

Disabilities can't keep these determined people off slopes

By Jami Kinton

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MANSFIELD -- Each year when Amanda Young's family traveled to Colorado to go skiing, she would be left behind.

Young, 33, has spina bifida, a spinal birth defect that has confined her to a wheelchair since the age of 10.

Growing up, skiing wasn't the only sport Young couldn't participate in.

"I could never find any recreational activities to do," the Columbus woman said. "It was hard sometimes being left out of things."

But that all changed when Young was introduced to the TAASC program.

A non-profit organization, TAASC -- which stands for The Adaptive Adventure Sports Coalition -- offers adaptive sports and recreational programs to people of all ages and disabilities.

They offer water skiing, sailing, rock climbing, kayaking, ice skating, sled hockey, cycling and, of course, alpine skiing.

Young said she knew TAASC board president Steve Ricker, who introduced her to the TAASC ski program at Snow Trails.

Starting at age 18, Young said she quickly fell in love with the sport and has been skiing ever since.

"It wasn't always easy," she said. "The first time I went down the hill I fell 16 times and it was discouraging. Then someone said to me, 'It's gonna be tough, but nothing in life is ever easy.'"

Young said she took the words to heart and stuck to it. Not long after, she was hooked.



Jason J. Molyet/News Journal

Corey McChesney is ready to hit the slopes Saturday morning at Snow Trails. He participates in The Adaptive Adventure Sports Coalition -- offers adaptive sports and recreational programs to people of all ages and disabilities.

### The Adaptive Adventure Sports Coalition

The Adaptive Adventure Sports Coalition (TAASC) is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization headquartered in Columbus. It was established in the spring of 1997 to help people with disabilities participate in adventure activities.

Its mission is to enhance the quality of life for people with disabilities by providing sports and recreational activities, and to offer opportunities for empowerment through education, leadership, and training in collaboration with community-based organizations.

TAASC is located at 1139 Dodd rehabilitation Hospital, 480 Medical Center Drive, Columbus, Ohio 43210.

For more information, call 614-293-4963 or visit [info@taasc.org](mailto:info@taasc.org) on the Internet.

**Source:** TAASC

"I realized I'd rather fall down and get bruised than sit and do nothing," Young said.

The falling didn't last long. Young said within six months, she was able to ski without an instructor.

"The equipment is much better now than when I first started," Young said. "People can now learn much faster than I did."

Young is now a ski instructor for other TAASC members.

"Skiing is my favorite sport by far," she said. "And falling is not a bad thing. It just gives you stories to tell."

The TAASC members meet at Snow Trails every Tuesday and Saturday mornings.

President Steve Ricker said seven disciplines are offered, including mono and bi-skis, which are basically seats mounted over a shock absorber and one or two skis. These accommodate people who use wheelchairs.

Two other disciplines are the four- and three-track, where skis and flip-skis (ski poles with mini-skis on the ends) are used by amputees or people who have trouble walking.

Snowboards include a balance frame that attaches to a snowboard and suit people with a variety of disabilities.

Ricker said there also are equipment and methods to assist the blind, visually-impaired and people with developmental disabilities such as Down syndrome and autism.

"We teach skills," Ricker said. "We don't just give people equipment and let them go for rides."

Ricker said families are encouraged to participate as well.

Glenna Amiralian didn't begin skiing when her daughter Angela joined TAASC, but it wasn't long before she found herself itching to ski.

Like Young, Angela Amiralian, 18, has spina bifida. She said a woman at church encouraged her to try skiing at Snow Trails.

Angela finally gave it a try.

"She was my inspiration," said Glenna Amiralian, of Ashland. "I'd come and watch Angela when she started and it really did look fun. I just thought, 'well if she can do it, I can do it.' "



Amanda Young of Columbus skis Saturday afternoon at Snow Trails.



Jason J. Molyet/News Journal

Marc Beasley works with Jackson Premer, 7, of Worthington on Saturday afternoon at Snow Trails. Premer participates in The Adaptive Adventure Sports Coalition -- offers adaptive sports and recreational programs to people of all ages and disabilities.

The family has been skiing at Snow Trails for nearly five years.

A new TAASC member, Ronnie Dunwoody, 15, tried his first attempt at skiing Saturday.

Within one hour, Dunwoody was skiing halfway down the bunny hill independently.

Dunwoody, of Crooksville, has Tourette syndrome, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and is mentally retarded.

"I'm just amazed at what he's been able to do today," said his mother, Betty. "I'm so happy he's been given this opportunity."

Rick Graham, a 10-year TAASC instructor, said when people are able to master the slopes, doors open for them as they gain confidence.

Tamara Premer knows this is true.

Her 7-year-old son Jackson has Rubinstein-Taybi Syndrome. He cannot speak and his development is delayed.

She started Jackson skiing when he was 4.

"After his first month skiing, I saw a huge improvement in his strength," the Columbus woman said. "It's definitely helped his walking and given him a much better sense of balance."

Premer said her son's confidence has improved as well.

"Even with the tether (a leash-like device used by instructors), as far as Jackson knows, he's skiing," Premer said.

Premer said skiing has allowed her and her son to bond. She said they've skied down every hill at Snow Trails.

"I highly recommend the TAASC program to everyone," she said. "These people are wonderful, and no matter what your disability is, they will get you to ski."

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