

Eliminating barriers and promoting inclusion at Miami-Dade County Parks

By: Rachel Goldstein

As a fellow for the University of Miami Mailman Center for Child Development's 2013-2014 Emerging Transformational Leadership Program ("ETLP"), I am working with other professionals in the Disability Rights Community to transform systems of care for individuals with disabilities. Our goal this year is to promote the integration and inclusion of persons with disabilities in Miami-Dade County parks by ensuring the parks, playgrounds, and recreational programs and services offered are accessible and inclusive.

Adults with disabilities often do not have access to health promotion services and physical fitness activities due to lack of access to fitness facilities, inaccessible exercise equipment, and lack of adapted sports programs. Furthermore, children with disabilities are often excluded from playing at playgrounds due to inaccessible paths and play equipment. While we already know that getting outdoors makes people healthier and happier, we want to ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to the same opportunities and are able to participate in leisure and recreational activities at Miami-Dade County Parks.

Many of the parks in Miami-Dade County do not have accessible pathways for individuals with mobility disabilities to travel through the parks. Furthermore, almost all of the parks do not have accessible physical fitness or playground equipment. Playgrounds that are accessible for children with and without disabilities should be implemented in our local parks. Also, accessible exercise equipment should be available at our parks, such as equipment that would allow wheelchair users to remain seated in during their workouts. By ensuring that there are accessible paths throughout our parks, accessible exercise equipment, accessible playgrounds, and inclusive programs and services, Miami-Dade County can promote the health, wellness, and integration of people with disabilities. I am eager to help develop and implement this project so that can be replicated in parks throughout South Florida.