

The saskatchewan association of recreation professionals

the benefits of hiring a ...

RECREATION
PROFESSIONAL
PROJECT



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the time given to this project by each person who agreed to be interviewed. Without their involvement and suggestions, this research could not have been completed. Thank you to those members of the Saskatchewan Association of Recreation Professionals who assisted with this project throughout the development and implementation stages. A special thank you to the Board Members and Executive Committee. We also thank Saskatchewan Lotteries for providing funding for this research project.

The *Saskatchewan Association of Recreation Professionals* is made up of over 250 members working or studying in various areas of the leisure services field including community recreation, therapeutic recreation, sports administration, facility management, parks administration, education, arts and culture, tourism and other related areas.

Mission Statement: The Saskatchewan Association of Recreation Professionals is a dynamic, volunteer driven organization committed to the ongoing development of leadership excellence of recreation professionals.

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I. INTRODUCTION

As we enter the new millennium, the recreational needs of communities and the organizations that provide programs and services are changing as they both respond to increasing financial pressures, participant demands, migration to urban living, increasing recognition and emphasis on wellness and prevention, and aging infrastructure. The Saskatchewan Association of Recreation Professionals (S.A.R.P.) ,in discussion with its members and educational institutions, cite the following trends as impacting recreation professionals in community recreation and therapeutic recreation.

- ❖ The evolving roles of professionals as “facilitator” and “enabler” as recreation, economic development and tourism responsibilities are being combined into one position.
- ❖ Increased recognition by the public of the “value” of recreation (social and economic impact).
- ❖ An increase in employment opportunities; *Statistics Canada Opportunities* has identified the Sport, Culture and Recreation field as one of the highest growth sectors in the country.
- ❖ Evolving Professionalism - an increase in the development of certification and standards for the recreation/leisure sector.
- ❖ Exercise therapy evolving as a profession. Also, there’s more emphasis on exercise for the aging population.
- ❖ Changing demographics to a more urban-based population. Lower population levels mean a decreased demand for recreation and consequently, decreased funding for rural recreation positions.
- ❖ Volunteers’ time is at a premium, meaning an increased need for paid recreation personnel.
- ❖ Long-term care is becoming less available due to health care cutbacks. This will increase employment opportunities in therapeutic recreation, especially in outreach programs where Recreation Therapists go into people’s homes.
- ❖ An increase in partnerships between the recreation field and service agencies that target children (e.g. Youth at Risk) will increase employment opportunities, especially for therapeutic recreation graduates.
- ❖ Areas of concern in the medical profession are constantly changing. This brings about the need for continuous learning about new and different diseases, illnesses and disabilities.

The Saskatchewan Association of Recreation Professionals (S.A.R.P.) recognized it was becoming increasingly important to promote the value of employing educated, trained and qualified *Recreation Professionals*. Consequently, a project entitled “The Benefits of Hiring a Recreation Professional” was implemented in September 1999. The purpose of the project was to research and develop an information package along with presentation materials that could be used by S.A.R.P. and its members to promote to employers, other professions, and the public the benefits of hiring a *Recreation Professional*.

The definition of a *Recreation Professional* for the purpose of this research: *an individual with a minimum diploma in the area of recreation or leisure.*

The project involved a survey of employers of recreation personnel from rural and urban Saskatchewan to determine what benefits they believed resulted from hiring *Recreation Professionals*, what factors impacted their hiring decisions and what qualifications, skills and experience they looked for when hiring recreation positions. It also involved talking to employers to determine why they were not employing *Recreation Professionals*.

As part of this project, personnel from the educational institutions in Saskatchewan that provide programs in recreation/leisure were also interviewed to identify what the institutions were doing to promote their recreation/leisure graduates and/or the profession itself.

Interviews by phone and face-to-face meetings took place from September 16 through October 14, 1999. Efforts were made to include employers from all geographical areas of the province including rural and urban representation. Research participants included:

- ❖ Nineteen employers of Recreation Therapists, Activity Workers and other personnel who delivered recreation services
- ❖ Twenty employers of community recreation personnel
- ❖ Three institutions SIAST; Kelsey both Therapeutic Recreation and Recreation and Leisure Diploma programs; University of Saskatchewan College of Kinesiology; and University of Regina Faculty of Physical Activities Studies.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE SURVEY OF EMPLOYERS

- ❖ To determine what employers in the community and therapeutic recreation sector perceive as the benefits of hiring *Recreation Professionals*
- ❖ To determine current hiring practices/trends and if regional differences exist
- ❖ To identify what qualifications, skills, and experience employers look for when hiring
- ❖ To identify reasons employers do not hire *Recreation Professionals*
- ❖ To identify strategies for the Saskatchewan Association of Recreation Professionals

