

Data Shows Participation in Sports Leads to a Successful Rehabilitation

By the time you read this perspective, Disabled Sports USA will have released its first landmark survey on sports and employment for people with disabilities.

What I and others have observed from 40 years of providing sports and recreation programs, is that those who participate in active sports during and after rehabilitation develop more positive attitudes about life and its possibilities with increased self-confidence, better health, and fitness. That certainly reflects the DS/USA motto, "If I can do this, I can do anything!"

We also have observed increased employment among our active members and participants compared to the general disabled population.

Even with agencies within the federal government promoting sports and recreation as vital to a successful rehabilitation, no one has been able to draw a direct connection between the two. Now we have data that indicates a correlation!

This past year, DS/USA secured the services of the well-known polling and research company, Harris Interactive. Among their polls, they have focused many on people with disabilities. However, Harris had not conducted any polls that specifically asked about sports and employment and other quality of life markers.

For our survey, three groups were contacted: the first was the general population of people with disabilities, which Harris had polled in the past; the second surveyed DS/USA members and participants around the country; the third surveyed Wounded Warriors who had received sports rehabilitation services from the Wounded Warrior Disabled Sports Project.

The results were truly amazing and absolutely confirmed what we have always believed, that participation in sports improves quality of life in all aspects and leads to higher employment rates among the active disabled population.

Here are some of the numbers: DS/USA members who are active in sports have an employment rate more than TWICE that of the general disabled population of working age (68% vs. 33%). Wounded Warriors, even though many have been recently disabled, have a higher employment rate (57% vs. 33%).

But the good news doesn't stop there. In comparison to the general disabled population, Adults with Disabilities (AWD), our active members (DS/USA Chapter Participants – CP and Wounded Warriors – WW) report that they have higher life satisfaction (81% CP and 74% WW vs. 57% AWD); are more sociable (92% CP and 80% WW vs. 70% AWD); better physical health (76% CP and 52% WW, who are still dealing with effects from war injuries vs. 25% AWD); healthiness of lifestyle (65% CP and 49% WW vs. 19% AWD); experience with weight problems (26% CP and 22% WW vs. 57% AWD); and they have (no surprise!), higher rates of participation in sports on a regular basis than the general disabled population (76% CP and 64% WW vs. 30% AWD).

What is most important is that those who are active attribute their involvement in sports as a key component about how they have achieved this status of satisfaction AND employment.

In short, participation in sports improves all aspects of life for a person with a disability and particularly employment prospects. We know this, now others do too. Sports is vital to a successful rehabilitation, employment, and self-satisfaction.

A special thank you to AIG, Wounded Warrior Project, and the U.S. Department of Labor for their underwriting of this landmark survey. We could not have done it without their support.




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Photo by Eric Chen