



MedStar Health

## MedStar National Rehabilitation Network

### Opening Doors to Fitness for the Physically Challenged

For people with physical limitations, each day is filled with challenges—a host of barriers to living their fullest possible life. Maintaining optimal health and fitness can be their biggest hurdle—and finding a gym to accommodate them may be impossible.

In August 2014, with the generosity of a matching grant from the Gordon S. and Marilyn C. Macklin Foundation, MedStar NRH opened the doors to a first-of-its-kind Wellness Program to provide adaptive exercise opportunities to this growing population of men and women.

Four-days-a-week, free exercise classes that feature open accessible gym time, circuit training, sports conditioning and boxing-based fitness are helping dozens of people with physical disabilities stay physically active. “Exercise is critical to maintaining the progress they made during rehab—and preventing serious secondary conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, respiratory illness and pressure ulcers,” explains Coordinator Harsh Thakkar.

Initially implemented for people with spinal cord injury, adults with a broad range of disabling conditions including stroke, brain tumors, MS and genetic disorders have become a part of a close-knit fitness community at MedStar NRH.

*(continued on next page)*

### Letter From the President

At MedStar NRH, our mission is to help people with disabling illness or injury reach their highest level of functioning. For many, lack of exercise following rehabilitation jeopardizes their recovery—and poses a threat to their health. When they do seek out exercise, they discover traditional programs can’t meet their special needs.

The MedStar NRH Adaptive Fitness Classes are filling a critical need for these men and women. They are opening doors that have long been closed to people with disabling conditions—and promoting the health of a growing number of area residents.

Sincerely,

John D. Rockwood  
President, MedStar National Rehabilitation Network  
Senior Vice President, MedStar Health

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- Harsh Thakkar



Community Services*	\$610,004
Health Professions Education	\$3,737,715
Charity Care/Bad Debt	\$3,129,826
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$7,477,545</b>

\*Includes subsidies, community health improvement services, community building activities, financial contributions and community benefit operations

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## Growing by Word of Mouth

News of the Wellness Program’s classes has helped the program grow from its original 14 participants. Today more than 200 people are making the gym a part of their fitness routine, participating in structured exercise, and free-time assisted by volunteer physical and occupational therapists, and trainers.

“On most days, 20 or so clients are lined up at the door before we open,” says Kathleen Seward, PT. “They tell me if we weren’t here, they would have no place to go. That would mean a decline in their ability to function.”

The program has attracted people from throughout the Washington, D.C. region—and from all walks of life. Some are athletes getting into shape for an adaptive sports competition. Others are young people without access to adaptive exercise—and older adults on fixed incomes. Several participants are so appreciative of the program that they’ve made donations to keep the classes going.

“It’s a safe place for me to exercise,” says one client. “The staff is well trained and they give me confidence to do what I have to do.”

“It’s been a tremendous benefit for me,” another participant adds. “I see the progress I’ve made—and the progress others have made, too.”

That sense of community has been an added benefit of the classes. “This is more than physical fitness,” says Joan Joyce, director of therapeutic recreation and community outreach. “The participants have formed important social connections—they learn from one another, encourage each other and have become friends.”

