

MOTIVATIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR DISABILITY SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

A qualitative report

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Buckinghamshire County Council and Leap With Us

Researched and written by:

Dr Ben Ives and Dr Ben Clayton

Human Performance, Exercise and Wellbeing Centre, Buckinghamshire New University

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INTRODUCTION

The publication of the Government's *Sporting Futures: A New Strategy for an Active Nation* (2015) provided the clearest emphasis yet on the sport and wellbeing nexus, stating that the nation must 'redefin[e] what success looks like in sport by concentrating on five key outcomes: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual development, social and community development and economic development' (p.10). The cost of inactivity to the NHS is £455m a year with Buckinghamshire one of the worst impacted counties in terms of cost per capita (Public Health England, 2016). Sport England (2016a) suggest that the cost rises to £7.4bn when considering the impact on the economy of premature deaths and sickness absence, and in Buckinghamshire alone an estimated 202 premature deaths could be prevented each year if 75% of the population aged 40-79 engaged in the recommended level of physical activity. The impact of physical activity on other aspects of wellbeing too are reported to be significant, with diverse populations showing a better general quality of life, better functional capacity, and better mood states following physical activity interventions (Bize, Johnson and Plotnikoff, 2007; Penedo and Dahn, 2005). It is not surprising, then, that central government place high importance on sport and physical activity as a cross-cutting solution that 'enhances individuals and communities, boosts the economy, and supports a range of other policy priorities, including health, tackling crime and education' (HM Government, 2015, p.11).

An essential thread of the Government's funding strategy looks towards the transformative properties of sport and physical activity and those social groups who have been less likely to engage and where the impact of the social good that sport can deliver will be felt most. This includes women and girls, disabled people, those in lower socio-economic groups, and older people (HM Government, 2015). While existing statistical data points towards these groups being underrepresented, there are likely to be any number of different factors responsible for this and the sector must work together to understand both the breadth and depth of reasons for non-participation in sport and physical activity. Without this more detailed, narrative understanding, solutions cannot be formulated, and this kind of understanding can only be gleaned from a closer working relationship between these underrepresented groups, through their local support organisations, and sport providers and funding bodies. This knowledge is essential given that responsibility for funding and projects should now be delegated to the local level and delivered through close partnerships with other community groups where the best understanding of the local need will be (HM Government, 2015).

To this end, this report aims to respond to some of the concerns raised by the most recent Government strategy with a focus on one of these underrepresented groups – **disabled**

people – in the Buckinghamshire area. Commissioned by Leap With Us and Buckinghamshire County Council, the Centre for Human Performance, Exercise and Wellbeing at Buckinghamshire New University conducted research that sought to go beyond a simple statistical understanding of participation and non-participation issues by speaking to local non-sporting disability organisations and their memberships so that we might hear about sport and disability in their own words. In the past, research has suggested that people with disabilities are less inclined to participate in physical activities (Williams, 1994) despite clear evidence of physical and psychosocial benefits (Ashton-Schaeffer et al, 2001; Strohkendl, 1995), but more recent research is in short supply and there have been calls to incorporate more individual, narrative experiences of impairment and disability into any new analyses (Smith and Sparkes, 2008; Thomas and Smith, 2009). A greater focus on the individual voice can allow us to appreciate more of the complexities of life as lived by disabled people and the agency that stems from their uniqueness *within* the sphere of disability, which informs their experiences in and decisions about sport and physical activity.

METHODS

This research used a flexible, qualitative design, which is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. The overarching aim of this study was to capture the social reality for disabled groups and individuals, using their own thoughts, experiences, and opinions, in their own words. We employed a purposive sample of three local non-sporting disability support organisations in the Buckinghamshire area, selected by Leap With Us and Buckinghamshire County Council, which predominantly represented learning and mental health disabilities, although memberships included people with learning, mental health, sensory, and physical impairments. Data were produced using one semi-structured group interview with salaried and voluntary staff at each organisation, which ranged from 40-minutes to 75-minutes in duration. These interviews sought to ascertain the organisations' current roles in and key challenges for sport and physical activity provision in Buckinghamshire, and the ways in which they feel participation in disability sport and physical activity in the region could be enhanced. A focus group with a convenience sample (arranged by the salaried and voluntary staff) of disabled members of each organisation was then held. These ranged from 45-minutes to 85-minutes in duration, and explored the main motivations and barriers to participation in sport and physical activity for people with disabilities. In total over 350 minutes (6 hours) of interview/focus group data were produced, recorded on a digital recording device, and transcribed verbatim.

