

Disability Sport in Sheffield

An evaluation of the wider impact on outcomes of investment in disability sport from 2010 to present



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Introduction

Background

Since 2010 the disability charity Within Reach and Sheffield City Council have worked in partnership to secure funding from Sport England to support a range of disability sport and physical activity projects across the city. **During this period over 7000 people have been engaged in hundreds of activity sessions.** These sessions have been delivered directly by coaches from Sheffield City Council, and by volunteer-led disability sports clubs that have been supported through funding from the project.

The range of people engaged is diverse, with a good representation of female (45 per cent between 2013-2016) and BME participants (10 per cent between 2013-2016). As are the types and locations of opportunities available. There are currently 55 separate clubs and activities running in venues across Sheffield.

Whilst much is known about the reach of

these projects in terms of numbers, less is known about the qualitative impact engagement has on individuals. Understanding the **wider impacts of involvement** on individuals and society is important if we are to evidence the value of investment in sport and physical activity programmes for disabled people. In the context of an end to Sport England funding, the winding down of involvement of Within Reach due to the retirement of its' chair Michael Elliott, and the reduction in Sheffield City Council's role in sports provision due to austerity, there is also a need to think through how opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity can be retained and expanded.

This research explores both of these aspects.

Focus of research

Firstly, by investigating the benefits of engagement on participants, their families and carers, volunteers and coaches; and how these benefits contribute to meeting Sport England's wider outcomes of sports

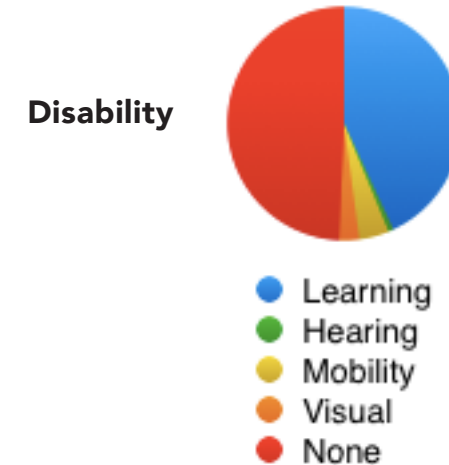
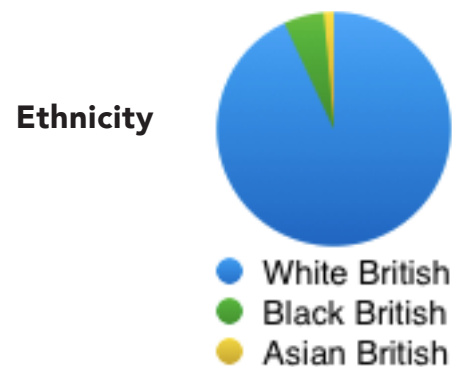
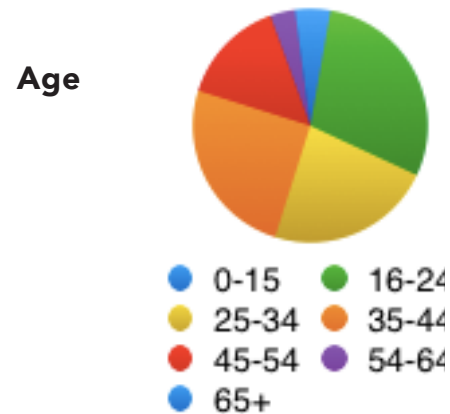
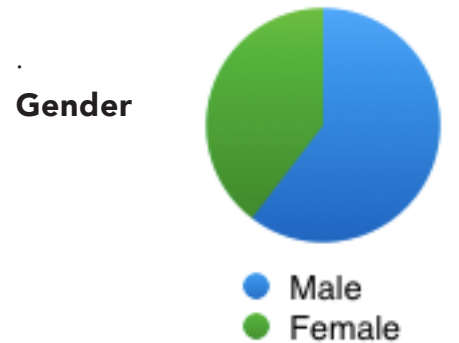
participation including **physical and mental wellbeing, individual, social, community and economic development.**

Secondly, by understanding the strengths and downsides of the design and delivery of the Sport England funded projects in order to build upon the legacy, and to learn lessons to inform the development of a new infrastructure to support disability sport in the future.

Who the study involved

This study draws on a diverse range of opinions, perspectives and experiences of disability sport in Sheffield from both individuals and organisations that have been involved over a number of years. These include participants themselves, their carers and family members; volunteers who support the running of clubs and activities; sports leaders from the public and voluntary sector who have been drivers of the strategic vision for disability sport; coaches who deliver sports sessions; as-well as non-users who are not currently involved.

Engagement with these groups was based on two core research methods - one-to-one in-depth interviews and group participatory research sessions. **A total of 144 research respondents participated in the research**, 39 were interviewed and 105 engaged in groups sessions during January 2018. The demographics of those who took part are summarised in the pie charts below.



Research respondents were asked to reflect upon the impact engagement in sport has had on theirs and others lives, to identify barriers to participation, as well as recommendations for the future. These methods enabled expertise and local knowledge from a variety of viewpoints to be heard, allowing for the development of a holistic understanding of project strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.

How to read the report

The report is split into four chapters.

The first explores the **strengths of the current offer** including the infrastructure in place to support disability sports clubs and activities; the role of coaches, volunteers and parents in enabling participation; and finally the accessibility of venues and activities.

The second sets out the **benefits of involvement in sport and physical activity** on participants, their families and carers. These include improved physical and mental health; access to a supportive and enriching social network; and the development of the skills and opportunities to live a fulfilling and independent life.

The third chapter highlights the **barriers to participation** both for individuals and their families, but also the organisations and individuals involved in delivering sports sessions. These include problems with accessibility of information and venues; the impact of wider discrimination and prejudice that disabled people face on their






confidence and readiness to take part; and the impact of a lack of parental support on participation.

The final chapter sets out the **recommendations** suggested by research participants. These include the need for the development of an active disability sport network comprising of a partnership of private and public providers in order to coordinate and pool of resources; integrate more effectively with health and social care agencies; and raise the profile and awareness of disability sport in Sheffield.

Chapter summaries

The summaries at the beginning of chapters one, two and three are coded to indicate where the sport and physical activity programme in Sheffield contributes to, or detracts from, the Sport England Impact Areas shown below.

