

# English Federation of Disability Sport Report

## **Active together:**

Evidence-based report on how to provide sport or physical activity opportunities for disabled and non-disabled people to take part together

Report findings based on a market research conducted in August December 2013 by the English Federation of Disability Sport.

Report written By Emma Spring, on behalf of the English Federation of Disability Sport, August 2014.

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## Foreword



We conducted this research as a direct response to feedback to the English Federation of Disability Sport's disabled people's Lifestyle Report, released in September 2013. The report identified that there were significantly fewer disabled people currently taking part in sport and physical activity alongside non-disabled people than the number who wanted to.

There is therefore a need to provide more opportunities for disabled people to take part in their preferred setting, alongside non-disabled people. Whilst we are aware that this setting is not appropriate in all situations, this report highlights ways in which it can be successfully delivered. It also outlines how it can be accomplished in different situations, maximising the benefits for participants and providers.

### **Emma Spring** **Research and Insight Manager**



Recent findings in EFDS's Motivate Me report show that a great majority of disabled people are more likely to respond to opportunities to get active which tap into the things that matter to them most, including: building friendships, maintaining health, becoming more independent and progressing in life.

More often than not disabled people are looking for opportunities which are as likely to appeal to their non-disabled friends and family and which enable them to get active wherever and in whatever sport or activity they choose.

Likewise, there is no one size fits all for how providers communicate with disabled people. There are still a number of different factors that can prevent groups of people or individuals from noticing and receiving communications.

This report addresses some of the key elements of organising activities with a mixed group of disabled and non-disabled people. We hope current and future providers can use the findings within this paper to increase the type of activities disabled people will want to take part in and support everyone to be active for life.

**Barry Horne**  
**Chief Executive**

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- Liverpool Lions Wheelchair Basketball
- AHOY Centre
- Chippenham Canoe Club
- Essex Sailing Club
- Southampton Canoe Club
- Wheelchair Laser-Tag
- Leeds SpiderY
- Wirral Youth Theatre/Youth Arts

## Introduction

In September 2013 the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) released the Disabled People's Lifestyle Report. One of the key findings in the report was that there was a significant mismatch between the way in which disabled people were currently taking part in sport and physical activity compared to how they would prefer to take part.

The report showed that 6 in 10 disabled people (64 per cent) prefer to take part with a mix of disabled and non-disabled people (what the sector tends to call an "inclusive setting"). However, only 5 in 10 (51 per cent) disabled people are currently taking part this way.

EFDS want to reduce this gap and increase preferred opportunities by encouraging more sport and physical activity providers to offer "inclusive" settings. Although inclusive settings are not feasible for all situations, they can be invaluable to improve participation at a grassroots level. They can allow disabled people to take part with friends and family, making activities more appealing and enjoyable.

Previous EFDS research<sup>1</sup> identified that providers may be nervous or lack confidence because they have a limited awareness and understanding of disabled people's needs and abilities. As a result, they may provide less appealing opportunities. Therefore, to increase the number of inclusive opportunities, we also need to increase provider confidence.

To support these two areas, EFDS identified a number of groups, teams and activities that already offer inclusive opportunities. We spoke to the providers and participants about their experiences. By understanding how people have delivered and continue to deliver successful inclusive activities, we can offer advice and guidance to others on how to do the same.

This report:

- Pulls together the findings from the research
- Highlights the benefits for the provider and participant in offering inclusive opportunities
- Identifies the potential challenges that people may face
- Offers possible solutions to help overcome the challenges
- Offers advice about how to improve the chances of success

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<sup>1</sup> Understanding the barriers to participation, EFDS, May 2012

EFDS hope that this report will encourage more sport and physical activity providers to take the necessary steps towards improving what they provide. The result being that more disabled people can take part in sport and physical activity in the way that they want to.



## Sample and Methodology

The findings in the report are drawn from qualitative interviews conducted with a variety of teams, clubs and groups based throughout England. They represent various sports and physical activity opportunities including people with various different impairments.

The different sports and activities include:

- BMX riding
- Canoeing
- Martial arts
- Contemporary dance
- Sailing
- Shooting
- Sports camps (multi sport including football, basketball, swimming, archery etc)
- Sitting volleyball
- Wheelchair rugby
- Wheelchair laser-tag

The activities are based across England:

- Cheshire
- Essex
- Kent
- Lancashire
- Leeds
- Liverpool
- Southampton
- Various London boroughs
- Wiltshire

The activities included a mix of gender, age and impairments. The clubs, teams and groups in the research ranged from small martial arts classes with 20 participants (with a 30 / 70 split of disabled and non-disabled participants) up to a canoe club of 500 members with 30-40 disabled members

### **Privacy note:**

Throughout the report case studies will be used – where any names have been used, these have been changed to protect the identity of those involved

## Executive Summary

### **Providing inclusive opportunities offers benefits for both participants and providers.**

For participants, an inclusive activity means disabled and non-disabled people get to mix and socialise with people they may not have met otherwise. This interaction helps to remove uncertainty and fear when interacting with others and helps to improve confidence as well as communication and social skills.

All participants have the opportunity to improve their technical skills in the sport or activity they are doing. In addition, they get the chance to experience and achieve things they may not previously have considered, such as developing through the sports' pathways, competing in other events, or moving into a mentoring or coaching role within the sport or activity.

For providers, by being inclusive with disabled and non-disabled people, the activity becomes available to more of the population. This can have financial benefits in terms of increased turnover as well as the ability to access new and different funding streams. The people involved in delivering the opportunities also get a chance to develop and improve their skill set.

### **Providing inclusive opportunities is not without challenges**

Misconceived perceptions of providers, participants and supporters (parents, carers, partners etc.) are a significant barrier to providing inclusive opportunities. Providers can often have a fear of offering opportunities to disabled people as they are uncertain as to how it can be achieved safely without costing too much. They may believe they need a lot of extra equipment which in turn could have significant financial implications.

Participants can often be unaware of opportunities available to them or they feel that inclusive opportunities are not something that they will enjoy. Supporters can often believe that opportunities are unsuitable or not relevant for the disabled people that they support.

