

Adaptive & Wheelchair Resources

Tennis can be adapted so that everyone can participate in the sport. People of any age, environment, condition or ability are invited to enjoy the game. In addition, the USTA is dedicated to providing top-flight programming and developmental opportunities to athletes of all ages, backgrounds, and physical and cognitive impairments. The goal, above all else, is for athletes to learn the sport of tennis, develop new skills they can apply in everyday life and to have fun.

3 CATEGORIES OF ADAPTIVE TENNIS

1. Intellectual and Developmental – cognitive challenges, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, Brain Injury
2. Physical and Recovery – CP, hemiplegia, amputees- standing, sensory impairments- blind, deaf, and/or stroke
3. Emotional and Social – psychiatric needs, substance abuse, PTSD

ADAPTIVE TENNIS TIPS

1. Become a Safe Play provider as it will give you access to curricula and equipment. Safe Play approval information: <https://customercare.usta.com/hc/en-us/articles/360041617612-How-to-Become-Safe-Play-Approved>
2. In order to start a program, you will need adaptive tennis equipment. Recommended equipment is on pg. 5 in the Adaptive Tennis Curricula, which you can access via the USTA National Adaptive website (see below).
3. It is essential for the tennis coach to attend adaptive coach development workshops including the annual USTA National Adaptive Championships coach workshop hosted at the USTA National Campus.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[USTA National Adaptive website](#)

[Register an Adaptive Tennis Program](#)

[Find an Adaptive tennis program in your state](#)

[Adaptive newsletter \(opt-in link\)](#)

CASE STUDY: DREAM COURT INC., ADAPTIVE TENNIS PROGRAM

| Submitted by Jessica Weyreuter

Introduction

Dream Court is a non-profit based in Montgomery, Alabama, with a mission to provide an adaptive tennis program to individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities: striving for inclusion and acceptance. Currently, Dream Court provides programming to 100 athletes annually, offering regular opportunities for physical, emotional and relational growth.

The vision behind Dream Court came from the founder's ambition to share access to the sport she had found so transformative to her own life to those with disabilities.

The program was announced in 2013 and given non-profit status in 2014. Dream Court has steadily continued its upward trajectory, becoming the premier adaptive tennis program in Alabama, as well as in the nation.

Dream Court has a staff of one employee who oversees the functions of the organization, over 500 volunteers critical to program infrastructure and 14 board members committed to the mission.

Dream Court's services include organizing purposeful and structured practices, running innovative competitions, arranging out of town travel and coordinating social community outings and celebrations.

The core of Dream Court's program consists of creating capability-oriented practices. These routine practices provide a stable community in which participants can explore new ways of movement and social skills in a controlled but fun environment. The organization strives for every individual, regardless of disabilities, to become the best tennis player they can be.

Organizers write a coach curriculum to train its coaches to consistently deliver a first-class tennis lesson specifically designed for each skill level.

Practices are offered during the spring, summer and fall seasons.

Competition is an important aspect of all services, as it supports measurable goals for each participant. Dream Court hosts two competitive events annually for local and out-of-state participants, including its Unified Doubles Play Day and USTA Wheelchair Tournament.

Goals

- Provide adaptive tennis programming for athletes with physical and intellectual disabilities.
- Provide opportunities for competition for Dream Court athletes within the adaptive tennis community.
- Create community among Dream Court athletes, volunteers, families and the general community.
- Create awareness, respect, and inclusion of individuals/athletes with physical and/or intellectual disabilities.
- Be a leading organization in the adaptive sports community by maintaining and furthering an impactful, sustainable and innovative presence.

Project Size: Served over 300 Individuals with physical and or intellectual disabilities throughout the last nine years.

Location: Montgomery, Alabama



Community Size: 199,054 is the population of the city. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Montgomery County of Alabama had 26,498 individuals under the age of 65 living with a disability as of July 2019.

Lead Advocate Organization: Dream Court, Inc.

Length of Project: Nine years; runs year-round

Budget: \$115,150

Funding Sources: Private donations, corporate sponsors, in-kind donations, local, regional and national grants.

Partnership(s): This program has benefitted from many partnerships:

- Collaboration with the City of Montgomery, Parks and Recreation Department which donated land for the construction of two tennis courts that became the program's home base and are still used for this project. The city has committed to provide ongoing maintenance of this site. Partnership with the city offers two more public tennis facilities for use for practices in the spring, summer and fall, as well as for Adaptive Play Days and tournaments.
- Great collaboration with local high schools, and colleges who send their tennis teams to volunteer with individuals in the program.
- Nonprofits such as Bridge Builders, Rooftop Friends and Junior League send volunteers.
- In-kind donations from local businesses have been beneficial to providing the best programs possible: Kreative Moments decorates the facilities for special occasions, and local restaurants provide meals for tournaments and social outings: Blue Bell Ice Cream, Chappy's Deli, Zaxby's, New York City Gyro and Burger King.

