

Reducing inequalities

What we've learned from
evaluation

Reducing inequalities

About this resource

We reviewed evaluation of over 25 Sport England programmes and campaigns as part of a rapid challenge to support Uniting the Movement.

This resource presents what we found about ways to help audiences, who have typically faced **inequalities**, in accessing sport and physical activity.

It complements a separate resource about how to provide **inclusive** sport and physical activity that is welcoming, accessible and open to as many people as possible.

While we have used audiences to segment the learning in this resource, intersectionality and local context will influence how the learning should be interpreted.

How to use this resource:

Click on an audience on the next page or navigate using the icons along the top.



Audiences



Women
and girls



Race and
ethnicity

Lower-socio
economic
groups

LGBTQ+

Less active
children and
young people

Older adults

Disabled people
and people with
long-term health
conditions

Carers

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Women and girls (1/5)

The impact of COVID-19

According to Active Lives data from 2019/20, women remain less likely to be active than men. When the pandemic hit, male activity levels fell more significantly than women with a larger drop during the initial lockdown (mid-March to mid-May).

However, while male activity levels recovered more quickly, female activity levels remained more consistently lower than 12 months earlier. This indicates that despite their activity levels initially seeming more resilient to the pandemic, those women who have seen activity levels fall may find it harder to return long term.

The fear of judgement

For many women, exercise is about managing their fears of judgement and gathering the confidence to get active. Women often try to mitigate their concerns by carefully planning their activities.

For example, ensuring the atmosphere around the activity is friendly, considering who they participate with (e.g. a friend), and thinking about the nature of the activity (e.g. swimming makes women feel more self-conscious than running).

Safety concerns can also inhibit women from exercising, particularly in areas where there is a lack of female-only spaces to be active.

Women and girls (2/5)

The importance of confidence

Developing confidence can lead to increased activity for women, but even minor changes such as changing the leader or location of a session can negatively impact confidence. It is common for women to have breaks from activity and consequently need to build their confidence when returning.

The right messaging can be your hook

This Girl Can (TGC) branding can offer reassurance and help women feel comfortable when exercising in new environments, while TGC activations have identified ways to engage and

motivate women.

Getting the right messaging is key. Promoting activities as opportunities for “me time”, to make friends and socialize has helped to drive participation. Emphasising that sessions are aimed at beginners and including coaching can help improve confidence.

The Volunteering Fund found that the appeal of addressing a wider issue in the community or supporting their peers was a better hook to engagement for women than volunteering or participating in sport/activity.

The Core Market Life Changes Fund and London Sport women’s project evaluations found that, like some

other subgroups, women often prefer language such as activity and movement to exercise and sport and engage with messaging that speaks of the health benefits of exercise.

Appropriate marketing imagery is important to help women to feel comfortable exercising, but often it has the opposite effect. Displaying authentic photos of women performing activity, such as being red faced and sweaty, can make activity feel less intimidating, and including a mixture of body types and ethnicities can make it feel more inclusive.

Designing and promoting women-only sessions can lead to engagement, particularly among older age groups.

Women and girls (3/5)

Drivers of activity

Findings from the Couch to Fitness programme evaluation suggest that convenience and low cost are important drivers for inactive women with creatives that highlighted the ease of the activities and low financial investment receiving the most engagement.

The importance of convenience is potentially further supported by the finding that TGC Swim, a programme with one fixed location, reached more participants than Let's Ride, a programme where locations were different each week.

Tailoring activities to specific sub-groups of women has had some success with Couch to Bhangra engaging a greater proportion of women of Indian and Pakistani ethnicity.

Postcode targeting via social media campaigns can initially be successful in targeting specific groups, but adverts can reach a point of saturation and require regular updating.

Perhaps most importantly programmes are only likely to be successful if they reflect and match their promotion. For example, both TGC Swim and Let's Ride sessions were marketed at beginners so coaches regularly provided encouragement and support to participants.

Women and girls (4/5)

Offer a variety

It is important to note that a one size fits all approach will not work for all women and they should at least initially be offered a mixture of activities.

The East London (women) project found many participants enjoyed solo activities that they could do at their own pace, e.g. jogging or swimming, but others preferred relaxed or social group activities, such as walking groups or Zumba.

