

Gender Equitable Program Proposal

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EXS 203

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May 1, 2021

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The YMCA would benefit from a gender equitable basketball program for youth ages 6-12 years old. Providing sports programs centered on gender equity allows for youth to develop strong ideals regarding equality and equity across the sexes and promotes equal opportunities to develop skills regardless of gender identity or sex. The YMCA will need community support, proper staff education, and procedures to implement the program. The following program proposal will ensure the program is a success.

Ideology

In today's society, there are many social norms that people follow. The primary beliefs that are upheld today regarding gender are as follows:

- a. "Human beings are biologically either female or male.
- b. Heterosexuality is normal, and other expressions of sexual feelings, thoughts, and actions are seen as unnatural, abnormal, deviant, or immoral.
- c. Men are physically stronger and more rational than women and more naturally suited to possess power and assume leadership positions in the public spheres of society."

(Coakley, 2020).

These beliefs, though widely accepted, are consistently being rejected by more and more people. Society is not so black and white as these orthodox gender ideology statements would portray. It is made up of a diverse group of individuals that come from varying backgrounds and have a wide range of perceptions, abilities, and needs. Although there is truth to the idea that biologically humans are either male or female and therefore predisposed a certain level of muscle

development, this is not grounds to dismiss individuals that fall outside these social norms. Boys and girls participating in the YMCA youth sports program will fall on a spectrum of strengths and weaknesses as well as emotional, physical, and psychological needs and abilities. The orthodox ideologies can lend to limiting beliefs and result in boys and girls being given different opportunities in sports, which contributes to a larger issue of disparity among the sexes.

Understanding the basic social norms and ways in which they may be exclusionary is essential in developing a gender equitable sports program. There are basic differences between boys and girls and these should be acknowledged, but not to the detriment of either sex. Equal opportunity should be available to youth across the gender spectrum regardless of sex, sexual orientation, or athletic ability, and programs developed for both sexes should be given the same level of attention, support, and funding. Rather than accepting social norms at face value and developing programs based on that, programs need to encompass a wider scope and embrace the idea that male and female participants have greater depth and diversity than the orthodox ideologies convey. This will help establish a sense of equity amongst boys and girls in the sports programs and allow for them to be designed based on human needs instead of general differences.

Support and Benefits

A gender equitable sports program for basketball is an essential addition to the YMCA because of the positive impact gender equitable teams have on youth. Boys and girls are influenced by perceptions in society, family life, and peers at a very young age. Adopting a gender equitable basketball program will help the youth in the community develop positive ideas about gender equity and will help negate the stereotypes that often prevail in society. The YMCA

can provide a safe space for boys and girls to connect with one another in this basketball program and develop skills such as teamwork, collaboration, communication, and leadership. The boys and girls will be given equal opportunities to demonstrate their skills which will foster an understanding that boys and girls, despite their differences, should be treated with the same respect and kindness.

Achieving success in the basketball program will require a great deal of planning, education, and support. The first step to gaining essential community support is to ensure all staff involved in the youth basketball program are educated on the importance of gender equity, working with diverse populations, and the spectrum of needs and abilities of boys and girls today (NCCA, n.d.). This will help establish a strong foundation for the YMCA to build upon in seeking community support for the basketball program. Once staff are appropriately trained and informed on proper practices, verbiage, and communication, the YMCA needs to host educational opportunities for the community regarding gender equity. Understanding is crucial for the program to be successful, and lack of education can result in stereotypical perceptions to continue and ultimately hurt the success of a gender equitable program.

To achieve this, the YMCA will host a series of three lectures available online and in person for community members and parents to view to better understand gender equity. The events will feature speakers well-versed in the issues related to gender and youth, as well as opportunities for a Q&A to address any concerns. These will be essential opportunities for discussion to foster support for the basketball program. They will also be a way for local businesses and organizations in the community to get involved and spearhead exceptional change within the community. Local businesses will be approached about the upcoming lecture series and offered advertising opportunities during the event in exchange for their physical and

monetary support. Seeing support from trusted organizations and companies in the community can help attendees feel more secure in the mission of the basketball program and will encourage greater support from the community.

Once education and sponsorship efforts have been completed, the YMCA needs to establish a committee to allow for community engagement and ongoing review of the program (NCCA, n.d.). The committee should be comprised of key YMCA staff working on the basketball program, parents of participating youth, and organizations with a vested interest in the success of the program. This will allow for a diverse collaboration of differing perspectives based on a common goal. It will encourage strength in community by bringing people together to discuss key issues, and will simultaneously ensure problems are handled in a timely and efficient manner by the committee to prevent any discrimination within the program. The committee will be made up of 15 members, with equal representation across the three groups. Committee members will serve on a volunteer basis for one year and will be selected by the prior year's members, with the option to serve for a combined three years. Community nomination will be used for initial selection and ongoing recruitment of committee members.

Gender Equity Considerations

The basketball program will be divided into three different age groups, with the option of gender-specific teams at age 12. Co-ed teams will allow for nonbinary youth to join a team without any question of gender identity. For the gender-specific teams at age 12, nonbinary youth will be placed on the co-ed team to avoid issues of discrimination or inequality. The divisions will be as follows:

- a. Co-ed ages 6, 7, 8
- b. Co-ed ages 9, 10, and 11
- c. Boys age 12
- d. Girls age 12
- e. Co-ed age 12

The age divisions will be split into teams of a maximum of five players on each team. Since the number of participants is odd, there will be at least two girls on each team to promote the mission of gender equity. Depending on the level of participation there could be as many as five teams within each age group. Two coaches will be chosen to manage the teams of the same age group to ensure uniformity across the program. This will also prevent any issue of a coach being left alone with a child at any point, and will allow for collaborative decision-making and strategy in coaching the youth. The court will be divided into playing time of hour increments for up to three teams of the same age group.

Potential Problems

There may be individuals in the community that feel co-ed sports are not fair to the participants due to physical differences and needs. The committee will be responsible for coordinating ongoing education efforts to inform concerned community members about the importance for gender equitable sports programs. The committee will also be asked to continually review the programs to ensure the differing needs are being met for both sexes to ensure proper attention is being given to both boys and girls with respect to their similarities and differences.

It will also be important to establish guidelines and procedures for when there is a change in staff or an issue with current staff. Discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated by the YMCA and any participating staff or volunteers engaging in such behavior will be terminated immediately. Coaches available to substitute for the basketball program will be maintained in the event a coach is sick, is terminated, or resigns from the position. The same process will be followed for the committee members if 80% of committee members feel the participating individual is engaging in negative, discriminatory, or hateful behaviors toward the other members, program participants, or YMCA.

Conclusion

By adopting a gender equitable basketball program, the YMCA will be able to offer exceptional opportunities for boys and girls to develop essential skills while encouraging connection and collaboration regardless of sex or gender identity. The plan above will help this program be a success for many years to come.

References:

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