

“Peace in the Parks”: Experiencing Rural Palliative & Grief Care with Alberta Parks

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BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Aligned with national and provincial inclusion frameworks, Alberta Parks has been exploring inclusion, accessibility and quality of life for people across the lifespan (i).

Connecting people to parks is a “natural” for many people whether rural or urban, rancher, car camper, solo adventurer, family picnic goer, or serious outdoor sports enthusiast!

This study builds on knowledge of parks inclusion for adults with disabilities and their caregivers, highlighting physical, emotional and spiritual benefits of time outside (ii).

Parks and natural places have also been found to play a role in quality of life at end of life, in palliative and grief experiences (iii).

This project extends those discoveries to learn more about the character of parks connection in palliative care for people living rurally, and how the connection can be facilitated for people at different phases, with different needs.

APPROACH

This action research project tracked: communication, transportation, support/volunteer, physical space and accessibility processes for a variety of parks and nature experiences at sites in specific rural catchment areas. People experiencing palliative care, including family and professional caregivers, were interviewed about their experiences of engaging in parks. Transcripts and observations were analyzed for (narrative) themes.

DISCOVERIES

The action cycle included planning and visiting park sites for brief (1-3 hour) visits for patients and families, sitting in green spaces, moving (assisted or unassisted, with a walker, or wheelchair) to a view spot of their choosing. Alongside documenting the experience, participants and family members/caregivers were interviewed.

Included in the project were: 5 palliative patients (3 male and 2 female, 4 between the ages of 50-60, and 1 over age 60) and their family caregivers, including 4 spouses and 1 daughter, along with 2 rural home palliative care nurses and 1 rural hospice chaplain.

Experiencing “Peace in the Parks” (the overarching narrative) was viewed as an opportunity for:

I. Individual/Personal Exploration

*Calming *Reflecting & reminiscing *Feeling & sensing again * Opening to new experiences * Renewed identity
* Accessing one’s own nature * Experiencing life’s stages
Eg. *“Food tastes better out here!”*
“Here [in park setting] I am free”

II. Social/Relational Discovery

*Reminiscing & re-experiencing together
*Renewed confidence for other shared experiences
Eg. *“Just being human together”*
“It is important to just be a wife again!”
“Here, we can ‘park’ palliative care”

III. Parks Processes

*Unique rural access needs *More information re. typical barriers, services, supports
*Everyone can make the connection with nature
*Value in parking/sitting areas & 100 m ‘walks’
Eg. *“Access takes planning, information and communication”*
“Not a new program but rather an invitation (a mindset that can be influenced by training and information...)”

The results were documented in a short film, “Peace in the Parks” (iv) and are intended to inform both parks and health communication, information, education and programming.

“Here, we can park palliative care – even if just for a little while...”



REFERENCES

- i.) Alberta Parks, Inclusion Plan <https://albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/visit-our-parks/inclusion-accessibility/>
- ii) Jakubec, S.L., Carruthers Den Hoed, D., Ray, H., Krishnamurthy, A. (2016). Mental Well-being and Quality of Life Benefits of Inclusion in Nature for Adults with Disabilities and Their Caregivers. *Landscape Research*, 41(6), 616-627.
- iii) Jakubec, S.L., Carruthers Den Hoed, D., Ray, H., Krishnamurthy, A. (2020). Grieving Nature – Grieving in Nature: The place of parks and natural places in palliative and grief care. In Quilley, S., Zywert, K. (Eds). *Health in the Anthropocene: Living well on a finite planet*. Toronto: UofTPress.
- iv.) Peace in the Parks documentary:
See <https://youtu.be/dk1SrzhwNzk> QRcode accessible here:



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