

**Continuing Education Needed by Park and Recreation Professionals  
to Ensure the Inclusion of People With Disabilities**

**Sabrina Fernando**



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**Department of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance  
Faculty of Human Development  
Victoria University of Technology**

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Fernando, Sabrina

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## Abstract

# CONTINUING EDUCATION NEEDED BY PARK AND RECREATION PROFESSIONALS TO ENSURE THE INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

By Sabrina Fernando

This study was concerned with determining the competencies required and the subsequent education needed for the implementation of inclusive practices within the park and recreation industry. With 3.6 million people or 19 percent of its total population possessing a disability, Australia is experiencing a transformation of its programs and practices as they relate to the inclusion of people with disabilities. Especially noteworthy is the impact that inclusion is having on the park and recreation industry. In order for park and recreation professionals to achieve a cutting edge standard of service delivery to people of all abilities, a study was undertaken to determine the skills, ability and knowledge that are needed to ensure inclusive practices.

Parks and Leisure Australia agreed, through its National Board of Directors, for its members to serve as participants in this study. The data analysed to obtain the results of the study was gathered from a questionnaire that was mailed to a random sample of eight hundred Parks and Leisure Australia members. It sought information in the following areas:

- The importance of competencies to park and recreation professionals' jobs for including people with disabilities.
- The level of perceived competence park and recreation professionals possess for including people with disabilities.
- The professional development needed by park and recreation professionals for implementation of inclusive practices.

This study examined the results of a needs assessment of Parks and Leisure Australia members and provides a list of recommendations for continuing

education programs that will assist the park and recreation industry to break down existing barriers to inclusive practice. The results of this study will provide important opportunities for the enhancement of the professional development requirements of modern day park and recreation professionals and the promotion of the rights of people with disabilities and their families.

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## List of Definitions

- Competence** – The demonstrated ability to complete a specific task (The Australian Education Council and Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training, 1992).
- Competency** – “The most superior or recommended technique for using knowledge or skills in successful job performance” (Clardy, 1997, p. 51).
- Continuing Education** – Post initial education that has special significance to professional development (Tennant, 1991).
- Disability** – Any restriction (resulting from impairment) or lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being (WHO, 1980).
- Education** – A process of systematic instruction for the purpose of intellectual and moral development (Oxford Dictionary, 1989).
- Inclusion** – The full acceptance and integration of people with disabilities into mainstream services which results in free and equal access to mainstream life (Smith, Austin, & Kennedy, 1996).
- Learning** – A relatively permanent change in cognition (i.e. understanding and thinking) that results from experience and that directly influences behaviour” (Blanchard and Thacker, 1999, p. 4).
- Leisure** – discretionary time which is used in a manner the individual chooses.
- Need** – “A discrepancy between desired and actual performance” (Clardy, 1997), p. 51).
- Needs Assessment** – An on-going and systematic process which provides useful information about the needs of a target population to those who can use it to influence policy and programs (Reviere, Berkowitz, Carter, & Ferguson, 1996).
- Parks and Leisure Australia** – The key Australian professional association which provides a broad range of services to members of the parks and recreation industry; an industry which represents a large range of professionals working in both private and public sectors in the areas of

public parks, botanic gardens, open space environments, recreation and leisure services (Parks and Leisure Australia, n.d.).

**Recreation** – Activities voluntarily undertaken to bring about pleasure and satisfaction during leisure time (Pigram, 1983).

**Training** – A process bringing a person to a desired state or standard of efficiency through instruction and practice (Oxford Dictionary, 1989).

## Chapter One

### Introduction

As Australia enters the twenty-first century, the inclusion of people with a diverse range of abilities into programs and services within our communities, has become the cutting edge standard for organisations. Inclusion celebrates and embraces the difference between individuals, based upon a belief that society benefits by including rather than excluding individuals who are viewed as different. Mahon, Mactavish, Bockstael, O'Dell, and Siegenthaler (2000) explain that individuals without disabilities benefit from inclusion because they learn different viewpoints and focus on shared interests between themselves and people with disabilities. This in turn benefits the community because it creates greater awareness and acceptance of diversity. As a result, human service organisations need to adopt positive attitudes and supportive practices to ensure that all individuals can participate in a range of freely chosen programs and activities (Lockwood & Lockwood, 1999).

Inclusion takes on considerable importance in Australia where 3.6 million people or nineteen percent of the total population have a disability (ABS, 1998). Inclusion is the full acceptance and integration of people with disabilities into general services which results in free and equal access to mainstream life (Smith, Austin, & Kennedy, 1996). A 2001 Victorian Government Draft State Disability Plan provides the following perspective on inclusion:

Inclusion is about belonging, and having a choice about how you interact with other people in the community. It is about having a place, having a role, having your rights as a citizen respected and safeguarded, and being valued for who you are and for the contributions you make to society (p. 55).

Deinstitutionalisation and the philosophical shift toward community living, along with an ageing Australian population, has resulted in an ever increasing number of individuals with disabilities living in the community. With a

continuously ageing population comes the certainty that more and more people with disabilities will display varying levels of interest in accessing park and recreation programs and services within our communities. Healey (2000) indicates that many of the lifestyle needs of people with disabilities are not being currently met, however, and that creative steps need to be taken to ensure this changes. Darcy (2001) elaborates on this point of view by claiming that people with disabilities have been systematically discriminated against in regard to access to leisure goods and services. Darcy believes that leisure providers through inclusive practice can improve upon the quality and quantity of services available to people with disabilities. The Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic games provided an important benchmark for continued reform in Australia. According to Darcy, reform should involve leisure providers striving for inclusive practices, programs and enabling environments which will maximise leisure participation by people with disabilities.

People with disabilities have a long history of exclusion. Rizvi and Christensen (1996) provide and discuss a range of historical perspectives that offer important understandings and insights surrounding the lives of people with disabilities. They remind us that no more than forty years ago many people with disabilities were forced to live in institutions in conditions of suffering and deprivation. Rizvi and Christensen inform us that:

In many cases conditions of incarceration for people with disabilities were far more terrible than those which existed for people with criminal convictions. Yet, these people had committed no offence against society. They suffered such degrading and inhumane treatment simply because they were disabled (p. 1).

The parks and recreation industry in the developed world has begun to redress a range of shortfalls relating to the injustices and inadequacies of services for people with disabilities by openly endorsing the concept of inclusive practice. Though this is the case, the industry requires further work to demonstrate a closer match between the concept of inclusivity and practice (Binkley, 1995). Binkley informs us that park and recreation professional's

attitudes are very important in attempting to achieve inclusiveness in the parks and recreation industry. She believes that professionals need to be proactive towards people with disabilities by being amenable to innovative changes that support the achievement of meaningful and positive experiences.

Australian law now makes it illegal to deny a person goods or services because they have a disability. The Disability Services Act (1986) supports the rights of people with disabilities to participate in the widest range of leisure activities and services available in our communities. Patterson (2001) indicates that by following DSA principles and the inclusion process, more trusting relationships between all people in a community can be built.

The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) ensures that people with a disability have access to the same opportunities that are presently available to people without disabilities. White (1994) argues that:

The spirit and intent of the Disability Discrimination Act is one of inclusion. It is about acknowledging that organisations which claim to provide for the needs of the local community actually do that, by including people with disabilities in their perception of the local community (p. 2).

Brennan (1994) discusses the importance of human rights and The Equal Opportunity Commission. The Australian government established the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 1986. Brennan states that this Commission has responsibility for serving Australian legislation to ensure that people with disabilities are given equal opportunity, as well as ensuring compliance with human rights agreements in accordance with Australian government policy.

Today, the role of parks and leisure in people's lives is recognised as being very important (Fine, 1996; Aldous & Binkley, 2001), especially in regard to quality of life and life satisfaction. Seedsman (2001) throws out a challenge to leisure managers to engage in post-modern thinking about their whole area of operations. The challenge should also include recognition of the belief that: "leisure is an important social, cultural, and economic force that has great influence upon the happiness, well-being and life satisfaction of all individuals"

(Edginton, Jordan, DeGraaf, & Edginton, 1998, p. 2). Leisure and recreation not only play the same vital role in the lives of people with disabilities ensuring the enjoyment of a balanced and quality life (Cordes & Ibrahim, 1996), but also often take on added importance because people with disabilities are frequently excluded from reaching high levels of achievement in other areas of life. The successful inclusion of people with disabilities into recreation and park programs is vital to their quality of life and sense of community acceptance. Segregated recreation programs for people with disabilities are no longer considered best practice. Rather, government policy now supports and encourages the inclusion of people with disabilities into general community park and recreation programs. Though traditional approaches to recreation for people with disabilities have been challenged, improvements to recreation outcomes for people with disabilities have not necessarily occurred (Lockwood and Lockwood, 1999). According to Stebbins (2000) the traditional approach to leisure and recreation services for people with disabilities was primarily concerned with 'keeping people busy' rather than providing meaningful activity involving choice making. Stebbins provides the following commentary to highlight the present level of thinking surrounding recreation and people with disabilities:

The thought that people with disabilities might take up a form of leisure capable of providing deep satisfaction through personal expression and a valued identity is simply incongruent with the view of them held by most professionals (p. 101).

The importance and role of both parks and recreation in assisting people to achieve life satisfaction is noted by Aldous and Binkley (2001). They state that cities all over the world are recognising the need to improve the environment they live in by enhancing and using its green space. They discuss the benefits associated with parks and plants and explain that these benefits are numerous and apply to individuals as well as societies. Aldous and Binkley inform us that "to date, research has found that plants can improve the micro and macroclimate, reduce stress and mental fatigue, increase well being, improve health and work productivity, and provide for an improved quality of life" (p. 9). These authors also

point out that although parks and plants are known to provide people with many elements for human survival, the relationship between them (i.e., parks, plants and people) is still being studied by researchers in order to advance an overall understanding.

Parks and Leisure Australia is a national professional association which provides a broad range of services to members of the parks and recreation industry; an industry which represents a large range of professionals working in both private and public sectors in the areas of public parks, botanic gardens, open space environments, recreation and leisure services (Parks and Leisure Australia, n.d.). At the present time, Parks and Leisure Australia offers opportunities for professional development through a program called CREST (*Continual Reward for Excellence in Self-Education and Training*), that aims to formally recognise the different ways in which parks and leisure professionals update their skills and knowledge. The inclusion of people with disabilities is one area in which CREST is currently interested. This research project examines perceptions surrounding the ability, skills and knowledge needed by Parks and Leisure Australia members for the successful inclusion of people with disabilities into their respective programs and services. An important challenge of this research will be the development of a continuing education framework for deployment by Parks and Leisure Australia through the CREST program.

### The Problem

People with disabilities have historically been excluded from many areas of community life. Recreation is just one area in which this has occurred. The provision of leisure and recreation services for people with disabilities has not been as efficient as it has been to other members in our community (Shivers & Hollis, 1985). They further elaborate on this point by discussing the issue of inequality in terms of access to recreation services. Shivers and Hollis claim that the equal opportunity legislation has not made any serious difference to accessibility of recreation services by people with disabilities. These authors state that equality of access is not occurring amongst people with disabilities and

steps need to be taken to ensure that equal opportunity is provided to all people living in our communities.

In today's society, people with disabilities are far more visible in the community and involved in community life. They have also begun asserting their right to higher levels of quality of life than in the past. The parks and recreation industry has become increasingly aware of the need to contribute more to the well being and quality of life of individuals within the community. Yet the quality and access of services available to people with disabilities are still largely lacking (Smith, Austin, & Kennedy, 1996). The parks and recreation industry must examine its *modus operandi* in light of this problem, especially in regard to their own knowledge of issues important to consumers with disabilities and future education of its workforce.

This view is strongly supported by Lockwood and Lockwood (1999) by way of the following statement:

Understanding the needs and preferences of people with disabilities is necessary to inform the education and training of providers, regardless of whether services are provided by specialist recreation providers or generic recreation professionals (p. 148).

### Aim

This study was concerned with determining the competencies required and the subsequent education needed for the implementation of inclusive practices within the park and recreation industry.

### Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the researcher's ability to develop an instrument to elicit appropriate and accurate information and by the response of participants involved in the study. Information gained through the questionnaire was limited by the respective perceptions of park and recreation professionals at the time of participation in the study. Due to the questionnaires being posted out to potential participants, the researcher had little control over the number of park and

recreation professionals who would return the questionnaire and therefore participate in the study.

### Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to park and recreation professionals who belonged to the professional membership of Parks and Leisure Australia. It excluded park and recreation professionals who were not members of Parks and Leisure Australia. This study was also delimited through a random sample of the membership that makes up Parks and Leisure Australia.

### Significance of the study

The parks and recreation industry is now mandated by law to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunity to participate in programs and services, as do people without disabilities. Legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Disability Services Act (1986) are a reminder to all organisations that people with disabilities must be included in community and consumer life. Failure to fully respond to the rights of individuals with disabilities results in discriminatory practice. Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated in a less favourable manner because they have a disability. Indirect discrimination occurs when a situation prevents a person with a disability from doing something they have a right to do (Australian Sports Commission, 1999). The Australian Sports Commission (1999) makes it very clear that all organisations are now bound by the Disability Discrimination Act to ensure that discrimination against individuals with disabilities does not occur. The Disability Services Act (1986) also highlights important reasons why the Australian community is responsible for ensuring that it caters for people with disabilities.

Inclusive practices are necessary to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities are being upheld. The Victorian Government has been working on The Disability Services Plan with a ten-year outlook. One of the key areas of this plan is a commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the community. The Victorian Government's Draft State Disability Plan (2001) discusses the

importance of inclusion. It is described as a way “to strengthen the community so that it is more welcoming and accessible, so that people with a disability can fully and equally participate in the life of the Victorian community” (p. 55). The inclusion of children with disabilities into mainstream educational institutions has been an area in which significant research has been undertaken (Lieberman & Houston-Wilson, 2002). Although this has not been the case in the area of park and recreation services, the impetus for such action can be found in the Australian Sports Commission (2000) policy on inclusion:

The independence of people with a disability and the increasing desire to participate in physical activity can be a catalyst for all organizations to take advantage of a more diverse market. In catering for people with a disability, an organization will improve their quality of service, increase numbers of participants and provide a sustainable financial growth to improve viability (p. 4).

Clear (2000) discusses why the move towards the inclusion of people with disabilities has taken so long. Historically, other marginalised and disadvantaged groups have earned their citizenship much sooner. The exclusion of people with disabilities from community life and community citizenship has been more easily accepted and more resistant to change. Clear goes on to demonstrate this point through the passing of the Anti Discrimination Act (1977) in New South Wales. He claims that though this legislation was brought about by a growing concern and debate about human rights issues, these issues were primarily race and gender based. The human rights of people with disabilities were still not included at this stage. It was not until 1981 that people with disabilities were included as part of this act.

People with disabilities are beginning to be recognised as an important consumer group. They are important not only because their rights are important, but also because they make up a large number in our community. There is an estimated 500 million people who have a disability living across our world (Stone, 1999). Of this 500 million, an estimated 3.6 million people with a disability live in Australia (ABS, 1998). This study's significance lies in its ability to provide

information, through a needs assessment analysis, to Parks and Leisure Australia professionals to improve their services to people with disabilities. It is important that the parks and recreation industry receive the information necessary to break down existing barriers to the successful inclusion of people with disabilities and support inclusive practices. This study will help to support the Victorian government's vision surrounding inclusion, set out in the State Disability Plan (2002). Steve Bracks, the Victorian Premier states:

As citizens of Victoria, people with a disability have an important contribution to make to the life of this state. To maximise this contribution we must support communities so that they can be more inclusive. The state Disability Plan 2002-2012 provides a strong and flexible agenda for change. It reaffirms the rights that people with a disability have to live and participate in the community on an equal footing with other citizens of Victoria (p. 1).

This study is not only essential to the continuing professional development of Parks and Leisure Australia members, but also provides an important vehicle for supporting the rights of people with disabilities and their families as well as of value to the community overall. In the past, services to people with disabilities and their families have often been provided as charity or privilege and not as an entitlement as they should be (Stone, 1999). Stone points out that people with disabilities should not feel grateful for what they get and their families should not feel guilty for needing help when accessing services chosen by them.

Clear (2000) discusses the attitudinal barriers that society places upon people with disabilities. For example, improving accessible environments can be seen as a concession that people with disabilities receive from the rest of society. Such attitudes are far from the reality of today's consumer world. People with disabilities now have the right and opportunity to demand desired and appropriate services from the parks and recreation industry. It is, therefore, important that this industry positions itself to progress innovative practices that support the inclusion of people with disabilities. A needs assessment of parks and recreation professionals was necessary to ensure the most effective

education recommendations were made in this regard. Armstrong and Barton (1999) discuss the importance of human rights when analysing the inclusion of people with disabilities.

The demands for equity and non-discrimination are derived from an informed understanding of the extent and stubbornness of the disabling barriers within society. It is these that need to be identified, challenged and removed. Nor is this merely an attitudinal problem, but one of institutionalized discrimination and oppression (p. 212).

Though some studies have already been undertaken investigating the inclusion of people with disabilities in the parks and recreation industry, it is important to note that these studies have taken place in North America. In fact, The National Recreation and Parks Association in America is currently working on new initiatives to improve services to people with disabilities (Lose, 2002). These initiatives will involve programs, materials and advertisements to help the parks and recreation industry adhere to the Americans With Disabilities Act when providing services in local communities. To date, no studies of this nature have been undertaken in Australia. There is, therefore, a significant need for Australia with its own cultural character, to identify its unique needs if it is to provide and maintain effective services to people with disabilities (Lockwood & Lockwood 1999).

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### *Introduction*

The growing body of literature and empirical evidence on the different facets that circumscribe this important area has been divided into the following three areas; needs assessment, continuing education and inclusion. These three areas were identified as important to past studies in this area, this research project and future studies yet to be undertaken.

#### Needs Assessment

Needs assessment is a systematic process that aims to provide useful information about the needs of target populations, to those who can use it to influence policy and programs (Reviere, Berkowitz, Carter, & Ferguson, 1996). Rossett (1987) discusses the reasons why needs assessment is performed. She explains that when conducting a needs assessment, information is sought regarding optimal knowledge or performance, current knowledge or performance, feelings of the target group, causes of problems and solutions to problems. The gap which exists between optimal and actual knowledge or performance is termed a need. “*Need* is defined as a gap-between the real and ideal conditions- that is both acknowledged by community values and potentially amenable to change” (Reviere, Berkowitz, Carter, & Ferguson, 1996, p. 5). The ultimate goal of needs assessment is to diminish or erase needs.

Blanchard and Thacker (1999) believe that training based on needs assessment enables organisations to adapt to changing conditions through appropriate in-service education and training to become more effective in the marketplace. They emphasise that training is not always effective and can often be isolated and not related to needs within the organisation or industry. A needs assessment will ensure that training meets perceived needs of the target group. “Training, at its best, is a set of processes aimed at continuously improving

employees and organisational systems, including the training itself” (Blanchard & Thacker, 1999, p. 4).

Blanchard and Thacker (1999) point out that ideal conditions for needs assessment and subsequent training often do not exist due to insufficient money, time and other such limitations. They insist that needs assessment is necessary, however, to ensure that the right education and training is being provided to the right people. Furthermore, in-service training based on needs assessment increases the chances that time and money are spent wisely, determines the benchmark for evaluation of training, supports the implementation of a strategic plan and increases the motivation of participants. Money spent on training programs which no one needs or wants is a situation that can be avoided if a thorough and relevant needs assessment is conducted (Blanchard & Thacker, 1999).

