



ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION TOOLKIT FOR YMCAS AND FITNESS FACILITIES



This toolkit was created through a partnership between Able South Carolina, South Carolina Disability and Health Project at the University of South Carolina, and the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability. Special thanks to the Caine-Halter YMCA in Greenville, SC, and Roger C. Peace Rehabilitation Hospital for allowing us to use their programs and facilities as an example to educate similar entities.

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Introduction

.....*Project Purpose & Goal*

People with disabilities deserve the same access to health and wellness programming opportunities that those without disabilities have. Ultimately, this toolkit should provide practical guidance to YMCAs, gyms, and fitness studios on how to improve inclusivity and accessibility of programming and facilities. Long-term, this toolkit can promote greater access to health and wellness for those with disabilities across communities.

Removing barriers to accessing the full fitness experience in facilities open to the public can start with some simple steps. Policies and practices need to address not only the built environment, access routes, and equipment, but also programming, staff, and trainers in order to build a truly inclusive environment.

All fitness centers should strive to welcome everyone to be a part of community health and wellness and have access to the tools to be the healthiest version of themselves, physically, mentally, and emotionally. The desire stemming from this project is to create a larger conversation and ripple effect of YMCAs, gyms, and fitness studios taking the initiative to serve the whole community, not merely those without disabilities.

.....*About Able South Carolina*

[Able South Carolina](#) (Able SC) is a nationally recognized “center for independent living” (CIL), a non-residential, community-based not-for-profit organization that provides an array of independent living services and educates the greater community about the rights of people with disabilities. Our mission is to create greater access and opportunities for independence through empowering individuals with disabilities and promoting community inclusion. Able SC is run and operated by a majority of people with disabilities, so we didn’t simply learn our mission; we live it every day!

[Able Access](#), a program of Able SC, is dedicated to helping any organizational partner get disability inclusion right. In a space where there are enforceable standards, best practices, simple solutions, and cutting-edge tools, Able Access takes the guesswork out of reaching a broader and more diverse market while ensuring that the provided programs are barrier-free. Able Access services include architectural accessibility assessment, digital accessibility testing, professional training, keynote speaking, policy and procedure review, and accessible event logistics.

.....*About the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability*

The [National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability](#) (NCHPAD) is a public health practice and resource center on health promotion for people with disabilities. NCHPAD seeks to help people with disabilities, and other chronic health conditions achieve health benefits through increased participation in all types of physical and social activities, including fitness and aquatic activities, recreational and sports programs, adaptive equipment usage, and more. NCHPAD actively works to create healthy equity for people with disability by providing individualized information, referral, and consultation services to people with disability, families, caregivers, policymakers, community members, health care practitioners, and public health professionals through an expansive array of web-based materials and health communication endeavors. Additionally, NCHPAD conducts national training initiatives that educate disability and non-disability service providers in community health inclusion.

..... *Overview of Caine Halter YMCA*

[The Caine Halter YMCA](#) in Greenville, South Carolina, features an indoor and outdoor pool, a state-of-the-art wellness facility, group exercise rooms, a functional training wing, dedicated cycle class space, and childcare space. The facility was designed with accessibility in mind and offers several programs by outside vendors that are directly marketed to individuals with disabilities, such as Roger C. Peace Rehabilitation Hospital's [UCAN Adaptive Sports program](#). This program provides adaptive sports opportunities for people with physical disabilities and often utilizes facilities like the Caine Halter YMCA for their events. Roger C. Peace offers nine different sports and sponsors a junior wheelchair basketball team. With a variety of adaptive equipment and trained staff and volunteers, they provide possibilities for people who are typically excluded from physical sports to have an active, healthy lifestyle.



..... *About Greenville, South Carolina*

The Caine Halter YMCA is located close to downtown Greenville. Greenville County is in the Upstate of South Carolina and has approximately half a million residents. It has the largest population of any single county in South Carolina and most residents with disabilities (State Reports for County-Level Data on Prevalence). While local data are not readily available, the CDC states that South Carolina ranks higher than the national average in the percentage of individuals with disabilities who are inactive, have high blood pressure, or are obese.

The Caine Halter YMCA is in an area where gentrification has led to rising home prices and financially burdened residents. While there is no shortage of gyms and fitness clubs in the area, these locations target downtown visitors with more disposable income. Having access to affordable health and wellness programs, like YMCAs, is essential for residents. Even individuals without financial barriers cannot have full access to health and wellness programming, as most locations are not physically accessible or fully inclusive in the services they offer, their staff's training, or their advertising materials.

..... *Civil Rights Context*

The Americans with Disabilities Act's (ADA) goal is to fully realize the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in all aspects of public life. Discrimination is the opposite of inclusion, and while intentional discrimination, or prohibition of participation from a particular group, is less common, unintentional screening out or exclusion happens regularly. Striving for full inclusion means recognizing that a facility's current state may not be 100% accessible now, but that it can be made more accessible through thoughtful planning and taking tangible steps in the right direction.

The ADA is typically referenced in regards to accessibility because it provides clear standards, enforcement authority, and pathways for technical assistance. While there are specific [exemptions](#) from the ADA, the best practices provided are a strong starting point for organizations seeking to reach new members, contract with business partners to provide wellness benefits to their employees, and welcome top talent with disabilities. Including individuals with disabilities is good business, and it is the right thing to do.

..... *Methods*

Instead of simply creating a guide with steps and resources, we thought it would be helpful to feature an actual site that has made strides to eliminate some of the barriers to access and inclusion. Able SC worked with

Caine Halter YMCA to record its current efforts to create an accessible wellness center that promotes inclusive programming. During this process, Able SC staff surveyed the facility, along with its website, programming, policies and procedures, marketing materials, and recently released fitness app to note some of its best practices and offer recommendations to improve access and inclusion further.

Able SC used a variety of tools, primarily an onsite physical assessment, as well as consulting the [Community Health Inclusion Index \(CHII\)](#) and the [Accessibility Instruments Measuring Fitness and Recreation Environments \(AIMFREE\)](#) instrument from NCHPAD, to evaluate the accessibility of the Caine Halter YMCA and its fitness equipment/amenities.