There are also challenges in attracting new participants and retaining them once they are interested. Attracting new participants relies on appealing and relevant promotion, which contains enough information for people to make an informed choice. Retaining participants involves ensuring that people have an enjoyable experience and that it meets or exceeds expectations.

### **There are many things that will help to overcome the challenges**

It is important to increase the knowledge and skills of providers so they are more confident when delivering inclusive opportunities. There are many resources already available that providers can access to improve their awareness of how to provide quality inclusive opportunities.

Providers must be careful not to offer too much too soon and risk a poor quality experience.

- Wherever possible they should be flexible with the opportunities, offering different levels for different abilities.
- It is important that they are honest about what is being offered so that people's expectations are not raised. They should be clear as to what is available, who is it for and what the aim is.
- They should not be afraid to ask questions. They should seek advice from others who have already been through the process and learn from their experiences.
- They should ask participants what they expect from an activity. Don't just assume.

It is vital to raise awareness of what is available.

- A variety of promotional methods and channels should be used to maximise exposure.
- Providers who have been successful with their inclusive opportunities should actively share or promote their better practice to support more of the same.
- Providers must consider the ways in which the communication will be promoted and the style, content and key messages that will be communicated.
- The benefits of taking part should be highlighted, but be creative and think outside of the box to appeal to more people.

Providers need to retain participants once attracted.

- They must ensure that participants feel safe, comfortable and confident.
- They need to offer a welcoming environment so people want to come back and tell their friends/family about their experiences
- They should utilise the skills already in the club, group, team and disabled people to help them provide this.

And finally, it is useful for providers to build a financial case for inclusion to offer additional evidence to board members or funders as to why inclusive opportunities make sense.

## Section 1: Why provide inclusive opportunities: the benefits

One of the main purposes of the research was to understand the benefits of providing inclusive opportunities. This is not only for the disabled and non-disabled participants, but also for the providers.

### 1. Benefits for participants

Inclusive opportunities provide many benefits for disabled and non-disabled participants but generally fall into two main categories

1. Personal development and skills
2. Experiences and achievements

#### a. Personal development and skills:

For all participants, taking part in inclusive settings has a notable impact on social skills, communication and confidence. The mixed environment means that people have an opportunity to socialise and communicate with a different cross-section of people than they would usually have but in a situation where they all have a common interest.

“It brings a lot of banter. And that is something which I really love. ... It breaks down barriers of what do you have and what do I have” (Participant, sitting volleyball)

This is particularly prominent among individuals with learning disabilities or social based impairments.

“She didn’t have much of a vocabulary of speech, she now will speak and answer questions. She was considered significantly autistic and struggled to communicate but because of this her mum can get conversation from her. Because she is mixing with young people and they are talking to her. She now knows what her daughter likes and that she is happy to talk to people. Also her posture. She always walked around with her head down. Now she’ll look up and she will want to look at you. (Provider, contemporary dance)

“They can see straight away that they are no different from anyone else. They can talk about the same things; they can say ‘How did your race go?’ (Provider, canoeing)

## Case study: Canoeing

Being a member of the club has had a remarkable impact on one paddler, Gavin, with all kinds of positive implications in his life in general. Canoeing was something Gavin used to do with his dad. They heard that the canoe club welcomed disabled and non-disabled people together so they came to try it out.

When Gavin first joined he was not very confident at all. He avoided eye contact, would hide his face and would not really engage in any conversation. He would be very introverted and not socially confident at all.

Over the five years he has been involved in canoeing, he has completely changed. He is now really involved in the club. He is more confident and initiates things. Things are going well for him in his life- talking about living more independently and leaving home. He went from only paddling with his dad to taking part in international competitions with other members of the club.

For non-disabled participants, their awareness of disabled people increases. They gain a better understanding of expectations and ability. It removes uncertainty, fear and helps people to become more accepting.

“When we had the first few disabled shooters in, people were a little cautious around them. Until they got to know them and realised it’s not a big deal if someone is in a wheelchair. You don’t need to treat them differently.”  
(Provider, shooting club)

“It has changed my opinion on quite a lot of stuff particularly around people that do have a disability- it does change how you would view them”  
(Participant, wheelchair rugby)

“It takes away the fear of disability for non-disabled people. Some of the youngsters have struck up quite good friendships” (Provider, canoeing)

Participants are also offered the chance to expand their skills and knowledge into new areas such as tutoring, mentoring or coaching. More experienced individuals are often given the opportunity to tutor or coach newer participants. This provides them with new additional skills they may previously not have had. Therefore, improving their future career prospects.

“The mainstream guys get that responsibility. It is a different sort of challenge for them. A different level. They get more out of it” (Provider, martial arts)

“We have had three people who volunteered themselves. For one young person, she approached me and said she was really interested as it was an area of work she would like to get into. So it has been a way of gathering experience doing something that she enjoys doing” (Provider, canoeing)

Sometimes participants are encouraged to be mentors to others. This can help to show them potential opportunities and achievements they could have in the sport or activity.

“I am only the assistant coach. I have not actually got any coaching qualifications. But I have played in the league that we are going to be going into. Because it is a new club he has brought me on as someone with a bit more experience because I played for Wigan for three sessions.” (Participant, wheelchair rugby)

### Case study: Contemporary dance

A contemporary dance class in Liverpool runs a scheme called Peer Educators, which uses young people from the class (aged 14 upwards) who want to be more involved in the programme.

These young people help support and lead the classes. They ensure no one is left out or confused. They are trained in supporting young people; how to listen and how to be empathic. Their role is to help the young people to express their ideas, especially the young disabled people.

Using young people from the class helps to engage others and gets them to work together. It means they gel as a group so it becomes a very integrated session. They are currently developing their Peer Educators programme to include disabled members after some of the group requested to take on such a role.

With the support of full time workers from the group, the new disabled peer educators attend open days and creative sessions at local special schools. Here, they lead warm up exercises and help to promote the dance class. They perform as a dance company, often with complex routines. They then mix and talk to people in the audience.

It provides the individuals with empowerment and a sense of achievement. It also lets the other disabled participants see what can be achieved.

“You see the other disabled people looking and thinking ‘I want to do that’. It becomes a stepping stone. Some of the younger ones look up to them and think that is what they want to do.”