III. INTERVIEW FINDINGS

i. Educational Institutions

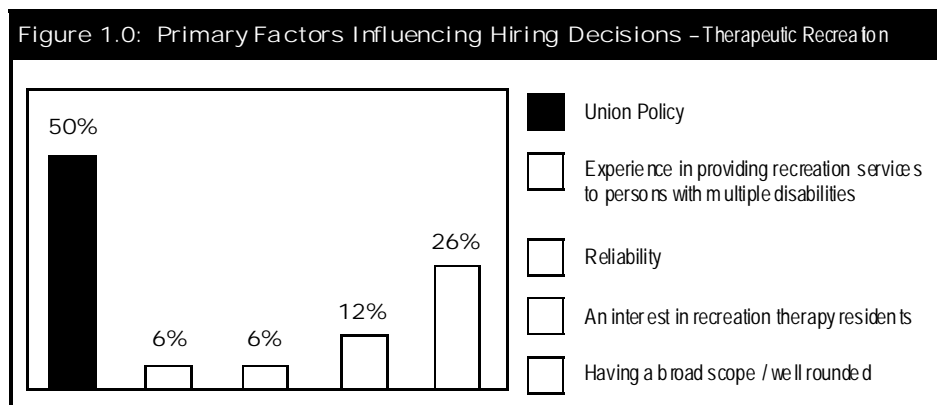
Educators identified the employment rate for recent graduates of recreation/leisure programs is high, there is little they do to promote these graduates to employers. The Recreation and Leisure program at SIAST – Kelsey Campus is the exception. The other programs view it as the graduate’s responsibility to find his or her own employment. The institutions place their emphasis on promoting educational programs to prospective students. The majority of graduates are able to secure employment, consequently, they did not feel a need to place greater emphasis or resources to assist students looking for employment. Every institution has a career placement office to assist students looking for employment but none of them had a direct promotional strategy. A detailed report, *Talking to Educational Institutions: Community and Therapeutic Recreation in Saskatchewan*, is available from the provincial office.

ii. Therapeutic Recreation

We asked employers the open-ended question: “What benefits do you perceive as being attributed to an employee’s educational background in recreation / leisure studies?” Forty percent (40%) of those interviewed identified that assessment skills were a significant benefit to their organization. Thirty-three percent (33%) cited communication skills, organizational skills, program planning, and broad perspective/vision. Twenty-seven percent (27%) identified that understanding the behavior of people with disease, illness and disabilities was a benefit and 27% said better documentation skills was a significant benefit to their organization.

Figure 1.0 illustrates the primary factors influencing hiring decisions. These were as follows: 50% union policy regarding seniority; 26% broad scope of ideas and well rounded; 12% interest in recreation therapy and the residents. Employers were also asked what other qualifications, skills and experience they were looking for when hiring: 40% identified field experience; 27% organizational skills and the ability to get along well with residents; and 20% program planning skills.

Employee skills as identified by the employer contribute to a higher quality of treatment and an increased quality of life and level of independence for the client.



Due to the specialized training the client is able to progress more quickly in restoration of health, which can result in earlier discharge and reduced re-admissions into the health care system thereby, reducing healthcare costs. A detailed report, *Talking to Employers: Therapeutic Recreation in Saskatchewan*, is available from the provincial office.

Employers identified that:

- ❖ There is a need to increase the level of understanding of the value of therapeutic recreation and value received from hiring a Recreation Professional, by employers, employees and health district boards
- ❖ The financial crisis in health care (especially in rural Saskatchewan) has a negative impact on decisions about hiring recreation staff (both increasing numbers and paying for the additional qualifications).
- ❖ Approximately half of the employers interviewed said union policy was a major factor in hiring decisions. Seniority took precedence over leisure/recreation education qualifications when hiring positions other than Recreation Therapists.
- ❖ There was a general lack of understanding of the role of a Recreation Therapist and it is often perceived as not as important as physical therapy or occupational therapy. This applies to both rural and urban areas.
- ❖ The unavailability of diploma program graduates with a specialization in therapeutic recreation (there is a new Therapeutic Recreation Diploma Program offered at SIAST (Kelsey Campus) but the first graduates will not be available until 2001) resulted in employers hiring under-qualified people to fill positions requiring these credentials.
- ❖ Some identified a difficulty in attracting personnel with the recreation/leisure qualifications to their rural community.

iii. Community Recreation

We asked employers the open-ended question: “What benefits do you perceive as being attributed to an employee’s educational background in recreation/leisure studies?”. Figure 2.0 on the following page illustrates the employer responses.