Sport England Impact Areas

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Physical wellbeing |  |
| Mental wellbeing |  |
| Individual development |  |
| Social development |  |
| Community development |  |
| Economic development |  |



Chapter One

Strengths of current provision

Chapter summary - Strengths of current provision

Infrastructure to support clubs and activities

1. Partnership between Within Reach and Activity Sheffield to provide leadership and strategic direction. ●
2. Support and funding provided by this partnership to set up sports clubs and activity sessions, greatly enhancing the offer available to people with disabilities in Sheffield. ●
3. Legacy of passionate and well-networked individuals and organisations who worked on the project and are committed to ensuring it continues. ●
4. The support given to existing clubs to ensure their future sustainability in the context of reduced public funding. ●

Supportive coaches, volunteers, families and carers

1. Committed parents and/or carers who provide transport and moral support to participants. ● ●
2. Skilled and experienced coaches who open up opportunities, are flexible in their approach, and able to respond to the individual needs. ●
3. An inclusive environment created by staff and participants, to ensure everyone feels welcome and supported. ●
4. Passionate volunteers who see the impact on participants, are supported in learning new skills, and ensure the day-to-day running and sustainability of clubs and activity sessions. ●

Accessibility of venues and activities

1. Quality sports venues that are accessible and welcoming. ●
2. Affordable clubs and activities. ●
3. A variety of opportunities, enabling people to make choices and find an activity they are suited to and enjoy. ●
4. Access to information about what is on offer from a variety of sources, including professionals, printed directories, on-line marketing, and information shared through word of mouth. ● ●

Sport England Impact Areas



Infrastructure to support clubs and activities

Within Reach

The work of Within Reach has been pivotal to increasing sports opportunities for disabled people in Sheffield. The charity has taken the lead in providing strategic direction, and, crucially, writing funding bids to draw in resource to support the development and maintenance of clubs for more than two decades. They have also been proactive in raising awareness about disability sport through their website and printed directory. The leadership provided by the charity, and in particular its chair Michael Elliot and supporting board, has proven crucial to ‘pulling people together, making links and getting the right [organisations] in the room’ [coach] to drive forward the agenda. This includes participants and parents themselves who are engaged in the design and delivery of the sport and physical activity programme. Indeed, the charities ethos of engagement is key to their success, and unusual in a sector that often assumes what people with disabilities want, rather than asking them.

Activity Sheffield

The close working relationship between Within Reach and Sheffield City Council is also a strength of the programme. The service formally known as Activity Sheffield, worked closely with the charity to support bid writing, employed project managers to coordinate the programme, and recruited a team of coaches to run sessions. Activity Sheffield committed to the partnership, and according to those involved ‘embraced the Within Reach ethos whole-heartedly’ [volunteer and parent]. Many members of staff were trained or retrained ‘so that they could welcome disabled people to any session’ [volunteer and parent], and most of them were ‘converted to the cause’ [volunteer and parent], and have continued this work inside the Council and as they have moved on to other organisations.

‘The city wouldn’t be where it is today without Within Reach. They got the funding in to deliver the sessions, and nobody would have done that without them.’ [manager]

‘Its not about paid officers, or raising the profile of the charity, its all about the disabled people and consultation. Whenever we wrote a funding bid we sat for three months getting consultations and deciding on sports. We were doing it because it was what people said they wanted to do.’ [manager]

‘The advantage of working with the Council is that they had the people, they took on the coordinating role, and had a project manager in charge of the programme. That has been absolutely key.’ [volunteer and parent]

‘Staff who worked on the project have spread their knowledge around the community. They knew the particular needs of particular groups and could handle that. I still come across people who continue to work in disability sport because its extremely rewarding. That is a massive hidden legacy.’ [volunteer and parent]

Club sustainability

Another important legacy of the work championed by Within Reach and Sheffield City Council has been a recent drive to ensure that those clubs set up with the help of public funding can sustain themselves without additional financial support. Volunteer-led clubs have been supported to establish as registered organisations with bank accounts, constitutions and committees. Whilst many find the process bewildering, with a little help they are empowered to take charge of their clubs and ensure their future by ‘applying for funding, or asking participants to pay for the sessions’ [coach]. Club leaders recognise that funding is constrained, and value the support they have received in becoming self-sufficient.

‘There is no funding in the future so we have had to begin with the end in mind. We have provided training, volunteer development, education around applying for funding and making sure that they are charging. In previous years we would just deliver, now we have to think about sustainability. The funding has stopped, but the majority of clubs will continue.’ [manager]

‘The success for me is that Activity Sheffield have supported us in becoming more independent which is really important.’ [volunteer and parent]

Supportive coaches, volunteers, families and carers

Skilled and committed coaches

Coaches are pivotal in getting people involved in sport and keeping them engaged. Coaches open up opportunities to participants by introducing them to sport through school, college or community-engagement events. For individuals without parental support, coaches often go the extra mile to ensure they can participate by providing transport and moral support. They also fight wider battles to ensure that disabled people have opportunities to participate in programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Sports Leaders UK.

Once engaged, continued involvement depends upon experienced coaches able to engage and train people with disabilities. These include coaches who:

- communicate effectively and develop a rapport with participants;
- treat everyone as individuals, respond to their needs, and draw out their unique strengths;
- take an organised yet flexible approach, so they can change activities and coaching styles to support participants, keep them alert and engaged;
- provide praise and recognition for personal achievements;
- listen to players and respect their opinions;
- create a relaxed and non-judgemental atmosphere where everyone can be themselves.

Coaches value the skills they develop which improve their effectiveness in coaching participants of all abilities. They also appreciate the positive and supportive attitude that participants bring to the sports sessions, often in contrast to ‘mainstream participants’ [coach], including:

- enthusiasm and ‘willingness to try anything’ [coach] and to ‘get the best out of it that they can’ [coach and manager];
- appreciation of what is on offer;
- ‘respect that the players have for each other’ and their coaches [volunteer, coach & parent];
- happiness and love of sport that they freely express - ‘the kids love just being on the pitch with a ball’ [volunteer, coach and parent].

‘[The coach] broached the subject of our children doing the Duke of Edinburgh. They said they won’t be able to do it. She argued why don’t we adapt it so they are using their initiative to their maximum abilities? That has been massive in Sheffield. We have had Gold awards. Its about changing the system and changing perceptions.’ [volunteer and parent]

‘The interaction between staff and participants is really nice. It means that when you come back they are straight in happy to see you, they appreciate how it is organised, and how we behave towards each other.’ [coach]

‘The coach will listen to them, if they have an opinion about tactics, or who should play where, she will include them’ [parent]

‘It helped my coaching skills. Each child has a different set of skills and needs. You need to think about how you should adapt sessions and so they are as inclusive as possible. It impacts my coaching across disability and able-bodied sport.’ [coach]

Army of volunteers

Alongside coaches are ‘a fantastic army of volunteers that are dedicating a lot of time’ [manager] to ensure the day-to-day running of the clubs including ‘taking subs, making refreshments and setting up the sports hall’ [coach]. These include a great many parents and family members, participants themselves, sports professionals who are involved or have been involved in a paid capacity but put in many hours for free, and volunteers with no connection to disability sport including solicitors, doctors, and students at school and university level.

The main factors that impact on volunteer involvement are:

- access to opportunities to develop communication skills and to meet new people;
- seeing the physical and social benefits to participants;
- feeling invested in the lives of those people taking part;
- access to funding to gain coaching qualifications.

All the coaches and volunteers interviewed for this study have a passion for disability sport, giving them immense professional and personal satisfaction, and a drive to continue in the field in a professional and voluntary capacity.

Family and carer support

In common with non-disabled groups, it is parents who make the key difference to sports participation amongst people with disabilities. Supportive parents:

- find out about sporting opportunities and organise attendance;
- provide transport to and from activity sessions;
- support their children physically and emotionally when they are participating;
- provide encouragement and praise - ‘my dad gets me going’ [participant], ‘my mum said you win - and I did!’ [participant].