Engaging girls and young women

Like TGC, Tackling Inactivity in Colleges has tried to respond to the impact a fear of judgement and negative previous exercise experiences have had on girls and young women. This has included designing activities that are different from those traditionally performed at school, organising initial female-only sessions and hosting classes in darker rooms without mirrors.

We have learned through the Satellite Clubs evaluation that younger females are more likely to attend sessions in school environments than in other settings. The programme has helped younger females, particularly from lower socio-economic communities, reconnect with dance activities they enjoyed as a child by offering encouragement, creating a judgement-free environment and removing perceived pressures such as wearing leotards or being assessed. The participants also benefitted from being able to choose the session content and music.

Women and girls (5/5)

Encouraging new mothers to return to activity

Providers can help new mothers increase their activity levels by offering the right environment and facilities, including an on-site creche, pram access, baby changing facilities and a kitchen to warm bottles.

New mothers are more likely to participate in exercise classes if they are scheduled throughout the day rather than a few fixed times.

Finally, the Core Market Life Changes fund found that connecting mums together and organising challenges, e.g. first post-baby 5k, can be successful at driving engagement.

In terms of reaching this audience, using services such as parenting groups, community organisations who accommodate children, or sports clubs who offer family sessions have previously been effective.



Race and ethnicity (1/3)

Drivers of inactivity

Family pressures, expectations, conservative views, and cultural factors can all negatively impact the ability of people, especially women, from Black, Asian, and other culturally diverse backgrounds to participate in physical activity. In addition, for the South Asian community lifestyle factors such as the need to look after multigenerational households can lead to time constraints and exercise being deprioritised.

Alongside the above, messaging such as that of We Are Undefeatable has less cut through with South Asian people as there can be a belief that long-term health conditions are pre-ordained and their actions and behaviour will have no impact on their situation.



Race and ethnicity (2/3)

How to engage culturally diverse communities

Projects have identified some proven ways to successfully engage with these audiences, however, it is important to remember that a nuanced approach is required with different ethnic communities:

1. Online sessions – during lockdown the Satellite Clubs programme found that online sessions enabled young women to participate in activity at convenient times and this reduced family tensions. For example, South Asian females said that exercising at home made it easier to fit in activity alongside family responsibilities. Another advantage of online sessions for this audience is that they can mitigate against cultural pressures to not be active in public.
2. Connecting people can help sustain participation. Online activities as part of Satellite Clubs helped connect diverse communities from across England leading to friendships being formed. For in-person activities, Tackling Inactivity in Colleges (TIC) found that participants can be encouraged to invite their friends.
3. Be mindful of cultural sensitivities – such as dress code or the timing of activities. For example, if designing activities aimed at Muslims, it can be helpful to time activities around Friday prayer or have flexibility during Ramadan. TIC found that female-only sessions proved popular among Muslim women as they felt more confident and comfortable to participate.
4. Combine activity with other opportunities – being active does not have to be the sole focus of sessions. For example, in Satellite Clubs exercise sessions with refugees incorporated English classes so that participants could benefit in multiple ways.

Race and ethnicity (3/3)

How to engage culturally diverse communities – continued.

5. Focus on understanding the circumstances of individuals – this can take time and patience but it helps to build trust. It is important not to generalise across communities as there are always a variety of viewpoints and experiences. For example, first-generation immigrants often have different perspectives to second and third-generation immigrants, or the views of people from Pakistani and Indian backgrounds may differ significantly. Using instructors with the right skills, approach, and experience is also key.
6. Develop flexible volunteering opportunities – women from ethnically diverse communities can often have conflicting family responsibilities, therefore allowing this cohort to volunteer at times suited to them can encourage engagement. Having a diverse workforce is important to drive engagement with different communities.
7. Market locally – research from the Tackling Inactivity Fund has found that South Asian communities are more likely to be reached through local media channels/stations rather than nationwide networks. It also found that many prefer auditory rather than written messaging. Muslim communities tend to feel comfortable in mosques so this could potentially be a good environment to recruit from.

