

**Skills on Wheels: Volunteer Motivation and Involvement Within a Pediatric Wheelchair  
Skills Training Program**

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**Author Note**

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### **Abstract**

Volunteering involves offering one's time and skills without financial compensation. The therapeutic benefits of volunteering include a greater sense of community, improved social relationships and increased feelings of self-efficacy. This 14-week doctoral capstone experience (DCE) focuses on improving the volunteer experience by integrating evidence-based training, management strategies, and understanding volunteer motivations. Skills on Wheels, which teaches wheelchair skills to pediatric manual wheelchair users, relies heavily on volunteers, particularly from healthcare and therapy backgrounds. However, challenges such as volunteer retention and a disjointed volunteer community prompted a need for a structured training program and data collection on volunteer motivations. The project involves developing a comprehensive volunteer training program that fosters autonomy, competence, and social connection, thereby enhancing volunteer satisfaction and retention. Using the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO), the paper highlights how volunteer involvement can be optimized to build meaningful community engagement. Qualitative and quantitative data showed that through utilizing a play-based structure to teach wheelchair skills, participants were able to form deeper connections with their participants and families when compared to previous years of Skills on Wheels. The doctoral capstone project established a sustainable volunteer training program as well as play-based interventions that will continue after the DCE. This project contributes to the understanding of how volunteer management can enhance both the volunteer experience and the therapeutic outcomes of volunteering.

## **Skills on Wheels: Volunteer Motivations and Involvement Within a Pediatric Wheelchair Skills Training Program**

In 2023, more than 75.7 million Americans (28.3%) formally volunteered with an organization, giving more than 4.99 billion hours of service (AmeriCorps, 2024). According to the Cambridge Dictionary, volunteering is defined as “offering to do something that you do not have to do, often without having been asked to do it and without expecting payment” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Through volunteering, individuals contribute their time and resources to help others without expecting anything in return. However, in order to reach 75.7 million people per year, volunteering must offer benefits.

The Occupational Therapy Practice Framework, 4th edition (OTPF-4) considers volunteering to be a meaningful occupation that can help people develop a sense of meaning and build skills (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020). The OTPF4 divides the occupation of volunteering into two categories: volunteer exploration and volunteer participation (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020). Volunteer exploration is defined as identifying and learning about opportunities for unpaid work consistent with personal skills, interests, location and time available (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020). Volunteer participation is defined as performing unpaid work activities for the benefit of the selected organization (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020). Research suggests that volunteering at an organization where individuals feel valued and respected can enhance perceived health outcomes, a topic explored further in this paper.

Occupational therapy students are often encouraged to volunteer through their university whether for a course obligation, to build confidence or to spend time with classmates and friends. One opportunity offered at Indiana University (IU) Indianapolis is to become involved with Skills on Wheels. Skills on Wheels is an evidence-based wheelchair skills teaching program that teaches important wheelchair maneuvering skills to pediatric manual and power wheelchair users. This program relies on volunteers' generosity to operate successfully. Skills on Wheels recruits volunteers from all over Indianapolis who have therapy/ healthcare backgrounds and provides them with training and knowledge required to teach skills, ensure participant safety and use clinical decision-making skills to grade activities for participants. Through volunteering their time at an organization like Skills on Wheels, occupational therapy students have the opportunity to build confidence, establish social connections, increase clinical knowledge and more. The purpose of this capstone project is to develop and establish a volunteer experience that enhances the therapeutic benefits of volunteering through training and volunteer management techniques. The project will also collect data on what motivates people to volunteer in order to increase volunteer adherence for future programs.

## **Needs Assessment**

### **Site Profile**

The site for the doctoral capstone experience (DCE) is a community-based setting located on the IU Indianapolis campus. Skills on Wheels is a four-day program that spans across all four Saturdays in April for three hours each session. Each session has 40 participants ages 6-17. The program takes place in Richard M Fairbanks School of Public Health in Indianapolis, IN. Skills on Wheels is an evidence-based training program designed to help kids maneuver life situations

in their wheelchairs (*Skills on Wheels*). The site mentor, Tony Chase, PhD, is an expert in research methods and assessment whose research background in childhood disability and mobility has resulted in a collaboration between Indiana University, Riley Hospital for Children, and The Crann Centre for Rehabilitation in Cork, Ireland. The site mentor indicates that this year's program will require a new volunteer training program as well as data collection on what motivated people to volunteer at Skills on Wheels in order to better understand how to build community and increase volunteer retention (T. Chase, personal communication, December 17, 2024).

## **Methods**

The doctoral capstone student has been a research assistant for Skills on Wheels for the last two years. The student was interested in becoming involved with the program through a capstone project in order to improve the impact of the program. After receiving confirmation from the site mentor that Skills on Wheels would take on the capstone project, the student conducted a brief phone interview to further discuss the project. During this brief interview, the student gathered information regarding the needs of the site. The student completed a student learning plan as well as an IRB for the project. This project has received approval through the Institutional Review Board at Indiana University.

## **Themes**

Before the interview with the site mentor, the student created a list of questions to help guide the interview. The site mentor identified that through the capstone project he would like a student to develop an evidence-based training program for volunteers, recruit volunteers, manage volunteers during the program and collect data on motivations behind why people volunteer at Skills on Wheels. In previous years, the community at Skills on Wheels has felt “disjointed” and

the content expert believes there is a disconnect between volunteers (T. Chase, personal communication, December 17, 2024). The DCE will aim to use evidence-based volunteer management strategies to build community within the program. The site mentor indicated that in previous years of the program, the participant and volunteer recruitment had been completed by the same person and that the roles needed to be split to ensure success for the program. The capstone student will collaborate with her capstone counterpart who is responsible for participant recruitment. Together, the two will develop evidence-based activities and structure for Skills on Wheels.

## **Gap Analysis**

### **Current State**

Skills on Wheels was founded by Tony Chase, PhD, in 2020 at Indiana University Indianapolis. In its fifth year of the program, the team decided to make logistical adjustments. The past four years, Skills on Wheels ran over five Saturdays, the first and last day being used to administer assessments. This year, the team decided to eliminate the assessments and decrease program days to four Saturdays. This is a significant change for the program. In years past, volunteers were extensively trained on assessment administration using in person sessions. Since Skills on Wheels is no longer using an assessment tool, the way volunteers are trained will need to be adjusted.

With the elimination of assessment days, Skills on Wheels has decided to become more occupation based with training content in its fifth year. This shift requires adjustments to volunteer education and training. In previous years, Skills on Wheels employed a bottom-up approach to training wheelchair skills. This year, the site is seeking to utilize a top-down

approach, using play-based interventions to teach skills. The site mentor reports that the current state of the community does not encourage volunteers to return year after year or volunteer consistently. Currently, the site is in a transition stage, with hopes of bringing new challenges to overcome.

