Community Based Project

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*It only takes one person to mobilize a community and inspire change. Even if you don't feel like you have it in you, it's in you. You have to believe in yourself. People will see your vision and passion and follow you.”* – Teyonah Parris (n.a.[71 Powerful Quotes About Being Part of a Community](https://www.happierhuman.com/community-quotes/)). The community endeavor that I hope to incorporate into our small town is to incorporate a more sensory-inclusive design for events within our community. One such event that I had the honor to create is Sensory Santa. This event has allowed children with unique physical, mental and health challenges to see Santa and Mrs. Clause. The event is offered to anyone who is unable to visit Santa Clause in a traditional way (malls, parties, waiting in lines or hesitant to get their pictures taken with Santa) This idea came to fruition with the help of my city’s mayor. I approached him with the idea, and with the help of his executive assistant we were able to secure a handicap-accessible venue that offered a large, enclosed space with dim lighting and a variety of sensory experiences (depending on each child’s need) safe space for a variety of participants. Along with the opportunity to see Santa and Mrs. Clause, they are given a time slot; this allows each child the opportunity to come to the venue, have time to acclimate to the environment and become comfortable prior to meeting Santa. The event also provided a photographer who has experience with children with unique challenges to document the event with photographs. Due to its success, it has become an annual event.

After seeing the success and the feedback from the event, our cities mayor wanted to know other ways that we could be more inclusive. After a brainstorming session, it was determined that we would start small to incorporate inclusivity in our festival. Our community has a yearly festival title Thde Potato Festival which is held the annually the second weekend of September. This event runs Thursday through Saturday, with multiple events. We created sensory bags that were placed at the information table for anyone who may need them. We decided that we would then talk with the festival committee. When I attended the event this year, I had a different purpose and viewed the event from an occupational therapy perspective and spoke informally with past therapy families concerns and barriers to attending the event.

Analyzing the event from the perspectives that they shared, I then discussed those findings with the mayor. As a member of the festival committee, I will have the opportunity to share some environmental design suggestions to incorporate spaces, tools and handicap accessible options to the venue. My hope is that this will benefit families of young and adult children with unique needs. We hope to publicize our inclusive design spaces so that the public is aware of them and will have access to them prior to the event for ease of use.

The third part of our brainstorming session is to provide work opportunities during the festival for young adults with diverse challenges to be part of the workforce. At our community festival, we are in the process of designing three paid positions during the festival that they can be employed. It is the long-term vision that these positions will grow. Currently, we have limited resources for such employment.

This project encompasses the vision of a dynamic system approach (Scaffa & Reitz 2020). Though in its infancy this program has the potential to provide the services needed in our community to individuals and their families with unique needs. It is my hope that with this partnership with the disability community, using an occupational therapy practitioner’s lens, I can play an important role in developing population-based interventions to support the complex occupation of health management to support health, well-being, and participation in other occupations. (Magasi, et.al. 2021). I am excited to see how this program develops and grows.

References

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