

The Analysis of Measures for Disadvantaged Groups to Carry Out Leisure Activities

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Abstract

More and more NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) have sprung up to help the disadvantaged groups, but few of them take the indispensable leisure needs in disadvantaged groups' daily life into consideration. As a result of the restrictions of all kinds of subjective and objective factors, leisure activities provided to the disadvantaged groups and carrying out by themselves independently are quite limited. Starting from the positive significance of leisure activities on the disadvantaged groups, this paper makes an analysis to the disadvantaged groups' current situations of leisure life, leisure needs and existing obstacles, and then discusses how NGOs help them carry out leisure activities.

Key words: Leisure activities; Disadvantaged groups; NGO

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INTRODUCTION

Leisure has been an important part of human life, but there are still a large proportion of disadvantaged groups who couldn't enjoy the leisure benefits in our country, and many people even think that leisure makes no sense for disadvantaged groups. Disadvantaged groups in our country are influenced by factors such as education experience, age, income, etc., so they may participate in

low-level leisure activities as a whole, which pay more attention to entertainment and recreation rather than development and mentality. For example, most old people spend their time chatting with neighbors, watching TV and listening to the radio, and few of them choose to read books and newspapers.

There explicitly stipulates in the famous *Leisure Charter* approved by WLO (World Leisure Organization) that leisure is as important as health and education to people's life. Everyone shall have the rights to leisure activities, and all governments must recognize and protect the citizens' right of leisure¹. We can see from above that leisure activities are all people's right including disadvantaged groups. Leisure for disadvantaged groups is of great significance. It also should take count of equity simultaneously, and we should share the fruits and benefits brought about in social development with disadvantaged groups.

1. THE POSITIVE EFFECTS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LEISURE FOR DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

International social work and social policy world basically has a same definition to the social disadvantaged groups, that is, social disadvantaged groups are the groups that are disadvantaged in society because of some certain obstacles or the lack of economic, political and social opportunities (Wang, 2003). The reasons for the emergence of disadvantaged groups mainly include physiological factors (related with the individual biological development) and social factors (including economy, politics and culture), therefore, people often divide the disadvantaged groups into two, namely physiological disadvantaged groups and social disadvantaged groups. Physiological disadvantaged groups mainly include children, old people, handicapped,

¹ World Leisure Organization. *Leisure Charter*, 2007, 7.

patients and so on; Social disadvantaged groups mainly include laid-off workers, unemployed or jobless person, migrant workers, rolling stone and so on. This paper mainly discusses the physiological disadvantaged groups' leisure benefits, especially the poor physiological disadvantaged groups such as the poor elderly person of no family, inconvenient handicapped, patients, etc.. These people can't participate in leisure activities independently because of some physiological factors, and can't enjoy the leisure benefits because of their poverty, so they are most in need of our attention and help in leisure activities. Physiological disadvantaged groups have much spare time since they can't work normally. If they can carry out abundant leisure activities, it will help to enrich their spare time, and they don't have to stay at home all day, which can change their monotonous life, relieve their pressure, and promote them to do effective leisure activities such as fitness, bodybuilding exercise, etc, and also which can build their body better, improve the physical quality and help them establish a good way of life.

1.1 Help to Enrich the Disadvantaged Groups' Spare Time

Leisure is each person's nature, and leisure activities have special significance for each person's life. Salutary leisure activities in daily life are of great significance to the disadvantaged groups. Most people in physiological disadvantaged groups can't carry out leisure activities independently because of their age and physical inconvenience, especially the poor groups of no family, since they have no financial support and companion, which makes them can't carry out leisure activities all year. Disadvantaged groups often have the sense of inferiority and they tend to feel incompatible with the ordinary citizens. In fact, these disadvantaged groups have more time than others to carry out leisure activities as they can't work normally. However, although they have more spare time, they can't carry out abundant leisure activities. For example, the elderly people of no family nearly have no job, and they rely on the government's minimum living guarantee for a living. However, they are difficult to get about and can't go out because of oldness, so they can only stay at home alone for a long time every day. The handicapped can't work normally and even can't take care of themselves because of some physical defects, and they can only rely on the support of their family. If they are in a rich family, they may have sufficient financial support and they can employ professionals for caring and accompanying to carry out leisure activities that they can do. But if they are in a poor family, their family members must be busy earning money for the family, so their family members have no time, money and efforts to accompany and support them in leisure activities. As a result, they can only stay at home and can't enjoy the pleasure of leisure.