Two members of the Able SC assessment team completed the onsite assessment. The team used a software app for recording notes, a tape measure, a digital level, and a digital fish scale (used for measuring the force required to open doors) to take accurate measurements of the facility. The team toured the YMCA and examined all aspects of physical accessibility. The app is not required to complete an onsite physical assessment; it is a paid service that Able SC uses to simplify reporting.

The software app that was used is located on a cloud-based ADA inspection and reporting system. The reporting system allows for users to gather findings, record barriers, and include relevant pictures. The app cites the 2010 ADA Accessibility Standards, the highest accessible standard currently recognized by the US Access Board and enforced by the US Department of Justice. The reporting system generates reports that include barrier removal recommendations as well as grievance management and transition plans. The Able SC team then customized the barrier removal recommendations to provide additional resources and suggestions.

The AIMFREE are instruments developed to measure the accessibility of fitness and recreation facilities as it pertains to persons with mobility impairments. These manuals are a validated series of questionnaire measures that can be used by persons with mobility limitations and professionals (i.e., fitness and recreation center staff and/or owners of fitness centers) to assess the accessibility of recreation and fitness facilities.

The CHII is a set of survey tools used to help communities gather information on the extent to which healthy living resources are inclusive of all community members, including persons with disabilities.

The full report was compiled for the facility with our recommendations for them to make their facility even more in line with the 2010 ADA accessibility standards. While we will not review the full report in detail here, we will reference some of the areas where Caine Halter is excelling and some areas it can improve. Able SC administered the AIMFREE and CHII. The group round-table discussion facilitation piece did not occur as the COVID-19 pandemic began during these assessment periods and could not be completed safely in-person, and staff was unavailable to us at that time.

The COVID-19 pandemic limited our access to professional staff and members of the YMCA during this grant timeline, so there is an opportunity for further research to be conducted in the future there, but we were able to use the framework of these instruments as references when we toured the space and conducted the onsite physical assessment of the facilities.

This process has been documented in a way that serves as a toolkit for use by other organizations. Each topic area begins with a general description of how it can impact access and inclusion and some key features to examine. From there, a list of best practices to create inclusion and accessibility in the issue area is listed and, below that, resources to explore that explain and support the listed best practices. Finally, our assessment of the Caine Halter YMCA provides a practical application and real-world examples to see these best practices in action or understand how to implement them better.

Key Features of Accessible Programs

Physical and programmatic access is critical to ensuring that fitness facilities are accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. While adaptive exercise equipment and inclusive programs are important when making sure all people can participate, facilities must also keep in mind that parking, marketing materials, restrooms, programming, and others are just as important.

.....*Marketing Materials/Website*

It is important that your fitness facility's website and marketing materials are accessible. People who are blind or low vision or individuals that may use screen readers or text to speech software to read information electronically need to be able to read all of the text and forms on your website and have information about the pictures. The website should be written in plain language to be accessible to those with learning or intellectual disabilities, or those who may process information differently. Plain language is communication your audience can understand because it uses clear, straightforward expressions, and only as many words as necessary to get your message across.

Take a look at your program's marketing materials. Are people with visible disabilities included in the pictures? Your program's website and brochures should include representation of those with disabilities. Not only does this representation create a more welcoming and inclusive environment, but it also lets potential members know you want their business!

Best Practices

- Is your facility or program's website accessible for those who use screen readers or text to speech software?
- Are your paper marketing materials available in an accessible electronic format on the website or in an accessible format (Braille, large text, etc.) upon request?
- Is the language of the website and marketing materials easy to read and written in plain language?
- Are people with various types of disabilities included on your website and in marketing material?
- Do you include all accommodation policies for people with disabilities (discussed in the Accommodations section below) in marketing and advertising materials, on websites, and communicated verbally to members?

Accessibility Resources

- [WAVE is a website evaluation tool](#) that identifies any accessibility errors. This tool is free and easy to use.
- Learn more about language accessibility on this [plain language government website](#).
- [The Roger C. Peace UCAN program site through Prisma Health](#) has great examples of pictures of people with disabilities enjoying adaptive recreation/fitness.

Caine Halter YMCA's Marketing Materials

The first area Able Access focused on was YMCA's marketing materials, specifically their website. According to the organization's executive director, almost all marketing and communications have moved to digital platforms and/or website links, even down to the membership agreements.

Observed Strengths

1. Caine Halter YMCA's website is accessible for those who use a screen reader. Most of their forms were located on the website.
2. Paper forms are available upon request, and staff also offer assistance in filling out forms electronically (See Figure 1).

Further Recommendations

1. Able Access did not observe any people with visible disabilities in the advertising images used on the website. Caine Halter could use images for marketing and advertising that include representation of those with disabilities to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment (See Figure 2).
2. Able Access observed on the website that most information and documents were outside of the plain language recommendations. A rewording of a few key descriptions in plain language would allow for those with and without disabilities to more clearly understand offerings and programs.

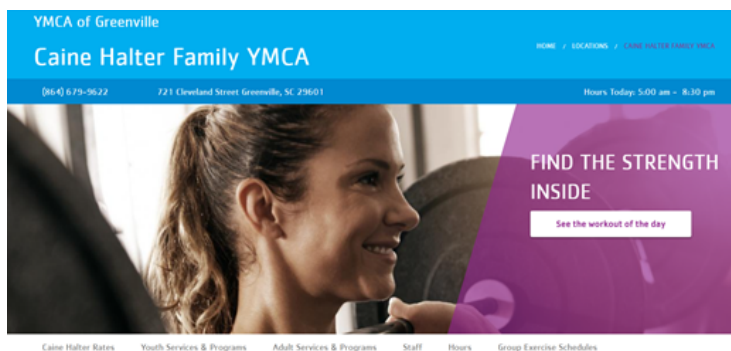


Figure 2. A screenshot of the Caine Halter Family YMCA home page.



Figure 1. A paper flyer for a job opportunity at the gym.

