

## 'An inclusive response to Covid-19 in sport & activity: A Sussex movement' - Summary Report

**Date of webinar:** 17.11.2020

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**Background:** On Tuesday 17th November at 10am a national virtual event hosted by the Activity Alliance, aimed to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on disabled people's lives. **A collective movement: An inclusive response to COVID-19 in sport and activity** can be viewed [here](#).

Before the pandemic, there was good progress in closing the unjust gap between disabled and non-disabled people's activity levels. By the end of 2019, we witnessed the highest number recorded for disabled people's activity levels in Sport England's Active Lives Adult survey. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic presents a huge challenge for disabled people and the sporting world.

Speakers talked about the need for innovative and accessible responses at all levels of sport and leisure. These perspectives were combined interviews and videos with disabled people, providing insight into the real life impact of covid and lived experiences engaging with physical activity. Speakers included:

- Barry Horne, Chief Executive of Activity Alliance
- Tim Hollingsworth, CEO of Sport England
- Huw Edwards, CEO of ukactive
- Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, Activity Alliance Honorary President and ukactive Chair
- Marc Woods, Chair of CIMSPA - event host
- Alex Brooker, Channel 4's The Last Leg co-host

**Purpose:** The SDSN webinar was a call to action for partners and SDSN members to reflect on the national event 'A collective movement: An inclusive response to COVID-19 in sport and activity' and discuss what this meant to them/how it relates locally and how we can implement an inclusive response across the county.

Through group discussions we wanted to understand the key points below;

- What resonates from the live event?
- Were the thoughts and insights discussed representative of the Sussex landscape?
- What are the challenges for disabled people and the sporting world in Sussex?
- How can we implement an inclusive response locally?
- Who should we be influencing?
- Where is collaboration and innovation possible?
- Which organisations or networks are already connecting?

As is the nature of group discussions not every question could be answered, however all conversations provided fantastic insights and points to consider.

Below provides a summary of some of the recurring points raised across the groups, plus some next steps that the network and Active Sussex can consider. Please see appendix 1 for the feedback notes from each break out group.

### **Summary of key points:**

Partners were really pleased to see a commitment from key organisations to put inclusion at the heart of strategy, but we need to **advocate** this message locally to leaders to ensure it is acknowledged and then acted upon. We can **influence** by sharing stories, case studies and insight to highlight the **wider benefits physical activity** can have to their communities/residents, such as potential cost savings for health and social care, providing a gap to depleting youth and children's services, and supporting mental wellbeing priorities, etc.

We have an opportunity to **reset** and **build back better** across the sector and more locally. But not everything needs to change, and it is important that we continue to do what worked well before the pandemic and deliver face to face where possible being mindful of those who are mindful of **digitally excluded**, however we have learnt many thanks so we need to **share this knowledge**, look to **pull resources and funds together** where possible and **act upon identified needs**. The Sussex Disability Sports Network has a key role in implementing this knowledge share, and so we encourage partners to be proactive in sharing and offering opportunities to collaborate and forge **new partnerships** and **co-produce** by **listening to disabled people**.

We need to **build confidence and trust** for both participants, deliverers, and facilities, to encourage participation in activity. This can be supported by **clear communication** and clarity of the messages around guidelines v's rules, however the **closing of venues/facilities has caused a massive disruption**, and there is growing concern for a **lack of inclusivity as they reopen** with the focus being on income generation.

There has always been a **need for more accessible provision** (both physically and financially), to ensure the most inactive residents in our communities can engage in the right activity, at the right place, delivered by the right person! So, although we need to continue to **advocate and support** our facility operators to respond to this, more emphasis could be made of working with **community and outdoor spaces** and consider **new ways of working** to reach these people. Partners have shown they can adapt provision, so how can this **adaptability** be used to better place opportunities in our communities.

The **Tackling Inequalities Funding** has been a positive driver for identifying new community organisations, who are not necessarily physically activity focused but know their communities. As such what can we learn from this approach to **shape strategy and policy** moving forward (**process, people, and workforce**).

### Next steps:

The Sussex Disability Sports Network (SDSN)...

- Continues to **listen and understand the needs of individuals**, by engaging them or the local organisations who do, and share this insight
- **Acts quickly and innovatively** where possible, but is also **proactive** in its approach of **building back better**
- Encourages non SDSN partners to **engage with the inclusive response conversation**
- Highlights and shares **case studies/stories** to help influence and advocate
- **Raises awareness** through visual events and campaigns
- **Promotes an 'Inclusive for all' agenda** across own organisation and wider networks

Active Sussex will...

