, and freedom of choice or intrinsic motivation (Cotton & Butselaar, 2012; Moxham, 2015; Patterson, 2007). Improvements in self-determination, self-confidence, family relationships, and social life have all increased due to active participation in TR activities within a camp setting as well (Anderson & Heyne, 2012a, 2013; Hebblethwaite, 2013; Moxham, 2015; Pilchak, 2008). Another benefit that has been found is that the engagement in Therapeutic Recreation activities provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be able to reduce feelings of helplessness by allowing them to have control of their own choices and independence (Moxham et al., 2015; Patterson, 2007).

According to the American Camp Association (2006), campers received benefits in many different ways. They received guidance, and emotional and practical support. They felt physically and emotionally secure. They were faced with opportunities for leadership, and they developed a sense of belonging (American Camp Association, 2006). In a study regarding the therapeutic use of community for adults with cerebral palsy, Dawson and Liddicoat (2009) reported that the experience of being at camp gives campers something to do, something to remember, and something to look forward to. For most of the campers who attend therapeutic camps, the experience of the camp is the only opportunity for them to participate in outdoor leisure settings. (Dawson, & Liddicoat, 2009). While participating in outdoor leisure activities is very common for campers without a disability, for those who have a disability, therapeutic camps provide

added enjoyment and lasting memories due to the lack of outdoor leisure participation outside of attending the camps (Dawson & Liddicoat, 2009). Therapeutic camps provide many different benefits for individuals with various disabling conditions. The present study is focusing on the benefits that one Therapeutic Recreation camp, Camp Koinonia, provides for youth campers.

Camp Koinonia

Camp Koinonia is an outdoor Therapeutic Recreation based camp for individuals ages 7 to 21 with multiple disabilities. Some of the different types of disabilities that are seen among the participants at Camp Koinonia are autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, Angelman's syndrome, and ADHD. Camp Koinonia is held every spring during the month of April. The camp is put on and run by graduate and undergraduate students from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK). Prior to the week of camp, the UTK students attend a weekly course that teaches and instructs them about various disabilities seen at camp and how to adapt and work with them. This course is beneficial for the students because they get to learn about various disabilities and they get to put together everything that they have learned and apply that information during the week of Camp Koinonia. Not only do the students learn about the disabilities but they also learn about the importance of the TR process, also known as APIE. Instructing the staff members about the TR process and having them carry it out during the week of camp allows the activities to be appropriate and adaptable for someone with a disability, making Camp Koinonia a Therapeutic Recreation based camp. The study presented examines the perceived benefits that Camp Koinonia provides for the young adults who attend the camp. While there have been many studies on the benefits that Therapeutic Recreation camps provide for children and youth, this study is focusing on the participants who are embarking of young adulthood.

Sense of Community Theory

One theory that professionals have applied within leisure settings and have found it to be an influential strategy is the Sense of Community theory (SCT). According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), "a sense of community is defined by four primary characteristics: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, as well as shared emotional connection" (p. 9). This theory emphasizes the impact that belonging to a certain community can have on an individual. "Membership is a sense of belonging and identification that involves the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group" (p.9). Feeling a

sense of belonging is related to the type of emotions you feel towards a group of people or a community. When you are with this group or community you are able to feel comfortable and you are able to feel as if you belong with the group. The next characteristic of the sense of community theory is influence. Influence refers to the member feeling as if they matter to the group and that the group matters to its members. Another characteristic of the SCT is integration and fulfillment of needs. This relates to the members being able to feel that their needs will be met through the resources that the group provides. The last characteristic of the SCT is shared emotional connection. This refers to the members sharing history, time together, and similar experiences.

To the researchers knowledge, a study by Dawson and Liddicoat (2009) about the therapeutic use of community for adults with cerebral palsy is the first attempt at applying the sense of community theory in a summer camp setting. These Scholars focused on understanding the experiences and memories that the participants had from attending a summer camp. One of the emerging themes was “being a respected member of a community”(p. 16). The article states that, “the role of community in camps that serve individuals with a disability is a promising concept with high potential for the future practice of Therapeutic Recreation and providing future paths for camp research” (p.23). Based on this study’s findings of the importance of community within a therapeutic camp setting, the sense of community theory fits well with the current study.

