

## AQUATICS

# “We Got Better”: Community Partners’ Perceptions of an Out-of-School Swimming Program for Underserved Children and Youth

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to describe community partners’ (CPs) perceptions of an out-of-school swimming program (OSSP) for underserved children and youth. Participants were four CPs associated with the OSSP during three consecutive summers and parents of the children and youth who participated in the program. We employed a theoretical perspective derived from the literature on community-engaged scholarship and worked within the interpretive paradigm through a descriptive case study design. We collected data with five qualitative techniques. They were analyzed through analytic induction and constant comparison. Key findings were that CPs found the OSSP to be relevant, to have a high level of reciprocity, and to be resilient. The OSSP was shown to counter structural, institutional, personal, and cultural barriers that limited underserved children’s and youth’s access to and value of swimming. The research and assessment data generated during the OSSP led to little reflection or program improvement. Others aiming to design similar programs may benefit from examining the organizational structure and content of the OSSP.*

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The second leading cause of unintentional deaths among children and youth in the United States is drowning (World Health Organization [WHO], 2018). Children and youth who reside in low-income underserved communities are at greater risk from drowning because they are unlikely to receive formal swimming instruction (Irwin et al., 2009; Irwin et al., 2019; WHO, 2018). Moreover, those who are at greatest risk appear to be minority (e.g., African American and Latina) children and youth (Gilchrist & Parker, 2014; Pharr et al., 2017; WHO, 2018).

A combination of personal, institutional, structural, and cultural factors is responsible for underserved minority children and youth being at greater risk for drowning than those in other subgroups. Personal factors include parents' inability to finance formal swimming instruction or to transport their children to pools (Ross et al., 2014). Key institutional and structural factors are the lack of pools in underserved communities and the problems public schools in these communities have in transporting students to pools in more affluent areas (Ross et al., 2014; Storm et al., 2017; Wiltse, 2014). Culturally, minorities are often stereotyped as being poor or non-swimmers and have few role models in terms of elite competitive swimmers (Norwood et al., 2014; Storm et al., 2017; Quash, 2018). Further, since they have little or no access to pools and cannot afford swimming instruction, those living in underserved communities are unlikely to value swimming (Ito, 2014; Storm et al., 2017). As a result, they have low levels of water safety knowledge and swimming ability (Ito, 2014; Storm et al., 2017).

To date, there has been little research of programs designed to improve underserved American minority children's and youth's aquatic skill and knowledge of water safety. Two recent studies carried out by Olaisen et al. (2018) and Frindell (2016) in the United States, however, strongly suggested that that it was possible to make improvements in these areas. The interventions in these studies lasted for 8 weeks and 9 days, respectively, and included swimming lessons, land-based lessons, and formal presentations to parents and guardians.

## **Rationale and Purpose**

In the United States, many programs with interventions of any kind with this population are the result of collaborations between

universities and various community partners (CPs; e.g., parents, schools, businesses, and nonprofit organizations). The out-of-school swimming program (OSSP) we examined during this study was the result of one such collaboration. In previous work, we had described the highly positive impact of the OSSP on the children and youth in the program, in terms of learning to swim and attitudes toward swimming (Susnara et al., 2022), and on the instructors responsible for delivering the OSSP, in terms of learning how to work with underserved children and youth in this context (Susnara & Curtner-Smith, 2022). To our knowledge, however, there was no research on CPs' views about such programs. Given that CPs supply resources, skills, knowledge, and support that are crucial to the effectiveness of university–community-partnered programs, this omission seems glaring. Consequently, our objective was to conduct research that began to fill the void. The purpose of the study, therefore, was to describe CPs' perceptions of the OSSP. The specific research questions we attempted to answer were to what degree did CPs believe the OSSP (a) was relevant for children, youth, themselves, and their communities; (b) provided reciprocity in terms of the CPs gaining from the program; (c) was resilient in terms of its longevity; and (d) produced research that was pragmatic and promoted reflection and improvement.

## Theoretical Perspective

Since the OSSP was the result of a collaboration between one university and various CPs, we employed a theoretical perspective from the literature on community-engaged scholarship (Pruitt et al., 2019) to guide our data collection and analysis. Specifically, Pruitt et al. (2019) argue that for university–community collaborative programs to be successful four interactive elements have to be present. These are *relevance*, *reciprocity*, *resilience*, and *research*.

