



## Research Brief

# Programs for Children with Disabilities

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Current Application: Kinetic Kids, Inc.; TEAMability, Inc.

In its most recent estimates, the U.S. Census Bureau found that 11.6% of Texans of all ages, over three million individuals, had a reported disability (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The following tables provide the most recent disability prevalence statistics among children for the United States, Texas, and the KCF counties of interest. Comal county is the only KCF county of interest without a higher prevalence of children with a disability than the state and national percentages:

*Prevalence of Disabilities among Adolescents and Children in the United States and Texas*

Age Under 18	United States	Texas
Population	73,475,378	7,121,800
With disability	3,042,011	297,510
% disability	4.1%	4.2%

Age Under 18	Bandera	Bexar	Comal	Kendall
Population	3,698	486,461	28,577	9,150
With disability	174	24,929	1,132	587
% disability	4.7%	5.1%	4.0%	6.4%

(U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.)

Many disabled individuals require treatment above and beyond general medical care. For this reason, a wide variety of local and national programs exist to provide physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development therapy for children with disabilities. Different types of programs include athletic programs, artistic programs, and animal assisted therapy.

### ATHLETIC PROGRAMS

Children suffering from a disability are more likely to have lower levels of fitness and have higher levels of obesity compared to children without disabilities. A review of data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination

Survey (NHANES) “found that 80% of children with functional limitations on physical activity were either overweight or obese” (Holecko, 2016). The scarcity of sports and recreation programs for children with disabilities only exacerbates this problem. Participating in physical activities regularly promotes independence, coping abilities, competitiveness, and teamwork among children with disabilities.

### SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES PROGRAMS

San Antonio offers opportunities for adapted sports activities for children with disabilities predominately through non-profit agencies. Some of the organizations providing adaptive sports and recreational activities in the greater San Antonio area include:

#### *Kinetic Kids*

Since its inception in 2001, Kinetic Kids has grown from a single program serving 12 children to 117 programs reaching 3,397 children with disabilities in 2014. Kinetic Kids offers disabled children a variety of sports and recreational programs which typically run once a week for approximately an hour during a 6-8 week session. Kinetic Kids also offers one day special events throughout the year (Kinetic Kids, 2013a).

#### *Sports Outdoor and Recreation (SOAR) Park*

SOAR is a non-profit organization developed by the Gordon Hartman Family Foundation in 2007 to raise funds for a recreational park targeting the needs of children with disabilities. Known as Morgan’s Wonderland, the park opened in April of 2010. The 25-acre park offers a variety of activities accessible to children with

disabilities including, but not limited to wheelchair accessible playgrounds, wheelchair accessible swings, an event area, and a gymnasium. Morgan's Wonderland is considered the World's First Ultra Accessible Family Fun Park (Morgan's Wonderland, 2015a). Additionally, Morgan's Inspiration Island, "the world's first ultra-accessible splash park" (Morgan's Wonderland, 2015b) opened in June 2017. STRAPS (South Texas Regional Adaptive & Paralympic Sports), another program conducted by SOAR, provides recreational and competitive sports opportunities to both youth and adults with physical disabilities including: soccer; softball; basketball, and goalball (STRAPS, 2018).

#### *Miracle League*

The Miracle League of San Antonio is a non-profit organization that provides a four acre outdoor sporting facility and baseball league to children and adults with special needs. There is a fully-lit, specially-surfaced cushioned synthetic turf baseball field that allows for wheelchair and walking assistance device access, which helps to prevent injuries. Buddies are assigned to each team member to assist with hitting the ball and running the bases. In addition, there is a three acre area of smooth asphalt that lets wheelchair bound children and adults play whichever sport they would like (Miracle League, 2016).

#### *Special Olympics Texas*

In addition to its well-known sports training and athletic competition programs for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, Special Olympics Texas (SOT) provides a Motor Activities Training Program (MATP) for young people who "physically perform movements or cannot follow the rules due to cognitive or behavioral limitations... Emphasis is placed on achieving personal bests, and it allows for adapted equipment and physical assistance" (SOT, 2018). In its most recent report there were a total of 9,330 athletes in the San Antonio area participating in the various Special Olympic programs (SOT, 2016).

### **ARTISTIC PROGRAMS**

Artistic experiences provide opportunities for creativity, problem solving, and critical thinking. The International Organization on Arts and Disability (VSA) reports that, "Students with disabilities who participate in the arts are given opportunities to convey sophisticated ideas, experience validation in their work, and enhance their academic pursuits. Inherent in arts education are means of diverse and variable expressions, responses, and outcomes, allowing students opportunities to diverge from the rote learning often required in other subjects. Thus, students with disabilities can exercise cognitive processes, find and develop their unique voices, and experience overall success" (The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, 2014, p. 5). Additionally, the fields of dance, art, and music offer professionally developed therapy programs that can be beneficial to children with disabilities.

#### *The Arc of San Antonio*

The Arc of San Antonio offers various services for individuals with developmental delays. For adolescents, the Arc program provides all-day summer programs involving recreational and art activities (The Arc of San Antonio, 2018).

#### *Kinetic Kids*

In San Antonio, the Kinetic Kids program offers a wide variety of programs for children with special needs, both physical and cognitive. They offer two music classes using instruments for children five years and older, Music Exploration and Keyboarding. Children are able to explore a variety of instruments and participate in a recital at the end of the program. Kindermusik is offered for children aged 2-6 with a focus on movement to music in order to stimulate brain development and nurture creativity and developing language skills. Kinetic Kids offers various art programs allowing children to display their creativity through day classes or work on projects during the holiday seasons. Dance programs are available for children who are able to walk independently or with an assistive device. Also included is line dancing for teens, which teaches popular dances so that in social settings everyone feels prepared

enough to dance. Similar to the music programs, children learn a variety of dances which they perform at a recital at the end of the session (Kinetic Kids, 2013b).