History

The vision behind Dream Court came from the founder's ambition to share tennis, a transformative sport in her own life, to those with disabilities.

Announced in 2013 and given non-profit status in 2014, Dream Court has steadily continued the upward trajectory of becoming the premier adaptive tennis program in Alabama, as well as in the nation. Dream Court's history is full of growth, beginning with the organization's kick-off party in May of 2013.

A short period of successful fundraising culminated in the construction of two tennis courts in one of the city of Montgomery's Edward Thompson Parks off Ray Thorington Road.

According to Jessica Weyreuter, Dream Court Founder and Director, "The program has been well received by the participating athletes and their families as well as the community as a whole. The latter gives rise to donors as well as the large number of volunteers that are essential to the efficient operation of the program.

"Dream Court has served more than 300 athletes and utilized over 700 volunteers since the initiation of the program. It has offered adaptive tennis sessions every spring, summer and fall season, beginning in 2013.

"The program began at ground zero with the participants having no prior experience and with volunteers simply trying to teach them how to make ball contact. Since that time, the organization has evolved, offering organized practices designed to meet the athlete's needs based on Special Olympic levels for those with intellectual disabilities, and Paralympic Levels for those with physical impairments."

There have been some stellar moments, Wayreuter adds. "In 2019, Dream Court was selected by the United States Tennis Association to put on a demonstration of their skills in Arthur Ashe Stadium during the US Open in New York City. Members of our donor base provided the funding to allow a group of over 50 to travel to NYC, put their skills on display at Ashe stadium during the round of 16, participate in two coin-toss ceremonies (Roger Federer/David Goffin and Serena Williams/Petra Martec), tour NYC and attend the Broadway production, Aladdin. The trip was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for the athletes and volunteers.

“We have witnessed our participants falling in love with the game through our program. Our biggest achievement is that we have formed a community through tennis that has broken barriers beyond the court. Through the construction of our courts, our athletes with special needs have a place to call home, and a location to go to where they feel welcome and safe.”

The program continues to give back to its participants, she notes.

“Consistency of year-round programs enabled each participant athlete to experience personal growth. Through structured programming, identification of strategies and elimination of roadblocks, each athlete has reached his/her current potential.

“Competitive opportunities have supported the settings of external and measurable goals for our participant athletes. We have offered seven Unified Doubles Play Days for those with intellectual disabilities and two USTA Wheelchair-sanctioned tournaments for those with physical disabilities. These opportunities have deepened the commitment to the game through reinforcing the desire for more practice.

“Offering several travel opportunities per year has instilled character, built confidence and shaped determination among those facing challenges.

“This year, we have ventured out beyond our original city of Montgomery. Just recently, we started an additional chapter in Daphne, Alabama, where we can promote an active lifestyle, model appropriate social behavior and continue developing self-esteem.”

Funding

- Dream Court is funded 76% by sponsorships; there are four different sponsorship levels: Title \$5,000, Gold \$3,500, Silver \$1,500 and Bronze \$500. Each sponsor is recognized on yearly t-shirts, court signage, webpage and social media shout-outs.
- 12.5% of funding comes from grant income, 6.5% by in-kind donations, 3% by donations and 1.7% by tennis program income.

Tips from the Pros

“We have the amazing opportunity to serve hope and to change lives through the sport of tennis. It is important to create and promote a worthy culture. Everybody who joins our team should feel better through a sense of belonging, connectedness, value, appreciation and dignity. Whether athlete, board member, volunteer or sponsor, each member of our community has a role in contributing to the impact and bigger picture of the mission.”

Lesson

“Tennis is a bridge that can be used to reach people, to love people and to impact people. We do not have to have all the answers, nor see the whole picture, but we have hope and faith that our work can create a ripple effect and make a difference beyond what we can dream or imagine.”



CASE STUDY: BUDDY UP TENNIS DALLAS | Submitted by Cheryl Halpern and Beth Gibson

Introduction

The program started in December 2008 in Columbus, Ohio by Founder Beth Gibson to help her 3-year-old son, Will, learn to play tennis.

“Individuals with Down Syndrome face increased susceptibility to physical and psychological health complications, including risk of obesity and Type 2 Diabetes, low muscle tone, loose ligaments, decreased core strength, atypical development of motor skills, high susceptibility to depression and anxiety, social withdrawal and challenges in behavioral activity,” states Gibson. “In recognition of these issues, the Buddy Up for Life program was founded, beginning with simple, experimental tennis activities such as popping bubbles or hitting balloons to build hand-eye coordination.”