For a university–community intervention to succeed, Pruitt et al. (2019) argue that it is crucial that CPs perceive it to be relevant. That is, CPs value the program because they stand to gain from it. Pruitt et al. (2019) also argue that university–community programs with relatively high levels of reciprocity are more likely to be effective than those with low levels of reciprocity. A high level of reciprocity, they explain, involves all CPs gaining from, as well as giving to, the program, which increases their motivation to contribute to a program's

success. The degree of resilience within a university–community program, Pruitt et al. (2019) note, determines its longevity and the extent to which it continues to flourish. Programs with a high level of resilience, they suggest, have strong structures and highly competent and committed university personnel and CPs who are able to anticipate and overcome barriers. Finally, following Boyer (1990), Pruitt et al. (2019) argue that high-quality research of university–community collaborations enable CPs to understand the degree to which a program is successful and to reflect on their own contributions, perspectives, and practices. Such reflection, they suggest, should lead to improved programs.

## Method

### Design and Participants

During this study, we operated within the interpretive paradigm and employed a descriptive case study design (Hays, 2014). All CPs associated with the OSSP were primary participants in the study. They included the branch director of the local Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), the chief executive officer (CEO) for the town’s YMCAs, the program supervisor for aquatics from the local Parks and Recreation Association (PARA), the program/outreach director from the First Tee, and the parents of children and youth in the OSSP. Permission to conduct this study was granted by our institution’s Institutional Review Board. In congruence with the board’s human subjects policy, all participants signed consent forms indicating that they were willing to take part in the study. In addition, all the participants were assigned pseudonyms for protection of their identity.

At the time of the study, Latasha, the YMCA branch director was 45 years of age and had been in her position for 9 years. She identified as female and African American. Amanda, the CEO of the town’s YMCAs, was 38 years old, identified as White and female, and had been working in the role for 5 years. Paul, the PARA program supervisor for aquatics, was 45 years of age, identified as a White male, and had 13 years of experience in his current position. Sharon, the First Tee program/outreach director, was 57 years old, identified as a White female, and had been working for the company while teaching children golf for 4 years. We did not collect detailed

demographic information from the parents as a further measure to protect their anonymity and to encourage them to participate in the study and provide their true perceptions of and perspectives about the OSSP.

## Setting

The OSSP took place at a PARA swimming pool and the adjacent YMCA, which were situated in an underserved low-income section of a medium-sized southeastern American town. The indoor swimming pool was 25 m × 10 m and ranged from 1.68 to 0.91 m in depth. The YMCA housed a large and well-equipped gymnasium and several multipurpose rooms. The state in which the town was located had the 10th highest number of unintentional drownings in the country for all ages from 1999 to 2017 (National Center for Health Statistics, 2017).

Our study was conducted during three summers in which the OSSP was delivered. During this time, the OSSP catered to 200 children and youth aged 4 to 14 years, free of charge. One hundred twelve (56.00%) of the participants were boys and 88 (44.00%) were girls. One hundred ninety-one (95.50%) of the children and youth were African American, seven (3.50%) were White, and two (1.00%) came from other racial and ethnic groups. One hundred sixty-four (82.00%) of the children and youth lived in homes deemed to be below the poverty line (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2020), and 146 (73.00%) qualified for reduced payment or free lunch at their schools.

## Out-of-School Swimming Program

Two staff in the outreach section of a major research university in the town, one professor from the kinesiology department at the same university, and the CPs from the YMCA, PARA, and the First Tee collaborated to deliver the OSSP. Key principles from the literature on effective out-of-school programs were followed by the two university staff who designed and directed the OSSP. These included choosing objectives based on the community's needs and creating partnerships with CPs who were able to provide resources, expertise, and support (Bartko, 2005; Hemphill & Martinek, 2017). Following Bartko (2005) and Lauver and Little (2005), the two directors also stressed that program instructors needed to build a safe, supportive,

and welcoming environment for the children, youth, and their parents. In addition, they emphasized the importance of instructors selecting stimulating and developmentally appropriate tasks for their charges.

During the first four weeks of June in each of the three summers that we collected data, the OSSP took place on Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. Children and youth were first placed in three age groups (4 to 6 years, 7 to 9 years, and 10 to 14 years) before being assigned to small homogeneous groups on the basis of their skill level in and experience of swimming. Each day, these groups rotated through three program components. The core component was a swimming lesson of 40 to 50 min. Secondary components were lessons of the same duration on enrichment and nutrition and land-based physical education.