‘I like the fact that when people volunteer they give something and they gain something for themselves through coach training and sports leaders courses.’ [volunteer and parent]

‘It is one of those areas that whoever has been involved have wanted to stay. Its great to be part of it. You know you are making a difference. You see them forging relationships and you come away feeling great. You can provide a positive experience. Engagement in the initiative has driven a passion for many people who have been involved in the programme.’ [manager]

‘They need support to get to that group or activity. The opportunities are there but they aren’t easily accessible. They have got to have someone to take them, motivate and encourage them.’ [parent]



Many parents go the extra mile to volunteer at clubs, taking leadership roles in establishing and managing them. Indeed many reported that sessions simply wouldn't happen without parents taking the lead.

Carers and personal assistants also have a key role in supporting people with disabilities to be more active. These include taking people to sports classes such as swimming and the gym, to finding fun and innovative ways to embed activity within a person's life.

'Our kids whilst disadvantaged are also blessed. Us parents put everything into them. We will never give up on them.' [parent]

'Her carer takes her to the park, writes a treasure hunt card, asks her to find things on the check list like a squirrel or a shiny pebble. She doesn't realise she is walking miles - clever or what?.' [parent]

Accessibility of venues and activities

Physical access, management and use of venues

The accessibility of sporting venues in terms of their location and connectivity on foot, by public transport, or by car is pivotal. Also important is the physical accessibility of venues for people with mobility issues, visual and cognitive impairments. These include level access, clear signage and way-finding. Adaptations to sports equipment also ensure participants with different disabilities can engage fully in sporting sessions. They include the use of foam and plastic swords in fencing, the provision of ramps in Boccia, and specially adapted games such as table cricket.

Parents, carers, coaches and participants are happy that they can access quality venues such as the English Institute of Sport. The quality of customer service received is also important and has, on the whole, improved over time. The visibility of different groups and individuals with disabilities using facilities was seen as particularly important in making everyone feel welcome within sports venues.

Affordability

Affordability is a key factor in opening up access. Most of the clubs attended during the research had kept the cost of participation low at £2 or £3 per session. When people can't afford the entry fee, some club organisers are able to reduce the cost to enable continued participation.

Choice and variety

The choice and variety of opportunities open to people is also important. Sheffield is seen as a 'a success story' and 'unique in providing such a range of activities' [coach], including archery, athletics, basketball, boccia, bowling, boxing, cricket, curling, cycling, dodge ball, football, golf, gym, horse riding, ice skating, karate, kayaking, multi-sports, swimming, trampolining, rebound therapy, volleyball, weight lifting and zumba.

'The attitude has improved because we are recognised as a group now. There are other groups with disabilities who use the space and it feels much more inclusive as a result. They have been brilliant. You can see the progress that has been made from when we first came.'
[volunteer and parent]

'I'm proud of this place. There is no distinction between disabled and non disabled - its really visible.' [parent]

'If you know that they can't afford it, you make allowances and break down the barrier for them' [coach].

'They can engage in a variety of different sports that they normally wouldn't have access to. They might actually enjoy that activity and they might be good at it. They can participate in something that gives them a chance to excel and achieve.' [coach]

The diversity of opportunities available allows people to access a range of sports, so they can find an activity that they are suited to and enjoy. Variety also gives people agency to decide what they want to do in any given session - 'its my choice, I'm listened too' [participant]. Access to non-competitive sport is also important, particularly for people who are not motivated by competition, and do not want to play team games or formal sports with set rules. Within individual sessions, groups often break-out of their main activity to try something else such as drumming or bowling. Access to one activity leads onto another for many participants.

Information and signposting

Information and signposting is also crucial in enabling access and participation, spread through a variety of sources:

- teachers, coaches and carers who can be 'brilliant at promoting what is out there, and the variety' [coach];
- the Within Reach directory and website, providing centralised information about what is available, when and where to coaches, parents and carers;
- banners, posters and leaflets provided by clubs - particularly those that are able to produce professional standard marketing material;
- taster sessions and fun days in community venues, local hospitals and schools are also effective, particularly when existing club members are there to demonstrate;
- information shared by peers through word of mouth, including members and other parents. Being plugged into this network is, according to staff, parents and carers, the most effective way to find out about the opportunities available.

'They do want to have a choice and not be dictated to that "you are going to this session" - they want to have a voice in it.' [coach]

'I think he started with swimming at a young age. When he started secondary we came across the Within Reach Programme which offered multi-sports, then team basketball came from that.' [parent]

'Being able to see a confident wheelchair user demonstrating sports really inspired me.' [participant]

'If you get a group of young parents or people with a particular disability, say impaired sight, and they pass the word amongst themselves, that is the best means of communication of all.' [volunteer and parent]



Chapter Two

Benefits to participants and their families

Chapter summary - Benefits to participants and their families

Improved physical health

1. Increased aerobic fitness, stamina, strength and energy levels. ●
2. Improvement and even reversal of health issues including obesity and diabetes, and easing of the symptoms of long-term conditions such as cystic fibrosis and sleep apnea. ●
3. Development of functional skills such as walking, running and coordination. ●●
4. Improved quality of life as a result of increased mobility and fitness. ●●

A supportive and enriching social life

1. Opportunities to socialise and make new friends. ●
2. A sense of identity and belonging, where everyone feels safe to be themselves. ●
3. Improved social and communication skills through interaction with coaches, volunteers and participants. ●
4. Life long friendships that provide support in times of need. ●●

Improved mental health

1. Improved confidence and self-esteem due to increased social interaction and reduced isolation. ●
2. Mental benefits of exercise, including improved focus, enhanced mood and relaxation. ●
3. Fun and enjoyment of participating. ●
4. Pride and confidence that comes with meeting personal goals and celebrating them. ●●

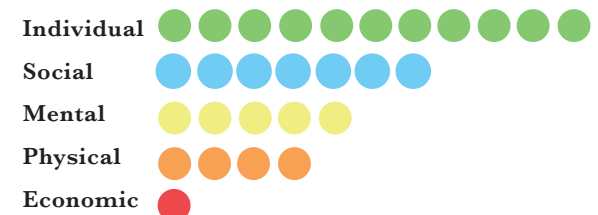
A fulfilling and independent life

1. Independence that comes from being away from parents and carers and gaining the support of friends. ●●
2. Exposure to life-enriching opportunities, including new sports and activities, competition and travel. ●
3. Opportunities to develop varied skills, including refereeing, coaching and leadership, leading to voluntary and paid work. ●●
4. A long-term focus, structure and meaning to life. ●

Benefits to families/carers

1. Pride, relief and satisfaction of seeing a family member meet their personal goals, improve their health and happiness. ●●
2. Respite from caring responsibilities enabling people to catch up with work, spend time with others, or simply relax and regain energy. ●●
3. Strengthened relationships between family members through joint participation in sport. ●
4. Access to a support network of friends who have gone through similar experiences. ●

Sport England Impact Areas



Benefits to participants

Improved physical fitness and health

Participation in sport improves a disabled persons' 'aerobic fitness and coordination' [coach and parent], stamina, strength and energy levels, helping participants to get fit and feel the benefit of being 'puffed out after a workout' [coach]. The longer an individual participates, the greater the benefits. This was particularly true for those who have seen significant improvements in their physical fitness, lost weight and enjoyed increased energy levels as a result of long-term involvement.

