

Taking part with disabled people

Non-disabled people's perceptions

This report looks at non-disabled people's experiences and perceptions of taking part in sport and active recreation with their disabled peers. It focuses, in particular, on the concept of inclusive activity, in which disabled and non-disabled people take part together.

Using 'implicit association testing', the survey underpinning the report sought to get beyond 'politically correct' attitudes to understand underlying, deeply-held perceptions. Answers with higher than average response times were categorised as deliberate, more rational responses, and therefore less deeply-held beliefs.



Activity Alliance has undertaken a number of studies as part of a full review of perceptions among those with an influence on disabled people's activity. These have covered disabled people themselves, disabled people's supporters and those who deliver sport and activity.

Research available at activityalliance.org.uk/research.

The online survey was undertaken by ComRes on behalf of Activity Alliance and revealed the following findings:

Limited experience or awareness of participating in inclusive activity has informed beliefs about disabled people's participation that don't necessarily match reality.



- Just **one in seven (14%)** non-disabled people were aware that they had taken part in sport or physical activity with disabled people and **only half (48%)** of the sample said they knew a disabled person. This compares with **51%** of disabled people who say they currently take part with non-disabled people.
- While taking part in sport or being active was often perceived as easier for disabled people than some more general activities, this varied significantly depending on impairment type.
 - Around **three in five** felt it would be difficult for someone with visual (**60%**) or physical (**57%**) impairments to play sport or be active compared to just **one in five (20%)** of those with a hearing impairment. This is despite people with hearing impairments being among the least active in reality.

Although the term 'inclusive sport' is not widely known there is an inherent understanding of its meaning.



- Around **two thirds (67%)** had no prior knowledge of what the term 'inclusive sport' means.
- However, unprompted definitions suggest an awareness that inclusive sport is 'for everyone', with almost **three quarters (74%)** covering this or similar sentiments.
- Perceived inclusivity varied by type of sport, with group exercise (**74%**) - for example fitness classes - and individual sports (**64%**) - such as running or swimming - seen as most inclusive. Team sports (**39%**) and one-on-one sports (**34%**) - like tennis - were perceived as inclusive by a far smaller proportion.

When asked directly, non-disabled people were open to the idea of taking part in sport and active recreation with disabled people.



- Almost **three quarters (73%)** of non-disabled people were open to taking part in sport or active recreation with disabled people.
- However, the extent to which they would be comfortable with a disabled person joining their gym, sports club or team, varied by impairment type.
 - **85%** said they would be comfortable about someone with a hearing impairment joining, compared to **72%** for someone with a mental health problem and **69%** for someone with a behavioural condition.
 - Respondents who were aware of having taken part with a disabled person were more likely to be comfortable with disabled people joining.

Non-disabled people were concerned that taking part together in inclusive activities may have a negative impact on the wellbeing of the disabled people.



- Respondents were most likely to mention as one of their top-three concerns that non-disabled people may patronise disabled people (**53%**), disabled people may get hurt (**47%**) or the non-disabled people may say something inappropriate (**37%**).
- Respondents who chose these concerns felt they applied more or less depending on the impairment group involved. While they were most concerned about patronising people with a learning disability (**39%**), people with physical (**57%**) and visual impairments (**51%**) were believed to be most likely to get hurt.

The benefits of taking part in inclusive activities were focused on the positive impact upon the non-disabled person themselves.



- By taking part in inclusive activity, respondents were most likely to mention as one of their top-three benefits that they could learn more about disabled people (**60%**), meet new groups of people they wouldn't normally interact with (**57%**) and feel more comfortable socialising or being around disabled people in a social environment (**44%**).

There was evidence of challenging underlying perceptions among non-disabled people, though this may be driven by an appreciation of the discrimination that disabled people face.



- Around a **quarter (27%)** implicitly associated disabled people with being 'equal to non-disabled people', although this increased to **69%** when including those who gave more deliberate responses.
- Respondents believed that people with mental health problems, behavioural conditions, learning disabilities and physical impairments were the groups experiencing the greatest prejudice in the UK today. People with visual and hearing impairments were believed to experience less (though still significant) prejudice.
- When asked about more 'negative' statements, respondents were most likely to associate with disabled people those about facing adversity, such as 'facing challenges' (**95% agreed**), 'lack of opportunities' (**74%**), 'disadvantaged' (**70%**), 'unfairly treated' (**69%**) and 'misrepresented in the media' (**63%**)
- In terms of taking part in sport and active recreation, respondents associated disabled people with being 'talented' (**96%**), 'able to compete' (**95%**) and role models (**89%**). However, they also felt there was a 'lack of funding' (**72%**), 'not enough opportunities' (**66%**) and 'difficulty accessing' it (**59%**).

Recommendations

Three recommendations have been developed to address the issues raised by the study. They cover a range of issues and require action across and beyond the sector to ensure that non-disabled people are both able and willing to participate alongside their disabled peers.

