



active
disability
ireland

Young People with Disabilities Physical Activity Consultation

Report



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About Active Disability Ireland

Active Disability Ireland believe that people with disabilities should have an equal opportunity to be active for life! That's why we remain committed to helping to build a more inclusive society where collectively we can help to empower, encourage and support people with disabilities to be more active with whom they want, when they want and where they want!

Over the past 17 years we have committed to supporting national policy and building an inclusive infrastructure across the sport sector. We are proud of the impact we, along with our partners, have made, but we know there is still much more that needs to be done to achieve our refreshed vision:

Creating an Ireland where people with disabilities have equal opportunities to be active.

“

You're very conscious that you don't want to stand out just because you have a disability. You want to be able to thrive as well.

”

-Youth Interview Participant

Executive Summary

Almost 70% of Children with disabilities shared that they enjoy taking part in sport and physical activity.

Only 27.4 % agreed that they find it easy to take part in physical activity.

The top 3 most enjoyable activities reported were swimming (61.6%), team sports (46.5%) and athletics (28.7%).

The top 3 reasons to be active were having fun (75.3%), being with friends (56.1%) and feeling good (47.9%).

The top 3 reasons making it difficult to participate were Lack of local provision / opportunities (56.1%), Lack of confidence in ability (43.8%), Having no-one to take part with (36.9%).

When asked how much these barriers affected them on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 1 being very little and 10 being severely) on average 6.1 was the effect.

The majority of respondents, when asked, 'what would make it easier to get involved' stated they would like more opportunities for activity in their area and to ensure that coaches were suitably trained to provide sessions.

The majority of respondents take part in PE at school with 62.4% stating they always participate and only 3.5% stating they never participate.

78.9% felt that PE was important, however only 31.5% said they felt confident during PE and only 38.6% agreed with the statement "I feel included in PE".

Most children who needed support to access PE said they had sufficient support (61.4%), however, 38.6% say they do not have enough support.

Executive Summary

46.5% of parents felt that their children didn't do enough physical activity with 65.1% stating that they find it difficult to get their children involved.

The top 3 difficulties parents face getting their children involved are:

- Lack of suitable places or facilities (58.1%)
- Lack of support or understanding from people working in sport and physical activity (41.8%)
- Worry about their child not being able to take part (32.5%)

Only 25.5% of parents felt they had enough support to facilitate their child to be active.

Parents felt that their child's disability had a significant impact on them being physically active with 51.16% reporting it affected them quite a bit and 20.93% reporting it affected them a lot.

The top 3 things parents reported would help them get their child involved were:

- More information on what is suitable for their child (53.4%)
- Practical support during an activity (51.1%)
- More information on what is available (46.5%)



The Purpose of the Consultation

Research has highlighted that people with a disability in Ireland are far less likely to be active than those without a disability with a difference of 28% vs 48% taking part (ISM, 2022). This difference is also apparent within younger demographics, the CSPPA (2022) study shows a substantial difference for children and youths with a disability. The study reported that children with disabilities are less likely to meet physical activity guidelines and engage in community-based physical activity than those without a disability.

It is imperative that we reduce this gradient in participation and ensure that there are no inequalities present across populations. Understanding the experience of young people with disabilities will enable Active Disability Ireland and the wider sector to provide more choice, and participation opportunities for children with disabilities to take part in sport and physical activity.

In 2022 Active Disability Ireland completed an in-depth consultation process with people with disabilities in Ireland to explore their living experience and examine barriers to activity as well as how they can be better supported to be active. The consultation was successful and elicited over 200 survey responses as well as 9 interviews, however, the consultation was only targeting the adult population and not children and youths.

In order to better understand the living experience of young people with disabilities, the research is set forth to address the following research questions:

What are the factors which influence engagement in physical activity for young people with disabilities?

What are the most prevalent barriers to activity that young people with disabilities experience?

How can these barriers be alleviated to ensure more young people with disabilities engage in activity?

What can Active Disability Ireland and other agencies do to ensure more young people with disabilities are engaged?

Consultation Process

This section will describe the consultation process including: the project advisory group, data collection methods and data analysis techniques.

Project Advisory Group

Active Disability Ireland undertook a collaborative approach to the process by establishing a consultation advisory group at the outset of the project. The purpose of the group was to provide direction for the project and to generate valuable ideas for bringing the project to life. The group oversaw the development of all materials associated with the consultation including information documents and consent documents. The group also acted as a sounding board for the researcher and provided valuable feedback on the survey and interview design.

