

Development and
Implementation of Community-
based Sports/Recreational
Programs for Youth with Severe
Disabilities

Why offer a program?

- The benefits of sports and recreational programs for children and youth with or without disabilities is universal .
- The opportunities for these programs diminishes as the disability becomes more functionally limiting.

What are the benefits ?

- Physical
- Social
- Family support & network opportunities
- Recreational
- Promotes inclusion
- Provides opportunities for non-disabled youth to get to know peers with disabilities.

Physical

- Minimize deconditioning
- Provide opportunities to stretch and strengthen muscles.
- Provide opportunities for practical carry-over & application of strategies and skills learned in therapy.

Social

- Provides opportunities to learn social skills in more integrated, natural settings.
- Increases opportunities for interactions with age-appropriate, non-disabled peers.
- Offers opportunities to develop new friendships with both similarly disabled and non-disabled peers.

Family Support & Networking

- These experiences offer parents and siblings opportunities to support their disabled child in more traditional roles.
- Parents/care givers can network with other families while their child is enjoying and benefiting of the program.

**Offers Opportunity to have fun!!
Builds Self-Esteem & Confidence**

The primary reason that most children/youth participate in sports/recreation activities is to have fun!

Sportsmanship and Competition

Competition and challenges are healthy and necessary for all people, regardless of ability.

Provides opportunities for non-disabled youth to get to know peers with disabilities.

- Improves attitude towards children with disabilities or those who are different
- Reduces prejudice, teaches tolerance
- Gives perspective
- Provides teaching opportunities for how to interact with others who are different

Elements of a Successful Program

Identify a population to target and validate the need

- Specify disability by function, not diagnosis
- Specify age range
- Verify no similar or competing program offered in area.

Identify appropriate sport/activity for targeted population

- Recognize that participants must feel that they are valued for their participation and contribute in a meaningful way.
- Activity/sport that allows for as independent participation as possible is usually the most meaningful.
- For wheelchair users who have limited use of arms, consider wheelchair sports that do not require use of hands for participation other than driving chair.
 - Power floor hockey, soccer, track/field are easily adapted and allow for independent participation.

Identify barriers to implementation and participation

- Accessible location w/ appropriate facilities for population.
- Finding sponsor/ organizational support
- Secure liability coverage
- Finding participants

Identify pool of volunteers to assist with program development and implementation

- Therapists that serve in community facilities, schools.
- University/college therapy, special education programs.
- Parents/siblings.
- Community service organizations.

Identify potential sponsor organizations.

- Organization should be one that has a proven history of community, or organization involvement with service, activities to benefit children or underserved populations.
- Organization should have the organizational structure to provide support needed, esp. liability insurance and have recognized name that is associated with quality.

- Rotary, Lions, YMCA, hospital

Contact potential organizations with letter explaining what you are looking for and request a time to come and present a proposal and business plan.

Develop business plan

Include

- Identify population to be served
- Lack of services/opportunities currently available
- Benefits of programs
- Proposal of program specifics: what activity & why, when, how long, where
- Identify what you want from them I.e. insurance, volunteers, \$(uniforms,equip, site rental) use of their logo.
- Identify how their sponsorship will benefit them.

Program

Planning/Implementation

- Location-should be able to have regardless of weather
- Pool of volunteers- adults for advertising, registration, etc. Peer buddies- local schools(students are eager to get involved for community service hrs.), local; churches, synagogues, sports clubs.
- Advertising
- Equipment needs- specialized vs adapted.

- Finding players/youth to participate- local hospitals that have outpt. Services, local public schools, physician specialists, pediatrician offices.
- Post notices in local newspapers, local education/community TV stations, web sites.
- Develop flyer-distribute through schools, contact school district case managers to distribute and “talk up” program.
- Contact local PTA
- Cost to participant should be affordable but within range of similar non-disabled programs- better commitment when cost is involved.

Keys to Successful Program

- Good match of program participants' abilities to program offered.
- Strong organizational structure to ensure dependable and predictable activity each week.
- Player involvement with meaningful participation for all.
- Well organized volunteer training.

Did the program meet it's objectives?

- Develop program evaluation for participants and families.
 - Keep it short.
 - Easy to read.
 - Simple scale for rating.
 - Offer opportunity for suggestions.

Success is not measured in
numbers!!!

Resources

- National Center on Physical Activity & Disability(www.ncpad.org)
- National Rehabilitation Information Center(www.naric.com)
- U.S.Electric Wheelchair Hockey Association(www.usewha.org)
- Universal Dance Center-wheelchair ballroom dancing
www.unidancesport.com
- National Disability Sports Alliance
www.ndsaonline.org
- National Sports Center for the Disabled
- www.nscd.org
- United StatesPower Soccer Assoc.
www.powersoccerusa.net
- US Youth Soccer Assoc.-TOPSoccer
www.usyouthsoccer.org