In some instances, participants are also able to learn new technical skills within their sport or activity. For example wheelchair-based sports or sitting volleyball offer new and different ways to work out which can often not be achieved in the traditional version of the sport.

Wheelchair basketball provides an incredible upper body workout. Sitting volleyball relies on core body movements rather than balance and leg strength. Players of the standard versions of such games can often find themselves at a disadvantage until they understand how to move their body in different ways.

“It takes away the stuff you are used to. It takes your ability of what you are good at or used to away. It is completely different. This takes time. It is quite frustrating. But it is good. It is a good thing to do, especially for coordination” (Participant, wheelchair rugby)

**b. Experiences and achievements:**

The social setting of sport and physical activity gives the participants a common ground from which to meet and socialise. This leads to new and different friendship groups that may not have existed without their participation in the activity.

“No one is any different from anyone else, whether you can walk or not. As long as you can play the game. That’s what it is all about- playing the game and having fun.” (Participant, wheelchair rugby)

Participants gain a sense of belonging, of being part of something and a member of the team. For disabled people within this study, taking part in sport and physical activity gives them a sense of freedom and inclusion that they do not experience regularly in everyday life.

“That real sense of freedom, that sense of achievement” (Provider, canoeing)

“I think that I get a sense of achievement. I definitely get a sense of purpose. A challenge” (Participant, sitting volleyball)

Taking part in activity can also stretch people’s horizons by giving them the opportunity to travel by taking part in regional, national or international competitions.

“People get to travel. We have been to France and played with people from Australia, France, Italy and Mexico” (Participant, wheelchair rugby)

By mixing disabled and non-disabled people together, expectations and aspirations can be raised. When disabled people train with non-disabled people and it can enable them to push their physical abilities more. Sometimes, this can have an impact on their technical skills beyond their expectations.

“If you label someone they will achieve within that label” (Provider, canoeing)

“The impression that you get is that they raise their game. By mixing them, they are probably going to reach a higher level than they would otherwise aim for.” (Provider, martial arts)

Whilst this has its benefits, it is also important for providers to be aware of what each individual can realistically achieve. They need to ensure they do not stretch themselves too far and cause injury to themselves.

## **2. Benefits for providers**

There were three main areas that the providers felt they most benefitted from by offering inclusive opportunities:

- a) Attractive to more members
- b) Funding
- c) Skills and development

### **a. Attractive to more members:**

By offering inclusive opportunities, clubs not only improve their provision for disabled people, but for everybody. The adaptations and changes made to ensure that disabled people can take part, can lead to positive improvements generally making things more accessible to other groups, such as young children or families.

“We don’t have any adapted equipment as such. We do have a couple of cat-canoes. A twin-hulled canoe, a bit like a catamaran – very, very stable. We have two of those. Whole families can use those.” (Provider, canoeing)



**b. Funding:**

By offering opportunities for disabled people to take part alongside their peers, the activity or club is accessible to more people. This can generate more income from an increased membership.

In addition, providing for disabled people gives the club more options when applying for funding. It opens up opportunities to apply for funding from new and different, such as the local authority, healthcare, social care and community funds.

“ We managed to get a little bit of money together from Southampton OTARs –a charity specifically set up to support athletes with learning disability. Also, Southampton PCT and a bit of money from Southampton City Council, to get some equipment together and to pay for coaching.” (Provider, canoeing)

By offering inclusive provision, the group, club or activity may become more appealing as a sponsorship option due to community value.

### Case study: Professional club sponsorship

A wheelchair rugby club was able to gain sponsorship from a professional rugby club.

The professional team wanted to improve their disability provision but did not have the time to devote to create their own team. They therefore agreed to be sponsors for a wheelchair team that was already established. They paid for the kit, which included the professional logo and covered the wheelchair team in their club magazine.

Having the team logo on the strip gave the wheelchair team a professional edge. It makes people more confident that the team is valued and helps them to attract more players, making the club more competitive.

The sponsorship allowed the wheelchair team to form links and relationships with other affiliated teams. They joined forces with the amateur team. This allowed them to use their committee and legal support as well as giving them access to a pool of potential players.

The professional sponsorships also had significant benefits when it came to funding applications. Being linked to a professional national squad makes applications look much more impressive and they could tap into bid-writing expertise.

Members of the professional team have also agreed to be patrons to the wheelchair team, which is a good promotional tool.

### c. Skills and development

Offering opportunities to disabled people gives providers the chance to increase their skills and experience in their sport or activity.

“It has broadened my spectrum – it hasn’t held it back. It has grown what we do and made me more aware of dance- its structures, how I can teach it, how I can support it and how I can develop them in it. And also how I get them to where they want to be. I think sometimes people perceive that people with disabilities may hold the activity back but no, it actually brings more to the opportunity.” (Provider, inclusive dance)

Not only can the providers learn from formal training, they can also learn from participants. By including disabled people in their sport, they can get first hand feedback on what disabled people want and need from sport. They can then improve their offer to meet the demand. This insight can be useful when trying to grow membership and provide for more people.

### CASE STUDY: Contemporary dance group

One of the major benefits a contemporary dance group has identified from offering inclusive provision is the ability to learn from the disabled participants.

The group started to include disabled people in their classes when a parent came to ask if their daughter with a learning disability could join in. She had grown too old for other activities she had previously been involved in. The group welcomed her and from that day, other disabled people started to join with a range of different impairments.

Over the years, the leaders in the group have seen that disabled people can bring a new perspective to the classes. They often think about things in different ways, approaching tasks from a different perspective. Their movements and expressions can be very distinctive and unusual, bringing a new and unique twist to a dance.

The new moves and different perspective are things that the instructors themselves may not have thought of, resulting in interesting and expressive new dances.

“They have such a different way to use their body. The non-disabled young people who are heavily into dance as a career love watching the movements because they will say ‘I never thought of moving like that’. And that is the whole point, they learn not to just dance in a certain way. It’s not a one way learning curve, we keep learning from each other.” (Provider)

## Section 2: Potential challenges

Offering inclusive opportunities can be challenging. There are different hurdles that organisations could face when trying to offer an inclusive setting. The hurdles fall into three main categories

1. Perceptions
2. Participation
3. Finance

### 1. Perceptions

One of the main barriers that many activities find they have to overcome is preconceived ideas about providing sport or physical activity for disabled people. Providers, participants (disabled and non-disabled), funders and supporters all have views and opinions about what is achievable and how it should be done.