### **Community Profile**

Skills on Wheels heavily relies on volunteers to make the program run smoothly. A majority of volunteers are recruited from local universities and graduate level programs including but not limited to: IU Occupational Therapy, IU Physical Therapy, UIndy Occupational Therapy, UIndy Physical Therapy, IU School of Medicine, IU Physician Assistant Studies, and IU undergraduate kinesiology students. The program also recruits Registered Occupational Therapist volunteers from Riley Children's Hospital. In years past, most volunteers were graduate level students studying occupational therapy or physical therapy.

### ***Desired State***

The desired state of the site is to provide a volunteer experience that promotes community and consistency to help Skills on Wheels succeed at teaching wheelchair skills. In order to achieve this, Skills on Wheels wishes to implement an updated method for recruiting, training and managing volunteers as well as collecting data on what motivates people to volunteer via online surveys. Through using up to date practices in volunteer involvement, Skills on Wheels wishes to create an enriching, fulfilling and educational experience for people that builds a strong community and encourages continued involvement with the program.

### **Identified Gap(s)**

Homing in on the therapeutic values of volunteering as an occupation can enhance a volunteering experience through building social bonds and community. Skills on Wheels seeks to foster community through volunteering at the program. However, the program requires adjustments to reach this goal. Currently the gap between the current state and the desired state can be explained through the Model of Human Occupation. In order to increase occupational motivation to become involved in the program, people have to feel autonomous, competent and relevant within the environment (Kielhofner & Burke, 1980).

To help bridge this gap, the capstone student will implement a training program and volunteer management strategies that elicit these required ingredients for occupational participation. Providing training to increase competency and confidence, including volunteers in decision making processes and making the experience valuable socially and clinically are all evidence-based strategies that will be utilized to help bridge the gap between current state and desired state.

### **Literature Review**

The author conducted a literature review to synthesize information to develop the capstone project in conjunction with the needs of the site and the target population. Through this capstone project, Skills on Wheels would like to develop a volunteer recruitment and education program in preparation for the program. The project will also gather data regarding motivation behind why people choose to volunteer their time at Skills on Wheels to help better understand how to recruit and maintain volunteers. The site requires the recruitment of volunteers to help the program run smoothly on program days. The literature search focused on the question: What are

best practices and motivations regarding recruiting and maintaining volunteers at Skills on Wheels?

### **Search Terms**

A search was conducted by the author to explore current research as it related to the guiding research question. Searches were conducted on PubMed, Google Scholar and the American Journal of Occupational Therapy. Each search contained one or more of the following search terms: volunteer, motivation, recruitment, satisfaction. All articles were filtered to have been published within the last 30 years. All research designs were included. Relevant literature included systematic reviews, randomized control trials, and umbrella reviews.

### **Motivation to Volunteer and Continue Volunteering**

Humans are an inherently helpful species. One popular manifestation of human helpfulness is the act of volunteering, where people voluntarily provide services, companionship or counseling to others without financial incentive (Clary et al, 1998). The concept that people would make personal sacrifices for the sake of helping others, often strangers, has long fascinated scholars of behavior (Clary et al, 1998). Current literature suggests several themes regarding motivations to initiate volunteering, and what makes people return to volunteer.

#### ***Motivation for Volunteering***

The act of volunteering does not begin when someone arrives at the event or nonprofit. The process of volunteering involves learning about an event, considering volunteering, accepting an invitation to help, attending a training/ orientation and finally, performing the task (Cnaan et al., 2022). Throughout these stages, an individual is assessing and evaluating the values of volunteering against the costs of their personal time and resources.

Many people seek volunteering opportunities to gain knowledge and skills as well as build their resume with meaningful experiences. Young adults are more likely to volunteer if the opportunity is applicable or appealing to potential employers (Cnaan et al., 2022). Motives for volunteering are influenced by the delicate balance between giving back while also developing new skills (Dempsey- Branch & Shantz 2022). Volunteering provides a unique low-stress environment where learning can thrive. As unpaid participants, volunteers can focus on learning without the pressure of meeting employer expectations. The experience is the perfect combination of giving and receiving that motivates people to continue to volunteer.

Since volunteering unites people toward a common goal, it naturally fosters community and social relationships, which motivates participation. People are drawn to volunteer work because they feel proud to wear the same uniform as their team members and have a sense of group identity (Sengupta & Joshi, 2024). Identifying with a community through organized volunteerism builds friendships and social connections that make people feel accepted within a group (Gray & Stevenson, 2020). These social benefits are powerful motivators for volunteering.

Altruism is a foundational pillar of volunteerism that draws on humanistic values to attract people to volunteer. Personal values such as expressing concerns for others, giving back and improving a situation for someone else are intrinsic motivators that explain why people choose to volunteer (Janus & Misiorek, 2019). A fundamental aspect of volunteering is that it is rarely spontaneous. When considering the notion that volunteering is a process of weighing benefits and costs, all aspects of motivation are often woven together. The tapestry of motivation is made of unique fibers for each volunteer. Therefore, personal values hold an important role in this tapestry, as they are enduring throughout the entire volunteering process (Erdurmazle, 2019).

### ***Motives for Continuing to Volunteer***

In order for an organization to successfully utilize volunteers, they should strive to have volunteers return for future events. Several factors influence what motivates volunteers to continue to dedicate their time to helping others. Volunteer management plays a big role in motivating volunteers to continue to come back. Satisfaction with one's work has been shown to improve life satisfaction, self-esteem and mental health (Cho et al., 2020). When volunteers feel like they did a good job and that their work was meaningful, they are fulfilled. Volunteer managers should also be intentional about recognizing and thanking volunteers for their work. Recognition increased feelings of competence and confidence in volunteers. Feeling confident in the work being performed was shown to be a powerful motivator for people to continue volunteering. Fostering autonomy and including volunteers in the decision-making process builds leadership qualities in a volunteer and has also been shown to motivate volunteers to return (Cho et al., 2020). Leaders should use humility, empowerment and an understanding attitude to promote the benefits of the experience and encourage people to continue through nurturing psychological needs (Erdumazli, 2019).

### **Therapeutic Values of Volunteering**

While the intention behind volunteering is often to help others, there is therapeutic benefit to the volunteer. Volunteering has been shown to improve psychological well being and social outcomes (Pettigrew et al., 2019). This happens through building community and collaborating with others who all share a common goal or interest. The socialization and relationship building that happens while volunteering can decrease symptoms of anxiety, decrease depression scores, and increase social functioning through broadened social networks and number of meaningful friendships (Nichol et al., 2024). People who volunteer also have

decreased feelings of isolation when compared to those who do not volunteer (Perez- Corrales et al., 2022).

Volunteering also has benefits in building self-esteem and self-efficacy. When an individual felt as though their contribution was appreciated by the organization, they were more likely to have increased well-being (Nichol et al., 2024). Volunteering can also build resilience in individuals. People who were given the opportunity to solve a problem or work through challenges in a volunteer role were more likely to have increased feelings of resilience and confidence (Gray & Stevenson, 2020). Occupational therapy students who volunteered in the last year were found to have higher perceived health and well-being than peers who did not volunteer (Naber et al., 2022). Occupational therapy students are vulnerable to feelings of isolation, anxiety, depression and may have low self confidence in their skills and abilities. Through volunteering, students can build skills, relationships and express their altruism in a way that will mold them into the therapists they want to become.