For some participants involvement has led to greater awareness of physical health, including diet and exercise. Others use sport as a way to address health concerns. These include those who find exercise helpful in managing the symptoms of long-term conditions such as cystic fibrosis and sleep apnea, as well as pressing but reversible health conditions such as obesity and Type 2 Diabetes. For example, one participant combined sport and physical activity with diet to loose a substantial amount of weight, 'she is a much healthier weight and has gone down from twenty one stones to twelve in three years,' and reversed her diabetes diagnosis, 'her blood sugars are back to normal' [parent]. Exercise is also used to counter the negative effects of medication such as weight gain. For those with mobility problems as a result of developmental and neurological disabilities, exercise is used to improve movement and coordination.

The physical benefits of involvement comes not just from participating in sport, but in having the opportunity to 'get out of the house' [coach and parent] and increase overall levels of activity. 'Getting them moving' is particularly important because many people with disabilities spend a lot of time 'stuck at home, watching TV' [parent]. Increased exercise and fitness can help people as they go about their daily lives, and is seen as central to promoting the long-term health of disabled people as they grow older. For those with learning disabilities this is particularly important due to the significant health inequalities suffered by this group.

'Its important for his fitness and health and wellbeing, and he recognises that. He's quite good at what he eats too. He has a learning disability but he understands that.' [parent]

'You see the progress. There was one boy who could only run on tip toes, he was struggling with walking, but now he can run at a real pace.' [coach]

'From the physical and medical point of view exercise is very important. A lot of disabled people aren't able to move around much in their homes. They can't get about very much.' [volunteer and parent]

'Its fantastic because you can see her running up the stairs now without even thinking about it, rather than huffing and puffing up and down them.' [parent]

'It has the same implications for other people, if they keep active into their older age they are more useful, more active and see more benefit to their life.' [parent and coach]

A supportive and enriching social life

Alongside physical health, there are considerable social benefits of involvement in sport and physical activity. Indeed, participants themselves stress the social aspects of their involvement that provides opportunities to ‘see friends’ and ‘have somewhere to go with them’ [participant], make new ‘friendships between years’ and ‘different groups’ [participant], and get involved in social activities facilitated by sports clubs. These include shared meals, celebrations and events, and nights out to clubs such as Under the Stars.

Being involved and included, and gaining a sense of identity from being part of a team is centrally important - ‘they feel comfortable, they fit in and they feel part of something and a community which is lovely’ [volunteer and parent]. Clubs provide a safe space, where participants can relax and be themselves without fear of judgement - ‘they are all the same ability, they don’t have to check their behaviour or over think things’ [parent]. In stark contrast to day-to-day experiences of exclusion, participants value the opportunity to take part and be treated ‘normally’ [parent].

Being part of a team helps develop communication skills. These include ‘listening skills and learning to take instructions’ [volunteer and parent], and improved verbal communications when interacting with team-mates and coaches. The development of new ways to communicate can have a profound impact on participants daily lives, for example being able to explain needs and priorities to medical staff and carers.

The opportunity to interact with a wider group of people beyond immediate family is particularly important. Participants’ benefit from being ‘around people in the same situation’ [carer], who are ‘like a family’ [parent], that ‘you’ve been around so long you can trust’ [volunteer], and are able to offer advice and comfort when facing challenges in life. Over time life-long friendships emerge, providing motivation and support on and off the sports field.

‘He often tries to hide his disability. He doesn’t go out because he has experienced being picked on, or looked at a certain way; or they think he is being ignorant. This is a safe place where he can be himself.’ [parent]

‘When he came he couldn’t take instructions or tell people that he needed to go to the toilet. The volunteers didn’t expect anything of him but they didn’t assume he couldn’t do things, they challenged him and developed ways to communicate with him in a fresh way. What it taught him and his father was that given time, energy and support he could take instructions, and now he is able to say yes I do need to go to the loo.’ [volunteer and parent]

‘This is one of the five or six opportunities in a week she gets to converse with people other than me and her mum.’ [parent and coach]

‘We have one girl who has poor vision and her confidence was low. One day two guys in the club came in really bright tops so she could see where to throw. It really touched me that they even thought to do that. That’s the benefit. They are there to help each other, and support each other.’ [volunteer]

Improved mental health, confidence and self-esteem

Participants also benefit from improved mental health, confidence and self-esteem. Much of this stems from the support gained from friendship which helps ‘combat isolation’ [parent], makes them ‘feel better about themselves’ [coach], ‘important and accepted’ [parent]. Mental health benefits also come from the ‘happy endorphins’ and ‘adrenaline rush’ [coach] released as a result of exercise. Sport provides a focus for participants, keeping them in the moment, alert and engaged in an activity. Exercise also helps participants to relax, calm down and regulate mood - ‘it keeps him mentally stable and on a level’ [parent].

Participants value the happiness they experience through sport - ‘its about having fun!’ [participant], seeing ‘happy faces’ [participant] and ‘making em laugh!’ [participant]. Fun is a key motivator - ‘if people aren’t enjoying it they won’t continue to come to the sessions’ [coach]. Even when an athlete reaches a high level, enjoyment is still central to their continued participation.

Increased confidence and self-esteem also comes through achievements in sport - ‘its about being proud of myself’ [participant], ‘showing off to friends,’ [participant] and feeling ‘pride from my family’ [participant]. Success is about meeting personal goals, rather than expecting everyone to ‘be the best’ [coach]. For some confidence comes from simply turning up and participating, finding a new skill and making small improvements. Achievements at all levels have the effect of boosting an individuals’ morale and self-worth. These include ‘hitting the target even though I’m blind’ [participant]; winning a trophy at a local competition [participant]; going to an England cricket trial [coach]and; competing on the international stage for ‘team GB’ [participant].

For individuals who are often told what they can’t do in life, achievements are an incredible confidence boost, often surpassing their own and others expectations - ‘they weren’t just involved, they got better at it, and they were surprised at what they could achieve’ [coach].

‘When there is a crisis in their life they come to the club and they talk about it. Its so meaningful for them. Often the parents die, or are ill. They come and support each other through these things and that’s incredible.’
[volunteer]

‘For me its about self esteem. Its about doing something and achieving something.’
[manager]

‘Its about the feeling of having a skill in something. Some start off unconfident, but if the rules are accessible, and you make it easy to follow, its a real good confidence boost.’
[volunteer]

‘They don’t have to be super fit or super athletes ... [at the special olympics] the slowest young man with two sticks who managed to cover 10 meters and overcame his pain had the biggest cheer - it was wonderful. Its allowing people to be involved in something no matter what their ability.’ [parent]

A fulfilling and independent life

Engagement in sport and physical activity contributes to independence and self-reliance. Particularly for those with learning disabilities and autism, attending clubs provides opportunities to develop vital life-skills. These include the increased independence that comes with learning about how to use services available in public sports centres [manager]; getting used to new surroundings [coach]; using public transport; learning ‘how to buy a cup of tea in a cafe’; and how to ‘interact with sport centre staff’ [coach].

