

# Occupational Therapy in Adaptive Sports:

## Creating Resources to Strengthen Program Quality and Student Experience at New England Disabled Sports

Karina Schappler, OT/s, Sarah Skeels, MPH, Jason Lafontaine, Mary Alicia Barnes, OT, OTD



## INTRODUCTION

**New England Disabled Sports (NEDS)** is a 501(c) nonprofit organization providing year-round adaptive sports to over 600 student athletes with various physical & cognitive disabilities.

### MISSION


... through sports & recreation, to enhance lives affected by disabilities.

### VISION

... we envision a world where disabilities are not barriers.

**Stakeholders:** student athletes, student athletes', families, caregivers and friends, volunteer coaches, NEDS board members & staff, Loon & BW mountain staff

 Adaptive sports positively influences overall health, quality of life, quality of family life, & quality of social life 4, 7

 OTPs have knowledge & skills needed to create &/or implement high-quality services & there is need for more OTPs to work in community-based practice 3

 Community based OT programs provide significant benefits in promoting quality of life, physical functioning, & mental health 5

The GAP of occupational therapists in community-based practice persists 1, 2, 6, 8

## PURPOSE & AIMS

**Purpose:** Improve program functioning by bringing inclusive, strengths-based, & client-centered OT lens to NEDS intake, orientation, & education processes to foster increased quality of NEDS athletes' experience.

### Aim 1

Review & revise intake process for new student athletes

### Aim 2

Create materials to improve orientation process for new student athletes

## METHODS

12 weeks in person as assistant program manager & volunteer coach

2 weeks remote

- 1 In depth observation of program operations
- 2 Semi structured interviews with NEDS staff, athletes, & their families (n=6)
- 3 Distribute surveys to previous and current NEDS athletes and families (n=21)
- 4 Analyze data
- 5 Develop materials
- 6 Collect & use feedback (n=14)

## OUTCOMES

### Materials Developed

Revised intake forms (electronic & print versions)

New student athlete informational materials (video & PowerPoint)

Common athlete disabilities PowerPoint

### Aim 1: Revised Intake Process Staff Testimonials

NEDS staff report revised intake form felt more **client-centered, strength-based, & easy to administer.**

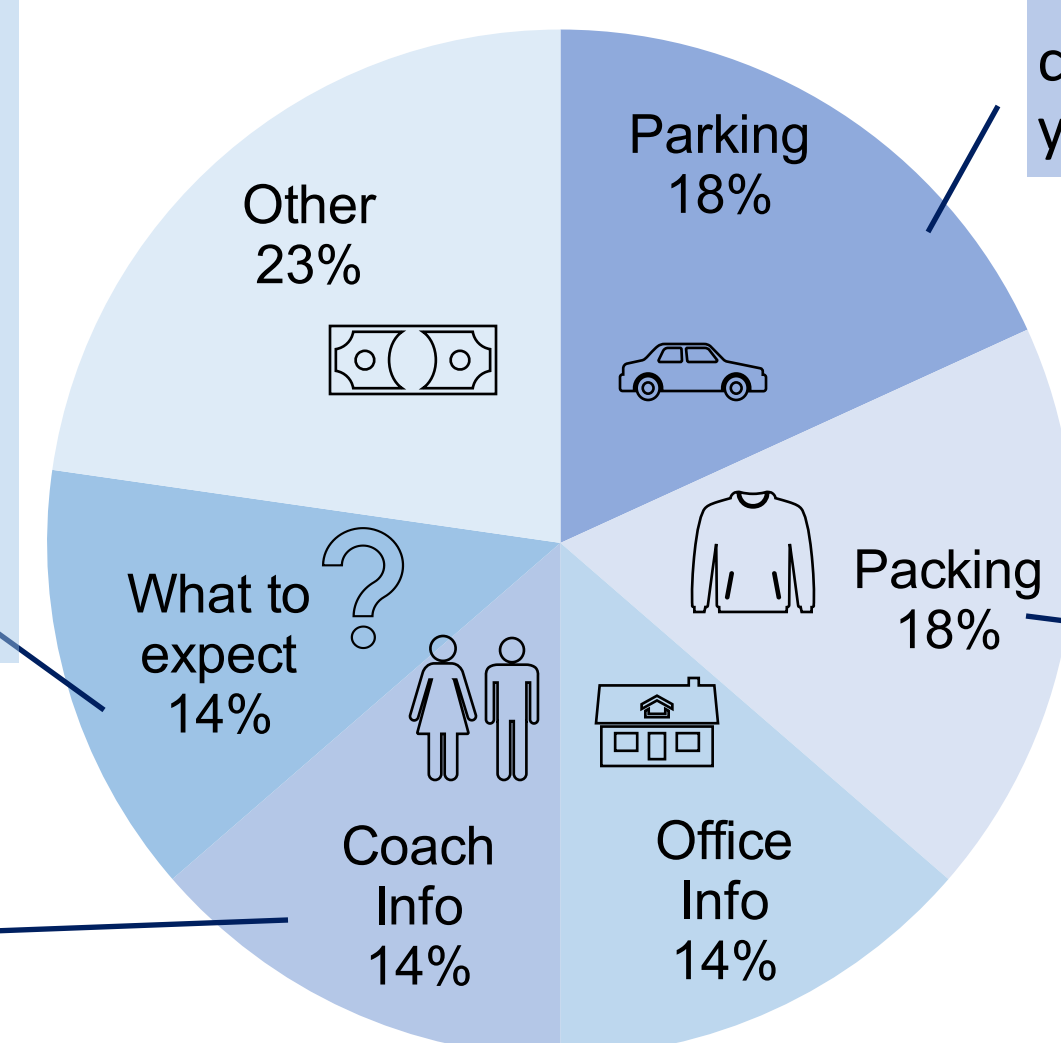
*"The new form is fantastic. It speeds up the intake process by having the participant questions in the same order as Salesforce. I also appreciate the more appropriate wording for the client filling it out as well as the way it centered around them in a positive way"* -Lily Desgroseilliers, CTRS/L, Sports Coordinator

