

## Kids get special fishing day in Highland



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A year ago, 2-year-old Christopher Snelson wouldn't have been able to reel in a fish, but Saturday morning at Highland Glen Park he was standing on the banks of the water eager to make his first catch.

"He has been with Kids on the Move for about eight months," said Terry Snelson, Christopher's father. "He used to have a tough time with his motor skills, but now, as you can see, that's not a

problem."

Kids on the Move is a state-funded organization first introduced 26 years ago that aims to assist Utah County children from infants to 6-year-olds in their development -- from speech to movement to behaviors.

"We see lots of kids with Downs syndrome, lots of kids with autism, a lot of kids with speech delays and we come in right when the child is born," said Holly Bushnell, Kids on the Move's public relations director.

Hundreds of children like Christopher circled the pond with their new blue, red and silver fishing poles. The pond isn't normally used for fishing, but for this event the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources stocked the location with a variety of fish species.

Some parents, like Adam Merkley, who have children bound to wheelchairs, tucked the fishing poles into their child's hand.

"Ezra loves to go fishing," Merkley said, while situating the pole across his son's lap.

While this wasn't Ezra's first time fishing, it was the first time for many children, said Tom Bean, event coordinator for Cabela's. Cabela's, an outdoor and sporting goods store, donated 300 fishing poles to Kids on the Move families and alumni who attended the annual event that aims to bring families together and give the community an opportunity to give back.

"It's all about the kids," Bean said, holding back tears. "To give a kid his first fishing pole, it's a great thing. The thing with Kids on the Move is these kids are disadvantaged, handicapped, some are financially disadvantaged -- when you have a child that's handicapped it's a tough thing. This is just a small way to pay back."

Ken Smith, a Cabela's employee who works at the gun counter, strung the 300 fishing poles in his living room.

"I've been fishing ever since I was younger than that 2-year-old over there, and this kid that just came up here was 6 and he had never caught a fish," Smith said, "so you really can't put a price on what we're doing here."

In addition to helping the kids catch fish, Cabela's employees gave tutorials to families on how to filet and cook the fish. They also showed families how to set up a tent that is light-weight and easy to assemble, Bushnell said, and introduced families to a tent with a larger door that accommodates a wheelchair.

"One of our goals with this event is to help parents and children have enjoyable interactions," said Kids on the Move executive director Eileen Chamberland. "The more you can create enjoyable engagement it makes the relationship better and the child's ability to learn."

The organization's therapists also are trained to help parents so parents know the best strategies to further their child's development, Snelson said. He said he doesn't think he would have discovered the best ways to help his son Christopher without the in-home assistance he receives from the program's therapists and teachers.

Dan Shepard said his 3-year-old son has a hard time speaking due to hearing loss, but joined the Kids on the Move program eight months ago and has since been able to communicate entire sentences.

"He picks up words when you tell him over and over, and the sign language has been great," he said. "He has no problem using that. It seems like every day he does something out of the blue and I'll think, 'I knew you could talk!' But there are times he just screams, so it's frustrating."

He said it was nice to be at the family fishing event, and it was comforting know he was not alone in the struggle to teach and communicate with his child.

The organization has served single teenage moms, children living in poverty and many other children in limiting circumstances, Bushnell said. These services help parents maintain their child's hygiene and give them the nutrients their bodies need. While there are children in need internationally, there are thousands in need in Utah, she said.

"I think you could pick any child here out of the 17,000 kids we've served, and they have a success story," Bushnell said. "It can cost up to \$2.3 million to raise a handicapped child and that's really scary. It really takes a whole community to raise these children."