Methods

This study utilized a qualitative research design. 12 Semi-structured interviews were conducted to campers that were attending a weeklong residential camp for youth ages 7-21 all of which who have multiple disabilities. There are 12 participants included in the study. Participants include individuals between the ages of 18-21, who have attended the camp one or more times, and who have little to no communicating difficulties. There is an even ratio of girls to boys with 6 of the participants being girls and 6 being boys.

Instrumentation

The present study employs a qualitative research design, which aims to discover the perceived benefits a Therapeutic Recreation camp provides for the young adults with disabilities. For the purposes of data collection, a qualitative semi-structured interview was utilized. The semi-structured format for the

interview was used to help the interview process be more relaxed and flexible (See Appendix A). The interview questions were posed in an effort to answer the following questions: What perceived benefits does Camp Koinonia provide for young adults with disabilities? In what ways does attending Camp Koinonia help the individual throughout young adulthood (ages 18-21)? Do perceived benefits differ when looking at specific demographics (e.g.-age, gender, family composition)?

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher scheduled each participant's interview time during their free period so as to not infringe on their participation in the camp programs. On the first day of camp, the researcher gave the participant and the participant's counselor a sheet of paper stating the date, time, and place of the interview. The interviews took approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. The researcher conducted all of the interviews. Informed consent was obtained from each camper's parent/guardian prior to camp. Prior to each interview, an assent form was read aloud to each participant before starting the interview. This study has been IRB approved.

Data Analysis

Interview data was transcribed verbatim by the researcher after collection using Dragon Speak Software. QDA Minor software was used to organize the data collected and code for themes. The researcher used the open-coding procedure known as, "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin 1990) to discover predetermined codes. The predetermined codes were used to group data into themes. An external researcher also read and coded the data to facilitate inter-rater reliability. The two researchers independently read through and coded the data multiple times to identify themes related to benefits that a Therapeutic Recreation camp provides for the young adult population it serves. After initial coding was discussed between the researchers, new codes were added to the existing codebook and the data was analyzed one more time. The two copies were then merged and compared for inter-rater reliability. An inter-rater reliability score of 87.5% was reported. To protect the identity of the participants in the study, pseudonyms were assigned by the researcher.

Results

Demographics of the Sample

A total of thirteen different parents/caregivers were emailed the consent form along with more information on the study. A total of twelve parents/caregivers signed, scanned, then emailed back the consent form or they signed the consent form in person upon check-in at Camp Koinonia. The total number of participants to participate in the study was twelve. Six participants were female and six participants were male. When the participants were asked where they lived and whom they lived with, all but one stated that they lived at home with both parents and the other stated that they lived at home with one parent. In response to the question if they had siblings or not, all of them stated that they had at least one sibling and 75% stated having two or more siblings. Additional demographic details of the sample are provided in Table 1. Participants in this study have one or more disability, as this is a requirement to attend Camp Koinonia. Some of the disabilities that these individuals have include: cerebral palsy, autism, Down syndrome, Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, and others. Table 2 provides a summary by camper's pseudonyms and includes more details on the range of disabilities for each camper.

Themes

Based on the analysis of the data, four themes emerged according to the common response patterns found while analyzing the data collected from the twelve interviews. The four themes identified were: 1) Social, 2) New Experiences, 3) Character Building, and 4) Escape. These four themes have been broken down into sub-themes with descriptions and quotes to support each theme.

Social

Social is the theme that stood out most while reviewing the coded data. Camp Koinonia is set-up in a way that allows the individuals participating to be exposed to a number of different social activities and social situations. The social aspect of Camp Koinonia is important to the campers because a lot of them do not get to experience social activities outside of Camp Koinonia. Some examples of social activities and social situations that are experienced at camp are: cabin group free-time, activities with their cabin group, meal time with their cabin group, a bonfire, a dance, a talent show, a carnival, and a scavenger hunt. Being a part of the social activities and social situations at camp allows the campers to be exposed to social situations. Two subgroups emerged under the Social theme: *Sense of Family and Friends*.