.....Policies and Procedures

Requesting Accommodations

Gyms have many moving parts and departments that work together to form a well-run gym. From the front desk staff to the personal trainers to the lifeguards, all play a role in creating an inclusive environment. The next area of focus is intra-organizational in scope. Regardless of which department your staff works in, all staff members should receive the same training and education on your facility's specific policies and any modified or accessible gym equipment. To handle accommodation requests and make members and guests with disabilities feel welcome, it is essential for staff to know your organizational policy on accessibility and for the process to request accommodations to be clear for members and guests.

Best Practices

- Have all staff members completed training(s) to feel comfortable and confident when working with members with disabilities? The training will also allow your staff to handle accommodation requests and make members with disabilities feel welcome.
- Do you have clearly listed procedures for members and guests to request accommodations in multiple formats?
- Do you use existing members of your facility who have a disability to act as peer support for new members?

Accommodations/Accessibility Resources

- [Able Access](#) offers a variety of professional training to help assist with providing access to people with disabilities. In addition to this, Able Access helps organizations with policy and procedure review by comparing existing policies with the ADA requirements navigating best practices.

Caine Halter YMCA's Policies and Procedures

Able Access interviewed the executive director and relevant staff about the policies and procedures for guest accommodation requests and reviewed the documents and handbook that lists these policies and procedures for staff to reference.

Observed Strengths

1. Caine Halter policies and procedures mention that members with disabilities can bring their trainer/PCA/physical therapist, etc. with them at no charge as an accommodation.

Further Recommendations

1. There were no references to accommodations and the process of requesting accommodations on the Caine Halter website. Including this information in marketing material lets people with disabilities know they are welcome and that Caine Halter wants their business.
2. There were no references to accommodations and the process of requesting accommodations clearly posted in the building, another opportunity to provide members and guests with disabilities to feel welcome and the facility to be inclusive.



Staff Personnel and Training

Personnel training for gyms and exercise facilities typically fall into two categories, administrative and programmatic. These aspects of staff training have opportunities to include best practices related to effectively including and serving individuals with disabilities in the gym setting.

Disability Cultural Competency

Incorporating disability sensitivity training as part of the onboarding procedure for all employees at your facility is one way to ensure your staff is equipped with skills to work with members with disabilities. These trainings should include topics such as person-first language, setting and maintaining high expectations, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) basics, and cultural expectations of people with disabilities. Consider holding this training yearly for all staff.

Best Practices

- Are you using a training that specifically focuses on disability exclusively? All staff will benefit from this training.
- Do all staff use person-first language when working with or speaking about persons with a disability?
- Do staff have the expectation that persons with disabilities can lead healthy lifestyles and benefit from exercise?

- Do staff have a baseline familiarity with the ADA in that it makes provisions for persons with disabilities to access the facilities?
- Do staff have cultural expectations that the rights and wishes of people with disabilities are to be respected at all times?
- Do staff participate in self and organizational assessments with follow up round table discussion regarding programs and services, staff, and policies to create staff buy in?



Disability Cultural Competency Resources

- [Able Access](#) offers a variety of professional trainings to help assist with providing access to people with disabilities. In addition to this, Able Access helps organizations with policy and procedure review by comparing existing policies with the ADA requirements navigating best practices.
- The [National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability \(NCHPAD\)](#) offers a wealth of resources and trainings to support staff in physical activities and being inclusive.
- [This toolkit by CBM](#) has some examples of person-first language and disability etiquette.

Caine Halter YMCA’s Disability Cultural Competence

Able Access interviewed the executive director and relevant staff on the training practices and resources utilized for onboarding and ongoing training of all Caine Halter YMCA staff members.

Observed Strengths

1. Caine Halter offers diversity training such as “YMCA of the USA: Working with Diverse Communities” (YUSA) to their staff.

Further Recommendations

1. The current diversity training does not cover disability. Able Access recommends that a more detailed and specific training that addresses proper disability terminology, expectations, and access accountability be provided annually to all Caine Halter staff in addition to their YUSA training.

Individual and Group Exercise

Group fitness instructors and personal trainers are two staff components that could use special attention when making your gym more inclusive. These two areas allow one-on-one and specialized attention for members who may need extra support or who find motivation from working out with others. Although group fitness instructors and personal trainers may have trained through different companies, you can streamline their knowledge on inclusivity by hosting your own training. You can also support and encourage staff to attend specialized trainings to increase knowledge and expertise.

Best Practices

- Do you ensure that staff and clients discuss health history, medications, and any associated or secondary conditions related to the client’s disability?

- Does the staff member also communicate this information to other staff working with the same member?
- Do staff work with the client to test flexibility, balance, strength, and cardiovascular endurance before beginning an exercise program to provide a clear baseline measure? Many field-based tests do not require clinical evaluations of oxygen consumption or specialized equipment. Refer to the Fitness Assessments Toolkit for ideas.
- Are you allowing your members to lead the conversation about their abilities? Do not be overprotective or assume what a client can or cannot do.
- Do staff engage the client in interactive discussions that identify his or her specific goals and objectives of the exercise program? Suppose the goals are functional in nature, such as using the stairs or carrying a bag of groceries. Do you test the client's abilities before beginning the exercise program and re-evaluate every 12 weeks? (If the disability is progressive or if there is a change in health status, more frequent evaluations may be necessary.)
- Do staff determine the client's barriers to exercise, such as lack of accessible equipment in the fitness center or unsafe neighborhoods that do not allow outdoor activity?
- Do staff ask clients what motivates them to continue exercising and determine the best strategy to provide that support?
- Is staff creative when designing an exercise program? For example, exercise that can be done in a gym setting can be supplemented with outdoor exercise or home exercise that incorporates daily activities and tasks.
 - When choosing the exercise venue, is staff considering what environment the client enjoys the most?
- Do your staff network with a team of healthcare professionals such as doctors, nurses, and physical and occupational therapists to provide guidance on any scope of practice outside of their knowledge base?
- Do your personal trainers and group fitness instructors understand how an individual's disability may affect things in an exercise specific way? Examples: dynamic balance, spatial orientation, sensorineural needs, language processing, communication preferences, and social and emotional needs.
- Do you require or support personal trainers and group fitness instructors to pursue specific adaptive training related to yoga, CrossFit, and other fitness modalities?
- Do staff know to always face the client so they can see your face, lips, eyes, and body?
- Are staff maintaining eye contact and speaking directly to the person, not to the interpreter if one is present?
- Do staff demonstrate to the client exactly what is required from start to finish to accommodate as many learning styles as possible?
- Do staff use visual cues and concrete examples whenever possible as they instruct? Visual and tactile cues should be used to enhance understanding; this includes having a black-or whiteboard available to use when necessary.
- Do staff use modifications as they demonstrate different exercises so that there isn't an overarching "one size fits all" approach?
- If an individual's speech is unclear or difficult to understand, do staff ask for clarification rather than pretending to understand?
- Do staff avoid loud, constant background noise as such sounds that may cause headaches (from echoes or vibration) or reduce the effective use of hearing aids, as well as cause sensory overstimulation?
 - If loud music is used as part of cultivating a particular class atmosphere, do you offer headphones to those who may need them as an accommodation?
- Do your fitness professionals familiarize themselves with the support devices, resources, and any adaptive technology available to them?

