

Swim West School of Instruction
Karen Kittelson, Founder
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Background Information

Swim West was founded in 1990 by Karen Kittelson, a graduate from the University of Minnesota with undergraduate degrees in both Sports Management and Exercise Physiology. In addition to serving hundreds of children of varying ages, Swim West holds classes designated for people with autism. Currently, approximately 45 children with autism are enrolled in classes at Swim West, and the number continues to grow. Although there is a fee for the instructional classes, Swim West is more than willing to work closely with families to accommodate all financial levels and in some cases offer scholarships to children who otherwise wouldn't be able to benefit from their instruction.

Swim West School of Instruction
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 17 years working with people with autism▪ Currently serves approximately 45 people with autism▪ Classes are both about teaching and letting children feel “free” from sensory overloads▪ Employees are trained in helping children with special needs (including, but not limited to autism)

Story

What is the hardest part of teaching a class of children with autism? Unlike any other swim class the most difficult part is getting the kids to stay above the water! Recall the last time you were underwater: you feel weightless, sound is muted, communication comes to a halt, and for a moment your senses get a break from the loud, fast-pace life around us. Now think of what causes anxiety for those with autism, all of those sensory issues that we take for granted. Water is a little piece of heaven on earth for children with autism. Instructors at Swim West laugh when asked about the most difficult part of teaching students with autism because they all know the largest challenge is teaching them at all. Not because they don't have the ability to learn, but because they often refuse to come above water.

Reported by Ashley Matthias, Edgewood College, March 2007, for Professor Denis Collins (dcollins@edgewood.edu) and the 2007 Good Samaritan Award, co-sponsored by the Samaritan Counseling Center and Edgewood College.