

Service Learning Reflection Report
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Boxing Strong is a boxing gym located in Monterey, California. It was founded and is currently owned by Masha Cavazos. Boxing Strong offers a variety of classes, from regular adult boxing (13+ years old), youth boxing (7-12 years old), boxing classes for children with special needs, wrestling, muay thai/kickboxing, and sparring. I was assigned to be an assistant coach for the Thursday classes, which are boxing for special needs as well as the youth boxing class. Their overall mission for the non-contact classes for the special needs children is, “This program will teach kids to develop social connections, interact and communicate with peers. They will engage in physical activities that would help them with their motor skills, improve agility, coordination and balance - aspects of physical development often overseen by other sports. Moreover, this program will boost their self-image, confidence, as well as give them tools for stress management/relief and coping with anxiety.” Their overall mission, or the mission for general classes include the following: “At Boxing Strong, you will learn proper boxing technique and combinations through rapid boxing rounds that will reshape your entire body, revitalize your mind, and fortify your spirit. This high intensity, interval-training is excellent conditioning for all sports that include explosive force, rotational movement, and coordination. It is an energizing and exhilarating way to sculpt your entire body and develop agility, strength, and power.”

Throughout my time at Boxing Strong, I have developed a profound connection with the mission and what they value. Working under coach George Rios, I was welcomed into a positive, encouraging environment filled with leadership, support, and joy. Although I assisted rather than participating, I still felt the powerful impact these classes had. I wholeheartedly agree with Boxing Strong’s mission and I truly believe their coaches do whatever it takes to implement it. I was able to witness the children accomplishing milestones in their overall development. With every moment of progress I felt proud to have been able to contribute, even if it was in a small

way. Beyond connecting with the mission, I also formed bonds with the children I served. This experience of mine allowed me to discover a passion that I have for working with the youth population.

A typical day in the life at my service site was very manageable, once I got there. I served on Thursday's 4-6pm at the Monterey location located on Garden Road, right next to the Monterey airport. I would rush over from soccer practice at CSUMB. My practice was over at 3:40 pm and I would make the 10-15 minute commute by car from campus to the gym. I would get there 5-10 minutes before the first class at 4 pm and quickly change into clean athleisure clothes in the bathroom. During this time, I typically would also be scarfing down a snack I packed in the car. Although getting there was a little hectic, once I arrived everything was always smooth as can be. Boxing Strong is located within a larger fitness complex owned by First City Crossfit. Within this complex, there are many other fitness organizations. I would park in the designated parking lot for Boxing Strong customers. There was always parking and I never had an issue finding a spot. The overall conditions for the complex were accessible to all, but their parking lot maybe could have been an issue for some because it was gravel, and not smooth pavement. However, when I would encounter families parking in the lot, I never noticed any issues they had.

After parking, I would walk in the unit where Boxing Strong was, set my belongings down in the cubbies, and greet Coach Rios. By the time I would walk in, there would always be 1-2 students already in the gym. I would also say hello to them and usually ask them how their day was at school. Next, I would prep the attendance whiteboard by writing 4pm and 5pm and encouraging students to sign in as they came in. As more children arrived, I would greet them with a warm smile and sometimes hugs too! After that, Coach Rios would get started with class

typically closer to 4:05, giving some time for more students to trickle in. The class started off with some stretching and warm up laps– I would often lead the warm ups– and then transition into the workout of the day. The workouts varied between simple boxing combinations on the bag, one-on-one practice with Coach Rios or myself, movements with a PVC pipe, or body weight exercises. At the end of each session, we rewarded the children with a game. They really liked limbo and freeze tag. The 4 pm class was a 45 minute class and typically always had about 5 students.

After the 4 pm class, I stayed for the 5 pm youth boxing class, which was slightly more advanced and lasted an hour. This class was designed for children who were curious to learn about boxing and who could show that they demonstrated safety while practicing with the coach or other students. I would greet the children who entered and again asked them too to sign in. While these classes were run the same way– warm up, laps, and the workout, these students were given more complex boxing combinations to work on to challenge themselves. Like the first class, this group of children loved playing games just as much. The youth boxing class enjoyed playing freeze tag as well! At around 6 pm, I would gather my stuff and leave for the day.

When I first arrived at Boxing Strong for my first day of service, I remember struggling a bit to find the specific unit it was at. Although I had been at that fitness complex prior and knew where to park, the entrance to Boxing Strong was not immediately obvious. The main entrance leads to a waiting room with a few chairs, and the gym itself is hidden behind two double doors to the left. After confirming with a parent that I was in the right place, I entered the gym and was impressed with the layout. I thought it was well organized and maintained, clean, fully equipped with a boxing ring, punching bags, as well as extra gear like gloves and jump ropes for those members who forgot them.

