



## Clarksville, Tennessee Case Study

### Parks: Return & Restore

How do you start an adaptive program with literally nothing? No dedicated funding, no staff, and no special facilities, just park and recreational professionals who understand that creating a program is the right thing to-do for the people of your community. Clarksville Park and Recreation (CPRD) in Tennessee is an example of the dedication of many it takes to start a program, especially in current down economic conditions.

Although there have been various attempts to begin adaptive programming, mostly on a case by case basis, it has been with little or no funding. This year, Kevin Cowling, Recreation Superintendent, along with the Director and key staff began the planning process to create a comprehensive adaptive program. An already busy staff accepted additional responsibilities realizing the depth of the need, “We do not have a person dedicated to therapeutic recreation so I had to get staff to pitch in and help develop an adaptive program. It is alarming that a city our size did not have a program.” Staff members stepped up and got the ball rolling.

Clarksville Parks is now operating a complete an adaptive swim program for those people with disabilities including working with the wounded warriors from nearby Fort Campbell. The program includes swim lessons and classes that focus on getting children, adults and families active. As part of this process Clarksville Park and Recreation partnered with NRPA as part of the *Parks: Return & Restore* Grant and worked with the United States Olympic Committee, Paralympic Division to become a Paralympic Sports Club. Since developing these partnerships, Clarksville P&R has been able to secure some additional equipment to expand their adaptive and therapeutic programming “The main goal is to get everybody active. Just because you have a cognitive disability or a physical disability doesn’t mean you’re finished recreating. It doesn’t mean you can’t do some of the things you used to do,” explains Cowling. “Our club is starting off as a recreational club, with the potential, once things catch on, of going competitive.”

CPRD, in the current budget was funded and has since hired a full-time aquatics director, with one of the main objectives to grow the aquatics portion of adaptive and therapeutic programming.

Cowling has also found great success in developing key partnerships. “So many people are willing to help. I constantly give out my business cards. We are currently working with a local Paralympian, the Clarksville Montgomery County School System, Austin Peay State University, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and Progressive Directions, an



employment agency for those with physical and cognitive disabilities. Our plan is to be able to help others in the future and become a benchmark for an outstanding adaptive program.”

#### Lessons Learned:

- Develop a plan of action
- Ask existing staff to assist with initial program development
- Develop partnerships both nationally and locally
- Stay focused on your goals, often diligence = impact
- Don't try to get too big too quick, controlled growth is critical