Diversity in Aquatics
Adapted Aquatics Council & Roundtable
Collaborative Work on the US National Water Safety Action Plan Recommendations that mention People with Disabilities (2024)

Led by: Adrienne Wesley and Monica Lepore
Contributions by: Ailene Tisser, Angela Beale-Tawfeeq, Carolyn Bingham, Ann Hughes, Dori Maxon, Jim Peterfish, Liddie MacNeil, Lisa Ruby, Knolan Rawlins, Shana Lorde, Tania Santiago Perez, Tana B. Carson, Mary Shrestha, Barb Seiden

This is the Brainstorming work from the "Diversity in Aquatics-Adapted Aquatics Council" Roundtable Meetings, monthly throughout 2024. This document is in response to the recommendations of the 2023 US National Water Safety Action Plan regarding Adapted Aquatics, Aquatics for People with Disabilities, and Inclusion of People with Disabilities into Aquatic Programming, and serves as Action Steps and Implementation Guidelines for 8 recommendations.

WS WC Recommendation 3 :
Build or revitalize publicly accessible pools and designated swimming areas to meet the needs of populations at higher risk of drowning.

Diversity in Aquatics-Adapted Aquatics Council Roundtable Action Phase/Implementation Recommendations:

a) Develop a Checklist that goes above Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines, for what might be practical/best practice guidelines for a variety of disabilities that helps the pool be more accessible to all (and pool decks, changing areas, locker room).
b) Encourage the construction of quiet areas or designated space for people to gather themselves due to sensory overload issues or anxiety.
c) Encourage facilities to publicly post pool schedules, so that people who have sensory needs can come at more quieter times.
d) Educate Local/State Health Departments and encourage them to have Americans with Disabilities criteria on checklist as they provide pools with opening licenses/permits.
e) Encourage pool facilities to have barriers such as a low wall or gate, to deter individuals who elope.
f) Advocate for outdoor pools to have gently sloping zero depth entries.
g) Educate municipalities who are doing pool renovations, to consider different levels of grade of texture for grounding methods for paths and pools. (Smooth,Rough,Rubber,Cement)
h) Encourage pools to use colors that have been demonstrated as calming or motivating.

WS WC Recommendation 5:

Enforce adherence to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) guidelines by all public aquatic facilities, particularly with respect to equipment and facility design.

Diversity in Aquatics-Adapted Aquatics Council Roundtable Action Phase/Implementation Recommendations:

a) Petition State Health Departments to NOT give permits to pools that do not have a working Primary Source of entrance to the pool according to the ADA.
b) Petition the US Access Board to make a "big deal" of accessible pools by giving a certificate of compliance or a logo that pools can use in their promotions.
c) Petition the IRS to give bigger "readily achievable conditions and tax credits or deductions" to facilities that make changes for accessibility.
d) Develop Public Safety Announcements in parks and recreation and homeowner magazines, that detail the inclusivity value of accessible pools, while also showing the fines that can be levied.
e) Work with Disability and Family Advocacy and activist groups to advocate for consumers to file complaints against inaccessible pool facilities; and education/knowledge of their RIGHTS.
f) Develop complaint "form" and distribute it to Disability Activist groups for them to send to their constituents.
g) Develop Committees that provide Free Accessibility Checks by advocates and provide stickers or logs for Accessible Facilities to display.

h) **Identify facilities that ARE accessible and spread the word**
i) **Identify Disability Awareness Partnerships with Community Buy-In.**
j) **Start a Letter writing campaign by experts, to various pools that we know, to HELP them to become compliant.**

WS WC Recommendation 6:

Develop and implement national minimum standards for adapted aquatics learn-to-swim instructor training and certification.

