



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

**NORTH SUBURBAN
YMCA**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Inclusive Programming Enhances Y Experiences for Individuals with Special Needs

Northbrook, IL: June 2014 – Celebrating the end of an active, engaging year, students in the North Suburban YMCA’s H.A.W.K.S programs performed in a dance recital on May 31 for family and friends. H.A.W.K.S (“Helping All Wonderful Kids Succeed”) programs provide physical and social opportunities for children and teens with special needs, including art, dance, cheerleading, yoga, personal training and fitness classes in partnership with Exercise Connection.

The H.A.W.K.S program has earned praise from parents like Maureen Kogen of Northbrook, whose daughter Kelly participates in H.A.W.K.S programs. “Kelly really looks forward to the H.A.W.K.S program every week,” says Kogen. “The Y has done such a great job in creating programs for kids with special needs. The great thing is that, since it is designed for kids with special needs, it is at a level where Kelly can fully participate. At the same time, having the peer helpers makes it seem as though it is a typical program. Also, having the program at the YMCA where many of her friends from school take other Saturday classes creates a nice social opportunity for her.”

The Y’s commitment to the special needs community is clearly demonstrated with the year-round range of classes and support systems that promote accessibility and inclusion. During the summer months, special needs programming is incorporated into the Y’s Day Camp offerings. For campers requiring special attention and assistance, the Y works with parents to arrange accommodations that enable the child to participate fully with their peers. This support includes hiring and training one-on-one aides where necessary. The Y offers a unique H.A.W.K.S Counselor-in-Training program (CIT) for high school age students with special needs. CIT provides these individuals with a wonderful opportunity to build leadership skills in a group setting with effective coaching and close supervision. The teens work with peer CITs and a professional staff as they provide support for younger campers. Outside the camp setting, the Y continues to partner with Exercise Connection (EC) to offer popular exercise programs, which teach and motivate individuals with special needs to embrace a healthy and active lifestyle. The Y

also sponsors a Special Olympics Aquatics Team, which includes swimmer Joe King who has qualified for state-level Special Olympics competitions for the past three years.

Besides providing direct services, the Y has become a destination for many local partner agencies to expand their services to clients. Organizations including Our Place, ACT, and Clearbrook enjoy access to the Y's workout facilities and pool, promoting fitness for their clients while at the same time connecting them to the larger community in the Y's friendly environment. The Y's growing partnership with Exercise Connection has led to a relationship with the North Suburban Special Education District (NSSED), which this spring began to use the Y's new Youth and Family Wellness Center for participants to pursue EC activities during school hours. NSSED will be expanding the Y partnership by offering more classes both during the day and after school. As noted by Laura Fine, Director of Training for EC, "The North Suburban YMCA is the premier fitness destination for adults and children with special needs in our community."

Effective partnerships with organizations such as Total Link2Community, Keshet, NSSED, and The Glenbrook Transition has enabled engaging employment opportunities for several teens and young adults with developmental disabilities and special needs at the Y.

"Our Y is determined to serve the needs of our entire community, including individuals with special needs and their families," noted Sari Glazebrook, the Y's Director of Special Needs. "It's gratifying to know that these families trust us to provide the best guidance and support for their kids. We are looking forward to a fun summer with all our H.A.W.K.S participants, both at camp and in our classes."

Camp and summer program registration is going on now. Complete program guides can be found on the Y's website, www.nsymca.org. For more information on programs for individuals with special needs, contact Sari Glazebrook, sglazebrook@nsymca.org or 847 272 7250.



Photo Caption: Students Kelly Kogen, Chloe Lavarre, and Carly Pappas participated in the HAWKS Dance Recital at the North Suburban YMCA.

About the North Suburban YMCA

The YMCA is a not-for-profit entity and relies on donations to make services available for all families and

individuals in its 15-city region. All board members are volunteers, who donate their time, talents and financial resources. Located at 2705 Techny Road in Northbrook, the YMCA has served the northern suburbs of Chicago for over 45 years. The Y is about youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility, providing programs and services that address the needs of our diverse community and are accessible to all. For more information or to make a donation, contact Barb Flanagin at 847-272-7250 or bflanagin@nsymca.org, or visit www.nsymca.org.