

Inclusive Programming & Self-Regulation at a Youth Recreation Program

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Arlington Recreation
Department

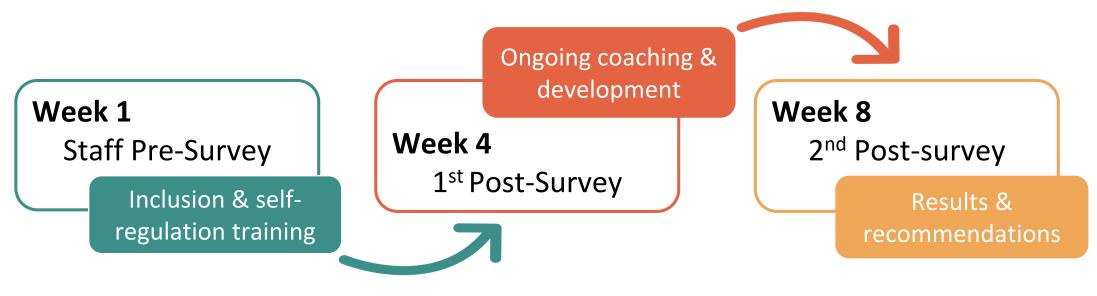
Background Information

- Summer camp provides opportunities for children to develop independence, social skills and the ability to self-regulate by managing their emotional and behavioral responses to the environment^{1,2}
- Counselors and staff are crucial to campers' experiences and participation³
- Club Rec, the summer camp run by the Arlington Recreation Department, aims to provide safe, fun and inclusive programming for all campers⁴
- Since 2021, Tufts University Department of Occupational Therapy has worked with Club Rec to support its programming, operations and inclusion practices
- **2021**: Review of Club Rec's inclusion practices^{5,6}
- 2022: Club Rec Inclusion Director; Inclusion training for staff⁷
- The 2023 project was developed from recommendations for additional staff training around supporting and engaging campers during downtime and transitions and increased collaboration with caregivers to ensure Club Rec is prepared to support participation of all campers

2023 Aims:

- 1. Train staff on self-regulation practices & introduce techniques to identify & support campers' self-regulatory responses & social-emotional skills
- 2. Engage campers in self-regulation & social-emotional skill development through programming and activities

Procedures



Staff surveys gathered data around knowledge of topics related to selfregulation, confidence in supporting camper participation, ability to implement new strategies, and interest in inclusive programming.

Staff

- Pre/Post/Post Qualtrics survey
- Inclusion & selfregulation training
- 1:1 coaching & inthe-moment support
- Observation notes

Camp Resources

- Cool Down Zones (CDZ)⁸
- Downtime & transition supportsEvidence-based
- Evidence-based activities for selfregulation (i.e. DIY fidgets & calm jars)⁸

urces Caregivers

- Camper registration form prompt on supporting camper participation
- Communication between staff and caregivers around camper behavior

Participants

Participants: Campers+, Counselors*, Activity Specialists*, Camp Director*, Camp Assistant Directors*, Parents/Guardians+(* = surveys, observations, & interactions; + = observations & interactions)
Inclusion criteria:

- Counselors & staff: Ages 15-30; Work at Club Rec for the entire duration of Summer 2023; Attend the original staff orientation and training
- Campers: Grades K-5 (Ages 4-11); Attend Club Rec for at least 1 session (of 8) **Staff demographics:**
- 50% between 15-17 years old
- 67% of staff are new to Club Rec in 2023
- 50% of new staff have experience with children in a recreational setting

Results

Field Notes: Self-Regulation

- Campers struggle to manage emotions during separation from caregivers

 Confusion during transition from AM-care
 - Confusion during transition from AM-care
 - Campers with noise sensitivity benefit from warning of loud noises in group activities

Downtime & Transitions

Drop-off

Modifying

activities

Campers

with history

of trauma

- Long periods of downtime for campers who finish projects early or are waiting to take the swim assessment
- Campers become upset when asked to begin a new activity or take turns with peers

Unexpected Events

- Campers with minor injuries benefit from spending a few minutes in the Cool Down Zone
 Challenging peer interactions & disagreements
- Campers need support managing emotional responses when they lose a game