Lower socio-economic groups (1/6)

Lower socio-economic group inactivity

Data from multiple sources including Active Lives tells us people in lower socio-economic groups are less likely than the average to be active and these inequalities have only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Some parts of this audience can be difficult to engage as they can distrust or have difficult relationships with statutory sector agencies and can have conflicting priorities for their time.

Building trust and communication

Building trust with lower socio-economic groups is vital to their engagement. Involving local groups and leaders can help achieve this as they may have existing positive relationships with participants, as mentioned earlier. For example, Families Fund projects have partnered with local schools and community organisations.

Long-term commitments also help cement trust; projects that are scheduled for several months or longer are less likely to be met with cynicism than short-term initiatives.

It can also be helpful to consider any life changes when timing communication. For example, a New Tenancy Assessment (four weeks after a home move) can be a key moment for recruiting participants as individuals are likely to have had time to settle in and may be interested in making new connections.

Lower socio-economic groups (2/6)

Co-creation and thinking local

Co-creation and participant-led delivery can help attendees set expectations and take ownership of their activities. Using local facilities or asking participants to suggest venues, even if they are not sports specific, can improve accessibility.

Importance of partners

Effective partnerships can contribute towards successful delivery as partners can bring new skills and expertise into projects. Alternatively, they can also provide access to the target audience.

Partners must also recruit instructors with the right skillset; having strong engagement skills can be more important than high-quality coaching skills when working with this audience.

Think beyond physical activity

Behaviour change is usually only possible when all influences on a person are considered, especially with a lower socio-economic group, as many deal with complex issues in their daily lives. Providers should take time to understand people, their barriers, and their community, not just their activity level.

Interventions can be designed with no initial connection to physical activity and can be used to help participants overcome other challenges. This can then lead to the change in conditions needed for them to prioritise activity.

Regardless of what the intervention is, having clarity on what the objectives are is key, e.g., to raise activity levels, create social benefits, etc.

A one size fits all approach is unlikely to be effective. Even if a specific method of engaging a lower socio-economic community is effective in one region, it will likely still require tailoring in another area.

Lower socio-economic groups (3/6)

Motivating this audience

According to the COM-B model of behaviour, motivation is one of three factors that need to be addressed for there to be behaviour change. Therefore, finding ways to motivate participants should be an important consideration for projects.

Research has found a link between increasing physical literacy and improved motivation. Educating lower socio-economic communities about physical activity can be impactful as some can be unaware of the reasons why exercise is relevant to them and how they can be active.

In addition, building friendships between participants can also motivate attendance, especially because people from lower socio-economic groups on average tend to have smaller social networks. These friendships can then help people to support one another with daily challenges.

Be flexible

Participants usually prefer to have a reoccurring time slot and location where the activity takes place because it makes it easier to plan for. However, it is important to be flexible and make changes if there are mitigating circumstances, particularly because people in lower socio-economic communities often have conflicting priorities.

Activities in each session do not need to be pre-planned, instead, they can be designed or adapted according to what audiences wish to do on the day.

Lower socio-economic groups (4/6)

The role of pricing

Organising programmes and sessions at low cost can encourage participation among lower socio-economic groups, especially families. Unfortunately, some lower socio-economic families perceive physical activity to be an expensive lifestyle commodity.

With other lower socio-economic audiences, while low costs can help, particularly at the beginning of an intervention, it is not necessarily always about making activities cheap or free. Instead, it can be more relevant to think carefully and creatively about pricing, payment structure, and being sensitive to the lower disposable incomes available to individuals.

Even if activities are made free, it does not guarantee attendance as cost is often not the main barrier that prevents people from being active, which, as discussed earlier, is why understanding individual circumstances is so critical.

School children

The School Games evaluation has found that some children from lower socio-economic families can lack confidence, have low levels of mental wellbeing and have behavioural difficulties. Some also have limited access to outdoor space and therefore many do not do much physical activity outside of the school setting. In addition, some less affluent pupils are digitally excluded, so it is important to provide them with hard copy resources.

Positively, school competitions provide and raise awareness of opportunities they haven't previously had and can help students feel more confident and capable of being active. However, it is important to note that some cannot attend after-school activities due to home commitments and therefore the timing of games and competitions needs to be considered.

