

Academic Service Project of Walailak University: Providing Free Education to Communities Locally and Nationally

It is widely recognized that sports and physical exercise are crucial tools in promoting the health and fitness of individuals of all genders and ages, including the underprivileged and people with disabilities. Exercise and sports for health are considered significant factors that are emphasized by all sectors, with the ultimate goal of enabling the general public, including individuals with disabilities, to achieve good physical fitness and robust health. However, support from governmental agencies has been found to be inconsistent and lacks continuity, with limitations in several areas, such as access to resources, knowledge, or personnel dedicated to promoting exercise who are unable to perform their duties continuously. Challenges also include a shortage of personnel with specific knowledge or expertise, as well as barriers to reaching underprivileged groups, such as children, youth, and women with disabilities.

Addressing health problems and enhancing the physical, mental, and emotional capabilities of the members of the development centers, who follow repetitive daily routines according to calendars or regulations, may lead to monotony and boredom. They occasionally receive opportunities from benevolent individuals for activities such as meals or special events, but these are infrequent. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, many activities have been suspended, including exercise promotion activities. Additionally, this situation has impacted the staff and caretakers at these centers, who may experience accumulated stress from caring for individuals with disabilities.

Promoting physical exercise and recreational activities for children, youth, and women with disabilities, who are underprivileged, as a means to foster social equality through health-oriented yoga and recreational activities, is a strategy to help develop potential, increase happiness, boost confidence, and enhance the well-being of youth and women with disabilities. If caretakers and personnel involved with youth, women, and individuals with disabilities are trained to understand proper exercise and sports tailored to specific needs, this would be essential because each individual's disability is a complex and sensitive matter. Therefore, it is crucial to provide care and education on exercise and health promotion to caretakers to ensure long-term sustainability. This is an area where government and related agencies should provide support and encouragement to reduce social inequality among underprivileged individuals, aligning with the country's development policy aimed at creating an effective social protection system. This approach integrates education with social protection systems, enhances the adequacy of benefits, and reduces the exclusion of vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, the homeless, those with overlapping problems, and those in distress residing in development centers for individuals with disabilities in Nakhon Si Thammarat, which responds to the national development strategy outlined in the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan and contributes to achieving SDG Goal 3, which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, in accordance with the policies of Walailak University.

From the data, it was found that the daily behaviors and routines of the youth and individuals with disabilities residing in these centers include some activities to encourage exercise for children and women. The center requests support from Village Health Volunteers (VHV) in the area. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020, exercise promotion activities

have been interrupted, resulting in the center's members lacking physical exercise and movement to enhance their well-being. This lack is a significant cause that affects the deterioration and growth, as well as the rehabilitation and development of the health of underprivileged youth and women with disabilities.

Furthermore, youth and women in underprivileged groups within the development and vocational training centers are social targets who still lack access to knowledge and information related to exercise promotion, particularly activities beneficial to both physical and mental health, such as health-focused yoga and various recreational activities that enhance well-being for all ages. Therefore, the School of Multilingualism and General Education, led by Lecturer Piyanuch Khunsawat, in collaboration with Assistant Professor Dr. Wisaka Anantawat from the School of Agricultural Technology, has initiated a community service project to promote exercise for people with disabilities by incorporating yoga and physical exercise along with recreational activities, such as music and games, to encourage physical activity among children, women, and individuals with disabilities at the Development and Vocational Training Center for the Disabled in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Sakhaeo Subdistrict, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province, free of charge. This initiative aims to bring joy, relaxation, and improved physical health to all participants.

The objectives are:

1. To enable individuals with disabilities to achieve good physical fitness and gain self-confidence in performing tasks or activities.
2. To promote proper and enjoyable exercise methods for children, women with disabilities, and youth at the development centers.
3. To ensure equal opportunities for exercise for children and women with disabilities that are appropriate to their conditions and identities through health-focused yoga and recreational activities.

In the long term, it has been found that youth and individuals with disabilities participating in health-focused yoga activities exhibit stronger health, a positive and cheerful mental state, and increased happiness. Among the youth and women at the centers who participated in yoga activities, no less than 180 minutes per week, 92% reported improved well-being, out of the total target group of 65 youth and members of the centers.