Sport may be the only activity that participants are involved in that does not directly involve their parents or carers - ‘on the sporting field, they can do something for themselves’ [coach]. The opportunities including ‘travelling and living away from home for a short period, may be the first time they are able to be away from their parents’ [coach, volunteer and parent]. Independence also comes from the social support gained from friends - ‘they have got more independent because they have supported each other to do things’ [volunteer]. In these ways, sport provides a mechanism through which to gain ‘control over life’ [manager].

Many participants are exposed to opportunities they wouldn’t otherwise enjoy, including participation in other sports and activities such as ‘bowling and ice staking,’ and new experiences such as ‘falling in the water!’ [participant] or ‘walking on the hills above Sheffield’ [coach]. Clubs also provide opportunities to get involved in sport through different roles, as scorers, referees, volunteers, coaches and sports leaders. As well as access to competitions and opportunities to travel. Sport can also lead to the development of new skills, that can be applied as part of voluntary or paid-work opportunities.

Sport is centrally important in the lives of those who attend on a regular basis, providing a clear focus in their lives, filling their evenings and weekends, and replacing solitary activities at home such as watching TV and playing on games consoles. For many, and particularly those who are

‘Its given him opportunities to be honest. He was part of the young leaders in sport because of his love of sport. It got him tickets to be a games maker at 2012.’ [parent]

‘The benefits, especially for those with disability, is that it helps broaden their horizons. We have had people who having first started out in a small way have found that sport has taken them all round the world, they have gone on to play for their country.’ [coach]

‘Through the project we put him through some life guard training, and then he actually got a job as a life guard despite the fact that he did have learning disabilities and visual impairments.’ [coach]

no longer in full-time education, the sports clubs they attend are not just the only exercise they participate in during the week, but the only activity full stop.

The Sheffield clubs have a particularly good track record of long-term engagement with sport - 'some of the people that are down there now, they started when they were 6, 7, or 8 and are now in their mid 30s' [parent and coach]. Many do not know what they would do without it - 'I don't know what he would be doing without sport in his life. He does something everyday' [parent].

For people who may not have the opportunity to enter paid employment or training, sport has the potential to play a key role in their future life. Keeping them active and engaged in society over the long-term.

'For some of our members its the only thing they do in a week. Older ones who have left school don't do as much. Its a shame they don't do more, but at least they are provided with this.' [volunteer]

'A lot of students leave education and aren't gainfully employed and they have a lot of time on their hands, sport is a lifesaver in that respect. For me being able to access sport and enjoy sport and therefore be quite good at sport is absolutely an essential life skill. As important as learning how to cook.' [manager]

Benefits to families and carers

Sharing in achievements and benefits

The benefits for families and carers come in seeing improvements in participants' health and happiness. Watching a loved-one make progress in an activity, avoid or mitigate the effects of a life-limiting condition, make new friends, or simply enjoy themselves, reduces worry and spreads joy. For parents who often experience exclusion and barriers to participation alongside their children, sport provides an opportunity to see them being involved and respected as individuals. Providing a safe-space of inclusion, where parents don't have to worry about their children's behaviour, or their safety. Participation in competitions are moments of real pride for parents. Seeing a child achieve, push themselves or simply take part is huge. When a child achieves it has a knock-on affect on parents who feel it is also a recognition of their efforts.

Respite

For parents who are under a lot of stress in what can be a pressured and exhausting caring role, clubs can provide an element of respite, giving them a much needed break. This time can be spent with 'other members of the family', to 'get other things done' such as domestic chores or paid work [parent], or simply space to relax whilst knowing that their children are safe and enjoying themselves.

Getting involved in a sporting activity is also a form of respite, providing a break from the regular routine and a space to have fun and relax with their child, whilst also strengthening the relationships between participants, carers and other family members.

'It makes us feel better. When they have successes the family think its amazing. Its totally exciting. It inspires my nephews to find out more and support him. There are a lot of family benefits, it makes you feel wow!'
[parent]

'It was like my gold medal because this kid that I have put so much into has done this. It was really exciting, a massive pat on your back, my kids come to this! Its just amazing.'
[parent]

'A hour a week might not sound much, but the parents can relax a bit, they can see the kids in the stadium, and they know they are ok. They can chill out, they don't have to stress, we are looking after them.' [volunteer coach and family member]

'It puts the relationship between participant and carer in a different light. It builds a stronger bond between the carer and the participants. Your doing the same thing. In a way its an equaliser.' [coach]

'For me as a sibling I've really enjoyed it, its a fun way to get to know your brother and sister with a disability - it can be stressful at home all the time.' [volunteer coach and family member]

A support network

For parents and carers, clubs provide an opportunity to socialise and catch up with friends, a space to relax, to ‘have a natter’ and a ‘laugh and joke’ [parent]. These friendships often extend outside the confines of weekly club sessions, with parents supporting each other over the phone and through social media. They also often long-term friendships, as participants continue their involvement in sports clubs for years.

This network is particularly important when families encounter difficulties, providing access to a peer group who really understand, have gone through shared experiences and face similar challenges - ‘we have that support, we all walk in each others shoes’ [parent].

Parents are at ‘different stages’ [coach] and are as a result a key source of information and advice. The network provides access to knowledge about ‘all sorts of things that are happening, city-wide’ as well as the ‘support that is available’ [volunteer and parent], including access to respite care, advice about housing or support with accessing disability benefits and services. Information and advice is also provided by coaches and volunteers. Many of whom bring their own specialist professional knowledge which can be extremely useful to participants and their families.

The benefits of access to this network of support and information is crucial for those who have, in the past, been isolated and disconnected from other people whose children have a disability. Caring for a disabled person can be a ‘lonely and full on job,’ sports clubs provide a crucial life line providing connections with people, and a source of strength and support.

‘Some of the mums here know what we are going through and that is brilliant.’ [parent]

‘Parents get together and share a lot of things. Not long ago we talked about the future for our children when we are gone - our fears and worries.’ [volunteer coach and parent]

‘To families and participants, when there is a crisis in their life, they come to the club and they talk about it, and they have got someone there.’ [volunteer]

A photograph of a group of people, including several individuals in wheelchairs, gathered in a gymnasium. They appear to be participating in a physical activity or exercise class. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The text 'Chapter Three' and 'Barriers to participation' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Chapter Three

Barriers to participation

Chapter summary - barriers

Individual barriers

1. Poor accessibility due to a lack of information, and lack of inclusiveness in the design and management of venues and mainstream clubs. ● ●
2. Cost for participants on low incomes. ●
3. Discrimination, prejudice and exclusion experienced by people with disabilities and their families in all aspects of life including education, health and social services. ● ●
4. Lack of parental support due to limited knowledge or motivation, and the pressures of juggling work, family and caring responsibilities. ● ●

Institutional barriers

1. Lack of public funding to support new and existing clubs and activity sessions. ●
2. Lack of awareness or commitment amongst decision makers to invest in sport and physical activity for disabled people. ● ●
3. Increased reliance on parents and volunteers to fill the breach. ● ●
4. Lack of integration with health and social care services. ●

Sport England Impact Areas



Individual barriers

Lack of knowledge and information

Lack of information and knowledge about what is available is a key barrier to participation- ‘there is a problem in communication’ [parent]. Those who co-ordinate and run clubs and activities are well aware of the difficulty in getting information out there, and to the right people. Whilst printed leaflets and booklets are an important part of raising awareness more needs to be done. Despite the potential of new technologies to spread the message about the clubs and activities available, it is still difficult to find out what is going on even with an online search, and web-resources such as the ‘local offer’ database are not fit for purpose. The real concern expressed by a great many of the people engaged is how to get to the people who are ‘most in need’ [parent] but ‘don’t know about the clubs’ [volunteer].