Sense of Family

By being exposed to social activities and social situations at camp, the campers have the opportunity to feel as if they are a part of a community. Many of the campers described being a part of a community by expressing that the people at Camp Koinonia are like a family to them. Some common responses from the campers were: “It’s like a big family”, “It’s like a big family reunion”, and “I have family here”. One answer that stood out in particular came from the question, “Why do you like to come back to Camp Koinonia each year?” Lacy, who has been attending Camp Koinonia for more many years, answered, “I like to come back each time because I have my friends and family here. They are like a big family of mine and I love them more than anything.” When asked the same question, Jackie responded, “I think its [Camp Koinonia] like what everyone says. It’s like a family here at camp, you know?”

Friends

Being exposed to the social activities and social situations that occur during the week of Camp Koinonia also gives the campers the opportunity to meet new friends and to continue old friendships. In response to, “Has Camp Koinonia had an impact on your life?” Jackie said, “It’s helped me build friendships with people that I wouldn’t have otherwise and you get to meet people and create such a strong bond with all these people.” When the campers were asked what they liked most about Camp Koinonia a few responses were: “I have fun with my friends”, “its fun and I get to hang out with my friends”, and “I have friends here that help me to become my best”. One answer in particular that stood out was from Dan who has been attending for more than half of his life. When he was asked, “What have you learned at Camp Koinonia?” he responded with, “I have learned to make friends.” Not only is Camp Koinonia a place for individuals with disabilities to meet new friends and to see old friends but it is also a place for these individuals to learn how to make friends for the first time.

New Experiences

While analyzing the data, the researcher noticed multiple answers included something similar to, “I did (blank) for the first time,” and “I learned how to (blank).” The New Experiences theme is broken down into two subgroups: *First Time and Learning New Things*.

Camp Koinonia provides a wide variety of activities for the campers to participate in including: Arts and Crafts, Sensory, Sports and Games, Canoes, Ropes, Horses, Cooking, Music and Movement, and Theatre.

There are many instances where campers will participate in one of the stated activities for the first time in their life. There are also instances when a camper will learn how to do something during one of the stated activities that they did not know how to do prior to attending camp.

First Time

Out of the twelve campers that were interviewed, half of them stated that they went zip-lining for the first time in their life while at Camp Koinonia. Five of the twelve campers that were interviewed stated that they rode in a canoe for the first time in their life while at Camp Koinonia. When asked if she had ever done anything new at Camp Koinonia that she had never done before, Jackie answered, “I’ve zip lined before and I’ve canoed before and I’ve ridden a horse before and I’ve never done those things before I got to Camp Koinonia and I never thought that I would ever do those things.” When Dan was asked the same question he answered, “I rode horses, I rode in a canoe, and I rode on a recumbent bike.” Cecilia answered, “Camp has given me so many opportunities that I haven’t been able to do otherwise like the bikes and the zip-line and the canoeing.” A response that stood out more than the others was from Sarah who said, “I did canoes and the rope swing for the first time at camp. I got over my fear of heights!” A follow up question asked Sarah to explain how that made her feel. She answered with, “I used to be afraid that I would fall out because I’m clumsy. I’m not afraid of that anymore and it’s one of my favorite things to do at camp now!” Other responses received were: “I rode a canoe for the first time”, “When I first came to camp I zip-lined for the first time”, “It was my first time to zip-line”, and “I did zip-lining at ropes for the first time and it was very breathtaking for me.”

Learning New Things

When the campers were asked, “Have you learned anything new at Camp Koinonia and if so, what is it”, Sean was the only one who responded with something tangible that he learned how to do: “I learned how to tie-dye a t-shirt.” The other campers all responded with intangible things that they learned while at Camp Koinonia. Some examples are: “I learned to have fun”, “I learned to be nice”, and “I learned to be my inner self.” Jackie answered, “You learn that there are not as many limitations as you thought.” Dan responded with, “I learned the very most meaning of synergy, teamwork, fellowship, and caring.” When Dan was asked to elaborate on his answer a little more he stated, “Well, I basically learned who I truly am.” A few other campers also said that they learned more about themselves. Examples included: “I learned that

I can do anything”, “I learned to build my self-confidence and self-esteem”, and “I learned that I can trust people.”

Character Building

During the week of Camp Koinonia, the campers are faced with the same ups and downs that campers would experience at any other camp. There are many opportunities for the camper to be successful in an activity and there are also times when a camper may be unsuccessful in an activity. For example, at the Sports and Games activity, the camper may be successful and kick the ball. However, there is also a chance that the camper will miss the ball and not kick it. Another example could be that a camper asks someone to be his or her date to the dance. The individual may say yes or the individual may say no. During experiences of this nature are moment's when individuals build their character. Two subthemes of Character Building emerged from the data: *Self-Confidence and Experienced Change*.