Individual and Group Exercise Resources

- Learn how to become a [certified Inclusive Fitness Trainer](#) through the American College of Sports Medicine.

Caine Halter YMCA's Individual and Group Exercise

Able Access assessed classes through observation and with the AIMFREE and CHII, along with internal checklists.

Observed Strengths

1. Caine Halter hosts “Beast Mode” classes that are CrossFit-style workouts, which can be easily modified and adapted because of their functional movement orientation and the types of equipment used. There are already a few members with visible disabilities who regularly participate in these classes.
2. Able Access observed that staff on the open gym floor and those teaching group exercise classes did not exclude or dismiss those individuals with disabilities from utilizing equipment or taking classes.
3. Able Access observed that staff teaching group exercises demonstrated different modifications that could be made to each movement and provided instruction for correct form to individuals throughout the class.
4. Some group exercise rooms provide television and whiteboards to display workouts, instructions, or helpful tips and reminders. Whiteboards are also available in the administrative offices to be utilized in the exercise rooms.
5. Caine Halter schedules consultations to discuss health and fitness goals for any members utilizing the personal trainer programs and services, which allows for individuals with disabilities to discuss any accommodations, gather health and exercise baselines and limitations, and set reasonable and accessible goals.

Further Recommendations

1. There was no outward advertising of adaptive or support equipment. Signs, forms, or the devices on display can allow more effective and full inclusion of individuals with disabilities.
2. There was no mention of staff who have specialized training related to accessible movement and exercise. Having staff with adaptive training can increase programming accessibility.
3. An expanded relationship with Roger C. Peace, a physical rehabilitative center that provides adaptive equipment and programming, could expand support and training to Caine Halter staff in areas outside of their current scope of practice, knowledge, and expertise.

..... *Accessibility of Facilities and Programs*

The following sections briefly examine the physical and programmatic obligations and opportunities that YMCAs, fitness centers, and gyms should be aware of, the best practices to implement those obligations, additional resources, and a case study of the Caine Halter YMCA and how it has worked to make its facility more accessible and inclusive. *This toolkit is not a comprehensive guide to the 2010 ADA Standards, which may be legally enforceable.

Location Access

Facilities should ideally be located in a centralized area where multiple transportation modes provide access to the facility. Individuals with a disability may drive a car to the facility, be dropped off, use the bus, or walk to site arrival points.

Best Practices

- Does the facility provide a parking area that complies with the 2010 ADA Standards?
- Is there signage directing drivers to accessible parking spaces and the loading area?
- Is there a loading area located nearest to the main entrance and that complies with the 2010 ADA Standards?
- Are there onsite sidewalks that connect to public sidewalks and comply with the 2010 ADA Standards?
- Are there onsite sidewalks that connect to routes that access bus stops or other forms of public transportation and comply with the 2010 ADA Standards?

Location Access Resources

- The United States Access Board offers a [Guide to Site Arrival Points](#).
- Download an [ADA checklist](#) for Location and Site Access [opens in .Doc format].

Caine Halter YMCA's Location Access

Caine Halter YMCA is located just outside of downtown Greenville, SC. It is in a residential area, can be served by public transportation and paratransit, and is approximately 0.5 miles to the closest bus stop that is navigable via the Swamp Rabbit Trail.

Observed Strengths

1. Caine Halter YMCA has a stand-alone accessible parking area and loading zone located nearest the main entrance.
2. They have clear, visible signs directing drivers to the accessible parking area.
3. Caine Halter YMCA is also located near the Swamp Rabbit Trail, a heavily trafficked multi-use paved trail that accesses multiple areas of Greenville County.

Further Recommendations

1. In the past, Caine Halter has been a hub for a city-wide bike sharing program. Though the program is currently being restructured, Caine Halter YMCA would be an ideal location to create an accessible cycling program because of its proximity to the Swamp Rabbit Trail.

Parking

Facilities should have a parking area that complies with the 2010 ADA Standards. The standards include the correct number of parking spaces, the correct slope of the parking area, and the correct height signage.

Best Practices

- Does the facility have the right number of accessible parking spaces according to the 2010 ADA Standards? The 2010 ADA Standards a ratio for parking used to determine the minimum amount of accessible parking spaces required. Adding more accessible spaces to accommodate users can help align the facility's mission with its environment.
- Are markings and paint clearly visible? This can help eliminate confusion about parking spaces.
- Does your parking space have a level slope? A parking space, even with a moderate slope, can be a fall hazard as individuals transfer in and out of their vehicles. The moderate slope can also prevent ramps and lifts in wheelchair accessible vans from being used.
- Do your spaces have access aisles? These are very important for individuals who use wheelchairs and wheelchair accessible vans.
 - Are the access aisles the proper width and slope, and curb ramps do not interfere with access aisles?

Parking Resources

- The United States Access Board offers [a Guide to Parking](#).
- Download an [ADA checklist](#) for parking [downloads in .Doc format].

