Is your community reaching everyone everyday?
Exploring the experiences and perspectives of recreation practitioners in serving low-income citizens.

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Background

Benefits of physical activity (PA) are well recognized. Over half (52%) of the Canadian population is inactive. Among those that are inactive, low-income individuals are at greatest risk. Little research has been done with those individuals that are providing the PA opportunities to low-income citizens.

Purpose

The primary objective was to glean the benefits of, and challenges to implementing programs designed for low-income citizens as experienced by recreation providers.

Methods

Design: Exploratory Qualitative Research Design. Social marketing concepts and theory provided the orientational framework to the design.

Participants: Recreation providers working in municipal recreation centres across Vancouver Island (N=9).

Data Collection: 7 key informant interviews conducted; Preliminary coding completed to create categories for the focus group; Focus group conducted to generate feedback about the initial interpretation of the data with 7 interviewees and 2 additional practitioners.

Data Analysis: Audio tape recordings transcribed verbatim and coded using Microsoft Word and NVIVO 2.0 Qualitative Software using grounded theory techniques.

Results

PRODUCT:
Core: The raison d'être of recreation as a profession, was the joy and ‘flow’ that leisure can offer everyone.
Tangible: Providing accessible and affordable opportunities for physical activity and recreation was extremely important to the participants and at the heart of what they do.
Augmented: Establishing partnerships and sustained relationships with community organizations.

PLACE:

We are in the people business, what I am is part of what I do...

PRICE:

We are a business, in municipal recreation...unfortunately we can’t meet any target productions by focusing solely on low-income.

Discussion

• Providers are rewarded intrinsically by offering programs to low-income citizens.
• Local government and policy makers need to ensure that providers are supported and rewarded for the work that they do.
• The development of partnerships will ensure that providers are able to collaborate with service organizations to enhance the likelihood of reaching low-income citizens.
• Creating policies that support the built environment will allow providers to implement services that are low cost and convenient for low-income citizens.

Conclusion

SM has been successful in framing this study as it has allowed the structure of the research questions, data collection, data analyses and results to be guided by a process that is shaped by and hinged upon an audience-centered approach. While low income citizens have often been considered an ‘audience’ by social marketing researchers, rarely have those who are tasked with delivering services for them been seen as a primary audience. This study contributes to our understanding of practitioners’ experiences and needs, and how to address them in order to more meaningfully reach low income citizens.

References