### **Capstone Implications**

The capstone student will use the knowledge gained through the literature to apply the principles of volunteer motivations and therapeutic benefits within the Skills on Wheels program. Through understanding what motivates volunteers, the student will use volunteer management principles that foster volunteer autonomy, confidence and competence. The capstone student will design the volunteering process in a way that can facilitate community, build relationships and recognize volunteers for their work and time. Through these efforts, the student hopes to increase volunteer participation and satisfaction to improve the Skills on Wheels program.

### **Guiding Theory**

The Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) describes what motivates occupations, their patterns and how occupations are performed (Kielhofner & Burke, 1980). MOHO conceptualizes human occupation as a cycle or system that can help a therapist support the client's sense of competence and identity. The system explains what motivates occupations, and how the occupations are performed within the environment (Kielhofner & Burke, 1980). MOHO can be used to better understand how meaningful activities are motivated and performed. This model consists of three components- volition, habituation and performance. Volition refers to the motivation a person has to perform occupations that fill their time (Kielhofner & Burke, 1980). Habituation is the process of organizing actions into habits, routines and roles and often has social associations (Kielhofner & Burke, 1980). Performance refers to the ability to complete the activity with the required performance skills the environment and task require (Kielhofner & Burke, 1980).

Current literature indicates that using MOHO principles such as setting clear roles and expectations, training volunteers and empowering volunteers in decision making processes can increase volunteer retention and satisfaction (Cho, Wong, & Chiu, 2020). When volunteers feel as though they can be autonomous in their environment, their self-efficacy in performance increases, which increases their likelihood of participating in the occupation of volunteering again. Guided by this theory, the capstone project will explore enhancing the therapeutic benefits of volunteering through training development and collecting data on what motivates people to volunteer.

### **Capstone Plan and Process**

#### **Goals**

In alignment with the needs assessment and literature review, three project goals were identified to further guide the doctoral capstone project. The student collaborated with the site mentor and other site employees to determine goals to best support the program. The main focus of these goals was to develop and implement a volunteer training program, develop play-based wheelchair skill interventions, collect data on volunteer motivations and gain research skills to help evaluate the impact of play based volunteering on volunteer experiences. The following goals have been created to address the program and population.

Project Goal 1: Student will develop and implement a volunteer training program to administer to volunteers before the spring Skills on Wheels program.

Objective 1: Student will collaborate with other Skills on Wheels staff members to acquire training videos.

Objective 2: Student will develop a training program that addresses changes being made to the assessment and evaluation process within Skills on Wheels.

Objective 3: Student will implement the training to volunteers before the program.

Project goal 2: Student will draw conclusions regarding what motivates volunteers to become involved with Skills on Wheels.

Objective 1: Student will develop a qualitative and quantitative survey to gather perceptions on why volunteers became involved with Skills on Wheels

Objective 2: Student will administer surveys after each program day.

Objective 3: Student will complete data entry and analysis for quantitative survey data and transcribe and code qualitative interview data.

Project goal 3: Student will develop play-based interventions for participants and collect data on how play-based volunteering impacts the volunteer's experience at the program.

Objective 1: Student will develop and plan play based group interventions that target specific wheelchair skills.

Objective 2: Student will develop a qualitative and quantitative survey to gather data on how play-based activities impact the volunteer experience.

Objective 3: Student will administer survey via Qualtrics after each program day.

### **Doctoral Capstone Timeline**

To meet the identified goals and objectives, the student created a timeline to guide the project in line with Skills on Wheels program days. The timeline was organized into 7 phases: IRB completion and recruitment preparation, volunteer recruitment and program development, volunteer training development, program intervention planning and development, volunteer training, program improvement, data collection and analysis and disseminate preparation. Many of these phases were fluid throughout the project, with some overlapping and some phases continuing throughout the duration of the project. Table 1 provides a brief description of each task completed during the phases.

**Table 1**

#### *Capstone Project Timeline*

Phase	Responsibility
<b>Phase 1: IRB Completion and Recruitment Preparation</b> Week 1-2	Finalize, submit and receive IRB approval Review previous volunteer recruitment protocols Connect with site mentor for volunteer goals
<b>Phase 2: Volunteer Recruitment and Program Development</b> Week 3-4	Create a survey to gather information from volunteers Distribute survey and other recruitment materials to potential volunteer sources Update Skills on Wheels program to reflect new goals related to play based interventions

<b>Phase 3: Volunteer Training Development</b> Week 5-6	Create a volunteer training program that addresses spotting, training wheelchair skills and program logistics Collaborate with SoW staff to utilize training videos
<b>Phase 4: Program Intervention Planning and Development</b> Week 7-10	Create play-based interventions to address wheelchair skills that are enjoyable for both participants and volunteers Plan out spaces for each intervention to take place Grade up/ down interventions so that all participants can participate Create visuals and handouts to help volunteers and staff lead interventions
<b>Phase 5: Volunteer Training</b> Week 8	Deliver volunteer training via zoom and recording
<b>Phase 6: Program Improvements, Data Collection and Analysis</b> Week 11-12	Create a timeline for next year's Skills on Wheels program Adjust interventions and activities based on feedback from program Collect data from volunteers and analyze data
<b>Phase 7: Dissemination Preparation</b> Week 13-14	Finalize research report and capstone paper

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## Project Implementation

### Volunteer Recruitment

In order to ensure a successful program, Skills on Wheels heavily relies on volunteers to help spot and train participants on their wheelchair skills. Volunteers were recruited via email, paper flyers and social media. Emails were sent out two months before the program to students who attended IU OT, IU PT, UIndy PT, UIndy PT, previous volunteers of the program, IU nursing students and OTRs and DPTs who work at Riley Hospital for Children. Paper flyers were distributed with a QR code to sign up for volunteering in the Health Sciences building. IU

Skills on Wheels Instagram and Facebook accounts made weekly or bi-weekly posts to recruit volunteers two months before the program start date. Table 2 indicates the affiliations of all Skills on Wheels program volunteers.

**Table 2**

*Volunteer Demographics*

Affiliation	Number of Volunteers
Indiana University Occupational Therapy Student	44
Indiana University Physical Therapy Student	5
University of Indianapolis (UIndy) Physical Therapy Student	7
Registered Occupational Therapist (OTR)	7
Registered Physical Therapist (DPT)	3
Speech Language Pathologist (CCC-SLP)	1
Physical Therapy Assistant Student (PTA)	4
Undergraduate Student	6
MD/ DO Student	1
Nurse or Nurse Practitioner	2
Assistive Technology Professional (ATP)	5
Physician Assistant	1
Community Volunteer	2

**Volunteer Training**

Volunteer training sessions took place over Zoom in March of 2025 on the 3rd, 5th and 6th. The capstone also created a recording of the training to send out to volunteers who could not

attend any of the live dates. Training was required for all volunteers to teach them about the purpose of the program, how to keep a participant safe, how to teach wheelchair skills and logistical details. The information was delivered in a slide deck and the slide deck was emailed to volunteers after they attended a live session. The purpose of the training sessions was to increase confidence and self-efficacy for volunteers in order to improve their overall experience with Skills on Wheels.

