

A clear path so close, yet far



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If an activity or action is considered effortless, it's often referred to as “a walk in the park.”

For the children and adult who are clients of Mission Road Developmental Center, however, a walk in the park isn't always a walk in the park.

That's because they're either physically, intellectually or developmentally disabled. A lot of the activities that we take for granted are very difficult for them.

Exercise is important for Mission Road's 340 clients who, because of the nature of their disabilities, are prone to being sedentary. This makes sense. To be blunt, some don't know better. And even if they do, many require supervision. For others, their physical barriers are impossible to overcome without adaptive equipment and a helping hand.

A University of Florida study shows that only 15 percent of adults with IDD (intellectual or developmental disabilities) exercise enough. Without exercise, they've got a greater chance losing muscle tone, suffering from limited joint flexibility, and developing conditions such as osteoporosis and pressure sores.

Obesity strikes 23 percent of adults and 16 percent of children, according to the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. Among the disabled, however, obesity strikes 36 percent of adults and 22 percent of children.

For that reason, said Lora Butler, Mission Road's executive director, the center includes exercise in the educational and lifestyle programs for most of its clients.

Clifford and Adele Bledsoe opened Mission Road Foundation and School in 1947 to care for their own son, Clifford, and two other children with similar disabilities, according to the Center's archives. Mission Road operates a residential community on the grounds and a job-training program at the Unicorn Center on Hamilton Wolfe Road.

Plans to get Mission Road clients to walk in the park aren't easy. Even though there are seven well-maintained city parks within a 5-mile radius of Mission Road's campus, these parks aren't always accommodating for Mission Road clients.

There are sometimes bicycles and joggers on those paths. That probably wouldn't bother most of us, but a lot of Mission Road's consumers don't deal very well with that sort of distraction. When confronted with sights or sounds that overwhelm them, said Mission Road's Lynette Nelson, they'll sometimes cup their hands over their eyes or ears.

As luck would have it, Mission Road has its own quarter-mile-long path on campus. Built a few years ago, it meanders casually through an empty field on the 22-acre campus. A fence blocks it off from the San Antonio River, which runs along the property line.

But the path is narrow and overgrown. Mission Road wants to upgrade it into a recreational resource that clients can use.

The plans call for a walkway that's compliant with the Americans With Disabilities Act. The walkway would be 3 feet wide, paved and leveled so that the gradient is easily navigable by wheelchairs. There also are plans to build ADA-compliant fitness stations along the path and landscape the barren field.

This isn't cheap. The whole project, Butler says, would cost \$230,000. The "starter" plan, which would level the path, widen it and pave it, would cost \$100,000. Mission Road is trying to raise money for it.

The people and the businesses of San Antonio have always had a big heart. They've always helped Mission Road and places like it. It would be great if San Antonio could step up again to make the world a little better for Mission Road's clients.

You can call or email me if you're interested in helping. I'll be more than happy to help you connect with Mission Road officials.

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