

# THE VOICE

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**GET UP AND *Get Active***



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## CREATING POSITIVE HEALTH AND FITNESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE OF ALL ABILITIES

There is no doubt that physical activity is essential to everyone's overall health and wellbeing. This creates a wonderful opportunity for recreation professionals to provide services that can improve the quality of life for people in their communities. While actual facilities and programs may vary, most providers work with a diverse population of people, including an approximated 20% of Americans who have disabilities. The New York State Inclusive Recreation Resource Center, funded by the New York State Developmental Disability Council (DDPC), is currently working with recreation providers across the state to promote inclusive recreation for people of all abilities. Inclusion refers not only to physically accessible environments, but also to the principle that all people should be welcomed and included in all aspects of their recreation experience.

### ACTIVITY FOR ALL

The slogan for the National Center for Physical Activity and Disability (NCPAD) is "Exercise is for EVERY body, and every person can gain some health benefit from being more physically active" (NCPAD: About Us, 2006). Simply put, there should be no reason

why a person with a disability can not enjoy the same recreation activities as anyone else, including going to the gym or to a fitness facility at their local community center. Once we agree that every person has a right to engage in activities that can make them happier and healthier, we then need to ensure that our facilities and services are truly inviting to all.

Tips for promoting inclusion at your facility:

- Utilize Universal Design principles to make facilities easier for everyone to use (visit [www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about\\_ud/udprinciples.htm](http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about_ud/udprinciples.htm) for more information)
  - Involve people of all abilities when planning new programs or facilities
  - Create programs that serve everyone, rather than design segregated or "special" services
  - Ask about the need for accommodations on your registration forms
  - Include images of people of all abilities in all marketing materials
  - Identify a single point person at your agency who can address needs and questions about accommodations and services
- Train all staff in disability awareness as a routine part of orientation
  - Hire staff trained and certified to work with people of all fitness levels
  - Provide fitness equipment and programs that can be modified for everyone's success
  - If you provide fitness trainers, learn about Inclusive Fitness Trainer Certification which certifies trainers to work with people of different abilities (ACSM National Office: 317-637-9200 ext 115 or emailing [certification@acsm.org](mailto:certification@acsm.org))

### FEELING INCLUDED:

#### A CUSTOMER'S PERSPECTIVE

Kerry Wiley has written an article in collaboration with her personal trainer, Jason Berner at Plaza Fitness in Albany entitled "Taking Control of Your Health and Wellness Taking Strides Toward a More Fulfilling Life." As a result of their successful inclusive approach to fitness and wellness, Plaza Fitness was recently awarded "Recreation Provider of the Year" by the DDPC. The following excerpt highlights several best practices for inclusion in fitness facilities, but also applies to a variety of recreation settings.

Kerry writes, "Inclusion is about making someone belong regardless of a clinical diagnosis. When I dealt with staff at Plaza Fitness, I was not made to feel like I was broken or that there was something wrong with me. The lead staff at Plaza Fitness welcomed me. The label of CP [Cerebral Palsy] did not matter. Staff assessed what I could achieve and then presented the concept- there is no limit. I was treated with respect, like every other customer, and not as a science experiment.

- Working effectively with a personal trainer requires trust, teamwork, strong communication, and information sharing. I authorized release of medical records so that my trainer would understand the clinical elements of my mobility issues, treatment, and how I functioned. There

is risk and vulnerability in such disclosure. Good trainers understand the concept of confidentiality. Disclosure of personal information never occurs without permission of the client.

- A good trainer identifies important clinical elements but still keeps the person first. They show an interest in life outside the 30-minute training session.
- A good trainer thinks outside the box. There have been multiple occasions when I was not able to perform an exercise on the first try. Jason supported me to find another way to do the exercise. Success happens through trial and error.
- When people look into joining a fitness studio or a related program, they need to shop for the right program that fits their needs and capabilities. When exploring available health and wellness programs, people need to examine what the over-arching philosophy of the program and staff is.

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- Fitness Management fosters a welcoming environment through its staff. I was a customer first and the disability was secondary. There is commitment to client success. My progress toward health and wellness has been achieved by

bringing together multiple partners - the doctors, the physical therapist, fitness studio management, and the personal trainer. I had to create a collaborative team that would help me to address my immediate health issues and also support my long-term goal to walk better." (Berner & Wiley, 2007)

#### LEARN MORE

Large numbers of military men and women who have been injured in service and a growing senior population only highlight the need for recreation providers to be knowledgeable and skilled in providing opportunities for people of varying abilities. In fact, people with disabilities are the fastest growing subgroup of the American population. When facilities and programs are designed for people of all abilities, everyone benefits. For more information about how you can make your recreation services inclusive for all, contact the NYS Inclusive Recreation Resource Center at (607) 753-4833 or email Project Coordinator Laurie Penney McGee at [Inclusiverec@cortland.edu](mailto:Inclusiverec@cortland.edu). You can also visit the NYS IRRC's web site at [www.cortland.edu/nysirrc](http://www.cortland.edu/nysirrc).

#### REFERENCES

Berner, Jason & Wiley, Kerry. (2007, May). Taking Control of Your Health and Wellness Taking Strides Toward a More Fulfilling Life. Retrieved June 26, 2008, from New York State Developmental Disability Planning Council e-bulletin: [http://www.ebulletin.us/archive/2007/may/05\\_07\\_bridge/05\\_07\\_take\\_control\\_your\\_ealth\\_well.php](http://www.ebulletin.us/archive/2007/may/05_07_bridge/05_07_take_control_your_ealth_well.php)

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