

Addressing Accessibility Barriers at the EquiCenter Farm for Participants with Mobility Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

Americans of all ages are impacted by disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are more likely to experience chronic health conditions, such as depression, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. As such, it is crucial to support interventions that improve health for individuals with disabilities. One such program is therapeutic horticulture (TH). TH is defined as any therapeutic intervention offered in a greenspace. TH targets vulnerable populations, such as veterans or individuals with mental illness. The literature on TH suggests it improves mental and physical wellbeing. In New York State in 2020, 21.5% of individuals had any disability. 10.6% of individuals had a mobility-related disability. Some populations are disproportionately impacted by disability, such as veterans.

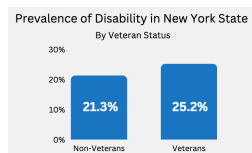


Figure 1. Prevalence of disability in New York State, by veteran status

COMMUNITY PARTNER

EquiCenter, Inc. in Honeoye Falls, NY offers various programs for individuals with disabilities, including a TH program for veterans. The EquiCenter farm also serves other community groups, such as local special education classrooms, through the Horticulture & Equine Active Learning (HEAL) program.

With the input of community partners, accessibility for individuals with physical disabilities was identified as a major barrier to program participation. For veterans and other community members with physical disabilities to experience the health benefits of TH, it is essential that accessibility barriers at the EquiCenter farm are addressed.

COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Problem Statement: The environment at the EquiCenter Farm is not fully accessible for participants with physical disabilities and/or mobility challenges.

Project Objectives:

- To assess whether the therapeutic horticulture program is accessible to participants with physical disabilities and/or mobility challenges
- To determine how the therapeutic horticulture program can be improved to serve participants with physical disabilities and/or mobility challenges

Methods:

- Review of literature, ADA Guidelines, and Principles of Universal Design
- Completion of accessibility assessment tools
 - Community Health Environment Checklist–Mobility (CHEC-M)
 - Community Health Inclusion Index (CHII)
- Participant observation & field notes
- Semi-structured qualitative interviews
 - Farm manager, director of farm programming, HEAL manager, volunteer, parent



Results:

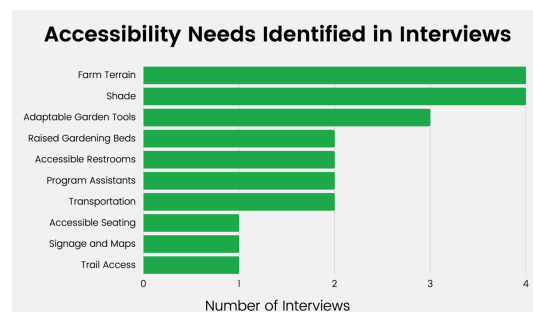


Figure 2. Accessibility needs identified through semi-structured qualitative interviews

Additional Accessibility Needs Identified:

(from all data sources)

- Accessible parking
- Access to potable water

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the qualitative interviews and accessibility assessment tools were compiled into a presentation for the EquiCenter board of directors, providing recommendations for improvements to enhance accessibility at the EquiCenter farm.

Lessons Learned:

- Importance of trust-building with key stakeholders
- Challenges associated with interviewee recruitment
- Financial and resource limitations for proposed improvements

IMPACT & SUSTAINABILITY

Next Steps:

- Presentation of results to EquiCenter board of directors
- Compilation of results into a written document to be used for grant applications

Sustainability:

- Periodic repetition of CHEC-M/CHII assessments by community partners
- Development of participant surveys to gather feedback on accessibility