Data were analysed using a thematic approach, which sought to interpret and describe the data set, and place data into themes for discussion. We read and re-read the transcripts to develop an empathetic understanding of the participants' world and engaged in an ongoing dialogue about what we saw as the emerging patterns related to the research goals. These patterns were then reviewed, meanings interpreted, and verified as prevailing themes. Once themes were generated, we then sought to identify quotes that best represented the essence of each theme. Essentially we aimed to use a selection of the participants' own words to shed light on the emerging issues and challenges for disability sport and physical activity provision in Buckinghamshire. This approach to analysis provides a voice for disabled people, shows some of the complexities of their engagement or non-engagement with sport and physical activity, and, moreover, produces insights that are accessible to the general public and are suited to informing policy development (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

As with all forms of research, there are limitations to any one study. The limitations of this research lie in the representative capabilities of qualitative inquiry and especially the purposive

and convenience sampling strategies employed here. Given the small sample size, we cannot make claims of a generalisable ‘truth’ about the entire disabled population in Buckinghamshire. Moreover, although our convenience sample of disabled people represented a range of disabilities, age-groups, genders, and life experiences, it should be noted that these individuals were typically not employed in regular work. Our study does, however, give a greater voice to the individual, which might generate ‘naturalistic generalisations’. That is, it provides the situated reader with enough detail about the case under study so that they might reflect on it and make connections with their own knowledge and experiences. As Delmar (2010, p.122) notes, ‘it is this recognisability that contributes to the generalisability of qualitative studies’.

The research presented in this report has received full approval by the Buckinghamshire New University Research Ethics Committee under the University’s Code of Ethical Practice.

PARTICIPANTS

DISABILITY ORGANISATIONS

Three initial organisations were selected as case studies by Leap With Us and Buckinghamshire County Council. The organisations were:

Talkback is an independent charity, which provides day activities for people with learning disabilities and further aims to create a safe, supportive environment through which disabled people can have a voice in new service provision and delivery.

Enrych is an independent charity, which supports adults with all types of disability to enjoy active and independent lives, and especially to engage in hobbies and interests. Enrych aims to help disabled people find, take-up, and integrate into existing opportunities for leisure in the community.

Bucks Mind is an independent charity, which provides one-to-one and group support for adults with mental health problems. It is a champion organisation for Five Ways to Wellbeing and offers a wide range of services including counselling, activity groups, and member drop-ins.

SALARIED AND VOLUNTARY STAFF

All salaried and voluntary staff that took part in this study were recruited via an initial gatekeeper within each organisation. Coincidentally, all these participants were female, but represented a range of ages and years of experience working with disabled people. All participants, as well as any other individual they mentioned, have been provided a pseudonym

when quoted within this report to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. All salaried and voluntary staff are referred to throughout this report as 'facilitators'.

DISABLED PEOPLE

All disabled people that took part in this study were recruited through the support organisations of which they were a member. Organisations were asked to, as much as was possible, select a diverse range of participants that they felt represented the organisation's membership, but focus group representation was also decided on who was available and was willing to be a part of the research. As stated above, the focus groups were made-up of a range of ages, genders, disabilities, and life-experiences. All participants, as well as any other individual they mentioned, have been provided a pseudonym when quoted within this report to ensure anonymity and confidentiality.

FINDINGS

Analysis revealed two dominant, broad themes concerned with the recognition of the importance of sport and physical activity and the potential physical and mental wellbeing benefits for disabled people, and the external (e.g. costs) and internal (e.g. lack of enjoyment) barriers to participation. A number of subthemes were developed within these categories and will be explored in detail below.

There were no notable differences between the opinions, experiences, and suggestions of facilitators and disabled people across the three cases. There was no evidence to suggest that type or severity of disability had any impact on the findings, therefore to further protect the identity of participants all data produced from all three organisations are brought together in our discussion of findings.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING BENEFITS

It was clear that all those that worked with disabled people and most of the disabled people themselves were aware of the need to participate in sport and physical activity. The facilitators placed importance on sport and physical activity for the mental wellbeing of disabled people, and also expressed concerns about the high levels of physical inactivity of the disabled people they worked with. These concerns were not only related to the participants' physical health, but also the cost implications for the NHS:

It's something I have always been passionate about, personally, anyway. For people with a learning disability, [physical activity] ticks so many boxes. It helps with mental health, it gives them a positive attitude, it gets them out and about, it gets them meeting people. There are so many reasons that it really helps them as individuals (Ruth, facilitator).

I just think a lot of our people are at huge risk of heart attacks, and things like that. That's not my worry, as such, but yes, it is my worry because I can see that they are also at risk of a lot of physical health problems [...] At the end of the day, they are costing, or will be costing the National Health Service, a good amount of money just because they're not looking after themselves now, and that's going to be an impact on the future, isn't it? (Fiona, facilitator).