The training session was divided into six parts to address all aspects of Skills on Wheels: What is Skills on Wheels?, Wheelchair Etiquette, Spotter 101, Skills Training, Program Day Details, and Questions. The first section “What is Skills on Wheels?” detailed what the program’s purpose is, who the participants are and where the program is located. It also included photos and roles of the program’s leadership and staff so that volunteers know who to look for if they need help with anything on program day. This section also included a video of a family testimony of how Skills on Wheels has impacted their lives so that volunteers align themselves with the mission of the program.

The second part of the training was about wheelchair etiquette. Training wheelchair etiquette is important in order to keep participants safe and avoid potentially uncomfortable situations. Wheelchair etiquette slides were adapted from Birdability, a website that is committed to accessible birding across the United States. Two visuals were used from Birdability (see Appendix B). The first one addressed words to use for someone who uses a wheelchair and how to refer to a power wheelchair (Birdability, 2021). The second visual addressed when it is appropriate to touch a person’s wheelchair, and when to crouch down or stand to speak to a child who uses a wheelchair (Birdability, 2021).

Next, volunteers were taught how to use a spotter strap to prevent rear tipping injuries. Volunteers were shown videos created by Skills on Wheels that demonstrate how to attach a spotter strap to a wheelchair and how to use a spotter strap to prevent rear tips. The capstone student inserted a visual depicting proper spotter strap form (see Appendix B). This section also addressed the importance of asking permission before attaching a spotter strap, how to communicate that the spotter is ready to spot and how to use push handles to prevent sideways tipping injuries.

In the fourth section, volunteers were taught how to teach wheelchair skills that are addressed at Skills on Wheels. These were taught through videos created by Skills on Wheels with a wheelchair user and former Skills on Wheels participant demonstrating and explaining the skills. After volunteers watched the videos, information was provided about feedback and learning in order to optimize participant learning.

The final two sections of the training focused on program day logistics and time for questions and frequently asked questions. The purpose of covering program day logistics was to make sure volunteers felt confident when they arrived at the program. It also included emergency procedures, dress code and how to use the sensory room.

### **Program Development**

In addition to volunteer responsibilities, the capstone student also developed and implemented play-based group interventions to teach wheelchair skills. These interventions were divided into six groups that each targeted different wheelchair skills. The purpose of developing a play-based approach to teaching wheelchair skills was to enhance the therapeutic benefits of volunteering such as building social relationships and feeling a sense of community and

belonging through playing games. Table 3 shows what games and interventions were planned by the capstone student and what wheelchair skills are being targeted through the activities.

The capstone student collaborated with the other Skills on Wheels capstone student to improve the flow and delivery of therapeutic activities at the program. The students decided that the activities would best be delivered in a group setting. This way, participants are able to interact and build friendships with other participants through play. In order to make this work, the students organized the participants into five groups of eight participants. The participants were placed into groups based on their age, cognitive abilities, wheelchair skills abilities and interests. Through using a station group model, every participant will have the opportunity to practice all the wheelchair skills available.

**Table 3**

*Station Descriptions*

Station number	Skills Targeted	Activity Description
1	Rolls forward Rolls backwards Turns in place Turns while moving forward Turns while moving backwards	Red Light, Green Light <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants will play the game while rolling forward and backwards and turning to avoid taped "potholes" on the ground</li> </ul> Asteroid Destroyer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants will roll forwards, backwards and turn to retrieve bean bags from the floor (bonus skills: reaches objects and shifts weight) and throw them at an exercise ball with the goal of getting the ball to roll to the other team's side.</li> </ul>
2	Maneuvers sideways Performs level transfer Folds/ unfolds wheelchair Performs ground transfers Gets through hinged door	Pirate's Treasure Hunt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants will collect gold coins by solving pirate clues (completing skills). Skills include the list to the left, as</li> </ul>

- well as maneuvering through a kitchen, opening drawers, transferring onto a bed and couch and maneuvering between furniture.
- 3 Ascends/ descends slight incline  
Ascends/ descends steep incline  
Ascends/ descends stairs
- Bean Bag Toss**
- Participants will take turns picking up a bean bag from a bucket (bonus skills: shifts weight and reaches objects) and place it on their head or in their lap as they wheel up the ramp. Once at the top, they will throw the beanbag off the ramp into a hula hoop of a matching color to the bean bag. Participants will roll down the ramp in a controlled manner to wait for their next turn. The same game will be played on the stairs with the bucket of bean bags at the top of the stairs instead.
- Fishin' off the Dock**
- Participants will roll to the top of the ramp and retrieve a fishing pole. They will use the fishing pole to catch a fish "swimming in the water" under the ramp and reel it up. They will put the fish in their lap, return the fishing pole and roll down the ramp in a controlled manner. Once they are at the bottom, they will return their fish to the "water" for someone else to fish for.
- 4 Reaches objects  
Shifts weight  
Rolls on soft surfaces  
Gets over obstacle
- Obstacle Course**
- **Slalom Roll-** Start at the poly spot and weave in and out of the cones as you roll through the course. Turn around the end cone and return to the start.
  - **Ball Carry-** Roll and carry a nerf ball from one cone to

another. Replace the ball with the one you have and take the other one. Roll back and repeat.

- **Head Balance: Noodle-**  
Balance a pool noodle on top of your head. Roll to the next obstacle while you balance it
- **Speed bumps-** Tape several halved pool noodles around 3 inches apart and wheel over it or *put bean bags under a mat and they have to roll over it or clear their casters over it*
- **Car wash-** cut curtain draped over a photo backdrop, maybe toss ball over the curtain and wheel through the curtain and wheel over a soft mat to go through car wash
- **BlazePods-** Participants will shift weight and reach up to tap the correct blaze pod color at different heights on the wall
- **Dance Party -** Align themselves in a marked area and show off their favorite dance move/wheelchair skill at the end of the obstacle course!

5

Ascends/ descends low curb  
Ascends/ descends high curb  
Performs stationary wheelie

Wheelie Practice

- Participants will practice getting into their wheelie position and taking deep breaths. Breathing visuals will be on the walls to help with anxiety. There will be a whiteboard to record the longest wheelie. There will be 1", 2", 4" and 6" curbs to practice with and weather permitting participants can use curbs outside.

6	Turns in place in wheelie Rolls forward and backwards in wheelie Descends high curb in wheelie Descends steep incline in wheelie	<b>Advanced Wheelie Practice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● This station is only for participants who feel confident about their stationary wheelie. This station will have the same materials as station 5.</li> </ul>
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### **Data Collection and Measures**

This capstone project collected data via online Qualtrics surveys. The survey was distributed after the program day on April, 2025 on the 19th. This survey collected data on volunteer motivations and whether play-based activities enhance volunteer motivations or influence their decision to return next year. It will also ask if volunteers believe that play based activities enhance the therapeutic benefits of volunteering. This data will be used to help determine if play based interventions should be continued for future programs.