Diversity in Aquatics-Adapted Aquatics Council Roundtable Action Phase/Implementation Recommendations:

These are the most important 'concepts/skills/knowledge/attitudes' that must be in an Adapted Aquatics Instructor Program. The next step is for a rubric to be developed, a 'call for program submissions', and a committee to evaluate programs to be considered "meeting these standards and achieving National Credential Standards' to be accepted as a comprehensive credential for teaching Adapted Aquatics and Inclusive Aquatics.

a) **American with Disability Act knowledge regarding what is essential/required for pools and pool staff so we can be advocates.**

b) **Affective Domain Skills (Sensitivity Training) regarding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access from physical and emotional standpoints including access to learning and learning styles that match unique attributes of learners. Trauma-Informed Practices. Understanding of Social/Emotional Learning.**

c) **The importance of swimmer driven support for initiation of communication and goal preferences. Swimmer as an Active participant for input into the process of swim. Importance of caregiver input into the development of goals, communication etc. Creating a Communication process to the student.**

d) **Content Knowledge of 10 of the most common disabilities seen in Adapted Aquatics Programming and how the typical characteristics affect learning and participation in aquatic activities; health and safety concerns and strategies based on typical characteristics; and possible equipment, goals, and contraindications. My suggestions: Swimmers with: Intellectual Disabilities including content specific to Down Syndrome; Autism Spectrum Disorder; Cerebral Palsy; Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder; Spina Bifida; Spinal Cord Injuries; Traumatic Brain Injury; Stroke; Amputee/Limb Disorders; Specific Learning Disability, Chromosomal/Genetic Disorders, Cancer, Blind, medically complications. Mental Health Challenges and Trauma. Possibly targeting and grouping adaptation, skills etc by "communication needs, behavioral, emotional needs, hearing, vision, cognition needs".**

e) **Specific enter and exit skills including chair lift, how to assist someone on ladder, ramp, side of pool and stairs, how to support transfers to and from wheelchair, shower chair, etc.**

f) **Safety Protocols such as: seizure management, getting people out in an emergency, determining ratios (appropriate number of staffing and credentialed/certified staff: maybe add "who" are appropriate staff), risk management, Emergency Action Plans.**

g) **Assessment and use of assessment to write individual goals and aquatic plans.**
Understanding how an IEP is written and information for the instructor to implement in the lesson plan designed for the individual.

h) **At least 2 practice sessions in direct supervision of an adapted aquatics instructor trainer, with feedback, in the pool with individuals with disabilities: one with those with cognitive disabilities and one with those with physical disabilities. Very important that during the training to be an AAI, the swim instructors are given the opportunity to meet a variety of individuals with disabilities, and age groups, including guest instructors that have disabilities. Experience is key particularly when teaching special populations and the more diverse your exposure, the better equipped . your chest of tools. Include a variety of ages to make sure that we cover the lifespan.**

i) **At least 2 practice sessions in the pool for safety protocols, lifts, transfers, holding and supporting participants, pool clearing/removal for emergencies.**

j) **Positive Behavior Support; (Behavior Management and Group/Classroom management); Understanding impulsement, triggers and behaviors that needs to be treated to change the thought process to a positive learning task. The importance of structure and consistency in lessons.**

k) **How to Conduct Lifespan, Inclusive and/or Separate Adapted Aquatics Program including advocating, environmental criteria (time of day, pool depth, pool temp), training assistants, ratios of instructor to swimmer, volunteer supports for group lessons**

l) **Intro to Adaptations with equipment, and with instructors hands to Head/Body positioning, buoyancy and floatation, physical and emotional comfort with assisting/supporting techniques – adapted to individual needs.**

m) **Caregiver education and training including training for those who care for individuals with disabilities from childhood through lifespan. Encouraging empowerment, and independence,**

n) **Importance of Ongoing Professional development including inservice (suggested, commitment, importance of, list of PD opportunities, encourage seeking PD).**

WS WC Recommendation 8:

Implement and embed diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) and cultural training in all aquatics, water safety, and marine safety organizations, beginning with leadership and expanding to all employees, volunteers, and instructor training programs.