While the disabled people themselves acknowledged that sport and physical activity were beneficial for weight loss and general physical health, this tended to be a more peripheral motivation. Indeed, they placed greater emphasis on the positive impact sport and physical activity could have for their mental wellbeing:

My journey has changed for doing it. I started going to the gym as a means to an end, because I wasn't as physically active as I was before I had my stroke, my weight had gone up to 19.5 stone. When I had the scales and the doctor shocked me, she gave me the referral to the gym [...] I've lost two stones by going to the gym and now I go there mainly for mindfulness. I enjoy my time there. I go there first thing in the morning or anytime the gym opens I'm there outside the door. I go in and I do two hours first thing in the morning. I come out the gym and I feel mentally vitalised, ready for the day. If I don't go I end up getting depressed (Gary, disabled person).

[Physical activity] help[s] boost your mood and that's why physical activity is so important because it boosts your mood, it changes your attitude. It gives you confidence [...] you feel more positive about everything (Charlotte, disabled person).

It's the little things. If they want people to stop being depressed about this when they get a disability, because trust me, it's bloody easy to just say, "I fucking hate the world. I can't be arsed with anything." If you want people to rise above that, a bit of physical activity [can help] [...] It's nature's anti-depressant (Trevor, disabled person).

[Sport and physical activity] doesn't just tie in with your physical health, but also with some of your mental health in a way. It's like you feel more confident. It helps you to do things like, "Oh, I can go and do that job now." Confidence is a massive area of just health in general and sport (Steven, disabled person).

When asked about the origins of the mental health benefits, both facilitators and participants suggested that these were principally gained from the social aspects of sport and physical

activity. For example, the facilitators suggested that sport and physical activity, as well as being beneficial in itself, may be an abettor to further valuable activities:

So, we'll say, "Okay, you might want to increase your fitness by walking, but do you have any other sort of goals or things you want to achieve?" And people will say, "Actually, it would be nice to belong to a group," and to feel like they're part of the community. So, a lot of the walk groups go for coffee afterwards. It's not just going for a walk, it's them actually extending their social network, having a coffee, having a chat. A lot of people we work with, day-to-day just see carers and maybe some family, so actually just to see some different people, to talk about their lives, is quite different. It's a bit more interesting to them (Sarah, facilitator).

[Sport and physical activity] is a lovely opportunity, to have a little bit of activity and then do something lovely afterwards (Fiona, facilitator).

The benefits of sport and physical activity for disabled people, then, can go beyond the exercise itself. It can provide a gateway to social wellbeing by opening-up further opportunities for friendship-building and meaningful interactions through complementary activities, including coffee-drinking, lunches, and simply time shared with others. Alongside this, the disabled people spoke about how the kind of social interactions generated through sport and physical activity can provide a general sense of self-worth and belonging:

[...] you get that social interaction, you actually get to see people. If you're in that situation, where you're locked in your own home half of the time, because you feel anxious or you don't have that confidence. I think having at least that human interaction makes you feel just that bit better. Having that person where you can talk about some of your problems, not all of them, but just some. Just makes you feel better about yourself (Steven, disabled person).

It's that friendship as well. I go to the gym and everybody says, "Morning Nick, morning Margaret, morning Mary, morning Fred," because we all go there at the same time of day. So you see the same people every day. If you don't go, you miss a day, you go and then they'll say, "Are you alright, you weren't here

yesterday.” I say, “No, I was feeling under the weather, couldn’t make it.” (Gary, disabled person).

While most of the disabled people we spoke to agreed that sport and physical activity offered a good mode of social interaction, which was a key element of social wellbeing, Steven and Gary were a rarity in that they were proactive and sought sport and physical activity opportunities outside of the disabled group. Many facilitators argued that interacting with the able-bodied community was important for disabled people and that recreational sport and physical activity may provide an opportunity for that:

[B]asically, people want to be like everybody else. They want to do what everybody else does. They don’t really want to be doing a special sport, just for them. They want to go home and say, “I played football today. I went out and I...” (Anne, facilitator).

[I]f someone said, “I want to do local walks”, and there are loads of Simply Walks groups, then most of the time we can find a group that’s close to someone and go with them. Not many people I meet say, “I’m disabled, I want to walk with disabled people.” Normally people say, “Oh, I’m Fred and I want to meet with other people,” and they don’t consider themselves disabled and joining a disabled group [sic]. They want to walk, so they’ll want to meet with people who like walking. So, it’s the walking that’s the thing they’re looking for, not the disability interest (Sarah, facilitator).

However, feelings among the disabled people themselves appeared mixed, ranging from a desire to participate in sport and physical activity alongside able-bodied people, to a more cautious assessment of the possible outcomes, and even some more vehement opposition to the idea:

I just like the encouragement and challenge of mixing with able-bodied people to persons in a wheelchair. Basically, it's a challenge for me [...] I'm the sort of person who likes a lot to socialise, not because of me being in my chair, but I always like to express, not my feelings, but my feelings [sic] and I like mixing with able-bodied

people. They want to see how I do things in this [wheelchair]. Being low down and to standing high, it's a lot different, but with me it's a challenge (Kevin, disabled person).