As physiological disadvantaged groups have much spare time, if they can carry out abundant leisure

activities, it will help to enrich their spare time, and they don't have to stay at home all day, which can change their monotonous life, relieve their pressure, and promote them to do effective leisure activities such as fitness, bodybuilding exercise, etc., and also which can build their body better, improve the physical quality and help them establish a good way of life.

1.2 Help to Expand the Disadvantaged Groups' Interpersonal Communication Scope

The disadvantaged groups' interpersonal communication scope is quite limited, which mainly focuses on neighbors and relatives, and they rarely associate with the outside world. One of the reasons for this is their sense of inferiority and the restriction of living environment. The other reason is the ordinary people's prejudice and discrimination to the disadvantaged groups. Only when disadvantaged groups actively contact with the outside world, strengthen the communication and exchanges and make more friends can they enhance their self-confidence, change their inferiority complex and have the courage to associate with other people. Thus, the carrying out of leisure activities gives the disadvantaged groups a good communication platform. For example, the disadvantaged groups having the same interests with citizens can dance, play chess, play drama and do exercises together, so as to establish a good relationship.

1.3 Help to Adjust the Disadvantaged Groups' Psychological Status

The Disadvantaged groups live in the hard conditions throughout the year, and the leisure activities they can participate in independently are still of great shortage. They often feel boring and empty in the long spare time. In addition, they are ignored by all parties and even encounter unfair treatment. All of these may cause the psychological imbalance and result in the emergence of negative emotion and negative attitudes towards life. Some of them even can't get the proper guidance and are easy to participate in unhealthy recreational activities such as pornography. That participating in healthy leisure activities in their spare time, enjoying the leisure benefits brought about in social development and changing their boring and empty way of life can help them form a positive attitude towards life, so as to alleviate the pressure of the society and maintain social stability.

2. ANALYSIS OF OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN CARRYING OUT LEISURE ACTIVITIES FOR DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

2.1 Constrained by Their Own Conditions

Physiological disadvantaged groups' personal competitive ability is influenced by their own obvious

physiological factors such as infancy, oldness, physical disability, valetudinarianism and so on. They may get social discrimination and exclusion because of these obvious physiological factors, which cause unhealthy psychological states and form psychological obstacles. Therefore, most of them often get constrained by their own conditions in carrying out leisure activities. Leisure activities they can participate in are greatly reduced because of the physiological factors, while the existing of psychological obstacles more vastly limits their participating enthusiasm. For example, factors like the degeneration of the old people's body functions, the physiological defects of the handicapped and inferiority complex have largely influenced their participation and enthusiasm.

2.2 Constrained by Economic Conditions

In general, the disadvantaged groups' economic income is relatively low, and some of them are households enjoying the minimum living guarantee, and some households even have no income and rely on the state subsidy for a living. Public leisure and recreational facilities of many leisure activities like cinema, amusement park, theme park, gym, commercial pedestrian street, KTV and so on overcharge, while most disadvantaged groups' economic income can only bear their needs of life and they don't have enough money or are not willing to spend so much money on leisure and recreational places. As a result, the conflict between the disadvantaged groups' limited economic capacity and the higher participating threshold rigidly reduced the types of leisure activities that disadvantaged groups can participate in.

