Increasing participation in physical activity and sport
Evaluation of Get Yourself Active
25th March 2019
Executive summary

9.4 million disabled people live in England\(^1\), but 42% do less than 30 minutes of physical activity per week. This level of inactivity is far higher than non-disabled people.\(^2\)

Given the wealth of benefits that physical activity is known to provide for disabled adults\(^3\), there is a clear need to better understand what stops them from taking part in physical activity. However, relatively little is known about how to overcome these barriers to participation.

Get Yourself Active

Disability Rights UK was funded by Sport England to develop and lead the Get Yourself Active programme between February 2015 and March 2019. Delivery was supported by the Cheshire Centre for Independent Living (CCIL) and Leicestershire Centre for integrated Living (LCiL).

The programme aimed to increase the number of opportunities for people with lived experience of disability, mental health issues and long-term health conditions, to get active. This included a focus on increasing the number of disabled people with personal budgets regularly participating in physical activity or sport.

The programme evolved into three strands of engagement work that were delivered across a total of 12 sites. As shown on the next page (Figure 1), each strand trialled a different approach to increasing the number of accessible opportunities for disabled people to get active.

\(^1\) Office for National Statistics. 2011 Census.


Evaluation

Traverse was commissioned as an independent evaluation partner by Disability Rights UK. Traverse’s initial remit was to support an internal evaluation of the programme. This remit was later expanded in the second year of the programme onwards to include an independent, formative evaluation.

The formative evaluation element aimed to capture learning about ‘what worked’ and ‘why’ when it came to increasing the number of physical activity opportunities for disabled people. This helped to inform the ongoing development of Get Yourself Active.

Key Findings

Responses received from disabled people at the point that they joined the programme supported the existing evidence base. 68% of all respondents at baseline participated in physical activity less than once a week, including 75% of people with personal budgets.

The main barrier to participation identified within the programme was a lack of knowledge about accessible opportunities. 75% of disabled people reported ‘not knowing what was available’ as the main barrier to participating in physical activity, while 86% of social workers felt that they knew ‘nothing at all’ or ‘only a little’ about accessible opportunities available in their local area.
Disabled people, social workers and interviewed sports providers also highlighted a lack of accessible physical activity opportunities for disabled people and trained frontline staff.

The three strands

Looking across the Get Yourself Active programme, there is good evidence that the three, interconnected strands have helped to overcome these barriers and make a positive difference in the lives of disabled people, as well as to the work of sports providers and health and social care professionals.

Local Coordinator. The local coordinators helped to increase physical activity levels among disabled people. The proportion of respondents who undertook physical activity at least once a week or more increased from 28% at the start of the programme, to 68% six months into the programme. There was some indication that this had helped to improve people’s mental wellbeing and contributed to reduced use of some statutory services.

Support that worked included providing one-to-one conversations with disabled people to improve their knowledge about accessible physical activity opportunities and encourage them to participate, as well as improving sports providers’ understanding of accessible activities and their knowledge of facilities in their local community.

A far greater proportion of respondents with personal budgets had also started to use them for physical activity six months into the programme. The survey data suggests that this was due to respondents feeling more positive about their personal budget and its use as a result of participating in Get Yourself Active.

The programme team felt that locating the coordinator post within CCIL and LCiL had increased the sustainability of Get Yourself Active, but also acknowledged that other DPULOs could struggle to create the space for such a role within a climate where many organisations are directing funding towards essential services.

Supporting social workers. 135 social workers were directly engaged through this strand. Over half of respondents to the social worker survey felt that the training and guidelines had made

4 Readers can find out how to access information in your local area on Disability Rights UK’s website.
a positive difference to their practice.

This included increased awareness about the importance of physical activity and the range of opportunities for disabled people. In some cases, this contributed to a culture shift towards an increased focus on physical activity among social work teams.

Theses impacts were enabled by the support of passionate and influential advocates, elements of the guidelines such as guidance on the Three Conversations Model and real-life examples, and opportunities for ongoing reflection such as within team meetings.

However, the success of this strand was also subject to external factors, including limited capacity among social workers to engage in the training or put their knowledge into practice, staff turnover, and a reluctance among clients to discuss activity through fear that they may lose access to benefits or negative impressions from previous experiences.

Sites therefore felt that sustainability relied on local authorities embedding opportunities to revisit the guidelines in their working practices, integrating them with formal referral methods and mitigating staff turnover through a ‘train the trainer’ model.

**Co-production.** The impacts of the co-production initiatives between disabled people and sports providers, facilitated by the local coordinators, are emergent since genuine co-production processes take time to develop, implement and refine.

Despite this, there was some evidence to suggest that this approach represents an opportunity for disabled people, physical activity providers and DPULOs to work together and improve provision. This included initial, small changes to sports facilities and services to make them work better for disabled people.

While the Get Yourself Active Coordinators were credited with kickstarting conversations between local organisations, early progress was dependent on openminded approaches that ensured processes were led and owned by disabled people.

**Programme-wide lessons.** The varied success of the Get Yourself Active programme across different sites underlined the importance of local gatekeepers to generate enthusiasm and overcome early challenges. The evolution of the three strands in
line with needs identified during the first two years of the programme also exemplified the importance of formative evaluation in pilot programmes when it is unclear what might work, for whom and why, as well as building in sufficient time for local organisations to develop, test and refine new practices.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

The evaluation has formulated a number of recommendations on how Disability Rights UK can build on the successes and lessons learned in its future work:

1) Build on the success of Get Yourself Active to advocate for the relevance of physical activity and sport to health policy agendas.

2) Build on the success of person-centred approaches in engaging disabled people to inform the development of similar initiatives such as local personal health budgets and social prescribing projects.

3) Support social work teams to maximise their enabling roles and embed the guidelines into practice through developing a short-form infographic or similar tool, and help mitigate staff turnover through developing an accompanying ‘train the trainer’ approach.

4) Develop a support package for sport sector organisations to increase their knowledge and awareness about disabled people’s lives and how to deliver physical activity opportunities that work for them.

5) Continue to champion genuine, user-led co-production processes to challenge perceptions about disabled people, improve local provision, and stimulate a long-term shift in strategy across the sport sector.

6) Build into future provision a focus on improving the knowledge of disabled people, their support networks, and key gatekeepers about the benefits of physical activity and how to access local opportunities.

7) Work with relevant partners in the health sector to develop and adapt the social worker guidelines to make them available to other health professionals.