Caine Halter YMCA's Parking

The Caine Halter YMCA features multiple parking areas due to the size of its campus. Caine Halter YMCA's main parking area is on tiered levels; the top tier is the accessible parking located nearest the main entrance (See Figure 3). The facility has separate parking areas for its main building, their offices, and their playing fields.



Figure 3. Caine Halter's primary accessible parking area.

Observed Strengths

1. The Caine Halter YMCA has included accessible parking beyond the minimum required to accommodate programs that are well-attended by seniors and people with disabilities.
2. Though not required by the ADA, Caine Halter has added parking for individuals with limited mobility in addition to their ADA compliant parking spaces.
3. The Caine Halter YMCA also offers accessible parking at different locations to ensure that members can access the right building without walking or wheeling across the entire facility.

Further Recommendations

1. While Caine Halter provides accessible parking most use areas, the tennis courts do not have dedicated accessible parking spaces resulting in faraway parking with additional barriers in between.
2. One of the parking spaces at the main accessible parking area has significant damage to the surface.
3. Due to a slope change in the parking area, two parking spaces have a slope that exceeds the 2010 ADA Standards.
4. "Accessible Parking" should replace all "Handicapped Parking" terminology.

Accessible Routes

At least one accessible route within the boundary of the site originating from site arrival points must connect all accessible buildings, facilities, elements, and spaces on a site.

Best Practices

- Is there at least one accessible route to every site element?
 - If a circulation path is interior, is the accessible route also interior?
 - Are the elevators in the same area as stairs and escalators, and not isolated in the back of the facility?
- Have you installed tactile directional signage that complies with the 2010 ADA Standards to orient members and visitors?
- Have you ensured that ramps comply with the 2010 ADA Standards by making sure the slope is within the correct range, as well as installing hand rails where necessary?

Accessible Route Resources

- The United States Access Board has a [Guide to Accessible Routes](#).
- Download this [ADA checklist](#) for Accessible Routes [opens in a .Doc format].

Caine Halter YMCA's Accessible Route

Observed Strengths

1. The walkway to the facility's main entrance is wide and flat and features a variety of areas to sit.
2. Caine Halter has walkways, sidewalks, and paths that connect all site arrival points to the facility.

Further Recommendations

1. Due to the size of the campus and its multiple parking areas, increase directional signage around campus directing members and guests to the desired parking area.
2. Due to the topographic nature of the Caine Halter YMCA campus and multiple routes to access the facility, Able Access recommends that signs are installed directing pedestrians to the most accessible routes around campus.

Lobbies & Entrances

At least 60% of public entrances must be accessible in new construction, in addition to entrances directly serving tenancies, parking facilities, pedestrian tunnels, and elevated walkways. "Public entrances" include all entrances except those that are restricted or used exclusively as service entrances.

Best Practices

- Do you have automatic doors installed that comply with the 2010 ADA Standards on all entrances? Automatic doors serve all individuals, not just people with disabilities.
- If a ramp leads up to the entrance, have you installed a flat landing zone that provides safe entry and exit to the facility?
- Wherever benches are located at your facility, have you installed or verified that there is a paved open space for those in wheelchairs to sit at the same level as those using the bench?
- In the lobby at the front desk, do you provide counter space at a height that complies with the 2010 ADA Standards?
- If seating in the lobby is provided to members, have you ensured that there is an open space for individuals who use wheelchairs to park?
- Have you ensured clear floor space in the path of travel so that individuals who use wheelchairs have space to maneuver?

Lobbies & Entrances Resources

- The United States Access Board offers a [Guide to Doors](#) and doorways.
- The United States Access Board has a [Guide to Built-In Elements](#), such as work surfaces, benches, and service counters.
- The United States Access Board has this [Guide to Wheelchair Spaces](#).
- The United States Access Board offers this [Guide to Building Blocks](#) such as floor or ground space.
- Download this [ADA checklist](#) for Entryways and Lobbies [opens in a .Doc format].
- Use this [ADA checklist](#) for providing goods and services [opens in a .Doc format].
-

Caine Halter YMCA's Lobby/Entrance

Observed Strengths

1. The Caine Halter YMCA utilizes automatic sliding doors at their main entrance (See Figure 4).
2. The front desk features a section of the counter which is lowered and complies with the 2010 ADA Standards (See Figure 5).
3. The front lobby has plenty of open floor space for members and visitors who use wheelchairs to maneuver.
4. Benches at the appropriate ensures that there is enough space for those in chairs to sit at the same level as those using the bench (See Figure 6).



Figure 5. Two different levels of front desk providing inclusive interactions between all members and staff.

Further Recommendations

No further recommendations were needed for this section.



Figure 4. Automatic sliding door at entrance providing plenty of room for wider power chairs at your entrance.



Figure 6. Two benches at appropriate height.

Restrooms/Shower

Facilities should provide accessible restrooms to their members. The 2010 ADA Standards provide a guide to ensuring all the elements in the restroom are accessible. Facilities are allowed to provide unisex accessible restrooms and showers but must also make the men's and women's restrooms accessible. Though not directly related to exercise, accessible restrooms are just as vital to making a fitness center or gym accessible as adaptive exercise equipment is.

Best Practices

- Does the facility provide restrooms that are compliant with the 2010 ADA Standards?
- Are all the elements in the restroom (stalls, dispensers, countertops, sinks, etc.) compliant with the 2010 ADA Standards?
- Does the facility provide showers that are compliant with the 2010 ADA Standards?
- Can the facility provide a shower chair to a member or guest with a physical disability?
- Are the restrooms in the facility clearly identified as being accessible?
- Are there signs to direct members and guests to the accessible restroom if a restroom is not accessible?
- If the facility is multi-story, does the facility have accessible restrooms in each level?

Restrooms/Shower Resources

- The United States Access Board offers this [Guide to Restrooms](#).
- Use this [ADA Checklist](#) for Restrooms [opens in a .Doc format].

Caine Halter YMCA's Restrooms

Caine Halter YMCA provides its members and guests with accessible restrooms throughout the facility. There are accessible restrooms on each floor and three unisex accessible restrooms with a shower on the lower level between the main entrance and the pool.

