Parents Step Up to Top Sports

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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A TOP Sports participant gets a high five from a volunteer during a t-ball game last summer.

A pair of parents has stepped up to the challenge of running the TOP Sports program for children with disabilities. Erica Lundahl and Emily Larson contacted Sue Olsen, CPD director of exemplary services, about a year and a half ago to ask if TOP Sports could be run more like a league than a skills camp. Lundahl and Larson have since taken over the operations of TOP Sports and have added soccer to the list of available activities.

TOP Sports began about seven years ago, when the Developmental Disabilities Council offered a grant to establish inclusive recreation and sports activities for children with disabilities. According to Olsen, TOP Sports was formed with the goal of working with Logan Parks & Recreation to create inclusion in their existing activities.

"It was a total failure. Nobody came," Olsen said. Focus groups and parent interviews revealed that parents didn't bring their children because they didn't want their children to lose.

"They wanted their children to be able to participate in sports, but not be blamed for losing or not get to play," Olsen said.

Since that first attempt, Olsen said, TOP Sports has evolved into more of a skills camp for children ages 3-18 who have developmental delays, and has had huge attendance. During the five-week sessions, children learn the rules of the game and have the opportunity to practice skills in basketball, t-ball and bowling. Art classes also are offered.

Olsen said the program has been unfunded since the original grant.

"Parents pay a fee, $10 or $15, but the kids always get a trophy or a hat or a baseball or a ribbon," she said.

Her budget pays for replacement equipment, and a USU student is in charge of recruiting volunteers.

"Our goal is to let the parents sit back and enjoy watching their kids play sports and socialize with other parents," Olsen said. "If there aren't enough volunteers, the parents jump in."