



The San Diego County Chapter of the ASA in collaboration with Aqua Pros Swim School has created an aquatics program for persons with autism called Pool PALS-The Pool for Persons with Autism Learning to Swim. One of the great loves of persons with autism is water and swimming. One of the great fears parents of autistic children have is the lack of awareness about the dangers of water. Drowning is the leading cause of death in children under the age of 14. There are many, many homes in California with swimming pools. The SDASA is committed to helping persons with autism learn to swim to avoid tragedy and enhance their quality of life.

The SDASA and Aqua Pros, recognizing the recreational and therapeutic benefits of swimming, as well as the tremendous safety issues, created this program beginning in 2002. Pool PALS includes the following components:

Scuba PALS

In 2007, we began ,Scuba PALS an adaptive scuba training program. Each "diver" is paired with a scuba diving instructor and an autism specialist. Specialized scuba gear is provided to insure optimum safety and learning.

SURF CAMP FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

This is a camp for persons with autism living in San Diego ages 5 years and up. It is held for 5 weeks each summer during July and August at Mission Beach and La Jolla Shores in San Diego. Each participant is paired, one on one, with an experienced surf/swim instructor. Typical daily activities include surfing, boogie boarding, beach-themed arts and crafts, playing games and water safety instruction.

This camp began with 15 participants the first year. The demand for surf camp was overwhelming. Each year the camp has grown. In 2007, there were 107 participants--a seven-fold increase since the first year! With additional financial support, we hope to continue the expansion of surf camp in the future.

For many participants, this is their first successful experience with surfing and boogie boarding. The campers are given structured, systematic instruction by experienced staff. There is a pre-camp training workshop for the instructors on successful strategies for working with persons with autism. Siblings are encouraged and welcome to attend.

MONTHLY FAMILY POOL AND PIZZA PARTIES

The San Diego County ASA provides free, monthly pool and pizza parties for persons with autism and their families. The parties are held the second Friday of each month throughout the entire year. There is swimming in an indoor, heated pool at the Boys and Girls Club in Clairemont. In addition, pizza, beverages and cookies are provided at no charge. Aqua Pros Swim School provides lifeguard supervision.

The parties began in August of 2001 and have become increasingly popular. Typical attendance each month is 75-100 adults and children. The event provides families with an opportunity to socialize and network in a safe and relaxing environment. It is an opportunity for the children to swim with their parents, siblings and peers. The San Diego Chapter of the ASA has an information table at each pool party with educational literature and resources for those in attendance.

ADAPTIVE SWIMMING LESSONS

When faced with learning a new skill or task, children with autism learn best with direct, one to one instruction. Because most persons with autism have limited awareness of dangerous situations, it is imperative that they learn to swim and become water competent as soon as possible.

Aqua Pros Swim School has been providing instruction for persons with autism for over 10 years. The San Diego County Chapter is committed to providing financial assistance for individual, swimming lessons for persons with autism living in San Diego County.

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