Self – Confidence

When the campers were asked if Camp Koinonia had an impact on their life, many responded with: “Yes, of course!” and “Yes, in many ways!” When probed with a follow up question asking them to explain their answer in more detail, many campers spoke about the impact that Camp Koinonia has had on their confidence level. Sarah stated, “It [Camp Koinonia] helped me to become more confident and it helped me to believe in me.” When asked the same question, Jackie shared, “Camp K has totally changed my life and has made me more confident in what I want to do with my life and just as a person in general I've like come out of my shell even more.” Not only do these campers feel more confident while they are at camp but some also feel this way when they return home from camp. One of the questions that the campers were asked was, “How do you feel when you get home after being at Camp Koinonia for a week?” Sean answered, “I’m able to be myself more” and Lacy said, “I feel more confident with myself.” These answers show that the benefits that Camp Koinonia has on the campers still exist when they are back in their normal, everyday lives.

Experienced Change

When the campers were asked if Camp Koinonia had an impact on their life and how, some answered saying they had become more confident with themselves. Other campers discussed the change that they had experienced in their own lives. A few said, “It’s changed my life” and “my life has been

changed forever.” When the researcher asked the campers to go into more detail, Sarah said, “I have more fun now because I have less anxiety.” Dan responded with, “It was part of the camp forces that helped me change my ways. It helped me change who I am.” At the end of Jackie’s interview she was asked if there was anything else she would like to add about Camp Koinonia. Jackie gave a great response of, “It’s just amazing. I know that sounds like a cliché word that people use a lot but it really is amazing. It changed my life and I’m glad that I had the experience and that I’m having the experience right now.”

Escape

Camp Koinonia is seen as a vacation or an “escape” for some of the campers that attend Camp Koinonia. It is seen as a time to have a break from their families, school, and daily life. For most of the campers that attend, it is also seen as a break from being “different” and from being bullied at school. From being able to “Get Away” from their families, school, or daily life, some of the campers feel a sense of freedom while they are at Camp Koinonia. Most campers will participate in more activities at their “free will” during the week of camp than they will in their lifetime. While the staff members at Camp Koinonia are to stick to the planned schedule, the campers are still able to participate in what they want to. No camper is forced to do anything that they do not want to do. For some campers that are not used having any freedom at home or at school, coming to camp allows them to feel the sense of freedom that they are not used to feeling. The two subthemes that are under Escape are: *Get Away and Freedom*.

Get Away

When Cecilia was asked to explain how she would describe Camp Koinonia to a friend, she responded with saying, “Camp Koinonia is a way to get away from any stressor that you may have.” When asked the same question, Lacy said, “It helps me to get away from the stress of school and from the bullies.” While Camp Koinonia is an escape from stress and bullies for Cecilia and Lacy, it is an escape from family for Sarah and Carter. Sarah and Carter were asked how it feels when they are home after a week away at Camp Koinonia. Sarah responded with, “Refreshed. It’s a break from all my siblings and I kind of miss it and I want to go back and be with my counselors because I don’t have any friends at school.” Carter responded with, “Good. I got a break from my family so I missed them.”

