

IMPROVING ACCESS & PARTICIPATION FOR ADAPTIVE SNOWSPORTS ATHLETES *EDUCATING FIRST RESPONDERS ON THE MOUNTAIN*

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BAC KGROUND

Adaptive snowsports athletes face occupational performance and participation challenges informed by environmental, personal, and occupational factors. Personal factors such as communication differences, sensory processing needs, and executive functioning challenges intersect with environmental barriers such as inaccessible emergency protocols, insufficient support from instructors, and lack of training among ski patrollers. Without adequate knowledge of disability and adaptive equipment (AE), patrollers may feel underprepared and respond inconsistently or unsafely, resulting in exclusion, miscommunication, and reduced self-efficacy for athletes. This Capstone Project aims to support athletes' participation by addressing patroller education and training. Occupational therapists are uniquely positioned to develop inclusive, collaborative, and context-specific education with the aim to improve access and participation for all athletes (Burtscher et al., 2019).

GOAL, OBJECTIVES, & ACTIVITIES

GOAL

Improve safety, access, and participation for Ignite Adaptive Sports athletes by creating and delivering occupational therapy-informed educational materials and resources to Eldora Ski Patrol.

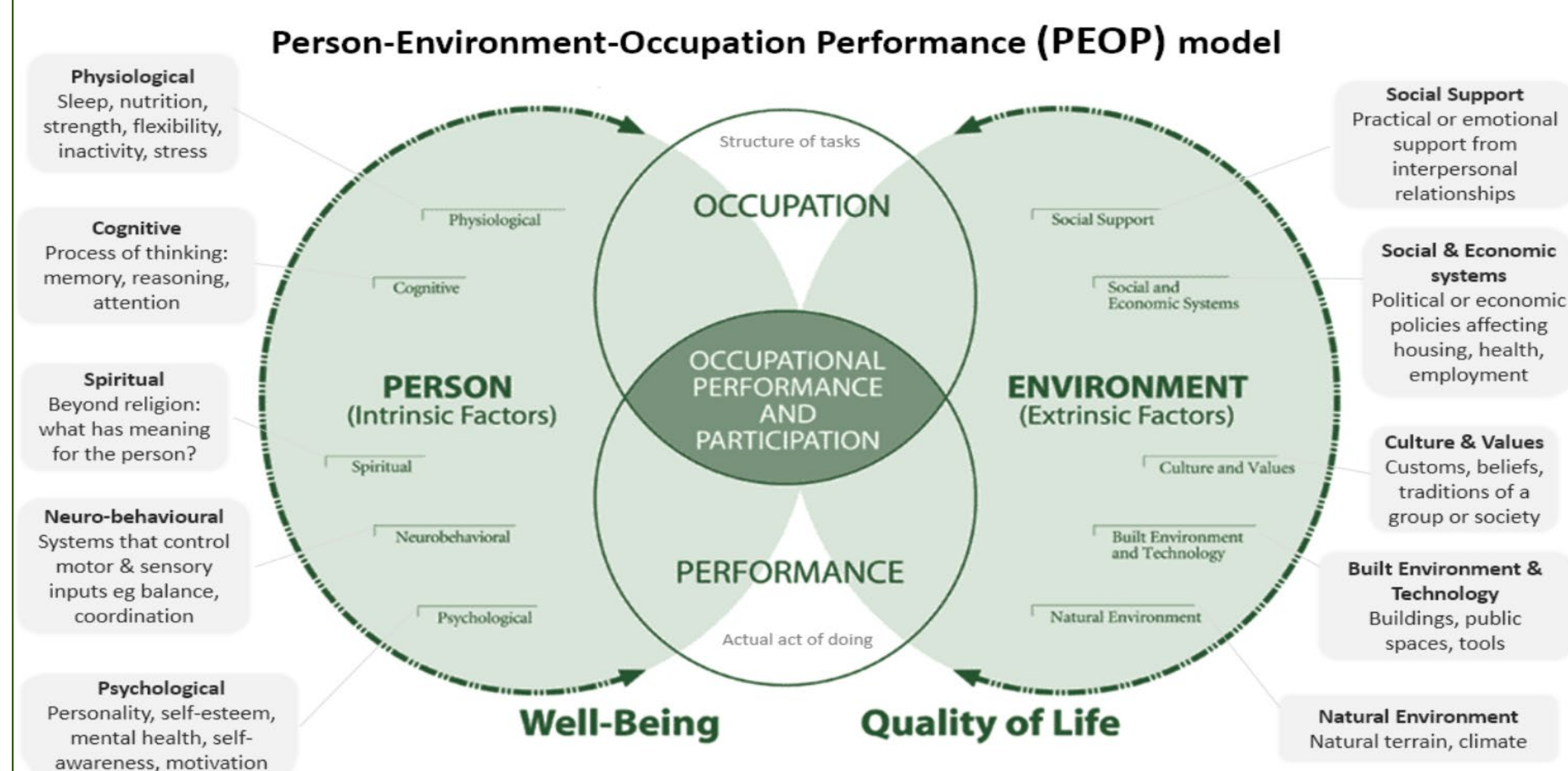
OBJECTIVES

1. Complete needs assessment (literature review, interviews, & surveys).
2. Create OT-informed training module focused on disability & adaptive equipment.
3. Deliver training module.
4. Evaluate effectiveness of training.

