The ABLE Youth Mission

“ABLE Youth, located in Nashville, Tennessee, creates children who use wheelchairs who are not defined by their disabilities. ABLE Youth leads children ages 3-12 and young adults 13-22, to become independent, graduate from high school and continue their education in college or enter the workforce. At ABLE Youth, sports is a motivating catalyst for kids to reach goals of independence. Our kids are examples that with believing in themselves, becoming accountable to themselves, and working hard, they not only can but will succeed in life” (1).

Individualized Experimental Objectives

- To develop and disseminate information that will help guide future advocacy efforts for the inclusion of adults with physical disabilities in facility-based exercise
- To expand on existing research regarding compliance to ADA standards and overall inclusiveness of community fitness facilities

Literature Review Highlights

- In 2014, 9.4% of people in Tennessee reported having an ambulatory disability (5)
- Individuals with disabilities participate in substantially less physical activity than their able-bodied counterparts (7, 11, 15-19).
- Individuals with disabilities have a higher likelihood of developing chronic diseases and harmful secondary conditions associated with sedentary behavior (7-8, 11, 15, 17, 19).
- Fitness facilities have the potential to play a critical role in increasing participation in physical activity among individuals with disabilities and facilitating continued recovery following discharge from skilled rehabilitation services (4, 7-8, 13).
- Despite structural requirements mandated by Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the majority of public fitness facilities are not in compliance with federal law (2, 4, 7, 11, 16-17, 20-21).
- Beyond non-compliance with ADA standards, inclusion of individuals with disabilities in community-based fitness facilities is limited by a lack of accessible equipment, programs, policies, and negative social attitudes (4, 7-8, 11, 13, 15, 18).
- Further research is needed to determine which factors enhance or impede fitness participation among individuals with physical disabilities (4, 15, 17).

Learning Activities

- Assessed 8 fitness facilities in the Nashville Metropolitan area using the Accessibility Instruments Measuring Fitness and Recreation Environments (AIMFREE) manual (15)
- Identified facilities’ strengths and weaknesses based on results of the AIMFREE assessments and used these findings to educate owners and managers
- Developed and distributed an online survey using Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) to gain a subjective perspective of fitness inclusion from adults with physical disabilities residing in Middle Tennessee
- Submitted an article for publication in Rehab Management magazine about the rehabilitation and wellness benefits of fitness inclusion
- Participated in events hosted by ABLE Youth, Achilles International, and the National Wheelcats

Outcomes

Demographics

- 2 non-profit national corporation facilities
- 2 park district/community centers
- 3 for-profit national corporation facilities
- 1 for-profit privately owned facility

Key Findings

- No facility received a perfect score on any 1 of the 11 sections of the AIMFREE that were evaluated
- The sections for which facilities received the most positive feedback were Access Routes and Entrance Areas, Elevators, and Bathrooms
- The sections for which facilities received the most recommendations for improvement were Equipment, Information, and Programs

Exploration of Fitness Inclusion in Middle Tennessee

Lindsay Pancoast OTD/S

Faculty Mentor: Teresa Plummer, PhD, MSOT, OTR/L, ATP, CAPS
Expert Mentor: Amy Saffell, Executive Director of ABLE Youth

The above image shows items 1 through 8 in Section A: Access Routes and Entrance Areas of the AIMFREE manual (15). This serves as an example of how fitness facilities were assessed for inclusiveness.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Teresa Plummer for her continuous guidance and the wealth of knowledge she has imparted on me throughout this process. I would also like to thank Amy Saffell for her enthusiastic support and constructive feedback. This project would not have been possible without the warmth and generosity of the entire ABLE Youth organization and the Nashville chapter of Achilles International.

Reference list available upon request