The survey also collected qualitative data on how the program can be improved in future years. The feedback will be disseminated to future capstone students and staff within Skills on Wheels to make improvements to the program. The student also collected informal feedback through conversations with volunteers and emails from volunteers regarding the efficacy of a play-based approach to training wheelchair skills.

### **Program Improvements**

After the program, the capstone student, Skills on Wheels staff, site mentor and future Skills on Wheels capstone students met to discuss the program and improvements that can be made for next year. The capstone student created a resource that detailed the volunteer recruitment and training timeline for future programs. All resources used during the capstone process were organized into a One Drive file that future research assistants and capstone students will be able to access. The student also created a video resource that detailed how to use

computer programs that assist in the volunteer recruitment and communication processes.

Through meeting with the future Skills on Wheels capstone students, the program will be able to build on this year's progress and make more improvements in the future.

### **Project Evaluation and Results**

#### **Assessment Administration**

A survey was administered via Qualtrics to Skills on Wheels volunteers. The survey was sent via email and a QR code was available to scan at the program. The volunteers completed the survey after they had volunteered at least one Skills on Wheels program day. The capstone student also collected qualitative data on the efficacy of the volunteer training materials through conversations with volunteers and emails from volunteers that contained feedback (see Appendix C).

#### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The survey was distributed after the second day of Skills on Wheels. The data was analyzed in Qualtrics. Bar graphs were created from this data. The capstone student also collected qualitative data in the form of free response questions. This data was organized into tables by questions (see Appendix C). This information was synthesized into the results sections of the doctoral capstone report.

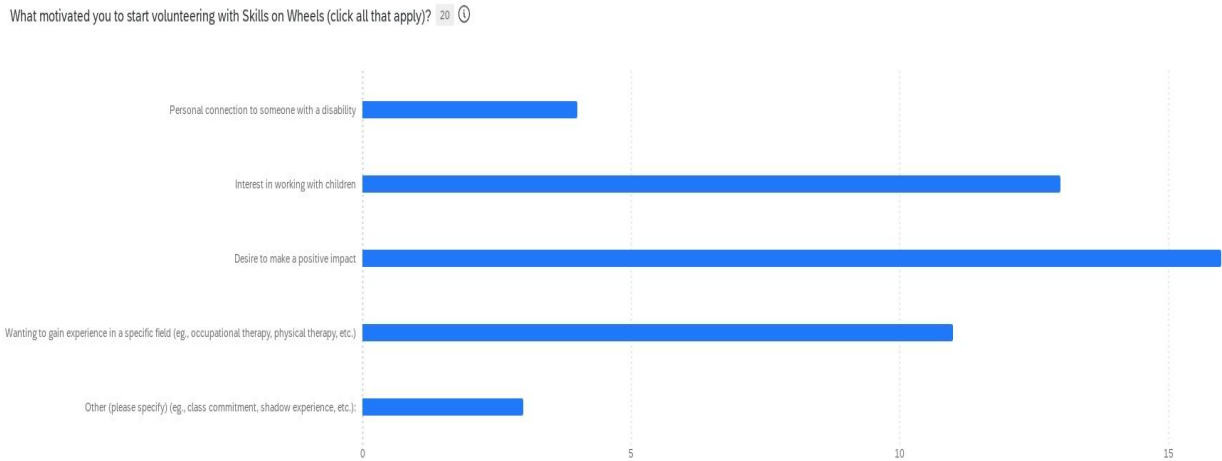
#### **Results**

The survey found that 82% of volunteers chose to begin volunteering their time with Skills on Wheels to make a positive impact (Figure 1). Respondents indicated that major motivators for volunteering at the program included seeing participants develop and progress in their skills (91%), connecting with participants (83%) and raising awareness through advocacy (73%) (Figure 2). Results showed that when choosing a program to volunteer at, the majority of

volunteers (55%) believed that developing skills and knowledge through their experience is very important (Figure 3).

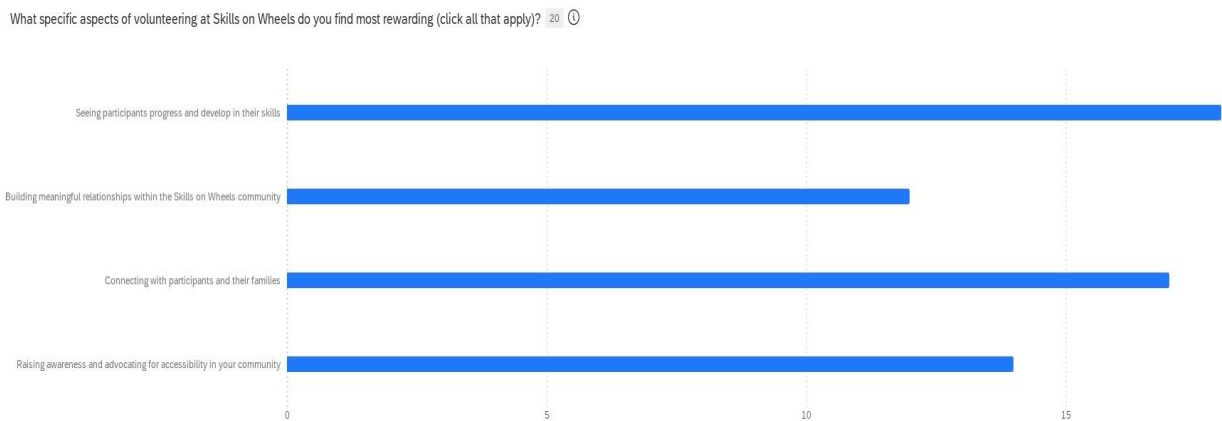
**Figure 1**

*What motivated you to start volunteering with Skills on Wheels (click all that apply)?*



**Figure 2**

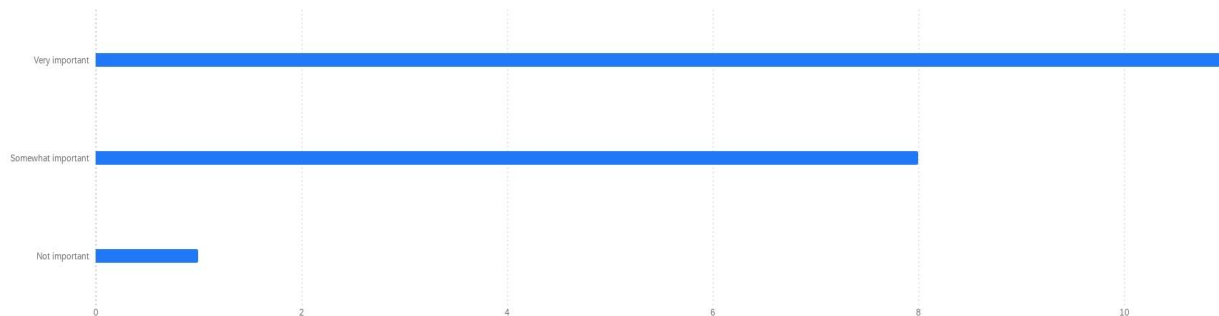
*What specific aspects of volunteering at Skills on Wheels do you find most rewarding (click all that apply)?*



