

Marie Michelle Briere Pt. 2 | Discover Stories Episode 68

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Noah Stolte 0:56

And how important have you seen like recreation manifest in those situations?

Marie Michelle Briere 1:03

Oh, so, yeah. So recreation has been, sometimes it's a little bit of a, oh, I should know this answer. I'm trying to think of those stories, because there's so many. Oftentimes, it's that connection. So when we're able to get them out to try something that they've never done before. Sometimes it's, maybe they haven't moved in that way in a very long time, they haven't allowed themselves to to explore their body or express themselves in a way because they thought it might be dangerous. Or they thought, "Well, I can't do that because, you know, I might fall right or people might not like me." So there's also the fear of like, if you're trying to connect with with others, you know, they haven't connected socially with others in quite a long time outside of the context of of their disability or the healthcare needs that they're going through, they often don't know anything else. They don't have a lot of knowledge or built up experience in other areas. And so just being able to try something different is huge. Suddenly you get conversations about like, "What about this? What about that?" And then working with young adults was kind of was a lot of what I noticed was that suddenly we were discovering a whole part of them that they hadn't been able to explore yet. And that was really empowering.

Noah Stolte 2:34

Cool. Do you often find that with the older clients, or not even older, but just like the non young adult clients that they can rediscover a passion that they had before?

Marie Michelle Briere 2:44

Even more so, because I think youth have this kind of blasé attitude like "Yeah, that was fun, I guess." [Laughs] And then next thing you know, they're like, "It was so cool," but they say behind your back. But then with older adults, right now, I'm actually working on the neuromuscular and skeletal floor, which sees, you know, anybody from, you know, who's had amputations or sometimes burns, a lot of lung transplant clients, we see a little bit of everything. We're kind of the miscellaneous floor, as they say. And for a lot of those people, they've had chronic illnesses and they've been sick for quite a long time. And so when I meet them and we start exploring, you know, things that they could do, I often get a sense of, like, "What do you mean I could do that? Are you sure? I don't know." And I'm like, "Well, we can try. You know, you're here, you're supported by all these people. Why not give it a go?" And then, usually a thing that I can think about the most is like, we have some adaptive bikes here, and it's always, I never get tired of it the moment I sit them in the bike, and we figure out the fit, and we realize, okay, now you can push through this. And they're like, "You know, I haven't gotten off the couch in like, three years. Like, the most I've done in terms of walking is, you know, to and from the kitchen, maybe a little bit outside my neighbourhood, just to stay a little bit active." You know, they're like, "This is the first time I felt the wind rushing through my hair." And that is just such an amazing moment because I think they value it a little bit more, just because they've had a bit more experience under the sun.

Noah Stolte 4:27

Totally.

Marie Michelle Briere 4:29

They've got a lot more experience as well to pull back from and be like, "This is reminding me of this." And like, "Oh, I haven't done this since I was, like, in my 20s, and I didn't think I'd ever be able to do this again." So if anything, I think they have a bit more gratitude. They certainly show it a little bit better. But ultimately, I think you can see the benefits right off the bat, when it's something that's somebody truly enjoys, or is, yeah, it's kind of being able to explore.

Noah Stolte 4:58

Yeah, that's amazing. Is biking a pretty common recreational activity that you end up doing with clients?

Marie Michelle Briere 5:05

Yes? So I think the most common, if we stay within the realm of like physical, physical goals or physical activity, cycling, swimming, getting back in the water.

Noah Stolte 5:05

Nice.

Marie Michelle Briere 5:06

Yeah, cycling and swimming, I think are two kind of big physical goals that people ask for. And so we evaluate that, we kind of say, okay, is this a realistic goal? And this actually brings in, while we're on the topic of cycling, we have this awesome organization here as well, called BCMOS. So BC Mobility Opportunities Society, and one of my colleagues in the last couple of years was able to develop an adapted cycling program at Pacific Spirit Park.

Noah Stolte 5:54

So cool.

Marie Michelle Briere 5:55

So cool! And I think it was something that was lacking. We were seeing so many people who wanted to get back on their bikes and wanted to get that freedom again, you know, and even if they weren't being able to get back on, you know, a two wheeled bike, they were open to a trike, right? A three wheeled bike. But there was a few barriers. And those barriers were, those bikes are expensive. They're very expensive, right?

Noah Stolte 6:21

Yeah, normal bikes are expensive let alone, like adapted bikes.

Marie Michelle Briere 6:25

Exactly an adapted bike, you know, it's probably not, it's not mass produced, it's something that is a little bit pricier. They take up a lot of space. They take up way more space than your regular bike. And sometimes, because people's experience in disability has often led them to have to downsize. It's just not space that they have available. So we found that we were getting a lot of people into biking and cycling, but ultimately, there was nowhere in the community for them to go and actually engage in this activity, and sometimes a lot of people also don't have the social supports or the connections to go cycling with them, just to make them feel a bit more safe, but also to have that social participation. So now that we have this community partnership with BCMOS, it's a lot easier now for us to be like, "Absolutely. You want to go biking? Let's do that. We're going to set you up with the bike. We'll, you know, see what is that you need. We'll adapt what needs to be adapted. And then we'll connect you with this organization so that you can actually have an outlet to go cycling in nature versus around our little figure eight that we have here. You know, I think we need to get you out." But, you know, that's just been such an amazing thing because

we're doing the skill building, but then we're also doing the community reintegration. And that's really what I think these community partnerships is all about. And as for swimming, swimming is the other big one, and, and I say that water is the equalizer. For a lot of people, right? It makes us a bit lighter, it helps us float. And for a lot of people, it's, you know, when you're sitting, if you're sitting in a chair for most of the day, or you don't get a lot of opportunities to stand and walk, either because of reduced balance or mobility. Yeah, water can be just an amazing way to experience those things again, and experience movement that you may not have tried before because it's maybe a little bit dangerous or a little bit more of a falls risk.