Freedom

When the researcher asked Dan to compare the learning environment at school to the learning environment at Camp Koinonia, he exclaimed, “Um, well, outside of camp Koinonia they never let me do certain things at certain times. At Camp it was like doing everything I felt like as long as I follow directions or participate etc. And it was also a place to do whatever I want, wherever I want, whenever I want.” Sean had a similar response of, “I feel more independent at Camp to do things I actually want to do.” Sean and Dan felt a sense of freedom at camp in a physical way because they are able to participate in what they want to participate in. Gary and Jackie felt a sense of freedom in an emotional way of being able to be who they are without being treated like they have a disability. When Gary was asked why he enjoys camp, he responded with, “Because it lets me be free to be who I actually am.” Jackie was asked the same question and said, “Because it really is the happiest place on earth and you don't feel like you have a disability for a week. It's like your disability disappears and I've never felt anything like that. It's like the most freeing feeling.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived benefits that a Therapeutic Recreation Camp provides for young adults with disabilities. In this study, similar types of community benefits were found within the *Sense of Community Theory* by McMillan and Chavis (1986). This theory is defined by four characteristics: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. The first characteristic that the results aligned with was *Membership*. Campers felt as if they were at a “home away from home” when they were at camp. They also felt as if they were a member of the Camp Koinonia family. Campers also voiced that they felt as if they were able to be themselves at Camp Koinonia because they are accepted for who they are which in turn leads to the next characteristic, *Influence*. *Influence* refers to the member feeling as if they matter to the group and that the group matters to its members. Campers felt that they were accepted for who they are and that they mattered to their cabin group. In return, the campers felt the same love for their cabin groups as well. The next characteristic is *Integration and Fulfillment of Needs*. This relates to the members being able to feel that their needs will be met through the resources that the group provides. Staff members at a Therapeutic Recreation camp have the knowledge of different disabilities, how to deal with them, and how to provide support for them. The

campers are able to trust the staff members for that reason, knowing that they will take care of them and meet their needs. The last characteristic of the SCT is *Shared Emotional Connection*, which refers to the members sharing history, time together, and similar experiences. During the week of camp, campers and staff members are together all day doing everything together. The campers get the chance to interact socially with others, which allows them to make new friends and keep up with old friends. This also allows the campers to get the chance to have experiences and moments with one another, which in turn causes the individuals to form a bond with each other.

Other studies have successfully utilized the SCT to other leisure programming such as wilderness canoeing and sport participation (Breunig et al., 2008; Lyons & Dionigi, 2007; Sharpe, 2005). A study by Dawson and Liddicoat (2009) utilized the Sense of Community theory when researching the therapeutic use of community for adults with cerebral palsy in a summer camp setting. One of the emerging themes that these scholars found was “being a respected member of a community”(p. 16). The article states that, “the role of community in camps that serve individuals with a disability is a promising concept with high potential for the future practice of Therapeutic Recreation and providing future paths for camp research” (p.23). Similar to our study, Dawson and Liddicoat (2009) also found that their data met each of the four characteristics of the theory. Not only did they find “being a respected member of a community as a theme”, but they also found that community was the most important theme that emerged from their research.

In this study, benefits found parallel multiple studies done on the benefits that a Therapeutic Recreation camp provides for the campers that attend the camp. One of those studies was on a Therapeutic Recreation Camp for individuals with a mental illness. These researchers found that improvements in self-determination, self-confidence, family relationships, and social life have all increased due to active participation in TR activities within a camp setting (Anderson & Heyne, 2012a, 2013; Hebblethwaite, 2013; Moxham, 2015; Pilchak, 2008). In this study, after leaving Camp Koinonia, the campers left feeling more confident in themselves, which directly affected their social life as well. The campers mentioned that Camp Koinonia helped them to learn how to make new friends and allowed them to keep in contact with old friends. They also stated that being able to return to Camp Koinonia each year has allowed them to connect with friends and form a strong bond with those individuals. Without Therapeutic Recreation

camping programs, some of these individuals would not have the opportunity to bond with and form friendships with people their age. The American Camp Association found that attending Therapeutic Recreation Camps allowed the campers to feel a sense of belonging (American Camp Association, 2006). The campers that attended Camp Koinonia also claimed that they feel a sense of belonging while they are at camp. The campers described Camp Koinonia as a place where they feel at home. Not only do they feel at home, but they also stated that they feel like they belong to a family and that Camp Koinonia is a big family in itself.

Shelton's 2011 study on Therapeutic camps as respite care providers found that Therapeutic Recreation camps allow children to experience the outdoors, and participate in activities that are "outside the norm," such as canoeing, climbing a challenge course, boating, arts and crafts, and other experiences. Campers that attend Camp Koinonia also get to participate in those outdoor activities such as ropes courses, canoeing, bike riding, and also horseback riding. Many of the campers that were interviewed stated that they participated in these kinds of outdoor activities for the first time while attending Camp Koinonia. They also said that Camp Koinonia is the only opportunity they get to participate in outdoor activities like canoeing, bike riding, horseback riding, and ropes courses. If it were not for Therapeutic Recreation camp programs, participating in these outdoor activities would not be possible for most of the campers that attend.