**Figure 3**

*How important is it that your volunteer experiences help develop specific skills or knowledge (eg., working with children, wheelchair skills training, advocacy)?*

How important is it that your volunteer experiences help develop specific skills or knowledge (eg., working with children, wheelchair skills training, advocacy)? 20 ①



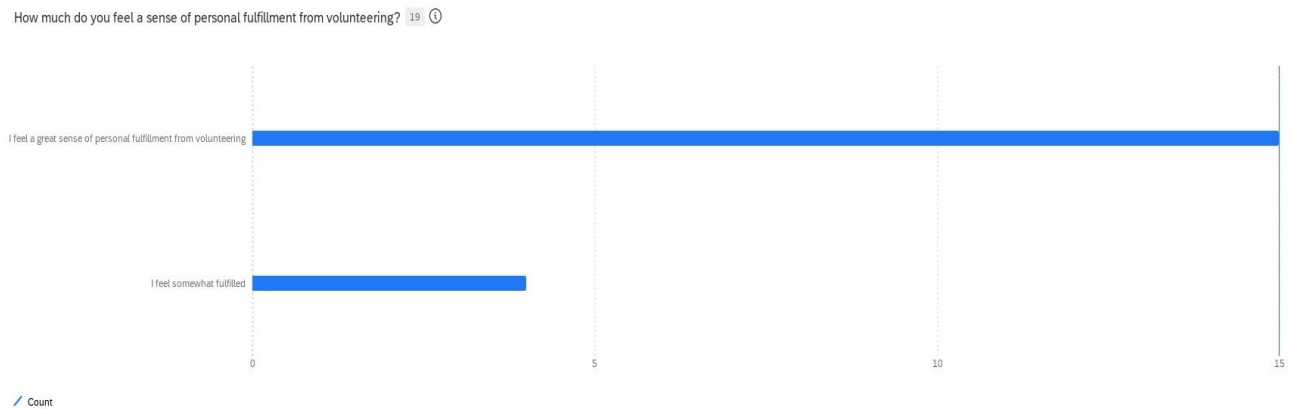
The survey showed that volunteers believed that the play-based nature of the program allowed their participants to improve in their skills faster with less pressure. One volunteer reported “It was SO much more motivating and fun for the kids. I saw kids laughing and smiling when working through the different skills like I hadn’t seen before. I think it also helped them to refine their skills and get faster by making things a competitive play-based game.” Another volunteer saw similar results with their participant: “I loved the play-based nature of the program this year. I think it really helped kids to feel more motivated and I saw a lot more progress in kiddos even just over the last 2 weeks.”

Results also indicated that the play-based nature of the program allowed volunteers to form meaningful connections with their participants. When asked if the play-based nature of the program would influence their decision to return to Skills on Wheels, this volunteer said: “I think it [play based activities] made it so fun for both the volunteers and participants. I felt like I was able to develop a deeper relationship with the kids too through laughing and having fun!” See Appendix C for more qualitative information about volunteers building meaningful relationships with participants.

Volunteering at Skills on Wheels was found to foster a feeling of connection to the community and a sense of personal fulfillment. Seventy- nine percent of volunteers reported that they felt a great sense of personal fulfillment through their volunteering efforts (Figure 4). Sixty- seven percent of volunteers said that volunteering at the program makes them feel connected to the community or others (Figure 5). When asked what aspects of the program help volunteers feel connected to the community and a sense of personal fulfillment, this volunteer said “I was able to meet a bunch of kids that I likely wouldn’t have met outside of SOW. It was fulfilling to watch kids grow in their skills, be excited to come back next week, and feel connected to other kids who are also wheelchair users. I loved getting to connect with the kids and encourage them while they’re learning.”

**Figure 4**

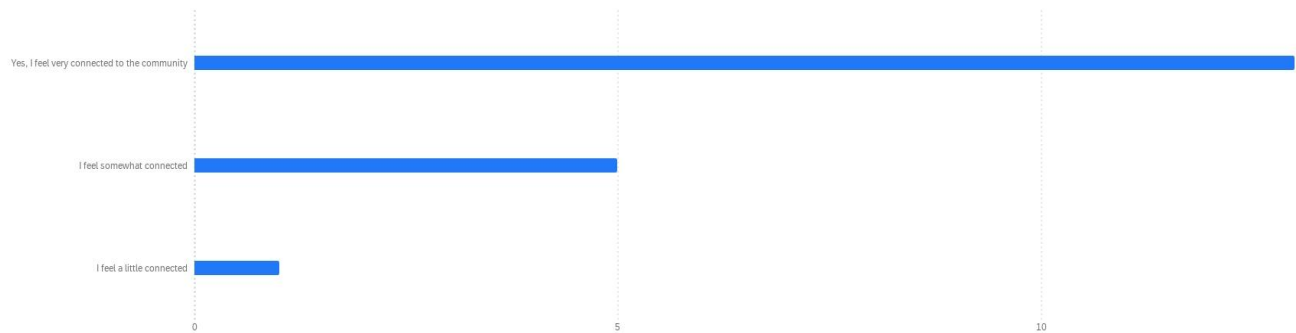
*How much do you feel a sense of personal fulfillment from volunteering?*



**Figure 5**

*Do you feel connected to the community or others through your volunteering efforts?*

Do you feel connected to the community or others through your volunteering efforts? 19 ⓘ



## Discussion and Impact

### Discussion

The DCE was successfully implemented through the Skills on Wheels volunteer training program, intervention planning and subsequent data collection. The capstone student sought to improve the volunteer experience through appropriate training and through play-based activities at Skills on Wheels. It was hypothesized that the implementation of a play-based program would increase the therapeutic benefits of volunteering such as feeling a sense of community, increased sense of personal fulfillment and building meaningful relationships with others. The student also collected data on what motivates people to volunteer in order to further improve the program in the future.

The data collected showed that through volunteering at Skills on Wheels, volunteers felt connected to their community. It also showed that people spending time at Skills on Wheels increased feelings of personal fulfillment. As established in the literature review, increased feelings of personal fulfillment can decrease feelings of isolation and increase self-efficacy. Results showed that the play-based nature of the program allowed volunteers to build deeper, more meaningful connections with participants. Through play, both kids and volunteers were able to laugh and be silly together while still building wheelchair skills in a low-stakes

environment. The low stakes environment is important to volunteering, as it allows the volunteers to feel comfortable making mistakes which enhances their wheelchair training skills (Dempsey- Branch & Shantz 2022). Through playing games, the volunteer was able to more effectively train their participants on important wheelchair skills.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. The first of these is a small sample size. There were 74 volunteers that were contacted to complete the survey; however, 20 responses were collected. There were 54 incomplete surveys. In order to better understand the volunteer experience, a larger sample size would be important for future data collection. Another limitation is that data was only collected at one point. It would have yielded a larger sample size to send out the survey after all four weeks of the program. Collecting data at the end may also change volunteers' opinions on the experience as the participants would have two more weeks to improve upon their skills and form deeper connections with their volunteers. Collecting data at multiple points over time would allow the researcher to see how the volunteer experience evolves throughout the Skills on Wheels program.