To answer your previous questions about whether I want to be mixed in, I'd like either/or, or both. It may not be a similar playing field as someone who is able bodied, but physically I'm fine. I can still be on fairly similar places as someone who is able bodied, but somebody who isn't, it's a matter of confidence. I just think of it as if I'm doing well, I look to the person next to me, I do just as good as the person who is more able body [sic] than I am. It comes back to that, it's my own confidence and self-esteem (Steven, disabled person).

Personally, I think if I was to go with able bodied people, it's almost like it [the disability] being rubbed in your face and fucked you up [sic]. I mean I don't know how anybody else feels, but that is my thing, it depresses me just thinking about that (Trevor, disabled person).

While there was no suggestion of disabled people and able-bodied people competing against one another in sport, even the suggestion of sharing the same field of recreation for activities that required some level of skill or ability raised questions about disabled people's confidence and self-efficacy. Some relished the challenge, others were very anxious at the thought of it, but there was a general recognition that sharing a sport or physical activity space with able-bodied people had the potential to either make or break confidence. Clearly, then, any integration would need to be carefully planned and implemented, as summarised by Ruth:

We would all love to say, "Yes, people need to be involved in mainstream stuff." They do, because people really need to be part of the community. I think we need to strip it back a bit and look at it honestly. Say, "Yes, that is everybody's ideal. That is everybody's goal, but let's make it happen properly." Let's build the person up. Let's work with them to build confidence and social skills. Have something to talk about. Work on those elements, so that they can get there and say, "What is your favourite team?" Have a chat about things (Ruth, facilitator).

BARRIERS TO SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Although all facilitators and disabled people were aware of the benefits of sport and physical activity, for both body and mind, further analysis revealed that the vast majority of disabled people did not participate in any form of exercise. As Ruth and Steven suggest, there are a number of perceived *external* and *internal* barriers preventing engagement with sport and physical activity:

There are so many barriers to taking part. People are often in residential homes, they don't have enough money. They may not find out about it. People don't use the internet the same way. The only way people tend to find out about it, is through word-of-mouth. What other barriers have we got? It's too expensive. They need someone to take them. They often think, "I'm not very good at it. I don't want to go there because I don't want to be shown up." (Ruth, facilitator).

You want to reduce the whole social care by getting people to participate in sport. It's a great way of helping someone emotionally and physically as well, but if you don't provide anything, like transport [...] All it comes down to is confidence, how well advertised it is, how do I get there? Is there anybody who can go with me just to help me, push me along to go to it? So then it becomes more of a regular activity (Steven, disabled person).

EXTERNAL BARRIERS

External barriers are those *material* issues that have a real or perceived impact, which prevents disabled people from engaging in sport and physical activity. These include physical (e.g. location of and access to facilities, activities, and services), economic (e.g. cost and affordability), and political barriers (e.g. funding and availability of services) (Hylton and Totten, 2013). A key issue identified in the data set was the difficulty of getting to sport and physical activity venues:

As far as I'm concerned what I feel, and I don't know if everyone feels the same, they need to sort the transport out. Then start thinking what they can offer us or what sports they can offer us. They have got a disabled club, which was a very

good club, but, again, how do you get there? It's been held at the Goodman Centre and you can go and have a swim and they only have disabled people. Any disability you go and they hire the pool from 8:00 until 9:00 for the whole hour. It doesn't matter what disability, they've got people there that will come in the water with you and make sure you're safe. If you don't drive, how do you get there? (Charmain, disabled person).

They need to start looking at what the government's brought in regarding transport, because unless they start looking into transport you will not get people to go to different clubs and get more activity (Charmain, disabled person).

Well, on the other side, you're then limited to where you can go. So say, for example, I wanted to take the group to Penn Woods, and I thought, "That's brilliant, I love Penn Woods." We can't all get there. We have to get a bus and it's two or three [buses] to get there, and logistically it's really difficult, so that's why – well, I think of all this countryside around here. How do you get there on a bus? (Elizabeth, facilitator).

As Charmain and Elizabeth highlight above, all facilitators and disabled people were agreed that transport was a considerable barrier to sport and physical activity. When asked about transport issues, the cost of transport appeared to be the main problem:

People with learning disabilities, they've got this really small, limited choice, made even more limited by what they can afford and how and when they can get there (Rebecca, facilitator).

In the bigger towns, say in Aylesbury and Wycombe, it's really easy. Because most people, if they're on a mobility scooter, can get there on the scooter. A taxi is a few quid. It's more the remote villages. It's, if they want to join that yoga class, it's six- pounds to yoga class. It's five-pounds taxi there, five-pounds taxi back. The whole thing becomes quite costly to do (Ola, disabled person).

The only thing it always boils down to, the majority of us haven't always got money on us and it always kicks in, money, is getting there and then more transport wise [sic]. That's the only thing that it just boils down to, is transport and cost (David, disabled person).