There are a variety of resources available for children and children with special needs that serve as a way to improve their overall quality of life. The U.S. The Department of Education enforces the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which is a law that allows children with disabilities to be given free appropriate public education that ensures special education and required services. With that being enforced across the country, public schools offer special education services, therapy that focuses on speech, occupational, or physical, or Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). These services and programs provide these children with the ability to learn in an environment that suits their needs and supports their educational growth.

Local organizations like Special Kids Connect, offer valuable community resources. This organization caters to families in the Salinas and Monterey area who have children with disabilities and offers a variety of resources for them. They offer programs for children to participate in sports at their own level and leisure. They emphasize developing motor skills, enhancing cognitive abilities, communication skills, and socialization skills. The organization also offers a resource center that gives guidance to parents who suspect their child may have developmental delays early on. Special Kids Connect offers a free membership to a library full of therapy equipment, puzzles, toys, games and more.

Financial resources also exist to support families. The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) provides payments to adults and children who have disabilities. These payments could go toward therapy, special needs sports or physical activity programs, like Boxing Strong, or even equipment the child may need.

As for neurotypical children, there are also great resources to improve their quality of life. There are numerous sports teams and leagues within Monterey County. Many schools offer physical education classes, which is a great way to implement the importance of physical activity

at a young age. There are also dance classes, martial arts, art classes that all promote not only physical health but social development as well. In most public schools, the cafeteria offers a well balanced meal, which allows children to be supported when it comes to nutrition. In addition, if a child is experiencing any mental health concerns, the Monterey County Behavioral Health Child and Youth services, offers mental health services for children and teenagers.

In the community where I serve, there are challenges that families of children with special needs face. These challenges make it difficult for residents to engage in healthy behaviors and, or, improve the child's quality of life. According to the Monterey County Health Needs Assessment of 2022, 11.3% of parents said that there was a time their child needed medical care for their child but they were not able to receive it. Although that is not the highest percentage, I believe that it is still significant considering that these children could also be those who require therapies, such as occupational or physical. Without these services provided to these children, it is very difficult for them to develop appropriately. Those who participated in the survey rated "access to care/services" as a major problem within the community. Here is what one physician had to say: "There are not enough primary care providers in the county. Wait times for specialists are very long as well. It is difficult to attract new providers to the county due to cost of living..." (Monterey County Health Department).

In addition, the cost of healthcare and the cost of living may be a barrier for some families. I chose to highlight the city of Monterey's costs solely because that is where the gym is located. While not all members of the Boxing Strong are from Monterey and could be from surrounding cities, the high local costs still impact the entire community. Monterey is 60% more expensive than the national average and 15% more expensive to live in than the average city in California. Not only is food, housing, and transportation costs less affordable than the average

U.S. costs, healthcare is also less affordable in Monterey (ERI Economic Research Institute). The expenses also increase for families with children with special needs. Families may struggle to keep up with the costs of living and do their best to improve the development of their child. It may not be an option for some families to have the ability to send their children to programs like Boxing Strong.

A third barrier that this community may face is a lack of funding within special education programs. According to the University of North Carolina Pembroke, many special education programs find it difficult to provide adequate support for students with disabilities. Schools also struggle to hire enough qualified special education teachers and supply proper resources, for example, such as assistive technology and individualized learning plans. Without these supports in place, children may miss opportunities for growth in both academic and social development.

The most prevalent course topic that I would say that connects with my service learning site would have to be ableism—specifically when it comes to physical activity. Children with special needs or disabilities are often excluded from participating in any sports teams at schools or even considered when it comes to establishing gyms or fitness facilities. Despite the title III of the ADA, which ensures that public and commercial facilities provide accessibility for people with disabilities, there are still fitness and recreational facilities that are considered a barrier. Gyms are indeed a public place and for individuals and yet accessibility for individuals with disabilities—especially children—is frequently overlooked. This exclusion is unfair for the families and the child as it limits the opportunities to engage in physical activity. (Rimmer et al.).

In addition, there is a lack of information and knowledge known about disabilities and the ADA within the fitness industry. Professionals within this field do not know how to make their programs and facilities more accessible to individuals with disabilities. In the fitness industry, as

well as an owner or manager of a public institution, it is important to be able to understand and execute the needs of every individual. Accessibility is frequently overlooked within gyms because people only think that fully functional abled people are the only ones who want to engage in physical activity. There is a lack of non-slip mats in locker rooms, narrow spaces, or a lack of adaptive equipment (Rimmer et al.)