### **Impact and Sustainability**

The doctoral capstone project allowed volunteers to have a meaningful experience through the Skills on Wheels program. Volunteers were able to build community and connection with others, as well as gain clinical skills through being wheelchair skills trained. Literature regarding the therapeutic impact of volunteering says that occupational therapy students who volunteer have higher perceived well-being and fulfillment, which was also consistent with survey responses in this study (Naber et al., 2022). It was found that the new play-based nature of the program allowed volunteers to build deeper connections with their participants. The play-

based nature of the program also helped participants build wheelchair skills quickly, and improvements were seen over the first two weeks of the program. The participants were also able to build relationships with the volunteers as well as with their peers through playing group games and learning skills in station groups. Volunteers were very encouraging and helped the participants reach their goals. Overall, the environment of the program allowed everyone involved to grow in their skills and abilities.

In order to continue the positive impact of Skills on Wheels, the capstone student has taken steps to ensure that the play-based nature of the program continues and improves. The student met with future SoW capstone students to discuss improvements for next year. These improvements included maximizing space to allow for more participants, improving intervention ideas to address more skills and further improving the volunteer experience through communication and organization. The student also documented and organized all the games that were planned by skills that were addressed. Future capstone students may use this resource as a guide to help plan new activities.

### **Conclusion**

This study found that volunteering is an effective way to build a sense of community, bring feelings of personal fulfillment and develop meaningful relationships with others. Skills on Wheels presented the capstone student with the opportunity to explore ways to develop a sense of community within the program. Over the 14-week doctoral capstone experience, the student developed a volunteer training program, recruited volunteers, planned play based interventions and implemented a play-based Skills on Wheels program. These efforts found that using a play-based model to train wheelchair skills increased a sense of community and fostered deeper connections between volunteers and participants. It is important to further explore this

relationship between play and community within Skills on Wheels in order to develop a deeper sense of belonging and enhance the therapeutic benefits of the volunteer experience.

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## Appendix A

### Volunteer Motivations Survey Questions

#### General Motivation

What motivated you to start volunteering with Skills on Wheels (check all that apply)?

- Personal connection to someone with a disability
- Interest in working with children
- Desire to make a positive impact
- Wanting to gain experience in a specific field (e.g., occupational therapy, physical therapy, etc.)
- Other (please specify) (e.g. Class commitment, shadow experience, etc.)

What specific aspects of volunteering at Skills on Wheels do you find most rewarding?

- Seeing participants progress and develop in their skills
- Building meaningful relationships within the Skills on Wheels community
- Connecting with participants and their families
- Raising awareness and advocacy for accessibility in your community
- Other (please specify)

#### Personal Experience and Skills

How important is it that your volunteer experience helps develop specific skills or knowledge

(e.g., working with children, wheelchair skills training, advocacy)?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- A little important

- Not important

### Play Based Activities

Have you volunteered at Skills on Wheels before the 2025 program?

- Yes, I have volunteered in the past year (continue to next questions in block)
- No, this was my first time volunteering at Skills on Wheels (end block, skip to Emotional and Social motivators)

How do you feel the play-based nature of the program influenced participant motivation to engage in wheelchair skills?

Would you be more inclined to volunteer again if the play-based nature of the program continued? Please explain your reasoning.

### Emotional and Social motivators

How much do you feel a sense of personal fulfillment from volunteering?

- Yes, I feel a great sense of personal fulfillment
- I feel somewhat fulfilled
- I feel a little bit fulfilled
- I feel no personal fulfillment from volunteering

Do you feel connected to the community or others through your volunteering efforts?

- Yes, I feel very connected to the community
- I feel somewhat connected
- I feel a little connected

- I feel no connection to the community through volunteering

What elements of the program have helped you feel connected through your volunteering efforts?

What things could be added to further develop a community of volunteers within Skills on Wheels?

Have you had any personal experiences that have shaped your decision to volunteer with Skills on Wheels?

Appendix B


Volunteer Training Resources

Wheelchair Words

~~Wheelchair bound~~ → Wheelchair user 

Wheelchairs are **mobility devices**, like skateboards, bikes, cars and buses.

**Wheelchairs don't bind**, restrict or otherwise define a person who uses them.

Wheelchairs **enable people to move** around more easily. Wheelchair users are the opposite of "bound" by their wheelchair! 

@birdability

[birdability.org](http://birdability.org)

 Wheelchair Etiquette

**Never touch, push or lean on someone's wheelchair without their approval.** It's part of their personal space. You wouldn't want someone to unexpectedly push you!

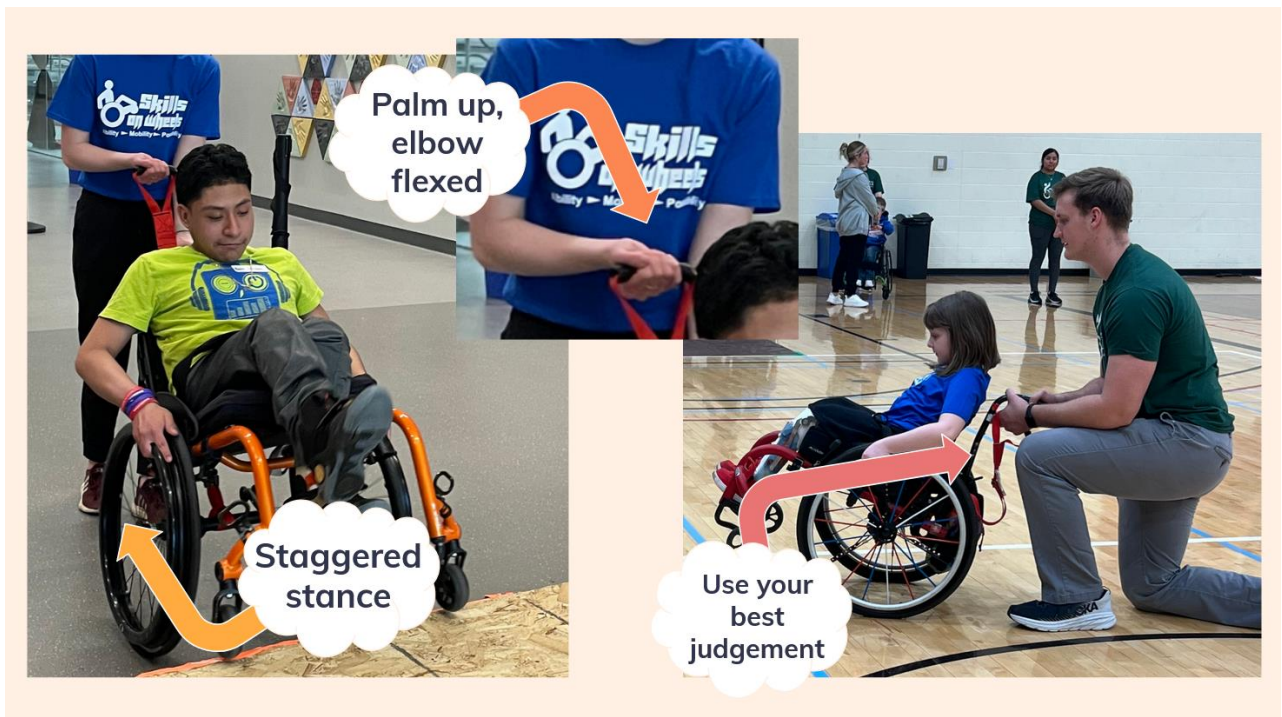
**Speak directly to the wheelchair user** if you're asking them a question.