Venue access and management

The location of clubs and activities impacts on participation. Whilst there are a ‘lot of disability clubs, they are not in all areas across the city’ [coach] or accessible without a car. Transport is a key issue. Young people in education find it difficult to access after-school clubs because school transport offers no flexibility on the location of evening drop-offs. Cuts to community transport services have also limited access for adults wanting to attend sports clubs and activities. Lack of transport means that participants are reliant on family members or carers to take them to activities, or may be faced with the expense of paying for taxis that can be prohibitively expensive.

The accessibility of sports venues is also a barrier, for example respondents reported a lack of lifts with sufficient capacity in one newly built venue; lack of access to adapted equipment such as ‘bigger spots on bowling bowls so blind and partially sighted people can see’ [participant]; as well as poor acoustics in sports venues that make them inaccessible to people with autism - ‘it can be far too loud, too echoey and that does not help’ [parent].

‘They say there isn’t enough opportunity for us, you start telling them about it and they don’t know that its going on. Its about not being aware of the opportunity, rather than there being nothing available.’ [manager]

‘I’ve found over the years that parents have different means of getting information. Its a mistake to think that because we have a directory people automatically got the information. Don’t take anything for granted. Don’t assume that people know.’ [volunteer and parent]

‘Its so dependent on the grapevine, and if you are not connected to it you lose out.’ [volunteer and parent]

‘If you could get transport to pick them up then participation would go through the roof.’ [coach]

The management of venues, and the support given to disabled customers, is also an area of concern. In some venues, parents and participants felt they receive an anonymous service, leading to a lack of contact or rapport with centre staff. They also reporting difficulties in sharing space with other facility users who do not respect, or understand the needs of athletes with disabilities.

Cost

The cost of attending activities is a barrier for those on low incomes. Parents who take on caring responsibilities, 'work less' and 'have less money' [parent]. Disabled people have fewer opportunities to work, and if they do they are likely to be in lower paid jobs and on limited hours. The majority of people interviewed for this study rely on disability benefits. Many reported that financial difficulties have worsened in the context of cuts to disability benefits - particularly for those with 'invisible' disabilities such as autism or learning disability. Benefits no longer cover the cost of participation and travel to "non-essential" activities. Even when opportunities are available at low cost, individuals may not attend due to fear that they may be deemed more capable and will have their benefits reduced.

Cuts to funding mean that clubs need to charge members. Whilst this is a key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of clubs, the price has to be low enough so poorer participants can attend. Whilst most clubs believe that 'nobody should be prevented to taking part because they can't afford it' [volunteer coach and parent], and many make allowances for those on lower incomes, they are also aware that 'if they are not here, we don't know if its because they can't afford it.' [volunteer coach and parent]. Many clubs have no choice but to charge, and can't make allowances for people even if they are struggling to pay.

'Staff are not on board with helping athletes. There is no representation at the management level, the only contact I have with staff is when I pay at the desk.' [volunteer coach and parent]

'Direct payment doesn't cover activities. It covers the support worker, their wages and the training centre - anything else is covered by the family if they can afford it.' [parent]

'You may have a family where somebody is quite capable of getting out more and they are restricted by their families because they fear losing allowance. They are so reluctant to spend their allowances on anything that could make them appear more able than they are.' [coach]

'Clearly £3 a week is quite a lot of money for someone with three children or if they are on benefits. They ask if they can have a discount, but we can't do that, which is hard to say.' [volunteer and parent]

Discrimination, prejudice and exclusion

Experiences of discrimination, prejudice and exclusion are also barriers to participation. Many participants reported that they suffer from bullying at school and college ‘there is a lot of bullying, kids posting horrible things on social media and taking the mic’ [parent]. As well as an attitude and expectation that a person with disabilities will not achieve - ‘we are written off at school’ [participant] and ‘feel treated like idiots’ [participant].

These negative experiences extend beyond education to interactions with the wider public. A number of parents interviewed for this study were extremely anxious about their children’s vulnerability in public places. Parents worry that their children are too quick to trust and make friends with people who ‘have taken advantage’ [parent]. Many feel a pressure to conform and fit in to the ‘mainstream’ [parent] in a context where, for example, autistic behaviours are not widely understood or expected - ‘people judge and stare if having a wobbly ‘ [parent]. In addition many have had poor experience of mainstream sports, where they feel out of place, a lack of support, or are simply excluded.

Within this context it is not surprising that many have anxieties about engaging in sport - ‘if you have had a bad experience that can put you off’ [parent]. Participants feel anxious that people will laugh at them, that they might be bullied, or that they might ‘not fit in’ [participant]. Some of these fears come from parents whose experiences tell them that it may be too difficult - ‘am I really going to let my son do that’ if there is a risk that ‘my child won’t be accepted?’ [parent].

‘I find it really hard because you feel that the child is being labelled - rather than saying look what they can do.’ [volunteer coach and family member]

‘If you want the best for them you need them to be perceived as normal as possible. You have to start on day one and work at it, repeat yourself a hundred times so they are not in any danger. The public can turn on you if they spot something different.’ [parent]

‘Its hard to take C. out. Everyone stares, she might meltdown, you might have to leave, there are times I want the floor to swallow us up. Its really hard. So you can see why people would stop going out.’ [parent]

‘He did try mainstream and they were not supportive, they have to fit into that box. When I first took him to mainstream he wanted to just run off. They just ignored him. It didn’t work - they didn’t have the skill level to support him.’ [parent]

Lack of parent/carer support

Lack of parental support has a fundamental impact on participation. If parents do not undertake regular exercise themselves they are unlikely to encourage their children. Participants can be held back by parents or carers who do not think they will be able to successfully take part. Without parental support a disabled person is unlikely to be able access sessions because they rely on someone physically taking them to a sports venue. Those who do have access via school or college, miss the moral support of their parents - 'some don't stay', 'parents can't come', 'some don't cheer,' 'family moans too much' [participants]. For people in care the barriers are even higher, depending on the individual good will of coaches and carers.

Families with disabled children face significant pressures in their lives. These include juggling the needs of other family members. Many parents work, as-well as caring for their families, making it extremely difficult to attend extra activities in the evenings or weekends. The caring responsibilities involved in looking after a disabled child are demanding. These responsibilities do not stop at 21 - 'parents support their children for life' [parent]. This is on top of the battles parents fight to get the best for their children in education, housing and health. As a result parents feel they are labelled as 'demanding', 'overbearing, whinging and complaining' [parents]. These pressures are exhausting and isolating experiences. In this context it is no wonder that many do not feel able to support their children in attending sports clubs and activities.