Another study found that the engagement in Therapeutic Recreation activities provided opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be able to reduce feelings of helplessness by allowing them to have control of their own choices and independence (Moxham et al., 2015; Patterson, 2007). Similar to the findings in this study, campers stated that they felt as if they were able to do what they wanted while at camp as long as they followed certain rules. They also claimed that Camp Koinonia helped them to become more independent by allowing them to make their own choices. At Camp Koinonia, the staff members are taught before the week of camp that they should do their best to help the campers to become more independent. The staff members show them how to do daily living skills such as how to tie their shoe, how to brush their teeth, or how to comb their hair. After the campers are taught these tasks, some of the staff members challenge the campers to do them on their own eventually. Campers are also allowed to make their own choices throughout the week during different activities. By teaching the campers daily living

skills that some of them have never been taught before, and by allowing them to make their own choices when it is appropriate, the campers start to feel and know that they have the capability to be more independent in their every day lives.

Cotton and Butselaar's 2012 study found that experiences of enjoyment, interest, relaxation, and freedom of choice were all benefits associated with Therapeutic Recreation camps. As well as with our study, many campers described their experience at camp as fun, exciting, and they could not wait to come back to Camp Koinonia. A few of the campers enjoy Camp Koinonia specifically because it provides them a time to relax and to get away from stressors such as school or family. These campers in particular commented on the way that they are treated when they are at school or at home. Some of them are made fun of, bullied, and just treated differently in general. When they come to Camp Koinonia they get a chance to escape from those things and be at a place where they are accepted for who they are. One of the campers specifically said that when she is at camp she feels as if her disability does not exist and that she is free to be the person she is.

Limitations

One limitation to this study was the lack of in-depth answers received during interviews with the campers who had an intellectual disability. The answers were very short and to the point. The majority of these individuals replied with, "I don't know" to a good number of the questions even after they were re-worded by the interviewer. This could be due to the fact that individuals with intellectual disabilities have an IQ level lower than 70, which in turn causes them to have more trouble comprehending the questions they are being asked. The lower IQ level also causes them to have trouble articulating the answer that they want to give. A second limitation that this study encountered was the researcher having a hard time understanding what some of the campers were saying during the interview. The researcher did not use any answer from a camper that was not easily comprehended. This caused the researcher to not be able to use some of the quotes that the campers said. Another limitation of this study was the level of focus the campers had while being interviewed. The researcher interviewed the campers sporadically throughout the week of Camp Koinonia. There was a lot of fun and exciting things going on during the week of camp. To control this, the researcher provided the camper and his or her counselor with a sheet of paper in the beginning of the week saying where the interview will take place and when the interview will take place.

The last limitation is the limited generalizability of the current study. This study focused on the benefits from one therapeutic recreation camp program offered in the Southern United States. No other camp programs were researched as part of this study and; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to other therapeutic recreation programs.

Practical Implications

This research helps to identify the benefits that the young adult campers received from attending a Therapeutic Recreation camp. The young adults receive benefits such as, increased social interaction, physical activity, self- confidence as well as increased independence. These benefits are especially important in the lives of individuals with disabilities because they do not have as many opportunities to receive benefits like an individual without a disability does. Such information helps to validate the importance and the value that recreation camps have on individuals with disabilities. These findings can provide insight for professionals within the Therapeutic Recreation field who want to provide such camp programs for individuals with disabilities. Not only does this research show the importance that camp has on the lives of the young adult population but it also shows that the benefits received are benefits that are beneficial to individuals with disabilities of all ages, especially young adults and adults. Understanding and knowing the benefits that a Therapeutic Recreation camp provides for its participants is important for professionals to know in order for them to be fully equipped to develop programs that will maximize the benefits met through the program.

Another practical implication that results from this study is the importance of Therapeutic Recreation based camps for individuals with disabilities as opposed to Non-Therapeutic Recreation camps. With a Therapeutic Recreation based camp the staff members are taught and informed on how to interact with people with disabilities and it is their duty to aid the campers in becoming more independent. This is then measured by the goals and objectives that the staff members create based off of their assessment of their camper before the week of camp. With a Non-therapeutic Recreation camp, the staff members are focused on providing a place for the campers to have fun, to make new friends, and to be physically active. While this is an enjoyable and influential experience for an individual without a disability, it is not enough for an individual with a disability.