The group was set up with a commitment for coproduction with people with disabilities in mind and as such included two young people with disabilities to ensure living experience was utilised as a guide. Additionally, two parents of young people with disabilities were in the group as the project also looked at the parental perspective. Finally, two representatives from disability sport organisations were included to provide their expertise and experience of involving young people with disabilities in physical activity and sport.



Sample selection

In order to gather vital insights for our organisation we set out to engage as many young people with disabilities throughout Ireland as possible. We utilised our network of contacts within the sector from NGBs, LSPs and disability sport organisations in order to try and spread the survey as widely as possible. In addition to this we utilised project funding to pay for promoted posts on social media to assist in the dissemination of the survey. In total **356** people engaged in our survey (178 young people and 178 parent guardians). Participants ranged in age from 10-17 years and were from 27 different counties.



178 Young People
with a Disability



178 Parents/Guardians



27 Counties Represented

Survey

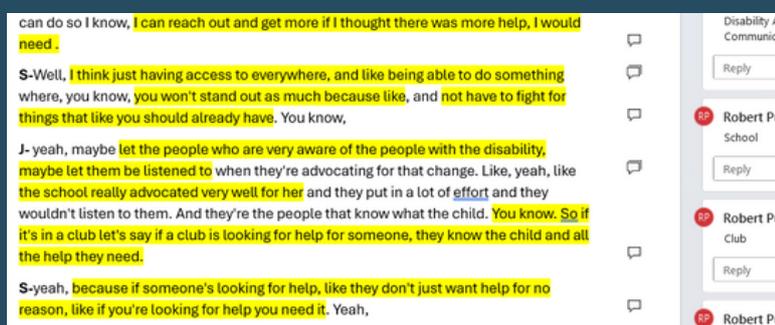
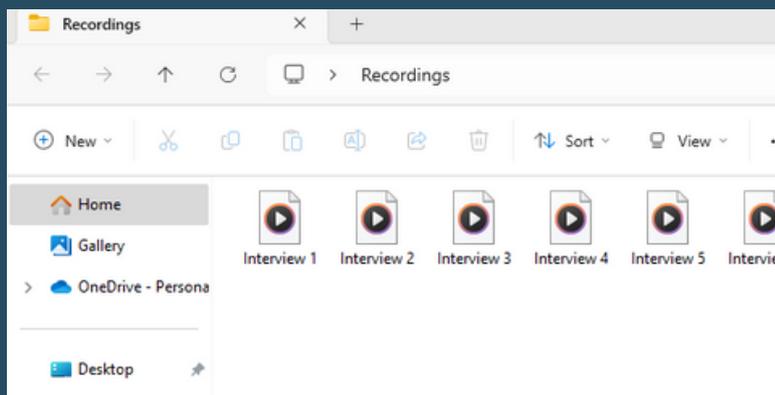
A survey was produced and hosted on SurveyMonkey. The survey aimed to gather information from young people with disabilities and their parent/guardian in relation to experience with physical activity, barriers, facilitators and potential supports. The development of the survey was in line with our philosophy of coproduction and was developed in conjunction with the consultation advisory group. Survey data was analysed via the SurveyMonkey platform.



Interview

In addition to the survey, six interviews were also utilised as a method of gaining additional insights and to open a space for young people with disabilities to have deep and meaningful conversations about their living experience. Predetermined questions were used, similar to the survey, however the discussion was more conversational in manner which allowed the freedom to change the direction of discussion and explore topics freely as they arose. Parents were also interviewed in order to hear their experiences.

Interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then reviewed for common themes present throughout the interviews.



Our Findings

This section will outline the key findings identified from the survey as well as interviews. Quotes from interviews will be used to support insights and to directly use the voice of living experience.

Perception of Physical Activity

For young people with disabilities that we spoke to, physical activity was seen as a priority in their lives. 69.8% surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that physical activity is a priority for them. Interestingly, when we asked the same question of adults with disabilities in 2022 81.8% either agreed or strongly agreed. The different ways in which young people engage in physical activity, in particular, through the school system may contribute to this disparity, however further investigation is warranted.

“ I love exercising. I think it’s so important and everyone should be doing it. ”

Physical activity is a priority for me.



