

## Introduction

- All children have the potential to thrive in the aquatic environment.
- By learning basic swim and water safety skills, children are introduced to a lifelong activity (i.e., the **future**) that they can participate in with **friends** and **family**.
- Including alternative therapies, such as aquatic programs, in children's treatment plans, provides one strategy for fostering **the 'F-words'** within children's health care.

## Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of a structured swim program on the lives of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and communication delays.

## Methods

- All participants had various roles and degrees of involvement in the study.
- Each child participated in a 1-hour, structured swim class, once a week for 10-weeks.
- A certified swim instructor was responsible for teaching each session.

Participants	#	Data Collected
Teachers	2	Semi-structured interview
Volunteers	13	Weekly progress forms Weekly journals Open-ended questionnaire
Parents	13	Background questionnaire Semi-structured interview
Instructor/ Researcher	1	Weekly journals Field notes

## Findings

- Parents, teachers, and volunteers agreed that all children benefited from participating in the program.
- Given the distinct properties of the water, it is believed that swimming not only fosters physical activity (i.e., **function** and **fitness**) but also provides social (i.e., **family** and **friends**) and emotional benefits (i.e., **fun**) for disabled children across the lifespan (i.e., **future**).

### Function

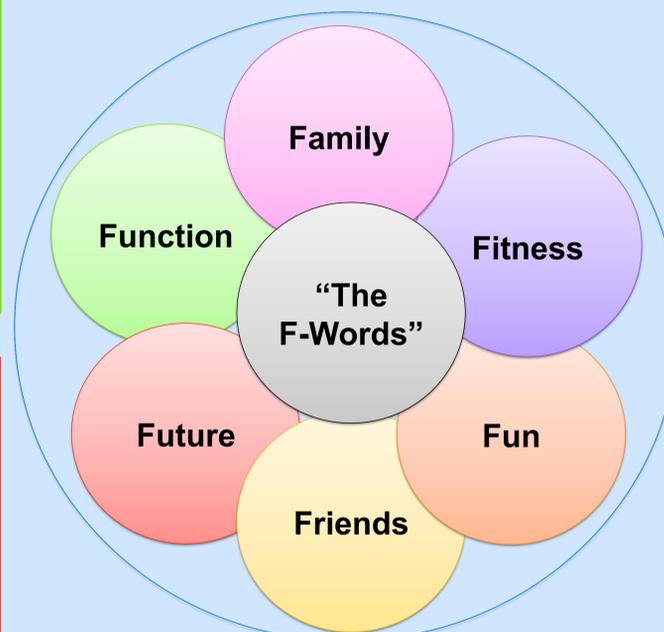
"The kids seemed so happy to swim. They enjoyed showing off their skills, which gave a sense of pride and they were happy to enjoy the different activities in the company of their peers and now friends. They also formed with us their swim buddies – full of trust and gratitude." ~Volunteer

### Family

"He is swimming once a week, he loves it and then we can do public swim, family swim. And he is always happy about swimming, he can't wait for swimming. We have had a lot of fun with him going swimming now that he is done these lessons." ~ Parent

### Fitness

"I think that was a combination of being in the water and then the physical activity because so many of these kids, I mean kids at this age are so strongly visual kinesthetic learners right, and the pool offers that need for that kinesthetic movement, in a way like you can't offer it anywhere else." ~ Teacher



### Future

"I think swimming is a really excellent way for children that can be sedentary to get physical activity...The pool offers a lifelong form of physical activity that they can do...And that's pretty powerful to be able to provide them with a physical activity that they can pursue into adulthood." ~Teacher

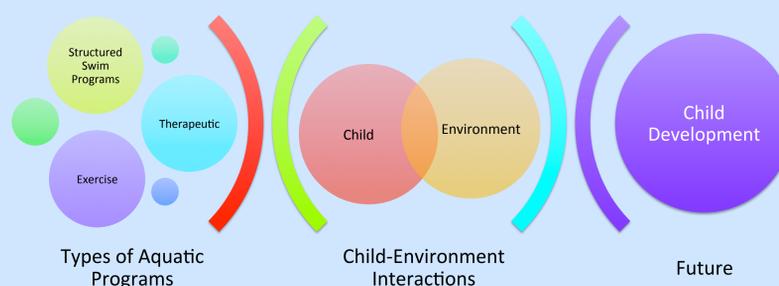
### Friends

"It was a great experience. The visible results of the children improving socially and physically over the ten weeks was incredible and it was great to form a bond with children and be able to share and live through their experiences in the water." ~ Volunteer

### Fun

"He is very excited about swimming. I know that in the mornings it is easier to get him out the door to school because it's swimming day. He's like "I get to go swimming today!" Because I see how natural [he] is in the water when he feels comfortable. He just loves being in there, he is a little fish." ~Parent

## The Ripple Effect: Implications



## Discussion

- To promote physical activity amongst disabled children, contextual factors (i.e., personal and environmental factors) must be considered simultaneously.<sup>2</sup>
- Swimming has been reported to be an enjoyable activity for disabled children.<sup>3,4</sup> If children are having **fun**, they are more likely to continue the activity into the **future**.
- Aquatic activities also provide a social environment where relationships can be fostered with **family** and **friends**.
- Lastly, the therapeutic features of the aquatic environment limit barriers and promote physical activity (i.e., **function** and **fitness**) for disabled children.
- Given the multiple potential benefits of aquatics for disabled children (i.e., **the 'F-words'**), it is important that the aquatic environment is included in children's treatment plans.

## Conclusion

- As physicians, therapists, and parents continue to search for effective interventions for disabled children, it is crucial that holistic services that focus on each of **the 'F-words'** are explored.

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