



Inaugural Adaptive Ski for the Health of It 2024-2025 Program Report

Exploring the opportunity to build sports, recreation and other education programs for students with disabilities in school districts operating on four-day week Calendars



May 1, 2025

Ski for the Health of It Personnel

McCall-Donnelly School District Personnel

Kim Arrasmith, Heartland High School, Director of Special Programs
Carissa Hill, Donnelly Elementary
Katie Mynar, Barbara R Morgan Elementary
Sara Wolf, Barbara R Morgan Elementary
Peter Oliver, McCall-Donnelly High School
Marlo Walz, Payette Lakes Middle School
Keith Walz, Payette Lakes Middle School
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Sara Brodhecker, McCall-Donnelly Early Childhood Center

Community Volunteer

Susie Erickson, Bus Driver and Advisor

AWeSOMe! Winter Program Coordinator

April Rossetti, Scheduled Lessons and Assigned Instructors

AWeSOMe! Volunteer Instructors

David Burica	Bill Marineau
Ingrid Burica	Eric Messenger
Alex Cohran	Joel Nitzy
Terry Edvalson	Stuart Pennington
Russel Fogel	Emma Peoples
Daniel Gallagher	Steve Riggers
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Rylinn Lee	Bill Senkowsky
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For More information about Ski for the Health of It and AWeSOMe!'s other programs, Contact Chris Wernert, by e-mail at chris@awesomemccall.org or call (208) 315-4275. Program information is available on our [website](#).

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Adaptive Ski for the Health of It project Report Summary

The announcement in the spring of 2024 that the McCall-Donnelly School District would be testing a four-day school calendar created an opportunity for Adaptive Wilderness Sports of McCall (dba AWeSOMe!) to suggest to Heartland High School Principal and Director of Special Programs Kim Arrasmith that a partnership be formed to offer an Adaptive Learn to Ski Program to students with disabilities on the days they would not be in classrooms.

Partnerships that evolve to address opportunities when there is trust between organization leaders are usually easy to organize and sustain when a need to be addressed is clearly identified. The opportunity to use time on a weekday when school is not in session to provide children with disabilities is new experiences is real. That students with disabilities do not have many organized opportunities to develop skills in sports that will place them on a par with their peers is also real. Besides having limited time for organized play and access to athletic skill building programs for students with disabilities, the students and their families often must overcome multiple barriers to sports participation: lack of transportation, sports equipment is expensive, participation costs can put participation out of reach, students' families don't believe they can learn the skills necessary to participate safely in sports. As an example: skiing requires understanding risks and learning calculated nuances a person must understand to be successful.

Over the course of three meetings, it was agreed the district's special education teachers would nominate students with disabilities to participate in the program. The teachers would make initial contact with parents to determine if they would want their children to participate. AWeSOMe! staff members provided materials for the teachers to use in promoting the program. Of the 13 families contacted, eight agreed to have their children participate. The district also agreed to provide transportation to and from McCall to Brundage Mountain Resort. AWeSOMe!'s responsibilities involved providing special adaptive equipment, raising funds to cover the students' participation fees, providing instructors for lessons, coordinating activities with Brundage, recruiting chaperones for the bus, and maintaining communications with the families and partners.

AWeSOMe!'s partnership arrangements with the McCall-Donnelly School District, Brundage Mountain Resort, and our volunteers were easily agreed to as the program is the right thing to do. The program was successful by all measures. The Ann and Frank Cahouet Foundation and the Idaho Community Foundation managed Shelton Foundation provided funds to cover the students' participation fees, 22 volunteer instructors taught the lessons, and Susie Erickson, a community volunteer, drove the school district bus and provided valuable insights regarding the students' abilities.

Three main goals developed to measure the Adaptive Ski for the Health of It program's success were identified. The initial program has been judged as a success by the students, their parents, their teachers. Only minor adjustments are needed to expand the program in subsequent years. The partners' and AWeSOMe!'s ongoing challenges will be to recruit and train enough volunteer instructors as more students become involved and to secure a stable funding base to support and expand the program.

Goal 1: All students with disabilities nominated to be program participants learned to ski, felt safe in their lessons, made new friends, gained confidence, and, most importantly, had fun. All the students want to participate in the planned 2025-2026 program. According to parents and teachers, the sports, play, and community aspects of the program have had an impact on children's confidence and physical and mental health, as observed within the framework of families and the schools' programs.

Goal 2: A framework for expanding the Ski for the Health of It program to serve more students with disabilities on a year-to-year basis with the same partners and adding Tamarack Resort as a second teaching site and new partner school districts is in place. Program expansion will include an additional seven students for 14 students in total on Mondays and Fridays when McCall-Donnelly students are not in school. Lessons for Cascade and New Meadows students with disabilities will be provided on alternate Fridays.