Noah Stolte 8:34

Yeah, totally.

Marie Michelle Briere 8:36

Yeah. So I think people experience a lot of freedom once they've developed the confidence of how they can move and access aquatic environments.

Noah Stolte 8:45

Cool. So this wouldn't be for all clients. I know, but do you find that some of them sort of with a goal to accomplish something like, to get better at biking, do you find like, that goal sometimes can really get some people out of their shells and really sort of energize them?

Marie Michelle Briere 9:04

Oh, yeah. And sometimes it's just being outside. We know that just, you know, when we're feeling tired or a little bit low, you know, we don't have a lot of energy. Sometimes it's because we haven't been active, or we know that physical activity in some form, does help increase our energy, increase our alertness, our focus. And so, just getting people outside, you're going to see a totally different person, right, because now they're connecting with something that's bigger than them, or they're connecting with memories or right areas of the city that they haven't been in in a long time. And then suddenly you got a conversation about, "Oh yeah, I was like five when my dad brought me over here." And like, "Oh yeah, this beach. I used to, you know, we would always bring our family dog here, and I've got great memory." And then so there is so many new ways to connect and having these very lighthearted conversations, which I think a lot of people either haven't had in a long time, just, you know, it takes the focus away from themselves as well.

Noah Stolte 10:12

A sense of normal, eh?

Marie Michelle Briere 10:15

Yeah, a sense of normal. And just, I'm a person in this environment and and I'm getting to appreciate it, and no one's asking me, you know, why am I not...just I'm here, I'm here like I'm taking part, I'm engaging in my community.

Noah Stolte 10:31

Yeah, and that's really cool. Okay, awesome. I had asked a question, what are some common misconceptions about rec therapy? You had kind of said that some people don't even know it exists. So I'm not sure that there are a lot. But if you've encountered any like people, assumptions they make about your job that maybe you want to set straight?

Marie Michelle Briere 10:56

Yeah. So misconceptions. So although recreation therapy is often, I think, because we're often missed, or people don't think about recreation therapy at all, that they also make quick assumptions as to the work that we do when they see what it is that we're doing with clients. And that's totally fair. The big misconception, I think we can all agree among the rec therapist kind of little social circle is we are often considered the fun people. They'll tell us, "Oh, you got to do all the fun stuff," which you know, by all means, is totally true. Again, as I said earlier, it's the best job in the world, according to me. But ultimately, we are also working with people who are going through a really scary and difficult period of their lives, and so I think I mentioned this earlier, but, you know, trying to help them find even a little bit of spark or something that can make them happy can be quite challenging, right? Sometimes they're going to be like, "No, this is not for me." Let me send these emotions and like, that is okay, and we have to respect that. But ultimately, if we can help that one person to find just one thing that can bring back, you know, some purpose and meaning to everything that they're currently doing, all the hard work that they're doing in their rehab. Like, "What is it for?" That, I think, is what's really empowering. Ultimately, I think a lot of people think about recreation therapy as recreation activities and yes, we do do recreation activities, but recreation therapy is not recreation activities. Recreation therapy is goal oriented, which means that we work one to one with folks to identify the problem, we target a goal, and we identify the interventions or the activities that will help them meet that goal.

Noah Stolte 12:56

Cool.

Marie Michelle Briere 12:57

Yeah, so we are fun but there's a lot involved in what we do and we put a lot of time and effort into it.

Noah Stolte 13:09

Totally. It's not recreation, it's recreational therapy.

Marie Michelle Briere 13:13

Exactly. And if we can get people to just be able to eventually take that on their own and go enjoy recreation activities with the skills that they've learned. And, you know? And this is it. This is an entire interdisciplinary effort. It's not just us, like, we're not the belly button of the world. It takes a whole team, and I think that's so important. Everything that they've learned from their OTs, their PTs, their social workers, their physiatrists, their sexual health workers, their nurses, all of that is so important in just helping people find the confidence to just get back out there again.

Noah Stolte 13:54

I think it's a testament really to how great the people at G.F. are. We sit down here in the basement a lot, but from what we've seen of like some community events, it seems like a really great place.

Marie Michelle Briere 14:07

You guys are part of the whole. You're a part of the whole. Don't worry about that. [Laughs]

Noah Stolte 14:13

Yeah. Anyways, we are getting close to the time limit of this Zoom meeting, so sad. But I think that was most of what I wanted to ask. So we'll probably just leave it there. Thanks so much for this interview. It was great. It went really smoothly.

Marie Michelle Briere 14:29

Yay. Thank you so much for having me. It was really lovely getting to talk to you about all of this. And I hope that for people who are listening, you know you don't necessarily, if you don't have access to a recreation therapist, just go to your local community centre. Check out the guide. Talk with the people there. They're more than willing to just, you know, work with you to see what is that you'd like to do in Vancouver. There's the leisure access pass, if that's something that's applicable to you. And there's just the benefits of getting out. Go get some sunshine, see how that feels.

Noah Stolte 14:29

Totally, I need to get out and see some sunshine sometime soon. [Laughs]

Marie Michelle Briere 15:09

Yeah it's finally coming out. Sit out there and enjoy the sun rays. It'll feel good.

Noah Stolte 15:15

Awesome. Thank you so much. I'm sure I'll see you around soon.

Marie Michelle Briere 15:19

Oh yeah. Thanks, Noah.