Leisure professionals should know the benefits that programs like Camp Koinonia provide for its participants so they can continue to develop these types of programs for the young adult and adult populations with disabilities. In regards to these populations, more programming needs to be developed for them simply because once an individual with a disability graduates high school, the opportunities for them decrease. Optimizing the opportunities for young adults and adults with disabilities to recreate, socialize, and grow their character, is extremely important.

Lastly, this study provides implications for the future management of Camp Koinonia. It shows that the impact Camp Koinonia has on its campers stems from the social aspect, the new experiences, and the opportunities for independence. Each of these components play a vital role in shaping Camp Koionia into being the program that it is. Camp Koinonia should continue to provide novel activities in the outdoor environment that allow its campers to improve socially, learn new things, experience growth, and become more independent.

Future Research

Future studies should replicate the current research, with the focus being on Therapeutic Recreation camping programs for adults with disabilities. This will allow the researcher to discover the exact benefits that such programs provide for the older population and the benefits could be compared to what was found in the current study. Such information will provide insight towards leisure professionals providing more programs for young adults and adults with disabilities after they graduate high school. Also, future research could be done by interviewing the parents or caregivers of young adults or adults with disabilities who have a harder time communicating or are not able to communicate at all about the benefits that they have received from attending Therapeutic Recreation camps. Since the parent/caregiver most likely knows their child/client better than anyone else, they would be able to help the interviewer to know what the individual is saying or to speak for them based on the reactions the parent/caregiver has come to know and understand.

Conclusion

After young adults with disabilities graduate high school their opportunities to be active, enjoy the outdoors, and to socialize, become limited. The lack of programming for these individuals is a problem. According to the data collected from the campers, Therapeutic Recreation camp programs provide a place

for individuals with disabilities to be around friends, to meet new friends, to feel a part of a family, to do things they have never done before, to become more independent, to escape from feeling different, and to simply be themselves. These are all benefits that are extremely important for any individual to be exposed to. Furthermore, Therapeutic Recreation camp programs are some of the only opportunities that individuals with disabilities get to experience said benefits. This study, along with similar studies in the future, will hopefully increase the awareness of the impact that Therapeutic Recreation camp programs have on young adults with disabilities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Camper Interview Questions

Section I: Perceived Benefits of the Camp Koinonia Experience

1. What do you like most about Camp Koinonia?
2. Has Camp Koinonia helped you to become more confident in yourself?
 - a. In what ways?
3. Can you describe how you feel when you return to school or home after being at Camp Koinonia?
4. Has Camp Koinonia had an impact on your life?
5. If you were to encourage a friend to attend camp, what would you say about it to make him/her to want to come?

Section II: Benefits Throughout Young Adulthood

1. What have you learned at Camp Koinonia?
2. Have you ever done something new at Camp Koinonia that you have never done before?
 - a. What was it? Or can you tell me more about that?
3. How has the camp Koinonia experience changed, as you have gotten older?
4. How is the learning environment different at Camp Koinonia from your learning environment in school? Is this a good or bad thing?

Section III: Future Participation in Camp Koinonia

1. Why have you chosen to come back to Camp Koinonia each year?
2. Would you attend a camp like Camp Koinonia as you get older and become an adult?
 - a. Why or why not?

Section IV: Demographics

1. How old are you?
2. Are you male or female?
3. Do you live with your mom, dad, or both parents?
4. Do you have any siblings?

Is there anything else you would like to add about Camp Koionia?

APPENDIX B

Email:

Dear Parents,

My name is Macie Parsons and I am a graduate student in the Therapeutic Recreation Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am on Grant Staff for The Camp Koinonia Program and I have been involved with Camp Koinonia for four years now. As part of my graduate work I am conducting a research project looking at the perceived benefits that therapeutic recreation camps provide for young adults with disabilities. I will be conducting short one to one interviews during the week of Camp Koinonia with select campers between the ages of 18 and 21.

You are receiving this email because your child has been identified as someone I would like to involve in this study. Should you choose to allow your child to participate in this study, he/she will be interviewed one time by me while at camp this April. Prior to starting the interview, I will be asking your child if he/she is interested in helping me with my project through a short interview. There will be no penalty if your child does not want to participate or if he/she wants to stop at any time. The interview will be audio recorded so that I can transcribe the interview conversation for later analysis. Your child will be given a pseudonym so that all personal information will be kept confidential. The findings of this study will be shared for educational purposes and pending the results published in an educational journal. Again, your child's identity will be protected. All data recorded will be stored on a password protected computer file or in a locked file cabinet.