Goal 3: A plan for intermediate and long-term Ski for the Health of It program financing is in place. While the plan to provide a secure funding base is a work in progress, we are hopeful the targeted grant applications that have been submitted to five granting organizations for the 2025-2026 school year will be funded. AWeSOME!'s targeted foundations based on their compatible missions and interests, emphasis on supporting children's health and education projects, geographic areas served, and invitations to apply.

School District	Number of Students	Prospective 2025-2026 Funding Sources	Request Amount
Cascade SD Valley County (Year 1)	2	C of I Student Philanthropy Council	\$ 1,800
	2	Shelton Foundation	1,800
McCall-Donnelly Valley County (Year 2)	13	McCall-Donnelly Education Foundation (awarded)	11,700
	1	Idaho Community Foundation Student Philanthropy Project, Heartland High School	900
New Meadows Adams County (Year 1)	3	Payette Lakes Progressive Club	2,700
Total Grant Requests	21		\$18,900
		In-kind Support	
Transportation Costs	6 trips	McCall-Donnelly van use	\$850
Volunteer Instructors Time	6 sessions per student	\$34 hour IRS value for \$1,632 x 22 Students	39,404
Equipment Rental	6 sessions per student	\$69-dollar rental fee for skis, boots, helmet, and poles per lesson	9,108

School District	Number of Students	Prospective 22025-2026 Funding Sources	Request Amount
Total In-kind Costs			\$49,362
Total Project Costs			\$68,262

The long-term goal is to have school districts include the Ski for the Health of It participant fee costs included in activities and/or athletic budgets. Reality is the Idaho's legislature's formula for funding public education and allocation of funds for students with disabilities could make future school district funding for Ski for the Health of It program challenging. The present effort to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education could also have a major impact on future funding of programs for students with disabilities. Idaho EDNEWS reports, the Idaho Senate rejected \$3 million in that would have helped public schools cover the extraordinary costs of serving highest-needs students, even as Idaho faces an \$82.2 million Shortfall in special education funding that needs to be covered by local districts.

April 7, 2025 E-Mail from Kim Arrasmith, Principal of Heartland Alternative High School and Director of Special Programs

This winter, the Adaptive Wilderness Sports of McCall (AWeSOMe) program partnered with the McCall-Donnelly School District (MDSD) to bring an unforgettable outdoor adventure to students with disabilities through the "Ski for the Health of It" initiative. This inspiring collaboration opened the slopes to 13 referred students, with 9 participating in alpine skiing at Brundage Mountain Resort.

With students ranging from kindergarten to high school, the program created six full days of inclusive, skill-building fun scheduled on non-instructional school days. With help from the MDSD's donation and collaboration of transportation via the activity bus, students were safely shuttled to and from each location, building a bridge between education and outdoor recreation for students who might not have this opportunity.

Each day began with pure joy and anticipation. As the bus rolled up each morning, students could be seen grinning ear to ear, buzzing with excitement and bundled up for the day's snowy adventure. Upon returning, that same bus was filled with laughter, stories, and the unmistakable glow of pride and accomplishment. Teachers and staff were continually touched by the students' elation displayed upon returning to school the following week. Many of whom spoke nonstop about the new skills they were learning and the fun they had with peers and AWeSOMe volunteers.

The coordination of the program was seamless, thanks to the exceptional dedication of AWeSOMe's volunteers. Every detail, from matching students with the right equipment to organizing snack breaks and tailored instruction, was executed with care and thoughtfulness. Communication with families was consistent and supportive, allowing caregivers to feel confident and connected throughout the experience.

Teachers who nominated the students were thrilled to see how the program impacted their students not just physically but socially and emotionally. In the days following each outing, classroom discussions were filled with exciting retellings of ski runs, friendly races, and the triumph of getting up after a fall. The students carried their newfound confidence and joy back into the classroom, sparking a sense of resilience and enthusiasm that didn't go unnoticed.

The Special Education Department and teachers across the district consider the program a tremendous success. It was more than skiing; it was empowerment, inclusion, and adventure rolled into one. Looking ahead, MDSD is already making plans to support the continued expansion of the program next year, with hopes of adding 5–6 more students to experience the same life-changing opportunities.

Through the continued partnership between AWeSOMe and the McCall-Donnelly School District, "Ski for The Health of It" is proving that with a little coordination and a lot of heart,

we can create meaningful, memorable experiences that enrich the lives of our students and strengthen our community.

March 11, 2025 E-mail from Susie Erickson, Community Volunteer and Advisor

As for my thoughts/opinions on the Ski for the Health of it program, I can't say enough positive things! I loved the excitement and energy of the kids as we boarded the bus for our first trip to Brundage! Most of these kids had never been to the mountain, nor had they ever skied! Watching progression with each kid from lesson to lesson made my heart leap with joy! Hearing the kids on my Harlow's bus talk about how much fun they had was so exciting! They continually asked me how many days until we ski again! This program was such a rewarding confidence builder for each of these kids! The volunteers with the Awesome program are so tuned to each student's needs, and the consistency of having each student with the same volunteers throughout the program was most beneficial to the kids! They were able to develop a rapport with their instructors and learned to trust and respect them! Just the other day there was a discussion on my Harlow's bus about skiing being done for this year! When the reality of this entered their thoughts there was a level of sadness that can only be attributed to the love and confidence they reaped from this program! I hope to be able to continue as the volunteer bus driver for the Ski for the Health of it Program for years to come!