Blanchard and Thacker (1999) explain that a needs assessment is made up of three components: organisational analysis, operational analysis and person analysis. Organisational analysis involves understanding the internal set up of the organisation and how this fits in with goals, policies and procedures. Operational analysis involves understanding specific jobs and the often changing requirements of these jobs. Person analysis involves an examination of groups and individuals who occupy specific jobs and whether they have the knowledge, skills, ability and attitudinal requirements. They go on to explain that these three components, though distinct from each other, often overlap. They also explain that needs assessment can either be proactive or reactive. Proactive needs assessment occurs before a need has been identified. It focuses on potential needs in the future based on the growth of the organisation and the community at large. Reactive needs assessment occurs after a need has been identified. It focuses on an identified specific problem.

In this respect, McCurry and Masters (1990) inform us that competency based assessment has been used by the Commonwealth Government to help restructure industrial awards. Such restructuring involved the definition and assessment of competencies in a range of occupations.

Smith and Keating (1997) believe that competency based assessment and training involves outcomes measured against specific standards related to the industry. They indicate that competency based assessment will generally be based on the following principles: *Validity* – to ensure the assessment assesses what it is supposed to assess, *Reliability* – to ensure the assessment can be interpreted and applied consistently more than once, *Flexibility* – to ensure it is appropriate to a range of people, settings and methods, and *Fairness* – to ensure it does not disadvantage anyone. They expose some of the criticism competency based needs assessment faces. Firstly, some see competency based training as placing education in a subordinate position to industry. Competency based assessment and training has been viewed as a 'behaviourist' approach to education, which is limited in its nature and now outdated. Finally, the practical problems associated with the implementation of competency-based assessment have also been voiced as a criticism.

The National Centre For Vocational Education Research (2000) states its position on competency-based training as:

Competency based training has provided a bridge between the industry clients and providers of vocational education and training. Competency standards have been an enduring means of articulating industry training requirements, thereby increasing the relevance and job specificity of vocational education and training efforts (p. 1).

The Recreation Industry Training Plan 1999 (1998) also stresses the need for future educational pathways based on competency standards within the recreation industry. The training plan recognises that even though a formal training culture is lacking within the recreation industry, a strong vocational education and training infrastructure is emerging. The Recreation Industry Training Plan 1999 (1998) also identifies the importance of competency-based training regarding the needs of special populations by way of the following statement:

A range of factors shapes the recreation industry. The implication of which for training suggest the need for specific issue and competency based

training programs to be delivered. A key recommendation suggests the packaging of a small number of learning outcomes / competencies delivered in a seminar or short course format and targeted at specific occupational and sector groups. Proposed training programs may focus on areas such as economic and financial management, industrial relations, risk management, event and facility management, service provision to people with special needs, outdoor recreation impact management and contract work arrangements (p. 3).

Goldstein (1993) warns us that all needs assessments are dependant upon the extent of the support offered by the organisation or target group. According to Goldstein it is thus important to gain people's trust as "an *intervention*, such as a needs assessment or training program, is a procedure, that interrupts organizational members daily routines and patterns of work behaviour" (p. 32). Goldstein indicates that it is essential to establish relationships with both the relevant top administrators in the organisation as well as the target group. If the needs assessment process is to succeed, acceptance by both parties is required. He goes on to explain that often uniformity is difficult to achieve. Although an organisation consists of members trying to achieve a common goal, often these goals are not explicit and conflict of ideas and interests can occur. Another difficulty brought to our attention is the many variables, which can affect the needs assessment process. Some of these are the target group, the type of training contemplated and the size of the organisation.

### *Needs assessment studies*

Inadequate training and education of public health professionals was identified as a contributor to disarray in public health. Because of this, Potter, Pistella, Fertman and Dato (2000) conducted a training needs assessment project for use in the public health workforce. A decision to determine universal competencies for training needs assessment was made because this area remained largely unexplored. Seventy-eight public health supervisors selected

competencies that they considered training priorities for the professionals they supervised. These competencies were reviewed and placed in an overall training framework. Public health leaders then used this framework to recommend competencies for a model education and training agenda. The universal competencies were found to establish a good starting point for assessing and meeting the training needs of the public health workforce.

Mathews (2000) conducted a needs assessment study of teachers in rural schools in southeastern Idaho and argued that “possibly the most critical element for successful planning and implementation of any major initiative, particularly technology, is needs assessment” (p. 385). This study was developed to assist teachers to become more effective through technology. According to Mathews “The basic question is: What competencies do teachers/instructors need to use technology effectively with their learners” (p. 385). Three thousand teachers participated in this study. Data was obtained through a questionnaire comprising of forty items. The results of this study provided valuable information to school administrators for future planning, training and staff development of teachers. It was found that newly hired teachers with Bachelors degrees had higher computer literacy skills than veteran teachers. Also, male teachers and younger teachers were found to be more confident in their computer ability.

Hall, Amodeo, Shaffer, and Bilt (2000) profile a training needs assessment of social workers employed in substance abuse treatment agencies. Investigation revealed that social workers received little education and training with regard to substance abuse in degree programs. Substance abuse was so widespread that most social workers routinely have contact with clients who have substance abuse problems. This study was the first region wide needs assessment conducted in this area. Random sampling was employed and a total of 1,590 subjects were surveyed. A questionnaire was developed specifically for this project. Survey items were identified through the literature and focus groups. Respondents were asked to answer questions related to training needs using Likert-like scales and open-ended answers. The data collected revealed that

resources for social workers were inadequate and that seventy-one percent of respondents indicated that they had a need for education and training.

The University of New South Wales (1994) carried out a needs assessment project to determine the health and welfare needs of transgenders. A needs assessment was found necessary due to a lack of current services and the alarmingly high rate of HIV/AIDS within the transgender community. Research, which preceded this study, was very limited and mostly clinical. Very little empirical social research on transgenders had occurred in Australia. Researchers from the transgender community were employed to help develop the questionnaire as well as distribute them. The language of the questionnaire was written to suit the subjects. The questionnaire inquired about many issues relevant to the lives and well being of transgenders. These areas included demography, sexual issues and practices, health issues, and transgender issues. These areas were seen as significant in determining the needs of transgenders in Australia. The questionnaire was randomly distributed across the transgender population and 146 were returned and used in the study. An example of some of the findings of this needs assessment was that sixty percent of subjects had been infected with a sexually transmissible disease and had used drugs. Other such findings indicated risky lifestyles and low self esteems. A list of recommendations based on this needs assessment was established to facilitate the growth of a strong and self-sufficient transgender community.

Curran, Hatcher, and Kirby (2000) present a needs assessment study used to identify the perceived continuing education needs of physicians. Because the practice of medicine is constantly updating and changing, medical practitioners must be able to develop their competencies to allow for the constantly evolving nature of their work. The preceding authors highlight that:

An important procedure medical educators use in the design, development, planning and evaluation of CME programs is the needs assessment. "Needs assessment" refers to a process by which the adult learners' opinions, feelings and educational needs are identified or diagnosed (p. 4).

A needs assessment questionnaire was designed and distributed to all licensed and practicing physicians. The questionnaire sought information on various areas of continuing medical education (CME), as well as demographics. Eight hundred and sixty seven questionnaires were distributed and 339 were returned, yielding a response rate of thirty-nine percent. The survey data was coded and analysed through the statistical package for the social sciences. Many of the findings from this study suggest large professional development implications for rural physicians. For example, that rural physicians were lacking in their opportunity to engage in continuing medical education when compared to urban physicians. Rural physicians saw the amount of time spent on continuing medical education as inadequate.

Malone and Shetterley (1998) describe a needs assessment study undertaken to determine the continuing education required by geriatric service providers. The University of Georgia coordinated the study as an initial step toward creating a university program that provided continuing education in gerontology. The needs assessment was also necessary to collect information on the relationship between gerontological higher education and gerontological continuing education. It was deemed important to determine whether the needs of working professionals were similar or different to the needs of students preparing to work in this area. A questionnaire for the study was developed by a focus group and then formatted into a telephone interview schedule. The schedule contained questions concerning the continuing education needs of gerontology personnel. Four hundred and three subjects took part in the needs assessment. They were randomly selected through their service provider. The returned data was examined using descriptive statistics and group comparisons. The variables used were issues in training methods and specific training topics. Results were organised accordingly.

Due to foreign competition and the pressure of increasing market share, Western Energy Corporation in North America decided to increase quality through a needs assessment of its organization. The needs assessment took place with the heavy involvement of the president and vice presidents of the

organisation. They each had more than twenty-five years of experience in the industry. The group for the needs assessment was targeted specifically at key managers because it was felt that they then could facilitate the subsequent training to all levels of the organisation. A needs assessment had proved to be very successful in another division of Western Energy Corporation and was therefore employed in this instance. An original questionnaire was developed which required several separate research efforts as well as a review of literature. Competencies and approaches to needs assessment were also reviewed. Data analysis involved a grouping of competencies and mean values based on importance. These means were compared to ascertain the group's training needs. The highest level of need for training was found to be in the area of commitment to quality. Along with this, there was a high level of need for skills related to team building.

Albert (1995) describes a needs assessment that took place in a company called Ultrasound Coronary Systems in North America. Because the industry is a rapid growth/high technology one, needs assessment is an ongoing requirement. The initial needs assessment involved gathering information from twenty-nine individual interviews. All participants were asked to focus on three main areas: the strengths of staff as a team, the corporate structure, and Human Resources issues. It was hoped that extensive qualitative data would be collected to highlight areas that needed improving. Participants were encouraged to give honest and candid answers and views. A content analysis was used to make sense of collected data and to identify key areas of need for improvement. This involved classifying verbal data into major content categories. Subsequently, responses were coded into specific categories. The five key issues identified as needing improvement were; developing a strategic focus, meeting staffing needs, modifying performance evaluation, improving communication and creating positive and supportive work based environments.

## Continuing Education

Continuing education is any post initial education that has special significance for professional development (Tennant, 1991). Lifvendahl (1998) says it is education that begins where regular education finishes and is dependent upon situations and experiences. For Lifvendahl:

Adult (continuing) education is a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills (p. 5).

Historically, education has been viewed for the young. Cross (1984), however, points out the limitations of a linear life pattern. This is a life pattern in which education is for the young, work for the middle aged and leisure for the elderly. A blended life pattern is viewed as much more desirable. This is one in which education, work and leisure occur concurrently throughout a person's life. The need for life long learning is becoming more essential everyday. As Jarvis (2001) indicates, human beings require life long learning to build self-identity and ensure appropriate social development. This process should take place throughout a person's life regardless of age. Smith and Spurling (1999) point out that many international bodies, such as UNESCO and The European Union, have already recognised this need by issuing major policy statements for life long learning.

Jarvis (1983) suggests that society is a very complex structure in which change is the norm rather than the exception. The educational structure of society must move with this change. Just as socialisation occurs throughout one's life, so should education. Chawla and Renesch (1995) discuss the importance of technology and its impact on change. Due to technology, change is occurring more rapidly now than it ever has in the past. This puts pressure on organisations to meet new dynamic challenges and changed circumstances. One of the most important ways in which to do this is through continuing education. Without continuing education, people run the risk of becoming alienated in their

jobs. There is increased pressure to be on the cutting edge and a desire for society to have a more educated and trained workforce. As Flagello (1998) states:

Ongoing education, or more precisely continuous learning, both on a formal and an informal level, will be the requirement for all employees to remain competent about an ever expanding body of knowledge and be key players on the playing field of life (p. 43).

In some professions, keeping abreast of changes is considered so important that continuing education is mandated. This occurs when members of a profession must fulfill educational obligations to retain licences or membership (Cross, 1984). In North America, park and recreation personnel are required to meet continuing education standards to ensure re-certification. Credentialing in therapeutic recreation began in 1956 and has subsequently advanced to ensure increasing professional competence within the recreation field (Stumbo, 1989). "Certified Leisure Professionals (CLP) are required to demonstrate various levels of educational attainment, experience and competence through examination" (Edginton, Jordan, DeGraaf, & Edginton, 1998, p. 171). This type of professional development is an area in which CREST has already become involved.

Jarvis (1983) exposes criticism that continuing education faces: mainly that it can be viewed as a threat, especially by those who have had limited education and as seen by the old adage "you can't teach an old dog new tricks" (p. 8). Jarvis suggests such negative attitudes are inappropriate because adults learn effectively at any age. He also claims that human beings are life long learners for two reasons. One is the changing nature of society, and the other is the curious nature of man. Jones-Shoemaker (1998) identifies a range of issues surrounding the future of continuing education. These issues include internal problems within the institution, problems associated with distance education and the increasingly urgent need for access to emerging technology.

Knowles (1990) explains the emergence of andragogy. Andragogy is a unified theory of adult learning, which is distinct from pedagogy, the theory of youth learning. Knowles traces andragogical history and notes its importance in

binding diverse ideas of adult education into a unified theory. Andragogical theory has changed the way adult education is organised and operated. It has had an impact on the training of adult education teachers as well as the way in which adult students are being helped to learn. Knowles illustrates that the Andragogical Model is based on the following six premises:

1. The need to know – Adults need to know why they should learn something before they begin learning it.
2. The learners self concept – Adults believe that they are responsible for their own decisions.
3. The role of the learner's experience – Adults enter education with a larger volume and different type of experience.
4. Readiness to learn – Adults are ready to learn things which will help them deal with real life situations.
5. Orientation to learn – Adults are life centered in their orientation to learning.
6. Motivation – Adults respond to both external motivators such as salaries and jobs, and internal motivators such as quality of life and self esteem, when Involved in education (p. 57).

Johnson and Hinton (1986) discuss why continuing education is so important. It allows, they assert, large numbers of people the opportunity to participate in education. This is particularly important for people who have limited education and possibly low self-esteem and little confidence. Such people tend not to pursue education on their own accord, without guidance and assistance. It is no longer acceptable for education to be monopolised by the already educated. Other groups such as women who missed the opportunity of further studies are now wishing to catch up to their colleagues. Johnson and Hinton observe that as many people as possible in a community should have access to the available intellectual resources. Society cannot afford to ignore the education of large numbers of people, both for social and economic reasons. Smith and Spurling (1999) suggest that every individual in a society has a right to pursue education. When this happens people lead more creative and fulfilled lives and society benefits at large by developing and expanding its available social capital.

An example of its importance is its potential impact on the increasing number of people living longer as continuing education is a need of an ageing population (Jarvis, 1983). Tennant (1991) informs us that continuing education also contributes directly to economic growth through retraining, skilling and updating knowledge.

Competency based continuing education is considered important for an organisation in which its members come from diverse educational and qualification backgrounds as can be seen by Australian recreation professionals who work with people with disabilities. Sixteen percent of these professionals have no post secondary training at all, twenty four percent of them have a recreation degree or diploma and the remainder have various qualifications outside of recreation (Lockwood & Lockwood, 1999).

### *Continuing Education in Parks and Recreation*

Schleien and Tipon-Ray (1988) found that in a study of parks and recreation personnel, the second largest barrier to inclusion of people with disabilities was untrained staff. The need, therefore, for continuing education was deemed essential. As parks and recreation professionals claim to be generalists and very often do not possess the skills, motivation or knowledge to include people with disabilities into their services, Schleien and Tipon-Ray believe that it is better to provide continuing education to generic personnel than to provide training to specialised personnel already in disability services.

Smith, Austin, and Kennedy (1996) also claim that continuing education in parks and recreation is an important area, one that will grow in the future. They feel that general parks and recreation staff require continuing education in special recreation services. Specifically, topics should address attitudes toward serving people with disabilities and issues surrounding inclusion into ongoing programs.

Lockwood and Lockwood (1999) stress that the role of recreation professionals is so diverse that ongoing professional development is essential. The rapidly changing disability field also necessitates ongoing changes in

professional competence. Lockwood and Lockwood recognise that parks and recreation personnel come from diverse educational backgrounds. Very few university recreation courses involve compulsory disability subjects. Therefore, they believe that more consideration needs to be given to the continuing education of all personnel. Generalists should be over educated in disability issues, rather than under educated. The authors bring to light the fact that unless all parks and recreation personnel are trained in inclusive practice, skills and information are controlled by an inadequate minority. This then means that only a few parks and recreation personnel can effectively provide services to people with disabilities.

Hawkins and Verhoven (1974) conducted a study into the utilisation of disadvantaged workers in park and recreation services. The study recognised, even in the 1970's, that recreation was a growing and diversifying area. With this growth came a responsibility for the public parks and recreation sector to meet new client based demands. The literature review involved in this study indicated a lack of reports relating to employment and training programs. The methodology used involved a series of interviews with administrators and subsequent observation sessions of park and recreation workers. Findings of this study included a serious lack of formal training and staff development for public park and recreation professionals. Recommendations in this area, therefore, revolved around developing extensive training programs.

Dempsey (1991) presented a paper for The Symposium on Leisure Research, which was held in conjunction with The National Congress for Parks and Recreation. Dempsey discusses a study into park and recreation professional's assessment of continuing education and certification. A questionnaire was mailed out to a state park and recreation membership. This questionnaire used a process called 'social judgment analysis' to measure participant's attitudes towards credentialing and continuing education. Results indicated that the most important factors in certification related to the cost involved in renewing it and what continuing education units would be involved.

The least important factors related to which agency would administer the certification and in what way.

### Inclusion

Inclusion is the full acceptance and integration of people with disabilities into mainstream services which results in free and equal access to mainstream life (Smith, Austin, & Kennedy, 1996). For the inclusion of people with disabilities to be successful organisations must adhere to these principles. Stewart (2000) discusses inclusion of all people in society today. Stewart believes that market driven societies such as ours have resulted in social marginalisation and exclusion. Society is now seeking a coexistence of competing values and interests. In a pluralistic world there are many different ideologies and groups of people, each seeking a place in a rapidly changing society. Gray (1986) expresses the idea that inclusion and equality are two very different concepts and one does not necessarily assume the other. Inclusion assumes only an ideal of common life. It does not necessarily result in an egalitarian justice. Gray informs us that inclusion can sometimes be linked to equality of people, however, this is often not the case. This can be demonstrated by inclusive philosophy that not only focuses on the inclusion of lower socioeconomic classes but also focuses on the inclusion of higher socioeconomic classes. Often this higher socioeconomic class will opt out of civic obligations and public service, which are important aspects of social inclusion.

Current Australian legislation makes it vital that organisations fulfill their responsibility of providing services to people with disabilities, with non-compliance considered a breach of the law. The Disability Services Act (1986) humanised services for people with disabilities. This legislation first established the process of inclusion into community settings. The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) promoted a culture and environment where discrimination against people with disabilities was considered unlawful and unacceptable (Australian Sports Commission, 1999). The Commonwealth Disability Strategy (1994) sets out guidelines for inclusion. The strategy is based on a belief that people with a

disability have the same fundamental rights as other Australians and should have equal opportunities to participate in community life. It should also be noted that any reference to disabilities would be incomplete without acknowledging the newly adopted WHO (2001) terminology that is based on a bio- psycho-social model. This model includes the ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health) that has been accepted as the international standard to measure and describe disability and health. It also encompasses the ICIDH-2 which is a classification of well-being domains based upon an individual's overall level of functioning.