If you think most of us are on either ESA, so Employment Support Allowance, or housing, do you really think we've got money to burn, to constantly do this travelling or pay to keep up this continuous sort of sport? That's where the cost comes in, some of us just don't have the money to spend (Steven, disabled person).

While the cost of transport was discussed by disabled people as the biggest financial burden, as some of the above quotes allude to, other costs, most notably the price of classes, were also perceived to be a significant barrier to sport and physical activity. The facilitators at all three organisations also expressed concerns about cost. Despite wanting to provide regular opportunities for engagement, the cost of provision restricted the variety and frequency of sport and physical activity these organisations could offer:

One of the big things we've found is that with putting stuff on, the cost of hiring venues and things like that, as an organisation, is very restrictive. Just to have the space to do sporting activities (Rebecca, facilitator).

The stuff that Leap produce, they produce Get Active sessions for people with a learning disability already. They have given us a big discount, so we can take people along. [But] we are a charity with a very limited budget. So, we can't do too much of that. We may have to look at getting funding elsewhere so we can do something in that way (Ruth, facilitator).

Another significant barrier to participation in sport and physical activity was the perceived ineffective communication about opportunities and between local government organisations. A key issue for the disabled people, as Charmain effectively summarises, was that they were simply unaware of opportunities for sport and physical activity that are currently provided in Buckinghamshire:

I don't know what's out there. I don't know what clubs are running. I've looked on the computer this morning. I thought, "Right, I will look on the computer regarding what clubs, what sports for disabled, and what have you, disability and what have you." I could find them for able [bodied] or people that can walk, but when it comes to somebody like me, in a wheelchair, I couldn't find [...] and I give up (Charmain, disabled person).

Delving deeper into this issue, we found that many disabled people felt that the main mode of advertising opportunities was via the internet. This, however, proved problematic because the majority either did not have access to or were not competent using a computer:

I think there's a little line going across this because a lot of people don't have computers. A lot of stuff is found with media on the computer. I think if you knew where to go, like if you said, "Go to the library, there is information there," I think we could go as a group and have a look (Brenda, disabled person).

Yes, what about the people that don't have a computer, not everyone has got a computer. If you are my age group, matured, we weren't brought up with computers. If you ask me to use your phone, I wouldn't have a clue. Not everyone is technology minded. What I was trying to say is not everyone has got social workers or people they can fall back on and say, "Look, I'd like to go out, I'd like to go and do a bit of sport. Where do I start?" (Charmain, disabled person).

People don't find out about what is going on either. People with learning disabilities generally don't use the internet to find things out. Their main source of finding out about things is word-of-mouth [and leaflets, but] a leaflet might not be easy-read. They might not be able to understand it (Ruth, facilitator).

I was going to say the internet is lovely, but the thing is, if you've got trouble reading, a learning difficulty, you're usually stuck with jargon words. In my situation, I have to see what's wheelchair friendly and what's not because I can't

say I want to do things if it's not wheelchair friendly. I'm wasting my time. Otherwise, I could transfer to manual, to electric. What I'll say, I'll say it's a challenge for me, but otherwise, the internet is really difficult for me because I've got reading trouble and spelling trouble. I have to get people to help me to spell things to go on the internet (Charles, disabled person).

Although access to and competence with computers appeared to be the primary barrier to finding information about sport and physical activity opportunities for disabled people, some argued that the issue may be a consequence of the ineffective approach of local government organisations, such as Buckinghamshire County Council and Leap With Us. For example, Steven suggested that part of the issue was poor communication between these organisations and disability support organisations, like Enrych, Talkback, and Bucks Mind. Others, like Elizabeth and Trevor, suggested that local government simply needed to do more to engage disabled people with sport and physical activity:

To be honest, sometimes it's down to that nobody on the local government side talks to each other. Nobody interacts with each other to say, "This is what's going on. This might be something that people with autism, range of other disabilities..." and you have people like us who come out, this might be something that's interesting for us (Steven, disabled person).

The real irony is we live in Aylesbury, the birthplace of the Paralympics, yet the emphasis is that we have to reach out to people like Enrych [...] or another charity or somebody else or Prevention Matters, if any of you have heard of that. There is nobody in local government or in government in general will reach out to you (Steven, disabled person).

I've always said [local government] need to be proactive. You need somebody that comes to you and says, "Look, it's not as scary as you think. Give it a go, we'll come with you. We'll ease you to it" (Trevor, disabled person).

Going back to the physical disability, I know the effect that has on people and it should be offered and it should be more widely put out there. Now how it's done,

I really do think the council, they have a website, they have a paper that goes out, a magazine that goes out. They should be able to list all the local clubs that disabled people can go to. It's not being talked about and it's not being seen as a priority. For mental health it is essential (Elizabeth, facilitator).

