

Disabled youths learn to run

By EDDIE COYLE

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Disabled people are making tremendous strides in many areas, including athletic performance. Forty-one of them completed the Nov. 2 New York City Marathon, a 26-mile trek through the five boroughs.

Now, a group of disabled runners will be sharing their time and experience helping disabled high school students to get into better physical condition through running.

They'll start by alternately running and walking short distance in the gym, or if they're running outside, from one lamp post to the next. But they're expected to make great strides in a short time.

The program, tentatively due to begin next month, will be conducted in six chapters—two in Brooklyn and one in each of the other four boroughs—by the Achilles Track Club with the city Board of Education's Division of Special Education, Adaptive Physical Education.

Marathon training

Dick Traum, a disabled runner who is coordinating the program with Irv Bader and Larry Facher of the Adaptive Physical Education Division, says they hope to have at least 1,000 participants. In addition, he says, they will offer marathon training to any of the disabled students 16 or over who want to run the Nov. 1 New York City Marathon.

Achilles, a team of disabled runners started by Traum in 1982, had 41 of its members finish the 1986 Marathon. Al Gordon, the chairman of Kidder Peabody, who still races at the age of 85, and marathoner Ted Rogers, the executive officer of NAL Industries, have both provided financial support for the program.

Traum, who lost his right leg in an automobile accident in 1965, started running with an artificial limb in 1976. He finished the New York City Marathon two years later. He explains the Achilles Track Club's mission: "Our group aims at encouraging amputees, people who've suffered strokes, heart attacks, cerebral palsy victims, arthritics, sightless people, and others (disabled people) to get out running—maybe only from one lamp post to the other at first." Traum adds, "Achilles is not really geared to the elite wheelchair runners who are already well organized."

Five steps planned

Traum, who has seen virtual athletic miracles performed by disabled runners, many of whom not too long



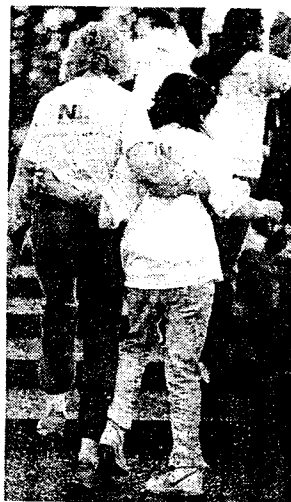
ago would have been sitting in a chair watching the TV set drone on as their mean of recreation, says, "Their real disability is not being blind or whatever, but being out of shape. They get reinforcement and a sense of self-esteem from physical accomplishments."

There will be five steps the students will take. In order, they are:

- The first goal will be to run 20 minutes at a stretch. They will receive an Achilles T-shirt after completing the run.
- Second will be participating in a two-mile "Fun Run" after which they will be awarded race T-shirts.
- Third will be competing in the annual "Gotta Have Park" 5K (3.1 miles) race in Central Park, at the conclusion of which they will receive T-shirts and running shoes.
- Fourth step will be running the five-mile Young Men's Christian Association race in June in Central Park. There will be disabled divisions and finishers will receive trophies, plaques,

ACHILLES Track Club founder Dick Traum (l.), who lost his leg in an auto accident, jogs in Central Park with cerebral palsy victim Michael Gibson.

NEWS PHOTOS BY MICHAEL GRAY



MEMBERS of the Achilles Track Club climb steps to Central Park Reservoir track for their daily jog.

and/or medals.

• Fifth will be the marathon training for a small number of the more talented students, who will be 16 by the date of the NYC Marathon. (minimum age established for the 26-mile

race. These participants will have special running classes during school hours, supplemented by work outs Wednesday nights and weekends. The Board of Education will provide transportation

Traum feels by encouraging disabled students to enjoy the benefits of exercise they are getting a new lease on life early on. And they enhance their opportunity to not only prolong their lives but vastly improve the quality of it.

Traum says of the students that will be enrolled in the program, "A trained disabled youngster will be able to cover longer distances than the average person on the street who is not in condition."

Traum sees far-reaching benefits for the disabled students through running. "If they work hard at it and achieve success, they can carry it over into other areas of their life. They'll develop what you could call a success history." Traum recalls the joy of one disabled runner when she told him, bursting with pride, "I did eight lamp posts today (running the length of eight lamp posts in the park)."

Traum says that the New York City Marathon "is the only major marathon that encourages the physically disabled to enter." He adds that they will get to start ahead of the rest of the field so they can finish with the thousands of middle and back-of-the-pack runners—not alone by themselves in the dark of night.

Positive outlook

The youngsters who continue into the running, Traum says will derive much emotional and psychological strength. "They will be mainstreaming (participating in regular races), rubbing shoulders with people who are not disabled; they will be treated as adults; they will have a sense of growth; they will share the high of running and finishing races."

"But most of all," Traum feels, "these youngsters will have a positive outlook on life and be ready to accept and overcome challenges they encounter in all areas of daily living."

Running, Traum believes, is the one sport in which people with a wide range of disabilities can compete. And even if they don't feel like entering races, it's his experience that the physical exercise itself can be of immense therapeutic value to them physically, emotionally, and even spiritually.

"Running, I feel, will become the sport of choice of the disabled," Traum concludes.

And it will be good for them—and for running. Those interested in further information should see the Special Education Department at their local schools.