'I think we have too many families that aren't involved in regular exercise. If your parents or carers aren't that bothered then you aren't going to be that bothered either.'
[manager]

'A lot of time our disabled people are held back because carers and parents think that they can't do it - they don't want to put them out there.' [manager]

'Its exhausting when they are little. I went to the eye, ear, nose and throat, asthma and dietary clinics - you have a lot of appointments. So you don't have the space to then go out and look for sport activities.' [volunteer and parent]

'Its been a fight from day one for everything that boy has done or has achieved, medical, health, education whatever, every single thing is a fight. It doesn't just happen, but we don't talk about the fight. Its really hard, and we are still battling.' [parent]

Institutional barriers

Funding

Cuts to funding threaten the development of new opportunities and the sustainability of existing clubs and activity sessions.

Sheffield City Council, who had previously coordinated and delivered sports sessions, are no longer able to offer the same level of support. Amongst those interviewed some are aware of the current constraints to the Council, others feel they could and should do more to prioritise activities for disabled people. Parents in particular argue that those in power should come and see the impact of participation in sport so they can understand its importance: ‘the high ups should come and see for themselves’ [parent]. Others feel that local and national government should take a more proactive approach by investing in programmes that help tackle key public health priorities including obesity and loneliness.

According to coaches, pressures on school budgets have also led to a reduction in sport for young disabled people. Whilst in the past a national schools partnership invested in sport and competitions within and between schools, the end to this funding stream has meant that the offer is much diminished. The focus on narrow learning outcomes at the expense of a wider education including sport is seen as ‘short-sighted’ [coach], made worse by changes in the curriculum which no longer requires that children do a minimum amount of directed PE.

The reduction of funding has also resulted in the loss of structures that have in the past successfully delivered disability sport in Sheffield. Leading to a concern that the management, coordination and funding role, previously provided by the local authority and Within Reach, will not be filled. Whilst the private sector can move in and support some provision, this could have price consequences. Without funding some clubs report that they will struggle to continue.

‘I don’t sleep - I mean you don’t like saying money makes the world go round but it does help. If you don’t have money it really stops things. It makes our lives ten times easier to get things sorted. To get venues and coaches and making sure it all continues.’ [coach]

‘On the one hand councils and government departments are talking about helping socially isolated people, on the other hand they are taking away the things that help them to get out of the house and socialise.’ [coach]

‘I think one of the problems we will always have is cost. I think everyone has to run at a profit. I think if it was cheaper it would be more accessible.’ [manager]

‘Some of the projects will struggle financially if they aren’t propped up - some may not continue. Some are fragile in their set up.’ [manager]

Reliance on volunteers

Funding cuts have also led to an increased reliance on volunteers and a reduction in paid staff. Some coaches who had previously been paid for their expertise, find that they now work for free. Whilst always volunteer led, many participants feel that provision is more and more dependent on ‘people’s good will’ [parent]. There is an expectation that a younger cohort of parents will take on more responsibilities. This can be a big ask for families who are under a lot of pressure, and clubs report that they struggle to recruit volunteers. This is also a problem at the strategic level where there is a lack of leaders with expertise to bring together partners and apply for funding opportunities to champion disability sport city-wide. The lack of volunteers combined with funding cuts have reduced the opportunities available for younger disabled people to participate.

Lack of integration with health and social care

All participants in the research were asked about their experience of the integration of sport and physical activity with health and social care. Whilst there are examples of some referrals from GP’s, consultants and physiotherapists, through the ‘hospital spinal injury unit’ [parent] and the Ryegate centre, integration appears to be the exception rather than the rule. According to parents information about opportunities to be more active is at best patchy from health professionals, citing a lack of ‘signposting at diagnosis or beyond’ [parent] and ‘no information about sport in health centres’ [parent]. Further, referral tends to kick in at ‘crisis moments’ rather than as a standard part of the advice received by people with disabilities from health professionals [coach].

‘We are expected to volunteer and do this outside the day job.’ [coach]

‘The pressure must be greater now, there isn’t the provision out there that the local authority provided so there is an expectation that parents will do it.’ [volunteer and parent]

‘There is no provision for younger groups coming forward. Our groups will just get older, they are happy, but where are the young people?’ [volunteer and parent]

Chapter Four

Recommendations and next steps



Chapter summary: recommendations

Awareness raising

1. Raise awareness by increasing the visibility of local teams, special events and tournaments to attract new audiences and foster pride in disability sport in Sheffield.
2. Raise the profile of athletes to show people with disabilities that sport and physical activity is for them too, whilst also challenging public attitudes and stigma.
3. Training for coaches and sports centre staff on working with disabled people.
4. Increase the knowledge of professionals in health and social care about the benefits of sport and physical activity and the opportunities available.

Make a commitment and coordinate support

1. Support and recognition of the achievements of the individuals and organisations involved in disability sport amongst leaders in Sheffield City Council.
2. Increased and more visible role in funding and delivery for the private sector including football clubs, sports venues, universities and corporate sponsors.
3. Increased role for health and social care in promoting and funding clubs that enable people with disabilities to have a more active life.
4. Harnessing of the key role carers play in supporting people with disabilities to access opportunities to exercise and socialise.

Develop the disability sport network

1. The development of a disability sport network of organisations involved in disability sport across the City.
2. The inclusion of club members and volunteers in the network to build on the success of Within Reach's consultative approach.
3. Representation of key players in health and social care in order to find ways to integrate sport and physical activity into referral pathways.
4. The development of a coherent strategy around funding, marketing, and training needs in order to pool resource and coordinate provision.

Recommendations

Raise awareness

A number of respondents highlighted the need for a change in public attitudes to disabled people. Whilst some felt that the 'broader cultural shift is happening' the majority thought that 'more should be done' [manager]. Access to an active lifestyle for everybody should be 'seen as normal' rather than 'something special' [manager]. Whilst strides have been made to normalise participation amongst other marginalised groups, for example women, respondents reported less acceptance of participation amongst disabled people, particularly those with autism and learning disabilities. A positive change in attitude would have a dual effect, both in reducing stigma and fostering an attitude of acceptance, whilst also showing disabled people that sport and physical activity is for them too.

In order to change attitudes respondents suggested a number of measures. These include:

- increased coverage of disability sport in the media in order to generate public awareness;

- raising the profile and achievements of athletes with a range of disabilities;
- coordinated and widespread publicity of disability sport in sporting and community venues, including the promotion of local teams, special events and tournaments to build awareness, attract new audiences and foster pride.

Broader shifts in attitudes could also be supported by:

- specialist training for all coaches on working with disabled people;
- the provision of training on 'acceptance of difference' for sports centre staff [parent];
- awareness raising of the benefits of physical activity and the opportunities available amongst teachers, carers, and health workers.

Make a commitment and coordinate support

As Within Reach and Sheffield City Council will no longer take on a central role, respondents stressed the need for other organisations to fill the breach. Many felt it

was important that clubs still had somewhere to turn to for support to set up new clubs, develop coaching skills, write funding bids, find and manage volunteers. As well as access to a network of peer support of other volunteers.

Some felt that the decision makers at Sheffield City Council should make a greater commitment to supporting sport for disabled people, and should 'employ somebody even if its on a part-time basis' [volunteer and parent]. They were seen to be best placed to fill a coordinating role with help from other organisations involved in the field. This could be justified by the Council's commitment to 'focus on people who need it most' including those who may find sport hardest to access but who will 'reap the most benefits', and thereby fulfilling a 'clear moral duty of care' [manager]. Others recognised that austerity makes the Council's continued co-ordinating role unviable.