Dattilo (1994) stresses the importance of inclusion in recreation settings. He describes leisure as a human right and therefore every effort should be made to ensure people with disabilities fully participate in it. He believes that though there has been improvement through legislation, discrimination against individuals with disabilities still exists in critical areas such as recreation. One of the largest problems facing people with disabilities is discrimination based on negative attitudes and stereotypes. This is consistently reported by people with disabilities, as being the most devastating barrier to inclusion. Dattilo also makes us aware that although people with disabilities are a minority; they are many in number. People with disabilities have clearly emerged as a large consumer group who spend money on leisure pursuits.

Moon (1994) observes that people with disabilities and their families are much more frequently choosing to participate in community programs rather than segregated programs. There are now more people with disabilities, living and working in the community than ever before. The problems and injustice associated with segregation of people with disabilities are reasons why people are opting for inclusive services. A service can be considered inclusive if people with disabilities have the same opportunity to participate as everyone else. Moon believes that organisations have a responsibility to examine themselves in terms of inclusive practice. Through self-evaluation, leisure agencies can identify and attempt to remove barriers and then facilitate and support inclusion of people with disabilities into their services. Furthermore, she states that recreation

service providers should play a significant role in educating the public about inclusion of people with disabilities in every aspect of community life; because all people have the right to develop social relationships and assume valued social roles.

Wolfensberger (1991) developed the concept of social role valorisation. This concept holds that if a person has a valued social role, other desirable and positive things occur naturally. Social role valorisation is regarded as the highest goal of normalisation. Nirje (1980) established the principle of normalisation as one in which people with disabilities should have the same access to conditions and patterns of everyday life that are enjoyed by people without disabilities. Schleien and Tipton-Ray (1988) indicate that normalisation and social role valorisation are the theoretical rationale for the inclusion of people with disabilities and that deinstitutionalisation and an ageing population are the practical rationale for inclusion of people with disabilities. Segregation is seen as inconsistent with normalisation and social role valorisation, and therefore inclusion is viewed as far more beneficial and ultimately inevitable.

Schleien and Tipton-Ray (1988) argue that there is a great need for improvement of services for people with disabilities. Even when service providers understand and agree with the theoretical base for inclusion, significant barriers, particularly negative attitudes such as low expectations and pity still exist. Lockwood and Lockwood (1999) point out that people with disabilities in Australia are predominantly involved in community rather than institutional living. Along with this, new groups of service participants, such as people with AIDS and people with acquired brain injury, are emerging. Service providers, therefore, must broaden their service delivery by staying abreast of these new needs. Lockwood and Lockwood assert that because a lot of research in inclusive practice is derived from North America, a need for a more Australian approach to inclusion of people with disabilities is warranted.

Inclusion not only benefits the individual by improving self worth and increasing the sense of belonging, but it also benefits the community (Moon, 1994). A heightened sense of awareness makes problem solving easier and

people who are included become more productive and contribute to the community. Carnevale and Stone (1995) also argue that the moral imperative of including people because it is just and fair is not the only reason why inclusive practice is so important. Successful organisations are increasingly attentive and sensitive to individual differences. Acknowledging and valuing these differences is seen as keystones in producing quality products and services. Binkley (2000) discusses an important initiative by the Australian Sports Commission entitled *Disability Education Program*. This initiative aims to provide support, education and training to people working in the sport industry, to reduce the barriers which people with disabilities face. Binkley claims that the *Disability Education Program* has been vital to promoting inclusion in the Australian sport industry, which benefits participants, service providers and the community. Similar education is also required by professionals working in the parks and recreation industry to suit their specific needs. Although the *Disability Education Program* has been an important tool in supporting inclusion, its content was not established through a needs assessment of sport professionals (K. Tessier, personal communication, December 14, 2000). Seedsman (2001) discusses the notion that an ideal approach to leisure management and human support services will involve a vision that continually develops the capacities of all people. He states that “multiple and diverse opportunities of the right kind, must be made available for exercising those capacities” (p. 112). Furthermore, dynamic environments result in differing life opportunities and motivation. Inclusivity is, therefore, necessary to ensure that all people are given the opportunity to maintain and develop their physical and mental capabilities.

### *Inclusive Practice in Parks and Recreation*

Several North American studies have been undertaken, specifically in relation to inclusive practice in Parks and Recreation. Austin and Powell (1980) conducted a study to determine the competencies that recreation professionals required when working with people with disabilities. A *Competency Identification Survey* was used to rate the importance of a range of competency based skills.

Altogether eighty-six competencies were found to be important when working with people with disabilities. Subjects involved in the study included recreation educators and professional recreators working with people with disabilities. This study was a major step toward bridging the gap between the recreation industry and people with disabilities.

Schleien, Germ, and McAvoy (1996) conducted an investigation of inclusive community leisure services. The methodology employed in this study involved the use of the *Community Leisure/Recreation Services and the Integration of Persons with Disabilities Survey* (Schleien and McAvoy, 1989), consisting of twenty yes/no and open-ended questions. This questionnaire sought information regarding recreation programming for people with disabilities, rationale for inclusive programs, populations served and inclusive program techniques. Questionnaires were mailed to subjects chosen from a predetermined subject list, consisting of park and recreation departments. All returned surveys were coded and entered into a computer for analysis. They found that parks and recreation services did not necessarily reflect constituent needs and instead offered services that they wanted to offer. In addition, the major barriers to inclusion of people with disabilities were found to be financial demands, transportation and staffing constraints. Negative attitudes held by administration and program staff were also found to be an important barrier, along with program practices. This means that successful inclusion of people with disabilities into parks and recreation services lies very much in the hands of parks and recreation personnel.

Allison (1999) studied organisational barriers in parks and recreation. Her study was qualitative and consisted of eighteen interviews of park and recreation professionals. Each interview consisted of twenty questions and ran for up to two hours. The interviews consisted of questions asking respondents to assess barriers and issues they observed and experienced during their careers. Data was analysed to identify concepts and themes. Follow up contact with subjects was made when clarification was required. The findings of her research suggest that parks and recreation agencies, like many others, often unknowingly involve

themselves in unequal and exclusionary behaviours. Because more people with disabilities are entering the workforce, Allison claims that parks and recreation agencies run the risk of leaving out a large segment of the population if they do not become more inclusive in their respective practices. Now that the law supports inclusion of people with disabilities, Allison warns that other organisations have been taken to court and severely penalised for exclusionary policies and practices. She also stresses the danger in believing that inclusive practices are a natural part of the human service field. Though theoretically, parks and recreation should apply to all people in a community; in practice, this is not the case. More often than not, policies and practices are seen to be symbolic rather than actual and substantive in nature.

McNeil (1999) investigated attitudes toward serving people with disabilities in parks and recreation programs. She emphasises that parks and recreation agencies are obligated to respond fully to the leisure needs of people with disabilities. McNeil's study methodology involved sending questionnaires to directors and supervisors who were part of a membership roster of the Florida Recreation and Park Association. The instrument used was developed through a collaboration of several established questionnaires. This questionnaire collected information about direct and indirect attitudes toward serving people with disabilities. It also elicited information regarding the respondent's age, educational level and years in position. A pilot study was conducted. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Her study revealed that without positive attitudes toward serving people with disabilities, inclusion does not take place. Furthermore, even if positive attitudes toward serving people with disabilities do exist, this is not enough to guarantee successful inclusion. She observes that currently, parks and recreation are still not meeting the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities because community recreation departments are lagging behind in the provision of leisure services.

Smith, Austin, and Kennedy (1996) claim parks and recreation has always prided itself in contributing to the well being of all the community, yet they have only had a tenuous grasp on the problems people with disabilities face when

seeking leisure. In fact, Smith, Austin, and Kennedy feel that the concept *recreation for all*, should be re-termed, *recreation for the norm*, because concern for special needs is lacking. Smith, Austin, and Kennedy expose some of the reasons why services for people with disabilities have been lacking in the past. These include insufficient budget, lack of skills and knowledge, lack of awareness and inadequate facilities. These reasons are viewed more as rationalisations allowing parks and recreation to remove themselves from the responsibility of providing services to people with disabilities. They feel that the attitude of parks and recreation personnel toward serving people with disabilities is the crucial measure of the quality of services offered.

Binkley (1995) also draws attention to the importance of parks and recreation becoming more inclusive in their practices. She informs us that the 1992 Disability Discrimination Act makes inclusive recreation a hard-hitting reality. A reality, which if not taken seriously by parks and recreation, can result in penalties. She also importantly questions whether a commitment to inclusion based on a fear of the law alone is enough. A commitment to inclusion based on a belief in its philosophy is seen as far more favourable. In any event, she believes parks and recreation should strive for best practice, which is not reacting, but instead being pro-active and on the cutting edge of service delivery.

### *Summary*

The review of literature for this study covered three major areas. The first area related to needs assessment, was chosen because of its relationship to the methodology employed in this study. Needs assessment has been identified as a vital process in developing any professional development curriculum. By performing needs assessment, the actual rather than assumed needs of a target group can be met more effectively (Blanchard & Thacker, 1999). Along with this, organisations that undertake needs assessments benefit by becoming more competitive and effective in the market place. Needs assessment literature was used also as an introduction to competency-based assessment which was directly related to the methodology employed in this study. Competency based

needs assessment is also viewed as another step toward ensuring effective professional development. By establishing occupationally relevant standards of competence, needs assessments can more effectively be planned and carried out. Competency based needs assessment is growing in Australia. An example of this can be found in the Commonwealth Government's use of this type of assessment (McCurry & Masters, 1990). Problems associated with needs assessment and competency based assessment were discussed. Many factors can have an impact on the effectiveness of a needs assessment. Though this is the case, the importance of conducting needs assessments for professional development is largely acknowledged as a strategic necessity for organisational survival (Goldstein, 1993).

The second area involving a focus on continuing education was chosen due to its importance to both the methodology and content of this study. Continuing education is the term used to describe on-going education, particularly in regard to professional development. On-going education is extremely important in a society in which change is occurring so rapidly. The accelerated growth of technology has meant that continuing education has had to occur to ensure people keep up with recent and emerging developments (Chawla & Renesch, 1995). Though there is some criticism about continuing education and its lack of theory, Knowles (1990) brings to light a unified theory of adult learning called Andragogy. Continuing education is important for society because it allows all people across ages to participate in education. This is of particular importance for people who missed out on education when they were young. Society benefits from this because people are more productive and more fulfilled (Johnson & Hinton, 1986).

The third area covered in the literature review focused on inclusion and was chosen because of its importance to the content of this study. Inclusion is a concept that is fundamental to the rights of people with disabilities. Rather than excluding people because of their differences, inclusion embraces them and gives them equal access to mainstream life (Smith, Austin, & Kennedy, 1996). The Disability Discrimination Act mandates inclusion and ensures that people

with disabilities receive the same opportunities that others do. Because parks and recreation is so important in people's lives and very much considered a human right, the inclusion of people with disabilities in park and recreation settings is given a great deal of importance (Dattilo, 1994). Inclusion not only benefits people with disabilities and organisations who promote it, but it also benefits the community at large (Moon, 1994). Though inclusion is now beginning to be recognised as an important process, as can be seen by the development of initiatives such as the Disability Education Program, there is still a large need for improvement of programs and services for people with disabilities (Schleien & Tipon Ray, 1988) .

Literature in the area of inclusion indicated a lack of adequate park and recreation services for people with disabilities. The combined literature, which was relevant to this study, although plentiful, highlights a paucity of Australian based work relevant to the continuing education needs of park and recreation professionals in the area of inclusion of people with disabilities. Therefore, the review of literature in this study supported the need for this research project and provided justification for the methodology chosen to conduct it.

## Chapter Three

### Method

#### *Introduction*

This study was concerned with determining the competencies required and the subsequent education needed for the implementation of inclusive practices within the park and recreation industry. The method employed in this study involved the following three sub-problems:

1. To select a comprehensive random sample of park and recreation professionals working throughout Australia
2. To determine the competencies required and the subsequent education needed for the implementation of inclusive practices within the parks and recreation industry.
3. To organise and analyse data for the purpose of identifying the implications for professional preparation and continuing education.

#### *Population and Sampling*

The population under investigation in this research project was drawn from Parks and Leisure Australia, a professional association with a membership consisting of 1600 professionals working in the parks and recreation industry. This membership represents a large range of practitioners working in both private and public sectors in the areas of public parks, botanic gardens, open space environments, recreation and leisure services (Parks and Leisure Australia, n.d.). It was necessary for the researcher to obtain approval from the Parks and Leisure Australia's National Board to investigate this population. The researcher wrote a letter to the National President of Parks and Leisure Australia, Martin Doulton, and to the rest of the National Board asking for their endorsement of the study. This letter was also followed-up by several phone calls with the National President that resulted in formal endorsement being obtained by the researcher. (Appendix A)

Due to the large membership of Parks and Leisure Australia, a random sample was taken from this population. Zemke and Kramlinger (1986) advise researchers to use random sampling to avoid getting distorted and unreliable results from a large population. Random sampling is a procedure that allows the generalisation of the findings of a small group to a much larger group by selecting subjects randomly from a list. Random sampling also ensures that a broad sample is taken and not just a specialised sample which can produce limited results. In this case, this was important because a random sample consisted of general park and recreation professionals who had not typically received adequate disability training (Smith, Austin, & Kennedy, 1996), rather than specialised professionals who had received disability training.

Zemke and Kramlinger (1986) also state that surveying a large population without random sampling will lead to a large proportion of surveys not being returned. This will then bring doubt upon the validity and representativeness of the returned information. They suggest that it is better to survey a smaller random sample of the large population and work hard to get them back. Brown and Dowling (1998) inform us that there have been advanced developments recently in relation to statistical probability and random sampling. This, in turn, has led to the potential use of sophisticated data analysis when random sampling has been employed. Brown and Dowling point out that notwithstanding the sophistication of a research study, the most important consideration is to achieve a representative sample of the population under investigation. To achieve this, they state that a random sample must ensure that each member of a population being researched has an equal chance of being selected into this sample. Brown and Dowling also state that random sampling must be an organised and deliberate procedure and not haphazard as the term may imply.

The number decided upon for the random sample in this research project was based on consultation with several statisticians as well as statistical literature (Zemke & Kramlinger, 1986; Rossett, 1987) and was also influenced by budget constraints. A 50 percent random sample was decided upon to ensure that the low rates of response typically associated with the distribution of surveys

would be effectively dealt with. Parks and Leisure Australia performed the random sample for the researcher based on a computer program they use for all their random sampling procedures.

### *Selection of the Instrument*

Based upon the existing research and literature, a questionnaire was the instrument selected for investigation of the research questions. Robson (1993) claims that “surveys are well suited to descriptive studies where the interest is, say, in how many people in a given population possess a particular attribute, opinion or whatever” (p. 49). In addition, previous studies undertaken involving parks and recreation and people with disabilities have successfully used questionnaires as their principal instrument (Schleien, Germ, & McAvoy, 1996).

Frazer and Lawley (2000) discuss the practicalities involved in instrument selection. They suggest, for example, a population like Parks and Leisure Australia that is geographically dispersed, is more effectively reached through questionnaires sent to participants in the mail. Frazer and Lawley also indicate that researchers should consider other factors such as budget and data analysis requirements.

Although questionnaires have been criticised as being biased towards the developer's own wishes for an outcome and also for a low response rate, (Rossett, 1987) the survey technique receives more support than criticism for being the cheapest form of information gathering. Gorard (2001) tells us that low response rates to questionnaires are more commonly associated with market research studies and not academic studies. Also, most people are comfortable with the anonymity of questionnaires and large numbers of people are easily accessible through the mail (Zemke & Kramlinger 1986). This is particularly important in this research project where the population under investigation is made up of 1600 members. A questionnaire was deemed to be the most efficient way to gather information from this large number of people. Gorard (2001) states that it is wise to use questionnaires in a research project when information in the

area being researched does not already exist and experimental trials are not a valid option.

Robson (1993) informs us that surveys are the most efficient way of not only receiving information but also spreading information to an average lay audience. Due to the non-intrusive nature of surveys, Robson claims that surveys are generally simple and straightforward and, therefore, are adaptable to the majority of populations.

### *Development of the Instrument*

Initial development of the questionnaire used in this study involved a thorough review of literature in three main areas of study, inclusion of people with disabilities in parks and recreation, continuing education and needs assessment. Literature regarding developing and using questionnaires (Zemke and Kramlinger, 1986; Clardy, 1997; Rossett, 1987; Busser, 1990) was utilised particularly to avoid common problems associated with the use of questionnaires and to obtain ideas about lay out. Literature dealing with the inclusion of people with disabilities in parks and recreation provided useful information about important competencies in this area (Austin and Powell, 1980; Binkley, 1995; Dattilo, 1994; Lockwood and Lockwood, 1999; Schleien, Germ and McAvoy, 1996; Schleien and Tipon Ray, 1988; Smith, Austin and Kennedy, 1996). Along with these, the Austin and Powell (1980) questionnaire, which listed a series of competencies identified as being important to disability and recreation, was used to obtain ideas and information.

Developing continuing education programs based on competencies is viewed as an essential method of professional and staff development (Scheeres, Gonczi, Hager & Morley-Warner, 1993). This is a way of targeting gaps and planning long term development goals for any organisation. The Competencies Needed for Therapeutic Recreation Professionals Delphi Study (2001) sought to determine key competencies for therapeutic recreation practitioners. It lists a series of competencies and asks participants to rate each one's importance to their role as a therapeutic recreation practitioner. The competencies from this

survey were also used in the development of the questionnaire for this research project.

Once an initial list of competencies was decided upon by the researcher, the first draft was given to Ged Prescott and Tom Forsell, both recognised leaders in the disability and recreation area at Sport and Recreation Victoria, for their review and feedback on the appropriateness of the proposed competencies. Both Ged Prescott and Tom Forsell are involved in promoting recreation for people with disabilities in the Victorian community and, therefore, have professional knowledge and experiences deemed important to this study. On receipt of feedback a range of modifications were incorporated into the questionnaire including the addition of a general information section and further questions on continuing education formats and methods.

The restructured questionnaire was then given to a jury panel for expert assessment. The jury panel was made up of three experts with knowledge considered important to this study: Dr. David Aldous of Melbourne University an expert in the field of parks, Dr. Barbara Hawkins of Indiana University an expert in the field of recreation and ageing, and Dr. Robert Neumayer of Charles Sturt University an expert in the field of disability and recreation. All three jurors were approached by phone to ask them for their service in this research project and then later were e-mailed copies of the questionnaire for review and feedback. Each of the jury panel critically assessed the questionnaire and made several recommendations that they considered important. These recommendations were subsequently incorporated into the study by the researcher.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of sixty-eight questions broken down into two discrete sections. (Appendix B) Frazer and Lawley (2000) point out that the order of questions and the lay out of the questionnaire are very important to its success. Because this research project had been endorsed by the board of Parks and Leisure Australia, a letter of support written by Martin Doulton, the National President of Parks and Leisure Australia, was included in the introduction of the questionnaire. The first section related to *General Information* and the second section focused on *Competencies*.

Section one sought general background information relating to the participant, which was deemed relevant to statistical analysis and demographic make-up of the study. The following areas of demography were included in this section: position title, region, area of responsibility, number of years in current position, basis of employment, number of years in the parks and recreation field, number of years as a member of Parks and Leisure Australia, member category, level of education, year of most recent education, current studying status, completion of disability studies or related subjects, age and gender. In total, sixteen questions were included in section one.

Section two sought information about a series of competencies that were considered important for facilitating the inclusion of people with disabilities in park and recreation services. Forty-nine competencies were included in the questionnaire. An example of how competencies were presented in the questionnaire is shown in Table 1. Participants were asked to assess each individual competency in the following three categories: how important the competency was to performing their job, their perceived level of self competence in this area, and their need for professional development in this area.

