**INFORMING QUALITY VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES IN AN ADAPTED PHYSICAL EXERCISE PROGRAM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY**

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**Purpose/Objective:** Adults with developmental disabilities (DD) tend to engage in low levels of physical activity, which is associated with poor health and physical fitness. The Adapted Physical Exercise (APEX) Research Group has created an inclusive, community-based exercise program through one-on-one fitness training for individuals with DD. Pilot work with APEX volunteer fitness trainers demonstrated ameliorated misconceptions of people with DD, improving perceptions and understandings of their capabilities. The purpose of the current study was two-fold: (1) to explore the transformative impact of volunteer interaction with people with DD in a fitness setting, accompanied by a further emphasis on understanding its capacity to stimulate social change; and (2) to expand knowledge of factors associated with quality experiences for APEX volunteers.

**Methodology:** We recruited 10 student volunteer participants (18-25 years of age) based on their ability to provide a safe and welcoming environment for individuals with DD. Volunteer participants completed two semi-structured interviews, at the commencement and end of their three-month term. Questions explored their perceptions of APEX programming, along with their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours relative to individuals with DD. In addition, volunteer participants completed brief audio diaries every two weeks answering questions pertaining to their experiences with the APEX program. Audio diaries were recorded immediately after a designated session; these data were captured at a time when phenomena were at the forefront of volunteer participants’ minds and may not be as readily accessible in the context of an interview. Volunteer participants were asked to respond to a set of pre-determined prompts for these audio diaries, which were recorded on their phones and subsequently submitted to the research team.

**Results:** Our findings draw upon 20 interviews and 30 audio diaries. Emerging themes from volunteer participants suggested they had a positive experience both in the APEX program and with the adult with DD that they trained. The data analysis for this research project is still in progress.

**Discussion/Conclusion:** This study contributes to the fields of adapted physical exercise, disability, and sport for social change, which ultimately seeks to enhance the lives of individuals with DD through full inclusion in sport and physical activity. Investigating the perceptions of volunteer participants in the immediate social environment of individuals with DD is a novel method of developing adapted exercise programming, and deepening understandings on social change toward inclusion.

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