



STAR CENTER AT A GLANCE

Who created STAR and who is leading the project?

When a popular La Crosse area sled hockey program expanded to other sports, the people behind those programs were inspired to think big.

The Coulee Region Sled Hockey Association had been formed to address the lack of opportunities for those with physical disabilities. The program demonstrated significant gains in strength, endurance and functional skills. These successful experiences were motivation to expand innovative, student-assisted, community-based assistive exercise programming to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

By 2017, the expanded programs and a larger mission prompted the creation of the Sports, Therapeutic and Adaptive Recreation (STAR) Association to address the issue of health equity in our community.

The STAR Association is led by a 21-member board of directors, and supported by an eight-member advisory board. These directors and collaborative partners—including the two health systems and three educational institutions that partnered to create the successful La Crosse Health Science Consortium—bring broad experience in advancing solutions for community health, disability issues and health disparity. The STAR board includes community members who have physical challenges themselves.

Have similar initiatives been piloted?

Our experience with smaller programs contributed to the creation of the STAR Center concept.

UW-La Crosse has successfully offered student-involved community exercise programs for nearly 25 years. Further, the Coulee Region Sled Hockey Association was formed to address the lack of opportunities for those with physical disabilities. These successful experiences motivated us to expand community-based assistive exercise programming to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

How is the STAR Center directly responsive to people with disabilities or challenges?

The STAR Center was conceived and designed largely by people living with health challenges themselves or with family members with health challenges.

Our board represents a broad range of professionals committed to caring for individuals of all ages with the full spectrum of disabilities and challenges. The professionals come from the fields of recreational management, recreational therapy, adaptive physical education, occupational therapy, pediatric therapy, physical therapy, orthopaedic surgery, rehab medicine and public health nursing. Community members having firsthand experience with physical challenges join these professionals in finding solutions.

How will The STAR Center provide the 40+ programs and one-on-one assistance described on its website?

The STAR Center provides the environment and infrastructure for community collaboration.

Professional STAR Center staff will develop and lead condition-specific fitness programs and several adaptive, inclusive and traditional recreational opportunities. And for those who need it, university students studying physical or occupational therapy, therapeutic recreation and similar disciplines will provide assistance as part of their clinical experience. Plus, our collaborative and programming partners will deliver traditional physical therapy, job and life skills training and dozens of socialization and advocacy opportunities.

How do other organizations view the STAR Center?

They see it as an opportunity to better serve their populations with resources not currently available.

Health care providers, public health and human services and non-profit entities helped us identify gaps in services, to best define the facets and scope of the STAR Center. Local health professionals confirm this new facility will offer unprecedented opportunities to improve outcomes, optimize resources and reduce the need for certain, more-costly medical services.

Why is a new facility needed?

Early in the assessment and planning process, we saw that modifications to existing local facilities would not sufficiently address diverse needs.

We had to develop a unique solution that combined the resources of many organizations in a single location. The STAR Center, developed around the specific programming needs of those with challenges to physical activity, is unlike any facility in our region. Transportation is required for universal access.

Does STAR Center provide a solution to transportation?

A multi-faceted transportation plan, currently in development, will expand access beyond public transportation.

We are evaluating transportation pilot programs nationwide to identify the most innovative and cost-effective approaches. The STAR Center's central location will serve students and participants living near the local bus line.

Doesn't the STAR Center duplicate other facilities?

Existing gaps cannot be bridged except through a project such as the STAR Center.

When our partners identified their critical issues, they pointed to an almost complete lack of adaptive and assistive equipment in currently available fitness centers and lack of access to knowledgeable assistance. Disabilities and impairment needs are very diverse. STAR Center professional staff will hold advance certifications in specialized medically based programs not available at other facilities. Additionally, university students will receive on-site clinical education under the guidance of professors and STAR Center professional staff.

Can the STAR Center be built in phases?

The STAR Center is eligible for \$5 to \$6 million in New Market Tax Credits.

Building in phases would forfeit up to \$3 million that would otherwise be invested into our community. Additionally, building the STAR Center in phases would serve a much smaller portion of the population, and compromise programming that addresses the health needs of certain individuals with disabilities. To achieve health equity within our community and maximize financial credits, STAR Center construction will occur all at once.

Will the STAR Center charge admission?

The public may use the Resource Center and Veteran Center free of charge.

Life Center programming will be free or at a nominal charge. Use of the recreational facilities will require a membership. A variety of available funding sources will assist those with limited financial means or qualifying disabilities.

How will the STAR Center improve health care for those with disabilities or challenges to physical activity?

The STAR Center will research and report on the impact of health equity on those with disabilities or challenges to physical activity.

Knowledge gained through this research will have a national impact on future public health policies, and allow La Crosse to become a leader in this important public health issue. Further, the STAR Center will serve as a blueprint for other communities and health organizations looking to address health equity, improve quality of life and decrease health care costs.

Will the STAR Center be self-sustaining?

The business plan developed with The Wisconsin Small Business Development Center at UW-La Crosse shows that the STAR Center will be self-sustainable with no need for outside grants or funding sources.

STAR Center leadership is happy to discuss further details upon request.