2.3 Constrained by Leisure Places and Facilities

China has entered into the ranks of aging society. The aging program development blue paper *China's Aging Program Development Report (2013)* noted that by the end of 2012, our country's aging population reached 0.194 billion that accounted for 14.3% of the total population, in which the population 80 years old or older reached 22.73 millions (China's Old-age Science Research Center, 2013). CDPF calculated that by the end of 2010, our country's total population of the handicapped reached 85.02 millions. In the face of the increasing disadvantaged groups, although the leisure places and facilities have increased and improved more than a few years ago, very few of industrial and commercial enterprises are willing to produce and supply welfare products or meager profit products because of our country's incomplete social security system and the influence of economic benefits. Meanwhile, all kinds of leisure facilities government provides the disadvantaged groups are not far enough to meet the social needs. As mentioned above, it is nearly impossible for disadvantaged groups to access the upscale leisure and recreational places, while the public leisure facilities are not far enough to meet their needs.

Throughout the leisure facilities from place to place, most of them are provided to the physically and mentally sound young adults for use, while the leisure facilities specially designed and constructed for the old people and the handicapped are almost blank. If no leisure facilities can be used, then how can they participate in rich leisure activities?

2.4 Lack of Attention and Recognition

In recent years, disadvantaged groups have aroused attention in society and got help and support in many aspects including subsistence supplies, educational training, employment security, medical insurance and so on, which improved their living conditions. One of the most notable forces helping disadvantaged groups is NGO (Non-Government Organization). In recent years, there has sprung up a large number of grassroots NGOs in our country. They play an important role not replaced by the government and market in aspects of alleviating social conflicts, safeguarding citizen's rights and interests and social assistance, etc..

At present, NGOs in our country mainly focus on environmental protection, poverty and disaster relief, education, women and children and so on. The recently concerned public welfare programs like Support Education, Free Lunch, Handy Public Services Series (Handy Salvation on Street, Handy Offering of Books to the Farmers, Take Photos to Save Children Beggars) are some examples of them. Most NGOs more often pay attention to the aspects including disadvantaged groups' subsistence supplies, educational training, employment security, medical insurance and so on, but few NGOs focus on the indispensable leisure needs. Few NGOs established the public welfare programs helping disadvantaged groups carry out leisure activities, and there are only some scattered public service activities involving the aspect of leisure. It is just the lack of attention of the society that makes it difficult for NGOs to carry out the leisure field. The following two reasons make it difficult: a) Capital shortage. Capital of NGOs is mainly from membership fees, donation from enterprises and individuals, government purchase of services, aid from foundations, etc.. But the assistance in leisure field now has not paid social attention, so the raising of funds in helping disadvantaged groups carry out leisure activities is more difficult than that in other fields. b) The lack of the social public identity. In recent years, there appear many scandals in NGOs such as financial problems, misappropriation of funds, cheat of donation, etc., which impacts the whole public service industry and makes their credibility questioned by the public. During the period when NGOs' credibility declines plus many people's thinking that it is meaningless for disadvantaged groups to carry out leisure activities, it is difficult to organize various leisure activities. These difficulties make the organizations that want

to carry out leisure field unable to do what they hope to do.

3. MEASURES THAT NGOS TAKE TO HELP DISADVANTAGED GROUPS CARRY OUT LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Helping disadvantaged groups carry out leisure activities mean a lot, which can mentally give them strong support and subtly influence their attitude towards life. To let disadvantaged groups enjoy leisure benefits and participate in rich leisure activities in their spare time for a long time, I want to propose the following suggestions here about how NGOs help disadvantaged groups carry out leisure activities:

3.1 Changing the Misunderstandings of Disadvantaged Groups Themselves and the Public

As disadvantaged groups are in the bottom of the society, they form a negative and pessimistic attitude towards life, and they think that they are the persons abandoned by the society. Therefore, NGOs first need to change the disadvantaged groups' misunderstandings of leisure in helping them carry out leisure activities, and try to remove their psychological obstacles, so as to let them fully realize that leisure is the right of every single person instead of that of the rich. Leisure can bring some hope and happiness into their lives and change their changeless and agonizing state of life, so that they are willing to try participating in more outdoor leisure activities.