The beliefs often stem from a lack of or misleading information. By providing relevant and useful information, these misconceptions can change.

#### a. Perceptions of providers

Providers are often unsure, if not scared of disability. They have preconceived ideas of what it means to be disabled and what impact that has on disabled people's ability to take part in sport or physical activity. They can sometimes make assumptions regarding the level and type of resources that may be required in order to support disabled people to take part.

Providers may believe that the sport or activity is not suitable for disabled people or that expensive specialised equipment will be needed. In some instances, this may be the case, but they should seek advice and guidance rather than assume that people cannot be included.

“Coaches have always been reluctant, because they have been a bit scared of disability. I went to the paddle-ability symposium specifically to do the foundation and intermediate modules, to take aware the fear of the rest of the club and to try and sell that it was all ok. Really they were fearful because we don't have any facilities and they were scared they wouldn't know what to do with someone with a disability.” (Provider, canoeing)

Often people underestimate what disabled people can and are able to achieve. This can also be linked to the perceptions of the level of support that disabled people require. Providers may believe that everyone will require a high level of one to one support, which most club groups or teams do not have. If one to one support is needed, disabled people will often bring their own support rather than rely on the club to provide it. In this instance, it is helpful for disabled people to know that supporters are welcomed at the activity.

Providers can often be deterred as they are confused and under confident as to the terminology and language to be used when trying to promote or speak to disabled people.

“The fear factor. We don’t want to say or do the wrong thing. We don’t want to upset people” (Provider, shooting).

#### **b. Perceptions of participants**

One of the main challenges is making people aware of any opportunities- that are available and making them appeal to people, so that they are interested and come to take part. This is relevant for disabled and non-disabled participants.

It could be that people are generally unaware of opportunities that are available to them. They do not know that certain activities or groups exist in their local area, or that they are suitable and relevant to them. Perhaps they do not know where to look for these opportunities, what websites, organisations etc. Opportunities may be promoted or delivered in a patronising way, which put people off from trying them or returning to take part again.

It could be that people make an assumption of what is expected of them. What would they be committed to if they were to join a new group or activity? For example, taking part in competitions, or providers may expect them to attend all the time , which they are unable to do.

#### **c. Perceptions of disabled people’s supporters**

Many disabled people rely on friends, family and professional support to aid them in daily tasks. This can often mean they need assistance in getting to and taking part in sport or physical activity. Therefore, supporters can play a significant role in influencing disabled people to take part. If their views and perceptions are biased they may prevent disabled people from being active.

Some supporters have perceptions of what disabled people can achieve, and can be surprised what can happen when people are given an opportunity to try.

“We sometimes had challenges from parents, who would be very much ‘little Johnny can’t do this, can’t do that’. And very much wrapped in cotton wool.”  
(Provider, contemporary dance)

“For some people, it’s not just the people in chairs. It’s their carers. If they are not interested in it, they are not going to come.” (Provider, wheelchair sports)

Participation in an inclusive setting can have a positive impact on the perceptions of friends and family of participants, especially about disabled people. The changes that disabled people go through as a result of their involvement in the activity can sometimes be surprising for their friends and family.

“One of the Mum’s phrases is ‘ You have made me see my daughter, who is fully autistic with Downs, as a teenager, and not as a disabled daughter’.”  
(Provide, contemporary dance)

## 2. Participation

### a. Attracting new participants

Attracting people to firstly take part and then sustain that participation, is a key challenge faced by many providers who organise inclusive opportunities.

Some activities can often struggle to attract new participants. There are many reasons why this might happen. The promotion that is used may not resonate well with the potential audiences. If trying to attract disabled people, some readers feel that the adverts and posters can often be patronising. The words or images used may not appeal or connect with disabled people. Also, it may not be clear from the promotion that the activity is for both disabled and non-disabled people.

“The thing that appealed to me was that non-disabled could play as well as disabled people. That was one of the things that appealed. It’s as if it’s better because everyone can play it. You are not segregating people out into ‘you can play this game and you can play that game’.” (Participant, wheelchair rugby)

Some groups or clubs may become over reliant on one or a couple of communication channels. Perhaps they just promote the activity through their website or social media. Dependence on one communication channel means providers are missing out on raising awareness among people who may not use or have access to that.

Some more active disabled people often feel that activities advertised just for disabled people can result in an unclear aim for the activity.

“The difference for me is, when the focus is a disability, you get a range of people who want different things out of a club. When you get something where the focus is participation or competition you get people of like minds.”  
(Participant sitting volleyball)

People may be concerned about the level of support they will receive when they arrive. They wonder whether clubs and instructors have enough knowledge and experience to provide them a comfortable and enjoyable experience.

#### **b. Retaining participants**

There are a number of challenges that clubs face when they look at membership retention. In order to be financially viable, groups, clubs and teams often need a minimum number of regular participants. Not only is this important from a financial and logistical perspective, regular participation helps to build up and maintain a club's personality.

It could be that activities are successful at attracting members, but struggle to retain them. One reason for this is the link to the participants' expectations. What do participants want to achieve at the club in terms of personal development and learning? They may have joined to take part in something fun, and find that the activity is too competitive, or vice versa.

In addition, it could be that there is a limit for the club on what can be achieved. Whilst the providers' are keen to offer a competitive element, local competitions may be too difficult to arrange due to a lack of opponents to play. This leads to more regional or national competitions, which require greater time and effort to get to, requiring a greater level of commitment from participants.

Clubs may be very successful at attracting members, but perhaps once people arrive, they do not have a good experience and are not willing to return. Or perhaps an activity can

become a victim of its own success, be too good and increase numbers so excessively that they no longer have the facilities and resources to provide a quality experience.

