



*"Every Child Deserves the Chance to Play Baseball"*



## Take Me Out to the Ball Game!

### The Effects of a Community Baseball League for Individuals with Disabilities

#### Camden Miracle Field Annual Survey Report (2019)

According to Coker, P. (Development Disabilities Newsletter), occupational therapy practitioners believe that engagement in meaningful activities will lead to increased life satisfaction (Yerxa & Baum, 1986). It is well documented that participation in age-related activities is important to developing friendships and achieving mental and physical health (Edouards, Gauthersona, D'Anjoub, Pupiera, & Devillarda, 2007; Wilson, 2002). Regular participation in physical activity is one of the most effective ways for adults and children, including those with disabilities, to help prevent chronic

diseases, promote independence, and increase quality of life (Cress et al., 2004). Participation in sports and recreational activities empowers adults and children with disabilities to develop friendships and an understanding of each other's capabilities. Integrating athletes with and without disabilities provides a setting where all athletes are challenged to improve their skills while increasing public awareness of the spirit and skills of individuals with physical and/or intellectual disabilities. For adults, participation in recreational activities is significantly related to the development of social support networks,

quality of life, and overall well-being (Cress et al., 2004; Law & Dunn, 1993).

Despite the increased number of community-based programs for children and adults with disabilities, there is limited research that examines the specific benefits of baseball as the primary form of recreational activity for children and adults with mental and physical disabilities. Additionally, little is known about the satisfaction of those parents of children or adults with disabilities who currently are involved in structured community-based recreational programs. This report will provide insight into the benefits of participation in a community-based baseball league specifically designed for children and adults with all types of disabilities and the potential impact on the players, their families and the volunteers.

In the United States, data from the U.S. Census Bureau using the American Community Survey (ACS, 2018) indicate that the prevalence of disabilities among children under the age of 5 is .7% and ages 5 to 17 years is 5.5%. The prevalence of disability among adults ages 18 to 34 is 6.4% and 35 to 64 is 6.4% and over 65 is 33.9%. Unfortunately, the lives of children and adults with disabilities are often made more difficult by societal barriers and the way society responds to disabilities (Sloper & Turner, 1992). Children and adults with disabilities are limited in their participation in recreational and social activities relative to their peers without disabilities (Murphy & Carbone, 2008). As a result, many feel socially isolated, thus compounding the magnitude of the disability (Zabriskie, Lundberg, & Groff, 2005). This isolation can lead to poor

health, limited community participation, and poor quality of life (Zabriskie et al., 2005).

Participation in sporting activities leads to a greater sense of competence in self-esteem and motor skill acquisition (Murphy & Carbone, 2008). In research concerning the impact of the traditional Special Olympics programs, parents reported increased self-esteem in their children.

Coaches have noted athletes' improved self-esteem and self-confidence, and desire to make new friends (Costagno, 2001).

### **Camden Miracle Field**

Camden Miracle Field succeeds at providing a recreational outlet for children and adults with all types of mental and physical disabilities. Each baseball season, approximately 80 children and adults with disabilities participate on a custom-built baseball field. This field has a cushioned synthetic rubberized surface that eliminates any barriers to wheelchair users or those that use walkers (or other devices) for mobility. Camden Miracle Field provides an opportunity for children and adults with disabilities to be part of a team, to be able to play with their peers, and to be accepted openly by their teammates and buddies. Buddies are parents, siblings or community volunteers who assist the players with batting, reaching the bases, fielding and throwing. Games operate using the following basic rules: (a) all players have a turn to bat each inning, (b) all base runners are safe, (c) every player scores each inning, and (d) each team and each player wins!

Camden Miracle Field was founded in 2010 and officially opened for game play in October, 2011. Two seasons are played each year and there are currently 74 players on the roster; players range in age from 3 years to 67 years old.

A 10-question survey was designed by the staff of Camden Miracle Field to measure: (a) the perceived recreational needs of children with disabilities residing in Camden County, GA, (b) the benefits of participating in Miracle League baseball, (c) parents' satisfaction with their child's participation in Miracle League baseball, and (d) the perceived benefits or improvements in motor function, self-confidence, social skills, and beliefs about being able to succeed. Survey responses consisted of yes/no questions and questions that could be rated as excellent, very good, good and poor. The survey also included a section for parents to provide written responses to open-ended questions related to specific areas

including: (a) physical and mental health, (b) self-esteem/confidence, (c) friends/social relationships, and (d) sense of belonging and being part of a team. The intention of the survey was to examine the parents' perception of the benefits of their children's participation in a structured baseball league and to seek recommendations for improvement of the league. The information from the survey was collected anonymously from the families. Therefore, responses could not be linked to specific families or players.