Diversity in Aquatics-Adapted Aquatics Council Roundtable Action Phase/Implementation Recommendations:

a) Identify which DEIA initiatives are best for swimming and water safety instructor training
b) Identify what goals should be embedded into water safety instructor training, and how to measure DEIA goals
c) Provide information about specific water safety principles imbedded into National Learn to Swim Instructor Training programs such as:
d) Encourage the use of bright colored bracelets for families to use on their children with autism, intellectual disabilities, epilepsy, in order for aquatic safety personnel to more easily identify people who are at risk for drowning.
e) Provide national examples of adaptations to the EAP that include how to manage emergencies when swimmers cannot see, hear, cooperate, understand etc. Should be included in all lifeguard courses, lifeguard management courses, and water safety instructor courses.

WS WC Recommendation 9:

Adapt and implement existing water safety programs so they are delivered in a culturally competent, trauma-informed, anxiety sensitive, and historically and socially relevant manner to the communities they serve.

Diversity in Aquatics-Adapted Aquatics Council Roundtable Action Phase/Implementation Recommendations:

a) **Identify and publish current 'best practice' being used in National Water Safety Instructor Training Programs.**
b) **Advocate for Incorporation of Social-Emotional Teaching Practices, and Trauma-Informed practices/principle, in Water Safety Instructor Training Programs.**
c) **Advocate for Incorporation of how processing, learning, and motivation, can be different with swimmers with disabilities, into national water safety instructor training programs .**
d) **Advocate for the Incorporation of cueing techniques into national water safety instructor training programs such as: Stop-Deep Breath-Listening Ears On-Fold hand/safe hands-How are you feeling?**
e) **Advocate for the Incorporation of teaching that can help swimmers with anxiety, into national water safety instructor training programs, such as: Repeat simple directions, first we do this and then we can do that.**

WS WC Recommendation 10:
Develop and implement standardized measures to assess the drowning risk of all persons with disabilities (i.e., epilepsy, autism spectrum disorder, and other disabilities).

Diversity in Aquatics-Adapted Aquatics Council Roundtable Action Phase/Implementation Recommendations:

a) **Advocate for the Centers for Disease Control and National Drowning Prevention agencies, to examine "data collection forms" that report demographics for drownings, and advocate for inclusion of many different disability categories to be on the form.**
b) **Request that the USNWSAP committee send surveys, and then advocate for, County and State health departments to report disability status in drownings/submersion accidents.**
c) **Contact the National Institutes of Health to request a review of drownings that do mention disability status and to have this published.**
d) **Conduct literature review to gather qualitative and quantitative data from individuals with disabilities, caregivers, healthcare providers, aquatic professionals, and emergency respondents to understand risk factors and experiences for submersion/drowning incidents.**
e) **Conduct validity and reliability testing of existing water competency and water safety assessments (e.g., American Red Cross, YMCA) for populations of people with disabilities.**

WS WC Recommendation 17:

Make existing water safety information and resources easily available and accessible to people of all ages, cultures, and abilities through a wide variety of access points, sources, local languages, and affordability, including scholarships and low-cost options where possible.

Diversity in Aquatics-Adapted Aquatics Council Roundtable Action Phase/Implementation Recommendations:

a) **Deliver free resources (for example, swimangelfish.com adaptive water safety tool kit and free mini courses for parents, lifeguards and instructors).**
b) **Make training available for swim instructors with scholarships (for example Green Mountain Sports and Ang (NDPA resources, USA swimming), SwimAngelfish)**
c) **Partner with large organizations such as National Drowning Prevention Association, American Red Cross, Starfish Aquatics, Colin's Hope, USNWSAP, and join forces with water safety initiatives**
d) **Advocate for partnering with state/county funding agencies to be approved as a vendor or provider for Medicaid Community Based Waiver Funds.**
e) **Partner with scholarship programs for water safety such as EveryChildaSwimmer.com, StepintoSwim, WaterSmartFlorida.com, Step Up for Students, Hope Floats, Stu Leonard Foundation, .**
f) **Apply for Grants to cover the publishing costs to make water safety education resources freely available (e.g., open access publications).**