Recommendation one

Increase public awareness of disabled people, especially in relation to being active. This must aim to challenge perceptions and create a more accurate and diverse picture of active disabled people among their non-disabled peers.

The media and those responsible for communications should be supported via resources such as [Activity Alliance's Media Guide](#) to produce balanced, realistic and accessible content.

This should demonstrate that any sport or activity can be inclusive while remaining competitive and fun. This could build on campaigns like Scope's ['End the Awkward'](#) but focus on inclusive activity. All impairment groups, including people with social and behavioural conditions as well as people with mental health problems, must be represented. Activity Alliance has produced videos covering these issues to accompany this report. These are available at its [YouTube channel](#).

Recommendation one in practice

National Disability Sport Organisations, supported by Sport England and Activity Alliance, undertook the Together We Will campaign between July and September 2016.

The campaign aimed to support and motivate disabled people along with their friends and family to become healthier, stronger and have fun being active. It showcased a series of ambassador stories from disabled people, about how and where they enjoy being active with friends and family. It also made it easier to find useful information about people and organisations that can support you to be more active.

Together We Will demonstrated how inclusion can be embedded throughout a small-scale campaign. Recognising the diversity of disabled people and their influencers, the promotional messages did not focus solely on disability. It concentrated on the benefits of being active, rather than impairments.

Campaign assets were inclusive and accessible to ensure everyone related to the campaign and could access the information.

Recommendation two

Embed inclusivity in many more opportunities so disabled and non-disabled people can be active together.

Experiencing inclusive activity is a key means of changing perceptions among both non-disabled and disabled people. It is also important to note that the vast majority of activity can be delivered inclusively.

Activity Alliance's 10 Principles should be employed to create inclusive planning and delivery of sport and active recreation. This must include non-disabled people who might not otherwise feel comfortable in a traditional sport context. Making inclusivity the default among those delivering activity is crucial, as highlighted in Activity Alliance's **'Delivering activity to disabled people: The workforce perception gap' report**.

Recommendation two in practice

Activity Alliance's Inclusive Activity Programme is funded by Sport England National Lottery investment and delivered in partnership with UK Coaching. It will provide training for 8,500 people who deliver activity, encouraging an inclusive, person-centred approach.

In February 2019, 13 university students from Loughborough University's Coach and Volunteer Academy attended an Inclusive Activity Programme workshop, hosted by Leicester-Shire and Rutland Sport. The University arranged the workshop to support the students' personal development and learning.

UK Coaching tutor and former GB Paralympic swimmer, Martin Mansell guided students through the key inclusion principles. They learnt how to adapt sports and activities using the STEP Tool

and Activity Inclusion Model, so disabled and non-disabled people can take part together. They were also introduced to the concept of 'reverse integration' by playing sitting volleyball and boccia.

Laura, a coach and PGCE student, signed up to the workshop because she wanted to increase her knowledge and become more confident in making sessions inclusive for all participants. The main learning points she took away were how to adapt activities for different groups and that disability specific sports, such as wheelchair basketball, can be a great activity for everyone.

Laura said:

“ It helped me to realise that separate sessions are not needed, just the adaptations of sessions to allow everyone to access it. ”

Laura now plans to use sitting volleyball as part of her sessions for both disabled and non-disabled participants because it enables everyone to take part together and builds on the fundamental skills of the game.

Recommendation three

Celebrate and share experiences of inclusive activity with representation for all impairment groups.

The Get Out Get Active programme is built on the concept of inclusive activity and involves disabled and non-disabled participants, volunteers and peer mentors supporting each other to be active. Experiences are celebrated via stories available on the [Get Out Get Active website](#), with learning between everyone involved encouraged.

Recommendation three in practice

Launched in 2016 and funded by Spirit of 2012, the Get Out Get Active (GOGA) programme is providing opportunities to engage the UK's very least active disabled and non-disabled people in fun and inclusive activities together. GOGA is delivered in 18 localities across the UK and is supported by a network of national partners. It will reach 16,500 individual participants, at least 40% of whom will remain active. All activities are underpinned by Activity Alliance's 10 Principles.

Bradford's GOGA organiser spoke to women in the local community and realised that women-only sessions would help to remove many barriers to participation, particularly among those from a black, Asian, and minority ethnic background. The female fitness sessions are an opportunity for women of all ages and abilities to take part in a variety of activities at their own pace, while also making new friends. Most of the women who attend sessions do not have other similar opportunities and would be inactive without them. The group includes a mixture of disabled and non-disabled women, with all activities suitable for everyone.

Activity leaders are from the local community and promote to local groups who may attend non-physical activity related sessions. Facebook and flyers are used to advertise them.

Since promoting the session and introducing the inclusive element, numbers have risen from 15 to around 50 women per week.

The full research report is available to download from

activityalliance.org.uk/research



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