### *TEAMability*

TEAMability is a nonprofit organization located in San Antonio which focuses on improving the learning of children (0-22 years of age) who have severe, combined disabilities. TEAMability provides transdisciplinary services including specialized evaluation, teaching, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and communication. Services are offered at both the TEAMability Learning Center and in schools (TEAMability, 2013).

### **ANIMAL ASSISTED PROGRAMS**

Animal assisted therapy (AAT) is a form of therapy that incorporates animals as an integral part of the treatment process, aimed at improving physical, social, emotional and cognitive functioning. This therapy is delivered by a trained health professional that has expertise regarding the clinical applications of human-animal interactions (Pet Partners, n.d.).

On the other hand, animal-assisted activities (AAA) do not focus on the treatment of a specific condition, but rather, “provides opportunities for motivational, educational, and/or recreational benefits to enhance quality of life” (Pet Partners, n.d.). AAA does not require a health professional and no treatment goals are developed. AAA may be delivered by a professional, paraprofessional, or simply a volunteer who is familiar with the animal and human population with which they interact.

The American Humane Association provides services in other settings in which the animal interaction provides comfort to children with cancer, teaches children in special-education and mainstream classrooms important life skills, and helps children learn how to read (American Humane Association, 2016).

### *Equine Therapy*

Two types of programs using horses appear to be most beneficial for children with disabilities. The first, therapeutic horseback riding, teaches

recreational riding skills for children with disabilities. Children can participate in group or individual lessons which are supervised by therapeutic riding instructors. Therapeutic horseback riding fosters a relationship between the child and the horse aiming to increase confidence and self-esteem. This program typically targets children with social, emotional, and learning challenges. In addition, using horses as a “biofeedback machine” can help therapists to better understand the emotional state of the client due to the horse’s sensitive nature and body language (PATH International, 2018b).

The second program, hippotherapy, is a type of physical, occupational, and speech-language therapy used as an integrated treatment plan. Hippotherapy focuses on children and adults suffering from neuromusculoskeletal dysfunction. Examples of medical conditions and impairments afflicting children and adults who seek hippotherapy are listed below:

#### Medical Conditions

- Attention Deficit Disorder
  - Autism
  - Cerebral Palsy
  - Developmental Delay
  - Genetic Syndromes
  - Learning Disabilities
  - Speech-Language Disorders
  - Traumatic Brain Injury/Stroke
- (PATH International, 2018a)

#### Impairments

- Abnormal muscle tone
  - Impaired balance responses
  - Impaired coordination
  - Impaired communication
  - Impaired sensorimotor function
  - Postural asymmetry
  - Poor postural control
  - Decreased mobility
- (American Hippotherapy Association [AHA], 2016b)

Like therapeutic horseback riding, hippotherapy also facilitates improved self-esteem and emotional self-awareness by developing a relationship between the child and the horse.

Additionally, hippotherapy is used to facilitate coordination and timing, grading of responses, respiratory control, sensory integration skills and attentional skills (AHA, Inc., 2016a).

#### *Horses Helping the Handicapped, Inc. (HHH)*

Also known as Triple H Equitherapy Center, HHH is a nonprofit, nationally accredited, equine-assisted activities and therapy center servicing both children and adults in Bandera, Bexar, Comal, Kendall, Medina, and Kerr counties. Its programs include:

- Therapeutic horseback riding
- Therapeutic horsemanship consisting of ground (dismounted) activities
- Equine-facilitated learning activities
- Horse-assisted psychotherapy

(HHH, 2018).

#### *Saddle Light Center (SLC)*

The SLC provides “professional equestrian therapy for children, teenagers and adults with neurological, orthopedic, learning, emotional or other disabilities” (SLC, 2018). The SLC offers both therapeutic horseback riding and hippotherapy for riders of all ages. This program serves individuals in the greater San Antonio area and offers programs ranging from 9 to 13 weeks throughout the year.

#### *Open T.R.A.I.L. Ranch*

Located in Boerne, Texas, this nonprofit organization offers equine assisted activities and therapies to children and adults with physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges in San Antonio, Boerne, and the surrounding areas. Its programs include Therapeutic Riding, Equine Facilitated Learning, and Vaulting (Open T.R.A.I.L. Ranch, 2016).

#### **CAMPS**

There are numerous camps for children with disabilities located throughout the country. These camps facilitate interactions between children who face similar challenges. There are

a variety of camps with both broad and specific disability focus. For instance, there are camps designated for children with various disabling conditions and others with specific focus on areas such as diabetes, amputation, autism, and cerebral palsy. Disability camps allow children of all ages to encounter new experiences and learn cooperation and communication skills while building self-confidence and a sense of independence. Camps are a great place for children to establish new friendships while learning valuable life-skills (Disabled World, 2015).

Locally, there are at least six camps that offer programs to serve children with disabilities in the KCF area of interest (American Camp Association, 2018). Camp CAMP (Children’s Association for Maximum Potential) is a disability camp located in Kerr County. The association serves children who are not eligible to participate in other camps due to the severity of their disabilities as well as non-disabled siblings of campers (CAMP, n.d.).

Many organizations provided day camps during school breaks. A number of them can be found on the Navigate Life Texas website which lists a host of resources available for children with disabilities living in Texas including:

- Easter Seals provides a variety of programs including summer camp
- Mission Road Ministries offers the Summer Outreach and Recreation Summer Camp Program (SOAR) for children in the community with intellectual/developmental disabilities and runs for 9 weeks during the summer”
- Barshop Jewish Community Center provides a summer day camp for children with special needs
- Arc of San Antonio’s summer day camp (Navigate Life Texas, 2017).

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