



# 'SHOE SHIFTING'

## HOW INCLUSIVE IS YOUR FITNESS FACILITY?

Discover a program designed to enhance the health of the 4.3 million Australians living with a disability. **By Carol Syer**

**H**ave you ever taken a really close look around your studio or club, and the patrons who utilise it? Who do you see? Or more importantly, who *don't* you see? Although we're all skilled and knowledgeable around the benefits of fitness, and we dedicate our days to encouraging others to improve their health and wellbeing, how welcome do you really make everyone feel when they're in your space? How accessible is your facility, your programs, your classes? Are you including everyone or could you be doing more?

### One in five Australians live with a disability

This equates to around 4.3 million people who are not currently being catered to by our industry. The most common primary disability is intellectual disability and, unfortunately, people with an intellectual disability are more likely to be obese than the general population (and obesity is already a serious problem among the general population, as we all know). Factors that contribute to this are limited access to appropriate community leisure facilities, lack of skilled staff onsite at such facilities, high calorie diets, and low levels of activity and exercise. So it pays to ask, 'are the needs of these populations currently being met by the fitness industry?' Do we design programs, classes and advertising with this group in mind? I think we all know the answer.

### Enter: the 'Enable' program

'Enable' was designed to create awareness, a sense of belonging, and to enhance lives through exercise. It was created by myself, my daughter Caitlin who has an intellectual disability, and fitness legend Marietta Mehanni, who has a brother with autism and so has also witnessed the challenges of living with a disability. Together, we researched what is currently available in this space in Australia, and when we confirmed the existence of a definite lack of training, we created a training platform to empower instructors with the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver programs to people with disabilities.

Enable is a full-day course that covers practical information including language and definitions of disabilities, and statistics around disability; exploration of inclusion, fears and challenges; two one-hour practical sessions: one for children and one for adults incorporating and explaining fundamental movement patterns; legalities, NDIS and insurance policies; marketing; and take-home notes.

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### First-hand experience

Having Caitlin present at the course ensures an exciting and authentic touch to this workshop, making it as unique as it is realistic and practical. We believe that people learn more about disability when people with a disability are involved in the delivery of the training.

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### Take a really honest look

Whether you are a group exercise instructor, PT, manager or any other member of fitness staff, I encourage you to take the time to really think about what it is like living with a disability, and then look at the business and take note of any barriers that may be limiting people with a disability from coming to you.

Don't be scared to invite people with disability into your business, to point out the areas where you can improve. They may identify physical barriers; they may feel unwelcome because of the type of advertising or marketing materials you use; they may identify negative staff attitudes, or a lack of appropriate programs. There are many reasons that you may not be aware of, as to why they don't currently come to your facility or use your services.

Of course, education – for you and your staff – is the best place to start when it comes to breaking down existing barriers and creating more inclusive fitness spaces. Everyone deserves the opportunity to exercise and Enable is here to kickstart the change. ♦