Background Information

Individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) have higher rates of obesity-related chronic disease due to a number of socioeconomic and structural barriers such as income, transportation, communication issues and stereotypes. The 2011 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) revealed that 37% of people living with disabilities reported being sedentary (not exercising recently) the largest percentage compared to other population groups. People living with disabilities had the highest prevalence of obesity at 38% compared with other population groups. People with disabilities also reported the highest prevalence of diabetes at 15% of this population.

Objectives of SCC

Upon completion of the nutrition classes participants will:

- Understand basic nutrition and interpret nutritional information on food packaging
- Have the skills to identify and buy healthy food items and prepare healthy food on a limited budget

Upon completion of the physical activity classes participants will:

- Have developed a physical fitness plan that is adapted to their specific disability and resources
- Know how to use equipment appropriately
- Have increased the amount of time they spend each week engaging in physical activity

Methods

Two cohorts of 10 young adults with developmental disabilities between the ages of 18-24 will complete the course during the pilot phase.

Nutrition

The design of the pilot project includes a six-week nutrition class series developed by UA Cooperative Extension’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP-ED), adapted to be culturally and linguistically relevant and meet the needs, abilities of the participants, and taught by a SNAP-ED instructional specialist.

Adapted classes include:

- My plate and food group basics
- Grains and Vegetables
- Dairy and Protein
- Portions, energy and exercise
- Stretching your food dollar (field trip to local grocery store)
- Food Safety and Knife Cutting Class

Physical Activity

During the nutrition class series participants will be enrolled in a similarly adapted physical education program at the YMCA. The participants will engage in physical activity and develop a personal fitness plan over the course of a six-week period. Participants will receive six weeks of YMCA staff guidance on how to use fitness equipment and specialized adapted classes such as kickboxing.

Discussion

The pilot SCC project will provide young adults with developmental disabilities with the resources, skills and guidance to develop healthy active lifestyles. In addition, the participants will develop skills that will provide the basis for potential employment as peer mentors.

As demonstrated, the obesity and diabetes rates for the population with developmental disabilities are disproportionately high. In addition, most physical activity and nutrition programs are not adapted to meet the needs of the population with developmental disabilities, are not marketed for the population or have staff with the necessary skills to adapt mainstream health education programs.

We anticipate that individuals who participate in the program will increase healthy eating habits and the rate at which they participate in physical activity; success of the project will be measured through these indicators. The evaluation will be based on the validated evaluation tool used by SNAP-ED. Participants will participate in pre and post surveys measuring knowledge, skills and behavior change. In addition to evaluating the overall impact of the program the data will be used to improve the interventions.

Collaborating Partners