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Barriers to Exercise and Nutrition for Special Olympics Athletes

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Introduction

Problem

- People with **intellectual disability (ID)** have higher rates of **obesity**.
- **Special Olympics Vermont (SOVT)** athletes compete in sports events throughout the year.
 - Athletes may **lose fitness** between seasons.
 - Their **nutrition habits** remain **unknown**.
 - **Barriers** to exercise and nutrition remain **unknown**.

Goal

- We were tasked with designing a successful **exercise and nutrition program** for SOVT athletes.

Methods

To make **recommendations** on how to design a successful **exercise and nutrition program** for SOVT athletes, we needed data on:

- Habits
- Awareness
- Barriers
- Motivating factors



Solution

- We conducted an interview-based **survey** of 59 SOVT athletes.
- **Participants** were ≥18 years old and recruited at a state-wide soccer tournament.
- **IRB-approved** protocol required verbal consent.
- **BMI** was calculated from height and weight.

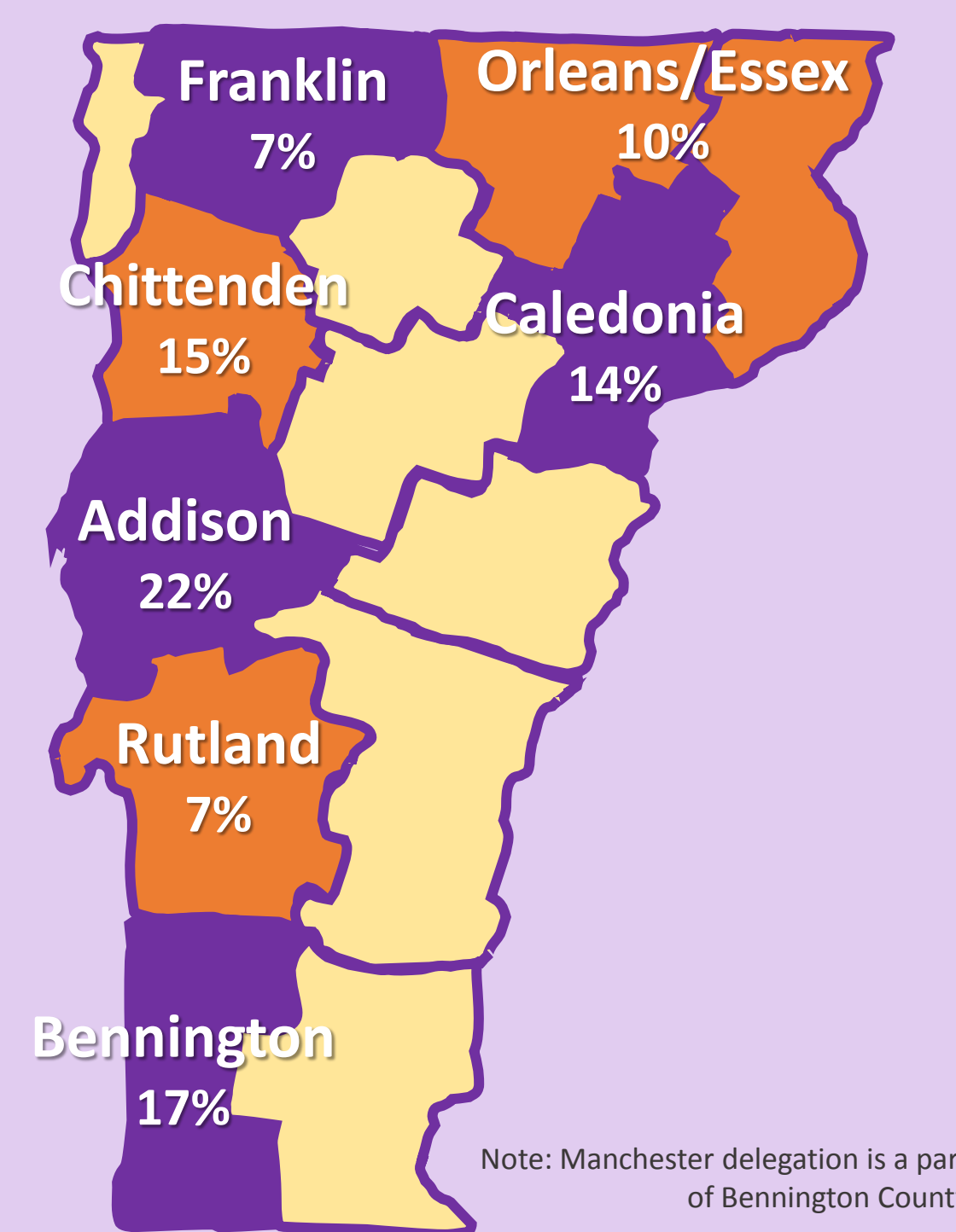
Results

	Age (yrs)	BMI
Females (n=23)	31 ± 8	30 ± 8
Males (n=36)	27 ± 8	27 ± 5

Values expressed as means ± SD.

"Eating healthy makes me who I am."
- Special Olympics Vermont athlete

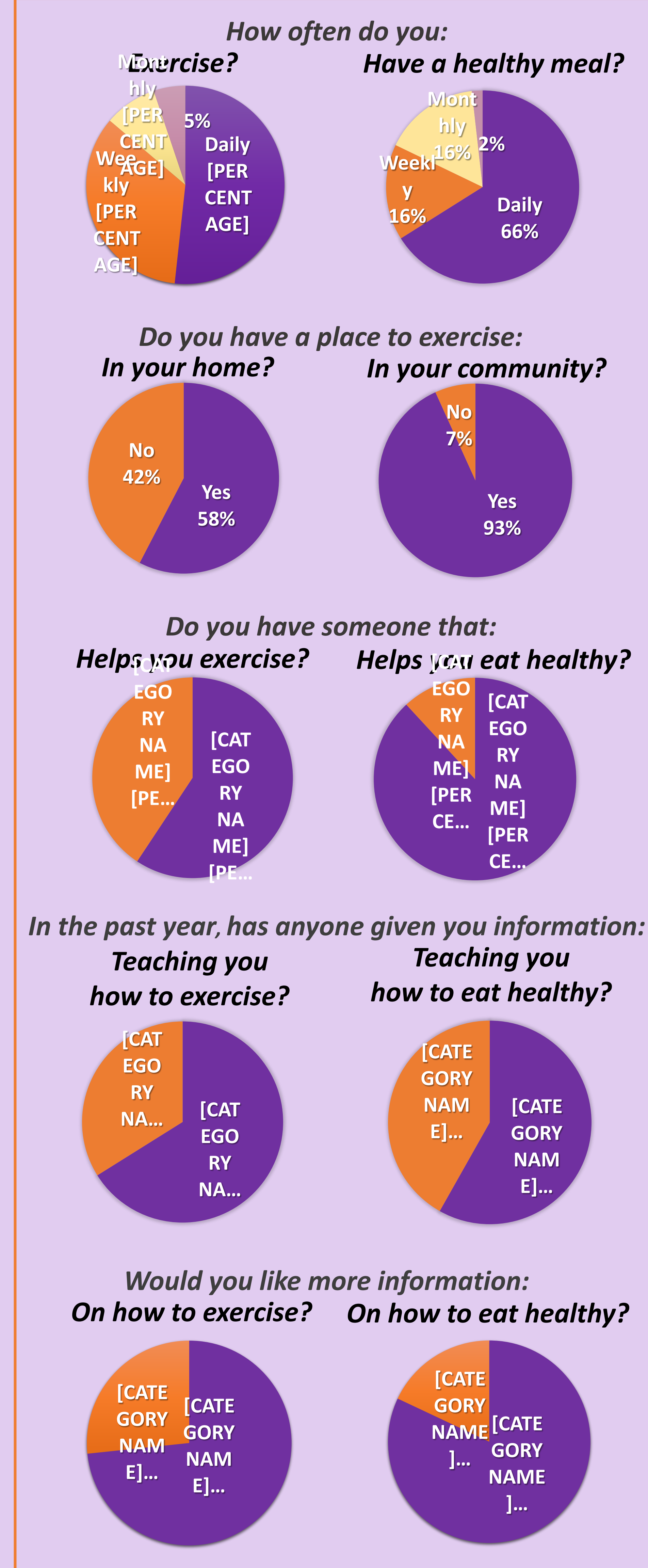
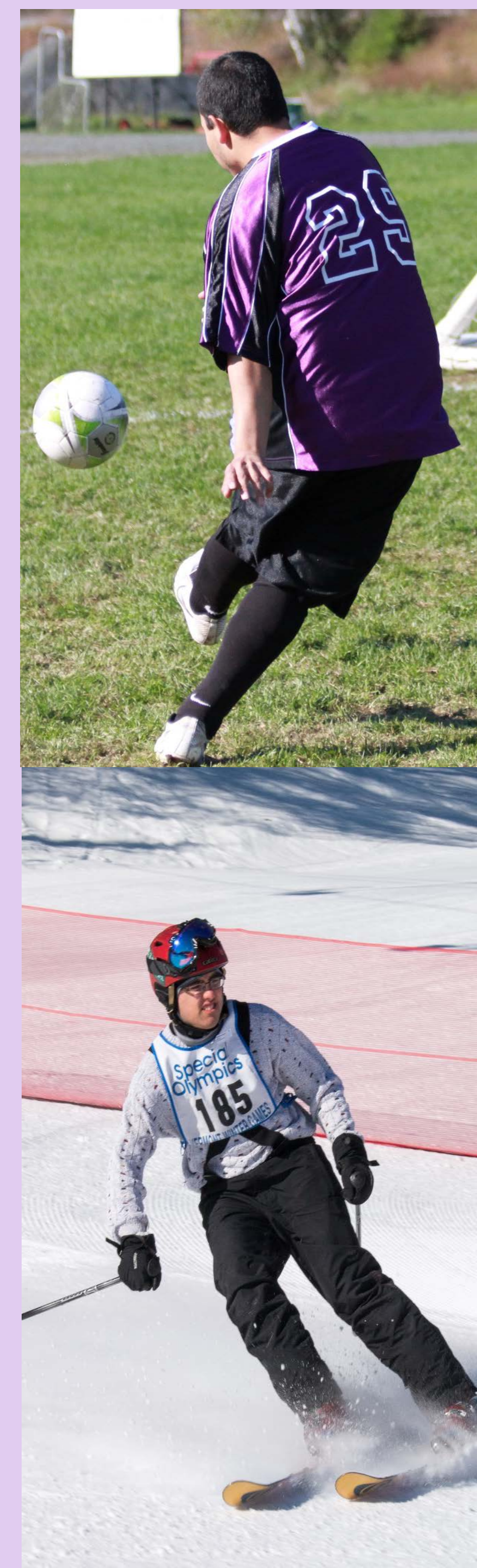
Vermont Delegations



What do you like to do for exercise?



What healthy foods do you like to eat?



Discussion

- **Limitations** include small sample size and selection bias.
- Even in our sample of soccer athletes, **70%** had BMIs that fell within the **overweight or obese** ranges.
- **Lifestyle interventions** should be based upon **reported** barriers and strengths—not county income or population size, which did not correlate with BMI.

Not a Problem ↔ **Problem!**

- ✓ Access to primary care
- ✓ Adaptive equipment
- ✓ Someone to help with eating healthy

- ✓ Feeling included
- ✓ Time with teammates
- ✓ Healthy meal
- ✓ Exercise
- ✓ Information
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Someone to help with exercise

Recommendations

SOVT Program

- **Inclusion**
 - Family
 - Team
- **Accessibility**
 - Home
 - Information
- **Lifestyle changes**
 - Simple modifications
- **Motivation**
 - Incentives

Future Research

- **Inclusion**
 - Community
- **Accessibility**
 - Transportation
- **Motivation**

"If SOVT developed a plan, would you want to try it?"

97% Yes!

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