The 16-lesson swimming component was taught by eight to 10 instructors during each of the three summers. The instructors were undergraduate university physical education students, sport pedagogy graduate students, and local physical education teachers. Most of them were trained by the kinesiology professor and held the Red Cross Water Safety Instructor (WSI) qualification. The goals of the swimming component were to teach swimming skills and improve water confidence and safety. Swimmer-instructor ratios were generally 4 to 1. Instructors used materials from the Red Cross Learn to Swim curriculum (American Red Cross, 2014) to plan their lessons and focused on basic skills for nonswimmers and strokes for beginning swimmers and any proficient swimmers. Water safety tips (e.g., “look before you leap,” “swim with a buddy,” and “reach or throw, don’t go”) were presented to and discussed with all groups prior to, during, and following lessons.

Enrichment and physical education component classes ranged from 35 to 50 children and youth. The enrichment component was taught by two local elementary school classroom teachers. Objectives were for children and youth to improve their health-related knowledge (e.g., healthy eating and living) and literacy skills through interactive project-based and scientific learning. The physical education component was delivered by a sport pedagogy graduate student and an undergraduate preservice physical education teacher from the university. For 4- to 6-year-olds, the goal was

to learn fundamental movement skills (e.g., dribbling, throwing, catching). For 7- to 14-year-olds, the objective was to improve sports skills (e.g., basketball and golf), levels of physical activity participation, social responsibility, and health-related fitness (e.g., learn the FITT [frequency, intensity, time, and type] principle). To achieve these goals, the instructors taught through the skill themes approach (Graham et al., 2013) and the multiactivity, teaching personal and social responsibility (TPSR) (Hellison, 2011), and health-related fitness (Harris & Cale, 2019) instructional models. Within this component, Sharon and her colleagues from First Tee also taught 45-min golf lessons to the children and youth.

### Data Collection

Data were collected through five qualitative techniques in all three summers. During fieldwork, Daniela M. Susnara conducted numerous *informal interviews* with the CPs and made notes on their contents as soon after they had occurred as possible. In addition, she *observed* CPs interacting with each other, the children and youth, and the instructors and made copious notes on these observations either live or at a later time the same day. Salient documents created by CPs were collected and notes were made on their contents during a *document analysis*. Thirty-four of the parents responded to a request for *written feedback* about the OSSP on a standard form that asked about which program components they considered most relevant and why. Finally, Latasha, Amanda, Paul, and Sharon completed *formal interviews* with Susnara. During each formal interview, the same protocol was followed, which permitted multiple follow-up prompts once CPs had responded to initial questions. In congruence with our theoretical perspective, initial questions posed during the formal interviews focused on the relevance (e.g., Do you believe there is a need for a swimming program in this community?), reciprocity (e.g., How, if at all, does participation in the OSSP benefit you/your organization and the community?), resilience (e.g., How, if at all, has the OSSP developed over time?), and research (e.g., In what ways, if at all, has research of the OSSP influenced its development?) of the OSSP. Formal interviews ranged from 25 to 40 min in duration, were audio-recorded, and were transcribed verbatim.

## Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through a three-phase process. In Phase 1, data from all sources were sorted into four subsets focused on the relevance, reciprocity, resilience, and research of the OSSP. In Phase 2, Susnara used the techniques of analytic induction and constant comparison (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) to code and categorize the data in each subset and reduce it to meaningful themes. Specifically, individual data chunks were assigned a numerical code and then codes were grouped to form categories. Categories were then grouped to form themes. During this process, M. D. Curtner-Smith provided feedback on and critiqued emerging codes, categories, and themes. In Phase 3, data were selected to represent themes in this manuscript.

Trustworthiness and credibility were established through three processes. First, member checks were carried out during informal interviews during which CPs were asked to confirm, refute, or modify the researchers' earlier interpretations of the data. Second, any negative cases (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984) discovered during the analysis process led to code, category, and theme descriptors being modified. Finally, triangulation involved checking that data from all sources were congruent with emerging interpretations.

## Findings

In this sections, we describe the degree to which the CPs believe the OSSP to be relevant and provide reciprocity in terms of them gaining from the program. In addition, we describe the extent to which CPs believe the OSSP is resilient in terms of its longevity and production of research that is pragmatic and promotes reflection and improvement.