### **3. Finance**

Many providers believe that including or organising activities for disabled people will be costly. They can believe that expensive adaptations need to be made to premises to ensure accessibility. Also, that new specialised equipment will be needed and will prove costly. In practice, there can be associated costs in providing for disabled people, but the extent of these costs depends on the type of activity that people are taking part in.

Some providers also believe that when organising activities for disabled people that it is best to supply them for free to encourage participation. This is understandable if the market research finds the target audiences to have financial barriers. However, many providers find through their experience that offering opportunities for free can lead to participants questioning the quality and standard of the activity. Offering things for free can sometimes also cause people to be less committed to regular attendance. This has led to some providers to offer instead- 'first session free' or 'free trial' etc.

## Section 3: Ways to help minimise the challenges

Although providers can face delivery challenges, these can be overcome and should not prevent people from providing inclusive opportunities. Below is a variety of ways in which people have overcome common barriers.

### a. Increase knowledge and skills

To overcome issues raised by misperceptions, some providers' knowledge and awareness needs to improve. There are a number of resources available that providers can use to increase their confidence and competence.

EFDS created the Inclusion Club Hub ([www.inclusion-club-hub.co.uk](http://www.inclusion-club-hub.co.uk)) in 2012. It supports sports clubs to improve provision and opportunities, so that more disabled people can be active at a local level. Clubs can use as an audit tool to find out how inclusive they are or a resource to support the club's development. Other support includes developing a club action plan, strengthening the Clubmark process, or general planning.

It is recommended that providers think about seeking training for their own workforce. There are numerous training courses available focusing on providing sport for disabled people. An example is Sainsbury's Active Kids for All Inclusive Community training ([http://www.efds.co.uk/resources/sainsbury\\_s\\_active\\_kids\\_for\\_all/active\\_kids\\_for\\_all\\_inclusive\\_community\\_training/](http://www.efds.co.uk/resources/sainsbury_s_active_kids_for_all/active_kids_for_all_inclusive_community_training/)). The training involves a three-hour practical workshop for those who directly support disabled people within the community, but are not traditionally associated with the sporting landscape.. Supported by e-learning and online resources, it will help to improve knowledge, competence and confidence in delivering sports based activities to disabled people. It is supported by Sport England and delivered through the English Federation of Disability Sport and sports coach UK.

Some National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of sport also offer impairment-specific training in their sports such Paddleability by Canoe England (<http://www.canoe-england.org.uk/our-sport/paddleability/>).

Providers can also contact other organisations or groups, which may have some better practice from their experiences that they can share. NGBs often have disability officers that may be able to provide advice and guidance. There may be other groups or clubs, which provide the same or similar sports around the country, that have already gone through this. Another good contact point are disability organisations. They could perhaps offer guidance on how to approach and attract disabled people to an activity.



“Talk to people. Go to other clubs. See how they are run. Get advice from those clubs – what pitfalls and experience you might need. You definitely need to speak to an existing club in whatever sport, just to see what sort of issues they have had and what experience. It is all about finding that link and drawing on that experience” (Provider, wheelchair rugby)

In some regions, there are regional disability forums. These exist within some local authority/County Sports Partnership networks and are designed to bring organisations together which want to help and improve the lives of disabled people.

“Get in touch with local coordinators. Every council should have a disability sport coordinator.” (Provider, wheelchair sports)

#### **b. Be clear about what is being provided**

When thinking about offering inclusive opportunities, providers need to take their time and ensure that whatever they organise is of a high quality and standard. Focus on one group of people with impairments or one area of their sport or activity. Do that well before moving on to try something new. Be aware of the limits and do not try to provide too much too soon.

#### **c. Be flexible but honest**

Where possible and appropriate, be flexible in the activities that you offer. Offer different options at different levels so people can take part regardless of their ability. This can be by either adapting or simplifying tasks within an activity- making it easier to do, or offering alternative sessions for different skill levels.

“Every session you do, you have different levels. So what I would do is- I would introduce them to a low level, and then I would slowly move up. Once a person finds the level that they are happy training at, they stay there or continue. I show them the other options for those that want to push it a bit further.”  
(Provider, martial arts)

“We developed an additional group so we have a stepping stone in. Lots of our young people have started in one group and then stepped into the higher group. If there are problems, we will take them back to the first group where

they feel more secure. It's a case of deciding what group is suitable for that young person at that time" (Provider, contemporary dance)

"The way I feel about it is that you do really have to match it to the person's ability. There really is little point in setting them up to fail." (Provider, canoeing)

Be open and honest about whom you can provide for. Make sure people are aware of what the sport entails before attending so that they are not disappointed. For example, sitting volleyball needs a fair amount of upper body balance. If you are unable to provide for other participants, be aware of other opportunities in the area that they could perhaps take part in instead and sign post them there.

"Ultimately we would say to anyone- 'come along and see what you can do and these are the risks. This is what we look for in individuals to actually play in the sport...'. I wouldn't want them to have all the hassle to get to us and find it is totally inappropriate. I would want to make sure that they come, and know and understand the sport. I would try and recommend them to try other sports." (Provider, sitting volleyball)

#### **d. Don't be afraid to ask questions**

It is important to understand participants' intentions for taking part and any physical restrictions, which may affect their ability to participate. This is especially important for disabled people so that activities can be adequately tailored if necessary.

"What we do is we ask 'what do you want to do? What do you want to try?'. Make an initial assessment on them. Get them on to the range. Get them started. Ask them- 'are you comfortable like that. Do you need a support? Do you need anything else?' Rather than sitting down and giving them a questionnaire and putting them on the spot." (Provider, shooting)

Do not be afraid to ask disabled people questions about their impairment and ability, as long as it is clear why you are doing so. Make sure people understand that the questions you are asking are to ensure that they can take part and have the best possible experience, rather than as an excuse to prevent from taking part.

“The whole thing is about selling it. For our sport, disabled people of the right profile are at an advantage. They play the sport better than non-disabled people. It is adapted for the disability. That is a selling point. I can say to them- ‘in terms of your mobility, what disability do you have as you can be much better at doing x, y and Z?’ I don’t say ‘what is wrong with you, what can’t you do?’ I don’t sell it like a disadvantage. I will ask them in a way that is real advantage.” (Provider, sitting volleyball)

“I think that is the key, just having coaches who are prepared to say ‘what can you do?’ and ‘what can’t you do?’. Let’s try and work it out together.” (Participant, sitting volleyball)

Most importantly, when developing inclusive opportunities, it is better practice to call upon the people who will be doing the activity to help shape how it should look.