Table 1

Competencies Represented in the Study Questionnaire

<u>Competency</u>	<u>Importance of competency to Job</u>	<u>Perceived Level of Self Competence</u>	<u>Need for Professional development</u>
	5. Very High 4. High 3. Average 2. Low 1. Very Low	5. Extremely Competent 4. Considerably Competent 3. Moderately Competent 2. Somewhat Competent 1. Little or No Competence	5. Extreme Need 4. Considerable Need 3. Moderate Need 2. Some Need 1. Little or no Need
17. Understand the value of inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1

Scales in each category ranged between one and five. Category one, importance of competency to job, asked respondents to choose between a range of very low importance to very high importance. Category two, perceived level of self competence, asked respondents to choose between a range of little or no competence to extremely competent. Category three, need for professional development, asked respondents to choose between a range of little or no need for education to extreme need for education. In all three respective Likert scales, high number ratings indicated:

- 1. High to very high importance of competency
- 2. Perceived level of self competence judged as either considerably developed or extremely developed
- 3. Need for professional development judged to be considerable or extremely important

Whereas low Likert scales number ratings indicated:

- 1. Low to very low importance of competency
- 2. Perceived level of self competence judged to be somewhat competent to having no competence
- 3. Need for professional development judged to be of some to little or no need

Competencies were set out in a table format so participants could easily assess all 49 competencies individually in their three respective categories. Competencies were categorised under one of two headings: 28 competencies fell under the heading of Concepts and Attitudes Held by Park and Recreation Professionals and 21 competencies fell under the heading of Delivery of Park and Recreation Services. At the end of this section, participants were further asked to list in order of preference their five most pressing professional development needs as well as rank in order of preference formats and methods for the delivery of continuing education. These two preceding requests were asked to obtain information relevant to formulating practical recommendations about future presentations of continuing education programs.

The request for open-ended responses was limited in the interests of avoiding potential problems associated with this survey methodology. Open-ended responses often result in participants straying from the topic being researched and frequently result in unclear or incomplete answers (Foddy, 1993). As a result, only one open ended question which requested them to list their five most pressing professional development needs was included.

The competency-based questions used a Likert like scale as an effective means for soliciting response options. Alreck and Settle (1995) inform us that Likert scales are appropriate for measuring people's attitudes or opinions on issues. The Likert scale, which is named after its creator, obtains degrees of response by participants that can easily be compared. Alreck and Settle claim that response comparisons are very important in attitude and opinion based questions. They further state that Likert scales are very popular with researchers because they are very flexible in lay out. For example, items can range from a few words to several lines in length. Likert scales also allow respondents to establish a clear and unambiguous approach to the task of completing the questionnaire. The Likert scale methodology also lends itself to easy acceptance by busy people who prefer to offer their support to complete questionnaires that are respectful of personal time constraints.

### *Pilot*

Upon receipt of ethics approval, a pilot study was set-up. The population under investigation in this research project was the membership body of Parks and Leisure Australia. It was decided that the pilot study would take place outside this membership body to ensure that no participants from the pilot study would be involved in the actual study. As “it is vital to carry out a pilot study with a sample which matches the profile of the sample for the main study” (Brown and Dowling, 1998, p. 67), the researcher approached several recreation organisations and arranged for twelve recreation and park professionals, who were not members of Parks and Leisure Australia, to participate in the pilot study anonymously. Anonymity of these participants was necessary to ensure adherence to the ethics policy governing this study. A covering letter was, therefore, attached explaining the purpose of a pilot study and asking participants to indicate any problems associated with filling in the questionnaire. (Appendix C) None of the pilot study participants indicated any difficulties involved in completing the questionnaire.

### *Printing and Distribution of Questionnaires*

Competencies used in this study were placed in a table format to facilitate participant assessment and identification of their needs. This was in accordance with the literature (Zemke and Kramlinger, 1986: Rossett, 1987: Gorard, 2001: Foddy, 1993), which advised researchers to keep questionnaires simple and easy to complete. Questionnaires were then printed and presented in a C5 size booklet. Parks and Leisure Australia provided the researcher with name and address labels of the 800 members involved in the random sample. Questionnaires were placed in envelopes along with stamped, self-addressed return envelopes to the researcher. Questionnaires were then mailed to potential participants at the addresses provided by Parks and Leisure Australia. Gorard (2001) informs us that mailing out questionnaires for participants to self-administer leads to several advantages. Firstly, there is less researcher/interviewer bias which can result in face-to-face contact including a guarantee of confidentiality and if required even anonymity. Along with this,

quantitative questionnaires enable a more efficient transfer of data to statistical packages, avoiding errors involved in coding and transcribing interview based information. All members of the population under investigation had already been informed of this research project and the potential mail out of questionnaires to them through an article written about the study by the researcher in the official publication of Parks and Leisure Australia. (Appendix D) This article was a means for the researcher to introduce the study and explain in some detail its merit and importance.

Follow up post cards were mailed to all participants three weeks after the questionnaires were mailed out. (Appendix E) These post cards were a reminder to people who had not at that stage responded. It was also a means of obtaining another copy of the questionnaire if they had misplaced their original one. A cut off date of four weeks after the mail out of postcards was set for the return of pending questionnaires.

### *Organisation and Analysis of Data*

A total of 289 returned questionnaires were entered as data into the SPSS statistical program representing a 36 percent response rate to the mailed out questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the population, the 49 competencies, and the preferred education formats and methods, as they permitted the researcher to summarise large quantities of data using measures that are easily understood by an observer. It would be possible, of course, simply to present a long list of measurements for each characteristic. Without the use of descriptive statistics, however, this kind of detail is not easy to assess—the reader simply gets bogged down in numbers (Burns, 1994, p. 32).

Data analysis began with a breakdown of demographic data obtained from section one of the questionnaire and was represented in table form in terms of frequency, percentages, and mean scores. This descriptive analysis gave the researcher an understanding of the characteristics of the population involved in

the study. These characteristics were relevant for the subsequent development of recommendations made later on in the research project.

All competencies used in the questionnaire were listed and ranked according to mean score rates in each of the three sub-categories (importance to job, perceived level of self-competence, and need for professional development). Priority lists of competencies relating to these three respective sub-categories were also established.

Along with this, an importance-competence analysis was undertaken to measure the relationship between importance and perceived level of self-competence in each of the competency areas. This analysis is based on the importance-performance technique used popularly to measure program effectiveness (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1995). This technique is guided by the principle that evaluation must take place by the people being evaluated. Henderson and Bialeschki indicate that this type of evaluation is particularly important because sometimes people have high levels of satisfaction, (or in this case perceived levels of self-competence), in an area which is not important to them. The importance-competence analysis allows identification of both the perceived level of self-competence and the importance of the competency to job performance by combining the two. The 'closeness of fit' of the respective combinations allows for the development of meaningful action plans and recommendations.

A scatter plot representing the competencies in this analysis was divided into the following four areas or quadrants.

1. Low priority area – This area represents low levels of importance and also low levels of perceived self-competence. No attention needs to be given to this area.
2. Possible overkill area – This area represents low levels of importance yet high levels of perceived self-competence. This area suggests possible over commitment of resources.

3. Keep up the good work area – This area represents high levels of importance as well as high levels of perceived self-competence. This status should, therefore, be maintained.
4. High priority area – This area represents high levels of importance and low levels of perceived self-competence. This area needs the most amount of attention in relation to provision of future professional development initiatives.

The threshold for the importance-competence analysis was set at above average importance (3) and below moderate competence (3). The threshold being set at average importance and moderate competence, therefore, established a benchmark for determining which skill areas participants felt moderate, little or no competence in and yet recorded an average, high or very high level of importance. The competencies that fell into this area, were the ones identified by the importance-competence analysis as needing attention. The threshold of (3) and above on the importance scale and (3) or below on the perceived self-competence scale was set to ensure that quadrant four (high priority area) would be the prime focus area for future action outcomes.

Data about preferences surrounding continuing education formats and continuing education methods were ranked according to mean score rates and placed in tables to obtain an understanding of results in these areas. This information was compiled to assist with the formulation of recommendations that were made at a later stage of the research project for attention by Parks and Leisure Australia. The vast majority of participants did not respond to the open ended question asking them to list their five most pressing professional development needs. As a result the researcher chose not to include the limited amount of responses to this question, as they would not be reflective of the overall population.

### *Summary*

The methodology employed was selected to accomplish the study's aim of determining the competencies required and the subsequent continuing education needed for the implementation of inclusive practices within the parks and recreation industry. Methodological procedures began with the identification of Parks and Leisure Australia as the population under investigation and the subsequent random sampling of this group. Development of the questionnaire involved a literature review, consultation with recreation professionals, review by an expert jury panel and a pilot study. Questionnaires were then printed and distributed, follow up post-cards were mailed and a cut off date was established for the return of questionnaires. A SPSS program for data entry and data analysis was developed. Descriptive statistics were generated to describe the demographic characteristics of the population, the 49 competencies, and the preferred education formats and methods and recommendations based on the results of these findings were made.

## Chapter Four

### Results

#### *Introduction*

This study's aim was to determine the competencies required and the subsequent education needed for the implementation of inclusive practices within the parks and recreation industry. Analysis of data generated from the results of this study is divided into four sections. These are demographic data, assessed competencies and continuing education needs, importance-performance analysis and preferred continuing education formats and methods.

#### *Demographic Data*

The population investigated in this study was a random sample of 800 (50%) of a total population of 1600 professionals belonging to the peak Australian professional body of park and recreation professionals, Parks and Leisure Australia. Out of this random sample, 289 professionals (36.1%) responded to the questionnaire. Seventy-two percent of participants were men and 27 percent were women. The majority of participants fell within the 30 year-old to 50 year-old age bracket. As park and recreation professionals are a very diverse group, representing a number of different areas within the two industries, it was deemed important to identify and analyse the following areas of demography.

*Position Titles Held by Park and Recreation Professionals*

Table 2 displays the different position titles held by park and recreation professionals who participated in this study. These positions listed were self titled by participants involved in the study and not ones that the researcher provided. This table indicates that managers account for the most common position title. They make up over one third (110 or 38.7%) of the overall participants involved in this study. The next most frequent position titles are officers who constitute 44 (15.5%) of the participants, directors who make up 32 (11.3%) and coordinators who make up 30 (10.6%).of the overall participants in this study. These results indicate that over three fourths (76.1%) of participants place themselves in a high ranking role. One retired individual and one superintendent represent the least common position titles held by respondents in this study.

Table 2

*Position Titles Held by Park and Recreation Professionals*

Position Title	Frequency	Percentage
Manager	110	38.7%
Officer	44	15.5%
Director	32	11.3%
Coordinator	30	10.6%
Consultant	19	6.7%
Planner	13	4.6%
Team Leader	12	4.2%
Architect	6	2.1%
Adviser	5	1.8%
Academic	4	1.4%
CEO	3	1.1%
Student	2	0.7%
Ranger	2	0.7%
Superintendent	1	0.4%
Retired	1	0.4%
No Response	5	1.7%
Total	289	100.0%

*Listed regional Residences of Respondents*

Parks and Leisure Australia is comprised of seven geographical regions. Table 3 indicates how many participants involved in this study resided in each of these regions. Table 2 indicates that more than one third of participants belonged to the region of Victoria, which had a participation frequency of 105 (36.6%). New South Wales had the second highest frequency of 63 (21.8%), Queensland had the third highest frequency of 53 (18.3%) and South Australia and Western Australia had equal amounts of participants belonging to their regions (21 or 7.3%). Hume region had a frequency of 13 (4.5%) and the smallest region Tasmania had a frequency of ten (3.5%).

Table 3

*Listed regional Residences of Respondents*

Region	Frequency	Percentage
Victoria	105	36.6%
New South Wales	63	21.8%
Queensland	53	18.3%
South Australia	21	7.3%
Western Australia	21	7.3%
Hume *	13	4.5%
Tasmania	10	3.5%
No Response	3	1.0%
Total	289	100.0%

\* Hume region covers postcodes between 2600 and 2999. This area includes Australian Capital Territory and a part of New South Wales.

*Park and Recreation Professionals Identified Primary Area of Responsibility*

Table 4 represents the areas of responsibility in which park and recreation professionals were involved at the time of participation in this study. The largest number of park and recreation professionals involved in this study identified with dual (recreation and park) areas of responsibility. The frequency of participation in the dual category was 120 (41.5%). The frequency of participation in the recreation category was 87 (30.1%) and the frequency of participation in the park category was 76 (26.3%).

Table 4

*Park and Recreation Professional's Identified Primary Area of Responsibility*

<i>Area of Responsibility</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Dual (Recreation & Park)	120	41.5%
Recreation	87	30.1%
Park	76	26.3%
No Response	6	2.1%
Total	289	100.0%

*Employment Status of Park and Recreation Professionals*

Table 5 represents the basis of employment that park and recreation professionals involved in the study held. This table indicates that nearly all respondents were full time park and recreation employees (274 or 94.8%). The frequency of part time park and recreation employment was 11 (3.82%) while the frequency of casual park and recreation employment was only 2 (0.7%).

Table 5

*Employment Status of Park and Recreation Professionals*

Basis of Employment	Frequency	Percentage
Full Time	274	94.8%
Part Time	11	3.8%
Casual	2	0.7%
No Response	2	0.7%
Total	289	100.0%

*Years of Service in Current Position*

Table 6 represents the number of years that participants in this study have been in their current job position. Analysis of data indicated that over half of the participants (169 or 58.5%) had been working in their current position for five years or less. Fifty-four (18.7%) of the participants had worked in their current position for six to ten years, and 29 (10%) participants had worked in their current position for 11 to 15 years. At the other end of the scale, fourteen participants (4.8%) had been in their current position for either 16 to 19 years or 20 years and over.

Table 6

*Years of Service in Current Position*

<i>Years of Service</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1 – 5 years	169	58.5%
6 – 10 years	54	18.7%
11 – 15 years	29	10.0%
16 – 19 years	14	4.8%
20 + years	14	4.8%
No Response	9	3.1%
Total	289	100.0%

*Number of Years Worked by Professionals in the Park and Recreation Field*

Table 7 represents the number of years that park and recreation professionals involved in this study had been working in the parks or recreation field. Approximately one fourth of respondents fell into the 20 plus year category (77 or 26.6%) and nearly another fourth fell into the 16 to 19 year category (69 or 23.9%). One fifth of participants fell into the 11 to 15 year category (60 or 20.8%), while 52 or 18% of participants had been working in the field for six to ten years. Only 27 or 9.3% of participants had been working in the field for five years or less.

Table 7

*Number of Years Worked by Professionals in the Park and Recreation Field*

<i>Years</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1 – 5 years	27	9.3%
6 – 10 years	52	18.0%
11 – 15 years	60	20.8%
16 – 19 years	69	23.9%
20+ years	77	26.6%
No Response	4	1.4%
Total	289	100.0%

*Years of Membership With Parks and Leisure Australia*

Table 8 represents the number of years participants in this study had been members of Parks and Leisure Australia or one of the preceding professional organisations which merged to form Parks and Leisure Australia in 1998, (The Royal Australian Institute of Parks and Recreation and The Australian Leisure Institute). Nearly half of participants (132 or 45.7%) fell into the one to five year range of professional membership. The second largest number of participants (53 or 18.3%) fell into the six to ten year range of membership and thirty participants (10.4%) fell into the 20 year or more range of membership.

Table 8

*Years of Membership With Parks and Leisure Australia*

<i>Years of Membership</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1 – 5 years	132	45.7%
6 – 10 years	53	18.3%
11 – 15 years	21	7.3%
16 – 19 years	21	7.3%
20 + years	30	10.4%
No Response	32	11.1%
Total	289	100.0%

*Parks and Leisure Australia Membership Category*

Table 9 reflects the different Parks and Leisure Australia membership categories held by the respondents in this study. Over half of the participants (152 or 52.6%) indicated that they fell into the member category of Parks and Leisure Australia. Ninety-nine (34.3%) of participants were corporate members, 23 (8%) were fellow members, four (1.4%) were retired members, two (.7%) were honorary members and two (.7%) fell under the category of student.

Table 9

*Parks and Leisure Australia Membership Category*

Membership Category	Frequency	Percentage
Member	152	52.6%
Corporate	99	34.3%
Fellow	23	8.0%
Retired	4	1.4%
Honorary	2	0.7%
Student	2	0.7%
No Response	7	2.4%
Total	289	100.0%

*Highest Level of Education*

Table 10 displays the highest levels of education park and recreation professionals involved in this study had attained. Over 95% of participants had completed some type of post secondary education. Analysis of the data indicated that a third of the participants (97 or 33.6%) held an undergraduate degree and 92 (31.8%) participants held a postgraduate diploma. Forty (13.8%) participants held a TAFE qualification. Thirty-seven (12.8%) participants had obtained a masters degree and six (2.1%) had obtained a doctorate degree. In contrast, only six (2.1%) had just completed high school and three (1.0%) of participants had not finished high school.

Table 10

*Highest Level of Education*

<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Undergraduate Degree	97	33.6%
Postgraduate Diploma	92	31.8%
TAFE	40	13.8%
Masters Degree	37	12.8%
Doctorate Degree	6	2.1%
High School	6	2.1%
High School Incomplete	3	1.0%
No Response	3	1.0%
Total	289	100.0%

*Year When Park and Recreation Professionals Completed Their Most Recent Education*

Table 11 represents the year when park and recreation professionals involved in this study most recently completed their education. The majority of participants (178 or 61.6%) completed their most recent education in the 1991 to 2002 year period. Sixty participants (20.8%) completed their education between the years 1981 and 1990, 23 (8.0%) between the years 1971 and 1980, nine (3.1%) between the years 1961 and 1970 and just one participant within the 1950 to 1960 year period.

Table 11

*Year When Park and Recreation Professionals Completed Their Most Recent Education*

Year Period	Frequency	Percentage
1991 - 2002	178	61.6%
1981 - 1990	60	20.8%
1971 - 1980	23	8.0%
1961 - 1970	9	3.1%
1950 - 1960	1	0.3%
No Response	18	6.2%
Total	289	100.0%

*Educational Status of Park and Recreation Professionals*

The vast majority of participants (235 or 81.3%) were not currently engaged in formal study at the time they responded to the questionnaire used in this study. Only 53 park and recreation professionals (18.3%) responded that they were currently engaged in formal study at the time of completing the questionnaire.

*Education Levels of Park and Recreation Professionals Currently Studying*

Table 12 indicates the level of education at which the 53 park and recreation professionals were currently studying. Over 60% of this group were studying at the postgraduate level. Analysis of the data indicates that the largest number of participants (16 or 30.1%) indicated that they were studying at the masters degree level of education. Eleven participants (20.7%) were studying at the postgraduate diploma level, six (11.3%) at the TAFE level of education and five each (11.3%) at the undergraduate and postgraduate certificate levels.

Table 12

*Education Levels of Park and Recreation Professionals Currently Studying*

<i>Education Level</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Masters Degree	16	30.1%
Postgraduate Diploma	11	20.7%
TAFE	6	11.3%
Undergraduate Degree	5	9.4%
Postgraduate Certificate	5	9.4%
No Response	10	18.8%
Total	53	100.0%

*Park and Recreation Professionals who had Completed Disability Related Subjects*

The number of participants who had not completed any disability studies or related subjects (206 or 71.2%) was two and a half times greater than the number of participants who had (81 or 28%).