## Relevance

All the CPs in the study indicated that the OSSP was, “without doubt,” relevant for and “needed” in their community and that the community gained from it. One CP said,

Oh yeah, [the OSSP] helps the community. Just by providing a safe haven for the kids and some consistency in their schedules, it's helped the community. But I think, definitely, offering the swimming helps too. And that's simply because

these kids are the ones who are most likely to drown. (Sharon, First Tee program/outreach director, formal interview)

In line with past research (Ito, 2014; Ross et al., 2014; Storm et al., 2017), the CPs also indicated that the OSSP countered institutional, structural, and personal factors that normally had a negative impact on the community.

### *Overcoming Institutional and Structural Barriers*

CPs noted that their community was “underserved,” institutionally and structurally, in terms of facilities and “programs” in general and public pools and swimming instructors in particular. They noted that, consequently, children and youth did “not have access to some of the programming that other [more affluent] communities have.” The OSSP, they explained, helped fill this void. Amanda (YMCA CEO) said,

This program is a blessing to the community. These kids don’t [normally] have the opportunity to, number one, take a swimming lesson cos they don’t have access to a pool with swim lessons available. . . . Another big reason why it is needed is because [the town] is surrounded by water. We have [the river], we have multiple lakes . . . that children are exposed to where they could just walk around . . . and, God forbid, fall in. . . . So it is a life skill, in my opinion, that children need. . . . They need to have water safety skills. (Formal interview)

One parent said,

[The OSSP] is something Jordan looks forward to every year. It’s great that he can keep coming to the Y, but it’s even better that he has the opportunity to learn to swim at the same time and I just feel better knowing that. (Lauren, written feedback, year 2)

### *Overcoming Personal Barriers*

Amanda spoke for most CPs when she noted that under normal circumstances people in the community could not “afford private swimming lessons or even group swimming lessons.” This, CPs indicated, was because the community included a high proportion of

“low income” and “single parent” families. The main personal factor that the OSSP helped with, then, was financial. One parent said,

If swimming wasn't a part of the Y's camp, I just don't know if we would be able to do it. You know? [The OSSP] works out so great because I drop them off in the morning for camp, they get their swim lessons, and I pick them up after work. We don't get charged any extra and we don't have to schedule anything extra. It's just convenient! (Ashley, informal interview, year 3)

## Reciprocity

CPs also indicated that a high level of reciprocity existed between themselves and the OSSP. In congruence with Pruitt et al. (2019), this appeared to be the main force that drove the OSSP and was responsible for its success.

### *Community Partners' Contributions to the Out-of-School Swimming Program*

In terms of what they contributed to the OSSP, the four CPs working for local organizations focused on the resources, services, and expertise they provided. Latasha, Amanda, and Paul noted that a major part of the YMCA and PARA's contribution to the program was to supply “support” in terms of “space,” “buildings,” and “the pool.” One CP said,

Without the Y site, I don't know how successful [the OSSP] would be. Its convenience too . . . is key. The swimming pool is literally right across the street. It's walkable. I'm not sure that the program would be able to reach all of the summer campers at the Y if the pool was not so conveniently located. (Latasha, YMCA branch director, informal interview, year 1)

In addition, these CPs noted that they provided “lifeguards” (PARA) and “staff” (YMCA) to supervise children and youth during transitions from one component of the OSSP to another and, if necessary, to deal with any “behavior management” issues that occurred during instruction. One CP said,

Logistics-wise, the program uses Y staff to keep student-to-instructor ratios in check. The [instructors] maintain the structure, content, and those types of things. But the Y staff is there to make sure that there's enough adult-to-child ratios. (Amanda, YMCA CEO, formal interview)

Moreover, Latasha (YMCA branch director) explained that the YMCA played a significant role in recruiting children and youth for the OSSP on the basis of the connections and trust the organization it already had with local families:

I would say . . . [the YMCA] helped with the participants—getting those children enrolled in the program, helping to promote the program beyond our doors in places throughout our community such as fairs and [school parent–teacher association] meetings. . . . So I think that we've probably been a little helpful in program promotion, recruitment, and student participation. (Formal interview)

