

recreation & fun

Recreation for Your Child with Special Needs- Fun and So Much More

by Fran Nickey, M.S.

Parents and guardians of boys and girls who have special needs can have so many areas to address in making sure they are covering all of the bases in getting what their child with disabilities needs to eventually reach his or her potential. Often, a good deal of time and attention are required to address a combination of issues that are medical, therapeutic and/or educational. Just keeping abreast of your child's needs and progress in school and staying connected to his or her teachers and school therapists can take considerable time and planning.

And for most parents, recreation just isn't at the top of the list. Kids, on the other hand, have a whole different point of view. For them, recreation is very important: it's all about fun. But adequate and appropriate forms of recreation are not just enjoyable, they have lots of benefits, too.

Recreation can provide the means for getting fit, learning how to make and keep friendships, working together as a team, feeling successful, building self-confidence and much more. So maybe we should take a tip from the kids. They know that recreation can be, well, fun; and shouldn't having fun be a part of childhood?

There are several different types of recreation that may be suitable for a youngster with disabilities, and parents are generally in the best position to select one or a combination of the most fun and appropriate type(s) of recreation for their son or daughter.

The primary purposes of treatment services, often referred to as recreational therapy, are to restore, remediate or rehabilitate in order to improve func-

tioning and independence as well as reduce or eliminate the effects of illness or disability. Recreational services, on the other hand, provide recreation resources and opportunities in order to improve health and well-being.

Adapted Programs

Adapted recreation and sports programs are specifically designed to meet the individual special needs of the participants. Adapted programs often have lots of parent involvement, a high adult to child ratio, and a good deal of structure. Some parents feel that their son or daughter with special needs benefits and has the most fun in this type of program. Adapted programs may be disability-specific or cross-disability. An adapted baseball program exclusively for children who are blind or have low vision—complete with adapted equipment and modified game rules—is an example of a disability-specific adapted sport. Cross-disability programs may have participants with a variety of disabilities, but may specify that the program is geared to children who have mild, moderate or severe disabilities. Generally, all or most of the children participating in disability-specific or cross-disability programs have one or more disabilities.

Information Please

The majority of children with special needs participate in typical recreation and sports programs, but frequently, in order to be successful, children with disabilities need some accommodations and/or modifications to the program. Necessary modifications and



accommodations are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which guarantees physical accessibility as well as program accessibility for all persons with a disability participating in recreation activities. But not all recreation leaders are familiar with even simple program modifications and accommodations. Children are much more likely to get the accommodations they need if parents provide the program leaders with adequate information about their child's specific needs as well as information about the modifications their son or daughter requires in order to participate.

Enjoying and feeling successful through recreational experiences is important and beneficial to everyone. Whether a child needs only a minor modification to an existing program or a specially designed adapted program to participate in recreation, with a little cooperation and good communication between parents and leaders (and youngsters, when appropriate), kids with disabilities will have many special ways to have a good time.

To find out about recreation services that may be available in your area, contact your local department of recreation. Many programs can be adapted, and often special programs are available.

The list below offers other options for programs that may be available near you.

Beep Ball

Fairfax, VA 22035
703-324-5549

Adapted T-ball for children who are blind or have low vision.

Challenger Baseball

Little League Baseball Inc., baseball/tee ball program offers youths who have mental and physical disabilities ages 6-18 a chance to play in a league. Season runs April - June.

Challenger Baseball & Tee Ball Charlottesville

434-973-3185

Area Served: Albemarle, Charlottesville, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa & Nelson counties

Fees Charged: \$35 per season; scholarships available

Arlington

703-351-5111, ext 5

Fairfax

1-800-440-0048

Danceabilities

6314 Falling Brook Drive
Burke, VA 22015
703-250-7777

dance@danceabilities.com

Danceabilities Ltd. offers therapeutic dance and movement classes in community and hospital settings for children with special needs from ages three through 16 in Northern Virginia. A variety of classes are available for children with such disabilities as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism, ADD, and mild coordination disorders.

Eddie's Club, Inc.

703-551-0652

www.eddiesclub.org

Offers supervised, volunteer-operated, recreation program for children and teens with any form of disability.

notes

Sign language on staff. Activities located in Springfield. Ages 4-21 with special needs. Fees Charged: \$40 per year per family. Can be waived upon request.

Massanutten Adaptive Ski School

www.massanutten.com/skischool.htm

MASS is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to promoting alpine skiing instruction to help individuals of all ages overcome a variety of challenges. Instructors and volunteers follow the PSIA Adaptive Teaching Model and other progressions as defined by National Handicapped Sports (NHS). MASS is an affiliate of NHS and endorsed by U.S. Skiing and PSIA.

National Rehabilitation & Rediscovery Foundation Therapeutic Recreation

703-519-3353

Marianne Talbot 202-298-1259

Dance & movement classes for persons ages 18 & up with brain injuries and neurological disorders. Classes at Lee Center Dance Studio, 1108 Jefferson Street in Alexandria.

Special Olympics

804-346-5544

800-932-GOLD (4653)

703-426-5601: Pat Hammeke, contact for Northern Virginia

804-346-9633 FAX

www.specialolympicsva.com

Northern Virginia Office

703-426-5601 or 800-526-6131

www.novasova.org

Northwest Virginia Office

540-433-7475 or 800-526-6133

Special Olympics is a year-round international program of sports

training and athletic competition for children and adults with mental retardation. Special Olympics Virginia is the state program of Special Olympics Incorporated.

Therapeutic Equestrian Program

8033 Ashton Avenue, Ste. 105

Manassas, VA 20109

703-469-8962

703-792-4630 Fax:

www.pwcgov.org/vce

rainbocntr@aol.com

Area Served: Prince William County, Cities of Manassas and Manassas Park.

Very Special Arts (VSA) Virginia

Phone: 804-648-7310

800-933-8721

www.vsaarts.org

Offers a theater program which allows performance opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities. Theater programs include school- and community-based initiatives that provide drama experiences for over 100 participants, volunteer opportunities for hundreds of supporters, and entertainment for community audiences in the thousands.

Bell Choir Programs offers children and adults with disabilities various levels of participation while striving for musical excellence within the bell choir tradition. Individual choirs hold one-hour weekly practice sessions for 8-10 weeks. Choirs make public performances at locations such as the governor's mansion, churches, art fairs, shopping malls, and libraries. ■