Observed Strengths

1. Caine Halter YMCA provides members and guests with inclusive public restrooms as well as private unisex restrooms.
2. The main restroom in the facility provides several accessible features.
3. The showers in the unisex restrooms provide permanent shower benches and handheld shower wands.

Further Recommendations

1. The main men's and women's shower compartments all have curbs that would prohibit an individual who uses a wheelchair from utilizing those showers. More accessibility can be provided by removing the curb on at least one of the shower compartments in each of the main restrooms.

Play Areas

The ADA regulations require accessible ground and elevated play components; accessible routes, ramps, and transfer systems; and accessible ground surfaces to be provided. In addition to this, the ADA also requires that there is an accessible route throughout the play area. This route must connect all ground level play components and elevated play components.

Best Practices

- Have you incorporated ground cover, routes, and ramps compliant with the 2010 ADA Standards to get to the playground from site access via nearby sidewalks? The key to accessibility here is most often connectivity between site elements.
- The ADA Accessibility standards for accessible playgrounds are included below but are not a full representation of best practices. Playground equipment that utilizes integrated ramps instead of transfer benches and transfer steps is more universally usable. Many kids may not yet have the skills to transfer out of their equipment.

Play Area Resources

- The United States Access Board offers this [Guide to Play Areas](#).
- Use this [ADA checklist](#) for Play Areas [opens in a .Doc format].

Caine Halter YMCA's Play Areas

Caine Halter YMCA provides its members and guests with accessible restrooms throughout the facility. There are accessible restrooms on each floor and three unisex accessible restrooms with a shower on the lower level between the main entrance and the pool.

Observed Strengths

1. Able Access observed that the playground equipment provides a variety of activity experiences. The play components are dispersed and integrated throughout the play area.

Further Recommendations

1. Upgrading to equipment with integrated ramps will provide greater access and inclusive play for kids with disabilities.
2. Pour-in-place or fixed-surface rubber fall materials are more accessible for children wheeling or crawling on the play surface as part of play.
3. Provide a level playground surface for the children and increase access for children who use wheelchairs.

Swimming Pools

Accessibility of swimming pools is primarily concerned with entry/exit to the pool by individuals with disabilities. The ADA requires an accessible means of entry/exit for pools, meaning a pool lift or sloped entry, a transfer wall or a transfer system, or pool stairs. The number of entry points is determined by the linear footage of the pool's edge. The 2010 ADA Standards provide several options for facilities to choose from based upon their needs. Facilities may be required to have multiple entry/exit ways depending on the size of the pool.

Best Practices

- Does the pool provide accessible entry by ramp or lift?
- If the pool has a sloped entry, does the facility have a wheelchair capable of entering the water readily available?
- If a lift provides access:
 - Is it in working order?
 - Does at least one staff member on every shift know how to operate the lift system?

Swimming Pool Resources

- An [ADA checklist](#) for swimming pools, wading pools and spas [opens in a .Doc format].
- [This guide](#) discusses barriers to health clubs and fitness facilities, including how to make pools accessible.

Caine Halter YMCA's Pool

ADA compliance states that pool lifts and sloped entries are a necessary means of access for swimming pools.

Observed Strengths

1. Able Access found that the Caine Halter swimming pools were designed with accessibility in mind. Both the indoor and outdoor pool offer a properly sloped ramp accessible for spectator use (see Figure 7).

Further Recommendations

No further recommendations were needed for this section.

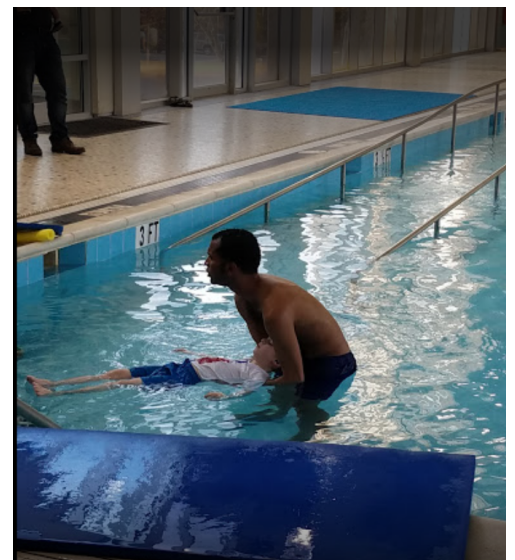


Figure 7. Shows the swimming pool ramp.

Basketball Courts

Areas of sports play such as basketball courts, soccer fields, tennis courts, etc. are primarily concerned with an accessible route to the field of play and seating for players and spectators with a disability.

Best Practices

- Does your facility provide a clear and accessible route to fields of play, sidelines, and benches that complies with the 2010 ADA Standards?
- Does your facility provide a clear space in the bench area for players who use a wheelchair?
- Does your facility provide wheelchair accessible seating for spectators that complies with the 2010 ADA Standards?
- If an accessible entrance is unavailable, does your facility use signage to indicate that services may be provided at a different accessible location/entrance?

Basketball Court Resources

- An [ADA checklist](#) for sports activity facilities.

Caine Halter YMCA's Basketball Courts

Observed Strengths

1. Caine Halter YMCA provides an accessible path of travel entering the basketball court, the fields of play, and the team/player benches.
2. The Caine Halter YMCA provides accessible spectator seating in their basketball court.

Further Recommendations

1. To access the accessible spectator seating, an individual either must use the elevator, pass through the Beast Mode gym, go down a driveway to access the sidewalk that accesses the door to the area, or previously have known to park in the accessible parking spaces that provides access to the offices. Although the route is mostly accessible, there is no clear signage providing direction to the accessible spectator seating, and is confusing. The team found the route because we assessed the entire facility.

Playing Fields

Areas of sports play such as basketball courts, soccer fields, tennis courts, etc. are primarily concerned with an accessible route to the field of play and seating for players and spectators with a disability.