INTERNAL BARRIERS

Internal barriers are the perceived absence of enjoyment, or conflict between the perceived image of an activity and the self-image (Hylton and Totten, 2013), which prevent disabled people from engaging in sport and physical activity. As Ruth and Fiona explain:

A lot of the people, when I asked [the] question, "How did you feel before you start?" "I felt shy." "I felt scared." "I felt nervous about getting it wrong." "I felt nervous because it's a new group." "Nervous." [...] "Me and sport don't mix." "I felt worried in general." So those are real concerns (Ruth, facilitator).

It's not even about the sport; it's just about doing something new. Anything new is a bit scary and a bit different, so it's not necessarily the physical activity (Fiona, facilitator).

One of the more common barriers to participation in sport and physical activity was simply the fear of the unknown. For example, for some, just the thought of going to an unfamiliar place, especially when alone, was enough to stop them from engaging with sport and physical activity provision:

I'm like that though. I never used to be. I don't like going to new places and places I haven't been before. Basically, how to get there and sorting the transport out and the buses and everything else, unless it's a familiar route (Alice, disabled person).

You'd have quite a lot of the anxiety of going to a class by themselves [sic]. So it's that, not just motivation, it's the buddy system or going somewhere where they're not familiar with (Grace, disabled person).

For others, however, the principal internal barrier was the sense of self-efficacy – which refers to a person’s confidence in their own ability to achieve success in specific situations or accomplish a task (Bandura, 1994) – when faced with the opportunity to engage with sport or physical activity. In other words, some disabled people often claimed to feel too anxious about their abilities and about how they might be perceived by others:

Basically, I was thinking even if you know full well what’s available out there, you start to think, “I have never been in this position before, I don’t know what I can and can’t do, will I be able to do that? Am I going to look like a complete dickhead in front of everybody and making an absolute fool of myself.” [...] I always make a fool of myself in public [...]. Basically, I’m just shit scared of going to these events and making a complete tit of myself in front of everybody. So I’ll always find it a perfectly justified reason for not going (Trevor, disabled person).

I think that’s the thing, when you go into that environment you’re putting yourself up there in front of it to be noticed. You don’t want that. You want to start back and try it a little bit in the shadows (Gary, disabled person).

Similarly, the organisations’ facilitators also saw self-efficacy as a major difficulty for engaging disabled people in sport and physical activity:

I think confidence is a big thing, actually – self-esteem and confidence – going back to this girl who went round the Rye, which is a mile, she genuinely didn’t think she would be able to do it, and yet she did it. So you just think there’s a barrier in itself, that she hadn’t got the confidence to think that she could do that, because she’d never had someone saying, “Come on, we can do it; we can walk round.” But unless you’re going to be knocking on people’s doors saying, “Come on, we’re going to walk a mile today.” That is another thing, they just don’t think that they can do it (Elizabeth, facilitator).

We could just support somebody to go along to the mainstream gym, or to go along to a Wednesday-night football training, a five-a-side or something. What would happen, when we step back, is people wouldn't go. They would be feeling that they are different, or their standard is not good enough (Rebecca, facilitator).

And a lot of people we meet say, before having a stroke or before an incident happening, really enjoyed... fishing, or golf. Particularly, a few chaps, who have had strokes, that played golf that say, "I was really good at golf" or "This was my handicap," and "Now, since having a stroke, I wouldn't be the same, and I don't want to play golf. I don't want to match myself or compare myself to previous me" (Sarah, facilitator).

Following discussion of barriers to sport and physical activity, we introduced some questions about participation in other leisure activities (see extract below for an example), such as going to the cinema or out for a meal. Interestingly, no external barriers, like cost or transport, or internal barriers, like vulnerability, were raised by the disabled people, and yet the barriers are surely comparable to those of sport and physical activity:

Researcher: Do any of you engage in any other type of leisure activities?

Zara: Oh yes, I go to the cinema [...] We go out for meals, don't we, sometimes?

Julie: I will go to the cinema or for something to eat.

Researcher: Do you go on your own or with somebody?

Julie: Usually with someone, but sometimes I go by myself.

Researcher: Does anybody else do any other leisure activities?

Ryan: Yes, cinema and go out for dinner.

Researcher: How do you get to those activities?

Ryan: I walk or get a lift.

[...]

Grace: People don't think that exercise is enjoyable. I think it largely comes down to that.

