

Unified Sports in Connecticut

A Girl Scout Gold Award Project by Olivia Wright

“It’s a time to focus on abilities, not disabilities.”

- Jason Shawndale Steen -



It is very hard to go to a new school. It is even more challenging for someone who has any kind of disability. I know this because I had to struggle with one. My life saver was when I overheard a conversation during which the sports director of our school mentioned the Unified Basketball team. I went to the school's website to find more information on the team, and I enrolled. I came to feel accepted and proud of being a part of something which I had not done before. It was my favorite activity for all four years of my high school career; some of my former teammates remain friends even after graduation.

My main intention of this Gold Award project is to provide Unified Sports resources to others who are challenged, physically or mentally, and easily lost in a big school setting, so that they feel like they have a place in their community. I want this to help others like it helped me. By being part of the team and their inclusion of me I felt like I was accepted in the whole Ellington High School community. “Studies have shown that participation in Unified Sports have led to improvements in students’ physical abilities, self-esteem/self-confidence, and relationships with peer athletes and peers at school” (Briere and Siegle 2008). The purpose of my Gold Award project is to give other kids resources so that they may have the same positive experience.



UNIFIED SPORTS RESOURCES

Spirit Horse Connecticut

Their mission, according to their website is “to assist each person with special needs in reaching their full potential with horses.” According to a study done by this company’s other location in Texas, this program has heard 64 children speak their first word, helped 48 children take their first steps to take care of their horses, and has seen 38 sit up for the first time. The horse farm in Canton CT is the perfect place for people, young and old, to spend time with horses which is very beneficial for mental health; also, movement on a horse helps them grow as people. Sign up now!
https://www.spirithorsect.org/uploads/1/3/0/4/13043115/client_application_50311_canton.docx

Special Olympics Connecticut

you can register by:
<https://www.specialolympics.org/programs/united-states/connecticut?locale=en> “Special Olympics offers 30+ Olympic style individual and team sports that provide meaningful training and competition opportunities for persons with intellectual disabilities.” The list of activities can be found below; you can click on the one that sounds interesting.
<https://www.specialolympics.org/our-work/sports/sports-offered?locale=en>

Arc of Farmington Youth Activity Club

This youth activity club gives people with special needs the opportunity to socialize with others while learning important life skills such as cooking, arts and crafts, fitness, music, movement and much more. To learn more about this you can contact the leader of this program, Jean Miller, by email. jmiller@farvarh.org. or by calling 860-693-6662 Ext. 128.

Leap of Faith Adaptive Skiers

This group is an opportunity for people with disabilities to participate in water and winter sports. Take a look at the list of things to do here! [Programs | LOF Adaptive Skiers](#)

TOPSoccer - Middle school and high school students can volunteer as "buddies" to work with the players who have mental or physical disabilities. Players can start participation as young as 4 years of age. TOPSoccer is a fun way for children with mental and physical disabilities to play sports with their peers and make friends! I participated in their fall program and loved the experience! [US Youth Soccer TOPSoccer | US Youth Soccer](#)

Paul Newman's Hole in the Wall

I heard of this one through my networking and research. So, I looked it up. This is an excellent quote that I think covers what this camp is: "to provide opportunities for children with serious illnesses to experience the spirit and friendships that go hand-in-hand with camp."

[The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp](#)



If through this research and resources listed above, I inspire one or two, or even twenty, special needs students to sign up, I will have achieved my goal in giving back to my community... And it is already happening. I received feedback from one of the school caseworkers who distributed this information at IEP meetings. One of the mothers gave her the following feedback, "My daughter went to her first TOPSoccer practice in Tolland and loved it... Please let the young woman that put this together know that we really appreciated her efforts. I wish there was more of this kind of sharing of information in our area." I want this to be the case for many others.

I wish to thank all the people who gave me support and encouragement throughout this Gold Award Project, especially my Girl Scout Troop 10747. My team helped me to carry this project out to the end. The members of the Gold Award Council gave me

constructive feedback to use so I could make this project better. The Ellington School District, Ellington Youth Services, and ProHealth Physicians of South Windsor all agreed to distribute this information, for which I am grateful.

As for me, the acceptance Unified Basketball brought to my life-- CHANGED my life!

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