Fifty-three percent 53% of those interviewed identified *programming* and *budgeting/accounting skills*. Forty percent (40%) identified *a strong philosophical base and understanding of recreation, which they felt, was a critical area that set Recreation Professional apart from others*. Thirty-three percent (33%) said *written communication skills* were definite benefits and 27% identified *leadership skills*. Twenty percent (20%) identified problem solving, oral communication, marketing/advertising knowledge, organizational skills and knowledge of grant structure and proposal writing. A detailed report, *Talking to Employers: Community Recreation in Saskatchewan*, is available from the provincial office.

The primary factors influencing hiring decisions were: 40% existing post-secondary education; 26% experience in the recreation field; and 20% union policy regarding seniority. Employers were also asked what other qualifications, skills and experience they were looking for when hiring: 16 % identified leadership skills, interest in recreation, local candidates, accounting background, knowledge of recreation philosophy, and marketing skills.

Figure 2.0: Primary Factors Influencing Hiring Decisions – Community Recreation



Employers identified that:

- ❖ The relationship between hiring a *Recreation Professional* and the associated financial savings is an important message that needs to be communicated to employers
- ❖ The majority of employers who do not hire *Recreation Professionals* said it was directly related to budget constraints (this was true for rural and urban)
- ❖ Union policy regarding seniority was also preventing some employers from filling recreation positions with *Recreation Professionals*, particularly in urban centres.
- ❖ Rural Saskatchewan reported recreation, being a “soft service” receives budget cuts before other required services such as road improvements in a community. Respondents said that while rural communities do not want to see recreation opportunities eliminated, they will choose to “downgrade” the recreation services by having volunteer recreation boards develop and deliver programming or by decreasing the quality and quantity of programs.
- ❖ Small town Saskatchewan has a unique culture. Being accepted into a community is often hard for an “outsider”. Often volunteer boards or local people are used, who may not have the same skill level as a *Recreation Professional*. These people are often preferred simply because they are from the local community. In addition, public support may not be there for the recreation person if it is perceived he/she is taking a job opportunity away from a local person. Many people from small town Saskatchewan feel strongly that rural jobs should be given to rural people.
- ❖ Rural community councils and boards need to be educated about the potential for quality recreation programming, the value of recreation, and how it can improve their town and community.
- ❖ Many urban employers mentioned that “finding a candidate with recreation experience” was critical, often more important than finding one with the educational requirements. Three urban employers commented that they would not hire right out of post-secondary school and that they required employees with a minimum of 2 years experience in a small town Recreation Director position or with a sport governing body.
- ❖ Rural and urban Saskatchewan both identified the undervaluing of recreation and *Recreation Professionals*. Efforts should be concentrated on raising awareness of the economic and societal value of hiring *Recreational Professionals* and the value of recreation to many audiences including employers, provincial and municipal government, health district boards, employee’s unions, regional recreation boards/associations and other stakeholders.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE ADDRESSED

The S.A.R.P. board of directors has reviewed and prioritised the recommendations put forward from the reports on educational institutions, therapeutic recreation and community recreation.

The following recommendations are seen by S.A.R.P. as high priorities. **Recommendations have notations that detail actions to December 2000.**

i. Education Institution Recommendations

1. DEVELOP A PROMOTIONAL STRATEGY AIMED SPECIFICALLY AT INCREASING AWARENESS OF S.A.R.P. AND ITS BENEFITS TO STUDENTS.

RATIONALE: Many recreation/leisure students are not aware of S.A.R.P. or the benefits of becoming a member of the organization.

How this is being addressed:

- Strategy implemented through 2000-2001 Membership and Recruitment, and Professional Leadership plans and will continue in future years. Successful recruitment of 40 student members in 2000.
2. S.A.R.P. SHOULD PURSUE STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS THAT OFFER RECREATIO/LEISURE PROGRAMS IN SASKATCHEWAN.

RATIONALE: The educational institutions can provide valuable input with respect to the development of promotional strategies and materials for employment, and lobbying efforts for *Recreation Professionals*.

How this is being addressed:

- Strategies in place to increase student contact with the Association, and to promote this project through the advisory committees of the TR and Recreation and Tourism program at SIAST, and through the U of R and U of S senate representatives.

ii. Therapeutic Recreation Recommendations

1. PROMOTE TO EMPLOYERS, CO-WORKERS AND UNIONS THE BENEFITS OF HIRING A RECREATION PROFESSIONAL, THE BENEFITS OF THERAPEUTIC RECREATION, AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO.

RATIONALE: Currently there is very little material available which promotes the benefits of recreation and the benefits of hiring a *Recreational Professional*. Many employers said people within their organizations were unaware of recreation as a critical component of resident care or of the impact it has on the quality of life of clients. The financial status of Saskatchewan's healthcare system is impacting the number and level of recreation personnel being hired in the province. Health District boards may not be aware of the financial benefits associated with hiring a *Recreation Professional* or the economic impact of therapeutic recreation itself. Union policy came up in nearly every conversation. This was identified as an area of major concern since seniority often takes precedence over educational background when hiring recreation personnel

in positions other than *Recreation Therapists*. Management should also review job descriptions so they reflect the value of an education in therapeutic recreation.