Sharon noted that, in contrast, the First Tee's main contribution to the OSSP was provision of pedagogical expertise and equipment for the physical education component of the program, specifically, the supply of instructors, clubs, and balls to teach golf. Moreover, Sharon (YMCA CEO) relayed how the instructors not only taught the content but also attempted to connect with and impact the children and youth on a personal and social level:

We also tried to share a life lesson with golf each day we were out there. Like in the beginning of the lesson we might talk about respect or honesty, and stuff like that, to build character. And then incorporate the idea throughout the lesson. (Formal interview)

According to the organizational CPs, the main contribution of parents to the OSSP was their positive reaction to the program and their support of the instructors working in it. One CP said,

It might not seem like the parents really participate in [the OSSP] but they do. The parents help support participation. I would say that they are silent reinforcement for us as far as keeping [children and youth] involved. They make sure

their children wear their swimsuits, follow directions, and participate. (Latasha, YMCA branch director, formal interview)

The parents echoed these sentiments and noted that they supported the OSSP by making sure their children were “showing up in a swimsuit every day” and encouraging them “to listen and follow directions.”

### *Community Partners’ Gains From the Out-of-School Swimming Program*

The OSSP helped the organizational CPs to fulfill their missions and, on a personal level, to gain a vast amount of satisfaction and motivation from the apparently positive influence the OSSP had on the children and youth. One CP said,

I think the community has improved because of [the OSSP]. It brought the children together in a way that they learned team-building. They learned how to support each other when they were in and out of the pool. They learned a lot of nutrition education. It also is giving children self-confidence. Providing confidence in children only makes the community stronger because it makes them more confident in school. It makes them more confident in their sports. It makes them more confident when they grow up and become adults. And they want to grow and get jobs, become taxpaying citizens. It makes them want to go to college. And it just helps them become and be better people and they live better lives. So we want to start them young. And it’s a great partnership because that’s what [the YMCA] wants to do . . . making sure that we’re reaching every child’s full potential. (Amanda, YMCA CEO, formal interview)

In addition, these four CPs explained that their organizations gained from the program in terms of demand for and enrollment in their own programs and stronger relationships with the community. Sharon, for example, relayed that the “take-up” for “free golf lessons” increased significantly from OSSP families. Paul (PARA program supervisor for aquatics) noted that “open swim” sessions offered by

PARA included an increasing number of OSSP children, youth, and their parents:

Well since [the OSSP] has taken off, we actually have had to add longer open swim times. . . . I don't know the exact numbers, but I just know each year we need to accommodate more community members during open swim on the weekends. You know, six or seven years ago we didn't really even have an open swim. . . . Each year, we see more and more swimmers and it's been like the older kids are becoming . . . better swimmers. And then the younger kids are more familiar with the water and they're able to hold their own a little bit more. (Formal interview)

Furthermore, the four organizational CPs noted that their existing staff gained from participating in the OSSP in terms of pedagogy, "professional development," and "experience." One CP said,

I think [participating in the OSSP] helped us become better teachers, and helped us appreciate what we do each day . . . because [in the OSSP] we had large numbers and the kids in [the OSSP] come from different families than our typical clients. [Our instructors] weren't used to doing that. I was, with my [physical education] background, but it made them appreciate that. And they are better teachers too in that they had to learn to teach in a different style. (Sharon, First Tee program/outreach director, formal interview)

Moreover, Paul (PARA program supervisor for aquatics) believed the OSSP might lead to his organization being able to recruit more staff from the community in the future. He said,

We do hire lifeguards from the community and it's always been a challenge to get swimmers from that community. And [the OSSP] helped get participants that have knowledge and the swim skills where . . . when they . . . get a little bit older, they can join our junior lifeguard program and then ultimately become a lifeguard and work for us in their own community. (Informal interview, year 2)

While parents appreciated what their children gained from the enrichment and nutrition and physical education components of the OSSP, they indicated that the swimming component was of most value, and they relayed what their children gained in terms of overcoming “fears” of the water, “learning to swim,” improved “confidence” and “comfort” in the water, and knowledge of “water safety.” In addition, a number of parents and guardians suggested that the OSSP helped break the cultural cycle (Ito, 2014; Ross et al., 2014; Storm et al., 2017) that had socialized members of their community into believing that swimming and aquatics were not for them. One parent said,

Well, you know what I think. . . . Swimming is a personal thing. I don't know if you know or not, but I don't get in the water. Not even to play. Not ever. So when you hear people talking about the black community being afraid of water, that would be me. I'm one of them. But [my son] was in [the OSSP] and he began to be comfortable in the water, so I can say that his learning to swim started here. (Tiara, informal interview, year 3)

## Resilience

CPs also believed the OSSP to be resilient (Pruitt et al., 2019) in terms of the likelihood that it would continue to contribute to the community and flourish. As well as being due to its high levels of relevance and reciprocity, this was because of, CPs noted, the standard of the instructors, the communication between OSSP personnel and participants, and the efforts to improve the program continually.