The role of gym owners and managers is crucial; they have full control over what they would like to do with their gym and they have the power to create inclusive or exclusive environments. Some may choose to make a difference in their community, like Masha, and some may not. I was speaking with the coach I serve with, and he was informing me on how the children with disabilities class started. He told me that his manager, Masha, had asked him what he wanted to do while being a coach. She asked him if all he wanted to do was coach and get paid, or accomplish something greater. The coach said he wanted to start and coach a class for children with disabilities. Masha got it done as soon as possible— maybe even a day or two after he suggested it. Boxing Strong has now been offering a class for these children for about three years and I would say it has been very successful. This goes to show that the power dynamic, owners in this case, could choose to be inclusive and not just include one population, but others as well.

The article “Pushing for disabled kids to have an equal shot at school sports,” written by Carolyn Jones, discussed how legislation would need to be installed in order for elementary schools and universities to provide sports teams for disabled students. Some families may not be able to afford private therapy or even group classes. If these children were given an opportunity at their own school to participate in physical activity, especially in a sports team which also encourages social interaction and other skills like teamwork, this would be very beneficial and

convenient to the parent. I do recognize that there are great programs, like Boxing Strong, however there are not enough. As a community we can collectively make steps in addressing this issue. We can continue to advocate for gyms to become more knowledgeable and accessible, we can advocate for schools to create sports teams for children with disabilities, and we can encourage those in power to establish accessible physical activity programs for these children to participate in. Without these efforts, many children will remain inactive thus not reaching their full potential. Physical activity and mobility has important physiological benefits for children (COH Marcomm), hence why a site like mine is necessary for this specific population.

Boxing Strong contributes to an inclusive and accessible space by adapting workouts to fit the needs of each child. The coach does not focus on form or pace of the movement; instead what they value is effort and growth. Coaches recognize that the children are doing their best and that they will keep encouraging them to do so. Coaches will sometimes pull students aside to work on areas that that specific student could improve on— typically certain ranges of motions. Boxing Strong ensures that every child has the opportunity to engage in physical activity while developing beneficial life skills like socialization and confidence.

I feel as if I have successfully used my patience, positivity, and willingness to learn to contribute to the health and wellness of the children I serve at Boxing Strong. I offer every child encouragement through whether it be me doing the exercises or games with them, or me just doing something so simple as to a high five. I believe that my actions at my site helped create a positive and empowering environment where these children felt supported, capable, and motivated to grow.

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Talking Points

1. Introduction -1 min

- a. Name
- b. Location
- c. Classes offered
- d. What I was assigned to

2. Missions -1 min

- a. Special needs: Build social connections, communication skills. Improve motor skills, agility, coordination, balance. Boost self-confidence and stress management.
- b. General classes: Focus on boxing technique, fitness, mental strength, and overall conditioning.

3. How I got there 30 sec

- a. Car, rushing from practice, eating in car, changing fast
- b. Describe how site was, where it was

4. Day in my life 1 min

- a. Greeted students and coach rios
- b. Coach rios intro
- c. Took attendance
- d. Sometimes led warm ups
- e. Helped lead activities: stretching, workouts, one-on-one coaching, and fun games like freeze tag and limbo.
- f. Witnessed kids meeting milestones and growing in confidence and ability. Rewarding

5. Assets 2 min

- a. Special Kids Connect: local nonprofit offering adaptive sports, early intervention support, and a therapy resource library.
- b. Supplemental Security Income (SSI): financial help for families, payments
- c. US Dept of Edu/ IDEA (individuals w/ disabilities education act)/public schools: Special education services, IEPs, therapies

6. Challenges / Barriers 2 min

- a. Access to Care: 11.3% of parents could not get needed medical care for their children (Monterey County Health Assessment).
- b. Cost of Living: Monterey is 60% more expensive than national average — healthcare, food, and housing are less affordable (ERI Economic Research Institute).

- c. Special Education Funding Issues: Schools struggle to hire enough qualified special education teachers (UNC Pembroke).

7. Connection to course topics 2 min

- a. Ableism in fitness, lack of PA opportunities for this population
- b. Many gyms and programs are not accessible to individuals with disabilities despite the ADA.
- c. Barriers include narrow spaces, lack of adaptive equipment, and limited professional knowledge (Rimmer et al.).
- d. Power of Gym Owners and Masha

8. Reflection 1 min

- a. patience, positivity, and willingness= the wellness of the children.
- b. games, offering encouragement, giving high-fives= create a supportive and empowering environment.
- c. discovered a passion for working with youth