“Just ask people. Don’t try and set up structures that you think disabled people want. Actually get disabled people in to the club and work with the non-disabled and disabled people together to work out what works for them.” (Participant, sitting volleyball)

#### **e. Raising awareness is key**

When promoting an activity, be sure to offer enough information that individuals can make an informed choice of whether the activity is suitable for them.

To increase participation people must be aware of the opportunities available, so it is vital that promotion for the activity is a key focus. Providers should use a variety of communication channels to promote the activity and maximise its exposure.

Make it clear that if disabled people require support, if it is not provided, they are welcome to bring others along to assist them. Perhaps offer supporters free or reduced entry to the activity. Allow supporters to take part in the activity by actually playing or providing another service (such as scoring). Make sure they feel welcome and part of the team.

Section 4 provides more detailed guidance on how to raise awareness through promotion.

#### **f. Utilise the skills you already have to improve provision**

If necessary, providers could increase coach to participant ratio. An example of this is by encouraging older, more experienced members of the club or team to take on a mentoring or coaching role. The supporters can sometimes offer extra workforce for the activity too- perhaps they would like to become officials, or given training. Attending the inclusive sessions as a mentor or coach provides individuals with the ability to learn new skills as well as offering the additional support to anyone who may need it.

#### **g. Highlight the benefits, but think outside the box**

To encourage people to take part, you need to outline the benefits of the activity. It is better to not just focus on the standard benefits of participation (such as health and fitness improvements and being a member of team), but think of other things that people may respond to.

- **New and different skills**

Are there specific skills that can be learnt from taking part, such as an upper body workout in wheelchair sports?

- **Opportunities to travel**

Can people take part in regional, national or international competitions if they join?

- **Involvement with playing**

Are there other ways people could get involved other than playing the sport, such as being a volunteer?

#### **h. Ensure a welcoming environment so people want to come back**

To ensure that participants return to an activity they need to enjoy their first experience. This means ensuring that they feel welcomed and safe. Some clubs and teams recommend a follow up scheme. This is where someone within the club contacts new participants after they have attended their first session, to see whether they will return and what their views and opinions of the activity are.

“We have a buddy system and I think that works really well. When a new player comes, one of us will become their buddy and just text them and say ‘are you coming tonight, do you want to meet first and we will go to it together’. And then after the first session we will text and say ‘it was great to have you there, can’t wait to see you next week’. So you feel part of the club.”  
(Participant, sitting volleyball)

## i. Understand what changes are needed

Be aware of the kind of physical adaptations that may be needed at premises. EFDS has developed a guide to physical access

([http://www.efds.co.uk/assets/0000/8214/Access\\_for\\_all\\_FINAL3\\_Dec\\_2013.pdf](http://www.efds.co.uk/assets/0000/8214/Access_for_all_FINAL3_Dec_2013.pdf)). It is aimed at anybody involved in running or working in a sports club as a user-friendly guide to facility accessibility. It is not a detailed technical guide, but intended as a starting point with readers signposted to further information and support where necessary.

Adapted equipment may not always be necessary and if it is, it may not always be expensive. In instances where specialised equipment is needed, highlight the benefits of you having such equipment, that it makes the activity accessible to more people.

“We don’t need adapted boats as such. The only difference is that the boats tend to be a bit more stable than racing craft; more stable so people don’t fall out straight away. They are more suitable for all kinds of people” (Provider, canoeing)

If more costly, adapted equipment is needed think about collaboration to share equipment or facilities with other clubs or groups. You could perhaps share and spread the cost.

Look into seeking funding for new equipment or facilities. Think about local funding that might be available. There may be some extra pots of funding that have usually been beyond your reach, which you may apply for e.g. from the health sector. Also, consider seeking sponsorship to help cover or support the costs of new equipment or facilities

## Section 4: Making the most of what you have- the promotion

There is a variety of different ways in which to promote inclusive opportunities to maximise exposure. When thinking about promotion there are three key areas to consider:

- The promotion methods you will use
- The distribution channels and where the communication will be shared
- The promotional content and key messages

### 1. What promotional methods to use

To maximise exposure and reach as many people as possible, variety is key. Using a range of different promotional methods will ensure a greater level of exposure across different audiences.

#### a. Internet

These days, the most commonly used method is the internet. Current statistics suggest that 86 per cent of the UK population use the internet<sup>2</sup> making it a viable method to promote activities. There are many ways in which to promote activities through the internet.

Stand-alone dedicated websites offer a controlled platform allowing the owner to manage and update the content as they see fit. However, these can be expensive to set up and maintain, and take time and effort to manage. To make sure that the website is as visible as possible it is important to maximise the search engine optimisation (SEO). One way to do this is to ensure the website appears in relevant searches that people run on search sites by using relevant tags to describe the content of the website. Updating your website's content regularly also helps you to rank higher in the search engines. But remember, what you think people are searching for may not be the reality. Ask your members how they found you and what they searched for. This may help.

An alternative method would be to share space on the website of someone else such as a local authority or sponsoring company. This reduces cost and management time, however means you have less control of the content.

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<sup>2</sup> ONS Internet Access Quarterly Update, Q3 2013

Social media such as Facebook or Twitter offers a more cost effective method of promoting activities via the internet with greater control. Groups, clubs or activities can set up their own page and manage the content. However, to maximise the benefit of social media and to create attention, it takes a lot of time and effort to build up relevant and useable networks. This enables you to become a respected information source.

“We are on Twitter. We have three or four different Twitter accounts depending on the club. And also Facebook accounts. So, we are quite ‘aggressive’. We are always sending out information” (Provider, wheelchair sports)

It may be worthwhile seeing if there is there someone within your club, team or group with more knowledge, experience or skill at managing and updating social media. They could help you to take full advantage of what it can offer.

However, please remember that social media has barriers too. Certain age groups (particularly younger and older age groups) as well as people with a learning disability may not be active social media communicators. This echoes that your channels must match your target audience in the best way possible.

