

In its most recent estimates, the U.S. Census Bureau found that 11.5% of Texans of all ages, over three million individuals, had a reported disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). 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 with a lower 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	73,294,450	7,328,217
With disability	3,084,450	300,576
% disability	4.2%	4.1%

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2021)

Age Under 18	Bandera	Bexar	Comal	Kendall
Population	3,809	501,624	32,124	10,338
With disability	263	27,459	1,267	474
% disability	6.9%	5.5%	3.9%	4.6%

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2021)

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 programs.

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 collected by Abilitypath.org, an online site for the special needs community, found that “[e]ighty percent of children with functional limitations on physical activity are either overweight or obese” (Holecko, 2020). In the past, a scarcity of sports and recreation programs for children with disabilities contributed to this issue. In recent years, however, sports and recreation programs for special needs children are more available. Participating in physical activities regularly promotes an emotional boost including elements such as independence, coping abilities, competitiveness, and teamwork among children with disabilities.

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 (TEAMability, 2013a). For example, its aquatic therapy program uses unique adapted equipment to improve strength, endurance, flexibility and range of motion. The children enjoy the benefits of therapy and the fun of being in the water (TEAMability, 2013b).

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 235 programs reaching 5,031 children with disabilities in 2017 (Kinetic Kids, 2021a). Kinetic Kids offers disabled children a variety of sports and recreational programs which typically run once a week for approximately 2-3 hours during a 6–8-week session. Kinetic Kids also offers one day special events throughout the year (Kinetic Kids, 2021c).

Morgan’s Wonderland (Formerly Sports Outdoor and Recreation (SOAR) Park)

SOAR was 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. Now 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, and an events area. Morgan’s Wonderland is considered the World’s First Ultra-Accessible Theme Park (Morgan’s Wonderland, 2021c). Since the inception of the Morgan’s Wonderland theme park, more programs have been created, including competitive sporting, a splash park, and a soon to open camp. An affiliated program, STRAPS (South Texas Regional Adaptive & Paralympic Sports), provides recreational and competitive sports opportunities to both youth and adults with physical disabilities including soccer; softball; basketball; and goalball (STRAPS, n.d.). Additionally, Morgan’s Inspiration Island ultra-accessible splash park officially opened in 2017, offering six attractions with three types of waterproof wheelchairs available for use (Morgan’s Wonderland, 2021a). Morgan’s Wonderland Camp is expected to open in 2021 for all ages and abilities. Activities will include “swimming, floating on a relaxing river, hiking,

archery, horseback riding, ziplining and much more” (Morgan’s Wonderland, 2021b).

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 (SOTX) provides a Motor Activities Training Program (MATP) for young people who “are unable to participate in official Special Olympics sport competitions because of their skill and/or functional abilities. ...Emphasis is placed on achieving personal bests, and it allows for adapted equipment and physical assistance” (SOTX, 2021). 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 (SOTX, 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.

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 aged 5-18, *Music and Drumming Around*. Children are able to explore a variety of instruments and in the *Music* program, the opportunity to participate in a recital at the end of the course (Kinetic Kids, 2021d). Various art programs are offered which allow children to display their creativity through day classes or work on projects during the holiday seasons. There are two *Dance* programs available for children. One program is for those who are able to walk independently or with an assistive device. The second is *Wheelchair Dance*, for children who use a wheelchair for mobility (Kinetic Kids, 2021b). Similar to the music programs, children learn a variety of dances which they perform at a recital near the end of the session. There is also a *Musical Theatre* program offered that combines the aspects of music, theatre, and dance. There are two groups for this program, both aged 5 to 18 years and based on abilities/needs (Kinetic Kids, 2021e).

ANIMAL ASSISTED THERAPY 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, 2021).

On the other hand, animal-assisted activities (AAA) do not focus on the treatment of a specific condition, but rather, “provide[s] opportunities for motivational, educational, and/or recreational benefits to enhance quality

of life” (Pet Partners, 2021). AAA do 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, 2018).

Equine Therapy

Two types of programs using horses appear to be most beneficial for children with disabilities. The first, Equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP), 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, 2021).

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 (American Hippotherapy Association, Inc. 2020).

Examples of medical conditions and impairments afflicting children and adults who seek hippotherapy or EFP are listed below:

Medical Conditions

- Autism Spectrum
- Developmental Delay or Disability
- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Learning Disabilities

- Cerebral Palsy
 - Down Syndrome
 - Speech-Language Disorders
 - Traumatic Brain Injury/Stroke
- (PATH International, 2021; American Hippotherapy Association, Inc., 2018).

Impairments

- Abnormal muscle tone
- Impaired balance responses
- Impaired coordination
- Impaired communication
- Impaired sensorimotor function
- Postural asymmetry
- Poor postural control
- Decreased mobility

(American Hippotherapy Association, Inc., 2018).

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, “confidence, empowerment, and a sense of self-worth” (RISE, 2021b).

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, Kerr, and Medina counties (HHH, 2020a). Its programs include (in part): Hooves, Hearts & Heroes – school-based program using an integrated curriculum as an extension of standard special education; From Fear to Responsibility – mental health assistance for at-risk children/youth; and Riding to Independence – therapeutic riding for children/youth with various physical, emotional, and cognitive challenges (HHH, 2020b).

Saddle Light Center (SLC)

The SLC provides “professional equestrian therapy for children, teenagers and adults with neurological, orthopedic, learning, emotional or other disabilities” (SLC, 2021). 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 8 to 15 weeks throughout the year.

RISE Therapeutic Equestrian Center

Founded in 2015, RISE works to provide equine and hippotherapy to those with intellectual or physical disabilities. The organization’s goal is to improve individuals physically as well as mentally by providing therapy that exercises bodies as well as minds. In order to maximize both benefit and safety, there are established weight guidelines for the riders relative to the horses and volunteers available (RISE, 2021a)

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, 2021).

There are several camps throughout the region that offer programs to children with disabilities. The American Camp Association (ACA) website can help locate a variety of camps suited for specific needs across the nation (ACA, 2021). 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 their non-disabled siblings (CAMP, n.d.).

Many organizations provide 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 (9 weeks)
(Navigate Life Texas, 2021).

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