

# HOW TO ENGAGE DISABLED PEOPLE IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: A SPORT PROVIDER'S GUIDE TO PRACTICE

"So put me on a dance floor, I'm fine, but ... I don't want to take part in sport. I've had the opportunity, I'm not interested."

**1) More 'activity', less 'sport':** Many disabled people often perceive sport to be overly competitive, judgmental and unforgiving, which can prevent them from engaging in physical activity. Therefore, providers need to work harder to promote 'activity' rather than 'sport'.

"I felt shy. I felt scared. I felt nervous about getting it wrong. I felt nervous because it's a new group. Me and sport don't mix."

"It would be absolutely great if we had days where you didn't have any expectations. You just go to these things and it's like you can try maybe a broad range of events and see what you can physically do."

**2) Provide a variety of activities:** Many disabled people do not always know what physical activities they might enjoy or have a talent for. Therefore, providers should offer multi-activity programmes to help disabled people realise their potential, increase engagement, and improve the likelihood that disabled people maintain an active lifestyle.

"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."

"It is a lovely opportunity to have a little bit of activity and then do something lovely afterwards."

**3) Include non-physical activities:** Many disabled people recognise the physical health benefits of exercise, but place greater emphasis on its qualities as an abettor to friendship-building and meaningful interactions. Therefore, providers should cater for this need for social wellbeing by including non-physical activities, such as coffee-drinking and lunches, in their provision.

"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 ... 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."

"I think having at least that human interaction makes you feel just that bit better."

"People who do not have a disability ... Sometimes they don't know how to approach you, they don't have that similar, sort of, empathy."

**4) Build an informed workforce:** Many disabled people worry that coaches will not acknowledge their anxieties or accommodate their needs. Therefore, providers must ensure that coaches are trained in how to deliver physical activity for disabled people and how to adopt an inclusive and welcoming approach.

"I think it has to be gentle and not a scary prospect. Something that they would look forward to, and not be judged on."

Generated from: 'Motivations and challenges for disability sport and physical activity in Buckinghamshire: A qualitative report' (December 2017)

Commissioned by: Buckinghamshire County Council and Leap With Us

Researched and written by: Dr Ben Ives and Dr Ben Clayton (Human Performance, Exercise & Wellbeing Centre, Buckinghamshire New University)



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"I don't know what's out there. I don't know what clubs are running. I've looked on the computer this morning ... but when it comes to somebody like me, in a wheelchair, I couldn't find [anything] and I give up."

**5) Create awareness:** Many disabled people are unaware of the available sport and physical activity opportunities. Therefore, providers must promote activities using a variety of approaches, such as communicating directly with disability organisations, producing 'Easy Read' flyers, encouraging word-of-mouth, and ensuring that online information is easy to access.

"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 ... a leaflet might not be Easy-Read. They might not be able to understand it."

"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."

**6) Carefully consider the time and place:** Some disabled people are anxious about going to new places, especially after dark, and also find transport a barrier to sport and physical activity. Therefore, providers should either aim to take sport and physical activity out into the disabled community, using spaces familiar to disabled groups, offer transport or subsidise transport costs, or ensure that sessions are provided in well-lit, well-known, safe locations on a bus route.

"Unless they start looking into transport you will not get people to go to different clubs and get more activity."

"A taxi is a few quid. It's more to the remote villages ... 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."

"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."

"Basically, 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."

**7) Consider sustainability:** Many disabled people at the same time desire and fear the idea of engaging in more mainstream sport and physical activity, but providers must also consider the sustainability of exclusive multi-activity provision. Therefore, they should seek to initially offer these programmes, but should also embed stepping-stones to future opportunities to allow for gradual integration into established disability sport clubs or mixed able-bodied / disabled recreation clubs.

"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."

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