How this is being addressed:

- S.A.R.P. is hosting a trade show booth at the 2001 SAHO conference in conjunction with the Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association and the Saskatchewan Recreation Facilities Association. S.A.R.P. has proposed to present a session to employers at that conference as well.
- S.A.R.P. president sends an introductory letter and “Benefits of Hiring” project information to each employer that advertises a position in Saskatchewan TR. Plans underway to target and contact other employers and unions in 2001.
- Members can borrow the presentation materials from the Benefits project to present to co-workers and employers.

2. S.A.R.P. (AND OTHER RELATED ASSOCIATIONS) SHOULD MAKE LOBBYING GOVERNMENT ON RECREATION ISSUES A PRIORITY.

RATIONALE: Many of those interviewed suggested the need for a louder voice to provincial government on the importance of therapeutic recreation and its impact on the health and wellness of Saskatchewan’s residents and healthcare costs.

How this is being addressed:

- This is a priority that the Professional Leadership core function area will work on in 2001.

3. DEVELOP, OR WORK WITH OTHER ASSOCIATIONS TO DEVELOP CERTIFICATION AND STANDARDS OF PRACTICE FOR THERAPEUTIC RECREATION IN SASKATCHEWAN

RATIONALE: According to employers, the lack of certification and standards of practice has a great effect on the industry. It is more difficult to promote recreation therapy as a credible, necessary service, especially when working alongside doctors, nurses, physical therapists and occupational therapists, who all have standards and certification.

How this is being addressed:

- Provincial S.A.R.P. standards of practice were adopted by the membership at the 2000 AGM.
- The Canadian Therapeutic Recreation Association is looking at national certification at this time.

Community Recreation Recommendations

1. RAISE AWARENESS OF AND PROMOTE TO EMPLOYERS THE BENEFITS OF HIRING A RECREATION PROFESSIONAL, AND THE BENEFITS OF RECREATION IN GENERAL. EDUCATE UNIONS ABOUT THE VALUE OF A LEISURE SERVICES EDUCATION AND THE BENEFITS THAT PERSONS WITH THIS BACKGROUND BRING TO THE ORGANIZATION.

RATIONALE: Employers do not understand the relationship between employing *Recreation Professionals* and the associated financial benefits to the organization (e.g. the reduced need for on-the-job training or the reduced risk of injuries). Many do not understand the benefits of recreation in general. Union policy sometimes dictates hiring people who are not *Recreation Professionals* over individuals with the proper education in recreation/leisure due to seniority criteria.

How this is being addressed:

- S.A.R.P. president sends “Benefits of Hiring” information to all employers who advertise for community recreation staff.
 - Partnered with Saskatchewan Parks and Recreation Association to produce promotional materials and to train professionals to deliver Benefits workshops.
 - Will attend SUMA and SARM conferences as exhibitors in 2001
 - Will be targeting employers and unions in 2001
 - Members can borrow the presentation materials from the Benefits project to present to co-workers and employers.
2. IDENTIFY THE BENEFITS OF HIRING A RECREATION PROFESSIONAL THAT WERE NOT MENTIONED BY EMPLOYERS WHEN INTERVIEWED AND THEN PROMOTE THOSE BENEFITS TO THE EMPLOYERS. RAISE AWARENESS TO EMPLOYERS OF S.A.R.P. AS A RESOURCE AND SUPPORT FOR RECREATION PROFESSIONALS.

RATIONALE: Employers did not identify some significant benefits such as superior community development skills, superior volunteer management skills and access to membership in a professional association that are related to the hiring of a *Recreation Professional*.

How this is being addressed:

- Members will be canvassed to provide examples of skills that employers did not mention. This information will be added to the Presenter’s Guide for the Benefits of Hiring a Recreation Professional.
3. LOBBY THE PROVINCIAL AND MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS. A STRONG, AGGRESSIVE LOBBYING STRATEGY SHOULD BE DEVELOPED TO INCREASE THE PROFILE OF RECREATION AND LEISURE ON THEIR AGENDAS.

RATIONALE: Many employers felt that the governments were not well enough informed about the benefits of recreation such as reduced healthcare costs and other socio-economic impacts (e.g. youth violence).

How this is being addressed:

- In 2001 plan for Professional Leadership core function area to develop and implement such a strategy.

IV. CONCLUSION

As noted, the many of the recommendations have been incorporated into the strategic plan of the Saskatchewan Association of Recreation Professionals. As well, some recommendations have been successfully implemented. The board of directors will continue to update this document on a regular basis, to keep the membership informed on the progress of implementing each recommendation.