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MCH Innovations Database Practice Summary & Implementation Guidance

Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Review - TRACK Trails

The Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Review for TRACK Trails (ORARTT) is a tool that is used to evaluate the accessibility of parks, trails, and playgrounds use among Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) who want to participate in outdoor activities at community venues..



Location

North Carolina



Topic Area

Family/Youth Engagement, Nutrition/Physical Activity



Setting

Community



Population Focus

CYSHCN Families & Caregivers



NPM

NPM 8.1 and 8.2: Physical Activity, Child Health, Adolescent Health



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Section 1: Practice Summary

PRACTICE DESCRIPTION

The Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Review for TRACK Trails (ORARTT) is a tool used to evaluate the accessibility of parks, trails, and playgrounds for use among Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) who want to participate in outdoor activities at these community venues. ORARTT was adapted by Innovative Approaches in partnership with TRACK Trails to provide families additional information about the accessibility of community recreation opportunities to encourage physical activity among CYSHCN.

Innovative Approaches of Henderson County is an initiative funded by the North Carolina Division of Child and Family Well-Being to improve the lives of Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN) by making systems-level changes in the community. A core component of our efforts are the collaborations and partnerships with parents of CYSHCN, health providers, and community agencies.

In early 2020, Innovative Approaches conducted a Needs Assessment to collect data from providers and parent/caregivers to identify issues that could be addressed to improve the lives of CYSHCN. Several priorities emerged including the need for more inclusive playgrounds and other outdoor recreational activities geared toward CYSHCN. This also aligned with the goal of impacting health issues by increasing physical activity as outlined in the 2018 Henderson County Community Health Assessment (CHA) and the 2019 Henderson County State of the County Health (SOTCH) report. The 2019 SOTCH also prioritized TRACK Trails as part of the physical activity focus area interventions and has worked to support the installation of multiple TRACK Trails in Henderson County.

Kids in Parks/TRACK Trails is a program created in 2008 by statewide partners in an effort to get kids and families “un-plugged,” outdoors and reconnected to nature for their health and the health of our parks and public lands. There are currently four TRACK Trails in Henderson County (Fletcher Park, Mills River Park, the Carl Sandburg Home, and the Park at Flat Rock. <https://www.kidsinparks.com/about>

IA and TRACK Trails have begun a partnership with the intention of:

- 1) increasing CYSHCN families’ awareness of TRACK Trails and subsequent use of these trails;
- 2) engaging families and children so they can provide lived-experience feedback for improving the trail systems and other outdoor recreational facilities for their use.

Innovative Approaches worked with families of CYSHCN and adapted a version of the NC Office on Disability and Health’s (NCDOH) Accessibility Review to create a document specific to outdoor recreational space. This tool, Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Review for TRACK Trails (ORARTT), is used to conduct accessibility reviews for each TRACK Trail, as well as for other outdoor projects in our community. Families and caregivers have been closely involved with conducting and leading accessibility reviews in many local parks and playgrounds. The anticipation is that this tool can be modified and replicated for use in other communities.



CORE COMPONENTS & PRACTICE ACTIVITES

Core Components & Practice Activities		
Core Component	Activities	Operational Details
Conduct a Needs Assessment	Provide opportunities for families and CYSHCN to give feedback on the need for more outdoor activities.	Gather information from key stakeholders via surveys, focus groups, asset mapping to identify outdoor spaces that are not accessible to CYSHCN.
Create Tools	Create/modify Outdoor Recreational Accessibility Tool.	Use ADA Accessibility Checklist and adapt it to fit outdoor spaces.
Use the tool to evaluate accessibility of outdoor spaces	<p>Conduct Accessibility Reviews at local TRACK Trail locations and other outdoor recreational places.</p> <p>Offer recommendations to park directors for improvements and help recruit partners for these projects.</p>	<p>Work with families and CYSHCN, park directors, park rangers, and other partners to complete Accessibility Reviews.</p> <p>Recruit family partners with lived experience and conduct group walk-throughs of parks to assess spaces.</p> <p>Write up an Action Plan with recommendations for improvements and work with community partners to find ways to modify outdoor spaces that increase inclusivity for CYSHCN.</p>
Opportunities for duplication	Share tool with others in the community who want to improve outdoor spaces.	<p>Train others to use the tool.</p> <p>Share with other communities with TRACK Trails or other outdoor recreational spaces who also want to improve these spaces.</p>

HEALTH EQUITY

Henderson County Department of Public Health (HCDPH) is the host agency for Innovative Approaches. HCDPH partners with local, regional, state, and federal entities to identify community health needs, and develop projects and solutions for those needs. Much of this is evident in the Community Health Assessment (CHA) process. The local CHA has helped guide priorities for Henderson County, as well as the need for this outdoor accessibility project with Innovative Approaches. The CHA process in itself is designed to focus on health



inequities in social, economic, environmental, housing, gender, disabilities, and other obstacles that adversely affect health in our county.

The Outdoor Recreational Accessibility Review project for TRACK Trails was selected as a priority project, in part, because CYSHCN often face a different range of challenges in relation to outdoor recreational opportunities. This can include physical, sensory, and emotional challenges which can lead to other health concerns – for instance, a child with mobility issues or medication side-effects might be more sedentary and at higher risk of being overweight due to medication side effects. Yet, there are very few prevention efforts that are tailored to meet these kinds of needs for CYSHCN – especially those efforts and activities for outdoor play.