E-mail from Ingrid Burica, Adaptive Wilderness Sports of McCall founder

The Ski for the Health of It Program took AWeSOMe! back to its roots in providing adaptive ski instruction to local youths living in a very winter-sports-oriented community. Even though the local school kids with disabilities were the first population AWeSOMe! served, when the program started in the winter of 2001-2002, the participation by these students waned dramatically once lessons were moved from the Little Ski Hill to Brundage. The primary reason for this drop in participation seemed to be linked to lack of transportation in most cases. With the McCall Donnelly School system partnering with AWeSOMe! to provide transportation for the Ski for the Health of It Program, the participation of local K-12 students surged. Transportation was a key element to the program's success. Another key element to success of the program was funding through grants allowing students to participate in the program at no cost to their families. Thus, two major barriers to participation were removed.

Student progress was enhanced by having multiple days of instruction available. It was very satisfying to watch my student progress from his first day skiing down the beginner hill, barely able to make a turn and unable to stop in a reasonable distance, to his last day skiing blue/intermediate runs, being able to control his speed well, stop when he wanted and even make short swing turns to control his speed through narrower sections of the trail. In addition, he demonstrated excellent follow-through following the skier's

responsibility code he learned throughout his lessons: always looking uphill before starting out and when skiing into merging trails, skiing in control and remembering to take his pole straps off to ride the lift as well as using the safety bar on the chairlift. He became a much more skilled, confident, and safer skier and told me how much he was enjoying skiing and participating in the Ski for the Health of It Program. He is hoping to buy his own ski equipment so he can ski more often.

We did have one student who dropped out after two lessons. This student's brother related to me that the reason for his little brother choosing not to come anymore was that he did not want to take lessons but just wanted to free-ski. This was despite giving him opportunities to free-ski once he had learned some safety skills, with some safety conditions on the "free-runs" such as stopping at least four times during the run and turning continuously so as not to bomb straight down the hill. Also, he wanted to try jumping and was instructed on landing techniques and taken down through the terrain park, practicing small jumps and stopping to watch his brother jump to add practice stopping. AWeSOMe! may have an opportunity to improve the program and minimize this reason for dropping out by advertising the program as lessons, educating students and their families ahead of time, and stating clearly it is not just free-skiing.

Overall, I see the Ski for the Health of It program as a great success in getting local students with disabilities involved in a locally featured winter sport, gaining skills, confidence, opportunities to socialize and have fun. The skills gained also will allow students to participate side-by-side with their non-disabled peers on days the school system brings the whole class to ski. I look forward to continuing to be involved in the Ski for the Health of It program and to watching the program grow to involve even more students.

Four Day School Calendar Trends

The Ski for the Health of It report describes the experience of engaging students with disabilities in outdoor sports and recreation activities on Mondays and Fridays when the McCall-Donnelly School District students are not in classrooms on the district's four-day operating calendar. The report also describes the challenges of a volunteer-based adaptive sports organization managing growth as the need for adaptive services increases in a small rural tourism dependent Idaho mountain community.

Almost 2,100 schools in the 2024-2025 school year in nearly 900 districts across 25 states have four-day school weeks, an increase of almost 850 percent since 1999, according to Paul Thompson, an associate professor of economics at Oregon State University who studies the impact of four-day school weeks. Idaho EDNEWS reports In 2023 ninety-seven Idaho school districts considered the move to a four-day school week. In the 2024-2025 school year 76 of Idaho's 115 school districts and 19 charter schools are operating on a four-day calendar. (Richet, Kevin, *A deep dive into four-day schools-and researchers found contradictions*, IDEDNEWS.org, Boise Idaho, September 26, 2024)

Nationally, a few larger urban school districts have adopted four-day calendars, and others are considering doing the same. The rationale for a change to a four-day calendar varies from district to district, but there are common themes. Positive rationale is the four-day calendar saves money, improves student attendance, and teacher recruiting and retention is improved. Negative rationale is the four-day calendar makes it difficult for parents with limited means to find affordable enriching childcare arrangements, children who are food insecure may go hungry on the fifth day when school is not in session, and access to optional activities is a problem because of transportation availability.

AWeSOMe! is not advocating for the four-day school calendar. We are advocating the use of the time gained from not being in classrooms be used to teach students with disabilities new skills and provide them with additional education opportunities. The time is finite and should not be wasted.