*Age and Gender of Park and Recreation Professionals*

Table 13 represents the ages of park and recreation professionals that participated in this study. Over two thirds of the participants fell between the 31 to 50 year old age bracket, with 109 (37.7%) in the 41 to 50 year old group and 95 (32.9%) in the 31 to 40 year old group. Forty-seven participants (16.3%) fell into the 51 to 60 year old age bracket and only 25 participants (8.7%) into the 20 to 30 year bracket.

Table 13

*Age and Gender of Park and Recreation Professionals*

Age Group	Men	Women	Frequency	Percentage
20 -30 years	16	9	25	8.7%
31 - 40 years	81	14	95	32.9%
41 - 50 years	70	39	109	37.7%
51 - 60 years	30	17	47	16.3%
61 - 70 years	8	0	8	2.8%
70+ years	1	0	1	0.3%
No Response			4	1.4%
Total	206	79	289	100.0%

The gender breakdown of park and recreation professionals who participated in this study indicates that there were two and a half times more men involved in this study than women with males accounting for 209 or 72% of

participants and females accounting for 79 or 27%. Table 12 indicates that around 50 percent of women fell into the 41 to fifty year old bracket.

Competencies

This research project focused upon a series of professional competencies to understand three areas; ‘importance of competency to job’, ‘perceived level of self competence’, and ‘need for professional development’. Figure 2 illustrates the presentation of the competency based questions that asked participants to choose a response based on a Likert like scale in each of the three preceding categories.

Table 14

Likert-like scales used in questionnaire

<u>Competency</u>	<u>Importance of competency to Job</u>	<u>Perceived Level of Self Competence</u>	<u>Need for Professional development</u>
	5. Very High 4. High 3. Average 2. Low 1. Very Low	5. Extremely Competent 4. Considerably Competent 3. Moderately Competent 2. Somewhat Competent 1. Little or No Competence	5. Extreme Need 4. Considerable Need 3. Moderate Need 2. Some Need 1. Little or no Need
17. Understand the value of inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1

Scales in each category ranged between one and five. Category one, importance of competency to job, asked respondents to choose between a range of very low importance to very high importance. Category two, perceived level of self competence, asked respondents to choose between a range of little or no competence to extreme competence. Category three, need for professional development, asked respondents to choose between a range of little or no need for education to extreme need for education. In all three of these Likert scales, numbers increased as importance, competence and need increased. The option

of number one was the least pressing in each category. The mean scores of each competency were calculated and placed in the three sub categories. Refer to (Appendix F) for a list of mean scores of all competencies.

*Priority Competencies*

This section of chapter four focuses on examining the priority competencies in the three areas of competency assessment. For each respective competency category the researcher ranked the 20 top competencies based on mean scores. The researcher determined the 20 highest mean score rates of all forty-nine competencies in all three categories and then ranked them in order of highest mean score to lowest mean score rate. Tables 15, 16, and 18 list for each category the 20 highest mean scores. Table 17 was established to identify the 20 competencies in which participants felt least competent.

*The 20 Most Important Job Competencies*

Table 15 represents the 20 most important job competencies. The mean scores for priority importance to job competencies do not vary by much with mean scores ranging between 3.54 and 4.05. This reflects that the highest priority competency fell between the *high* and *very high* range of the importance of competency to job scale and the other 19 priority competencies fell between the *average* and *high* range of this scale. The most important job competency in this table is *ability to develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities*. The second most important job competency is *understand the value of inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities*. The third most important job competency is *ability to identify physical barriers to accessibility*. *Knowledge of the characteristics of the major disability groups* is the fourth most important job competency, *knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act* is fifth and *ability to identify strategies for overcoming physical barriers* is sixth most important in this table.

Table 15

*The 20 Most Important Job Competencies*

Ranking	Competency	Mean	Std Dev
1	Ability to develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities.	4.05	.96
2	Understand the value of inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities.	3.99	.86
3	Ability to identify physical barriers to accessibility.	3.94	.92
4	Knowledge of the characteristics of the major disability groups.	3.90	1.09
5	Knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act.	3.86	1.03
6	Ability to identify strategies for overcoming physical barriers.	3.84	.99
7	Understanding of the implications of the legislation acts on the professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities.	3.82	1.01
8	Knowledge of duty of care responsibilities towards people with disabilities.	3.80	1.06
9	Understanding of social and cultural influences on recreation participation.	3.78	.99
10	Ability to facilitate inclusive park and recreation services.	3.74	1.08
11	Understand the role of leisure in the lives of people with disabilities.	3.70	1.01

Table 15 (Cont.)

*The 20 Most Important Job Competencies*

Ranking	Competency	Mean	Std Dev
12	Knowledge of ways in which park and recreation services can help to serve the developmental needs of people with disabilities	3.66	.94
13	Knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities.	3.65	1.10
13	Knowledge of own personal attitudes and biases toward people with disabilities	3.65	1.07
14	Ability to design an accessible environment	3.62	1.16
15	Awareness of frustrations experienced by people with a disability when faced with inaccessible environments and exclusive programs	3.61	1.08
16	Ability to consider individual needs and interests when providing services for people with disabilities	3.60	1.00
17	Knowledge of departmental policies, procedures and practices which relate to services for people with disabilities	3.58	1.09
18	Awareness of concerns families of children with disabilities may have	3.56	1.05
19	23. Knowledge of appropriate terminology relating to people with disabilities	3.54	.97

*Ranking of the 20 Competencies in Which Participants had the most Self Competence*

Table 16 represents a ranking of the 20 competencies in which participants perceived the most competence. This ranking ranges from the highest mean score of 3.63 to the lowest mean score of 2.91. This means that participants perceived level of self-competence fell between the *moderately competent* to *somewhat competent* range. The competency chosen as highest in this group is *ability to develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities*. The second highest competency is *knowledge of own personal attitudes and biases toward people with disabilities*. Third is *understand the concept of inclusion for people with disabilities*, fourth is *ability to identify physical barriers to accessibility* and fifth is *understand the value of inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities*. *Understand the role of leisure in the lives of people with disabilities* and *ability to identify strategies for overcoming physical barriers* both have equal status of being the seventh most important competencies in this table.

Table 16

*Ranking of the 20 Competencies in Which Participants had the most Self Competence*

Ranking	Competency	Mean	Std Dev
1	Ability to develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities	3.63	.92
2	Knowledge of own personal attitudes and biases toward people with disabilities	3.55	.84
3	Understand the concept of inclusion for people with disabilities	3.52	.91
4	Ability to identify physical barriers to accessibility	3.35	.79

Table 16 (Cont.)

*Ranking of the 20 Competencies in Which Participants had the most Self Competence*

Ranking	Competency	Mean	Std Dev
5	Understand the value of inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities	3.33	.75
6	Ability to facilitate inclusive park and recreation services	3.21	.92
7	Understand the role of leisure in the lives of people with disabilities	3.14	1.00
7	Ability to identify strategies for overcoming physical barriers	3.14	.77
8	Ability to consider individual needs and interests when providing services for people with disabilities	3.13	.93
9	Understanding of social and cultural influences on recreation participation	3.08	.96
10	Understand the impact a leader can have on a person with a disability	3.06	1.02
10	Knowledge of duty of care responsibilities towards people with disabilities	3.06	1.01
11	Ability to design an accessible environment	3.04	.97
11	Knowledge of society’s attitudes, (past and present), toward people with disabilities	3.04	.94
12	Knowledge of ways in which park and recreation services can help to serve the developmental needs of people with disabilities	3.03	.82

Table 16 (Cont.)

*Ranking of the 20 Competencies in Which Participants had the most Self Competence*

Ranking	Competency	Mean	Std Dev
13	Knowledge of appropriate terminology relating to people with disabilities	2.97	1.04
13	Awareness of frustrations experiences by people with a disability when faced with inaccessible environments and exclusive programs	2.97	1.01
14	Knowledge of departmental policies, procedures and practices which relate to services for people with disabilities	2.96	.96
15	Ability to identify attitudinal barriers to accessibility	2.91	.90
15	Ability to include consumer input in program and service development	2.91	1.00

*Ranking of the 20 Competencies in Which Participants had the Least Self Competence*

Table 17 lists the 20 competencies in which participants had the lowest amount of perceived self-competence. The ranking starts with the lowest mean score and, therefore, the skill area indicating the least self-competence. The competency that most participants felt they had the least competence in was *knowledge of the history of recreation services to people with disabilities, including therapeutic recreation*. Next on this table is *knowledge of park and recreation professionals who have expertise in inclusive practices*. Third in this group is *knowledge of journals and other literature which may be used to improve the quality of park and recreation services to people with disabilities*. Fourth is *knowledge of leadership techniques useful for executing recreation activities for people with disabilities* and fifth is *awareness of attitudes of people with disabilities toward people outside their disability group*.

Table 17

*Ranking of the 20 Competencies in Which Participants had the Least Self Competence*

Ranking	Competency	Mean	Std Dev
1	Knowledge of the history of recreation services to people with disabilities, including therapeutic recreation	2.34	1.04
2	Knowledge of park and recreation professionals who have expertise in inclusive practices	2.38	.97
3	Knowledge of journals and other literature which may be used to improve the quality of park and recreation services to people with disabilities	2.39	.96

Table 17 (Cont.)

Ranking of the 20 Competencies in Which Participants had the Least Self Competence

Ranking	Competency	Mean	Std Dev
4	Knowledge of leadership techniques useful for executing recreation activities for people with disabilities	2.42	1.04
5	Awareness of attitudes of people with disabilities towards people outside their disability group	2.45	1.05
6	Knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities	2.47	.89
7	Ability to implement inclusive recreation programming	2.48	1.03
8	Knowledge of advocacy as it relates to the recreational needs of people with disabilities	2.50	.99
9	Knowledge of funding sources for the development of par and recreation services for people with disabilities	2.51	1.03
10	Knowledge of first aid and safety procedures which may relate to people with disabilities (e.g. handling seizures)	2.53	1.12
11	Knowledge of appropriate assistive techniques such as physical guidance for people with visual impairment	2.55	1.04
12	Knowledge of recreation programming for people with disabilities	2.56	1.03

Table 17 (Cont.)

Ranking of the 20 Competencies in Which Participants had the Least Self Competence

Ranking	Competency	Mean	Std Dev
13	Knowledge of agencies which can provide resources to assist in the inclusion of people with disabilities	2.64	1.04
14	Knowledge of current social issues and how they may affect services to people with disabilities	2.65	.91
15	Ability to source and select equipment appropriate for people with disabilities (e.g. regular or adaptive)	2.67	1.03
16	Ability to assist people with disabilities by directing them to appropriate services within the community	2.68	1.01
17	Knowledge of the characteristics of the major disability groups	2.69	.95
18	Ability to identify and evaluate equipment adaptations necessary for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities	2.74	.97
19	Ability to modify activities for people with disabilities	2.75	1.06
20	Understanding of the difference between cognitive, emotional, physical and sensory disabilities	2.76	1.02

### *The Top 20 Professional Development Needs*

Table 18 represents the top 20 perceived professional development needs from all 49 competencies. These priority competencies indicate that even though mean scores decrease according to priority, they do not decrease by much. This difference ranges between the highest mean score of 3.33 and the lowest mean score of 2.97. All these priority competencies, therefore, fall between the *some need to considerable need* ranges in the need for professional development scale. The remaining professional development competencies (Appendix F) fall between the *some need to moderate need* ranges in the need for professional development scale. The most pressing perceived professional development need identified in this study is *knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities*. The second most pressing professional development need is *knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities*. The next most important competency in this group is *understanding the implications of the legislation acts on the professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities*. *Knowledge of the characteristics of the major disability groups* is the fourth most pressing professional development need, *knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act* the fifth, and *ability to design an accessible environment* the sixth most important in this group.

Table 18

*The Top 20 National Professional Development Needs*

Ranking	Competency	Mean	Std Dev
1	Knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities.	3.33	1.14
2	Knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities.	3.27	1.12
3	Understanding the implications of the legislation acts on the professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities,	3.24	1.19
4	Knowledge of the characteristics of the major disability groups.	3.18	1.06
5	Knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act.	3.16	1.21
6	Ability to design an accessible environment.	3.12	1.24
7	Ability to identify strategies for overcoming physical barriers.	3.11	1.05
7	Knowledge of ways in which park and recreation services can help to serve the developmental needs of people with disabilities.	3.11	1.00
7	Ability to identify strategies for overcoming attitudinal barriers.	3.11	1.10
8	Ability to identify physical barriers to accessibility.	3.04	1.13

Table 18 (Cont.)

*The Top 20 National Professional Development Needs*

Ranking	Competency	Mean	Std Dev
8	Understanding of social and cultural influences on recreation participation	3.04	1.15
9	Ability to identify attitudinal barriers to accessibility.	3.02	1.06
9	Understand the psychological impact a disability can have on recreation participation.	3.02	1.11
9	Knowledge of journals and other literature which may be used to improve the quality of park and recreation services to people with disabilities.	3.02	1.08
9	Knowledge of duty of care responsibilities towards people with disabilities	3.02	1.23
10	Awareness of frustrations experienced by people with a disability when faced with inaccessible environments and exclusive programs	3.01	1.15
10	Understanding of the difference between cognitive, emotional, physical and sensory disabilities	3.01	1.16
11	Understand the role of leisure in the lives of people with disabilities	2.99	1.17
12	Understand the value of inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities	2.97	1.04
12	Ability to facilitate inclusive park and recreation services	2.97	1.20

### *The Top 10 Regional Professional Development needs*

As many educational opportunities provided by Parks and Leisure Australia are run through the regional branches, the breakdown of priority competencies according to region are represented on Table 19. The mean score rate of each competency, in each region, were ranked and represented from highest to lowest. Some of the mean scores in each region are identical and, therefore, are represented by a common ranking.

A ranking of competency mean scores in New South Wales resulted in the highest one, *Overcoming physical barriers*, holding a mean score rate of 3.64. In Victoria, the competency *current international trends* held the highest mean score rate of 3.25. In Queensland, the competency *implications of legislation and funding sources* held the highest mean score rates of 3.33 and *design accessible environments* held the highest mean score rate of 3.05 in South Australia. In Western Australia, the competency *identify physical barriers* held the highest mean score rate of 3.48, the competency *funding sources* held the highest mean score rate of 3.40 in Tasmania and the competencies *characteristics of disability groups* and *current international trends* held the highest mean score rates of 3.46 in Hume. The competencies *funding sources* and *current international trends* are the only two that are present in each of the states top 10 list of professional development needs.

Table 19

The Top 10 Regional Professional Development needs (with standard deviations in brackets)

NSW	Mean Score	VIC	Mean Score	QLD	Mean Score	SA	Mean Score	WA	Mean Score	TAS	Mean Score	Hume	Mean Score
1.Overcoming physical barriers	3.64 (.93)	1.Current international trends	3.25 (1.07)	1.Implications of legislation	3.33 (1.10)	1.Design accessible environment	3.05 (1.17)	1.Identify physical barriers	3.48 (1.28)	1.Funding sources	3.40 (1.17)	1.Characteristics of disability groups	3.46 (1.03)
2.Funding Sources	3.60 (1.04)	2.Funding sources	3.23 (1.09)	1.Funding Sources	3.33 (1.16)	2.Identify physical barriers	3.00 (1.25)	2.Overcoming physical barriers	3.46 (1.19)	2.Overcoming physical barriers	3.00 (1.05)	1.Current international trends	3.46 (1.37)
3.Overcoming attitudinal barriers	3.57 (1.07)	3.Implications of legislation	3.16 (1.15)	2.Current international trends	3.18 (1.09)	2.Funding sources	3.00 (1.14)	2.Funding sources	3.46 (1.39)	2.Develop mental needs	3.00 (.66)	2.Overcoming physical barriers	3.38 (1.10)
3.Identifying physical barriers	3.57 (.99)	4.Current Australian legislation	3.11 (1.17)	3.Current Australian legislation	3.08 (1.26)	2.Current international trends	3.00 (1.29)	3.Implications of legislation	3.45 (1.27)	2.Psychological impact	3.00 (.81)	2.Current Australian legislation	3.38 (1.32)
4.Current international trends	3.54 (.95)	5.Develop mental needs	3.02 (.94)	3.Journals and literature	3.08 (1.08)	2.Overcoming attitudinal barriers	3.00 (.97)	4.Current Australian legislation	3.43 (1.20)	2.Economic impact	3.00 (1.24)	3.Identifying physical barriers	3.31 (1.11)
4.Characteristics of different disability groups	3.54 (1.10)	6.Overcoming attitudinal barriers	2.96 (1.05)	4.Design accessible environment	3.00 (1.15)	3.Overcoming physical barriers	2.85 (1.22)	4.Current international trends	3.43 (1.36)	3.Identifying attitudinal barriers	2.90 (1.37)	3.Implications of legislation	3.31 (1.32)
5.Journals and literature	3.49 (1.07)	7.Design accessible environment	2.92 (1.25)	5.Overcoming attitudinal barriers	2.98 (1.08)	4.Identifying attitudinal barriers	2.80 (1.02)	5.Design accessible environment	3.38 (1.12)	3.Implications of legislation	2.90 (.99)	4.Develop mental needs	3.23 (.96)
5.Develop mental needs	3.49 (.89)	8.Overcoming physical barriers	2.91 (.98)	6.Psychological impact	2.96 (1.09)	5.Develop mental needs	2.75 (1.00)	5.Economic impact	3.38 (1.27)	4.Identify physical barriers	2.88 (1.13)	5.Funding sources	3.00 (1.37)

Table 19 (Cont.)

The Top 10 Regional Professional Development needs

NSW	Mean Score	VIC	Mean Score	QLD	Mean Score	SA	Mean Score	WA	Mean Score	TAS	Mean Score	Hume	Mean Score
6.Current Australian legislation	3.48 (1.16)	9.Identifying attitudinal barriers	2.86 (.93)	7.Difference between Cog, Emo, etc	2.91 (1.13)	5.Characteristics of disability groups	2.75 (1.05)	6.Frustrations in accessible environments	3.33 (1.28)	5.Design accessible environment	2.86 (1.45)	6.Design accessible environment	3.00 (1.38)
7.Identifying attitudinal barriers	3.46 (1.04)	10.Identifying physical barriers	2.79 (1.08)	7.Characteristics of disability groups	2.91 (.99)	6.Frustrations in inaccessible environments	2.30 (1.21)	7.Diversity of disability groups	3.14 (1.19)	6.Current international trends	2.80 (1.07)	7.Identifying attitudinal barriers	3.00 (1.08)

Legend

NSW – New South Wales

VIC – Victoria

QLD – Queensland

SA – South Australia

WA – Western Australia

TAS – Tasmania

HUME - Hume

### *Importance Competence-Analysis*

This section of chapter four has utilised the importance-performance analysis methodology (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1995). To ensure relevant terminology, however, the term competence has been used to replace the term performance. Figure 1 is a graphic depiction of this analysis. It displays where all 49 competencies meet along both the *importance of competency to job* axis and the *perceived level of self-competence* axis. Each competency point is labeled with a number to allow identification of the competency via the legend.

The scatter plot representing the competencies in this analysis was divided into the following four areas or quadrants.

1. Low priority area – This area represents low levels of importance and also low levels of perceived self-competence. No attention needs to be given to this area.
2. Possible overkill area – This area represents low levels of importance yet high levels of perceived self-competence. This area suggests possible over commitment of resources.
3. Keep up the good work area – This area represents high levels of importance as well as high levels of perceived self-competence. This status should, therefore, be maintained.
4. High priority area – This area represents high levels of importance and low levels of perceived self-competence. This area needs the most amount of attention in relation to provision of professional development initiatives.

