Navigating the community with a disability: How Ability App can help and why OTs should get involved

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Navigating the community with a disability: How Ability App can help and why OTs should get involved

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Expert Mentor – Alex Knoll

Introduction
Ability App was founded by Alex Knoll, a 14-year-old international speaker with a passion for helping provide resources about accessibility. Ability App is a free app where users can find:
• Disability friendly and inclusive features at public spaces around the world
• Business info, photos, rating, and comments
• Results that can be filtered based on disability type: cognitive, mobility, hearing, vision

Mission & Vision
“We strive to serve people with disabilities, their families, and caregivers by providing a road-map of accessible public spaces and business locations around the world while raising awareness about the importance of accessibility and inclusion.”

Needs Assessment
Research
• 1 in 4 adults (61 million Americans) in the United States live with a disability that impacts major life activities (CDC, 2015).
• When you look at social isolation and loneliness in older populations, a lot of those problems can be because the community gets harder for them to navigate and access (Marleo, 2020).

Ability App
• There is a need to expand the number of locations that are available for Ability App users

Goals
• Student will facilitate group meetings with Ability App ambassadors and other health care professionals/students
• Student will synthesize the lived experience of individuals with disabilities, via PowerPoint presentation by reviewing forms of multimedia
• Student will advocate for the needs of individuals with disabilities regarding community accessibility

Delivery & Outcomes
I reached out to 10+ different OT schools around the nation to discuss Ability App, community accessibility, and the need for OT involvement. I held virtual meetings with Tennessee State University, Belmont’s Student Occupational Therapy Association (BSOTA), and was a guest on Dr. Stephanie Lancaster’s podcast called “On The air”. I was able to become well educated on the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities and used my new expertise and OT lens to complete 40+ reviews on Ability App this semester. The following pictures are examples from two reviews I completed in Tennessee.

Country Music Hall of Fame:
Ross’s Landing Playground:

Resources
There are many different resources that provide information on accessibility standards and measurements. These are some of the resources I used and referenced as I completed assessments and reviewed different places for accessibility.
• Ability Ambassador Guidebook
• Guidelines for Disability Inclusion in Physical Activity, Nutrition, & Obesity Programs and Policies
• The American with Disabilities Act Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal
• Environmental Assessment of Public Recreation Spaces (EAPRS)
• Guidebook for EAPRS Direct Observation Tool
• How to Advocate in the Time of COVID – Tennessee Disability Coalition

Conclusion & Future Goals
• There is a need for the development of new positions for OTs within community initiatives (Hyett et al., 2020)
• Societal attitudes influenced participants feelings of being included and involved in society...change in attitudes is necessary to increase accessibility and participation for power mobility device (PMD) users (Weidehammar et al., 2019).
• OT is poised to lead in diversity, equity, and inclusion to maximize the health, well-being, and participation of all people, groups, and populations. By completing reviews on Ability App, OTs can advocate for individuals with disabilities, promote accessibility and increase awareness of these topics in every community.
• Future goals: increase awareness of Ability App and continue to network the app around the occupational therapy community, continue to advocate for the role of OT jobs in the community, and increase awareness of the lived experiences of individuals with disabilities

Community Accessibility

Mobility:
Visual:
Hearing:
Cognitive:

Acknowledgments
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Scan the QR Code or visit theabilityapp.com for more information about the app and how to get involved!

References:
Available upon request