



PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT
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Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Children & Youth Services Committee
H.B. 1831 Hearing
Rep. Karen Boback, Chair
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Oral Testimony

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Plymouth Township Parks & Recreation

Self Introduction

Joanna Sharapan, Recreation Program Manager for Plymouth Township Parks & Recreation. I graduated from Lock Haven University of PA in 2000 with a Bachelors of Science in Recreation Management and a minor in Business Management. I have worked for Plymouth Township Parks & Recreation for 19 years and I have personally planned, organized and facilitated hundreds of recreational programs for all ages in our community.

Who Plymouth Township Parks & Recreation Is

Established in 1922, Plymouth Township is located in central Montgomery County and consists of several departments including Parks and Recreation, Police, Fire and Emergency Management, Public Works and Zoning. We are a municipal government agency governed by 5 elected Township officials. The Township belongs to the Delaware Valley Insurance Trust (DVIT) which provides risk management, legal counsel, and continuous education opportunities for the Township and it's employees. DVIT continuously audits the operations of the Recreation Department and provides guidelines for better practices to ensure the safety of all participants. The Parks & Recreation Department is very fortunate and operates out of the 77,500 square foot Greater Plymouth Community Center (GPCC). The GPCC has a room designed and dedicated to preschool aged programming. We also program in the surrounding parks and public school facilities offering a variety of recreation programs for all ages. There are 18 full-time parks and recreation professionals who work at the GPCC. All employees are compliant with the PA Child Protective Services Law, have college degrees and are First Aid and CPR certified. Our programs range from adult sports leagues, youth dance, fitness personal training, swimming lessons, special events, adult interest classes, special needs, wellness seminars, youth sports, American Red Cross certification classes and much more.

History of Mini People Summer Camp

Mini People Summer Camp ran successfully from 1993 until 2016. This six week, half-day recreational camp was for children ages 4-6 years old. Mini People Summer Camp was a child's introduction to their community, autonomy from their parents and socialization. Many of our original Mini People campers became employees, often summer camp counselors in the program they first attended. We had to cease operation in 2016 after being made aware of the new regulation changes to the PA Child Care Code. Once the program was canceled we were faced with many complaints from parents who had expected to send their kids to our camp. Parents organized themselves and submitted letters to their Representatives on our behalf stating the importance of our programs.

What Needs We Satisfy in Our Community

Mini People Summer Camp was an inexpensive and safe recreational opportunity for parents. In 2016, the cost for a Township resident was only \$85 for the entire week. Mini People was a feeder program into our school-age, teen camps and youth programs. For some even their first place of employment. This program was where many campers made their first friends, stepped out of their comfort zone for the first time, built confidence and learned new things. This program got kids out of the house and introduced them to their community police officers and firemen who taught them valuable life lessons. It was convenient for parents to have all their children in one location where they felt safe and comfortable. Plymouth Township Parks & Recreation never considered Mini People Summer Camp as childcare as it only met for three hours a day. It was a recreational program that gave a child their first away from home experience.

Application Process

- We started the application/certification process in June 2016. We ran Mini People Summer Camp that year on a "good faith effort" to become certified.
- We knew this was not going to be a quick or simple process so we did not continue with the certification for 2017 and decided to try to start the process in May 2018 with the hopes of being licensed and ready to go for summer 2019.
- We submitted our second application in June 2018. After many back and forth conversations with DHS we got all the required paperwork submitted.
- As time went on and many attempts at an update, we never received any response from DHS.
- After unsuccessfully attempting to make contact with our representative for 6 months we finally contacted the Director of Certification Services in January 2019
- At this time, we were told we needed to resubmit our entire application.
- We went back and forth with a new DHS representative and got most of our required paperwork in order. We had an unannounced visit and inspection in June 2019. We had a few minor things that needed to be done and submitted in order to receive a provisional license. Everything was done and submitted on August 8, 2019 with the exception of one staff persons transcripts. Eventually the transcripts were submitted on August 28, 2019.
- At this time I also requested information on the number of participants we are able to take based on the size of the rooms.

- On August 27, 2019 I received an email stating that my degree does not fall under the early childhood education or human services umbrella and that I do not have 30 credits in qualifying courses that would bridge this gap.
- Getting everything wrapped up by the end of August was very important because the timeline we worked out with DHS was to get all the necessary paperwork and proof of work done in August 2019. At that point we would be given a provisional license. We would then get another inspection done in January/February to extend the provisional license for another 6-months, when we could have our final inspection with children in our camp program.
- At this point, as we wait for a response from DHS, some of our required certifications such as the health assessment, in-person DHS orientation and annual required training will expire before we get our provisional license.

Documentation Discrepancies- FEIN and Political Subdivision

- Submitted our REV-1220 form (which states we are a Government Entity and it included our FEIN) with our application in June 2018. In July 2018 we notified that this documentation was incorrect and that we needed a letter from Dept. of the Treasury, IRS.
- Myself, my Assistant Director and the Township Finance Director worked tirelessly to obtain this required documentation and we were able to submit the correct documentation in August 2018.
- We also submitted a letter from the PA Dept. of Revenue stating that Plymouth Township is a “Political Subdivision of the Commonwealth.”
- We didn’t receive any response from DHS until January 2019, after contacting the Director of Certification Services.

Qualifications

- For certification purposes, I’m considering myself the “Director” of the summer camp. The Director is required to have a degree in child development, early childhood education, special education, elementary education or the human services field plus 1 year experience working with children.
- After submitting my Lock Haven University transcripts it was deemed that I did not have a qualifying degree to satisfy this requirement.
- My Bachelor of Science Degree from Lock Haven University is from The Stephen Poorman College of Business, Information Systems and Human Services.
- Lock Haven University’s Recreation Management program is nationally accredited from The Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professions. This accreditation recognizes academic programs in colleges and universities that prepare new professionals to enter the parks, recreation, tourism and related professions.
- I have also been working in this field, for Plymouth Township, since December 2000.
- Between my 19 years experience and my degree in recreation I feel I should be qualified to run a recreational summer camp for preschool aged children.

In Conclusion

It is my understanding that the PA Child Care Code was revised in 2007 and under the new interpretations municipal recreation programs had to comply. We operated without incident from 2007 to 2016 and were unaware of any regulation changes. In 2015, the state informed us of the new requirements implemented as a result of the Child Protective Services Law, however the Child Care Code changes were never communicated. Because of the revised childcare requirements municipal recreation departments are now categorized as child care when they are clearly not the same. It is my feeling that the revised Code has had unintentional consequences that the state is now required to enforce without understanding the scope of these programs.

While we believe Mini People Summer Camp is an extremely valuable program it is a very small part of what we do. Our current policies and procedures for our summer camps mirror many aspects of the regulation. However, dedicating a staff person to keep up with the license for a 6-week program is unreasonable. We are not a childcare facility, we offer quality recreational opportunities to the citizens of Pennsylvania.