### Survey Q7: Provide any additional information on what would have been helpful to know or expect prior to your first day at NEDS?

"It would be amazing to have a video to show kids the space at NEDS and what to expect their lesson will be like. Especially for those who are anxious or like to know the plan ahead of time".

"A get to know the instructors' quick clips! They could be fun, and students could watch a few before hand".

"The NEDS building was a bit chaotic with a lot of people around. Signage about where to go, maybe a greeter available when you walk in? It was intimidating as it seemed like everyone knew each other and knew what was going on".

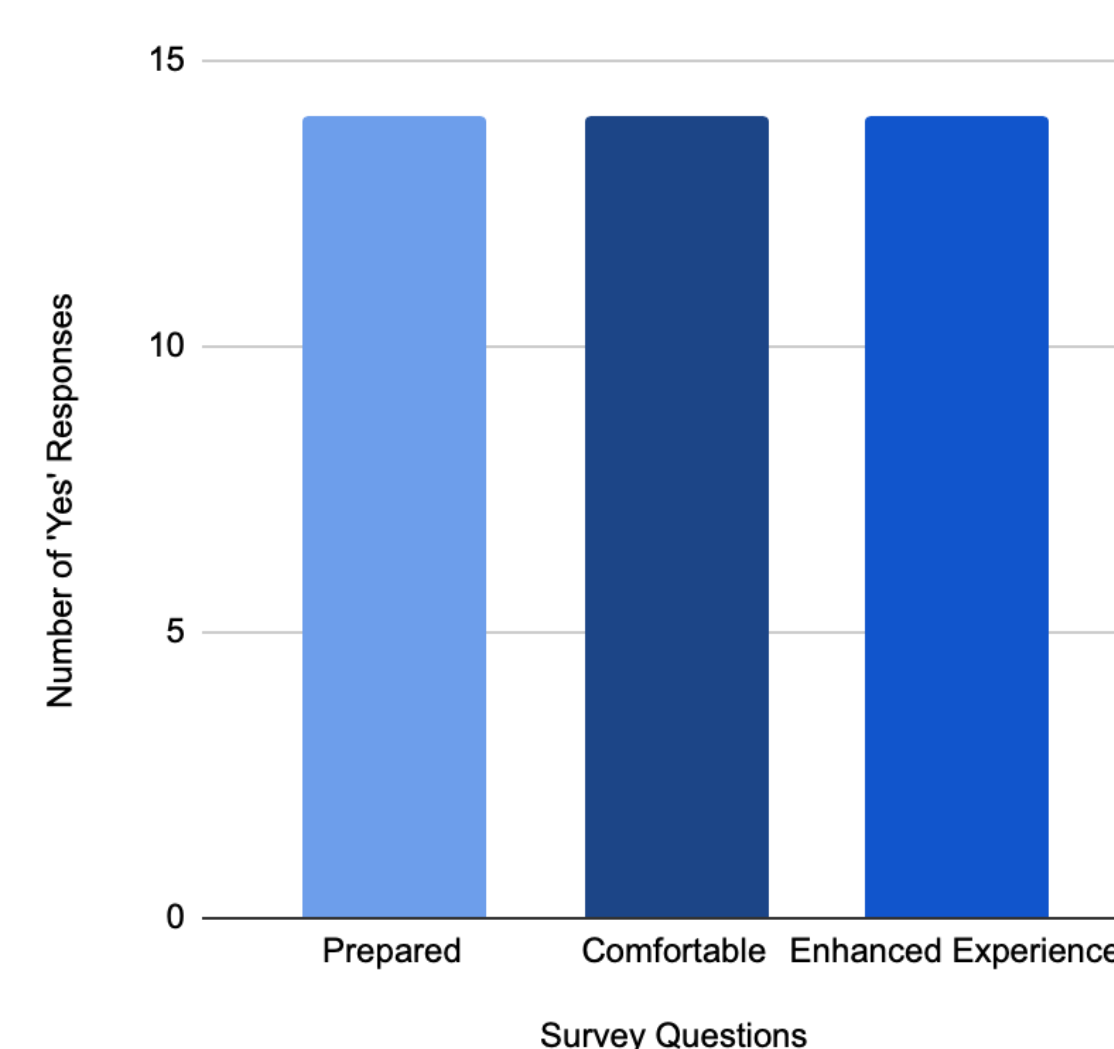


"Parking at Loon is a challenge, especially if you have a later lesson".

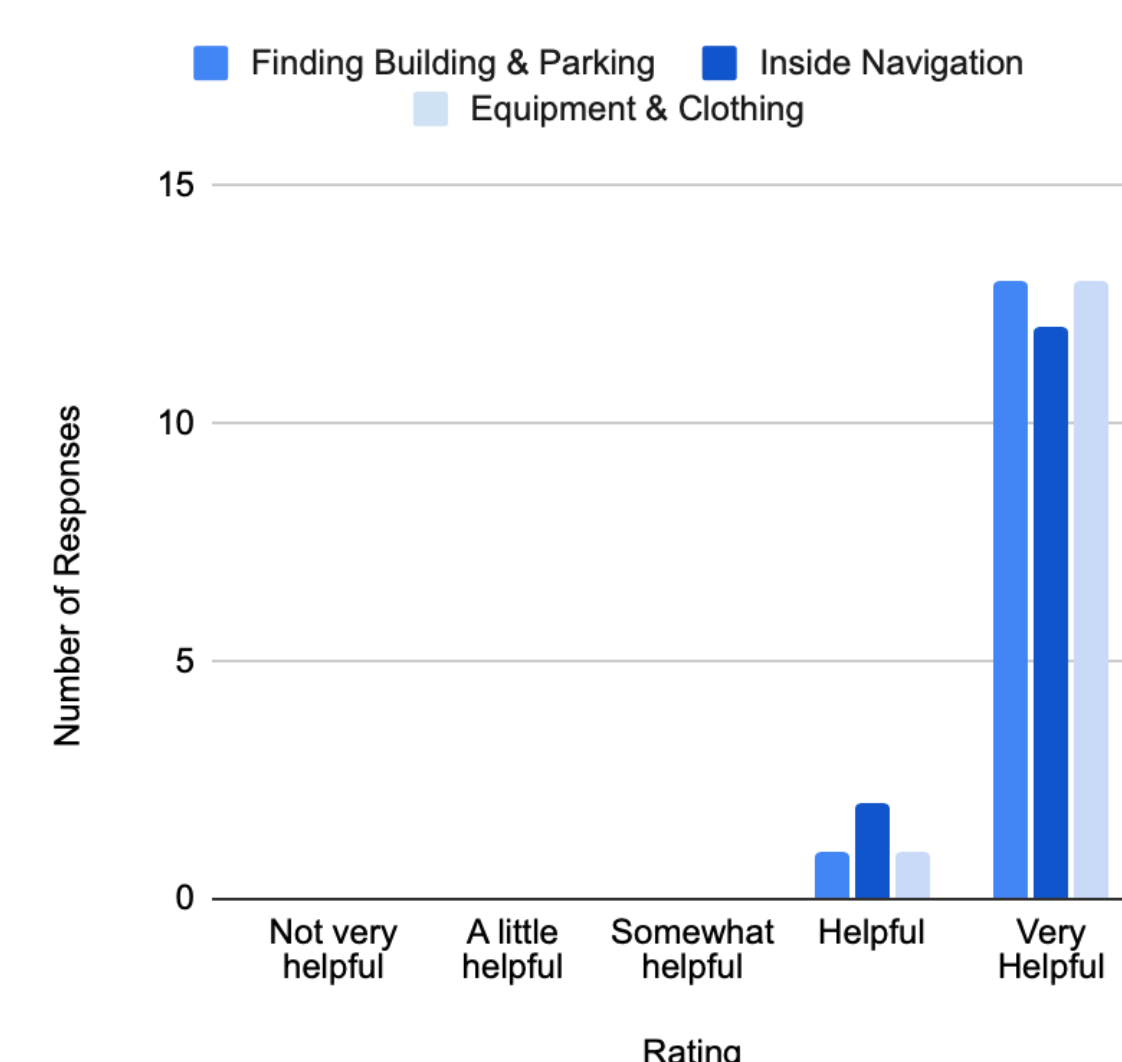
"For newcomers, a welcome video sounds like a great idea. Especially noting that you have items like booties, helmets and goggles to loan. That way people don't purchase items unnecessarily".

