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New Nonprofit Fitness Center Trains Athletes of All Abilities Lions United Helps People with Special Needs Build Confidence, Health & Skills

Mendota Heights, Minn. (March 15, 2018) – A new nonprofit is bringing together people of all abilities in an athletic training facility designed specifically for individuals with physical or intellectual disabilities. The organization also is dedicated to the Special Olympics Project UNIFY® philosophy, which aims to build “communities of welcome” for people with intellectual disabilities.

Lions United Fitness Center, which opens at 2535 Pilot Knob Road, Suite 126 in Mendota Heights, Minn., on March 25, 2019, focuses on building confidence through physical development, improving health through nutritional consulting and advancing skill levels through individual and sport-specific skills training. There is no cost to people with special needs for facility use or sport-specific training.

The nonprofit’s founder and lead trainer is Andrew Cameron, who is a certified and experienced Special Olympics coach and trainer. He said Lions United is committed to helping people achieve their highest-possible levels of health and athletic performance regardless of physical or intellectual capacities or challenges.

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“Whether it’s about general health, competing in a sport or having a great time improving with teammates, people who work out and train at Lions United won’t just get better and stronger, they’re going to gain the confidence to ROAR!” Cameron said.

Special-Needs Experience

Cameron has worked with people with disabilities and their families for more than 15 years. He holds certificates in both personal training and personal training in special populations, is a certified sports nutritionist and is certified in nine Special Olympics sports – basketball, bowling, flag football, floor hockey, golf, power lifting, softball, swimming and track & field.

He says experience with families is nearly as important as experience with the athletes. “One of the most distressing issues for families of people with disabilities is that many personal trainers in existing gyms/training facilities are not able to relate to their kids,” he said. “That’s not a criticism. It’s just that they don’t have the experience behind them.”

Lions United addresses that issue head-on. In addition to Cameron, the facility will be staffed by an experienced team of certified coaches, personal trainers and sports nutritionists, some of whom have disabilities themselves.

Full-Service Facility

Lions United Fitness Center is a 5,300-square-foot, full-service health and fitness training facility. Equipment includes an 11-piece circuit set that is slightly modified for people with disabilities, power lifting stations, rowing machines, kettle bells, RMT clubs, medicine balls and slam balls. Lions United also has cable machines and crank cycles that are ideal for people in wheelchairs, a tire-flipping machine, suspension weight-training machines and heavy bags. The facility is 100 percent Americans with Disabilities Act compliant.

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Zero - \$20 Monthly Fees

Fees for members with disabilities are \$20/month, a cost that will be offset completely through a partnership with the [National Independent Health Club Association](#). As long as a member works out at Lions United eight times a month, NIHCA will reimburse the member \$20 for that month. The net membership fee is zero. Membership fees for athletes without disabilities are \$40/month, but with the NIHCA reimbursement the net monthly cost is \$20.

Lions United's is partnering with [Built on Bravery](#), which provides a professional level of fitness training that is the foundation of a much broader health and fitness regimen. A group of eight elite athletes from Built on Bravery tested the Lions United Fitness Center in advance of its opening.

"WE ROAR AS ONE"

Lions United believes strongly in the Special Olympics' Project UNIFY philosophy. In fact, Cameron said, that's why "United" is part of the new nonprofit's name.

An aspect of Project UNIFY is bringing together people with and without disabilities to tear down societal barriers and personal reticence about interacting with people who are different than ourselves. The goal is to create "communities of welcome" for people with intellectual disabilities.

"We're committed to being part of a larger effort to build more welcoming communities, and the first one is Lions United Fitness Center itself," Cameron said. "This is a place where people with and without special needs can train together, build confidence in themselves and each other to achieve goals. It's how we really do roar as one."