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Heather Wynn, left, and Melissa Ottway take part in a fitness session offered through a partnership of Live, Work, Play, an Ottawa organization that supports adults who have intellectual disabilities.

Getting fit becoming popular at LiveWorkPlay

Monday, November 7, 2005 -- Natalie Miller

Fitness was once a tough sell to people with intellectual disabilities who access services at an Ottawa-based organization.

Not anymore. In fact, working out has become so popular, LiveWorkPlay has constructed a fitness room and pursued grants to help fill it with gym equipment. CEO and co-founder Keenan Wellar says the fitness room will open in January 2006.

For several years, staff at the organization that supports adults with intellectual disabilities has been trying to interest men and women in physical activity. LiveWorkPlay executed a pilot project, partnering with Aphasia Centre of Ottawa, which has a fitness room and is a neighbour of LiveWorkPlay. It was a hit.

"The peer momentum has been big," says Keenan, and "the camaraderie around 'we work out together.'"

Getting started was the biggest challenge. "Most of them were not in the habit of fitness." He says

there were complaints being voiced after just one kilometre on the treadmill. But that has since changed.

Now, wrap-up sessions at the end of the day to report on activities often focus on fitness. As well, people are talking about the calories they burned, monitoring their heart rates and using the stairs instead of the elevator. "The momentum has kind of built from people talking about it."

Another benefit is "the whole self-esteem issue," says Keenan. "People are feeling better about themselves."

Keenan says there are health and weight concerns amongst the people LiveWorkPlay supports. "Health, nutrition is a huge issue for this population. It's a tough sell."

Attempts in the past have been made to generate interest in the local gyms, which would be ideal, but it's difficult to motivate people to go on their own, Keenan says. As well, the social context of the gym can be intimidating.

Because the pilot was a success, LiveWorkPlay decided to renovate part of its space in August to create the workout room. It received a \$5,000 grant from the Ottawa International Airport Authority and is waiting word on a second grant of the same amount. The grants will go towards the purchase of three treadmills and a recumbent bike. The room will also be equipped with a stereo system and water cooler. Keenan expects it to be used by about 24 people. "It's kind of coming together."

LiveWorkPlay is a non-governmental organization that partners with the public, private, and charitable sectors to provide supports and services to men and women who have intellectual disabilities.

If you are interested in making a donation towards the fitness room, click [here](#).