- Continue building the case to **influence** an inclusive movement on behalf of the network and partners
- **Engage** with organisations to **gather insight** and **disabled people's voices**
- **Share case studies and information** about funding streams, resources and insight around inclusion and diversity
- **Support and promote** Sussex Disability Sports Network partner events and campaigns
- **Facilitate** opportunities to collaborate
- **Encourage co-production** between DPULO's and sports and physical activity organisations

## Appendix 1: Small group feedback

### Group 1

- **Powerful stories** from individuals but the **issues and challenges they face are stating the obvious**
- Good range of speakers from participants, deliverers and strategic organisations
- Positive to hear from Sport England and their commitment to tackling inequalities
- There are challenges but there is **opportunity to build back better**
- What is the definition of restart?
- Maintain services and improvements pre Covid but look to improve further- **we need to restart better!** To do this we need to **listen and understand** the barriers and issues, looking to **be innovative and creative** where possible.
- Identified the **need to build participant confidence** to return to sessions
- Partners agreed that **increasing confidence and reassuring participants that is safe to return is very important**
- In Horsham they have introduced temperature checks before sessions, strong hygiene and cleaning protocols, as well as clearly explaining the changes to participants- as a result sessions have been well attended and the feedback has been really positive
- Group discussed the importance of **promotion and communication with participants**, to reassure participants and ensure their needs are being catered for
- Important to consider **inclusive communications**
- Sussex Bears returned in September and following the NGB guidance so started the session outside and put Covid 19 protocols in place
- There is a **harsher impact to disabled people that live alone and particularly those with no outside space**
- Many disabled people's **mental health has suffered as a result of feeling isolated** and one of the things **they look forward to most is the socialisation**
- **No one size fits all!** Everyone is different and that needs to be considered- for some participants it is like starting over again, their progress and movement has been affected.
- If someone is newly injured then they are unlikely to be as confident therefore may not attend sessions
- There is a need to continue to **collaborate and develop partnerships** that help improve provision
- There is a need to make disability sport less about the paralympics and more about the benefits of inclusion and being physically active
- Can Sussex look to **celebrate more individual stories of participants and how it has benefited their lives**
- Important to focus on **inclusive practice** - don't exclude anyone from sessions! For example, family members or friends being allowed to take part as well.
- Very important to **listen and understand** to real needs and **work together locally** to ensure local provision caters for those needs.

## Group 2

- Ongoing struggle around some of the communication, interpretation and understanding of the rules for disabled people - people are unsure about whether they should be shielding or getting out and being more active
- Providers have had to support participants to understand the rules before supporting them back into activity
- Good opportunity to **deliver activity online** and virtually but this has **emphasised the digital exclusion** for some, particularly for those who have tried it and not worked well with the technology
- **Workforce** has been required to work in a different way and required them to **demonstrate different skills** - not be focused just on physical activity but other areas of support around general well being through lockdown and periods of shielding
- **Increased impact on mental wellbeing** as well as the lack of physical activity
- Challenge around bringing people back to activity with the same **confidence and trust** they had previously - this might take time
- Delivery providers also have to have the **confidence to deliver safe and secure sessions** for those who are more vulnerable or require **additional adaptations** to the sessions previously being delivered
- Desire to make all activity as inclusive as possible but this will require further **trust** to be built amongst those delivering the sessions
- Important to get those previously engaging in sessions back into activity, there also needs to be a focus on **reaching new inactive participants**
- More **sharing of localised good practice** to help build the confidence of those delivering the activity and those wanting to engage but feeling unsure about whether they should
- **Activity finder/or signposting** within the network from one activity to another will also help to rebuild the local offer for disabled people - there is still a need for a directory of services
- **Connect with more partners from outside the sector** including national and local charities in order to understand how COVID-19 has impacted on specific disabilities and long-term health conditions
- Sussex wide approach - regular meetings offering the **opportunity to collaborate** will help to overcome the impact of COVID-19 on disabled people and their opportunities to increase their activity levels (case studies will certainly support this)

### Group 3

- Sport England have taken disability sport very seriously
- Coronavirus has added more and **more barriers**
- **Social interaction is very limited** - sessions are not able to be back in face to face - real lack of group environment.
- **Reset** - Working with partners, charities etc to get things going in the right way. Inclusion as part of standard offer.
- Make sure we **consider people as individuals** with different needs, which may look the same nationally but has some nuances when you look closer/locally. Be very aware of what the individual needs.
- National conversations focusing on leisure facilities and gyms etc. How much translates to on the ground delivery, as Leisure Centres are needing to prioritise other sessions due to less money being brought in.
- Schools and leisure facilities currently not letting outside providers in, therefore needing to look for new venues.
- **Venues are a big challenge** - Putting protocols in place and slippage starting to come in and getting back to **old routines and habits** from staff and participants.
- **Fear** - community can be reluctant. Extra burden of Covid making them scared.
- **Change is a very challenging** thing - what can we do to mitigate this
- May have to start from scratch with promotion etc which will need resources.
- Cuts mean funding may not be there - so share the wealth on pots of money.
- Support **governance** for disability groups as there isn't always a governing body who can set rules etc.
- Need to **influence Councillors, members LA and CC prospective, CEOs higher management** etc
- SDSN is great! Built knowledge initially. Very **open to collaboration** as a group. Active Sussex is great at sharing info.
- Tackling Inequalities Fund is a great example of what can happen moving forward