Buddy Up Tennis clinics are comprised of 30 minutes of fitness conditioning and 60 minutes of professional tennis instruction. In these clinics, buddy volunteers are partnered with athletes to maximize and customize the experience. Athletes are provided with the opportunity to join a team, improve motor skills, enhance coordination, grow emotionally and create friendships. All activities are supervised by specially trained Buddy Coaches.

Goal

To enable athletes with Down Syndrome to flourish, succeed and reach their fullest potential in a unique environment that combines tennis, fitness and social activities.

- **Project Size:** As of May 2022, Buddy Up Tennis Dallas had 106 registered athletes and 385 volunteer buddies. Enrollment per tennis season was, at that time, approximately 40 athletes, ranging in age from five to 48.
- **Location:** The Episcopal School of Dallas, Dallas, Texas
- **Community Size:** The population of Dallas is approximately 1,300,000. The Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas has about 2,200 member families, many of whom actively seek programs that will engage their children.

- **Lead Advocate Organization:** Buddy Up for Life, Inc.
- **Length of Project:** This is an ongoing program. Buddy Up Tennis Dallas was offered weekly from March 2019 - February 2020 at an indoor tennis facility. During the pandemic, activities were all virtual and one-on-one. The program returned to its signature tennis clinics on beautiful outdoor courts in September 2021. Given the weather extremes in Texas, Buddy Up Tennis is now offered in the spring and fall, complemented by Buddy Up Fitness indoors in the winter and summer.
- **Budget:** The annual budget for Dallas is approximately \$25,000.
- **Funding Source:** Local grants and individual donors.
- **Partnership(s):** The Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas promotes these programs to its members and The Episcopal School of Dallas lets the program use the facilities on their campus at a reduced cost.

History

With extensive research and refinement over the past 14 years, the program has evolved into the first and only organization with a comprehensive tennis and fitness program tailored to athletes with Down Syndrome. But it wasn't finished growing yet.

In September 2018, Dallas community volunteer and lifelong tennis player, Cheryl Halpern, was inspired when she saw a feature on NBC National News about Buddy Up Tennis. Buddy Up Tennis had just been named the USTA Adaptive Program of the Year.

Cheryl raced to her computer to volunteer with the organization, only to discover that the Ohio-based organization did not have a chapter in Dallas. She immediately reached out to the organization's founder and the two began collaborating to build a chapter in Dallas.

In March 2019, Buddy Up Tennis Dallas made its debut as the largest launch in the organization's history. Fueled by community enthusiasm and the support of the Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas, the program has continued to grow, boasting 106 registered athletes with Down Syndrome (ranging in age from 5 to 48) and more than 385 volunteer buddies as of May 2022. It is the largest chapter in the country.

Based on a survey conducted this spring among Buddy Up Tennis participants

- Nearly 90% of parents strongly agreed that their athlete is excited to attend Buddy Up Tennis
- Over 80% of parents observed improvements in their athlete's tennis strokes, balance, coordination, movement and sportsmanship.
- 70% of parents strongly agree that their athlete has a positive attitude for the remainder of the day after Buddy Up Tennis.
- The three interpersonal skills for which parents observed the greatest improvement were listening, manners and comfortably speaking with peers.
- The three intrapersonal skills for which parents observed the greatest improvements were confidence, handling adversity and mental alertness.

Funding

This program has been funded by local grants from The Sandlot Children's Charity, Tennis Competitors of Dallas and The Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas. Individual donors were solicited through e-mail and social media campaigns; session fees are paid by most athletes (though full scholarships are provided upon request).

Buddy Up Tennis is now a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with 26 chapters nationwide.

Tips from the Pros

- Establish and maintain high expectations of athletes. Buddies are empowered to adapt drills and exercises to challenge their assigned athlete at an appropriate level. They model and promote sportsmanship, etiquette, teamwork, respect and effort during all activities.
- Utilize consistent language for tennis instruction. In Buddy Up Tennis, each of the major tennis strokes has been broken down into a series of simple steps that are verbalized and demonstrated regularly, facilitating learning even when athletes are paired with different volunteers from week to week.

Lessons

“The tennis community wants to give back to the sport,” says Beth Gibson. “When building a tennis program for a targeted population, tap into the local tennis community via leagues and personal networking. Many players recognize that the benefits of tennis go far beyond the court, and they are eager to share these gifts with others. This network of players can then leverage their contacts to help the program gain traction in the community. Ensure that volunteers have a rewarding experience so they will naturally advocate for the program.”

Enthusiasm and compassion are more critical to successful volunteering than tennis experience. Volunteer buddies and coaches create a positive and fun environment for the athletes, regardless of their skill level. This builds a love for the game and, more importantly, self-esteem.