I enjoy taking part in physical activity.



Although the above figures clearly show that young people with disabilities view physical activity as a priority and enjoy taking part, there are also difficulties which they face in their perceptions of physical activity. In particular, a lack of confidence to participate was prevalent with only 39.4% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel confident while participating.

“ I don't like standing out or feeling different. ”

For some participants in the consultation it was clear that they did not view physical activity as something for them and as something that they are unable to do.

“ I don't really like it. It's not something that I can do. ”

I feel confident when I take part in physical activity and sport.



Perception of Physical Education

For young people with disabilities physical education is one of the most important methods of getting active. The majority of respondents take part in PE at school with 63.1% stating they always participate and only 3.5% stating they never participate. Additionally 78.9% felt that PE was important. Roughly half of students report to not regularly enjoy PE with only 51.8% stating that they always or usually enjoy PE.

“ P.E. is great. I like hanging out with my friends. ”

I feel that physical education is important.



I always take part in physical education.



I regularly enjoy physical education.



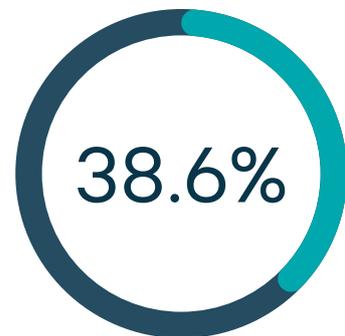
Although the majority of respondents reported to regularly participating in PE, again many reported a lack of confidence. Only 31.5% strongly agreed or agreed that they felt confident during PE with only 38.6% agreeing that they feel included in PE.

“ I don't like not being with other kids. Not being understood. ”

I feel confident during P.E.



I feel included in P.E.



“ Sports day is hell, I hate it. I'm excluded all day. The only good thing was the ice-cream truck. ”

Barriers for Young People with Disabilities

Understanding the barriers young people with disabilities face when participating, or trying to participate in physical activity, both in and out of school, was one of the key outcomes set out at the beginning of the consultation process. By clearly defining the primary barriers, it will be possible to take actions that directly address these issues. The most common barrier identified was a lack of opportunities/local provision with 56.1% reporting this as a barrier.

“ I would like clubs for people like me (autistic and dyspraxic) - especially during the 3 months of summer holidays. ”

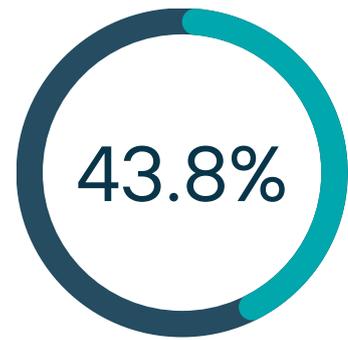
There is a lack of opportunities to be active.



A lack of confidence in their ability was the next most commonly reported barrier with 43.8% reporting to this. From interviews with young people with disabilities this self-perception that they are unable to participate seems to stem from having been excluded in the past and from previous experiences with teachers/coaches making them feel as though they aren't capable of participating with peers.

“ They're scared that I'll get hurt so they just keep me on the bench. Everyone else gets to have a go at the end of games. ”

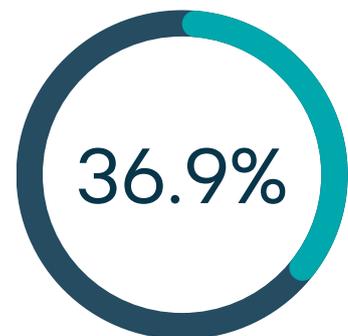
I have a lack of confidence in my ability to get involved in physical activity.



Having no-one to take part with is the third most common barrier reported by young people with disabilities with 36.9% stating this has affected them in the past. In particular, this seems to be an issue within PE at school with interview participants noting how teachers find it difficult to include them as they may be the only person with a disability in the class.

“ I enjoy being with my peers, but as I am the only person in a wheelchair and activities are usually for a mobile person. ”

I have no-one to take part with.



Support for Young People with Disabilities

We asked young people with disabilities what were the key areas which could be improved to support them to be able to get involved in physical activity. 62.3% stated that the number one thing that would help them get involved was more opportunities for activity in their local area.

“ I want more inclusion for physical disability/wheelchair users. Most inclusion sports and camps are geared towards intellectual disability. ”

I would like more opportunities in my local area.