Meanwhile, we need to change the misunderstandings of the public in helping them carry out leisure activities. Many people think that leisure activities are the needs generated in constant pursuit of quality of life and spiritual life after having certain economic capacity to meet their material life. The public need to realize that leisure activities are also an integral part of the disadvantaged groups' life, which can mentally be and physically benefit the disadvantaged groups. At the same time, providing leisure benefits to the disadvantaged groups is an important part of building a harmonious society.

3.2 Establishing Public Welfare Programs Helping Disadvantaged Groups Carry Out Leisure Activities

NGOs should establish some relevant public welfare programs in accordance with the service targets and needs to help the groups that truly need help. Public welfare programs should be planned and established through the discussion and detailed analysis of many professionals, so as to ensure their effective and long-term running. Children One-to-One Support Program of World Vision is an example, which gives the children in poor mountainous areas chances to go to school. Countless children benefit

from this program, and the donors benefit from it too, because this program helps many caring people achieve their desires that they hope to help the people who need help. Benefits a good public welfare program can take to people are immeasurable. Therefore, establishing a public welfare program is an effective and long-term way for NGOs to help disadvantaged groups carry out leisure activities.

Many corporate public welfare programs can become the programs helping disadvantaged groups carry out leisure activities if making a little change to them plus some systematic leisure plans. For example, all kinds of caring actions can organize volunteers every month from time to time on the basis of that program to take the old people to the leisure places for participating in leisure activities, and also the volunteers can ask and chat with them at the same time. Consequently, multiple effects can be received through this way. Leisure activities of each month need to be arranged reasonably and should consider various aspects. Firstly, we should focus on cultivating their attitude of active involvement, and then develop their interests and hobbies. Finally, we should develop their ability of independently carrying out leisure activities, and let them dare to play their own strengths and make them form a positive and optimistic attitude towards life.

3.3 Establishing Leisure Activities Bases Provided to Disadvantaged Groups for Free Use

Disadvantaged groups can only participate in leisure activities in the park and square for free, and the lack of leisure facilities and places is the important reason why disadvantaged groups can't participate in rich leisure activities. Therefore, if any NGOs can provide the disadvantaged groups with free comprehensive places for leisure activities, it will bring their lives great leisure benefits. Different interest-oriented classes can be offered in the leisure places in line with their leisure preferences in different places, such as Drama Class, Chess Class, Aerobics Class, Reading Class, etc. Related equipment can be raised from enterprises and individuals in the society by holding public service activities or they can get support from related government sectors through the communication and coordination.

3.4 Helping Disadvantaged Groups Master Some Self-Leisure Activity Skills

In various leisure activities, those carrying out at or near the home account for a large proportion, especially for the physiological disadvantaged groups, because they are disturbed by physical obstacles and can't often go out. Therefore, independent self-leisure activities like painting, fishing, handwriting, flower and bird growing, handicraft and so on are necessary. NGOs can recruit volunteers who have relevant skills in accordance with each person's preferences and abilities, and then train them and let them participate in leisure activities independently. In this way,

they can take part in salutary leisure activities at home, which can not only let them happily spend their spare time, but also make them learn a new skill, improve their self-confidence and be good for the construction of social and cultural life.

CONCLUSION

Currently, leisure activities for disadvantaged groups lack attention of all the society. This situation is badly in need of change. More and more NGOs are expected to carry out public service activities that aim to help the disadvantaged groups participate in positive leisure activities, so that the government, public, media and enterprises can pay attention to and recognize this field, and then change the present situation and meet the disadvantaged groups' leisure needs. Aristotle once said, "We need the noble

virtue to work, and we need that to take leisure as well because leisure can make our life meaningful" (Sun, 2002). That making our changeless life meaningful is also an important part of building a harmonious society.

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