Best Practices

- Does your facility provide a clear and accessible route to fields of play, sidelines, and benches that complies with the 2010 ADA Standards?
- Does your facility provide a clear space in the bench area for players who use a wheelchair?
- Does your facility provide wheelchair accessible seating for spectators that complies with the 2010 ADA Standards?
- If an accessible entrance is unavailable, does your facility use signage to indicate that services may be provided at a different accessible location/entrance?

Playing Fields Resources

- An [ADA checklist](#) for sports activity facilities.

Caine Halter YMCA's Playing Fields/Tennis Courts

Observed Strengths

1. Caine Halter YMCA provides an accessible walkway surrounding the playing fields.

Further Recommendations

1. There is no accessible parking area or an accessible entrance to the tennis courts.
2. Although all areas have an accessible route, depending on the field of play you are assigned, an individual who uses a wheelchair may be required to travel a long distance to access the fields. Installing an accessible path that provides access to the playing fields near the center of the group will make the area even more inclusive.

Exercise Machines & Equipment

The machines provided are a vital part of how gym programs are delivered to individuals working out independently. This independent use is a key theme in the Americans with Disabilities Act and is an important consideration for the types and numbers of equipment provided in a given space.

Best Practices

- Does your facility meet the ADA standards that require that at least one of each type of exercise equipment is on an accessible route and has a clear floor space positioned to enable an individual with a disability to use the equipment?
- Have you integrated accessible machines throughout the gym space?
- Do you have at least one piece of accessible or universal equipment for each type of exercise (See Figures 8 and 9)?



Figure 8. An accessible bicep curl machine.

Exercise Machines & Equipment Resources

- Here is an [ADA checklist for exercise equipment](#) [opens in a .Doc format]

Caine Halter YMCA's Exercise Machines & Equipment

Observed Strengths

1. Caine Halter provides accessible options for exercise machines and equipment for its members.
2. In Caine Halter's Beast Mode/CrossFit style workout area, there are standing rowing machines, cages, bands, ropes, and TRX equipment that can be used to offer a range of modifications/adaptations to group workouts.

Further Recommendations

1. Provide equipment that can be used universally for each type of exercise. For Caine Halter, this includes adding a handcycle to the cycling room.

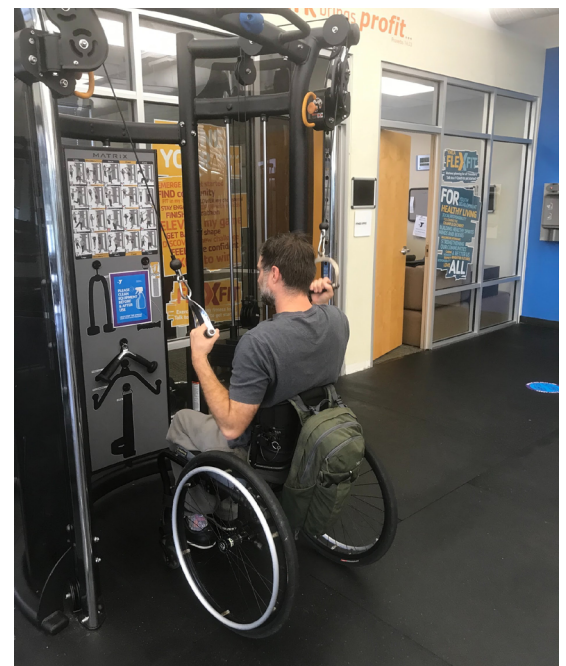


Figure 9. An accessible multi-use machine.

Programming

Group exercise classes are an important component of any gym. These classes provide a unique experience for your members who want to work out with others. Making group exercise classes accessible could increase attendance and make your gym stand out from others in your community. Remember, all members of your gym's community should feel supported by group exercise instructors.

Best Practices

- Are there options for instruction assistants in classes as an accommodation?
- Do you offer group exercise classes in a space that is easily accessible to enter and exit?
- Do you partner with community members to offer classes such as adaptive yoga, dance, and spin classes?
- Have you trained group exercise instructors on creating an accessible class not just to those with physical disabilities, but all disabilities? This may be as simple as adjustments to the way staff give instructions, class environments set up for sensory issues, or mobility options.
- Have you asked your members with disabilities what types of group exercise classes they would like to be a part of?

Programming Resources

- [National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability \(NCHPAD\)](#) offers a wealth of resources and trainings to support staff in physical activities and inclusivity.
- NCHPAD offers [best practice tips](#) for the exercise professional or personal trainer working with individuals with disabilities.

Caine Halter YMCA's Programming

Able Access assessed the programming options for Caine Halter with all three tools, BlueDAG, AIMFREE, and CHII and through interviews with the executive director and other relevant staff.

Observed Strengths

1. All group exercise classes happen across four classrooms, 2 group classes, a room with bikes for spin classes, and a functional training wing. All four rooms have at least one accessible entrance and exit.
2. Caine Halter has an ongoing partnership with Roger C. Peace, a recreational physical therapy practice. Roger C. Peace has certified physical and occupational therapists that provide adaptive programming, such as yoga and basketball, and offers adaptive equipment for members, such as basketball wheelchairs.
3. Caine Halter has an ongoing partnership with Carolina Dance Collaborative, a mobile dance outreach that has trained dance educators, including in inclusive dance practices. Carolina Dance Collaborative provides inclusive dance programming and an adaptive dance class (see Figure 10).



Figure 10. A dance class in progress that includes students with disabilities.

Further Recommendations

1. Able Access did not observe that assistants were in group fitness classes other than the classes provided by partners Roger C. Peace and Carolina Dance Collaborative. Clearly identifying assistants in group exercise classes allows for added support for all those taking class, including those with disabilities.
2. Able Access recommends that the facility hold specific training for ensuring accessibility in classes both in terms of instruction and space.
3. Able Access recommends that Caine Halter survey its members with disabilities to determine what classes they are attending, what classes they feel are inaccessible to them, and any other relevant information to increase inclusion.

COVID-19 Best Practices

Since the health impacts of COVID-19 are more significant for individuals with underlying health conditions, steps taken to limit the spread is imperative to the disability community inside and outside of the YMCA membership. The hope is for a swift end to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the lessons learned are valuable and may apply to future outbreaks of other pathogens.