g) Create school-based water safety curriculum/standards at national level for school-age children who are in special education classes and schools, including water and land-based lessons.
h) Translate popular resources into local languages to reach various communities (use google translator).
i) Ensure that water safety videos are captioned correctly, and that written script is available. Phone number to call for “live translators”
j) Ensure that written information is in braille and/or spoken language.
k) Ensure video description for individuals with visual impairment is provided on videos.
l) Affordable based on income for services (levels of income/scholarship and pay based swim lessons) (local people big businesses can support)
m) Ensure that there are safe swim lesson facilities in geographic areas that have a high drowning profile.
n) Building capacity through Education and training for more people/families etc. to make drowning prevention part of education, communities, etc. Partnering with professional preparation programs in the public sector to educate and inform. Can we grow ‘pipelines’ that can help us educate younger professionals to grow this?
o) Explore Social Economics factors for surrounding business to support swim lesson programs with tax benefits. (Are there benefits (tax benefits, recognition) to corporations who donate to various drowning prevention programs?)
p) Encourage fundraising efforts between swim lesson agencies and people who have more wealth.

WS WC Recommendation 18:

Deliver water competency training that meets the needs and resources of specific communities. This includes, but is not limited to, training that considers language, culture, local bodies of water, socioeconomic factors, and disabilities.

Diversity in Aquatics-Adapted Aquatics Council Roundtable Action Phase/Implementation Recommendations:

a) Encourage aquatic instructors to learn some common phrases in languages of swimmers you serve.
b) Request Local health departments send out a fact sheet on the local regions water source/mapping and encourage aquatic facilities to include specifics of water safety in those areas (ie, Alaska water safety swim lessons always include how to survive if you fall into freezing water, and how to escape from falling through the ice).
c) Provide swim instructors with the understanding of culture, holidays, customs and encourage water safety instructors to not only use “holidays that they are familiar with” when they are making fun activities (ie, don’t just use Christmas as you are making holiday fun activities).
d) Encourage Swim instructor Training to include the geographic region of language, culture, local bodies of water and social economics factors and disabilities such as: Aquatic Clothing being different if you use fully covered swimwear.

LJ Recommendation 20:

Create an easily accessible centralized resource about water safety, U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets, and adapted aquatics flotation devices for people with special needs, physical disabilities, neurological conditions, or developmental disabilities who need adaptive life jackets or are at higher risk for drowning (e.g., those with ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, epilepsy, and cardiac conditions).

Diversity in Aquatics-Adapted Aquatics Council Roundtable Action Phase/Implementation Recommendations:

a) **Develop a page on the USNWSAP web site with sharing to all national swim instructor pages, learn to swim providers, parks and recreation organizations, boating and fishing agencies, beach patrols etc., with names, brands, and specific comments by experts as to the appropriateness of each Coast Guard approved lifejacket for a variety of body types and disability characteristics**
b) **Ask universities to develop research about what PFDs have reliability with individuals with disabilities.**
c) **Encourage U.S. PFD makers to create some PFDs to create, evaluate, and distribute, PFDs that serve many types of people with disabilities.**
d) **Recommendation for swim instructors to practice and try out all types of life jackets to determine which is the proper fit and safe**
e) **Develop a web page on all the most prominent aquatic and boating agencies that show the availability of the only International Coast Guard Approved PFDs PFD-A.com**

Authors and Contributors:

Adrienne Wesley

Monica Lepore: Ed.D., Certified Adapted Physical Educator, Starfish Adapted Aquatics Instructor Trainer, Certified USA Triathlon Paratriathlon Coach, Certified Special Olympics Swim Coach.

Ailene Tisser: MA, PT, Certified Autism Specialist, Certified Primitive Reflex Specialist

Angela Beale-Tawfeeq

Carolyn Bingham: Owner BAMM Swimming, LLC., Adaptive Swim Program, MS Science of Education, American Red Cross LGI, WSI,BSL,Wilderness, CPR,1st Aid, Coach for Safety and Babysitters Training, Former Instructor for USWFA

Ann Hughes

Dori Maxon

Jim Peterfish

Liddie MacNeil

Lisa Ruby

Knolan Rawlins

Shana Lorde WSI, Adapted Swim Instructor, RBT, USA Swim Coach, LG, LGI

Tania Santiago Perez, PhD, CTRS

Tana B. Carson, PhD, OT, WSIT, AAI

Mary Shrestha

Barb Seiden