Lower socio-economic groups (5/6)

Ex-offenders

The barriers ex-offenders face in securing jobs are well-documented with around 90% of those leaving prison entering unemployment.

The United Together is a pilot that supports ex-offenders in probation to reach their full potential by providing a pathway of personal and professional development and reduce their risk of re-offending. Alongside mentoring and peer-to-peer support sport and physical activity was used to try to help ex-offenders build their confidence and improve their team working and communication skills.

The feedback from all involved was overwhelmingly positive. The probation officers mentioned that the activities, particularly those that required collaboration, led their clients to feel part of a community.

For the participants the peer support provided was the most valuable aspect of the programme, but physical activity, such as football, was also beneficial as it kept their minds occupied, built their confidence and provided opportunities to make friends.

Positively, data collected from a random sample of participants showed that the re-offending rate among those engaged with the United Project (26%) was almost half compared to those who were referred to the project but did not engage (56%). In addition, participation in the project significantly increased participants' self-reported mental wellbeing.

These findings suggest that interventions that combine physical activity with other types of support can help creative positive outcomes for ex-offenders and can be used to help this audience re-integrate into society.

Lower socio-economic groups (6/6)

Volunteering

Volunteering opportunities can reduce isolation and potential boredom for low-income families, especially over school holiday periods. Families can be enticed by creating roles for both adults and children and by offering childcare facilities. In addition, providing perks such as a free lunch can also incentivise involvement because it helps reduce cost as a barrier to volunteering.



LGBTQ+

Compared to other groups, data on the physical activity levels of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) community – and the sport they play – is less well established.

However, the sport and physical activity sector is working with community groups to better understand what works for them and some Sport England projects have captured insights on this audience.

We understand from Satellite Clubs that prejudices and fear of judgement have been detrimental to the confidence of some LGBTQ+ young people. Therefore, they may need reassurance that the environment will be inclusive before they engage in activity.

Communicating with this audience privately has also previously helped with programme recruitment.

Similarly, findings from commissioned research with Pride Sport found that building trust is key to engaging LGBTQ+ people, and this can be achieved by providing dedicated sessions for them and ensuring staff understand the societal challenges and barriers this audience encounters.

Less Active Children and Young People (1/3)

Data from Active Lives shows that similar inequalities exist for children and young people as for adults: girls, those from low affluent families and those from ethnically diverse backgrounds are more likely to be less active.

Children and young people access physical activity in a variety of settings (i.e. formal leisure settings, school and informal settings such as parks and playgrounds) which can be different from adults. In this section we focus specifically on age related or children and young people specific setting related inequalities that are not covered by the other demographics. Much of our learning for this comes from the Families Fund projects, Satellite Clubs and Secondary Teacher Training.

The importance of family as an influencer

To address inequalities families play a key role. Educating parents as to the benefits of and knowledge of where and how to be physical active helps to encourage continued physical activity away from more structured opportunities.

Supporting families to take ownership and a positive experience of 'I can/we can' will lead to increased motivation. Parents are motivated by seeing their children having fun and understanding why being physically active is good for their children. Parents, children and young people often take it in turns to motivate each other so it is important to develop motivation across everyone in the family.

Less Active Children and Young People (2/3)

The role of educational settings

Inclusive environments and allowing each student to access opportunities that genuinely reflect their needs and wants are essential. Tackling inequalities and addressing inactivity requires a shift in thinking, culture and approach.

We need to support all stakeholders to take ownership for ensuring positive attitudes and engaging all students in a more active lifestyle e.g. students themselves, governors, non-PE staff, senior leadership teams, parents and carers.

By improving the universal offer and by listening to what students want, schools have managed to improve participation from groups who were disengaged and less active.

Student voice is a critical driver – and it's vital that this voice represents all students, especially those that are disengaged and might not know they have a voice in relation to PE, school sport and physical activity.

Respond to the differences and consistencies in students' perceptions, motivations and barriers. We tend to focus on the differences but addressing both will have a greater impact for all. Sometimes the smallest changes will have the biggest impact.