Ski for the Health of It Program Goals

Goal 1 to teach students with disabilities to ski in the six two-hour lessons offered by the Ski for the Health program was successful. All nine students involved in the 2024-2025 learned to ski, ride the ski lifts, and explored multiple ski runs under the close supervision of their instructors. All parents report that their children felt safe in their lessons, made new friends, gained confidence, and, most importantly, had fun. All the students want to participate in the 2025-2026 Ski for the Health of It program.

Goal 2 to build a framework for expanding the Ski for the Health of It program to serve more students with disabilities on a year-to-year basis with the same partners and two new partner school districts was accomplished. McCall-Donnelly School District will nominate additional students to participate in the year two program. Students with disabilities from the Cascade and New Meadows school districts will be invited to participate in the 2025-

2026 program. Cascade students will be taught to ski at Tamarack Resort, AWeSOMe!'s second teaching site.

Goal 3 of having intermediate and long-term Ski for the Health of It program financing in place is a work in progress. We are hopeful the targeted grant applications that have been submitted to five granting organizations for the 2025-2026 school year will be funded. The original plan was to mount a campaign to have intermediate and long-term funding for the Ski for the Health of It budget included in activities or athletic school district budgets by the 2026-2027 school year.

This is a questionable possibility today. The Idaho's legislature's formula for funding public education and the allocation of funds for students with disabilities might make future school district funding for Ski for the Health of It type programs a challenge. During this just ended legislative session, the Idaho Senate refused to accept a House of representative three-million-dollar appropriation for special education in the face of a gap of \$82.2 million special education funding deficit according to the Office of Program Evaluation report. The present effort to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education and apparent lack of empathy for protecting diversity could also have a major impact on future special education funding.

A fallback alternative is having the McCall-Donnelly Education Foundation, Payette Lake Progressive Club, Rotary Club, Sabala Foundation, the City of McCall Local Option Tax program, and other local foundations and civic organizations collaborate to adopt the Ski for the Health of it as a legacy program to provide year-to-year funding. We have asked the leader of one of the organizations to consider arranging a discussion with other local grant giving organizations about forming a collaborative to fund the adaptive Ski for the Health of It for McCall-Donnelly students with disabilities of It for the next five years.

Goal 4 to recruit and train new instructors to accommodate a growing number of winter programs students, including more Ski for the Health of It program participants, was accomplished. The number of available instructors (two for each student) determines how many students can be accommodated. April Rossetti was able to schedule two instructors to cover all Ski for the Health of It student's lessons. This is no small feat as AWeSOMe! Instructors who are retired or otherwise available on Fridays often travel and have other responsibilities.

AWeSOMe! is fortunate that there is good season-to-season instructor retention, and that recruiting has resulted in ten new volunteers joining the AWeSOMe! family each of the last two years. Because of the number of nonprofit organizations in Valley County—there are over 100—recruiting volunteers and fundraising is competitive. The supply of volunteers in a small population may mean that AWeSOMe! will have to begin paying instructors to meet program growth demands. This may be especially true in our efforts to recruit younger instructors who need a paycheck. While paying instructors is a possibility, the details of using volunteer and paid instructors have not been thoroughly discussed.

Ski for the Health of It Program Partners

Partnerships that evolve to address opportunities when there is trust between organization leaders are usually easy to organize and sustain when a need to be addressed is clearly identified. The opportunity to use time on a weekday when school is not in session to provide children with disabilities new experiences is real. That students with disabilities do not have many organized opportunities to develop skills in sports that will place them on a par with their peers is also real. Besides having limited time for organized play and access to athletic skill building programs for students with disabilities, the students and their families often must overcome multiple barriers to sports participation: lack of transportation, sports equipment is expensive, participation costs can put participation out of reach, students' families don't believe they can learn the skills necessary to participate safely in sports. As an example: skiing requires understanding risks and learning calculated nuances a person must understand to be successful.

Besides having trust between program partners, they must be willing to commit resources to achieving common goals, whether it is funding or in-kind support. Ski for the Health of It is not an inexpensive program but is affordable in the context of funds and efforts spent on a similar number of students competing in school sponsored interscholastic athletic and scholastic-based events.

McCall-Donnelly School District

In February 2024, the McCall-Donnelly School District board of trustees announced that schools would test a 2024-2025 four-day school calendar. The district reported a survey of teachers and parents found seventy percent of parents and teachers favor the four-day week calendar. The four-day calendar with selected Mondays and Fridays off will continue to be used for the 2025-2026 school year.

Adaptive Wilderness Sports of McCall

Adaptive Wilderness Sports of McCall (dba AWeSOMe!) was founded in 2002 by a physical therapist and an occupational therapist to provide McCall-Donnelly School District students with disabilities ski lessons alongside their peers in the Little Ski Hill learn to ski program. AWeSOMe! relocated four years later to Brundage Mountain Resort to take advantage of chairlifts that accommodated adaptive ski equipment, better adaptive teaching terrain, seven day a week operation, and to add services to adults with disabilities.