Attached you will find the Consent Form for you to sign if you would like to allow your child to be interviewed during the week of Camp Koinonia. Your child's participation is voluntary.

If you choose to allow your child to be interviewed please either digitally sign the form and email it back to me or print and sign the consent form and mail it to:

Macie Parsons
1914 Andy Holt Ave, HPER 362
Knoxville, TN 37996

Phone: (865) 974-4363

Thank you,

Macie Parsons

APPENDIX C

Table 1. 1 Breakdown of Participants

Gender	n	%
Male	6	50%
Female	6	50%

Age		
18	4	33.3%
19	2	16.7%
20	2	16.7%
21	4	33.3%

# of years attend Camp K		
2	1	8.3%
4	3	25%
5	2	16.6%
6	1	8.3%
8	2	16.6%
10	2	16.6%
13	1	8.3%

Table 1.2 Demographics of Participants by Pseudonym

Name	Gender	Age	# Of years attended Camp Koinonia	Primary Disability Secondary Disability
Jackie	F	21	2	Cerebral Palsy
Sarah	F	20	4	Emotionally Disturbed Learning Disability Visual Impairment
Elizabeth	F	20	6	Down syndrome
Deborah	F	20	8	Autism Intellectual Disability
Lacy	F	19	8	Down Syndrome
Cecilia	F	18	5	Cerebral Palsy Cortical Visual Impairment
Aaron	M	18	4	Autism ADHD
Dan	M	18	13	Autism Seizure Disorder
Gary	M	18	10	Developmental Disability OCD ADHD Bipolar Disorder
Carter	M	20	10	Intellectual Disability Speech Impairment Shaken Baby Syndrome
Sean	M	19	5	Cerebral Palsy Spastic Quadriplegic
Kevin	M	21	4	Learning Disability Apraxia

APPENDIX D

Certification for Exemption from IRB Review for Research Involving Human Subject

March 16, 2015

Macie Dean Parsons
UTK - Kinesiology Recreation & Sport Studies
Thornton Athletics Student Life Center
1801 Volunteer Drive
Knoxville, TN 37996

Re: UTK IRB-15-02170-XP

Study Title: Perceived Benefits of Therapeutic Recreation Camps for Young Adults with Disabilities

Dear Ms. Parsons:

The Administrative Section of the UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your **application** for the above referenced project. It determined that your application is eligible for **expedited** review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1) categories (6) and (7). The IRB has reviewed these materials and determined that they do comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects.

Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval by the IRB of your application version 1.4, as submitted. Approval of this study will be valid from March 16, 2015 to March 15, 2016.

In the event that subjects are to be recruited using solicitation materials, such as brochures, posters, web-based advertisements, etc., these materials must receive prior approval of the IRB. Any revisions in the approved application must also be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Finally, **re-approval** of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above. You may not continue the research study beyond the time or other limits specified unless you obtain prior written approval of the IRB.

Sincerely,
Colleen P. Gilrane, PhD
Chair
UTK Institutional Review Board

VITA

Macie Parsons was born in Cookeville, Tennessee to the parents of Melissa and Frederick Parsons. She is the youngest of 2 children with an older brother named Ryan. Her family moved to Franklin, TN where Macie attended Grassland Middle School and Franklin High School. After graduation she headed to Knoxville, Tennessee to attend the University of Tennessee, Knoxville where she eventually obtained her Bachelors of Science Degree in Therapeutic Recreation. Immediately after graduating undergrad, Macie started graduate school at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Upon her first semester in the graduate program, Macie was selected to be a Graduate Research/Teaching Assistant for the Therapeutic Recreation Program. This led her to eventually have the opportunity to be a co-director for Camp Koinonia. Macie will graduate in May 2016 with a Masters of Science in degree in Therapeutic Recreation with plans to attend Baylor University to pursue a Masters of Arts in Christian Ministry. Macie would like to one day start a ministry within a church for individuals with disabilities and eventually forge that into a ministry based summer camp program for individuals with disabilities.