

## Camping in tents for people with mobility issues and wheelchair users

Many factors need to be considered in the planning and implementation of an outdoor overnight camping experience for people with mobility issues. In collaboration with each individual participant, needs and abilities must be considered and individual plans developed to ensure adequate equipment, facilities and support structures are in place to ensure a safe and positive camping experience.

The information provided in this document, outlines some general considerations in the planning of an overnight camping experience for people with mobility issues. Refer to AAAS Good Practice Guide for Camping for other recommendations.

### Program design and planning

- Overall program to be co-designed with a person with mobility issues who understands the issues and potential barriers to participation.
- User-led, person centered approach is practiced that provides each participant with choice and control over defining their own goals for the camp experience
- Safe and supportive environment exists where participants feel comfortable to try new experiences
- The camp experience builds capacity of individuals to be independent in the outdoors as well as engaging in a socially inclusive group experience
- A reasonable balance between duty of care measures for the activity and exposure of participants to a reasonable level of risk.
- Flexible program design, allowing adequate time for camp set up, rest periods and unforeseeable circumstances
- Provide participants with detailed information about the camp including planned activities, facilities available, equipment provided/required. Specific information is helpful e.g. Accessible bathroom size, number of bathrooms available to the group, distance from camp site to the bathroom. Photos of the facilities are also useful.

### Facilitation

- Camp leaders and support staff should adopt a empowering, person-centered approach that ensures participants undertake tasks independently and only providing assistance when requested
- Weather conditions and seasonal factors have been considered e.g. heat exposure, potential for snow fall and the effect of these conditions on the physical wellbeing of participants
- Open and clear communication between leaders and participants
- Participant/Leader ratio to be determined by the individual and group needs

- Provide option for participants who are unable to participate in the camping experience independently, to have a personal carer accompany them to provide the necessary support.

### **Camp site selection**

- The ground surface area of the camp site is firm, e.g. packed earth, compacted topping. The ground remains firm after rain and prolonged dry periods
- If possible, relatively clear ground that is clear of obstacles such as rocks, sticks that interfere with wheeled mobility devices
- The area of the camp site is relative flat, with a gradient less than 1:20
- The area for pitching tents for sleeping is flat
- Potential tree hazards are observed e.g. unattached limbs, dead trees and limbs, impact of severe weather on trees and avoid pitching tents under trees
- Adequate shade and shelter exist and protection from high winds
- There is availability of fresh drinking water
- Knowledge of the accessibility of tracks and trails leading to and from the camp site
- There is access to toilet and bathing facilities suitable to the needs of participants. In natural bush settings, this can be challenging and individual participants must be aware of the toilet and bathing facilities available at the camp site prior to undertaking the camp experience. The distance between tent and toilet and bathing facilities must be considered and the existence of a continuous, accessible path of travel to the facility.

### **Equipment**

Tent and bedding considerations:

- Tents should provide easy access (barrier-free threshold and easy to use zips) and appropriate height and internal space for transferring
- Tents should be easily assembled from a seated position, by a person using a wheelchair.
- Sleeping mats or adjustable portable stretcher beds of adequate height, size, stability and pressure care suitable to needs of participants
- Lighting in tent, use of head torch or portable battery powered lantern
- Extra bedding available to provide additional layer of warmth if required
- Individuals ability to transfer independently from wheelchair to stretcher bed or wheelchair to ground mattress. If not possible, consider the use of a portable battery powered hoist for base camp set up

### Cooking considerations:

- Camping tables with adjustable legs provide flexibility of table height
- Accessible cooking equipment and eating facilities and utensils
- Use of gazebos as shelter for outdoor cooking experience

### Other equipment:

- If power is required for powering electric wheelchairs or respirators, it is critical to understand that electricity is unlikely to be available in natural bush settings. If portable generators are used, consider back up options if generators fail.
- Provision of wind proof and water proof jackets to reduce the chilling effect of wind and rain
- Adaptive recreational equipment must be used as per manufacturers recommendations and leaders must be competent in its use and application
- Consider use of off-road wheelchairs or wheelchairs attachments e.g.
  - All terrain powered wheelchairs e.g Zoom Chair
  - Free wheels; portable large wheel that can be attached to the front of a standard manual wheelchair that makes it easier to self-propel over rough surfaces
  - Power assisted off-road hand cycle (adaptive mountain bikes)
  - Parks Victoria Trail Rider chair (limited to certain Victorian National Parks)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Social Ventures Australia Consulting 2019; Access All Terrain Evaluation Report , YMCA Victoria Project