In 2023, AWeSOMe! extended services to Tamarack Mountain Resort at the request of parents in the Donnelly, Chris Wernert was hired as executive Director and Beth Guest hired as Technical Director/Winter Program Director to meet the challenges of growth, develop additional programs, and move to offering year-round programming.

Key to the Ski for the Health of Its success is the willingness of AWeSOMe!'s volunteer instructors to commit to teaching students with disabilities over the six-lesson program. Each lesson requires a lead instructor, an assistant instructor, and a ski buddy if the

adaptive equipment requires additional help or for safety. Besides participating in Professional Ski Instructors of America (PSIA) clinics held at our two teaching sites, they also participate in in-house clinics.

Today there are 44 active AWeSOMe! volunteer instructors. Our instructors come from varied backgrounds. Many are retired. These include people in healthcare (physician, orthopedic nurse practitioner, physical and speech therapists, and hospital administration), education (teachers, counselors, public school and university administrators, high school and university students), natural resources management (forest service employees, firefighters, timber managers), ski industry workers (active and retired ski patrollers and instructors), and a newspaper reporter, civil engineer, software developer, and deep-sea diver/contractor. Many of these instructors, supplemented by other community members, volunteer for AWeSOMe!'s summer programs.

New volunteers start as ski buddies and advance through assistant to lead instructors based on clinic attendance, group clinics, one-on-one training, and shadowing and helping in lessons. For the nine students in the Ski for the Health of It program a minimum of 18 instructors was needed, plus five or six ski buddies who turned out to help with the lessons. The ski buddies were very helpful with the youngest students.

Brundage Mountain Resort and Tamarack Resort

Brundage Mountain Resort and Tamarack Resort provide AWeSOMe! office and equipment storage space and our students' free lift tickets and ski equipment when they are in their lessons. AWeSOMe! provides specialized adaptive ski equipment. The resorts also provide space for group lesson activities and volunteer instructor training clinics.

The Program Model

Several months prior to the school district announcing the board of trustee's decision to test the four-day calendar, AWeSOMe!'s Executive Director Chris Wernert had a discussion with the board of directors about the composition of students being served in the context of the organization's nonprofit responsibilities and founding purpose. He pointed out that except for a few scholarship students, the students enrolled in ski lessons were from affluent families and the majority were from Boise and nearby urban Treasure Valley Communities. Chris suggested efforts be made to serve more local school age children and young adults, returning to the organization's roots in fulfilling the organization's nonprofit obligations.

Percentage of Winter Students by Home Zip Code			
Communities Served	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Rural Communities	30%	51%	50%
Urban (Treasure Valley Communities)	59%	32%	28%
Out of State	11%	17%	10%
Total Percent	100%	100%	100%

Ski for the Health of It Program Back Story

AWeSOMe! Volunteer Instructor Terry Edvalson, who moved to McCall nine years ago and walks his dog daily on the trail that passes by the high school, observed and interacted with the special education students and Susie Erickson, a special education teachers' aide. The students were on the trail nearly every afternoon when school was in session, regardless of the weather, walking, bike riding, cross-country skiing, interacting socially, and most importantly, having fun. Unfortunately, there was a decline in outdoor activities for the students with virtually no outdoor sports and recreation activities in the 2023-2024 school year following Susie retirement in August 2022. District staff members report that budget constraints and lack of staff were factors in the decline of outdoor sports and recreation activities.

Terry recognized that the McCall-Donnelly School District (MDSD) moving to the four-day calendar offered an opportunity to AWeSOMe! to introduce an adaptive ski for the health of It program based on his experience teaching in the Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort's Ski for the Health of It program. In 2011, Oregon's Baker 5J School District adopted a four-day school calendar. An Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort board of directors' member who is also a ski instructor, after a discussion with other ski instructors, met with school district administrators to propose a Ski for the Health of It program for Baker 5J students on Fridays when they would not be in classrooms.

The Baker 5J School District administrators agreed to partner with the ski area. The district agreed to advertise the program, collect registration information and the \$80 dollar participation fee, provide bus transportation, and recruit chaperones to ride the buses. Scholarships were provided from a fund established by learning center instructors. Students were recommended for scholarships by teachers for students from families with limited financial resources. The participant fee covered a small portion of the ski area expenses of paying instructors' wages and furnishing ski equipment. The Baker City based Adler Foundation provided a grant to the nonprofit ski area to support the program. The Adler grant award has been renewed annually. The program proved to be successful from the first day and has been expanded to serve students from North Powder, Union, and Cove

school districts that operate on four-day calendars and for home-school students in Baker and Union counties.

Terry suggested the Anthony Lakes-Baker 5 J Ski for the Health of It program model could be replicated as an adaptive learn to ski program. Chris agreed the concept had merit and the idea should be explored with the McCall-Donnelly School District. A meeting was arranged with Kim Arrasmith, Heartland Adaptive High School Principal and Director of Special Programs, to broach the idea of implementing an Adaptive Ski for the Health of It Program in the McCall-Donnelly School District in the 2024-2025 school year.