Promoting both healthy living and inclusive health programs are two ways in which Innovative Approaches works to reduce health inequities. Outdoor activity helps improve overall health through means of improving physical, mental, and social emotional wellbeing. For CYSHCN, the lack of access to outdoor activities and spaces can impact whole body health. At a community level we are looking at ways to build capacity for access to outdoor spaces for CYSHCN by fostering collaborative relations among organizations, including public private partnerships.

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

Parks made changes to their facilities based on the suggestions obtained from the assessments. There are currently four TRACK Trails in Henderson County (Fletcher Park, Mills River Park, the Carl Sandburg Home, and the Park at Flat Rock. <https://www.kidsinparks.com/about>. Other outdoor recreation spaces such as other county/city parks, and a new “Splash Pad” project initially asked to participate. Funders approached Innovative Approaches to help pay for upgrades and modifications. Finally, one predominant county park implemented plans for a new accessible playground and built an All-Inclusive Playground that opened in May 2023. [Watch the opening day of the park here.](#)



Section 2: Implementation Guidance

COLLABORATORS AND PARTNERS

Practice Collaborators and Partners		
Partner/Collaborator	How are they involved in decision-making throughout practice processes?	Does this stakeholder have lived experience/come from a community impacted by the practice?
Families and caregivers of CYSHCN	Partnering with families and caregivers to provide feedback about the Accessibility Reviews and the process of identifying gaps in accessibility.	Yes, parents and providers of CYSHCN are integral to this process.
Children and Youth with Special Healthcare needs	CYSHCN give us feedback on how to optimize the outdoor recreation experience for them.	Yes, CYSHCN have lived experiences in trying to access outdoor spaces and can provide helpful insight.
Outdoor Recreation Partners (Kids in Parks, Parks and Recreation, city and county leaders.	Organizations that manage trail systems, parks, and other outdoor recreational areas are in positions to accept and implement the recommendations for improvement.	Some partners have direct experience with a CYSHCN in their family. These partners are very invested in improving outdoor spaces for children of all abilities.

REPLICATION

The Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Review for TRACK Trails (ORARTT) tool has been further utilized in several outdoor spaces and will be continued on an on-going basis to identify gaps in parks, and trails for accessibility. The expectation is that this or a similar tool can be utilized by other communities to identify gaps in outdoor spaces and ultimately improve accessibility for CYSHCN and their families.



INTERNAL CAPACITY

Innovative Approaches of Henderson County employs a full-time Coordinator who leads this initiative. The Coordinator collaborated with families of CYSHCN to adapt a version of the North Carolina Office on Disability and Health’s (NCDOH) Accessibility Review to create a tool specific to outdoor recreational spaces. The Director of NCDOH provided guidance and support throughout the tool development as well as help with evaluating some of the parks. The Innovative Approaches Coordinator continues to recruit parents and families with lived experience and conduct group walk-throughs of parks, playgrounds, and trails to evaluate for ease or difficulty of accessibility.

PRACTICE TIMELINE

Phase: Planning/Pre-Implementation		
Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Conduct a needs assessment to identify spaces that are not accessible to children and youth with special healthcare needs (CYSHCN)	Dependent on size of community and number of outdoor recreation spaces: 2+ hours	IA Coordinator and parents of CYSHCN
Create or modify an assessment tool	3+ hours	IA Coordinator and parents of CYSHCN

Phase: Implementation		
Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Recruit parents of CYSHCN and community stakeholders to help with assessments.	Several days to coordinate	IA Coordinator



Use the tool to evaluate accessibility of identified outdoor spaces.	Dependent on number and size of outdoor recreation areas. 2+ hours	IA Coordinator, parents of CYSHCN, parks directors, park rangers, community stakeholders
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Phase: Sustainability

Activity Description	Time Needed	Responsible Party
Record/document suggestions and changes to the outdoor recreational areas.	3 hours	IA Coordinator
Develop a Plan of Action to provide to park staff.	8+ hours	IA Coordinator
Communicate the suggested changes to a park's director or decision maker.	1 hour	IA Coordinator
Make physical changes to the outdoor recreational areas.	Weeks, months, or years	Park Directors and decision makers

PRACTICE COST

There are no financial costs for using the Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Review for TRACK Trails (ORARTT) tool other than a few printed copies for reviewers. Time, effort, and volunteer's hours are the only additional cost for utilizing the tool. There would be costs to the parks department that make the physical changes to the outdoor spaces.

LESSONS LEARNED

Parents of CYSHCN are often very busy and overwhelmed. It is beneficial to be patient and persistent in recruiting and collaborating with parents. Participating in the Accessibility Reviews alongside families and CYSHCN is also important to help keep maintain momentum and to elicit helpful feedback. Many of our outdoor spaces cannot be modified or changed due to the location of the trails (ie: cannot change the slope of a hill or



move a tree), so some trails may not be able to be changed to accommodate all children. However, even small changes can make a big difference, such as cutting out a curb, or creating more handicapped accessible parking spaces. The Plan of Action document that is given to the park staff is very time consuming. Finally, it would be helpful to have a resource list for common issues (perhaps even built into the tool itself) and to try to stick to a tighter timeline.

NEXT STEPS

We would like to train others in the community to use the tool: in particular, there is a Committee for Activity and Nutrition that has expressed interest in helping us sustain the project by training their members. We will continue to modify the tool as we learn more from the process and from CYSHCN and families about potential barriers and solutions in community recreational settings.

RESOURCES PROVIDED

Sample tool