Staff Survey Results

Managing

language

barriers

Training

Topics

Downtime

transitions

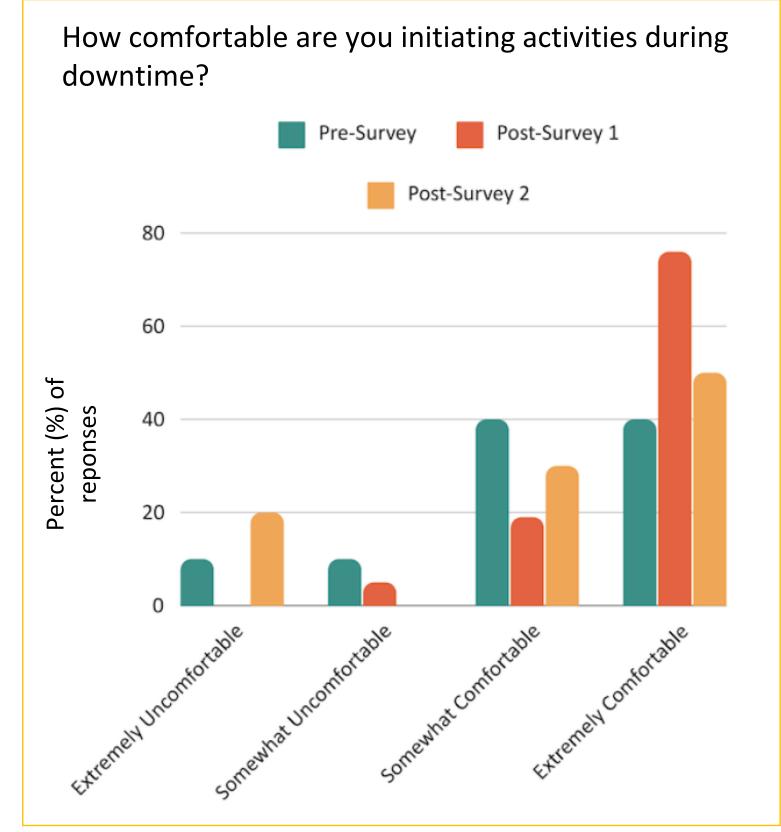
Behavior

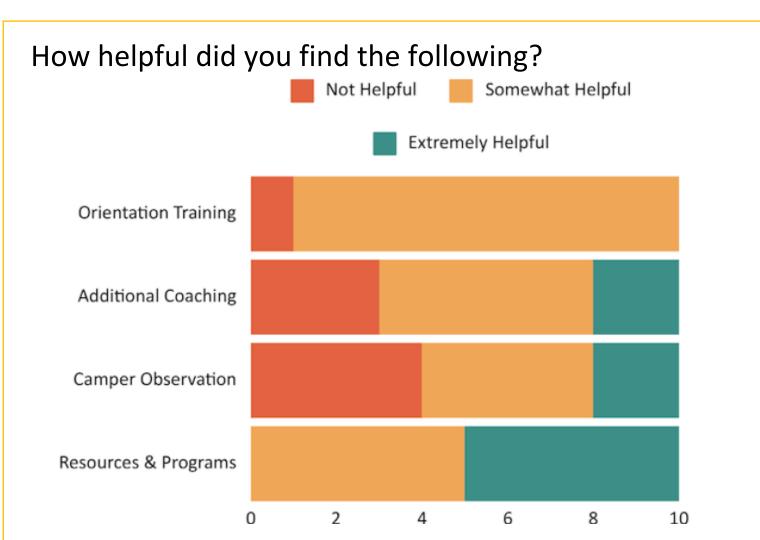
modeling

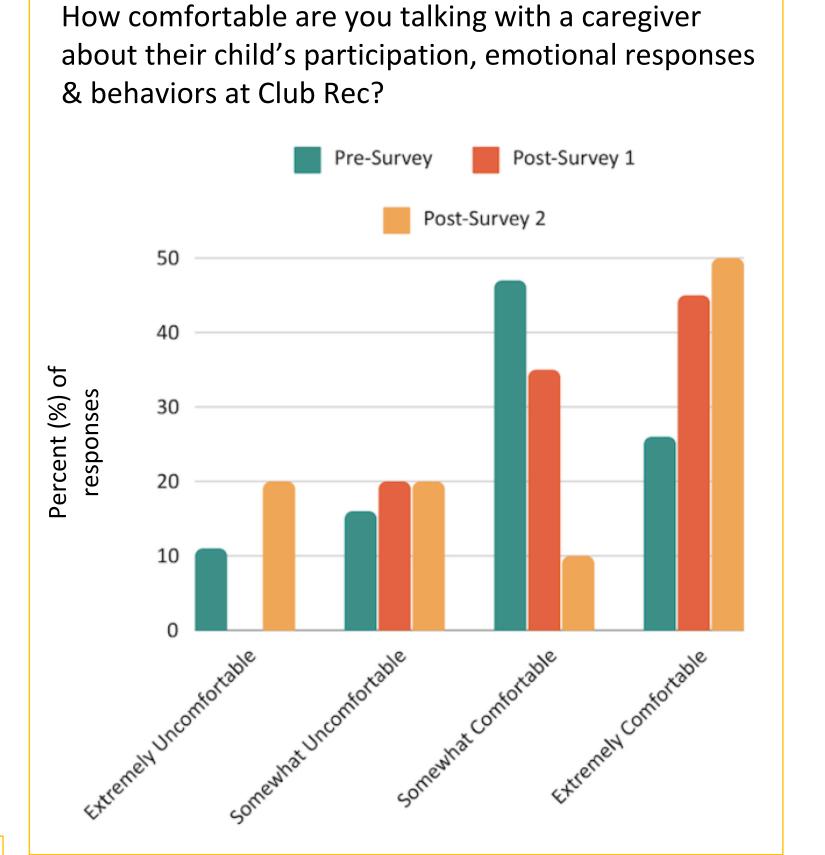
Inclusion

for campers

with ASD







Pre-survey: 24 responses; 1st Post-survey: 19 responses; 2nd Post-survey: 10 responses (+6 incomplete responses)

- Staff and counselors demonstrated an increase in knowledge of concepts related to self-regulation
- 80% of survey participants Definitely agree and another 10-15% of participants Probably agree that counselors and staff positively affect campers' behaviors and ability to manage their emotions

References & Resources:



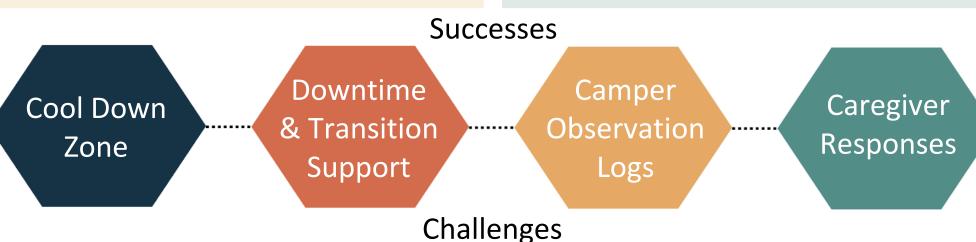
Program Development & Review

At least 5 campers used a CDZ each day; 90% of staff that used CDZs reported positive camper outcomes

Timers & visual schedules minimized unexpected behaviors and strong reactions during transitions

Counselors reported that caregivers appreciated conversations around camper observations

Caregivers shared information to help Club Rec support their child's participation



Limited implementation by staff of mindfulness and breathing exercises introduced in staff

training Inconsistency with observation logs and infrequent follow-up conversations with caregivers

Staff required frequent reminders to initiate downtime activities and implement strategies from training

Few caregiver responses; Nonmedical responses were not used to prepare and support counselors

Future Considerations

Topics for staff training:

- Strategies for working with children with ADHD
- Navigating conversations with caregivers
- Additional coaching and support for new staff members

Limitations:

- Decrease in number of surveys completed from the 2nd to the 3rd survey may be result of staff burn-out or decrease in motivation at the end of the summer. Some of the results may not accurately depict counselor and staff views due to a smaller sample size for the final survey.
- Some staff did not complete the initial pre-survey

Recommendations

Staff training and development:

- 1. Counselor engagement & motivation
 - Focus-groups around expectations of working at camp and motivations
 - Team-leads assigned for each age group to support counselors with completing observation logs and supporting team morale
- 2. Specialist coaching
- Activity modifications
- Planning and leading
- . Leadership team training (director, assistant directors, inclusion director)
- Professionalism, feedback, behavior modeling, strengths-based approach
- Prepare them to effectively lead and give feedback to counselors and staff
- Clearly define roles and expectations

Caregiver communication & interaction:

- 1. Questions on registration forms and caregiver survey
- 2. Weekly updates from counselors using camper observation notes
- 3. Club Rec welcome/introduction video for new campers

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