Fostering Physical Activity for People with Disabilities Through Park District Programs

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Introduction

• One in four Americans are living with some form of disability (Center of Disease Control and Prevention, 2018).
• Having a disability correlates to poor health outcomes, low education, worse economic stability, and more poverty (WHO, 2017).
• Rehab and exercise among people with disabilities has shown to help with independence and overall functioning (WHO, 2017).
• Community-based fitness centers are often not prepared well enough to accommodate those with disabilities.
• Community-based fitness centers should serve the community in many ways, one important way is by providing inclusive fitness opportunities.

Aims

1. To develop a program that provides fitness instructors with disability training.
2. To determine its effectiveness for the fitness instructors working with clients who have disabilities.

Methods

1. Create a 2-hour virtual training program covering topics including: defining terms related to disability, stereotypes, ADA, disability diversity, general behaviour, portrayal, language, critical conversations, disability vs exercise, and activities to practice.
2. Recruit participants who were fitness instructors at local park districts (participant demographics below).
3. The 11 instructors completed pre and post surveys rating their confidence in ability to adapt a fitness class for disabilities, attitudes toward disability, and overall attitudes toward disability.
4. Differences were then analysed by using matched-pairs t-tests.

Results

• Post Disability Awareness Training and Education Program the participants showed significant improvement on their confidence in their ability to adapt a fitness class
  \[ t(8) = 3.62, p < .01, d = 1.21 \]
• There was no significant difference in attitudes toward disability from pretest to posttest, attitudes started high and stayed there.
• Major feedback on the training itself include:
  - Enjoyed the length and format of the training. It was reasonable timing and adaptable to their situations.
  - Enjoyed the wide variety of speakers that brought a variety of backgrounds.
  - Not all content was new to them, but all of it was relevant.
  - The manual was a great resource to come back to when needing a refresher
  - Training was overall useful.

Conclusions

1) The program developed for the local fitness instructors on disability training was useful and educational for the participants.
2) A 2-hour virtual training program can improve fitness instructors’ confidence in participants ability to adapt a fitness class for those with disabilities.
3) Evidence for changes in attitudes towards disability needs more data and experimentation.

Future

• Although participants appreciated the virtual training to accommodate the COVID-19 pandemic, some would prefer in-person engagement. This would help...
  - Role-playing
  - Practice using adaptive equipment
  - Cueing
  - Dealing with multiple needs at once
  - Practicing conversations around disability
• It was suggested from many participants that they would like the training to be ongoing, this could include quarterly catch-up trainings, newsletters, links to resources, and mentorships.