### *Standard of the Instructors*

CPs were overwhelmingly confident that the instructors of all three OSSP components were high quality. One CP said,

I think part of the reason the kids get so much out of the pool portion is because of the instructors. When they all come in prepared to teach, with their certifications, it just makes things flow easier. You don't have to worry about if they know what they're talking about. (Paul, PARA program supervisor for aquatics, formal interview)

In addition, CPs were of the opinion that the high-quality teaching that they had witnessed was central to the OSSP's success and a key reason why it would continue to succeed in the future. One CP said,

I really admire the way y'all hire your staff and prep them for the summer. I think, you know, since they are all trained, or are being trained to become teachers, it really helps and the kids really respond to them. Maybe if we could start doing training together that would be good for . . . our staff—just to get everyone on the same page. (Latasha, YMCA branch director, informal interview, year 3)

### *Communication*

CPs were also quick to suggest that the high level of “communication” and the “partnership” forged between the personnel and participants in the OSSP over 3 years was another prime reason for the program's apparent success. One CP said,

It's such a great partnership because we all listened to each other and we all work really, really well with each other in my opinion. We all take as many suggestions as we can and we figure out the best solution. And if it doesn't work, we scratch it and we start over. It's a very open relationship, which is one of the best partnerships, especially with a university. Because many times, a partnership with a university can be difficult. But this one just has been absolutely top-notch. (Amanda, YMCA CEO, formal interview)

Importantly, the CPs also realized that the level of communication they enjoyed by the end of the program was not immediate or automatic but evolved over time. Early on, for example, they explained that communication between groups was “limited” and “sparse.” As they became more “comfortable” with each other, however, the situation improved and, by the end of the 3 years, CPs were adamant that communication, cooperation, and “understanding” would be crucial to the OSSP's continued success. One CP said,

You pay attention to what's needed, how it's needed, and how people are going to receive it. We take the past year's

reaction, input, participation, and all that to develop the next year's curriculum, activities, experiences. Everything's based off of what we experienced and learned the year before. So it has grown, it has improved so much every year. (Latasha, YMCA branch director, formal interview)

### *Continual Improvement*

The CPs perceived that efforts to overcome barriers, “modify,” adjust,” and improve the OSSP were making a significant contribution to the program's resilience. For example, as a result of multiple “conversations” and “reflection,” during the 3 years of the program, the OSSP evolved to include a “streamlined swim curriculum,” “more hands-on science projects,” a “simplified registration and enrollment” process, improved “behavior management” plans, and more focus on “social and emotional learning.” Moreover, it overcame “issues” with “space,” “large numbers” of participants, and “funding.” According to Latasha (YMCA branch director),

[We] evaluate everything and so when you return each year things are always better. Whether it's classroom control or enrichment topics or the pool instruction, we are always revamping it and growing it to meet the needs of the children. (Formal interview)

Paul (PARA program supervisor for aquatics) said,

I think each year we got better and better . . . and the program got more efficient and [we were] able to streamline the learning program and add more and more programming to it . . . doing nutrition, fitness exercise, as well as swimming. Programming that the community asked for and needed. (Formal interview)

Key to these improvements being conceived and implemented, the CPs suggested, was the democratic way in which they operated. One CP said,

It's not a “this is how it's going to be because this is how it's always been done” type of program. We are not like that. We're always trying to evolve and make it the best that it can

be. So we share training. We're always open to, "Hey, this works," "Hey, I can bring in this professor," or "I'm an expert in this." You know? Like, "Hey, can I share this information with you?" (Amanda, YMCA CEO, formal interview)

## Research

Three main research foci were pursued during the OSSP. As well as the current study focused on the CPs, there were studies of the swimming instructors' perspectives and practices (Susnara & Curtner-Smith, 2022) and of the children's and youth's acquisition of aquatic skills, knowledge of water safety, and perceptions of and value for swimming (Susnara et al., 2022). In addition, data were generated for assessment of children's and youth's acquisition of health-related and nutritional knowledge, literacy skills, and land-based physical skills. One broad theme regarding these research foci and assessments emerged from our data. This was that CPs had limited access to and knowledge of the research. Consequently, CPs in the study were not prompted to reflect on or improve the OSSP on the basis of the results of previous research. Rather, and as illustrated in the Resiliency section, they relied primarily on their own perceptions to drive these activities.