While the significance of the external and internal barriers discussed across the previous themes should not be marginalised or trivialised, there was strong evidence to suggest that some of these barriers, as recognised by Grace, were a pretext for a lack of enjoyment. In other words, the predominant pattern identified in our analysis of the data was that the disabled people under study were reluctant to participate in sport and physical activity simply because they did not, or felt that they would not, like it:

So, is it anything to do with the disability? I mean, what barriers does the disability itself actually create? [...] So, actually, often someone on paper, with their disability, that wouldn't be why they're not participating or why they're not going. It is more to do with their lack of motivation to do sport [...] Everyone normally says to me, "Oh I think I should be fitter, I think I should do more." But if I say, "What do you want to?" they say, "I want to join this craft group." So, it's not everyone's priority. I think people realise they need to do it, and it's better for their health, but going and doing it is a different thing [...] I think we, as people, we're lazy, aren't we? So, if our priority isn't exercise - if that's not our number one hobby, we'll do lots of other things first, before we do our exercise (Sarah, facilitator).

You have to be a sportsman kind of mentality, don't you, and you get these people that enjoy sport and get involved in all sorts of sport whenever they can. You get other people that don't enjoy it and therefore don't exercise and therefore... I've got the difference between my son and my daughter, one's sporty and will thoroughly enjoy getting himself involved and everything else. The other one avoids exercise at all cost (Alice, disabled person).

You don't know until you're doing it. That's the thing, if you've enjoyed something, yes, you'd want to carry it on, but if you're not enjoying it so much then you're not going to carry it on, are you? (Zara, disabled person).

There was a feeling, then, among the disabled people and facilitators that the presumption that disabled people are inherently motivated to exercise is part of a rather naïve and imperious discursive movement to make sport and physical activity a cornerstone of disabled people's lives. As Charlotte further explains below, people who suffer an impairment do not

necessarily become motivated or inspired to become 'disabled athletes'. Indeed, if they did not enjoy sport prior to their impairment, they are unlikely to enjoy sport afterwards:

For me, I'd just say, I'm in the wrong place because I loathe physical activity. So put me on a dance floor, I'm fine, but anything else I don't want to take part in sport. I've had the opportunity, I'm not interested. I wasn't before [my impairment]. My attitude is the person that you were before you had your injury is the same person. I was not interested in sport before, so I've not been interested in sport since and that's it. I think a lot of people who get a disability, people tend to forget that they are the same person as the person they were before. They might accentuate certain characteristics, but that's it (Charlotte, disabled person).

Given the above, it is unsurprising that facilitators at Talkback, Bucks Mind, and Enrych suggested that they regularly struggle to engage their disabled members in the physical activity opportunities they provide:

You can sell things. You can say things in a way that people will come round to doing it, but we know our people, and we know there are certain people who will not do anything for love nor money. I don't know what their barriers are, but they are resistant (Fiona, facilitator).

I've tried to signpost people in that way, and they'll just say, "Yes, yes, yes." You'll get the odd member, one or two, who will take it up, but they are more the exceptions (Elizabeth, facilitator).

Sarah even went as far to suggest that well-funded provision in itself is not enough to encourage disabled people to be more active:

Would you like more funding for physical-activity related stuff? Would that be a positive? I'm not sure people would take it up. So, say if we were given money and, "Here's an instructor to do an indoor football course, or a multi-sports course,"

then out of all of our members - say if we ran it in Wycombe - you'd probably get, I don't know, four people come (Sarah, facilitator).

As will be explored further in the summary discussion, perceived or actual lack of enjoyment may be the biggest barrier facing the local government and partner organisations in their bid to increase physical activity among disabled people. While HM Government (2015) and Sport England (2016b) talk about the importance of 'behaviour change' we cannot help but feel that to bring about change in behaviour we must first change people's *attitudes* to sport and physical activity. Getting those underrepresented groups to move through the stages of Sport England's (2016b, p.21) behaviour change model is not a straightforward and unproblematic process. As our evidence suggests, for many disabled people, after 'contemplation' comes rejection because of a perceived lack of enjoyment and, for others, 'action' does not lead to 'maintenance' due to an actual lack of enjoyment.

CRITICAL SUMMARY

The aim of this report was to provide a richer and more detailed account of disabled people's thoughts, feelings, and experiences of sport and physical activity, which goes beyond a statistical representation of participation and non-participation. We employed qualitative interviews and focus groups with three local non-sporting disability support organisations and their memberships. The resultant narrative is that disabled people do not tend to be naïve about the physical and, especially, the mental health benefits of an active lifestyle, but experience a number of real and perceived internal and external barriers that often prevents participation in sport and physical activity. Chief among these barriers were issues relating to the cost of activities and transport, preconceived images of sport as being competitive and judgemental with unempathetic providers, coaches, and athletes, lack of awareness about provision due to poor communication and ineffective modes of advertisement, anxieties about sporting ability and personal safety, and a lack of enjoyment. While none of these barriers should be underplayed, especially those caused by anxieties, perhaps the most significant barrier, and the main challenge for future provision, is that many disabled people have not enjoyed, or perceive that they will not enjoy, partaking in sport and physical activity. Arguably, and from our perspective, this lack of enjoyment can cause disabled people to fixate on the difficulties of engaging, such as the cost and hassle of getting there, and finding the necessary information about provision. Indeed, while disabled people often raise these as barriers to sport participation, they do not seem to prevent them from engaging in other leisure activities that they enjoy, such as going to the cinema or out for a meal. Again, it is important to stress that we are not dismissing the idea that these issues may prevent engagement with sport and physical activity, but rather suggest that attempting to remove these external barriers is fruitless unless sport and physical activity is first made more enjoyable. Moreover, increased enjoyment can also go a long way toward reducing some of those internal barriers, such as the perceived emphasis on unforgiving competition and the resultant anxieties about abilities. In other words, successfully tackling the enjoyment issue will help to overcome those other barriers, and therefore this should be the priority for those local government organisations and sport and physical activity providers who want to see a sustainable increase in disabled people's participation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE: A MORE PROACTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE APPROACH

