

Since 2008, Get FIT @ Rowan has been improving the quality of life of its participants, who are individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and their caregivers. Led by Rowan University students, Get FIT @ Rowan provides one-on-one fitness training and nutrition education for participants, who are age 16 and older. This fall, the Get FIT @ Rowan faculty and staff were fully prepared to postpone the program indefinitely until it was safe to meet in person again. Many participants and students were deeply disappointed by this news, but understood the nature of these unprecedented times.

This all changed with the help of the student program coordinator, Jenna Bottiglieri, who was eager to find a way to continue the exercise program. Bottiglieri pitched the idea to Program Director, Dr. Leslie Spencer, to run the program fully remote via Zoom. Once approved, the Get FIT @ Rowan team implemented a completely virtual program for the first time in Get FIT @ Rowan history.

Virtual Get FIT @ Rowan opened up a window of opportunities for people with IDD who had few other options for exercise, nutrition education and socialization. It allowed participants a chance to stay active in a time when it is crucial to stay home, while improving their health and daily lifestyles. It also gave 10 Rowan student trainers a chance to serve the participants in one-on-one fitness sessions, gaining valuable professional skills in the process. This virtual program also opened an opportunity for two Rowan seniors to have an internship as coordinators of the Get FIT @ Rowan program, for Bottiglieri in the Fall 2020 semester and currently Salvatore Murphy in the Spring 2021, in a time where finding an internship is nearly impossible.

The Rowan student trainers got creative when it came to the virtual exercise programs. The 10-week Zoom exercise program includes both group classes and one-on-one training sessions with student trainers. When the program was in person, there was the luxury of using a fitness facility on campus where the trainers could take their clients on walks, use a full range of fitness machines, and utilize free weights for strength training. However, when doing the exercise program fully from the client's home, the staff had to modify the original workout guide to be adaptable to home workouts.

Participants of the program were provided with a resistance band and were guided in a workout that incorporated the resistance bands to their fullest capacity. The exercise program included upper body, lower body, plyometric training, core, and balance exercises. Social interaction was also another traditional and valued aspect of Get FIT that the program team found creative ways to foster in a virtual environment.

In the past, trainers and clients would go on walks together and had time in between exercises where they could chat and socialize. To make up for this loss, the program team created “Snack and Chat” events where the participants and trainers



would come together via Zoom to make healthy snacks and socialize. These sessions were a

huge success, as everyone on the Zoom call made a fun and healthy snack (using a simple ingredient list shared ahead of time) and ate it together as they talked.

Overall, the Fall 2020 Semester of Get FIT @ Rowan and first ever fully virtual program was a success! The virtual exercise program is making a return for the Spring 2021 Semester with even more Snack and Chat events in addition to the group and one-on-one fitness sessions. While we cannot wait to be in-person again, Virtual Get FIT @ Rowan has been a great experience for the participants and the Rowan students who lead it.

We invite you to see the online article on which this COVID Story was based. Please check out “Students Move Rowan's Get FIT Program Online.” *Rowan Today* | *Rowan University*, 16 Dec. 2020, today.rowan.edu/news/2020/12/students-move-rowan-get-fit-program-online.html.