#### Group 4

- **Understand, innovate, act** - is something that we can strive for locally.
- Both positive and negative reactions to the pandemic, but there are many issues that were there before so how do we really implement?
- Many people are completely removed from sport and will be even more disengaged due to the pandemic. We need to continue to focus on **tackling inequalities**.
- **Disabled people need to demand more and demand better**- how can we ensure their voice is heard?
- How much should we put in to the immediate (**reactive**) and for the longer term (**proactive**)
- **Adaption to provision has engaged new people**, and barriers that previously put them off such as weather etc haven't because they now see the activity providing more than exercise - i.e. the social element outweighed the normal negative reaction they would have to not wanting to go out in the rain!
- **Closure of leisure centres** has had a huge immediate negative impact, especially for more specialists sports/activities needing certain equipment, or providing a safe space - but need to **ensure reopening is inclusive**
- Ensure leisure operators are connected in to the conversation and highlight the wider benefits to them for reopening with inclusion at the heart - **social and economic benefits**
- **Shielding** has meant it's been easy to slip into a **passive lifestyle**, especially with things being taken away. Increased anxiety and lack of confidence.
- Booking onto sessions - **digital exclusion**
- Conflicting messages around social distancing and group gatherings has been confusing - especially when referring to the provision for people with a disability and being supported by carers or PA's. Need to ensure clarity of **'guidance v's rules'** for both individuals and organisations to build **confidence and trust**.
- Masks - barrier for those with a hearing impairment that rely on lip reading
- Group exercise outside was often the only social interaction some people were getting and helping to manage their mental health - losing that social connection will impact mental wellbeing as much as physical wellbeing. Can we **connect better with mental health services** who are covered under support groups to collaborate?
- How do people find out what is still happening locally?
- **Advocacy and campaign** - we need to create a collective voice and be more proactive at campaigning the messages to ensure the voice of disabled people doesn't get forgotten as things 'come back, different!'
- Support disabled people to make their voice heard - provide a platform to allow them to **share their stories**
- **Influence Council leaders** as they make hard decisions around services - ensure they understand the **wider benefits of physical activity** to their communities/residents, saving for social care for instance.
- Use **case studies to influence** how we move forward, and **building back better**

## Appendix 2: List of Attendees

Attendees - External	Attendees – Internal
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nicola File - Engagement Advisor (East &amp; South East), Activity Alliance</li> <li>2. Ricky Perrin - Director, Sussex Bears</li> <li>3. John Dale - Community Development Officer, Crawley Borough Council</li> <li>4. Paul Saunders - Development Manager, Sussex FA</li> <li>5. Paul Taylor - Sports Development Manager, Horsham District Council</li> <li>6. Loretta Lock - Managing Director, Defiant Sports</li> <li>7. Paul Brackley - Disability Manager, Albion in the Community</li> <li>8. Matt Laird - Wellbeing Officer, Crawley Borough Council/Crawley Wellbeing</li> <li>9. Daniel Burnett - Fitness Centre Manager, Chailey Heritage Foundation</li> <li>10. Phil Broom - Disability Clubs Development Officer, Albion in the Community</li> <li>11. Martine Walters - Chair, CYCALL</li> <li>12. Jade Harker - Football Development Officer, Sussex County FA</li> <li>13. Ray Blakebrough - Director, Defiant Sports</li> <li>14. Abbie Sandle, Varndean College</li> <li>15. Mike Porteous - Director, ZigZag Alive</li> <li>16. Melanie Kinnear - Active Sussex Trustee</li> <li>17. Shanni Collins - Active for Life Worker, Brighton &amp; Hove City Council</li> <li>18. Paul Gillett - Trustee, ESAB</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19. Gemma Finlay-Gray, Strategic Relationship Manager, Active Sussex</li> <li>20. Ross Joannides, Strategic Relationship Manager, Active Sussex</li> <li>21. Nick Chellel, Strategic Workforce Officer, Active Sussex</li> <li>22. Marci Pollakova, General Administrator, Active Sussex</li> <li>23. Ed Bartram, Events Officer, Active Sussex</li> </ol>

For more information or to provide your thoughts if you couldn't attend the event, please contact;

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