#### **b. Word of mouth**

Word of mouth is probably the best promotional method anyone has in any business. Having something recommended by friends and family increases confidence about the content and quality of an activity. This is especially important among disabled people who place extra emphasis on recommendations from people they trust.

“I wouldn’t say we advertise a whole lot as a shooting venue. A lot of the disabled shooters have come to us through word of mouth.” (Provide, shooting)

But as much as word of mouth is great if you are doing well, it can also work in bad situations too. Effective word of mouth promotion is extremely dependent on a good reputation. This requires people to have a positive experience when taking part. It is also important that when people take part they understand the main aims of the activity, the key messages they should be passing on to others.

“Now it has such a good reputation. We have children who come with their brothers or sisters or friends who have a disability, or others who just come of their own accord. We get a lot of parents saying they choose to come here

because they like the integrated approach and they think it's good for their children." (Provider, multi sports camp)

### **c. Sponsorship and patrons**

If a club, group or activity is lucky enough to gain sponsorship, this also provides another method of promotion. A sponsor and their brand can increase the promotional opportunities through their own sources. This promotion can be incredibly effective as a sponsor's brand adds value and is an additional confidence builder.

"By having their logo on our clothing, it gives us that boost and looks more professional. People see our shirts and think if they can entice a professional rugby club to endorse them and help them out then other teams or companies will follow suit." (Provider, wheelchair rugby)

The use of patrons is also a good way to seek endorsement and emphasise the value and quality of the activity.

### **d. Visual demonstrations / have a go sessions**

Providing people with an opportunity to see your activity in action, or even have a go themselves, gives them more of an idea of whom it is suitable for and how it can be done. It provides people with a better idea to determine whether the activity is right for them

"A lot of other children saw our shows and were like 'oh how come she is dancing?' So slowly but surely more disabled members started to trickle into the group" (Provide, contemporary dance)

"The other way that the club attracts new members is through its adult taster sessions programme which runs during the summer. It is immensely popular – people just apply to come down on a Saturday. I say 'apply as there is often a waiting list to give the sport a try'. It has been really popular. Often we will have 60 people going through a one-day taster session. They're all completely new to the sport – that is another way that they club has grown" (Provider, canoeing)

## **2. The distribution channels and sharing points**

When thinking about promotion it is important to be proactive. Do not assume that people will come looking for and find you. It is important to spend time and effort to make sure that you are visible in the local community.



“We do roadshows, so we actually go onto schools, primary schools, high schools, colleges, prisons, young offender institutes to make people more aware.” (Provider, wheelchair sports)

To reach the widest possible audiences it is important to think beyond sport and activity. Look to other areas where there may be people who would be interested in taking part or who have access to an audience they can promote to on your behalf.

“There are a lot of disabled people that don’t think sports are within their world so they don’t look at sports websites. But if you go to the websites that they do look at, like disability organisations that talk about funding, that talk about how you get help, and you make sure you force them to put a thing in there about sports, then they will think about sports.” (Provider, sitting volleyball)

A good starting point is to advertise in the facility where your activity takes place. Other clubs, teams or groups may also use that facility, see your advert, and be interested in taking part.

“One week I only had three players, and the boxing club came in to use the other half of the hall. They looked curious and interested. So I got them to warm up with us and they slowly enjoyed it. Everyone was down on their bums doing essentially volleyball, just in a different way.” (Provider sitting volleyball)

Also, try advertising in other local facilities where other activities take place. However, do not just think about sport and physical activity, but also consider advertising in other venues where other local community groups attend. This could be mother and baby groups, local diet groups or youth groups etc.

Think about linking to and using the health sector as a way to promote your activity. You may get a lot of uptake from advertising in local health centres or doctors’ surgeries. Link with statutory services, so that the relevant people (such as social workers or carers) are aware of relevant opportunities in the local area. Make links, if relevant, with local physiotherapists or occupational therapists who can promote your activity.

“We are on the menu of sporting activities that people can take part in. It is well-known now within the day services. So all those people who have access

to the day services (some 300+) they will get to know about the opportunities for sport for them, and canoeing is one of them. If they want to have a go at that, they can do so at the club.” (Provider, canoeing)

Schools are also a good way to promote activity. You can ask about their channels, perhaps posters, leaflets, newsletters or perhaps running a demonstration in their assemblies.

If your focus is to specifically increase the number of disabled people taking part, think about key touch points that they might use to find out information. Link to disability groups or publications who will have a targeted audience of disabled people.

“We hooked up with Galloway Society for the Blind and they brought groups down regularly and that is where we got the 20-25 from. That makes us one of the biggest blind shooting clubs in the UK.” (Provider, shooting)

Attending local, regional and if applicable national festivals is useful to raise awareness of the activity. It provides people with a visual aid and an opportunity to try things out to better understand what the activity is about.

“Have a go days are really important. When I had my accident, I thought I knew a lot about sport, but I hadn’t tried any disability sport. So I didn’t know what I would or wouldn’t enjoy. The more clubs can get out into the community and get people to have a go is really, really important” (Participant, sitting volleyball)

It is important, however, to be prepared at these events, be able to signpost people and provide them with relevant information about where they can take part if they show an interest.

The use of local media, newspapers and radio, is a good way of increasing awareness and interest in activities. It enables people to provide a background to an activity, but requires additional information sources, such as websites, where people can go if they want more information.

Most of all, remember that your potential participants may not be active. Think about the places you attend regularly in your daily life as these may be the best place to find eager participants looking for a new challenge. Hairdressers, shopping centres, supermarkets to name a few are great locations too.

### 3. What promotional content should be included

When promoting the activity it is important to use phrases, words and images, which attract people's attention. You should plan to attract people through things they feel are relevant to them and what they emotionally connect to.. Do not get too worried and concerned about the wording and phrasing that is used, but avoid patronising language . Just provide the relevant facts and contact points for more information.

From research findings, the popular activities do not focus on disability. Even though legally they would be classed as disabled, some disabled people do not associate themselves with that description, so you may put many people off. Think of other things that people might find interesting, such as the benefits the sport provides or the opportunities that become available if you take part.