Our fall of 2019 season was cancelled mid-season due to insurance coverage issues and a lack of a formal land-use agreement with the City of Kingsland. In the spring of 2019, 74 players participated and 24 of the parents completed the survey. The specific benefits reported by the parents as a result of their children participating on Camden Miracle Field are reported in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Perceived Benefits of Participation in the Camden Miracle Field Baseball League**

Perceived Benefits	Yes	No
Increased Sense of Belonging	95.83%	4.17%
Developed New Friendships	87.50%	12.50%
Improved Physical Health	91.67%	8.33%
Improved Mental Health	95.83%	4.17%
Improved Self-Esteem, Confidence	100%	0%

  

Perceived Benefits	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Poor
Overall Experience	66.67%	29.17%	4.17%	0%

The open-ended questions were answered by 68.5% of the parents who completed each survey. Responses to the open-ended questions regarding observed benefits suggest that the parents valued their child’s participation in the league. Comments also indicated benefits such as improved motor coordination, greater motivation to participate in recreational activity, improved self-esteem, and improved physical health and ability. Specific examples of parents’ comments are provided in Table 2.

An additional question on the survey asked parents what could be done to improve the experience for the players. Only 64% of the parents who answered the open-ended questions provided a response to this question, which included requests to have more games in the

season, more seating and to provide refresher training to the on-field volunteers as the season progresses.

The principal findings were that parents of children with disabilities who participated in Miracle League baseball highly valued their child’s involvement. The majority of the parents responding to the survey reported that participation in this weekly sports activity resulted in increased self-esteem, motor functions, social skills, and improved overall mental and physical health. Most parents reported that their children made new friends, and that their participation in the Camden Miracle Field baseball league had a positive impact on their entire family.

**Table 2 – Samples of Reported Benefits of Participation in the Camden Miracle Field Baseball League**

Theme	Parent Responses
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**Sense of Belonging**



“My children transformed from withdrawn kids to the happy outgoing with a feeling of acceptance. How great for any child.... extremely special for a special needs child.”

“Playing with friends has built her self-confidence immensely.”

“He loves telling people that he plays baseball and talks about the team. “

“Alex looks forward to these games and has stated several times that he is glad to be on a team. “

“Turned from a invert to outgoing super star.”

“We've become very close with our teammates.”

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## New Friendships



**“Most of the people on her team she goes to school with. But I did see her having a conversation with someone on the team which is something she doesn't do so that was awesome.”**

**“Yes he refers to these teammates as his friends and likes spending time with them at the games. He also considers his buddies to be his friends.”**

**“He would not talk before and he is so comfortable talking with everyone now. “**

**“He has made new friends, both players and spectators.”**

**“More willing to experience new things and people!”**

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## Improved Physical Health



**“He seems to be better coordinated and has more energy, and a willingness to go to the playground more.”**

**“Improved hand/eye coordination, catching & throwing has improved significantly.”**

**“Lot more energy.”**

**“Hitting a baseball is beyond all expectations.”**

**“Yes. Both have grown as players in physicality and in skill.”**

**“He loves hitting those home runs. Three so far.”**

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## Improved Mental Health



**“He seems to be happier on the days that he plays ball. He also is happy on Saturday when he can share his success with others.”**

**“More self-confidence.”**

**“Mood is more balanced and cheerful.”**

**“He is not as depressed as he used to be.”**

**“He has a desire to fellowship with others.”**

**“Better mood.”**

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## Improved Self-Esteem, Confidence



**“Yes! Yes! Yes! He has improved self-esteem and is really proud of himself when he puts his uniform on and gets ready to go.”**

**“Mike was leery about playing at first. But after seeing his friends participating, he knew he would like it. He's even made more friends.”**

**“He is very proud to be a part of the team.”**

**“Confidence tripled.”**

**“Over the moon!”**

**“Very confident being himself instead of pretending.”**

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## Overall Experience



“Mike (as well as Scott and Robert) have had a great time at the games. It's a chance for them to have fun and nobody laughs at them.”

“Friendship and being around and sharing things other people that don't have special needs children can't understand.”

“This league supports kids that are sometimes invisible to those outside of their families. These children do not have the opportunity to shine at sports. This gives them that chance.”

“It provides Robert with a sense of belonging and normalcy.”

“The excitement of being a part of a great team.”

“Everyone gets a chance to play and it's a family atmosphere.”

“The opportunity it provides my children to play a sport.”

“The acceptance of every person!”

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## Conclusion

Camden Miracle Field is an example of a successful community-based sports program for children and adults with all types of mental and physical disabilities. The results of the parent survey reveal the positive effects of participating in team sports. The attitudes and perceptions of the children and adults who participate in team sports, as well as their families, are essential for planning successful community-based sports programs. The results of the Camden Miracle Field parent survey provide important insight into the perceptions of the benefits of participating in Miracle League baseball. This information speaks to the importance of community-based sports for children and adults with disabilities, as few studies have reported the potential impact of

community recreation on the players as well as the entire family unit. More importantly, the findings highlight the need for local communities to develop and sustain recreational opportunities for children and adults with disabilities.

For more information about Camden Miracle Field, please visit [www.camdenmiracleleague.com](http://www.camdenmiracleleague.com), call (912) 322-1970, email [camdenmiraclefield@gmail.com](mailto:camdenmiraclefield@gmail.com) or write:

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