The competencies that fall into the *high importance and low competence* quadrant (bottom right quadrant; quadrant four) are the ones requiring most attention for future continuing education programs. Overall, 31 competencies fell within this quadrant. Competencies (52) *knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the*

*Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act and (53) understanding of the implications of the legislation acts on the professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities, stand out as having priority need for education. Competencies (54) knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities, (65) knowledge of departmental policies, procedures and practices which relate to services for people with disabilities and (25) awareness of concerns of families of children with disabilities may have, appear to be the next most significant competencies in this analysis. Competencies (39) awareness of frustrations experienced by people with a disability when faced with inaccessible environments and exclusive programs, (23) knowledge of appropriate terminology relating to people with disabilities and (43) awareness of the diversity of different disability groups are also important competencies within this quadrant. Becoming less important in this quadrant but still requiring attention, are competencies (37) ability to identify attitudinal barriers to accessibility, (38) ability to identify strategies for overcoming attitudinal barriers and (41) understanding of the difference between cognitive, emotional, physical and sensory disabilities. Moving towards the left of this quadrant, are the next most important competencies (40) knowledge of the characteristics of the major disability groups, (45) ability to identify and evaluate equipment adaptations necessary for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, (19) understand the psychological impact a disability can have on recreation participation, (50) knowledge of agencies which can provide resources to assist in the inclusion of people with disabilities and (42) understanding of the difference between the terms disability, handicap and impairment. The remaining competencies in quadrant four will be listed according to their position of importance on the scatter graph. They include: (33) Knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities; (46) ability to source and select equipment appropriate for people with disabilities; (56) knowledge of current social issues and how they may effect services to people with disabilities; (55) knowledge of journals and other literature which may be used to improve the*

*quality of park and recreation services to people with disabilities; (20) understand the economic impact a disability can have on recreation participation; (48) awareness of basic mechanical devices; (63) knowledge of park and recreation professionals who have expertise in inclusive practices; (59) ability to modify activities for people with a disability; (57) knowledge of advocacy as it relates to the recreational needs of people with disabilities; (60) knowledge of recreation programming for people with disabilities; (27) awareness of attitudes of people with disabilities towards people outside their disability group; (51) ability to assist people with disabilities by directing them to appropriate services within the community; (49) knowledge of appropriate assistive techniques such as physical guidance for people with visual impairment and (47) knowledge of first aid and safety procedures which may relate to people with disabilities.*

Quadrant three (top right quadrant) represents competency areas that reflect high levels of importance as well as high levels of perceived self-competence. Professional development in this group of competencies is not as critical and only maintenance may be necessary. The competencies in this quadrant that are plotted closer on the scatter graph to quadrant four are the ones that may require maintenance. Overall, a total of 15 competencies were found in this quadrant. These competencies include (31) *understand the impact a leader can have on a person with a disability*, (26) *knowledge of society's attitudes toward people with disabilities*, (36) *ability to design an accessible environment*, (18) *knowledge of ways in which park and recreation services can help to serve the developmental needs of people with disabilities* and (61) *knowledge of duty of care responsibilities towards people with disabilities*.

There are no competencies visible in quadrant two (top left quadrant). This area represents low levels of importance yet high levels of perceived self-competence. A possible overkill area.

Quadrant one (bottom left quadrant) represents a low priority area in terms of professional development. The competencies plotted in this area reflect low levels of importance and low levels of perceived self-competence. The three competencies that fall in this quadrant are (64) *ability to facilitate inclusive*

*recreation programming, (62) knowledge of leadership techniques useful for executing recreation activities for people with disabilities and (21) knowledge of the history of recreation services to people with disabilities including therapeutic recreation.*

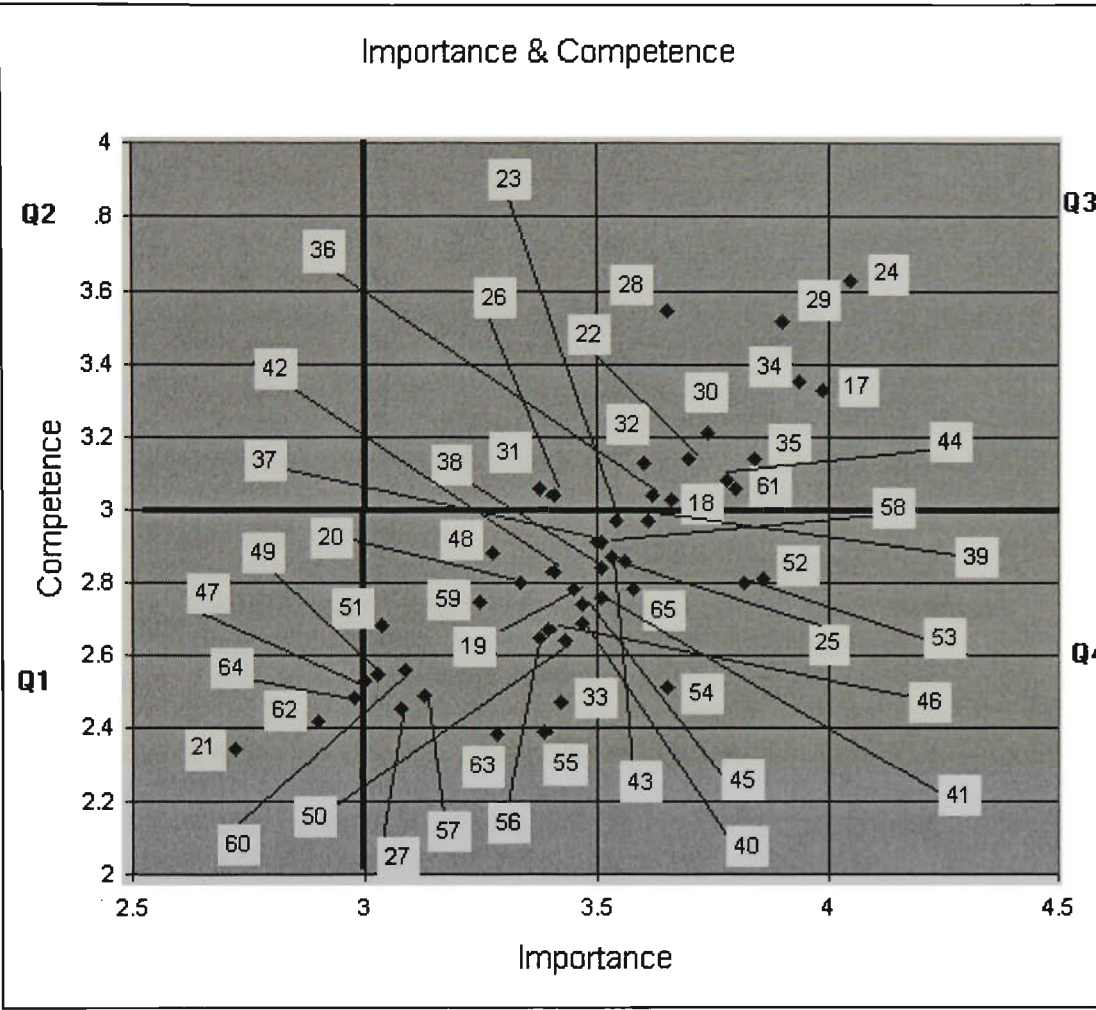


Figure 1: Scatter graph representing competencies when importance and competence are combined.

Quadrant Legend

- 1. Low priority area – This area represents low levels of importance and also low levels of perceived self-competence. No attention needs to be given to this area.
- 2. Possible overkill area – This area represents low levels of importance yet high levels of perceived self-competence. This area suggests possible over commitment of resources.
- 3. Keep up the good work area – This area represents high levels of importance as well as high levels of perceived self-competence. This status should, therefore, be maintained.

4. High priority area – This area represents high levels of importance and low levels of perceived self-competence. This area needs the most amount of attention in relation to provision of professional development initiatives.

### *Legend*

17. Understand the value of inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities
18. Knowledge of ways in which park and recreation services can help to serve the developmental needs of people with disabilities
19. Understand the psychological impact a disability can have on recreation participation
20. Understand the economic impact a disability can have on recreation participation
21. Knowledge of the history of recreation services to people with disabilities including therapeutic recreation
22. Understand the role of leisure in the lives of people with disabilities
23. Knowledge of appropriate terminology relating to people with disabilities
24. Ability to develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities
25. Awareness of concerns families of children with disabilities may have
26. Knowledge of society's attitudes, (past and present), toward people with disabilities
27. Awareness of attitudes of people with disabilities towards people outside their disability group
28. Knowledge of own personal attitudes and biases toward people with disabilities
29. Understand the concept of inclusion for people with disabilities
30. Ability to facilitate inclusive park and recreation services
31. Understand the impact a leader can have on a person with a disability
32. Ability to consider individual needs and interests when providing services for people with disabilities
33. Knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities
34. Ability to identify physical barriers to accessibility
35. Ability to identify strategies for overcoming physical barriers
36. Ability to design an accessible environment
37. Ability to identify attitudinal barriers to accessibility
38. Ability to identify strategies for overcoming attitudinal barriers
39. Awareness of frustrations experienced by people with a disability when faced with inaccessible environments and exclusive programs
40. Knowledge of the characteristics of the major disability groups
41. Understanding of the difference between cognitive, emotional, physical and sensory disabilities
42. Understanding of the differences between the terms disability, handicap and impairment
43. Awareness of the diversity of different disability groups
44. Understanding of social and cultural influences on recreation participation
45. Ability to identify and evaluate equipment adaptations necessary for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities
46. Ability to source and select equipment appropriate for people with disabilities (eg. regular or adaptive)
47. Knowledge of first aid and safety procedures which may relate to people with

disabilities (eg. handling seizures)

48. Awareness of basic mechanical devices (such as wheelchairs and frames), which may be used by people with disabilities
49. Knowledge of appropriate assistive techniques such as physical guidance for people with visual impairment
50. Knowledge of agencies which can provide resources to assist in the inclusion of people with disabilities
51. Ability to assist people with disabilities by directing them to appropriate services within the community
52. Knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act
53. Understanding the implications of the legislation acts on the professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities
54. Knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities
55. Knowledge of journals and other literature which may be used to improve the quality of park and recreation services to people with disabilities
56. Knowledge of current social issues and how they may affect services to people with disabilities
57. Knowledge of advocacy as it relates to the recreational needs of people with disabilities
58. Ability to include consumer input in program and service development
59. Ability to modify activities for people with disabilities
60. Knowledge of recreation programming for people with disabilities
61. Knowledge of duty of care responsibilities towards people with disabilities
62. Knowledge of leadership techniques useful for executing recreation activities for people with disabilities
63. Knowledge of park and recreation professionals who have expertise in inclusive practices
64. Ability to implement inclusive recreation programming
65. Knowledge of departmental policies, procedures and practices which relate to services for people with disabilities

*Competencies Found in Both the Top 20 Professional Development Needs and High Priority Competencies in Scatterplot*

Table 20 depicts the following overlapping competencies found in both the top 20 perceived professional development needs as well as in the priority competencies established in the importance-competence scatterplot. In total, 11 competencies were found to be common to both these priority groups. The following competencies, which are in no rank order, are found in this group.

*Knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act, understanding the implications of the legislation acts on the*

*professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities, knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities, awareness of frustrations experienced by people with a disability when faced with inaccessible environments and exclusive programs, ability to identify attitudinal barriers to accessibility, ability to identify strategies for overcoming attitudinal barriers to accessibility, understanding of the difference between cognitive, emotional, physical and sensory disabilities, knowledge of the characteristics of the major disability groups, understand the psychological impact a disability can have on recreation participation, knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities and knowledge of journals and other literature which may be used to improve the quality of park and recreation services to people with disabilities..*

Table 20

*Competencies Found in Both the Top 20 Professional Development Needs and High Priority Competencies in Scatterplot*

Number	Competency
52	Knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act
53	Understanding the implications of the legislation acts on the professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities
54	Knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities
39	Awareness of frustrations experienced by people with a disability when faced with inaccessible environments and exclusive programs
37	Ability to identify attitudinal barriers to accessibility
38	Ability to identify strategies for overcoming attitudinal barriers to accessibility

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41	Understanding of the difference between cognitive, emotional, physical, and sensory disabilities
40	Knowledge of the characteristics of the major disability groups
19	Understand the psychological impact a disability can have on recreation participation
33	Knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities
55	Knowledge of journals and other literature which may be used to improve the quality of park and recreation services to people with disabilities

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*Formats and Methods of Providing Continuing Education*

This section of the chapter discusses the results of the inquiry into preferred formats and methods of providing continuing education programs to park and recreation professionals. Participants involved in this study were asked to rank in order of preference, (1 = highest to 6 = lowest), formats and methods of continuing education. These rankings have been presented on Table 18 and Table 19 reflecting the ranking and mean scores of each format and each method displayed. Due to the ranking order, (1 = highest to 6 = lowest), the lowest mean score indicates the highest preference by participants in this area. The mean scores calculated from responses allowed the researcher to determine which formats and which methods were chosen as higher preferences and which formats and which methods were chosen as lower preferences in this study.

*Preferred Continuing Education Formats*

Table 21 indicates that workshops were chosen as the most preferred format of continuing education by participants in this study with the lowest mean score rate of 2.28. The second most preferred format was formal lectures/seminars, reflecting a mean score rate of 3.12 with on the job training being the third most preferred format with a mean score of 3.47. Resource material was the fourth most preferred format with a mean score rate of 3.51 and independent Internet study was the fifth most preferred format with a mean score rate of 4.13. The least preferred format was mentoring reflecting the highest mean score rate of 4.40.

Table 21

*Preferred Continuing Education Formats*

Ranking	Format	Mean	Std Dev
First Choice	Workshops	2.28	1.37
Second Choice	Formal Lectures/Seminars	3.12	1.64
Third Choice	On The Job Training	3.47	1.56
Fourth Choice	Resource Material	3.51	1.59
Fifth Choice	Independent Internet Study	4.13	1.77
Sixth Choice	Mentoring	4.40	1.39

*Preferred Continuing Education Methods*

Table 22 indicates that the most preferred method of continuing education chosen by participants was half-day programs with the lowest mean score of 1.84. The second most preferred method was all day programs, reflecting a mean score of 2.15 and the third preference in this area was evening sessional programs with a mean score of 3.68. By appointment was the fourth most preferred method with a mean score of 4.28 and a one week-long course was the fifth choice with a mean score of 4.29. The least preferred method of continuing education was weekend programs, which had the highest mean score rate of 4.68.

Table 22

*Preferred Continuing Education Methods*

Ranking	Method	Mean	Std Dev
First Choice	Half Day Programs	1.84	1.06
Second Choice	All Day Programs	2.15	1.08
Third Choice	Evening Sessional Programs	3.68	1.34
Fourth Choice	By Appointment	4.28	1.33
Fifth Choice	One Week Course	4.29	1.64
Sixth Choice	Weekend Programs	4.68	1.34

## *Discussion*

Analysis of the demographic data provides interesting observations regarding the participant population involved in this study. For instance, although the range of occupations in which the participants were engaged varied, the majority of respondents were mature males holding high levels of job responsibility. Along with this, even though 95 percent of respondents had completed some type of post secondary education, at the time of this study 81 percent of participants were not studying. This may possibly be a reflection of the general age of the population, with over 70 percent of participants aged between 31 and 50 years old. This age group may suggest lower rates of participation in study than perhaps a younger age group. This is further reflected in the fact that 38 percent of participants had completed their most recent education more than ten years ago.

It is not surprising that participants expressed a need for more current education in the form of continuing professional development packages as 71 percent of participants had not completed any type of disability studies or disability related subjects. Combined with this lack of exposure to disability studies is the mobile nature of this work force. With over 70 percent of participants having changed their current position within the last five years, continuing education takes on added importance. New competencies need to be addressed not only in the areas of disability and inclusion but also in those areas required by the diverse positions that park and recreation professionals will hold over the course of their careers.

There are also other demographic factors found in this study that may be relevant to professional development needs. First, It is important to note that nearly all participants were employed on a full time rather than part time or casual basis. In addition, forty-one percent of participants did not identify with either park or recreation areas of occupational responsibility, but instead identified with the dual area of occupational responsibility (park and recreation). This fact suggests that a large overlap of job responsibility exists and should, therefore, be considered when developing continuing education programs.

Finally, the large discrepancy between the number of male participants and female participants involved in this study may or may not have a bearing on the development of future continuing education programs.

The 20 most important job competencies table lists in order of priority the competencies participants felt were most important when performing their job. It is interesting to note that two competencies relating to physical barriers and two competencies relating to legislation are amongst this group. One can, therefore, assume that understanding and adhering to Australian legislation and being aware of physical barriers and how to overcome them is fundamentally important to park and recreation professionals' job performance. This leads one to wonder if participant motivation in this area is linked to a desirable commitment to the philosophy of inclusion or to a fear of being in breach of the law. This also might be indicative that people find it far easier to identify with problems associated with physical barriers to accessibility than with the more complex issues involved in inclusive practices.

The ranking of competencies according to the perceived level of self-competence tables list the highest 20 and lowest 20 competencies in terms of participant self-competence. The competencies indicating the most amount of self-competence in this group both centre around attitudinal issues. First is *the ability to develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities* and second is *knowledge of own personal attitudes and biases toward people with disabilities*. An observation can be made, therefore, that participants felt most competent in attitudinal areas than in areas connected to service delivery. At the other end of the scale of the competencies are the competencies in which participants felt they had the least competence. These competencies involved *knowledge of the history of recreation services to people with disabilities, including therapeutic recreation* and *knowledge of park and recreation professionals who have expertise in inclusive practices*. Lack of knowledge in the first two competency areas is not surprising, yet not knowing where to access expertise for assistance in providing inclusive services is a major concern, especially in the light that

participants do not feel *considerably* or *extremely competent* in any of the 49 competencies. As a result, their ability to provide inclusive services is limited.

The top 20 national professional development needs table represents in order of priority the 20 competencies in which participants felt they needed professional development. It is interesting to note that, once again, both legislation based competencies and physical barrier based competencies are in this group. These competencies are, therefore, both important to job performance as well as to professional development. *Knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities* and *knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities* were the two most pressing professional development need competencies chosen by participants. These competencies are also an indication of service management needs rather than service delivery needs, reflecting the management orientation of the park and recreation professionals who took part in this study.

The importance of these two competencies leads into discussion about the top 10 regional professional development needs table. Though all regions displayed a similarity in their professional development needs, the only two competencies that were in each of their top 10 lists were *knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities* and *knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities*. Interestingly, as stated above, these two competencies were also the two most pressing national professional development needs chosen by participants. All of the competencies except for, *understand the economic impact a disability can have on recreation participation*, that fall into the top 10 regional professional development needs table also fall within the top 20 national professional development needs table. This implies that national and regional professional development needs do not vary greatly and it would be viable for Parks and Leisure Australia to offer professional development at either or both levels.

