

THE **Voice**

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GREEN ECONOMY

How being environmentally friendly benefits your health, wealth, and wisdom



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REDUCE REUSE RECYCLE

PRINCIPLES FOR ADAPTING EQUIPMENT FOR FULL PARTICIPATION

"I will need some specialized equipment to participate in the art class," the caller, Ann, said as she registered for the fall program, "I have cerebral palsy, so I can't grasp things very well and I have a lot of involuntary hand movement. But I am really excited to learn to paint and can't wait to join the class!" The recreation specialist taking the call, Leslie, thought about the lack of equipment her department has, and the small budget for program supplies. A quick look on the web site of an adaptive recreation equipment company made her groan – the equipment commercially available was well beyond her entire budget. She called the participant back and asked, "Can you help me figure out what kinds of adaptations you need for the art class?" Ann responded enthusiastically. "Of course I will help. And we can use three principles to figure this out – reduce, reuse, recycle!"

We are all familiar with those three ideas when it comes to natural resources – reduce, reuse, and recycle. But how can they apply to adapting equipment and activities to allow for full participation for people with functional differences?

REDUCE

When it comes to adapting equipment or activities, reduce how much you change either. Don't assume that because someone has a disability, he or she needs adaptive or specialized equipment. Always ask the participant what he or she needs. Not only will the participant with a disability, or a family member, best know the needs, but they will also have ideas for adaptations based on previous experiences. Adaptive equipment should only be used when it is needed to facilitate fuller and more successful participation, and then, the least amount of change should be made. If possible, adaptations to equipment or activities should be faded out as participants gain skills.

REUSE

Look at the things you already have in your program or facility that can be reused in multiple ways. For example, we included a participant in a canoe trip who needed specialized supportive seating

in the canoe. Instead of lugging along specialized equipment, we made use of things we already had on the trip for other purposes. In the center of the canoe, we created seating with three rolled tents, foam sleeping pads, and a crazy creek chair. The camp supplies we already had along created the perfect supportive seating for the participant who needed it in the canoe. When we got to our campsite, all the items were put to use in other ways needed for the trip. We reused common materials to create the adaptation that was needed, and we used them in multiple ways.

You can create many homemade adaptations with common materials. Figure 1 lists some of the typical materials used to make adaptations to recreation equipment. These materials can be purchased in a discount or hardware store at a fraction of the cost of commercial adapted equipment. For example, using the foam from a hair roller to build up a pencil or paint brush handle costs about fifty cents; purchasing an adaptive gripper from a company that sells adaptive equipment costs around twelve dollars.

Here are some examples of homemade adaptations to recreation activities and equipment:

- A chunk of PVC pipe is duct-taped to the arm of a wheelchair to create a fishing rod holder
- A large round key ring is attached to a zipper pull to make it easier to grasp and pull
- Velcro is used to attach a tennis racket (or ping pong paddle, hockey stick, etc.) to someone's hand who cannot fully grasp to hold it
- Duct tape is used to hold objects in place for someone who can only use one hand
- Bells are attached to or embedded in objects so that someone with a vision impairment can hear their location (e.g., balls, jump ropes)
- A wooden board with a slanted groove sawed into it can hold playing cards
- Alligator clamps are attached to small knobs on a toy or game or device, allowing much more leverage for someone who cannot grasp

- A long wooden dowel is duct taped to the handle of a gardening tool, allowing someone to use it while seated or in a wheelchair
- A youth lacrosse stick is used by someone in a wheelchair to pick up and retrieve objects
- Electric cable ties are used to create looped handles on a variety of small objects (e.g., a water bottle)
- Foosball "men" are painted in higher contrast (e.g., one team all white, one team all black) to be seen more easily

RECYCLE

The best way to "recycle" adaptive equipment is to share it. You can do this in many ways. First, every region of New York has an independent living center located nearby whose mission is to help people with disabilities live independently in their communities. Independent living centers operate equipment loan closets that include a variety of resources, from adapted recreation equipment to wheelchairs to ramps. If you only need adaptive equipment temporarily, using the services of a loan closet will save money and resources.

Another way to recycle is to donate any adaptive equipment that is used infrequently at your agency to your local loan closet. The equipment will still be available when you may need it, and will also be available for others who need it. Another strategy is to pool equipment between agencies. For example, the local parks and recreation department and the nearby state park can share the purchase of an adaptive bike or an all-terrain wheelchair. It can be kept in a shared location that is well-advertised, where users at either agency can access it to check out.

Lastly, many hospitals, disability organizations, or health care agencies may have adaptive equipment to donate to your agency. Many disability organizations have newsletters or web sites where people advertise used adaptive equipment that is no longer needed, and sell it well below the cost of buying it new.

Reduce, reuse, and recycle – three simple principles you can use to help you adapt recreation equipment for full participation. By collaborating with the participant with a disability, and being creative

and thrifty, you will be able to come up with all sorts of "green" ingenious adaptations. In the sidebar, read the story of Rich Fabend, who has developed many inventive and useful pieces of adaptive equipment since he acquired his disability, and now shares his ideas on a web site.

So, what did Ann and Leslie come up with, so that Ann could fully participate in the art program? After working together, with Leslie explaining the demands of the art program, and Ann explaining her abilities, they came up with several adaptations to help Ann successfully participate. They used one of the large wooden pallets in the studio for a table surface, which they attached to Ann's wheelchair with alligator clamps. Using duct tape, they attached a cup of water and paper towel surface to her work surface, so Ann could independently clean her brush between colors. They built up the handle on Ann's paint brush with foam, and used velcro straps to help her grasp it firmly. Ann developed an eclectic, abstract style of painting that did not require fine motor skills. Her work, with its fun and vibrant colors, became some of the best selling in the parks and recreation art shows each year!

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Figure One. The Adaptive Equipment Resource Kit



MEET RICH FABEND

Rich Fabend, a 1965 SUNY Cortland alum, is an avid outdoor recreationist, and has been all his life. He sustained a spinal cord injury while surfing in 1999, and now uses a wheelchair. Because of his love for outdoor recreation, and his desire to help others, Rich has developed many ingenious and creative ways to adapt equipment. His inventions are featured on his web site, Handi-help. He shares a broad range of ideas, from outdoor recreation to daily living equipment. He also provides many insights and lessons he has learned to better adapt activities and equipment.

His web site is:

<http://handihelp.net>

Rich states on his web site: *"We can accomplish many things that at first we believe we cannot do, with persistence, perseverance and trial and error. Attitude is far more important than ability."*



FOAM



VELCRO

WOODEN DOWELS



DUCT TAPE

SLEIGH BELLS



PLEXI GLASS