



Engaging disabled people in sport and activity - the role of supporters



When thinking about encouraging disabled people to be active, it is not just disabled people who need to be aware of existing opportunities.

What do we mean by supporters?

A supporter is someone who provides ongoing support to a disabled person. For example, helping them to go shopping or assist with household tasks or providing advice and encouragement when trying new activities. A supporter can be anyone from a spouse, family member, friend or paid professional carer.

Why are supporters important?

Our research suggests that disabled people often have much narrower social networks. The people in these networks often have much stronger relationships with the disabled person and a greater level of influence in helping them make decisions. In fact, 8 in 10 supporters said they would have some role in helping a disabled person decide to take part in sport or physical activity.

The level of influence supporters have in encouraging disabled people is impacted by many things. Most notable is the relationship they have with the disabled person. Parents often have more influence than professional carers and the extent to which supporters themselves are active - more active disabled people having more active supporters.

What role do supporters play in encouraging disabled people to be active?

Supporters not only influence the decision of whether a disabled person is active, but they also offer a range of emotional and physical support to enable them to be active. This includes:

- Being a motivator or inspirer
- Offering logistical and organisational support
- Acting as a cheerleader or encourager
- Acting as a researcher, finding new activities
- Being a confidence builder or consoler
- Providing hands-on support and environment management

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So what do supporters need to know to recommend an activity to a disabled person?

There are a number of details supporters need to know before suggesting a suitable activity. These include:

- Safety - of the disabled person and other participants
- Environment - from the venue's general attitude and focus to approachable, caring and willing staff and other workforce
- Participants - is the activity inclusive or disability focused? Which is more appropriate for the individual?
- Facilities - from the actual sports equipment and facilities, through to venue set-up and accessibility
- Focus - emphasis needs to be on fun, socialising, movement and relaxation



So what can you do to harness the power of the supporter?

It is important to ensure that the supporter is aware of opportunities available for disabled people. Ensuring relevant information is available to answer their concerns is paramount. In order to reach them you should focus on:

The imagery used

- Imagery which does not suggest an activity is too strenuous but shows people having fun is preferred
- For professional carers, imagery which overtly shows disability is preferred, enabling them to quickly determine the relevance of an activity. This kind of imagery is less well received by parents and family

The language used

- Not all supporters will understand what an 'inclusive' offer may mean. So use images to help explain

Stories giving examples

- Use examples of disabled people who are already engaged in the activity
- Give feedback from other supporters who have had a positive experience

Contact information

- Make sure it is clear supporters can contact you with further questions

Place information where supporters will find it

- Online searches are the first port of call. Maximise exposure by using the most relevant search terms
- Word of mouth among supporters is key. They trust recommendations from other people in a similar situation to themselves

Please refer to our supporters research for more information.

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