

The International Journal for Direct Support Professionals

Summer Fun: Creative ways to get out and about!

By Amanda Gee

Hello Summer! Finally! Nine years ago, I wrote an article about creative art in the summertime ([The art of summer, Service, Support, and Success, 3\(8\)](#)). With this current article, I am revisiting this topic on this first summer post-pandemic. In the past nine years, a lot has changed; I moved across the country, had children, changed jobs, and I have learned a lot about community access and participation.

Winters are long and cold! So, when it is nice outside, you want to be out doing things with the people you support. But it can be hard to think of things to do, where to go, and often on a budget. Little things can be as fun and as rewarding as big things. You need to think outside the box, do some research, get creative, and step out of your comfort zone.

There are definitely some things you need to investigate before heading out:

- **Accessibility** – Can the people you support easily get in and out? Are there ramps?
- **Bathrooms** – Will those you support need access to a bathroom while you are out?
- **Eating spaces** – Will the person you're supporting need to eat while you are out? Will they need access to certain things to do that?
- **Shade** – Will there be any shade? Will it be too hot?
- **Don't forget** – **water, sunscreen, hats, sunglasses, snacks, anything else the people you support may need.**

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Community Centres

Check out your local community centre and those in the communities around yours. Community centres often host events that are free or low cost. It could be a craft sale, bake sale, plant show, or a community fair. They often have classes on things such as yoga, dance, painting, etc.

Community Events

Local communities often host community events. They will have parades, events in parks, fireworks. If you follow their pages on social media, you can keep up to date on what is happening.

Community Garden

Check if your area has community gardens. Maybe you could get a plot to tend with someone you support, so they can grow their own vegetables, or maybe you can support someone to volunteer to help out around the community plot. Community gardens are a great place to learn, to explore gardening and to connect with new people.

Library

Libraries offer a wealth of community programming, and most of it is free. They show movies, host cooking classes, craft groups, information sessions, and fun activities. Check out your local library and see what they have available. They may even be able to modify what they are offering to meet the needs of the individuals you are supporting.

Libraries are also full of books, magazines, resources, computers, music, and movies! They are a great place to explore a new country through picture books, or learn new skills. You can also just sit and flip through a magazine with someone you support. They are relaxing spaces that are typically quieter and more chill to meet some sensory needs and, most often, they are air-conditioned with accessible bathrooms!

Art Gallery

Art galleries are great places to visit. They often cost money, but they also frequently have discounts or free days or evenings. They are a perfect place to visit on a hot day. Larger galleries typically have good bathrooms, air conditioning, great places to eat, and lots to see. Sometimes, they even have special events or activities happening. Even smaller art galleries are wonderful to check out to see new things!

Make a day of it, bring lunch, take time to really enjoy and talk about the art that you and the people you support discover. Art galleries are also often sensory friendly spaces and tend to be quieter than other public venues.

Museums

Like art galleries, museums are great places to visit. You and the people you support can learn so many things about the world. They also cost money often, but there are regularly discounts available. They are also generally very accessible spaces! Exhibits tend to rotate with time, so you can check out new things. These spaces also tend to be quieter for those who have related sensory needs.

Farms

Feeding ducks and goats, meeting pigs and llamas – farms can be wonderful places to visit. Look for farms that are open to the public. Many of these places that host apple and pumpkin picking offer things to do during the summer months are well. They often have farm markets where you can purchase food and visit with animals.

Nature and Parks

Find a good walking path, boardwalk, park, or accessible beach. Visit a forest, lake, or garden. Getting out in nature is so good for us! Make a day of it and pack a picnic! Bring bubbles to blow, blankets to sit on, and a ball to kick around or throw.

Splashpads

Many people think that splash pads are just for kids, but I would like to argue that they are not. Anyone can enjoy running or wheeling through the refreshing water at a splashpad. Let your inner kid out along with the people you support! Make a day of it. The joy this can bring is immense, and it can be such a refreshing experience on a hot day!

Explore!

Go visit new places where the people you support have never been! Do a tour of coffee shops, visit a new town, check out some public art, take a ferry or train ride. There are probably plenty of places in your area where you and individuals you support have never visited.

Art Making

As an art therapist and arts facilitator, I feel that I need to add a section about summertime art making. We can and should make art, and be creative all year round, but there are some extra fun things people can do when it's warm outside.

- **Colourful chalk** – Get a large package of sidewalk chalk and use it with the people you support at their homes or on the go to make art on sidewalks and driveways.
- **Nature Collage** – Collect natural materials such as leaves, flowers, seeds, sticks, etc., and make art with them. You and those you support could attach them to paper, or make arrangements and leave them in nature for others to see.
- **Paint Rocks** – People have been painting rocks since before the pandemic, but it seemed to really take off when most of us were staying at home. Rocks can be purchased or found in nature; they can be painted to decorate the home or yard of those you support, or they can be left in public places for others to find.
- **Art Making Outside** – Summer is a great time to make art outside! Make art with those you support on the patio, or deck, or take supplies to the park. Give people the opportunity to draw nature or just draw in nature. It can also be a great time to do messier things such as tie-dying, painting, slime making, etc.

When getting out and about, and trying to make plans, a good way to think is – why can't we go there? And how can we make it successful? The possibilities really are endless. Be playful and creative, get out there, and explore your community, try new things – summer really is about having fun! Don't forget your sunscreen and stay hydrated!

About the author

Amanda Gee, BFA, RCAT, RCT (she/her) has been working with individuals with intellectual disabilities and dual diagnosis for the past 23 years in many different capacities. Amanda is an artist and an art therapist, and she lives and works in Mi'kma'ki, also known as Nova Scotia, Canada. She is the client support and education specialist at DASC: Dartmouth Adult Services Centre – where staff excel at adventure! Amanda is a registered counseling therapist, a registered Canadian art therapist, and also specializes in helping people through grief and loss through the lifespan. Amanda believes in being creative, getting outside, and that everyone is an artist in their own way!

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