Face Masks

In order to keep businesses running during COVID-19, it is essential to follow all safety protocols. Your facility may fall under a mask ordinance, or you may require members to wear a face covering. ADA regulations require your business to offer alternative ways to provide access to goods and services.

Best Practices

- Do you allow the option to wear a plastic face shield instead of a face covering for those who cannot wear masks?
- If a member says they cannot wear a face mask, you CAN ask if they cannot wear one because of a disability. However, be cautious about asking invasive questions such as the nature of the disability.
- Do you offer clear face masks for staff to wear since face coverings are a communication barrier for people who are deaf and hard of hearing?

Face Mask Resources

- [The Great Plains ADA Centers offers this FAQ](#) on the ADA, small businesses, and face mask policies.

Social Distancing

The CDC defines social distancing as keeping a safe space between yourself and other people not from your household. To social distance, stay at least six feet away from other people. COVID-19 spreads between people who are in close contact.

Best Practices

- Have you marked off every other cardio machine to allow space between members?
- Have you spaced out weight machines, so they are at least six feet apart?
- Are you utilizing other areas of your gym, such as



- basketball courts, to house gym equipment?
- Do you have one entrance and one exit?
- In group classes, do you put X's on the ground spaced out 6 feet apart to encourage members to stay in that area?
- In group classes, are you encouraging participants to stay in their space and discouraging movements involving the entire room, such as running?
- Do you keep doors open inside the gym to allow airflow?
- Are you discouraging microphone sharing between instructors?
- Are you spacing out class times to ensure enough time is in place for cleaning after class?
- Are you safely hosting classes outside? Be aware of the temperature and the type of surface on which members are working out.

Social Distancing Resources

- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) gives tips on [how to practice social distancing](#).

Facility and Equipment Cleaning

Best Practices

- Do you have cleaning stations set up throughout your gym that have extra cleaning supplies?
- Do you designate employees to walk around the gym floor to clean up after members who forget?
- Have you divided your gym into zones? Close one zone at a time to deep clean. For example, cardio machines in zone 1, weight machines in zone 2, free weights in zone 3, and mats in zone 4. Encourage members to help you clean!
- Have you posted on social media about your facility's cleaning guidelines? Sharing this information will help members feel comfortable coming back into the gym.

Facility and Equipment Cleaning Resources

- Here is the [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\) guidance for COVID-19 Employer Information for Gyms and Fitness Centers](#).

Additional Considerations

Best Practices

- Do you encourage members to sign up for group classes online?
- Are you limiting class sizes? Limiting class sizes will depend on how big your rooms are for members to stay at least six feet apart.
- Have you considered opening later in the day and closing earlier at night?
- Are you conducting a temperature check for all employees before starting a shift?

Additional Considerations Resources

- Here is the [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\) guidance for COVID-19 Employer Information for Gyms and Fitness Centers](#).

.....*Accessibility Tools and Resources*

Guidance on best practices in accessibility and inclusion are available from governmental, non-profit, academic, and business outlets. Leveraging these tools with local input from those who have experience with disabilities can help ensure priorities are in-line with local needs and that the solutions do not become unintended barriers themselves.

Training

- [Able Access](#) offers a variety of professional trainings to help assist with providing access to people with disabilities.
- [National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability \(NCHPAD\)](#) offers a wealth of resources and trainings to support staff in physical activities and being inclusive.
- [Adaptive Training Foundation](#) located in Dallas, Texas, offers workshops focused on teaching CrossFit-style exercise to those with physical disabilities.
- [Mind Body Solutions in Minneapolis, Minnesota](#), offers adaptive yoga teacher training. This training equips yoga teachers with the knowledge to work with people with a wide range of disabilities and create welcoming environments in your classes for everyone.
- NCHPAD offers [best practice tips](#) for the exercise professional or personal trainer working with individuals with disabilities.

Accessible Programming

- Certify Strong created an [adaptive workout plan](#) members can do at home or in the gym.
- Learn how to become a [certified Inclusive Fitness Trainer](#) through the American College of Sports Medicine
- This [ADA checklist](#) discusses facility approach and entrance.
- Recent [ADA standards for playgrounds](#) were incorporated in the 2010 update.
- The 2010 ADA Standards are available in a specialized [ADA checklist for play areas](#) [opens in a .Doc format].
- The [ADA checklist for swimming pools, wading pools, and spas](#) is a great assessment and planning tool for aquatics facilities [opens in a .Doc format]
- This [ADA checklist](#) provides guidance for sports activity facilities.

Comprehensive Resources

- This [barrier removal guide for fitness facilities](#) discusses barriers to health clubs and fitness facilities, including how to make pools accessible.
- [Able Access](#) is a one-stop-shop for accessibility consultation services, offering variety of professional trainings to help assist with providing access to people with disabilities. Also, Able Access helps organizations with policy and procedure review by comparing existing policies with the ADA requirements navigating best practices.

Accessible Equipment

- [Certify Strong](#) and [Cybex](#) offer equipment that can be universally accessible. [SCI Fit](#) offers hand-cycling equipment, and many other sellers provide universal or modifiable equipment.

COVID-19 Guidance

- The CDC provides [guidance on social distancing](#).
- The Great Plains ADA Center has provided [helpful information for businesses wanting to ensure their face mask policies comply with the ADA](#).

..... *Meaningful Implementation of the Tool*

We encourage you to use and share this toolkit with your local, state, and national networks as a guide for other gyms, wellness centers, fitness studios, and recreational facilities to self-assess and improve their accessibility and inclusivity.

It is meant to provide tools, resources, and illustrative examples. With that in mind, every location is different and will have unique considerations for space, member priorities, available resources, and more. A comprehensive effort to further accessibility must include consultation with local gym leadership, members, and sponsors, focusing on recruiting a team that represents disability and other diverse groups.

We would love to hear from you if you have further questions or want to share any changes you have made to your facilities or programs as a result of this toolkit. Contact us at advocacy@able-sc.org or 1-800-681-6805.