Less Active Children and Young People (3/3)

Young People

As children and young people get older, we know that activity declines and these inequalities become more embedded. We also know that this is a time of physical and social change, all of which can impact on physical activity behaviour. For example, leaving school or university can easily disrupt routines. Providing options that help to minimise these impacts and provide stability is important when looking to engage this audience.



Older Adults (1/3)

Older adults are disproportionately more likely to be inactive than younger audiences. Even those with a resilient habit are dropping out of activity or reducing activity levels as they get older. Our Active Ageing projects addressed these barriers and provided support to maintain an active life through:

1. Putting older people and inclusivity at the heart of the design and co-designing the opportunities with their participants, considering the whole journey to make people feel comfortable and included. For example, Love to Move has co-designed the music and language locally with its participants so that each class reflects and represents the musical tastes and cultural diversity of the local community. This tailored approach saw some classes using music from the participants' teenage years which they associated with energy and enjoyment, and this led to a significant increase in engagement, mobility and fun during the activities.
2. Developing pathways to support individuals into other offers as they get fitter, increase their skills or tire of an activity and want to try another.
3. Adapting the activity to participants' needs and confidence levels and helping them experience activities they enjoyed in the past, e.g. non-competitive walking football rather than matches
4. Recruiting groups rather than individuals to help with motivation through a ready-made peer group
5. Adopting a flexible approach as there is no 'typical' participant as everyone has different needs and motivations. Staff need to be skilled in adapting to meet individuals' needs.
6. Training staff and volunteers to enable participation from older adults, for example, training volunteers to operate electric rickshaw tricycles enabling less physically able older people to go on bike rides.



Older Adults (2/3)

Older adults in care

One area of focus for the Calderdale Local Delivery Pilot has been around increasing physical activity for people, generally older adults, who are in care settings. Their system approach has highlighted a variety of barriers and where improvements could be made.

	Challenge faced	What we did
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those in care not asked about physical activity when assessed Physical activity not integrated into Adult Social Care's commissioning arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions on physical activity embedded in all assessment forms Building physical activity into clients' lives is now embedded in all service specifications
Physical environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those in care not being encouraged to move during home care visits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People receiving care are now encouraged to get up and open the front door to let the carer into their home - if they're able to
Organisations and institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care providers not encouraging clients to be active 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better Living Team supports activity delivery in settings Training provided to staff to enable activity delivery
Social environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carers don't feel confident talking about or enabling physical activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training provided to carers to have good conversations about physical activity and support clients to move more
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those in care not asked about activities they might be interested in, and clients not prompted to think about the value of being active 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active at Home booklet issued and activities developed/delivered to match interests

Older Adults (3/3)

Digitally excluded

Generally older adults are more likely to be digitally excluded, those who are digitally excluded are also over-represented among people with health conditions, representing about 1 in 5.

The digitally excluded also tend have smaller circles of influencers so it is critical to engage the right partners, for example adult social care and healthcare professionals in the promotion of physical activity, along with friends and family and mainstream TV and tabloid media. Hard copy information may be preferred for this group.



Disabled people and people with long term health conditions (1/9)

This is a highly diverse audience both in terms of the nature and impact of disability or long term health condition and in terms of mindset, experiences of physical activity, demographics and lifestyle.

Much of our evaluation data from our campaign We Are Undefeatable and research such as #Easier to be Active are focused on long term health conditions. An estimated 43% of the population are living with at least one health condition (according to 2018 NHS data) and multiple conditions are becoming the new norm (according to Health Foundation research in 2018).

People with health conditions would like to see more understanding from the public about their condition and how it affects them. Similarly, there needs to be better representation of people with health conditions in the media. This lack of awareness and representation leads to specific barriers for this audience, impacting on mental wellbeing and motivation to be active.

Our evaluations have highlighted a variety of themes when supporting disabled people and people with long term health conditions to be active.



Disabled people and people with long term health conditions (2/9)

Inclusive messaging and opportunities

We need to ensure that messaging and opportunities to be active are inclusive. Language, tone of voice and images (particularly with a strong emotional pull) must be inclusive for people with disabilities and health conditions.