In this context, a number of respondents suggested that the private sector should play a more proactive role both in funding

and delivering the agenda, including local football clubs, sports venues, universities, and corporate sponsors. A key benefit would be that disability sport would be embedded 'in mainstream environments,' and become 'part of their day to day offer' rather than something special, or nice to have [coach]. Indeed some feel the long term aim should be a greater number of inclusive sessions rather than those that are 'disability specific' [manager], breaking down barriers and misconceptions and making sports participation more inclusive for everyone. Others argued for the provision of both inclusive and separate groups depending on the needs and desires of disabled participants.

Develop the disability sport network

A network of organisations that had previously been coordinated by the local authority is still active, bringing together a range of committed individuals, all with a passion and drive to ensure provision does not fall away in the context of funding cuts.

A number of respondents argued that club members and volunteers be included within

this network to ensure their voices are heard in decision making processes. This would build on the approach implemented by Within Reach to put participant and parent/carer voices at the heart of the programme delivered.

Others felt that health and social care should be represented as one way to 'break down the communication barriers between sport and health professionals' [volunteer and parent]. Their representation as part of the network was seen as an effective way to understand the best way to communicate the 'long term benefits of an active life' [manager], and how sport and physical activity could be successfully integrated into health in order to prevent people from 'going into social isolation and requiring more medical intervention' [manager]. In addition, having carers around the table 'who meet with disabled people on a day-to-day basis' [manager] was seen as a step on the way to embed sport within the disability sector. Closer integration with social care and health were also seen as important ways to reach those who currently don't benefit - 'its a key way to

reach the unengaged' through the establishment of a referral pathway [manager].

The function of the network would include the development of a clear agenda and action plan coordinating provision across organisations to ensure that people are not 'working in isolation' [coach]. This would avoid repetition, and help ensure wide coverage of opportunities in terms of geography, sports availability and demographics of those benefiting. The network would also be responsible for keeping abreast of funding opportunities, and writing bids when opportunities arise; providing information and support to those who want to set up a new club, as well as networking opportunities and training for volunteers and; coordinating the marketing of what is on offer from different organisations across the city.

Next steps

Actions for individuals

1. Talk about it

Word of mouth has been identified as one of the most successful ways to get the message out about disability sport. The best promoters are those who are personally involved, including participants and their families, coaches and volunteers. We have only spoken to a fraction of people who are involved in the sector and have uncovered a host of powerful stories about the benefits of participation. There are hundreds more with equally compelling stories to tell. If all of those people could take on the mission to talk to their own networks, including family members, friends, colleagues and professionals who they encounter in their day-to-day lives, the message could be spread far and wide.

2. Take action to raise awareness

As well as word of mouth, participants, families, coaches and volunteers could be a useful network through which to spread marketing materials in sport and community

venues across the city. These could include the circulation of a sport directory, or information about events and teams in sport, education, health and community venues. It could also involve their engagement in 'guerilla' marketing, such as the distribution of stickers in places that disabled people would see them such as accessible toilets, accessible seats on public transport, wheelchair accessible taxis, participants clothes and kit. This work would have to be coordinated by the disability sport network, but could be most effectively implemented by those on the ground.

3. Support and enthuse carers and personal assistant

Carers and personal assistants often take a central role in the lives of people with disabilities, but their influence is currently under utilised in supporting participation. There are numerous examples of care workers going above and beyond to support their clients to live an active life. However caring work is often poorly paid and undervalued. By being proactive in encouraging carers to get involved and offering them training, they

would have the opportunity to develop their own skills, whilst also providing the practical and moral support that disabled people need to take part.

4. Call out and challenge poor accessibility or bad service

Whilst accessibility and service have improved in sporting venues across the city, there is still work to be done to ensure that people with disabilities feel welcome and included. Where a service does not come up to par individuals should call it out and make a complaint. With more feedback from their customers venues would be aware of an issue and could then implement a change.

Actions for organisations

1. Coordinate provision across public, private and voluntary sector partners

The disability network is already established with a strong membership of organisations involved in disability sport across Sheffield. This network needs to take urgent steps to secure the legacy of the Within Reach/

Activity Sheffield projects by developing a clear and actionable strategy to ensure the scope and reach of opportunities continues and extends over the coming years. This should include succession planning to replace organisations and individuals who have led but are now taking a back seat. It should also bring health and social-care providers around the table.

2. Develop a marketing strategy

There is a clear need to increase public awareness of disability sport, as well as reaching disabled people who are not currently engaged. It would be useful if the disability network could develop a shared identity for all activities run by its members - this could include a simple, recognisable logo, and directory of events and opportunities run by all organisations involved. A marketing strategy would need to encompass all forms of communications, including word of mouth by harnessing the existing network of participants, families, volunteers and coaches; online advertising and listings on the Move More or Local Offer websites; the continuation of the printing and circulation

of a sports directory; and the production of posters, leaflets and stickers to raise awareness.

More could also be done to publicise disability sport in Sheffield in the local and national media, which should be seen as a national success story.

3. Involve participants, parents and volunteers in decision making

The network should bring participants, parents and volunteers around the table alongside organisations and workers. This would ensure the legacy of the approach driven forward by Within Reach, to put the needs and desires of the users of services at the heart of decision making.

4. Provide support to volunteers

Volunteers are the life-blood of the success and sustainability of sports clubs across the city. Whilst strides have been made to make them self-sufficient, there is still a need to provide centralised support, training and information for existing and new clubs.

Organisations involved in the network already provide support of this kind, but there is a need to coordinate and market this offer more clearly so that it is more accessible.

A photograph of a group of people, many in wheelchairs, at what appears to be a community event or competition. The image is overlaid with a solid blue color. In the foreground, a woman in a wheelchair is smiling and holding a certificate. To her right, another woman in a wheelchair is also smiling. In the background, other people in wheelchairs are visible, some holding certificates. The overall atmosphere is positive and inclusive.

Appendix

Research methods

In order to understand the impact of and barriers to participation in disability sport in Sheffield, Shortwork employed two main research methods.

In-depth semi-structured interviews with existing participants, families, carers, coaches and volunteers in order to capture a range of experiences and perspectives of disability sport in the city. Most interviews were carried out face to face. One was carried out over the phone. All interviews were recorded, with permission from respondents, and transcribed by the researcher. A total of 39 interviews were carried out, 20 with coaches, volunteers and other workers, 2 with participants and 17 with parents or carers.

Participatory appraisal research based on a set of simple interactive tools with participants, families, carers, coaches and volunteers during sessions attached to existing sport sessions. The interactive tools have been designed to overcome barriers such as language, literacy or numeracy, and are underlined by an ethos of involvement

and engagement that is based on showing respect, establishing rapport, abandoning preconceptions, being flexible and supportive. These aspects make the tools particularly suitable for talking to individuals with learning disabilities and autism, who made up the majority of participants engaged in the research. Participatory research sessions were all carried out face to face, with respondents views recorded using post-it notes and flip charts, and through observer notes. 105 people were engaged in participatory research sessions including 16 coaches, volunteers and workers, 65 participants and 24 parents or carers.

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