**Offer help, but be prepared to graciously accept 'no'.** Plenty of people don't need help, or would rather do it themselves.

**Don't stare!** No body likes that.

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**Appendix C**

**Qualitative Survey Responses**

*Qualitative Survey Responses*

<b>Question</b>	<b>Volunteer Responses</b>
<p>How do you feel the play-based nature of the program influenced participant motivation to engage in wheelchair skills?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● My participant on Saturday loved the games aspect but also seemed to have some intrinsic motivation, so I think the games really helped her stay engaged.</li> <li>● I think keeping the program play based has given participants more buy in, into participating in each skill. I haven't volunteered as a spotter yet for this year, but from what i have heard the kids have been more comfortable learning the skills this year, so i think the play-based piece has helped</li> <li>● Participation in developing wheelchair skills was as simple as possible with the play based nature of the program. Competitive and fun activities encouraged repetition and confidence in trying new and hard skills.</li> <li>● I think the play based nature of the program reduces the amount of pressure and stress that learning new skills can cause. Most kids were just able to participate and have fun!</li> <li>● I think it was very helpful for the children and takes a little bit of pressure off of them because it feels less formal. However I think there may need to be more “play” options that are more conducive to the older kids</li> <li>● It is very inclusive and helpful</li> <li>● It was SO much more motivating and fun for the kids. I saw kids laughing and smiling when working through the different skills like I hadn't seen</li> </ul>

	<p>before. I think it also helped them to refine their skills and get faster by making things a competitive play-based game. I loved it so much.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I loved the play based nature of the program this year. I think it really helped kids to feel more motivated and I saw a lot more progress in kiddos even just over the last 2 weeks.</li> </ul>
<p>Would you be more inclined to volunteer again if the play based nature of the program continued? Please explain your reasoning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Yes because it keeps the kids happy and laughing which is one part I love about SOW.</li> <li>● yes! i'd volunteer either way, but i am excited to see how the play based nature of the program will continue</li> <li>● Yes! It makes it much more fun and easier to engage with participants when they too enjoy the activities, which leads to better outcomes for all involved!</li> <li>● Yes! I love skills on wheels and I think that way the program is formatted is why people come back every year.</li> <li>● Yes! I think it made it so fun for both the volunteers and participants. I felt like I was able to develop a deeper relationship with the kids too through laughing and having fun!</li> <li>● YES! It was so fun this year</li> </ul>
<p>What elements of the program have helped you feel connected through your volunteering efforts?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Talking to the participants and getting to know them and help them learn more skills makes me feel connected. Even if it's just 1 or 2 participants, they are part of my community and making a difference starts small and local.</li> <li>● Building connections with the kids and seeing how much confidence they gain within one morning session.</li> <li>● I think just being able to engage with faculty and my peers outside out class.</li> <li>● I love partnering with an OT student</li> <li>● Meeting people with disabilities in my</li> </ul>

	<p>community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Connecting with kids and their families before and after the program!</li> <li>● Having the option to volunteer in different parts of the program has helped me feel connected to families, participants, and siblings of the program.</li> <li>● I've developed a much better understanding of how we can support those who use wheelchairs and help them navigate their environments. Learning about the participants' interests and goals also helped me feel more connected and able to support their unique needs.</li> <li>● Getting paired one on one with a Skills on Wheels participant has made me feel the most connected.</li> <li>● Giving back to the kiddos I treat in clinic and helping them utilize the equipment I recommended</li> <li>● I was able to meet a bunch of kids that I likely wouldn't have met outside of SOW. It was fulfilling to watch kids grow in their skills, be excited to come back next week, and feel connected to other kids who are also wheelchair users. I loved getting to connect with the kids and encourage them while they're learning.</li> <li>● I just love being part of the SOW family, and love getting to see the same kids and families (and new ones) show up</li> <li>● networking with administration on how the program works</li> </ul>
<p>What things could be added to further develop a community of volunteers within Skills on Wheels?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Maybe a volunteer video talking about how much they love SOW. Idk if that's been done before.</li> <li>● I think continued discussions and emails would be helpful</li> <li>● Volunteer meet up before hand and volunteer celebration at the end of the</li> </ul>

	<p>program</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● maybe an hour or so before the program, have a “get to know you” session between the volunteers so they can meet each other</li> <li>● Continuing to advertise and advocate for the program even amongst neighboring schools and organizations.</li> <li>● More smaller events throughout the year.</li> <li>● Maybe more small group activities so as a volunteer you could form connections with multiple participants</li> <li>● I think it would be helpful to know common mistakes kids make when doing skills and how to coach/correct them in order to meet the skill. I didn’t feel very confident in this and think it would be especially helpful for volunteers!</li> </ul>
<p>Have you had any personal experiences that have shaped your decision to volunteer with Skills on Wheels?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● I work at RHI and have a passion for helping those in need, and specifically a big passion for neuro.</li> <li>● The world has come very far with accessibility, but there are still so many things that need to be improved upon when looking at the level of accessibility in the community. Skills on wheels is a great way to help kids learn necessary skills so they can become independent and confident in their community, even when the level of accessibility is not what it should be</li> <li>● I personally just see how inaccessible our community can be, so I want to take an active part in helping kids gain the skills to navigate the community.</li> <li>● Being an OT student and working in adaptive sports!</li> <li>● Seeing kids have fun participating in meaningful and functional skill development encourages me to continue to be a part of this volunteering effort.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● I have a cousin who went through the program and loved it.</li><li>● Tiffany is the best!</li><li>● I understand how difficult it can be to be in a wheelchair so I can help the kids be comfortable</li><li>● I had a friend who was a wheelchair user who would talk to me about different things she learned with her OT and how they have made an impact on her day to day. This influenced my passion for skills on wheels because it was a way for me to make that same difference and influence conversations that the kids I interact with might have with their peers!</li><li>● yes, I had a patient who has done this before and had amazing things to say about this program.</li></ul>
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