Some people who would be considered disabled under the equalities act do not self-identify as being disabled so any messaging targeted at this group needs to be mindful of representing them, without necessarily referring to them as being disabled.

Classic exercise vocabulary can alienate disabled people and people with health conditions. Using messaging that is relatable, as in someone like me, is important. While also acknowledging the unpredictability of health conditions which can impact motivation and capability can be effective.

Reassurance and support from influencers

People with disabilities or long-term health conditions can be reluctant to get involved in physical activity as they are fearful that physical activity may make their condition worse, or that their condition means they won't be good enough to take part.

This audience needs reassurance that physical activity is safe and possible from influencers / trusted voices. There are a range of people who influence this audience's ability and desire to be active – from healthcare professionals, fitness professionals, health and social care charities and social and support networks such as family, friends and carers.

These influencers can be more important for disabled people and people with health conditions than for the non-disabled population. However, these influencers can also discourage physical activity through their own feelings towards physical activity, confidence and expectations about the person they support.

Disabled people and people with long term health conditions (3/9)

An integrated system that works for this audience

The system should ensure the network around the disabled person or person with a long term health condition is informed about how to support them to be more active.

We need to ensure this audience is connected with the right support and information. This involves the broad array of influencers (healthcare professionals, fitness professionals, health and social care charities and family, friends and carers).

Realistic and personalised physical activity goals

Put the individual at the heart of everything we do and talk to the person not to their impairment.

Goal setting and progression towards goals can be extremely motivating but needs to be realistic and account for the wide variety of starting points. For example, for some people daily housework or a short walk might be important accomplishments

Disabled people and people with long term health conditions (4/9)

Opportunities could be made more inviting

There are a variety of options that can be considered to make the environment more inclusive:

1. Relevant offers being made available – this could be specific sessions for this audience e.g. quieter sessions with a calmer ambience for those that require this, or could be ensuring that they are supported to take part with non-disabled peers
2. Range of options for participation e.g. 1:1s, online options, group sessions to help meet the needs of a range of people
3. Integrate a social aspect into the offer – physical activity that is ‘social’ broadens participation, helps to overcome condition-related barriers, benefits both physical and mental wellbeing, fuels the motivation flywheel and can also increase frequency of activity
4. Reduce cost or no cost for accompanying carers
5. Physical positioning of equipment – for example, need to make sure that wheelchair users can safely access the equipment and facilities
6. Currently, this audience may need extra reassurance in relation to COVID secure measures that are in place in these facilities

Disabled people and people with long term health conditions (5/9)

The sport and physical activity workforce needs to be confident in supporting this audience

They need to:

1. Be knowledgeable about health conditions and potential limitations, and adapt activities accordingly, offer tailored support, and provide alternatives when necessary
2. Know how to deal with medical events that may happen as a result of a health condition, in addition to injuries. For example, hypos among diabetics
3. Be supportive/empowering of people trying something new so they do not feel judged
4. Provide one-to-one interaction where possible, to facilitate good understanding of participants and to tailor sessions appropriately
5. Encourage and enable people with health conditions to participate at their own pace
6. Be knowledgeable about how to communicate with and aware of specific needs for people who are hearing impaired.

Disabled people and people with long term health conditions (6/9)

Improve information about the options to be active

It is important that this audience can easily find available opportunities and identify which activities are suitable and safe for their condition.

Sources of information on physical activity can be overwhelming. We should make sure information on suitable organised activities is consistent, up-to-date, comprehensive and publicised via key channels such as health professionals, charities and activity providers.

We should use consistent terminology to describe levels and types of physical activity so that this audience understands its appropriateness for them. This terminology should account for intensity, progression, and any available adaptations.

For those with special education needs develop 'easy read' materials (and the same for adapting evaluation tools e.g. easy-read surveys).

At home activity

Inspiration and guidance for in-home activity / self-directed activity is particularly relevant due to Covid, but also broadly relevant for people with health conditions who may feel anxious about doing physical activity in public places or be more affected by the weather and the unpredictability of their condition. Some people value practical, curated sources of accessible activity.

Disabled people and people with long term health conditions (7/9)

Dementia specific learning

Isolation can be common for people with dementia and their carers so it is essential to build positive, trusting relationships.

