

Thanks so much for the opportunity to be the Disability (Adaptive Aquatics) Chair for Southeastern Swimming. I wish I could be there, but I will see you all in October. I have put together some resources and information for the coaches concerning coaching swimmers with Disabilities.

In January I was fortunate enough to take part in USA Swimming Disability workshop and think tank in Colorado Springs at the Olympic Training Center. I learned a lot and had a great experience. INCLUSION is a huge issue for coaches who work with “able bodied” swimmers. How do I work with disabled athletes, how do we utilize our pool space appropriately to accommodate these swimmers, Frankly, what do I do with these swimmers? There are no SET answers. You have to be open to working with all types of swimmers as a team and on an individual basis and it is hard at times. Below is a link to USA Swimming’s Disability resource page. There are a lot of great articles you can find specifically on what you may need help with. Dave Dennison is the head Paralympics Coach and there are two power point links below also.

USA Swimming Disability resource page, Tons of information and great articles:

<http://www.usaswimming.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabId=2197&Alias=Rainbow&Lang=en>

Dave Denniston - Coaching Boys & Girls with Disabilities

<https://usaswimming.adobeconnect.com/a792273714/p61bylnzusp/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal> (PowerPoint presentation)

<http://www.usaswimming.org/Rainbow/Documents/00d95c3b-d1ab-4db4-815c-cffacd6a117d/Coaching%20Swimmer%20with%20Disabilities%20%282%29.pdf> (Video of Dave’s PowerPoint Presentation above is you would rather listen than read)

U.S. Paralympics Swimming announced a new program for USA Swimming member coaches who want more knowledge/techniques for coaching athletes with disabilities. This new program will allow coaches to collaborate on swimming knowledge/techniques with Dave Denniston while he works with the U.S. Paralympics Swimming Resident Program at the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs (“CSOTC”). The application form is attached and it gives you the opportunity to work one on one with Dave and his athletes. Check out the attached application. It would be a great experience for all of us!

Below are some statistics and information we use in our marketing with SEASTARS and a few Parent Testimonials to help share the importance of what the sport does for “special needs” swimmers of SEASTARS. If you are not aware of the program I run please visit our website [www.seastarsaquatics.org](http://www.seastarsaquatics.org) or if you ever have questions concerning inclusion or situations that may arise please feel free to contact me 8504186045 or [Robin@seastarsaquatics.org](mailto:Robin@seastarsaquatics.org).

### **U.S. and Florida Health Facts:**

- Approximately 17% (or 12.5 million) of children and adolescents aged 2—19 years are obese in the U.S.
- 30.9% of children with special health care needs ages 10-17 in Florida are overweight or obese (BMI ≥ 85th percentile) and 33.4% of children with non-special health care needs ages 10-17 in Florida are overweight or obese
- Since 1980, obesity prevalence among children and adolescents has almost tripled and there are significant racial and ethnic disparities in obesity prevalence among U.S. children and adolescents
- County obesity rates are variable within states, but even states with the lowest prevalence of obesity have counties where many low-income children are obese, and at risk for chronic disease
- The long-term negative increased risk of obesity includes many preventable illnesses such as Hypertension, Type-2 Diabetes and Heart Disease.
- 2010 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) Report to Congress published a report which underscores access to, and participation in, extracurricular athletic opportunities provide important health and social benefits to all students, particularly those with disabilities

### **Special Needs:**

- US Government Studies have shown that for students with disabilities, regular physical activity may help control or slow the progression of chronic disease, improve muscular strength, control body weight, and enhance students’ psychological well-being through additional social ties and improved self-confidence and self-esteem
- The same study also found that students with disabilities are not given an equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular athletics in public elementary and secondary schools. As such, new guidance was distributed to school districts communicating what steps need to be made to ensure “that require students with disabilities to have an equal opportunity for participation in nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities, and discusses the provision of separate or different athletic opportunities

### Comprehensive and Multifaceted Youth Development Programs that work:

- Research has shown that “youth development programs [work best if they] are comprehensive and multifaceted, building on the assets and strengths of young people and assisting them to define goals, complete school, and plan their futures. Youth development seldom tackles isolated problems...but focuses instead on providing holistic support and opportunities for young people. Youth development is a strategy that attempts to meet the needs young people themselves identify—to have life skills, to be cared for and safe, to be valued and useful, and to be spiritually grounded—by building on their capabilities, assisting them to cultivate their own talents and to increase their feelings of self-worth, and easing their transition to adulthood.”

#### **Bradley Thomas** **Special Needs Swimmer** **Age 21**

Bradley had a brain hemorrhage at birth and as a result he suffers from cerebral palsy and has a severe disorder. He loves the water and for years I put him in numerous (and I mean numerous) swim lesson programs. With the initial goal to keep him from drowning if he were to fall into the pool or a body of water. Finally following surgery to his leg we enrolled him in physical therapy through Sacred Heart's pool-aquatic therapy. This allowed him to do exercise that he could not otherwise do on land. He also learned how to stay above water and not drown.

Once we got to that point, after about three months of therapy he was discharged. I was determined to use water type therapy to increase his strength and to loosen his spastic muscles. There are very few options for children such as Bradley since he cannot mentally or physically swim or perform other task in the water that other 16 year olds can.

