



# P.A.L.S. as a Component of Inclusive Programming

By Nicole Hendricks

**A**t the Boys & Girls Clubs of Carlsbad, we are committed to an inclusive environment in which children with disabilities are active members who participate in a variety of programming activities. While facilitating inclusion is primarily the job of Club staff, we have also benefited greatly from the Physical And Learning Support (P.A.L.S.) program. P.A.L.S. are peer buddies who befriend members with disabilities, participate alongside them in programming, and support them in their daily activities.

We have found P.A.L.S. to be invaluable in:

- including children with disabilities in daily life at our Club;
- forming friendships between typically developing youth and young people with disabilities; and
- raising disability awareness in both our Club and the community at large.

## Why P.A.L.S.?

The simplest answer is that most kids like to be around other kids. Many children with disabilities are constantly under the wing of adults – from parents at home to teachers at school to aides after school.

P.A.L.S. gives members with disabilities a much-needed break from constant adult care. Relationships with typically developing children are especially valuable for students in special education classes at school. For several of our members, the Boys & Girls Club is one of the few or only places they interact with typically developing peers. Pairing members who have disabilities with typically developing members helps build social skills and friendships.

Members with disabilities are included in every area of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Carlsbad. They go on field trips, swim, and participate in programs such as Music Makers, the C'bad Drama Club, Power Hour, Money Matters, SMART Girls and the Keystone Club.

## What is a P.A.L.?

P.A.L.S. should be compassionate, eager to learn and set good examples. Other than those few guidelines, consider everyone. You would be surprised who makes a good P.A.L. Club members are never too young to be involved in P.A.L.S.

All youth can be invited to participate in P.A.L.S. through announcements at Club meetings and promotional flyers. However, many children who would not respond to a general invitation will respond to a personal invitation by staff. Also, do not underestimate word of mouth; P.A.L.S. who love the program will tell their friends.

**Boys & Girls Clubs of Carlsbad**

**Membership: 2,700**

**Annual Budget: \$900,000**

**Facilities: 2**

**Founded: 1952**



Nicole Hendricks is inclusion director for Boys & Girls Clubs of Carlsbad.