

**Physical Education Program at the
Carmen Pingree School for Children with Autism**

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Autism is a Pervasive Developmental Disorder “characterized by severe and pervasive impairments in several areas of development: reciprocal social interaction skills, communications skills or the presence of stereotyped behaviors, interests and activities” (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). Children with autism also have motor skill and coordination deficits and decreased levels of fitness.

Nationwide the incidence of autism is one in 150 children. In Utah, however, the incidence is even higher - one in 133 children. Physical activity has been shown to decrease stereotypical and self-stimulatory behaviors and increase focus of attention in children with autism.

In January 2007 Dr. Hester Henderson and several of her graduate students started the physical education program at the Carmen Pingree School for Children with Autism. The graduate students in the Special Physical Education program taught the program and supervised the undergraduate students in the Introduction to Special Physical Education (a service learning course) who taught 36 hours in this program as their practicum internship.

The goals of the program are to improve motor skills, increase levels of fitness, and improve social skills. Students are evaluated on motor skills and fitness. Class and student evaluation forms are developed. Then physical education activities are provided based on assessment results.

This program has been very successful in meeting its goals and has provided an excellent practicum experience for the service learning course and the graduate students.