



THE PROBLEM

In New York, over 86% of adult Special Olympics athletes are overweight or obese. Because of this, Special Olympics New York partnered with the YMCA of Greater Rochester to help their athletes get YMCA memberships. Most of the Special Olympics athletes qualified for the YMCA of Greater Rochester's financial assistance program that allows reduced membership fees for individuals and families with financial need. However, the paperwork and supporting documentation required for the YMCA financial assistance program was too complex for many people with intellectual disabilities to complete.

THE SOLUTION

Together, Special Olympics New York and the YMCA of Greater Rochester brainstormed how to make the financial assistance application more accessible to people with intellectual disabilities. They realized that the majority of Special Olympics athletes received government benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Medicaid. The income eligibility limits required to obtain these benefits were well below the threshold for receiving YMCA financial assistance, meaning that anyone who qualified for SSI/Medicaid benefits would also qualify for the YMCA financial assistance program. With YMCA of Greater Rochester board approval, the financial assistance process was changed so that proof of SSI/Medicaid benefits could be substituted for the YMCA's financial assistance application. The YMCA of Greater Rochester then trained their staff on how the procedure had changed.

OUTCOME

Because of this procedure change, more Special Olympics athletes have become members of the YMCA of Greater Rochester and they are able to benefit from everything the YMCA has to offer. One Special Olympics athlete reported that thanks to his YMCA membership, and the encouragement of YMCA staff, he has now overcome his fear of swimming in deep water. Simplifying the financial assistance process not only helped Special Olympics athletes become members of the YMCA, but it has also helped others in the community who previously had difficulty with the financial assistance application as well, including those with low literacy, and non-native English speakers. The YMCA of Greater Rochester financial assistance program is now more accessible for ALL people.