Mind Body Mingle
Supporting youth with disabilities to make friends, manage stress, get active and be independent

Background/Rationale:
Adolescence is a time of growth and development, but youth are at risk of developing poor eating habits and become less active during this time. For youth with disabilities, it can be difficult to find programs that promote healthy lifestyles that are accessible, inclusive and support their individual needs.

We wanted to engage youth and parents in order to learn more about the interests, motivators, successes and barriers for participation in order to design an effective health promotion program for teens with disabilities.

Design/Methods:
This multi-phase project took place from 2015-2018 and included the following activities:
- A literature review and Canada-wide survey for existing health promotion programs for adolescents with disabilities
- Youth program design workshops & parent survey
- Pilot program at the North York YMCA
- Evaluation
  - Goal attainment and qualitative interviews

What we learning/Results:
From the youth perspective:
Desired areas of focus for health promotion programs:
- Emotional wellness (mood, coping with stress, feeling supported)
- Improving physical fitness and/or muscle strength
- Knowing what physical activity options there are
- Maintaining healthy body weight
- Socializing and making friends

Mind Body Mingle Pilot
A community-based, recreational group program for high school students with disabilities. Co-developed with teen clients of Holland Bloorview, Mind Body Mingle provided youth with an opportunity to learn about themselves, participate fun activities that promote wellbeing and make friends while working toward personal wellness goals.

Who?
Clients of Holland Bloorview 13 – 18 years of age (up to 21 if still in high school)

Where?
North York YMCA

Key Themes/Results from the Pilot
From Qualitative Interviews with Participants & Coaches:

Goals identified included:
- Social skills
- Stress management
- Independence
- Activity exploration & enjoyment

Conclusions/Next Steps:
- Dissemination of Mind Body Mingle program manual
- Program to continue at North York YMCA and expand to other regions in October 2019

Factors that influence engagement in health promotion activity:
- Affordability
- Timing
- Facility Access/Comfort
- Age appropriate

From the parent perspective:
- Inclusivity through support of individual needs
- Desire for engaging activities to inspire and motivate
- Importance of opportunities for success and confidence building