



PARENT Connection

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Join In: The Benefits of Community Programming

A parent interview with Oksana Romanov.

By Andrew Arruda, Family Support Coach, TPAS, Surrey Place Centre



There are many benefits of being involved in community programming. Community programs such as swimming, sports, music, and play groups are delivered in an organized, safe and supported way. These programs allow individuals with similar interests, needs and abilities to enjoy taking part in activities together.

Community programs promote the generalization of known skills. This means a child can perform the skill across many people, in multiple locations and at different times of the day. For example, the words and actions to songs learned at home can be practiced with teachers and peers in music class.

These programs also give parents the opportunity to connect with one another. It can be beneficial for parents to belong to multiple communities at the same time, including their local, cultural, parental, and autism communities. These communities can provide supportive settings where parents may share information face to face with

other people who have shared interests and experiences.

Oksana Romanov, a parent of a child who is currently involved in TPAS, provided a parent's perspective on community involvement. Some of the community programs she and her son have participated in are *Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation - Adapted Programs and Integrated Service*, *Ontario Early Years - Let's Get Started*, and *Triple P*. Oksana highlights specific benefits from her involvement: "It is a way of giving back to my community...makes me feel better... you can create partnerships, alliances, and supports." Parents may find that there are unanticipated benefits to participating in community programming, such as forming new friendships and discovering new skills or activities that their child enjoys. Oksana describes her experience: "Parents are looking for a path for themselves and their child. They have some idea what they may find, but they also never know what they may find."

Here are a few useful resources to help you get involved in community programs in your area:

City of Toronto: Parks, Forestry and Recreation

<http://www.toronto.ca/parks/>
416-338-4FUN

Offers a wide range of recreational programs and summer camps for children of all abilities. Participants are offered varied supports to promote safe and meaningful experiences through the Adapted and Integrated Services program. Families are also eligible to receive financial assistance for recreation programs under the "Welcome Policy."

Ontario Camping Association (OCA)

www.ontariocamps.ca
416-485-0425

A complete listing of all residential and day camps in Ontario, including those for children with special needs. Also provides a listing of Bursary and Subsidy Programs available to help with the cost of camp.

Respiteservices.com

<http://www.respiteservices.com/>
416-322-6317 ext.1

Provides support in developing respite options on behalf of families in Toronto. Coordination can also be provided in order to overcome barriers to respite, and includes assisting families with funding forms, contacting agencies on behalf of families and assisting families to connect with support workers.

Autism Ontario

<http://www.autismontario.com/>
416-246-9592

Provides information on local services, including community resources, summer camps, and funding options. Also provides a link to the CALYPSO website, which is a specialized resource designed to help parents find the right camp or camp program for their child or youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Ontario.



Contact your Family Support Coach for more information on getting funding options to help with the cost of community programs.

Planning for Successful Community Involvement

By Anna Peitos, Instructor Therapist, TPAS, Surrey Place Centre



With March Break and the summer quickly approaching, many parents will ask, "How can I get my child involved in new activities this year?" Choosing the right activities to participate in is an important first step. Learn about your child's strengths and interests to help you choose new activities in the community. Does your child enjoy water play, dancing, physical activities, or quiet environments? Finding out about your child's interests can help you discover several different programs and activities in your community, such as swimming lessons, going to the movies, a trampoline club, or The Science Centre. Routines and schedules may be an important part of your child's life and trying something new may create some worry and bring up many questions. Start your planning for community involvement by answering a few questions:

What are some useful strategies that I can use to introduce my child to new environments and activities?

While your child may show a preference for structure and routines, exposing your child to new environments or situations can help

create new routines and may change certain behaviour patterns. Using visual aids such as schedules, first/then boards, and personal stories can help prepare your child for new experiences in the community. For example, your child's instructor may be able to help you create a personal story to prepare your child for upcoming events. The story could include photos of the new activities or settings and a description of the events and social interactions that may take place.

How can I teach my child safety skills, such as staying within a group, following directions, or learning new routines?

Going for short walks in your community may be a great way to practice outdoor and traffic safety. It is helpful if you talk about the rules during these short outings so that your child becomes familiar with them. Look for frequent opportunities to reinforce your child for walking beside you, holding your hand, or stopping at a traffic light. Playing games like Red Light/Green Light can help your child practice following directions and understanding rules.

Are there any helpful techniques that I can use to work on turn-taking and sharing with my child?

Sharing and turn taking may be one of the most challenging, yet rewarding skills to teach your child. Sharing means your child will tolerate another person playing with a toy that he wants for a set amount of time. Being able to share or take turns may help children participate in group games, interact with peers, and attend activities within their community. Here are some ideas that can help you work on sharing and turn taking with your child:

- Take turns with toys that will draw your child's attention to your actions, as well as promote eye contact with you (e.g., cause and effect toys that create sounds or play music, blowing bubbles or balloons, peek-a-boo).
- Take a turn with the object or toy that your child is playing with. Use kind words to praise your child for allowing you to participate in his play.
- Start with a short period of time that your child easily tolerates (for example, a few seconds), before giving the item back. You can increase the amount of time your child is expected to share based on their success.

Introducing new experiences to your child can help strengthen important developmental skills, such as speech and language for communication, self-help skills for daily living, learning about safety in their community, and social skills for building meaningful friendships. Your child's teachers and therapists are always there to assist you with any concerns or questions you may have regarding community participation.



For individualized strategies, contact your Supervising Therapist. For additional articles, including "Activities that Encourage Sharing and Co-operating," go to www.connectability.ca.