### Limited Access and Knowledge of Research

On a positive note, three of the organizational CPs and a few parents were aware that data were being gathered that indicated children and youth in the OSSP were improving in terms of their ability to swim. One CP said,

You can definitely see their swim skills. They were carefully charted from the moment that they started the program. . . . Most of them would be a beginner or a non-swimmer. And then if you look at their evaluation at the end of the program, there is definitely recorded improvement. (Paul, PARA program supervisor for aquatics, formal interview)

Sharon, however, explained that she "wouldn't know anything" about these or other data that were being collected, and this was also the view of most parents. Moreover, all the organizational CPs were at

least somewhat frustrated that they did not have more access to the data. One CP said,

You know what, I would like to just know a little bit more about the children. . . . I mean [the OSSP administrators] do share that, so I don't want you to think that they haven't. But I would like to have some of the data, just a little bit for grant writing or for presentations . . . you know, the advancement of the children's progression in the swim lessons. I think that that would be good. Even just to support the program. I think I would like that. (Latasha, YMCA branch director, formal interview)

## Conclusion

To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine CPs' views of an OSSP designed to improve the swimming skills and water safety knowledge of underserved children and youth. Moreover, this study is the first to be guided by a new theoretical framework recently developed from the literature on community-engaged scholarship (Pruitt et al., 2019). In congruence with that framework, the key findings of this study are that the OSSP is relevant, has a high level of reciprocity, and is resilient. Moreover, the OSSP counters structural, institutional, personal, and cultural barriers (Ito, 2014; Quash, 2018; Ross et al., 2014; Storm, et al., 2017) that limit underserved children's and youth's access to and value of swimming. Collectively, these findings suggest that the OSSP is mostly effective, from CPs' perspectives, and that its organizational structure and content may benefit other groups looking to set up similar programs that aim to improve underserved children's and youth's aquatic skills and knowledge. It may also be that groups attempting to design programs that aim to improve different sports skills, fundamental movement skills, or other aspects of underserved children's and youth's lives (e.g., academic skills) can replicate or extrapolate from successful elements of the OSSP.

More negatively, the study indicates that OSSP data does not generate a great deal of reflection or program improvement when CPs have little knowledge of or access to it. One way to counter this negative finding in the future is to ensure that CPs have access to all

research findings through periodic and pragmatic presentations and the dissemination of summaries of key findings. Formal discussions of data during reflection sessions and workshops with CPs can lead to improved program resilience. These discussions might include the creation of needs statements for future grants. A second way to improve CPs' access to and use of data is to invite them to engage in participatory action research (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019) so that they are part of and invested in the research process.

At this juncture, we should also emphasize our belief that those who study the views of CPs regarding the effectiveness of interventions of any type designed to improve the lot of underserved children and youth in some way would do well to employ the theoretical framework from Pruitt et al. (2019) for this purpose. Use of this framework should enable researchers to provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding of such interventions as they confirm, expand on, and add to elements of the theory. Researchers might also consider examining such interventions through different theoretical perspectives. For example, given the personal, institutional, structural, and cultural factors that are responsible for underserved minority children and youth being at risk for drowning, examining such programs through the lens of hierarchical leisure constraints theory (Godbey et al., 2010) might provide additional and useful insight.

There are limitations to this study. It uses only one OSSP, four organizational CPs, and parents. Future research of programs in different locations, with different organizational structures, and with a focus on different content may be of use. In addition, studies of programs in which a wider variety of CPs are involved may prove helpful. For example, examining the perceptions of CPs who work for organizations that provide funds and resources but who are not directly involved in delivering programs might provide different perspectives. All such research should have the goal of informing those who design and develop programs of a similar nature and with similar goals.

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