ACTIVITIES

- Conduct needs assessment.
- Analyze barriers to participation.
- Develop training content.
- Design inclusive emergency protocols.
- Pilot education session.
- Propose sustainability plan.

THEORETICAL BASIS



OUTCOME EVALUATION METHODS

Pre- and post-training surveys

Consistent feedback from stakeholders

Implementation of sustainability plan

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION



This Capstone Project partnered with Ignite Adaptive Sports to create and deliver an OT-informed training focused on disability and adaptive equipment to first responders. Based at Eldora Mountain Resort in Nederland, Colorado, Ignite is a volunteer-run organization providing snowsport opportunities to people with disabilities.

Before the training was delivered, 47 Ignite athletes and instructors completed a survey that asked about their interactions with first responders and what they believed was most important for ski patrollers to know. Their responses helped identify what content was most crucial to include in the training: themes included communication styles, sensory needs, respect for disabled athletes, AE management, and safety with transfers.

"My son would not be able to articulate what is wrong if he were to be injured. He needs a way to communicate without having to use words."

"Please be conscious of how disabled bodies can react intensely under duress."

"Patrol should be trained in communication differences for autistic people."

"I process speech slowly and need extra time to respond."

"Disability is not always obvious."

"I would guess they respond well to physical disability, but should learn more about neurodiversity."

"Procedures for using and transporting adaptive equipment."

DELIVERABLES

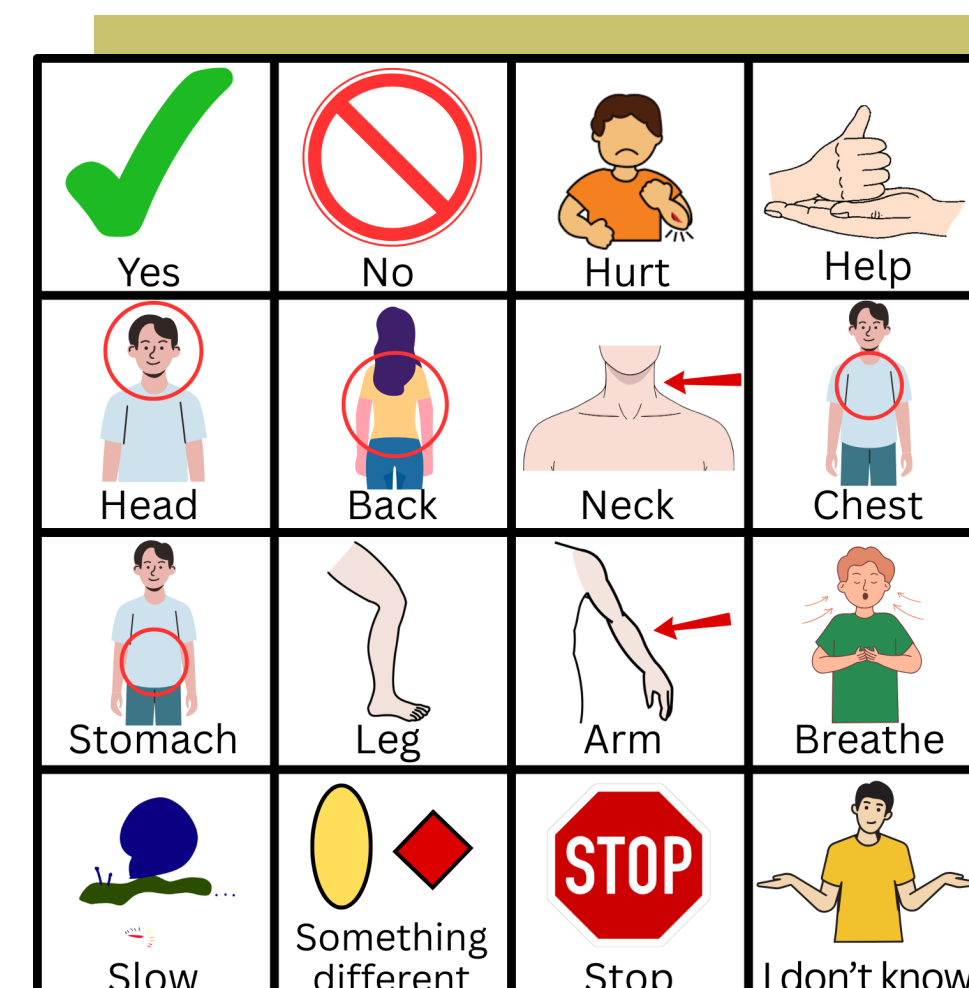
- 1.5-hour disability & AE training with lecture & hands-on portion
- 7 AE handouts & activity stations
- Emergency low-tech AAC board, designed in collaboration with speech language pathologist (SLP)
- Ignite athlete information cards
- Resource list for further learning
- Online access to training