Most disabled people fully recognise the importance of an active lifestyle for physical and mental wellbeing, but their lack of motivation, built on a lack of enjoyment, a number of anxieties, and perceived external barriers, often prevents participation. Moreover, many feel that local government and service providers do not do enough to urge and *stimulate* the disabled community to adopt an active lifestyle. While we do not claim that our findings are wholly representative of the disabled community, we have collated a number of rich and comparable stories of 'being disabled' and based on these we now offer eight suggestions for a more proactive and sustainable approach to sport and physical activity provision for disabled people. These suggestions are interdependent with some persistent elements:

Less 'sport', more 'activity': Disabled people are typically worried about their own capabilities and often perceive sport to be competitive and unforgiving. This image of sport prevents many disabled people from engaging in physical activity. Therefore providers and sport coaches need to work harder to promote 'activity' rather than 'sport' and create a welcoming and non-judgmental environment.

Multi-activity approach: Many disabled people have never engaged in physical activity, or have limited, distant, and sometimes unpleasant memories of sport. Because of this disabled people do not always know what physical activities they might enjoy or have a talent for. Therefore providers and coaches should look to adopt a multi-activity approach to their programmes to prevent boredom, increase engagement, and improve the likelihood that disabled people maintain an active lifestyle.

It must be fun! Like able-bodied people, many disabled people do not, or feel that they will not, enjoy sport or physical activity and will look for any excuse not to do it! This means that providers may only have one chance to engage disabled people and change their attitudes toward physical activity. Therefore providers and coaches must absolutely ensure that enjoyment is prioritised above all other agendas. Fun must be at the heart of all provision!

Blended physical and non-physical activities: While most disabled people acknowledge the physical health benefits of exercise, many place greater emphasis on its qualities as an

abetter to friendship-building and meaningful interactions. Therefore providers and coaches should more clearly acknowledge and cater for disabled people's need for social wellbeing by including non-physical activities, such as coffee-drinking, lunches, and simply shared time with others in their physical activity provision.

Knowledgeable workforce: Many disabled people worry that the facilitators at the coalface will not acknowledge their anxieties or be able to accommodate their needs. Therefore providers need to ensure that coaches have received at least basic training in how to deliver physical activity for disabled people – such as the UK Coaching 'How to Coach Disabled People in Sport' workshop – and adopt an inclusive and welcoming approach to their practice.

Gradual integration into mainstream sport and physical activity: While most disabled people do not want to be treated differently to able-bodied people, their impairments and preconceptions about sport often create anxieties. As a result, many disabled people simultaneously desire and fear the idea of engaging in mainstream sport and physical activity, such as established disability sport clubs or mixed able-bodied / disabled recreation clubs and activities. From a sport development perspective, integrating into the mainstream is the desirable and arguably the only sustainable route, but disabled people's anxieties must be taken into account. Therefore providers and coaches should seek to offer multi-activity programmes, exclusively for disabled people, but should also embed stepping-stones to future opportunities to allow for gradual integration into mainstream sport and physical activity.

Simplified advertising, better communication: Many disabled people are not aware of the sport and physical activity opportunities available to them in their local area. This is in part because of a lack of communication between local government and disability organisations about future and current provision. It also stems from the mode of advertisement adopted by providers, which often assumes everyone has embraced the digital age. However, many disabled people lack the skills or confidence to use computers and access the internet, or simply do not know where to look online. Therefore providers need to better promote their activities using a variety of approaches, including communicating directly with disability organisations, producing 'Easy Read' flyers and posters, encouraging word-of-mouth, and ensuring that online information is easy to access and can be found in one place.

Carefully considered time and place: Some disabled people are anxious about going to new places, especially after dark. Many also see a lack of transport options and the cost of transport as a barrier to participation in sport and physical activity. Therefore providers and coaches should aim to take sport and physical activity out into the disabled community where possible, using spaces familiar to disabled groups. Alternatively, providers may look to offer transport or subsidise transport costs, or if this is not feasible they should ensure that sport and physical activity is provided in a well-lit, well-known, safe location that is on a bus route.

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