Participants in the meeting, held in late spring of 2024 with Kim, AWeSOMe! Board Chair Bill Marineau, Chris, Terry, and Susie Erickson, to discuss the possible roles of the two organizations in developing a program. Susie was an early AWeSOMe! volunteer and continued her connection with the special education students as their school bus driver after her retirement. Her ongoing involvement with the students and their families would lend credibility to the proposed program. The meeting resulted in an agreement that AWeSOMe! would prepare a description of the program for use in a fall meeting as a basis for regarding the district's involvement, and formalizing partners' responsibilities.

In September 2024, a second meeting was held where agreement was reached on the school district's and AWeSOMe!'s responsibilities. The Mondays and Friday lesson dates were fixed by the district's calendar. The lesson day schedule, transportation arrangements, communication strategies, and the process of selecting students were decided. The district's special education teachers would nominate students to participate in the program using AWeSOMe! guidelines and to determine which families were willing to enroll their children in the program. The district agreed to provide bus transportation between Heartland Alternative High School and Brundage Mountain Resort. AWeSOMe! staff members were tasked with developing a parent information packet, arranging for instructors, and confirming Brundage Mountain Resort's participation in the program.

The third meeting on November 14, 2024, between Kim Arrasmith, AWeSOMe! Technical/Winter Program Coordinator Director Beth Guest, and Terry Edvalson, reviewed the list of 13 students nominated by the teachers. Beth, from her decade of experience working with families of children with disabilities, knew several of the prospective students. All nominations were accepted and the teachers, working through Kim, were asked to contact the families and provide them the Ski for the Health of It information packet and determine if they would enroll their children in the program. The teachers were also asked to determine if any of the parents might be available as bus chaperones.

Eight parents agreed to let their children participate in the Ski for the Health of It program. One family had two students nominated. One of the parents reported her son wanted to participate but would be unable to do so because of a series of medical appointments scheduled on the days ski lessons are offered. The other parents presented no reason why

their children wouldn't participate. The oldest student left the program after two lessons and at Suzie's suggestion a five-year-old was added for the final three lessons.

AWeSOMe! sent a letter and additional program information to the families of participating meeting at Heartland High School on December 3, 2024. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss program details, solicit parents' suggestions about the lesson schedule, and to complete program registration and waiver forms. Only one parent of two of the older students attended. The other parents were involved with family obligations or were unaware of the meeting.

Program Operations

The lesson learned in the program startup phase is that parents, while eager for the chance for their children to participate in the program, are extremely busy. They often don't read material sent home from school. One parent suggested that most of the notices sent home from school do not apply to her child with disabilities, so they go unread. Our fallback was for the teachers to resend the information packets, registration and waiver forms home with the students, and with an offer for parents to complete the forms online. At the same time Beth began contacting parents directly to discuss the program and answer their questions.

While two of the mothers indicated they could possibly find time to be bus chaperones, Chris and Terry decided they would take on that role. It was a good decision. Meeting the parents when they dropped off their children for the bus was a time to answer questions and get information regarding the students' mood and concerns that day. On return after the lessons, Terry and Chris had the opportunity to report to parents on the students' successes that day.

Following the advice of a community volunteer who works with young adults with disabilities, April Rossetti, AWeSOMe!'s winter program coordinator responsible for scheduling lessons and assigning instructors, contacted each family during the week preceding each lesson to confirm students' participation in the coming lesson. She became the focal point of communications for the project. The parents did contact her with questions and to let AWeSOMe! staff know if a student would be absent. In fact, only two students missed one lesson each because of being ill.

Of the nine students enrolled all were males between five and seventeen years of age. Their medical diagnoses are ADHD, autism, global disability, and spina bifida that qualified them for AWeSOMe!'s services. The McCall-Donnelly Ski for the Health of It students' disabilities are ADHD, autism, spina bifida, and global disability. The students ranged in age from five to seventeen. The two older students and the student with spina bifida had very limited skiing experience because of participation in school ski field trips.

The following diagnoses are representative of children and adult students' disabilities involved in AWeSOMe!'s programs year-to-year. Most students have multiple diagnoses. We anticipate female students and students with other diagnoses will be included in future Ski for the Health of It programs.