### Aim 2: New Student Orientation Materials Evaluation Results

#### Effectiveness of Informational Materials



#### Effectiveness of Informational Materials



## DISCUSSION

Results indicate occupational therapists have the potential to improve program functioning & participant experiences in community based adaptive sports organizations by using an inclusive, strength-based, & client-centered OT lens to observe, participate, & develop resources & recommendations.

Revised form improved the overall intake process

Qualitative responses from staff indicate revised form improved the intake process for new student athletes, making it easier to collect client centered information, improving the care & experience of the student athlete.

Informational materials helped students feel prepared & comfortable


Quantitative & qualitative data from pre-surveys & semi-structured interviews indicated a gap of first day preparatory information. Post-survey data shows informational materials (video, PowerPoint) enhanced their experience.

### Recommendations & Role for Future DEC Students

 Through informal observation, a gap of disability knowledge among volunteer coaches as New England Disabled Sports was discovered.

 'Common Disability' PowerPoint was created to serve as a resource for coaches.

 **Increasing common disability knowledge will improve student athletes experience by improving coaches' capabilities to work with student athletes.**

 Future DEC student - analyze coach knowledge pre & post PowerPoint & implement trainings as needed. Add summer programming information.

## CONCLUSION

According to the research & literature, having an occupational therapist on site at an adaptive sports organization has a **positive** effect on student athletes & adaptive sports programming. This project addressed the gap by having an OT student on site for 12 weeks to observe, analyze, & develop recommendations & materials for NEDS.

Occupational therapists have the knowledge and skills to successfully work in community-based practices & should continue to work in these areas to improve program operations & participant experiences.

## REFERENCES & CONTACT INFO

This project would not have been possible without the ongoing mentorship and support from Sarah Skeels, Jason Lafontaine, Mary Barnes, & all of New England Disabled Sports staff, athletes, & families. Special thank you to Nehda Khadjenoori, OT/s for her teamwork & collaboration throughout this experience.

Contact: [karina.schappler@tufts.edu](mailto:karina.schappler@tufts.edu)  
[sarah.skeels@tufts.edu](mailto:sarah.skeels@tufts.edu)

Scan QR code for references & supplemental materials

