

Award for Programs for the Disadvantaged in Memory of Carolyn Keane

POPULATIONS OF GREATER THAN 50,000



MICHAEL WILKES

ICMA's Program Excellence Award for Programs for the Disadvantaged, established in memory of Carolyn Keane, recognizes a local government that has enhanced the quality of life for the disadvantaged, including homeless citizens and people with AIDS. This year, ICMA presents the Award for Programs for the Disadvantaged in the greater-than-50,000 category to Olathe, Kansas, and City Manager Michael Wilkes for Camp Rolling Along.

Children with significant disabilities are often limited when it comes to social and recreational opportunities, forcing them to stay at home when they are not in school. Olathe, Kansas's Camp Rolling Along was designed to

expand the world of these children, providing them with an opportunity to participate in a day camp like their peers and offering parents and other caretakers a much-needed respite.

In implementing this vision, the city faced several major obstacles. Perhaps most obvious was the need to find a campsite that was fully accessible to people in wheelchairs. The city also needed specialized transportation to get children to and from camp and off-site activities, equipment such as lifts to move campers in and out of the pool, and other specially adapted equipment. In addition, the city needed to gain the trust of parents whose children often have "high-risk" medical conditions and who are unaccustomed to having their children participate in activities outside of school.

The city, the Olathe District Schools, various community agencies, and parents of potential campers met for over a year to work on a plan to overcome these challenges. The Olathe School District agreed to provide the Hartland Learning Center as a site for the camp and waived building rental fees. The center had some of the necessary equipment, and the school district agreed to provide the rest, giving city staff access to such equipment as needed. Social workers from the Olathe School District and city recreation staff held meetings throughout the school year with prospective parents to answer their questions and address their concerns. As parents expressed concerns about their children's medical conditions, the city of Olathe agreed to hire a registered nurse for all camp sessions.

Both the city and the school district recruited camp staff. The city then engaged the American Red Cross, local physical and occupational therapists, and behavior management specialists to train the new hires on feeding procedures, lifting, use of adaptive devices, and related issues. In addition, local junior high and high school youths were recruited as "inclusion companions" for the campers. Their role was to participate in activities with the campers and to be positive role models.

The city of Olathe uses Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) to make recreation programs available to low- and moderate-income families. CDBG covers up to 75 percent of the program fees for qualifying individuals. Additional funds were raised for campers who cannot afford the remaining cost.

Camp Rolling Along opened its doors in June 2000. Two sessions are scheduled for each summer. Campers enjoy swimming, gym activities, bowling, cooking, t-shirt design, and holiday crafts. The sessions have been filled to capacity, and parents have requested increased hours, additional camp days, and more sessions.

Program evaluations from campers and parents have documented the success of the program. Noting the goal of providing parents with relief from the time-consuming job as primary caregivers, one parent wrote, "This is the first time in as long as I can remember that I have had some time for myself." Another parent wrote, "This is the first time my son has ever been able to go to camp like his sisters. Camp Rolling Along has been one of his best experiences, ever." ♣