“We tell people it will be good for their coordination.” (Participant, wheelchair rugby)

“I use it very much as a fitness tool. I have actually offered sitting volleyball as SitFit – fitness classes based on sitting volleyball movements. I get them moving around in different ways. They usually find it extremely challenging.” (Provider, sitting volleyball)

“We have had people come down who don't necessarily want to take it up as a sport and play in competitions, but they want to still come down and train because it gives them a really good upper workout.” (Provider, wheelchair rugby)

“You might be clumsy with your vocabulary. Just advertise it talking about volleyball. Use visuals, someone playing sitting, someone playing beach, someone standing. So the message is in the picture rather than verbally.” (Provider, sitting volleyball)

It is important to offer enough relevant information for people to make an informed choice about whether or not the activity is suitable for them. The factors that are important to people are:

- Who is the activity for, who can come and take part? Are supporters welcome, can they take part?
- Are there different skill and ability sessions / adaptations available for those with lower skill?
- What are the aims and objectives of the activity? Is it participation or competition?
- Where does the activity take place, at what time and how can you get there?

- What are the facilities at the venue like? Are they toilets? Are there accessible changing areas?
- Do coaches and instructors have experience providing for disabled people?

“I would be looking for whether it is run on participation or competition and some information about the training sessions. To me, you can’t get involved in a club that only meets once a month. I work, so I can’t do anything that involves being done in the middle of the day.” (Participant, sitting volleyball)

It may not be possible to contain all this information on a poster or leaflet. In this instance, the poster or leaflet should direct to other information sources where the information does exist. If you are unable to provide opportunities for certain groups of people at your activity, then think about being aware of other suitable activities in the area and provide links to those.

Try not to just aim information and promotion at the people who may take part, but others who can influence them such as family, friends, carers or healthcare professionals.

It is important not just to focus on the content, but the actual style and layout of promotional materials. There are certain things that you should consider to ensure that promotional materials are as accessible as possible and reach more people. Take a look at the EFDS inclusive communications guide for more detail on the areas to consider.  
[http://www.efds.co.uk/resources/case\\_studies/2697\\_access\\_for\\_all\\_efds\\_inclusive\\_communications\\_guide](http://www.efds.co.uk/resources/case_studies/2697_access_for_all_efds_inclusive_communications_guide)

## Section 5: The advice

When we carried out the interviews, we asked providers if they had any advice that they would give to others who were thinking about trying to offer inclusive provision.

Below are a set of quotes which the providers gave. They fall in to these main areas of advice:

### a. Just give it a go

“Just give it a go. You don’t need to do that much to make sport accessible”  
(Provider, shooting)

“There aren’t as many barriers as people think” (Provider, shooting)

“Give it a go. Start small. It won’t be as daunting as they might imagine  
(Provider, multi sports camp)

“Don’t tell yourself you can’t do it. Tell yourself you can rather than you can’t.”  
(Provider, canoeing)

### b. Don’t be afraid

“Don’t tie yourself in knots about terminology. Don’t worry you are going to upset someone by referring to sight or sound if they are deaf or blind.”  
(Provider, shooting)

Do be frightened. You don’t have to get it 100% right. It doesn’t matter if you haven’t got the most accessible building in the world with every facility that you could possibly imagine. (Participant, sitting volleyball)

“Not being embarrassed to ask. You need to ask those questions. That is an open and honest conversation. A lot of parents are happy that you are open to talk because they are so used to people pretending that they are not seeing something and thinking they are being politically correct. (Provider, inclusive dance)

“Just ask people. Don’t try ad set up structures that you think disabled people want.” (Participant, sitting volleyball)

### **c. Do things in bite size chunks**

“I tried to hit the ground running. I should have slowed down a little bit”  
(Provider, wheelchair lasertag)

“Start off simple. Try and keep it basic, but have a progression option. Start with the simplest movement and then build it up and allow people to stay at the level they are at. Acknowledge the individual’s level and achievements.”  
(Provider, martial arts)

“Try to recruit from other sports, so that you are not just starting with a completely blank slate with people who don’t know how to use chairs. If you get one or two who know how to use chairs, their experience rubs off on other players. Find a club that can lend some players to get yourself going. (Provider, wheelchair rugby)

### **d. Seek advice**

“Get in touch with local coordinators. Every council should have a disability sport coordinator.” (Provider, wheelchair sports)

“Talk to people. Go to other clubs. See how they are run. Get advice from them clubs – what pitfalls and experience you might need. You definitely need to speak to an existing club in whatever sport, just to see what sort of issues they have had and what experience. It could be something as simple as ‘which wheelchair do we get?’ It is finding that link and experience and drawing on that experience.” (Provider, wheelchair rugby)

### e. Be prepared

“Research what equipment you are going to need to start with.” (Provider, wheelchair rugby)

“Be prepared to invest. Be prepared to look at your equipment and look at your facilities and think how do we make that better for people. How do we make that happen?” (Provider Canoeing)

“Making sure the place is accessible.” (Provider, sitting volleyball)

“Put a lot of time into it” (Provider, wheelchair sports)

“Seek training in the practicalities of setting up a session.” (Provider, canoeing)

“The coaching courses can help the coaches to have an understanding of what can be done.” (Provider, canoeing)

“Make sure you have all the information about everyone before they come along, so you know who is in the group. Then, you can make sure when they are planning the activity there is something that will suit everyone’s needs” (Provider, multi sports camp)

### Contact EFDS

For more information on this survey or report, please contact Emma Spring at the English Federation of Disability Sport. Email [espring@efds.co.uk](mailto:espring@efds.co.uk) or telephone 0161 200 5442

The report is available to download on [www.efds.co.uk](http://www.efds.co.uk)

Twitter [@EFDSInsight](https://twitter.com/EFDSInsight)

### Join our insight panel

EFDS is always looking for disabled people's support on our insight projects. There are many occasions we may get asked to help with other organisations' research or for our own development plans.

If you would like to join our panel of disabled people, please contact us on [research@efds.co.uk](mailto:research@efds.co.uk) or 0161 200 5442. It will be mainly communication via email or telephone, so you do not have to commit to any unnecessary time or travel.