**The Summer Inclusion Program at Charlottesville Parks and Recreation**

What is the Summer Inclusion Program?

The Summer Inclusion Program is a local collaboration that provides mentors, adaptive materials, and on-going support to assist with the inclusion of children with special needs in Charlottesville Parks and Recreation summer camps.  The Summer Inclusion Program’s mission is to help create a supportive environment for children who could use just a little extra assistance in camp, due to special needs. We provide a trained inclusion leader at each participating site. We provide simple adaptive materials. We provide training on inclusion to all summer camp personnel, and are available for additional trainings and support throughout the summer.

What Is the Camp Setting Like?

The Charlottesville Parks and Recreation summer camps run for six weeks.  The main camp program runs from 9am-4pm with before and aftercare available.  All programs are run at indoor sites, primarily schools.  It is a full, busy program with a variety of camp activities and field trips.  The elementary programs house up to 140 children who have completed grades Pre-K through 3 in groups with an average of 20 children.  Each group has 2 leaders.  The children move from activity to activity with their groups, but there are some all camp activities.  The pre-teen programs house up to 90 children who have completed grades 4-6.  They are assigned to groups of approximately 25 children with two leaders.  In this setting children move from activity to activity with whoever will be doing that activity.  They do some activities with the entire camp.  The two pre-teen groups go on many field trips together.

What does the Inclusion Leader do?

Our Inclusion Leaders have two primary roles: They provide support and encouragement for children in order to help them become more comfortable and successful with activities that might otherwise prove challenging.  They share strategies with other staff members so that all of the staff can better understand and accommodate children with special needs. The Inclusion Leader is not a medical, behavioral, or educational specialist. S/he is not there to provide therapeutic interventions, but to lessen the likelihood that a child’s disabilities will disrupt his or her camp experience.  The Inclusion Leader provides simple support and suggestions while at the same time encouraging children to function as independently as possible.

In practice this work plays out in a variety of ways, even in the same setting. Here are some of the things our Inclusion Leaders have done to help children be successful in Charlottesville Parks and Recreation Programs:

* Step in to help calm an agitated child.
* Offer suggestions on how to adapt a craft activity for a child with fine motor coordination issues.
* Help a leader simplify instructions for a child with intellectual disabilities.
* Take over a group so that another camp leader can focus on assisting a struggling child.
* Recommend solutions to reduce problem behaviors (one Inclusion Leader created a safe place for a child who tended to run from the room when overwhelmed).
* Provide materials and activities that are well suited to a child’s needs and interests.

These are only a few of the ways the Inclusion Leaders have provided support to participating programs. The needs of each child and program will vary.

Does the mentor provide one-to-one support to children with special needs?

We do not have enough staff to provide one-to-one support for a child who needs it all the time.   Typically, we find that there are up to a dozen children enrolled in a program who need support from time to time. Our Inclusion Leaders support these children as needed. Some require help more often than others and Inclusion Leaders need to be accessible to more than one child.

Who are the children you serve?

We are open to serving any child with special needs who can be expected to be successful in this setting with the level of support described above. Thus far, we have served children with autism spectrum disorders, cognitive challenges, mood disorders, ADHD, and learning disabilities.  Children need to be able to function with a one-to-ten adult child ratio with occasional support. They need to be able to respond to cues and supports.  As an example: a child who ran out when overwhelmed was successful because she responded well to reminders to go to her safe spot.  If a child is unable to resist dangerous or disruptive behaviors even with cues, camp staff will need to evaluate the appropriateness and safety of the setting for the child at that time.

Will there be an Inclusion Leader at every camp?

There will be an Inclusion Leader assigned to every elementary and pre-teen site, a total of five camps. There will be no Inclusion Leaders in the teen and summer playground programs.  It is possible that original assignments will be changed, based on emerging needs of the camps. In other words, if one site does not need an Inclusion Leader’s support, s/he could be re-assigned to a site that could benefit from an additional Inclusion Leader on site.

What are the roles of Camping for All and The Enrichment Alliance?

Camping for All and The Enrichment Alliance are partnering organizations in The Summer Inclusion Program. Our staff members assist in the recruitment and screening of mentors. We provide the mentors with pre-service training. We train all camp staff on the role of the mentor and provide some quick strategies for assisting children with the types of challenges we most typically see.  Through the course of the summer, we visit camps weekly to observe, talk things over with staff, and make recommendations for assisting campers.  We are available to camp staff and mentors by phone and e-mail as well.

I think this might be a good match for my child. What do I do now?

You will need to enroll your child in Charlottesville Parks and Recreation’s summer program, indicating on the registration form that you would like to have your child participate in the Summer Inclusion Program.  You will be contacted by someone from The Summer Inclusion Program. We will have a candid discussion about what we can and cannot offer in the way of support, to allow you to determine if this program is a good choice for your child.  Conversations with school staff and service providers will help us understand your child’s needs, so we would appreciate your permission to exchange information with them.  [Consent forms](http://enrichmentalliance.org/?page_id=652) may be downloaded at the Enrichment Alliance websites.  [Camp registration forms](http://www.charlottesville.org/Index.aspx?page=32) are available through the Charlottesville Parks and Recreation website. We will all do our best to help your child have a positive experience, but please remember this is not a therapeutic or special education program, and do not enroll your child if you do not believe s/he can function in the conditions described.

I don’t think my child can be successful with the level of support you are able to offer. What else is there?

Charlottesville Parks and Recreation offers a Therapeutic Recreation Program for children and youth with moderate disabilities, ages 8-21, at Crow Recreation Center.  The program runs from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm Monday through Friday. After the summer camp program ends there is a 1 week Camp Creativity Program, a 1 week Camp Green Challenge Program for teens with disabilities and a 1 week adult camp. For information on these programs contact [Sarah Blech](mailto:blechs@charlottesville.org) (434-970-3264).

For information about other local and regional programs for children with disabilities, contact [Deb Shapiro](mailto:camping4all@earthlink.net) at Camping for All (434-806-8835).