Examples of Students' Served by AWeSOMe by Primary by Disability		
ADHD	Cerebral Palsy	Spina Bifida
Autism, Nonverbal	Congenital Quad Amputee	Multiple Sclerosis
Apraxia	Developmental Coordination Disorder	Ehlers Danlos (soft tissue disorder)
Blind	Downs Syndrome	Poor Motor Coordination
Amputations	Dwarfism, Lax Joints	Right or Left Side Weakness
Stage 4 Cancer	Dyspraxia	Spinal Cord Injury

Parents were asked to complete a short Ski for the Health of It program questionnaire on March 7 when they dropped off their children and return it completed that afternoon when they picked them up. All parents returned the questionnaire. They report that their children had fun, felt safe, made new friends, and want to participate in next year's Ski for the Health program. The parents reported the program helped their children gain confidence, meet new challenges and benefit from the lunch hour social activities. Their comments were all positive concerning the project's organization and outcomes:

- "He reported enjoying the chairlift (which is a huge step forward!) and meeting so many new friend and overcoming fears"
- "He learned that sometimes new challenges are hard, but they are worth it."
- "He had fun learning and he felt protected by the people helping him. He loves skiing."
- "The program helped my son learn to not give up in trying a new sport. Learning to ski taught him he can accomplish new things by not giving up."
- "Confidence! Our son uses a wheelchair, hates the cold and has some sensory issues. This year he had fun skiing in below zero temperatures, wore a helmet without issue and met amazing people along the way."
- "Our son's fear of things is what holds him back. This opportunity is another case where he could be shown that it is ok to be scared but to also be brave and try anyway. The opportunity to be part of this program is beyond wonderful for our boy. We are not a skiing family so he probably would not have been put on skis without this and he had so much fun. I think it has helped him learn about his body movement which is another benefit."
- In a conversation with one of the instructors a mother of a kindergarten student said, "He is afraid of heights, I can't believe he rode the chairlift without freaking out."

Evaluating Student Progress

AWeSOMe! keeps statistics on each student and reports aggregated data on all students. The data is used for planning, management, fundraising, and reporting about the program to the parents, sponsors, donors, ski areas, and our other partners. Each student has an individual file that has information about the student's disabilities, equipment used, lesson plans, skills worked on and accomplishment in each lesson, the chairlifts used, runs skied, and recommendations for the next lesson. The file is kept in a secure file in the cloud, accessible by our instructors and updated after and reviewed before the next lessons so when a new instructor is assigned to a student there is adequate information to take next steps in the skills development process without losing ground.

Students' accomplishments are reported in the stories told of the challenges they have faced and overcome in learning to ski. Given the challenges our students face, their lesson-to-lesson skills learning progress, even if slow, is always impressive and significant. To understand how significant disabled students' challenges one must consider their disabilities.

Recommendations

1. Continue the practice of using teachers to nominate students with disabilities and as the initial contact point with families regarding the Ski for the Health of It program. The feedback from the teachers is important in measuring the long-term impact of the program on students.
2. Students with disabilities should be encouraged by the school staff members to participate in all school ski days at Brundage Mountain Resort and Tamarack Resort. With notification through Brundage and Tamarack or to AWeSOMe! directly, we will have instructors on hand to provide free lessons to the students with disabilities. This will also help in identifying potential Ski for the Health of It participants.
3. Schedule time in a special education teachers' meeting for a brief presentation to review AWeSOMe!'s services and capabilities to serve students with a variety of disabilities.
4. We noted that several students didn't have breakfast before skiing. Explore the possibility of the school district providing fruit and breakfast bars for the students.
5. Initiate a discussion with school district administrations regarding including the Ski for the Health of It program in the school budget and contracting Adaptive Wilderness Sports of McCall to provide contracted adaptive sports skills building lessons and education services.
6. Initiate discussions with Valley County organizations and foundations with missions of serving children to consider collaborating to fund the Ski for the Health of It as a legacy

program for a minimum of five years. (One organization officer has been approached with the idea. We will continue the discussion over the summer.)

7. Consider copying school districts that ask students and their families to pay activity fees to pay a small part of instruction costs. Financial assistance would be made available to families with limited financial resources.
8. Discuss the development of a Special Olympics Program in Valley County with parents of children with disabilities to determine if there is interest in reviving the program. If the answer is yes, support organization development efforts.

AWeSOMe!'s 2025 Summer Program - Play for the Fun of It

AWeSOMe! has a grant to provide scholarships for students with disabilities in summer camp activities. Families of students who participated in the Ski for the Health of It program are being referred to our [website](#) for camp details. The camp will be open to other students with disabilities as well. The McCall-Donnelly special education teachers will be asked to let the families of their students know about the AWeSOMe! summer camp activities.

AWeSOMe!'s Post High School Services

AWeSOMe! initiated the Out and About Program in July 2024 with bridge funding from the Ann and Frank Cahouet Foundation until City of McCall's Local Option Tax grant funds became available in April 2025. The Out and About Program was proposed by AWeSOMe! staff members to the City of McCall in response to *The Draft January 2023 Access McCall: ADA Transition Plan and Self-Assessment*, page 8:

“Providing young adults with access to City programs and services is critical as they transition from youth as aging out of the school system often results in a loss of the support, therapies, and assistance they received in school. Building systems to meet their needs fosters independence and promotes employment and community integration.”