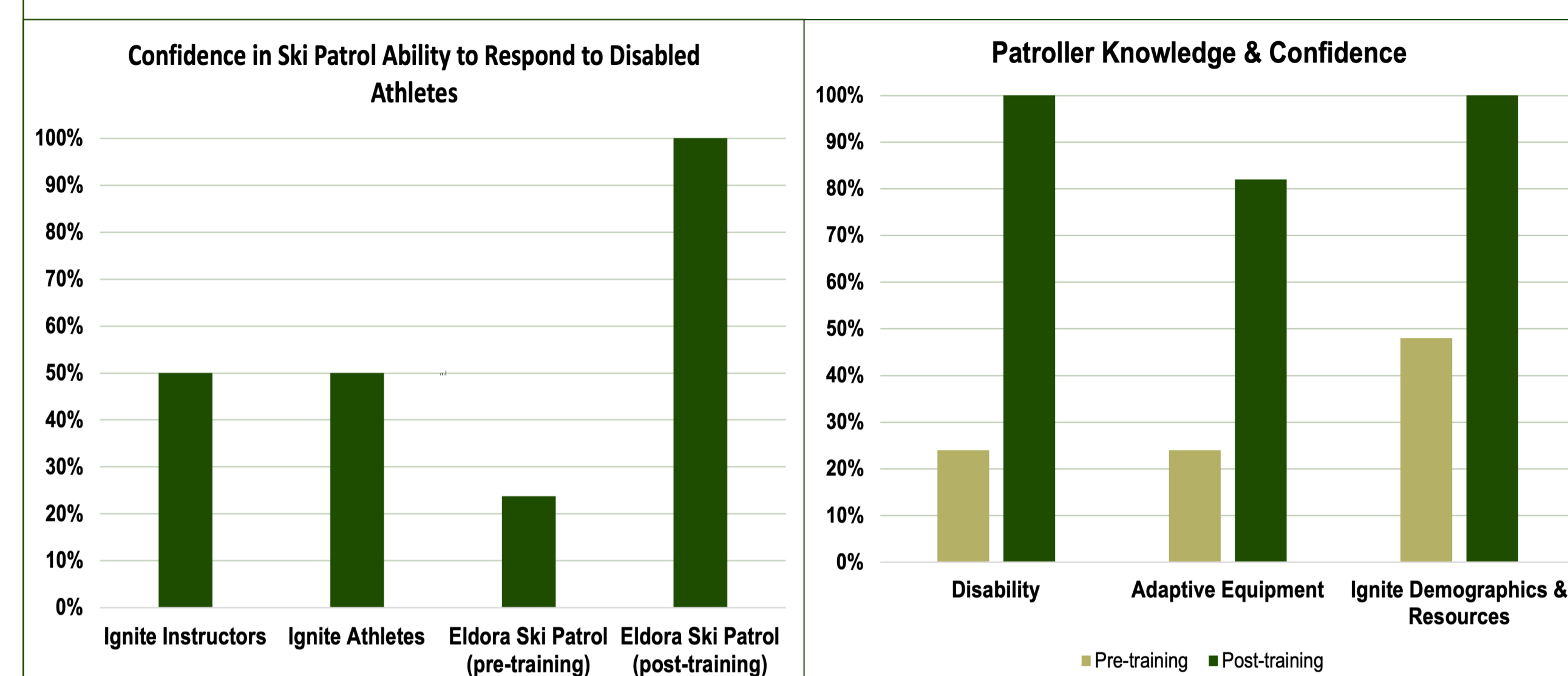
My name is: _____ I am diagnosed with: _____

If I get injured, I want ski patrol to know: _____

IGNITE ADAPTIVE SPORTS



OUTCOMES



Of the 11 patrollers that took both the pre- and post-training surveys, 100% reported an increase in knowledge of disability and AE, and 100% reported an increase in confidence responding to disabled athletes in emergencies. When asked what benefited them most, responses included:

"Learning about disabilities under the lens of OT."

"Getting hands on with [adaptive] equipment."

"Understanding language preferences."

"Learning new communication tools."

"The intersection of OT and emergency medicine."

DISCUSSION

1. This Capstone Project demonstrated that tangible improvements in safety and access to outdoor spaces for disabled populations can be made through education and awareness.
2. The development of this training in collaboration with key stakeholders, especially input provided by adaptive snowsports athletes, strengthened its relevance and effectiveness.
3. First responders in every context can benefit from more education and training around disability and adaptive equipment. As disabled people make up nearly 60% of emergency department visits, first responders' lack of education surrounding this population is unacceptable.
4. This training will continue to be improved upon and implemented annually with Eldora Ski Patrol. The author hopes to expand access to this training to other patrols across Colorado and the United States, and eventually to first responders broadly.

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- The instructors of Ignite Adaptive Sports, especially Alex Thackera
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- Sophie Anderson & Banjo Haley



References