

The Need Exists

The Opportunity Exists

The Spirit Exists

Indoor rowing has become a phenomena often disconnected from our experience as rowers. It offers the disabled an excellent avenue for improved physical activity; it offers community through an ever-growing worldwide online community; it opens the door to both recreational and competitive opportunities. By starting your **Adaptive Initiative** with indoor rowing, you will lay the foundation for expanding into **Land-Water** programs.

The following outlines our experiences over the last four years to bring the sport we love within the reach of those with disabilities. While our efforts were certainly propelled by the inclusion of rowing in the **2008 Paralympics**, we have come to appreciate the broad range of opportunities that both indoor and on-water programs offer whether recreational, competitive or educational. With patient planning, a shared knowledge base combined with active outreach programs; every club in this country can open their doors, expand their mission and become inclusive models and leaders within their community. In the process you will discover **miles of smiles** and may just help train a future **Paralympian**. Here are the steps we have found successful as we approached unknown waters.

Stage 1: Adaptive Introduction/Outreach

We all understand the ‘erg’; nobody else does. Mention ‘indoor rowing’ to the uninitiated and you are confronted with quizzical stares of confusion. The general response is: ‘how do you row indoors? Once they understand, they need to experience indoor rowing; you also need to understand the world and demands of the disabled. Your ‘erg race’ offers an excellent opportunity to **Reach out, Introduce** and **Explore**.

Do the following at your next event:

***Arrange a ‘demo/exploration’ area**

Set up an adaptive erg and allow ‘invited’ participants to explore/discuss

***Vendor participation**

Approach **WinTech** (local rep), **Concept 2** (spare rail) and **Chosen Valley** to provide ‘loan’ equipment and participate in the outreach effort so you can measure/evaluate interest while gaining knowledge from their experiences.

***Invite Service Organizations**

Contact the local park district, rehab centers and organizations providing sport programs for the disabled. Speak to the ‘director’ level and arrange for them and their staff to come and explore indoor rowing while witnessing a real event.

Stage 2: Build Awareness – Expand Dialogue

Get your ergs out of the boathouse and go to local events/organizations to provide hands-on experience for those with disabilities. Encourage local organization to invite you to their facilities/events so people can try indoor rowing. At **CIRC**, we have divided our efforts into recreational and competitive.

Recreational efforts focus on all established disability programs for those 8 and older with no expectation of recruiting competitive athletes. Our **competitive** effort focuses on those who participate in competitive sport. Most of these athletes are over 20 who compete in wheelchair basketball/tennis, sled hockey, Goalball, swimming or any other paralympic sport. The objective, whether recreational or competitive, is to entice and encourage while building mutual confidence and exploring program development. Furthermore, you are establishing a network of contacts while meeting experienced coaches, physical therapists and program directors.

Stage 3: Adaptive Exhibition

You are now ready to have an *Exhibition Race* at your next indoor event recruiting at least four athletic competitors from among those you have met over the past year. This should also be a media event. We run our event immediately after our master competitors and before our junior/collegiate events so that the media can cover all aspects of indoor rowing within a 90-minute period.

Stage 4: Continued Awareness: Land-Water Pilot Program

Use your momentum to further build awareness and expand your outreach programs. It is also critical to nurture a 'volunteer pool' as awareness and program participation increase. This stage is decision time for your club. Will you:

Only offer an adaptive erg event once a year?

Continue the adaptive out reach program?

Launch an *Adaptive Land-Water Pilot* program (ALWP)?

An *ALWP* allows your club to expand its community services without impacting the early morning/late afternoon rowing/training programs. Our first pilot program will start in February 2009 with plans to run several indoor sessions over a two-month period with a water introduction in late spring. This program assumes handicapped accessibility. We are partnering with the **Chicago Park District** who is providing club modifications to meet ADA requirements. Meeting and working with the Chief Disabilities Officer of the **CPD** was one of our initial objectives from Stage 1. It has been a very productive and supportive relationship. I can appreciate that this process demands time and energy therefore it is worth mentioning that we have never run into 'stumbling blocks' that undermined our efforts or threatened our mission.

More Information:

The following links are to pdf files on the **Chicago Indoor Rowing** site. These explain in detail our experience over the past 4 years as we progressed from *Stage 1* through *Stage 4*.

[Why Adaptive? The value of inclusion](#)

[Adaptive Rowing/Paddling: A Pilot Program](#)

[Adaptive Initiative: The CIRC historical journey](#)

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