The importance-competence analysis (figure 3) verifies the most pressing continuing education needs identified by park and recreation professionals involved in this study. The three competencies which stand out in this analysis are, once again, *knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities, understanding of the implications of the legislation acts and knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities*. The importance of these three competencies to the professional development needs of park and recreation professionals cannot, therefore, be understated. These three competencies are amongst 11 that overlap both the importance-competence analysis and the top 20 professional development needs table, in which the funding sources competency holds the highest priority. It is also interesting to note that the majority of the 49 competencies fell within the high priority for education quadrant in the importance-competence analysis while the remaining competencies fell mostly within the maintenance of education quadrant, reinforcing the notion that there is a great need for education involving the majority of competencies used in this study.

It is also important to note that even though the competencies in quadrant one were rated as of low importance with low self-competence, it does not mean they are not important to address in continuing education. It could simply mean that the participants were avoiding such issues as knowing how to facilitate inclusive recreation programming and execute recreation activities.

The most preferred continuing education format was workshops and the second most preferred format was formal lectures/seminars. It is surprising in this instance, that independent internet study, which is a cutting edge format of providing continuing education, was not chosen as a preferred format. This could be a reflection of the age of the population under investigation. While younger people are very familiar and comfortable with internet and overall computer usage, older people may not be. Another possible explanation for this could be that park and recreation professionals involved in this study prefer to undertake continuing education in a group environment, rather than on their own. Motivation

might be a factor here. Half-day programs and all-day programs were chosen as the most preferred continuing education methods respectively. Half-day programs may be preferred to all day programs simply due to shorter time spans and the ability to maintain effective learning capacities. The other continuing education methods listed as choices such as weekend programs could have been viewed as somewhat more intrusive upon time and leisure, thus, deeming them less attractive alternatives.

The results of this study indicate that participants felt they needed continuing education in the area of inclusive practices for people with disabilities. Furthermore, based on the results of this study it appears that education in the disability area has been lacking. Park and recreation professionals have not been educationally prepared to ensure inclusive services for people with disabilities. This is highlighted by the fact that participants did not feel *considerably* or *extremely competent* in any skill area and also by the fact that 45 out of the 49 competencies fell into the importance threshold of the importance-competence analysis. Priority competencies may be a good starting point for developing continuing education packages, however, low levels of perceived self-competence indicates that education may be necessary in all competency areas to boost levels of competence. Additionally, the importance-competence analysis confirmed that park and recreation professionals involved in this study were able to identify their own needs as the results of the importance-competence analysis corresponded with the results of the professional development needs table. As park and recreation professionals were capable of expressing what they needed for professional development in this area, it is important that any future educational opportunities are developed in consultation with them.

### *Summary*

Chapter four identified the demographic make-up of participants involved in this study. Demographics included position titles, regional belonging, identified

primary area of responsibility, employment status, most recent education, educational status, education levels, age and gender.

Tables reflecting the 20 most important job competencies, the 20 highest perceived self competence skill areas, the 20 lowest perceived self competence skill areas and the most pressing national and regional professional development needs were also established. These tables were established through a ranking of mean score rates for each individual competency. Along with this, an importance-competence analysis was undertaken to establish priority education needs determined by the link between the importance of competencies to job performance and the perceived level of self-competence in each skill area. Ten overlapping competencies were found in both the priority area of the importance competence analysis and the 20 most pressing perceived professional development needs. Tables were also established to represent the most preferred format of providing continuing education (workshops) and the most preferred method of providing continuing education (half-day programs).

## Chapter Five

### Summary, Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

#### *Summary of procedures*

The aim of this study was to determine the competencies required and the subsequent education needed for the implementation of inclusive practices within the parks and recreation industry. The study was designed to provide information that would be useful to continuing education bodies involved in the delivery of professional development programs for the parks and recreation industry. The literature review undertaken for this study was divided into three main areas comprising **needs assessment**, **continuing education** and **inclusion**. The methodology employed in this study addressed the following three sub-problems:

1. To select a comprehensive random sample of park and recreation professionals working throughout Australia
2. To determine the competencies required and the education needed for the implementation of inclusive practice within the parks and recreation industry.
3. To organise and analyse data for the purpose of identifying the implications for professional preparation and continuing education.

Methodology began with identification of the sample that was drawn from the professional body of Parks and Leisure Australia. Approval was granted from the National President and board to commence the study. The professional association called Parks and Leisure Australia had a membership of 1600 professionals at the time of this study. It was necessary, therefore, to obtain a random sample of this population to obtain reliable results. Statisticians and statistical literature were consulted to decide upon a 50 percent random sample resulting in 800 potential participants. The random sample was performed by Parks and Leisure Australia and provided to the researcher.

A questionnaire was identified as the most suitable instrument to achieve the aim of this study, as research indicated that questionnaires had been

successful in previous studies relating to the inclusion of people with disabilities. A series of stages were involved in the development and finalisation of the questionnaire used in this study. A literature review, consultation with recreation professionals, review by an expert jury panel and a pilot study were undertaken before final printing and distribution of questionnaires to the identified sample population. After a final stage of follow-up post cards being mailed out to all participants, a cut off date was established for the return of questionnaires. The next stages of method employed in this study involved the setting up of an SPSS program for data entry and data analysis. A total of 289 returned questionnaires were entered as data into the SPSS program representing a 36 percent response rate to the mailed questionnaires.

Data entry and analysis began with a breakdown of demographic data obtained from section one of the questionnaire and was represented in table form displaying frequency and percentage. Statistical data analysis commenced with a specific focus on selected demographics including position titles, regional residence, primary area of responsibility, employment status, years of service in current position, number of years worked in the park and recreation field, years of membership with Parks and Leisure Australia, Parks and Leisure Australia membership category, level of education, year of most recent education, educational status and education levels, age and gender.

Further data entry and analysis involved all competencies listed in the questionnaire. All 49 competencies were listed and ranked according to mean score rates in each of the three sub-categories (importance of competency to job, perceived level of self competence and need for professional development). (Appendix F) Data about preferred continuing education formats and methods was also entered and analysed.

Tables reflecting the most important job competencies, the highest perceived self-competence skill areas, the lowest perceived self-competence skill areas and the most pressing national and regional professional development needs were also established. These tables were established through a ranking of mean score rates for each individual competency. Along with this, an importance-

competence analysis was undertaken to establish priority education needs determined by the link between the importance of competencies to job performance and the perceived level of self-competence in each skill area. Eleven competencies were found to overlap the priority area of the importance-competence analysis and the 20 most pressing professional development needs. Tables were also established to represent the most preferred format and method of providing continuing education programs.

### *Findings*

This study was concerned with identifying the continuing education needed by park and recreation professionals to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities. The findings of this study included the following:

1. The vast majority of current literature surrounding studies involving the inclusion of people with disabilities and park and recreation services was found to be derived from North America.
2. The majority of participants involved in this study were full-time male professionals who had tertiary education qualifications, held high job positions, had been working in the parks and recreation field for over 11 years and had not completed any disability studies or related subjects.
3. The following three competencies were identified as having the highest priority in the 20 most important job competency group; *ability to develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities, understand the value of inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities and ability to identify physical barriers to accessibility.*
4. The following three competencies were identified as the skill areas in which participants had the most self competence; *ability to develop positive attitudes towards people with disabilities, knowledge of own personal attitudes and biases toward people with disabilities and understand the concept of inclusion for people with disabilities.*
5. The following three competencies were identified as the skill areas in which participants had the least self competence; *knowledge of the history of*

*recreation services to people with disabilities, including therapeutic recreation, knowledge of park and recreation professionals who have expertise in inclusive practice and knowledge of journals and other literature which may be used to improve the quality of park and recreation services to people with disabilities.*

6. The following three competencies were identified as having the highest priority to the top 20 professional development needs of participants; *knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities, knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities and understanding the implications of the legislation acts on the professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities.*
7. The following four competencies were found in both the top 20 importance to job competencies as well as the top 20 professional development needs; *knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act, understanding of the implications of the legislation acts on the professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities, ability to identify physical barriers to accessibility and ability to identify strategies for overcoming physical barriers.*
8. Upon regional analysis, the following two competencies were found in each region's top 10 professional development needs; *knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities and knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities.*
9. The following two competencies were found to have the highest priority for education in the importance-competence analysis; *knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act and understanding of the implications of the legislation acts on the professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities.*

10. Eleven competencies overlapped the top 20 professional development needs and the priority quadrant in the importance-competence analysis
11. Forty-five out of the 49 competencies on the scatterplot representing the importance-competence analysis fell into the important threshold.
12. Thirty-one out of the 49 competencies in the importance-competence analysis fell into the priority quadrant.
13. Participants did not feel *considerably* or *extremely competent* in any of the 49 competencies used in this study.
14. Half-day workshops was ranked first choice in the preferred continuing education format and method question.

### Conclusions

The following conclusions were based on the findings of this study:

1. The literature surrounding the inclusion of people with disabilities and park and recreation services indicates a gap in meeting service delivery needs.
2. No definitive body of knowledge currently exists in Australia regarding the continuing education needed by park and recreation professionals to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities.
3. Park and recreation professionals involved in this study were able to identify a series of competencies as their most pressing national and state professional development needs.
4. The two most pressing national professional development needs were also the only two professional development needs that were common to all states.
5. Park and recreation professionals involved in this study indicated that legislative, barrier, funding and international trend based competencies had particular importance to their professional development.
6. Participants considered most competencies surrounding the inclusion of people with disabilities as important to performing their job.
7. Continuing education is needed in nearly all competency areas.

8. Park and recreation professionals involved in this study identified that any future professional development should preferably be offered in a direct workshop setting and in short un-intrusive periods of time.
9. Park and recreation professionals involved in this study have not been well prepared in the area of inclusive service delivery.
10. Park and recreation professionals have a need for professional development to become more inclusive in their practices.
11. The needs assessment performed in this study supports the establishment of an organised and systematic continuing education curriculum, in the area of inclusion, to enhance the professional development of park and recreation professionals..

### *Recommendations*

A range of recommendations follow, which, have emerged by way of the findings and conclusions derived from this study. These recommendations are deemed to be appropriate and relevant to both the study's aims and the continued development of the park and recreation industry.

1. A definitive body of knowledge regarding the continuing education needs of park and recreation professionals to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities should be developed and made available to professionals working in the industry and people preparing to work in the industry.
2. A national continuing education program should be offered based upon the identified 20 priority professional development needs as well as the priority education needs established in the importance-competence analysis, placing particular emphasis on those competencies that overlap both of these areas.
3. Regional continuing education programs should be offered based upon the identified state priority professional development needs, placing particular emphasis on the two most pressing national professional development needs,
4. Continuing education should be offered as a half-day workshop program.
5. Results of this study should be disseminated to interested continuing education bodies, (in particular CREST), who play a role in the park and

recreation industry, for incorporation into future continuing education packages.

6. On going review of the professional development needs of park and recreation professionals based on the changing needs of people with disabilities should take place within the parks and recreation industry.
7. Tertiary education institutions should include results from this study into the curriculum preparing individuals to work in the park and recreation industry.
8. Tertiary education institutions should investigate the opportunity of using results from this study to provide continuing education courses to professionals already working in the park and recreation industry.
9. A needs assessment of final year recreation students should take place to identify whether current professional preparation programs are addressing issues surrounding the inclusion of people with disabilities.
10. A needs assessment study should be undertaken in the parks and recreation industry looking at other continuing education needs outside of the inclusion of people with disabilities.
11. Issues relating to barriers, disability legislation, funding and international trends need to be addressed in any continuing education program provided for park and recreation professionals.
12. Professional development should be offered in all competencies needed for the inclusion of people with disabilities, due to low competence and high importance placed on this area by park and recreation professionals.
13. The researcher should produce a document summarising results and recommendations of the study and present them to the National President and Board of Parks and Leisure Australia.

**APPENDIX A**

**LETTER OF FORMAL ENDORSEMENT FROM PARKS AND LEISURE  
AUSTRALIA**



27 February 2001

Ms Sabrina Fernando  
3 Ramfurley Drive  
Glen Waverley 3150

Dear Sabrina,

Thank you for your letter of 18 February 2001 outlining to myself and members of the National Board of Parks and Leisure Australia your proposal to study as part of your proposal for candidature for the Master of Arts degree at Victoria University on the subject of Continuing Education needed by Parks and Recreation professionals to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Having read with great interest your letter and the supporting documentation I am convinced of the role that Parks and Leisure Australia has in assisting associated research that will assist recreation and leisure professionals everywhere in fully understanding the scope of responsibility that they have to the community.

On behalf of Parks and Leisure Australia, I am delighted to be able to endorse your study which already shows great promise and is testimony to the 6 months research that you have already put in to bring the proposal to this stage. I have advised Gary Henshall who is Parks and Leisure Australia's Executive Officer to assist you in accessing membership information so that the distribution of questionnaires can perhaps be incorporated within our routine membership mailouts. It may even be that electronic access is also possible. Accordingly I am drafting a letter of support so that you may add that to the questionnaires and hopefully give some further credibility to the excellent research task that you have undertaken.

**National Office:**  
15 Neale Street,  
Bendigo Vic. 3550  
A.C.N. 083 489 463

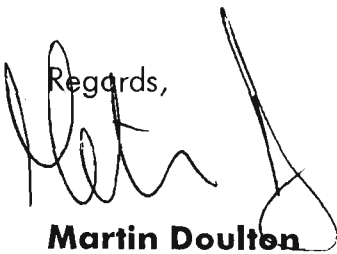
**Postal:**  
P.O. Box 210,  
Bendigo Central Vic. 3552

**Tel:** +61 +3 5444 1763  
**Fax:** +61 +3 5444 1783  
**Email:** [office@parks-leisure.com.au](mailto:office@parks-leisure.com.au)  
**Web:** [www.parks-leisure.com.au](http://www.parks-leisure.com.au)

If you could contact Gary Henshall on the PLA National Office directly to discuss how the administrative processes might be streamlined please feel free to do so. Other opportunities that Parks and Leisure Australia may have available to it in promoting your research project is via perhaps an article in Australian Parks and Leisure - the organisations journal on the web site and via the Australian Leisure Managements PLA page.

Wishing you every success in gaining the quality and quantity of the research material so that your research project can certainly make a positive difference to the professional development needed by Parks and Recreation professionals to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in the wide raft of recreational and leisure opportunities available within the community.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin Doulton', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

**Martin Doulton**  
National President  
Parks and Leisure Australia

Copy: Gary Henshall and Associates  
PO Box 210  
Bendigo Central Vic 3552

**APPENDIX B**

**THE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE**



**Victoria University of Technology**

PO Box 14428	Telephone
Melbourne City	61 3 9688 5052
MC 8001 Australia	Facsimile
	61 3 9688 4063

**Footscray Park Campus**

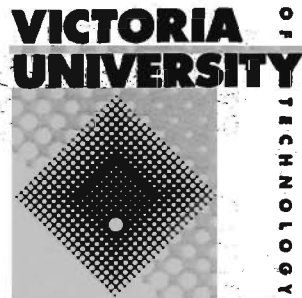
Department of Asian and International Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Ballarat Road  
Footscray

# Continuing Education Needed by Park and Recreation Professionals to Ensure the Inclusion of People With Disabilities

A Study by: **Sabrina Fernando**  
**Victoria University**

**Victoria University of Technology**

PO Box 14428	Telephone
Melbourne City	61 3 9688 5052
MC 8001 Australia	Facsimile
	61 3 9688 4063



**Footscray Park Campus**

Department of Asian and International Studies  
Faculty of Arts  
Ballarat Road  
Footscray

***Information to Participants***

You are invited to participate in a study that seeks to determine the continuing education needed for the successful implementation of inclusive practices within the park and recreation industry. This questionnaire involves a series of competencies that relate to the inclusion of people with disabilities and forms part of a needs assessment study for you as park and recreation professionals. Your involvement in the study is important, as it will help to ensure an accurate reflection of the education and training needs within the park and recreation industry. Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and simply involves completing this questionnaire and returning it in the stamped addressed envelope provided. This will take you approximately twenty minutes. The return of completed questionnaires will imply that you have given your informed consent to participation in the study. It is hoped that you will recognize the study's worthwhile nature and importance to both people with disabilities and the park and recreation industry. Completion of questionnaires is completely anonymous and will only be viewed by the researcher for coding and subsequent analysis of data. Results of the study will be made available to Parks and Leisure Australia. Thank you for your consideration.

The researcher will be happy to respond to any queries regarding the study and can be contacted by phone on (03) 9560 0906 or via e-mail at: [sabrinafernando@hotmail.com](mailto:sabrinafernando@hotmail.com)

If you have any complaints regarding the study you may contact the Secretary, University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University of Technology, PO Box 14428 MC, Melbourne, 8001 (telephone no: 03-9688 4710).

Section I: General Information

1. Position title \_\_\_\_\_ ☐

2. Region: HUME ☐ NSW ☐ QLD ☐ SA ☐  
VIC ☐ WA ☐ TAS ☐

3. Primary area of responsibility: Park ☐ Recreation ☐ Both ☐

4. Number of years in current position \_\_\_\_\_

5. Basis of employment: Full time ☐ Part time ☐ Casual ☐

6. Number of years in the parks or recreation field \_\_\_\_\_

7. Number of years as a member of Parks and Leisure Australia \_\_\_\_\_

8. Parks and Leisure Australia member category:

Corporate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fellow	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student	<input type="checkbox"/>
Retired	<input type="checkbox"/>
Honorary	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Highest level of education attained:

High School Incomplete	<input type="checkbox"/>
High School	<input type="checkbox"/>
TAFE	<input type="checkbox"/>
Undergraduate Degree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Post Graduate Certificate	<input type="checkbox"/>
Post Graduate Diploma	<input type="checkbox"/>
Masters Degree	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doctorate Degree	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. Year when most recent education was completed \_\_\_\_\_

11. Are you currently studying?    Yes ☐            No ☐

12. If yes, at what level?    High School ☐            TAFE ☐            Undergraduate Degree ☐  
   Post Graduate Certificate ☐            Post Graduate Diploma ☐  
   Masters Degree ☐            Doctorate Degree ☐

13. Have you ever completed any disability studies or related subjects as part of your education?  
          Yes ☐                            No ☐

14. If yes, what subjects have you completed?

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

15. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

16. Sex: Male ☐            Female ☐

Section II: Competencies

The following pages list a series of professional competencies that relate to the inclusion of people with disabilities into park and recreation services. Please read each competency and complete the following three scales.

The first scale is *importance of competency to job*. It asks you to determine in your present position the importance of each competency when including people with disabilities. Importance ranges from (5) very high to (1) very low.

The second scale is *perceived level of self competence*. It requires you to examine your perceived level of competence for each ability, skill and knowledge listed. Competence ranges from (5) extremely competent to (1) little or no competence.

The third scale is *need for professional development*. It asks you to review each competency and indicate your need for professional development in each area. Need for development ranges from (5) extreme need to (1) little or no need.

Based on these ranges please work across the page and circle the most appropriate response in each scale.

Examples

If you feel adapted physical education has high importance to your job, your level of competence in the area is only moderate and you have a considerable need for professional development, you would answer as indicated below.

	First scale	Second scale	Third scale
Competency	Importance of competency to Job	Perceived Level of Self Competence	Need for Professional development
	5. Very High 4. High 3. Average 2. Low 1. Very Low	5. Extremely Competent 4. Considerably Competent 3. Moderately Competent 2. Somewhat Competent 1. Little or No Competence	5. Extreme Need 4. Considerable Need 3. Moderate Need 2. Some Need 1. Little or no Need
1. knowledge of adapted physical education	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1

However, if you feel adapted physical education has very low importance to your job, your level of competence in the area is considerable and you have only little need for professional development, you would answer as indicated below.

