

the MISSION

of the Youth Advocacy Project for Routt County (YAP) is to enhance the effective services of Routt County agencies serving special needs, at-risk, and/or low income youth through financial and hands-on support.

Fall 2016



Letter from the Director Exercise for EVERY Body!

The slogan “Exercise is for Every Body” is frequently stated on the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability’s (NCHPAD) website. NCHPAD’s mission encourages individuals with disabilities and chronic health conditions to become more physically active. While the many benefits of exercise for the average person have been well researched, studies also reveal that participation in sports and physical activity improves the health, general mood, social awareness and self-esteem of people with disabilities. (www.sportsanddev.org/theroleofSportandAPA). More specifically, regular exercise for individuals with disabilities increases cardiac and lung function, improves the ability to perform daily tasks, protects against the development of chronic diseases, decreases depression and anxiety, helps control weight, and increases life expectancy (www.nchpad.org/Exercise-Guidelines).

Clearly many mainstream recreational activities and sports are appropriate for individuals with physical, cognitive, and sensory disabilities when modified. Frequently, barriers must be addressed and overcome for those with disabilities and other special needs to participate in such activities, including transportation, public attitudes, expenses, access to inclusive facilities or adapted sports and equipment, safety concerns, and natural or built environmental barriers (www.nchpad.org/BenefitsandBarrierstoExercise). It is especially critical for the health and development of children with disabilities that they have the opportunity to develop a routine, from a young age, of being involved with sports and physical activities. Parents of children may be apprehensive to encourage their children to become involved because of these obstacles and deterrents, and fear of failure, but the demand for adaptive sports and recreation has grown exponentially, which has increased resources in every community. Here in our Yampa Valley, we are very fortunate that Steamboat Adaptive Recreational Sports (STARS) implements impactful recreational programming for youth with disabilities throughout the summer and snow sports during the winter months. Recently, STARS began collaborating with the Steamboat Springs School District to offer adaptive physical education during the school day. This is a step forward towards equitable access to meaningful physical education as well as an improved quality of life for everybody. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sara Craig-Scheckman".

Sara Craig-Scheckman, *Executive Director*



Adaptive Physical Education

What is adaptive physical education? Put simply, it is physical education that meets the unique needs of individual students with disabilities – those that have physical, cognitive, sensory, or other types of challenges. To ensure that all children receive physical education in school, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) became a federal law in 1975, with several amendments since that time. Children with autism, hearing, speech or language impairments, as well as physical limitations, all qualify for special services such as Adaptive Physical Education under IDEA.

We are grateful that Steamboat Adaptive Recreational Sports (STARS) is working to make physical education accessible to those with disabilities throughout our community. STARS began in 2006 as a way for people with disabilities, including children, to participate in winter sports at the Steamboat Ski and Resort Corporation. Over the years it has evolved from winter programming to also include summer camps for locals and others across the country with disabilities, as well as providing options for military personnel who have suffered trauma or need help transitioning to civilian life. STARS has added another component to its programming – adaptive physical education in the Steamboat Springs schools. While the Steamboat Springs School District does their best to practice an inclusionary model in gym class, they have limited resources for adaptive equipment and training. Through a CSFF grant, as well as funding from the Yampa Valley Community Foundation, Ski Town Rotary, and Disabled Sports USA, STARS was able to pilot the program by providing equipment and incorporating adaptive physical education into Steamboat schools during the 2015 school year.

When you think about physical education in the schools you may picture dodge ball, jumping rope, or running laps. Now imagine physical education for a child who is in a wheelchair; or one with an Autism Spectrum Disorder where social interaction and taking turns can be difficult. How would gym class look for them? STARS has taken traditional physical education and has skillfully modified it so that all children, regardless of abilities, are able to participate.

In its pilot year of Adaptive PE programming, STARS served 40 local children with disabilities. In the winter, the kids got to ski on Mt. Werner with STARS staff, and in the shoulder season they participated in sit volleyball, wheelchair basketball, and biking on adaptive bikes. The program was a success and STARS Executive Director, Julie Taulman, has her eye on adding Nordic skiing, snowshoeing and sled hockey this winter, and tennis in the spring. Taulman said that STARS developed an Adaptive PE manual for schools and gym teachers in the Steamboat Springs School District with instruction on how to implement inclusionary models along with different lesson plans. At the beginning of the 2015 school year, STARS conducted a training for middle and high school PE teachers on adaptive equipment as well as working with clients with physical or cognitive disabilities. Taulman says that Adaptive PE “puts everyone on a level playing field,” and a big piece to understanding disabilities is education. One of the most impactful Adaptive PE sessions was wheelchair basketball at the high school – and

Adaptive Equipment Costs

Sled Hockey	\$600-\$750 <i>(plus the cost of helmets and pads)</i>
Sportschair	\$1,200
Hand Cycle	\$2,500-\$5,000
Sit Ski	\$5,000-\$9,000



the impact on able-bodied students was most likely larger than the impact for special needs students. High school students without disabilities participated in wheelchair basketball, giving them a new perspective of the sport – from the wheelchair. This was a powerful learning experience which helped all students gain some understanding of the challenges faced by students with disabilities.

While high school students participated in Adaptive PE every week, middle schoolers started out participating every other week, and then transitioned to Adaptive PE every week during the winter. Elementary students participated exclusively during the winter months, only as a result of limited time and funding. Taulman stressed that exercise doesn't have to be about sports, just movement. Since children with disabilities are predisposed to obesity due to food aversions, mobility limitations and side effects of medications, it is imperative for them to increase activity levels. The positive effects of physical activity are especially great in children with disabilities. Some of the benefits include:

- Improved muscle strength, coordination and flexibility
- Better motor skills and body awareness
- Improved behavior, focus, and self-confidence
- Increased attention span
- Improved quality of sleep
- An outlet for physical energy
- A sense of accomplishment
- A way to cope with stress and anxiety

Many of these benefits help children with disabilities in school, especially in the area of better focus and attention span. Adaptive PE is a new opportunity for these kids to get out and be active, and it helps them work through anxiety and be more productive. The fact that the kids have a great time doing it is a positive experience in itself, and helps make going to school easier for them.

Taulman said that STARS has also worked with a couple of special needs students in Oak Creek and at the North Routt Community Charter School. STARS hopes to expand into other Yampa Valley schools on a more regular basis. Down the road, Taulman would like to see physical education teachers who specialize or have advanced training in Adaptive PE.

Taulman thinks that team sports are also an option for people with disabilities. "Just because they have a disability doesn't mean they can't participate on a team," she says. Kids with special needs have the same competitive desires as their peers; Adaptive PE is customized for students with differing abilities than their peers, while at the same time allowing them to participate in a school activity that most take for granted.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November 1

YAP Grant Applications Due

November 21 – 25

Office Closed – Thanksgiving

December 1

YAP Grant Notifications

December 19 – January 1

Office Closed for the Holidays

January 12

YAP Winter Celebration



Vision

The Youth Advocacy Project for Routt County (YAP) envisions a strategic network of collaborative, sustainable youth serving agencies that builds resiliency in youth and guides them towards their optimal potential.

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