The City of McCall awarded AWeSOMe! a grant from the Local Options Tax (LOT) fund to start the Out and About Program to provide young adults with disabilities (ages 18 to 34) an opportunity to participate in AWeSOMe!'s sports and recreation program post high school graduation. The grant funds a university intern studying adaptive sports and recreation to serve as program coordinator and pay participation fees for the young adults with disabilities in a variety of sports and community-based recreation activities.

Students learning winter sports skills with AWeSOMe! in school will have continuing support post high school from AWeSOMe!'s Out and About program.

AWeSOMe!'s Operating Policies

The Ski for the Health of It Program operates within the framework of AWeSOMe!'s operating policies.

Commitment: AWeSOMe!'s outdoor recreation program promotes physical activity and conditioning as well as emotional well-being, positively impacting the overall health of participants.

Opportunities: AWeSOMe! provides participants and volunteers opportunities to learn new skills, challenge themselves, and work together to enhance the health and self-confidence necessary for the participants to expand their human potential.

Inclusiveness: Participation in the winter and summer outdoor sports and recreation lessons is open to participants with a disability who wouldn't fit into a traditional skills development class and is medically stable. This includes individuals with a permanent physical or learning disability who need adaptive equipment and/or one-on-one instruction. In addition, the program facilitates participation by students with disabilities in local school sponsored sports activities.

Essential Eligibility Criteria: Criteria for both our winter ski/snowboard and summer kayaking lessons are on our website (www.awesomemccall.org). Our lessons are always dependent upon the availability of the appropriately skilled instructor and the appropriate equipment.

Community Service: AWeSOMe! offers adaptive outdoor sports lessons to people with disabilities of all ages regardless of their ability to pay. Every effort is made to keep programs and services costs low.

Integration: AWeSOMe!'s outdoor sports lessons aim to teach skills that prepare individuals to participate in outdoor recreation as independently as possible. Adaptive outdoor activities help to put individuals with disabilities on par with their non-disabled counterparts, allowing side-by-side participation in popular outdoor past times.

Disability Awareness: Integration of people with disabilities through recreation helps educate the non-disabled population about people with disabilities and their capabilities, making it easier to weave them into the fabric of society in general. The volunteer experience enhances disability awareness and personal growth.

Ski for the Health of It Student Impacts

Impact 1: Colten, a six-year-old student with learning disabilities who participated in the 2025 AWeSOMe! Ski for the Health of It Program at Brundage Mountain. Colten had never skied before and his mom says he “is afraid of everything ... he may be scared to try new things but once he gets comfortable, he will have a blast.” By the last session of the program Colten was more than comfortable and truly had a blast skiing!



Colten's first year of skiing!

Impact 2: Will is a fifteen-year-old student from McCall Donnelly School District with autism. Will has skied before but it was over five years ago, so participating in the 2025 AWeSOMe! Ski for the Health of It Program was an opportunity for him to enjoy skiing again. Will was a little rusty in the beginning ski session but by the last ski day he was making parallel ski turns on steeper terrain.



Will - on the chairlift at Brundage!

Impact 3: Elliot is a twelve-year old student at the McCall Donnelly School District with spina bifida. He loves skiing and really enjoys jumping in the terrain park! He made the most ski runs during the Ski for the Health of It Program and can't wait until next winter to ski some more with AWeSOMe!



Elliot - getting some "air" at Brundage!

Impact 4: Temo, is a five-year old student at the McCall Donnelly School District with general learning disabilities. The Ski for the Health of It Program offered Temo his first ever opportunity to ski. Temo was excited from the moment he put his ski boots on. He quickly learned to maintain his balance on skis and soon was able to make turns as he skied down the beginner run at Brundage. He is looking forward to skiing again next year with the program to continue learning to become a better skier.



Temo – practicing using a pole for support!

Impact 5: Andrew is an eight-year-old student with the McCall Donnelly School District, with this being the first time he has ever skied. Andrew progressed tremendously with the Ski for the Health of It Program. When he started, he had never skied before and struggled to gain self-confidence. However, by the last ski session, Andrew was full of confidence and skied excellently with no assistance down the beginner runs at Brundage Mountain.



Andrew – learning to balance on skis using a bamboo pole!

Impact 6: Skyler is a eleven-year-old student with the McCall Donnelly School District with mild learning disabilities and participating in AWeSOMe!'s Ski for the Health of It Program to improve his skiing skills that he developed over five years ago. Skyler is a natural athlete, and even though he hasn't skied for over five years he was on blue runs in no time. He was a joy for AWeSOMe! instructors to ski with and have fun conversations! Skyler is excited to ski again next year!



Skyler – Heading up to the top of the mountain at Brundage!

Impact 7: Zachary, a 17-year-old student with the McCall Donnelly School District with an autism spectrum disorder. Zachary started the Ski for the Health of It Program as a fair skier, by the end of the ski sessions he was a solid intermediate skier and was a blast to ski with. He enjoyed learning and exploring the ski runs at Brundage Mountain.



Zachary - after an icy day of skiing at Brundage!