	First scale	Second scale	Third scale
Competency	Importance of competency to Job	Perceived Level of Self Competence	Need for Professional development
	5. Very High 4. High 3. Average 2. Low 1. Very Low	5. Extremely Competent 4. Considerably Competent 3. Moderately Competent 2. Somewhat Competent 1. Little or No Competence	5. Extreme Need 4. Considerable Need 3. Moderate Need 2. Some Need 1. Little or no Need
1. knowledge of adapted physical education	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1

Concepts and Attitudes Held by Park and Recreation Professionals

Competency	Importance of competency to Job	Perceived Level of Self Competence	Need for Professional development
	5. Very High 4. High 3. Average 2. Low 1. Very Low	5. Extremely Competent 4. Considerably Competent 3. Moderately Competent 2. Somewhat Competent 1. Little or No Competence	5. Extreme Need 4. Considerable Need 3. Moderate Need 2. Some Need 1. Little or no Need
17. Understand the value of inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
18. Knowledge of ways in which park and recreation services can help to serve the developmental needs of people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
19. Understand the psychological impact a disability can have on recreation participation	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
20. Understand the economic impact a disability can have on recreation participation	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
21. Knowledge of the history of recreation services to people with disabilities, including therapeutic recreation	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
22. Understand the role of leisure in the lives of people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
23. Knowledge of appropriate terminology relating to people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
24. Ability to develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
25. Awareness of concerns families of children with disabilities may have	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
26. Knowledge of society's attitudes, (past and present), toward people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
27. Awareness of attitudes of people with disabilities towards people outside their disability group	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Importance of competency to Job</b>	<b>Perceived Level of Self Competence</b>	<b>Need for Professional development</b>
	5. Very High 4. High 3. Average 2. Low 1. Very Low	5. Extremely Competent 4. Considerably Competent 3. Moderately Competent 2. Somewhat Competent 1. Little or No Competence	5. Extreme Need 4. Considerable Need 3. Moderate Need 2. Some Need 1. Little or no Need
28. Knowledge of own personal attitudes and biases toward people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
29. Understand the concept of inclusion for people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
30. Ability to facilitate inclusive park and recreation services	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
31. Understand the impact a leader can have on a person with a disability	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
32. Ability to consider individual needs and interests when providing services for people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
33. Knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
34. Ability to identify physical barriers to accessibility	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
35. Ability to identify strategies for overcoming physical barriers	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
36. Ability to design an accessible environment	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
37. Ability to identify attitudinal barriers to accessibility	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
38. Ability to identify strategies for overcoming attitudinal barriers	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
39. Awareness of frustrations experienced by people with a disability when faced with inaccessible environments and exclusive programs	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
40. Knowledge of the characteristics of the major disability groups	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1

<i>Competency</i>	<i>Importance of competency to Job</i>	<i>Perceived Level of Self Competence</i>	<i>Need for Professional development</i>
	5. Very High 4. High 3. Average 2. Low 1. Very Low	5. Extremely Competent 4. Considerably Competent 3. Moderately Competent 2. Somewhat Competent 1. Little or No Competence	5. Extreme Need 4. Considerable Need 3. Moderate Need 2. Some Need 1. Little or No Need
41. Understanding of the difference between cognitive, emotional, physical and sensory disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
42. Understanding of the differences between the terms <i>disability</i> , <i>handicap</i> and <i>impairment</i> .	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
43. Awareness of the diversity of different disability groups	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
44. Understanding of social and cultural influences on recreation participation	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1

*Delivery of Park and Recreation Services*

<i>Competency</i>	<i>Importance of competency to Job</i>	<i>Perceived Level of Self Competence</i>	<i>Need for Professional development</i>
	5. Very High 4. High 3. Average 2. Low 1. Very Low	5. Extremely Competent 4. Considerably Competent 3. Moderately Competent 2. Somewhat Competent 1. Little or No Competence	5. Extreme Need 4. Considerable Need 3. Moderate Need 2. Some Need 1. Little or No Need
45. Ability to identify and evaluate equipment adaptations necessary for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
46. Ability to source and select equipment appropriate for people with disabilities (eg. regular or adaptive)	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
47. Knowledge of first aid and safety procedures which may relate to people with disabilities (eg. handling seizures)	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Importance of competency to Job</b>	<b>Perceived Level of Self Competence</b>	<b>Need for Professional development</b>
	5. Very High 4. High 3. Average 2. Low 1. Very Low	5. Extremely Competent 4. Considerably Competent 3. Moderately Competent 2. Somewhat Competent 1. Little or No Competence	5. Extreme Need 4. Considerable Need 3. Moderate Need 2. Some Need 1. Little or No Need
48. Awareness of basic mechanical devices, (such as wheelchairs and frames), which may be used by people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
49. Knowledge of appropriate assistive techniques such as physical guidance for people with visual impairment	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
50. Knowledge of agencies which can provide resources to assist in the inclusion of people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
51. Ability to assist people with disabilities by directing them to appropriate services within the community	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
52. Knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
53. Understanding of the implications of the legislation acts on the professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
54. Knowledge of funding sources for the development of park and recreation services for people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Importance of competency to Job</b>	<b>Perceived Level of Self Competence</b>	<b>Need for Professional development</b>
	5. Very High 4. High 3. Average 2. Low 1. Very Low	5. Extremely Competent 4. Considerably Competent 3. Moderately Competent 2. Somewhat Competent 1. Little or No Competence	5. Extreme Need 4. Considerable Need 3. Moderate Need 2. Some Need 1. Little or No Need
55. Knowledge of journals and other literature which may be used to improve the quality of park and recreation services to people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
56. Knowledge of current social issues and how they may affect services to people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
57. Knowledge of advocacy as it relates to the recreational needs of people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
58. Ability to include consumer input in program and service development	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
59. Ability to modify activities for people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
60. Knowledge of recreation programming for people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
61. Knowledge of duty of care responsibilities towards people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
62. knowledge of leadership techniques useful for executing recreation activities for people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
63. Knowledge of park and recreation professionals who have expertise in inclusive practices	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
64. Ability to implement inclusive recreation programming	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1
65. Knowledge of departmental policies, procedures and practices which relate to services for people with disabilities	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1	5 4 3 2 1

*Continuing Education for Park and Recreation Professionals*

66. After considering the preceding list of competencies relating to the inclusion of people with disabilities, please list in order of priority your five most pressing professional development needs in this area:

high

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

low

↓

67. Please rank in order of preference (1=highest preference, 6=lowest preference) the following formats of providing continuing education:

Formal lectures/seminar	<input type="checkbox"/>
Workshops	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mentoring	<input type="checkbox"/>
On the job	<input type="checkbox"/>
Independent study through the Internet	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resource material (videos and kits)	<input type="checkbox"/>

68. Please rank in order of preference (1=highest, 6=lowest) the following methods of providing continuing education:

All day programs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Half day programs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Evening sessional programs	<input type="checkbox"/>
By appointment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weekend programs	<input type="checkbox"/>
One week long professional development course	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **PILOT STUDY COVERING LETTER TO QUESTIONNAIRE**

## Pilot Study

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this pilot study. Your participation will be completely anonymous and will not contribute towards the results of this study. The purpose of this pilot study is to ascertain whether any problems exist when filling out the questionnaire attached. If you come across any problems whilst filling out this questionnaire, please state what they are and the question number in the space provided below. Your assistance is greatly appreciated and will be of great benefit to achieving the aims of this study.

Thanking you.

Sabrina Fernando.

[illegible]

## **APPENDIX D**

**ARTICLE ABOUT THE STUDY PUBLISHED IN THE PARKS AND LEISURE  
AUSTRALIA JOURNAL**



# Research Review

by Anne L. Binkley, Ph.D.

**E**ditor's note: It is not often that individual members of *Parks and Leisure Australia* are given the chance to enhance the existing body of knowledge in the field through participation in meaningful research. This issue of Research Review highlights just such an opportunity. Sabrina Fernando, a masters student at Victoria University, has received endorsement from the PLA National Board of Directors to conduct a study that seeks to determine the continuing education needed for the successful implementation of inclusive practices within the park and leisure industry using a random sample of PLA members. In the near future, a number of you will receive a questionnaire in the mail. Please recognise the importance of the study and take 20 minutes out of your busy schedule to complete it. A full report of the findings will be provided to Parks and Leisure Australia and a summary will appear in *Australian Parks and Leisure*. Details of the research project are provided below.

## *Continuing Education Needed by Park and Recreation Professionals to Ensure the Inclusion of People with Disabilities*

by Sabrina Fernando

The inclusion of people with disabilities in the provision of generic services has become an accepted principle for service organisations in Australia. With 3.6 million people or 19% of its total population possessing a disability, Australia is experiencing a dramatic transformation of its programs and practices. Especially noteworthy is the impact that inclusion is having on the park and leisure industry. As people with disabilities are excluded from so many areas of life, their inclusion in park and leisure programs can be vital to

their quality of life and sense of community acceptance. As a result, segregated programs for people with disabilities are no longer considered best practice. Rather, government policy now supports and encourages the inclusion of people with disabilities in generic programs. The park and leisure industry is now mandated by law to ensure that people with disabilities have the same opportunity to participate in programs and services as do people without disabilities. Failure to fully respond to the rights of individuals with disabilities results in discriminatory practice. Inclusive practice is therefore necessary to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities are being upheld.

This research project seeks to examine the abilities, skills and knowledge needed by park and leisure professionals to successfully include people with disabilities in their programs and services. The methodology to be used in this study has been designed to ensure that the experience and knowledge of park and leisure professionals will form the basis for the development of appropriate continuing education programs.

The National Board of Directors of Parks and Leisure Australia has agreed to members being approached by mail to participate in the study. A random sample will be drawn from the 1600 member population. A questionnaire has been developed based on a thorough review of the literature as well as discussion with leaders in both the park and leisure and disability fields. It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete and seeks to elicit information in three main areas:

1. the importance of a range of competencies necessary for park and leisure professionals to include people with disabilities in their programs;
2. the level of perceived competency park and leisure professionals currently possess for including people with disabilities;
3. the professional development needed by park and leisure professionals for implementation of inclusive practice.

It is hoped that, due to the important and worthwhile nature of the study, PLA members will respond enthusiastically to the survey. Once all questionnaires have been returned, data will be analysed and a report produced, including practical recommendations for the development of appropriate continuing education programs.

This study is significant because it will provide information to assist park and leisure professionals in improving their services to people with disabilities. The aim is to assist the industry in breaking down existing barriers to the successful inclusion of people with disabilities and to support inclusive practice. The study is seen as not only important to the professional development of Parks and Leisure Australia members, but also to the rights of people with disabilities, their families and communities. Some studies have already been undertaken investigating the inclusion of people with disabilities in parks and leisure programs, but most of these have been in North America. To date, no studies of this nature have been undertaken in Australia. There is, thus, a significant need for Australia, with its own cultural character, to identify its unique needs if it is to provide and maintain effective services to people with disabilities.

Further information on the study can be obtained from Sabrina Fernando via e-mail at: [sabrinafernando@hotmail.com](mailto:sabrinafernando@hotmail.com).

**APPENDIX E**

**FOLLOW UP POST CARD TO RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE**

Dear Colleague,

If you have already completed the questionnaire mailed out to you on the inclusion of people with disabilities, thank you very much for your interest and response. If you haven't, a response from you would be greatly appreciated because it is essential to this study's success.

Please take the time out from your busy schedule to participate in this important research. Should you have lost your questionnaire or require a replacement copy, please call me at (03) 9560 0906 or e-mail me at: [sabrinafernando@hotmail.com](mailto:sabrinafernando@hotmail.com)

Thank you for your valuable time

Sabrina Fernando.

**APPENDIX F**

**ALL 49 COMPETENCIES WITH MEAN SCORE RATES IN EACH SUB-CATEGORY**

*All 49 Competencies With Mean and Std Dev Rates in Each Sub-Category*

*I = Importance of Competency to job, P = Perceived Level of Self Competence & N = Need for Professional Development*

Competency	I Mean	I Std Dev	P Mean	P Std Dev	N Mean	N Std Dev
Understand the value of inclusive recreation for individuals with disabilities	3.99	.86	3.33	.75	2.97	1.04
Knowledge of ways in which park and recreation services can help to serve the developmental needs of people with disabilities	3.66	.94	3.03	.82	3.11	1.00
Understand the psychological impact a disability can have on recreation participation	3.45	1.03	2.78	1.03	3.02	1.11
Understand the economic impact a disability can have on recreation participation	3.34	1.02	2.80	1.08	2.89	1.12
Knowledge of the history of recreation services to people with disabilities, including therapeutic recreation	2.72	1.05	2.34	1.04	2.57	1.14
Understand the role of leisure in the lives of people with disabilities	3.70	1.01	3.14	1.00	2.99	1.17
Knowledge of appropriate terminology relating to people with disabilities	3.54	.97	2.97	1.04	2.89	1.02
Ability to develop positive attitudes toward people with disabilities	4.05	.96	3.63	.92	2.71	1.23
Awareness of concerns families of children with disabilities may have	3.56	1.05	2.86	1.00	2.96	1.15
Knowledge of society's attitudes, (past and present), toward people with disabilities	3.41	1.05	3.04	.94	2.73	1.17

APPENDIX F (Cont.)

*All 49 Competencies With Mean and Std Dev Rates in Each Sub-Category*

*I = Importance of Competency to job, P = Perceived Level of Self Competence & N = Need for Professional Development*

Competency	I Mean	I Std Dev	P Mean	P Std Dev	N Mean	N Std Dev
Awareness of attitudes of people with disabilities towards people outside their disability group	3.08	1.07	2.45	1.05	2.84	1.09
Knowledge of own personal attitudes and biases toward people with disabilities	3.65	1.07	3.55	.84	2.63	1.18
Understand the concept of inclusion for people with disabilities	3.90	.97	3.52	.91	2.79	1.17
Ability to facilitate inclusive park and recreation services	3.74	1.08	3.21	.92	2.97	1.20
Understand the impact a leader can have on a person with a disability	3.38	1.13	3.06	1.02	2.75	1.13
Ability to consider individual needs and interests when providing services for people with disabilities	3.60	1.00	3.13	.93	2.88	1.14
Knowledge of current international trends in inclusive park and recreation services for people with disabilities	3.42	1.12	2.47	.89	3.27	1.12
Ability to identify physical barriers to accessibility	3.94	.92	3.35	.79	3.04	1.13
Ability to identify strategies for overcoming physical barriers	3.84	.99	3.14	.77	3.11	1.05
Ability to design an accessible environment	3.62	1.16	3.04	.94	3.12	1.24

APPENDIX F (Cont.)

*All 49 Competencies With Mean and Std Dev Rates in Each Sub-Category*

*I = Importance of Competency to job, P = Perceived Level of Self Competence & N = Need for Professional Development*

Competency	I Mean	I Std Dev	P Mean	P Std Dev	N Mean	N Std Dev
Ability to identify attitudinal barriers to accessibility	3.50	1.08	.2.91	.90	3.02	1.06
Ability to identify strategies for overcoming attitudinal barriers	3.51	1.09	2.84	.90	3.11	1.10
Awareness of frustrations experiences by people with a disability when faced with inaccessible environments and exclusive programs	3.61	1.08	2.97	1.01	3.01	1.15
Knowledge of the characteristics of the major disability groups	3.47	1.09	2.69	.95	3.18	1.06
Understanding of the difference between cognitive, emotional, physical and sensory disabilities	3.51	1.07	2.76	1.02	3.01	1.16
Understanding of the differences between the terms disability, handicap and Impairment	3.41	1.11	2.83	1.01	2.84	1.20
Awareness of the diversity of different disability groups	3.53	1.01	2.87	1.01	2.90	1.07
Understanding of social and cultural influences on recreation participation	3.78	.99	3.08	.96	3.04	1.15
Ability to identify and evaluate equipment adaptations necessary for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities	3.47	1.15	2.74	.97	2.95	1.11
Ability to source and select equipment appropriate for people with disabilities (e.g. regular or adaptive)	3.40	1.27	2.67	1.03	2.91	1.22

APPENDIX F (Cont.)

*All 49 Competencies With Mean and Std Dev Rates in Each Sub-Category*

*I = Importance of Competency to job, P = Perceived Level of Self Competence & N = Need for Professional Development*

Competency	I Mean	I Std Dev	P Mean	P Std Dev	N Mean	N Std Dev
Knowledge of first aid and safety procedures which may relate to people with disabilities (e.g. handling seizures)	3.00	1.32	2.53	1.12	2.82	1.30
Awareness of basic mechanical devices, (such as wheelchairs and frames), which may be used by people with disabilities	3.28	1.08	2.88	1.07	2.58	1.13
Knowledge of appropriate assistive techniques such as physical guidance for people with visual impairment	3.03	1.13	2.55	1.04	2.69	1.16
Knowledge of agencies which can provide resources to assist in the inclusion of people with disabilities	3.43	1.13	2.64	1.04	2.86	1.11
Ability to assist people with disabilities by directing them to appropriate services within the community	3.04	1.28	2.68	1.01	2.69	1.118
Knowledge of current Australian legislation which is relevant to serving people with disabilities such as the Disability Discrimination Act and the Equal Opportunity Act	3.86	1.03	2.81	1.07	3.16	1.21

APPENDIX F (Cont.)

*All 49 Competencies With Mean and Std Dev Rates in Each Sub-Category*

*I = Importance of Competency to job, P = Perceived Level of Self Competence & N = Need for Professional Development*

Competency	I Mean	I Std Dev	P Mean	P Std Dev	N Mean	N Std Dev
Understanding of the implications of the legislation acts on the professional responsibilities involved in serving people with disabilities	3.82	1.01	2.80	1.06	3.24	1.19
Knowledge of funding sources for the development of par and recreation services for people with disabilities	3.65	1.10	2.51	1.03	3.33	1.14
Knowledge of journals and other literature which may be used to improve the quality of park and recreation services to people with disabilities	3.39	1.02	2.39	.96	3.02	1.08
Knowledge of current social issues and how they may affect services to people with disabilities	3.38	.96	2.65	.91	2.87	1.02
Knowledge of advocacy as it relates to the recreational needs of people with disabilities	3.13	1.09	2.49	.99	2.77	1.10
Ability to include consumer input in program and service development	3.51	1.10	2.91	1.00	2.72	1.13
Ability to modify activities for people with disabilities	3.25	1.16	2.75	1.06	2.68	1.13
Knowledge of recreation programming for people with disabilities	3.09	1.20	2.56	1.03	2.72	1.14
Knowledge of duty of care responsibilities towards people with disabilities	3.80	1.06	3.06	1.01	3.02	1.23

APPENDIX F (Cont.)

*All 49 Competencies With Mean and Std Dev Rates in Each Sub-Category*

*I = Importance of Competency to job, P = Perceived Level of Self Competence & N = Need for Professional Development*

Competency	I Mean	I Std Dev	P Mean	P Std Dev	N Mean	N Std Dev
Knowledge of leadership techniques useful for executing recreation activities for people with disabilities	2.90	1.21	2.42	1.04	2.62	1.18
Knowledge of park and recreation professionals who have expertise in inclusive practices	3.29	1.11	2.38	.97	2.90	1.12
Ability to implement inclusive recreation programming	2.98	1.18	2.48	1.03	2.67	1.20
Knowledge of departmental policies, procedures and practices which relate to services for people with disabilities	3.58	1.09	2.78	.96	2.96	1.17

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