For people with dementia, cognitive processing difficulties, or more severe physical restrictions, carers often provide the necessary practical and psychological support to ensure physical activity happens at all. The carers themselves may therefore benefit from emotional and practical or financial support to continue to facilitate this.

There is a need to have dementia-friendly facilities with appropriately trained staff. The dementia guide developed by Alzheimer's Society gives clear practical advice for things that sport and physical activity sector can do to make facilities more accessible (e.g. layout, use of different colours).



Disabled people and people with long term health conditions (8/9)

Supporting people with poor mental health

Physical activity can provide an enjoyable experience for people with poor mental health, as it gives them an opportunity to focus on something positive and fun, while giving them a sense of achievement.

Peer support and the personal experiences of people with poor mental health should be a central element of the programme design and delivery. Support should include information on wellbeing (physical and mental), advice on overcoming barriers, providing positive reinforcement and setting realistic goals.

A relaxed environment which focuses on fun and enjoyment rather than on participants' mental health problems. Sport and physical activity providers should deliver group sessions, which are fun and promote connection with others, creating an empathetic and welcoming environment. Where possible, sessions should be peer-led.

Staff from mainstream facilities should attend the Mental Health Awareness for Sport and Physical Activity (MHASPA) training to reduce stigma within mainstream facilities, and to support them to positively interact with people with mental health problems.

Motivation can be low for this audience, due to a low sense of self-worth and confidence. Rewards and incentives can help boost motivation but these need to be tailored to what work wells for that age group.

Family and friends should be included in the programme through 'bring a friend' and/or information sessions.

Regular timetabled sessions should be scheduled, changes should be minimised where possible.

Disabled people and people with long term health conditions (9/9)

Volunteering opportunities

The volunteering evaluation also found specific barriers for people with poor mental health to volunteer in sport and physical activity. These were overcome through:

1. Partnering with local authorities and organisations such as Mind and Crisis to gain referrals to their volunteer activities. Having already been diagnosed or having explained their background to the trusted referral organisation, this meant that the volunteer did not need to explain this again to the project, which could have been a barrier.
2. Providing a buddy system for volunteers to provide them with on-going support throughout the opportunity.
3. Working with local businesses to secure volunteering opportunities and address the stigma around mental health in the community.

The volunteering fund projects also removed barriers to participation for people who have a visual impairment, by:

1. Offering team building activities and development opportunities (including sport coaching qualifications) for visually impaired volunteers to develop their confidence, provide them with skills and improve their employment prospects
2. Volunteers running a sports day, which was advertised for visually impaired people of all ages to try visually impaired tailored sports.
3. Linking with visually impaired groups, including National Governing Bodies for visually impaired sports, visually impaired schools and specialist colleges to promote the project and gain referrals.
4. Training sport venues on how to support those with a visual impairment to participate in sport and volunteering.

Carers

It is thought that 1 in ten people in the UK are carers (Carers UK). As a group they face specific barriers to participation in physical activity. For example, a lack of time and the unpredictable nature of caring makes committing to formal sport and physical activity or building it into their routine a challenge.

Also, high quality replacement care can be difficult to find which limits the opportunities for the carer to leave the person/s they care for.

These challenges are exacerbated for those living on low incomes, as they cannot 'risk' losing pre-paid session fees.

However, our evaluation with Carers UK and through our campaign We Are Undefeatable has shown there are solutions to reduce the impact of these barriers and to engage this group in physical activity:

1. The sport and physical activity sector needs to become more 'Carer aware' by providing

opportunities that are inclusive and accessible i.e. flexible booking options and sessions at different times to enable carers to fit physical activity around caring responsibilities

2. Provide opportunities that enable the carer to do physical activity with the person they care for
3. Offering 'carer' sessions can encourage a social element where participants can talk to other carers and help them to support each other to stay active
4. Offer complementary wellness therapies alongside physical activity offer
5. Provide online and digital options that can be fitted in around their caring responsibilities.

Wider system change is needed to address some of these barriers i.e. greater access to carers breaks, increase in carers allowance and for physical activity to be discussed as part of carer assessments.

Find out more:

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