Most swim instructors – who are often very young, are intimidated by him even though he is very sociable. He did not qualify medically for any further therapy. That is when I found out about SEASTARS Aquatics. It was a perfect program for him using skilled (Coach Chaz and Robin) instructors who could work with Bradley to help him reach a potential that I would have never dreamed of. They have worked with him very often 1 to 1 with patience and kindness to help him learn to increase his strength, endurance, and safety in the water. He is learning to swim laps in the pool. The water allows him to take advantage of the buoyancy which allows him to stretch his muscles that he could never do before.

He also loves doing it so he is cooperative in a way that is hard to achieve by other means. It has been just a wonderful thing for him. More than you could ever imagine. I hope that the program can continue to grow so others, both disabled and non-disabled, can benefit from it.

-Mary Thomas

#### **King Richard** **Special Needs Swimmer** **Age 21**

SEASTARS is the answer to every parent's dream that has a child with special needs. Our son, King, has Autism- a lifelong brain disorder. Since he began the swim program he has made noticeable improvement in the areas of social, physical, mental and emotional development. Now, King is more focused, follows directions well, and has become more trusting.

At times his autism does present some challenging behaviors; however, he has developed a better sense of respect for authority and program rules. Chaz and Robin work exceptionally well with King. They demonstrate true professionalism, patience, and creativity. They're always willing to make the necessary adaptations to meet the needs of each child. And more importantly, SEASTARS instructors display a caring attitude, which not only makes every child feel special, but their parents feel special, too.

SEASTARS has definitely impacted Kings life, and our lives as well. Now, we are confident that our child has the ability to learn, and can handle himself safely in water. This swim program is certainly living up to its goal -“ making a difference, one stroke at a time”!

Ann & David Richard-parents

#### **Riley Stevens** **Special Needs Swimmer** **Age 9**

*From Riley's Mom:*

When I was first introduced to SEASTARS Aquatics Swim Team in May 2005, I was looking into the program for my son, "for the future." Riley, who has several medical diagnoses that challenge him, was 3 ½ years old at the time. I thought that he may be too young and too weak to begin an organized program. I knew Riley loved the water and because of his low muscle tone he was able to do things in the water that he couldn't do outside of the water against gravity. After speaking with Robin and Chaz, I was pleasantly surprised. SEASTARS welcomed him with open arms!

Riley has worked 2-3 days a week with Chaz since that first meeting in May 2005. His strength and development have changed dramatically in that time. He is able to float independently on his back and kick his legs. He can blow bubbles and move his arms in a freestyle stroke with assistance. With minimal floatation and a bit of steering assistance he can almost kick an entire length (25 yards) of the pool.

Prior to his involvement with SEASTARS, Riley was not strong enough to move from sitting to lying down or transitioning to attempt to crawl. He wasn't able to support himself in a standing position. Now he is rolling around, beginning to crawl and walking with assisted support. I attribute a lot of his strength gains to his involvement in the SEASTARS Program.

I truly believe Riley would not be where he is today without SEASTARS! I highly recommend the SEASTARS Program to any parent with a physically or mentally challenged child.

**Alec Crumpler**  
**Age 13**

My husband and I would like to express a huge thanks to the coaches and Swimmer's of the Seastars Aquatic Program. Our son, Alec, has been in the program for a little over a year. He has Tourettes Syndrome and some associated OCD and anxiety problems. Before finding out about Seastars, Alec had tried swimming lessons with three other programs in Pensacola--all of them were unsuccessful. He really liked the water, but the larger class sizes and the lack of individualized attention to Alec and his needs, made it impossible for him to succeed. He couldn't learn as fast as the other kids, so he was always self conscious and behind in the class.

After only a short time with the Seastars, we could see improvement in Alec's swimming skills and most importantly, in his confidence and self esteem. He is never left behind, because the coaches move at his pace and skill level. If he is having a bad day, it is okay. If he doesn't feel comfortable diving into the pool, it is okay. He is completely accepted for who he is--there is never any pressure to be anything else.

Recently, Alec began swimming on the team and competing in meets. I have to admit that a year ago I never would have believed that he would have the skills or the self confidence to do so. This was a boy who was terrified of the lanes lines painted on the bottom of the pool! He absolutely loves going to meets to swim and to be with his team mates.

Seastars has afforded Alec the opportunity to know what it's like to be part of a team. For a child like Alec who just wants to be like the other kids, this is the gift of a lifetime. He is making memories, building relationships, and learning values that will serve him throughout his life.

Our heartfelt thanks go to Coach Chaz, Coach Robin, and Coach Heather. They are patient and loving with our son, and we will never be able to thank them enough for the positive difference they have made for our family. And thanks to the other swimmers and their parents--we are all so grateful to be Seastars.

Kent and Denise Crumpler

**Anonymous Swimmer**  
**Age 11**

My son is 8 years old and has sensory processing disorder, food and chemical sensitivities, and other health impairments. He has had difficulties with transitioning to other activities, attention, and following directions from unfamiliar adults. He has been swimming with SEASTARS for the past year. During that time, he has not only learned how to swim and enjoy the water, a task that has not been accomplished in any other swimming program, but has had opportunities to be involved in activities with other neurotypical peers and not been at a disadvantage. He has gained confidence, learned to listen and follow directions better, and has improved his coordination and strength. SEASTARS swimming program is a gift to all children with special needs.