The other main area which young people with disabilities identified was to ensure that coaches are suitably trained to provide inclusive sessions for individual with different types of disabilities with 55.7% reporting to this. By ensuring coaches are effectively trained, a lot of the barriers identified above can be alleviated.

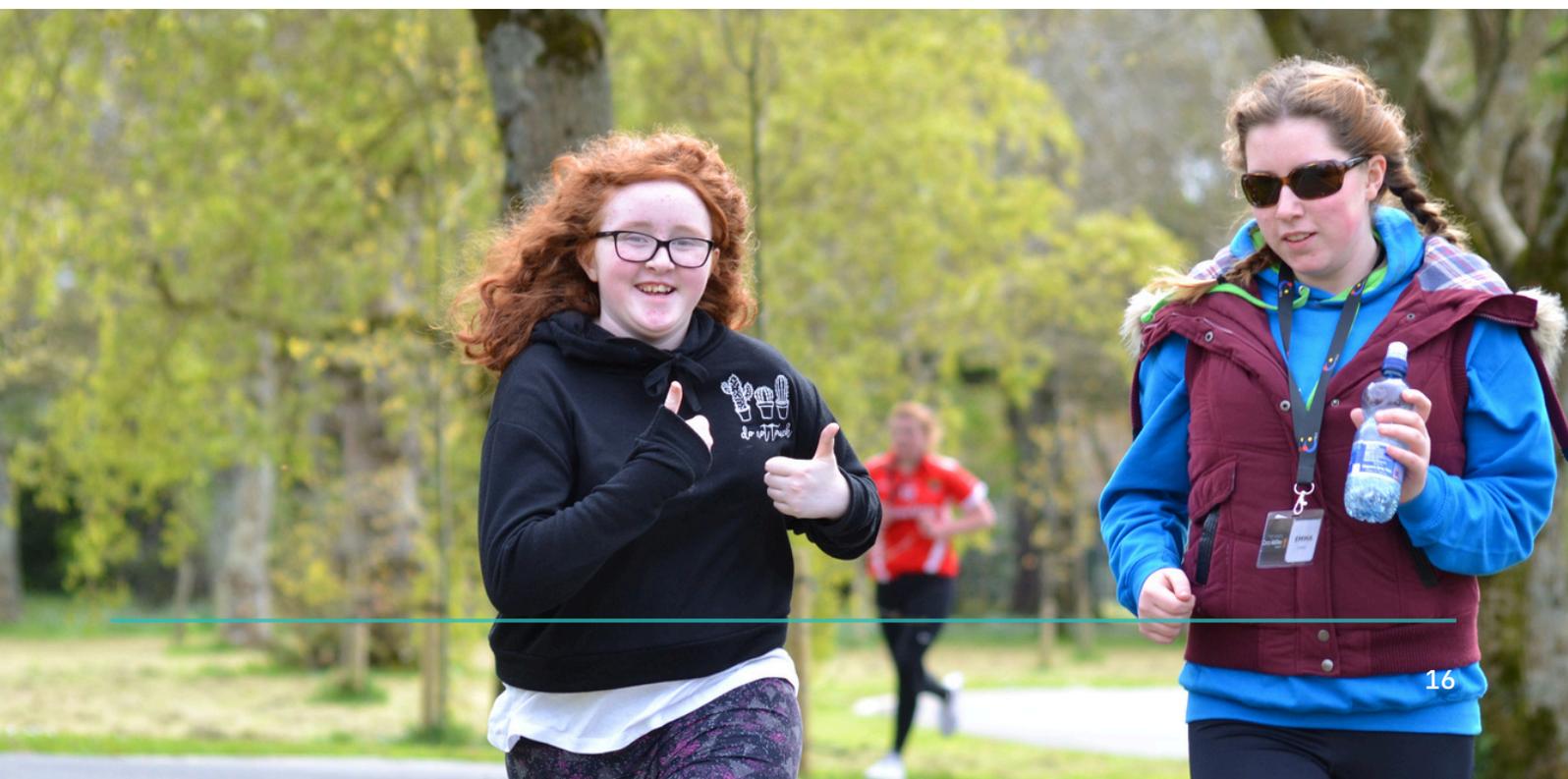
“ If someone is teaching sports I think they should have to do more training so that they know what they are doing. ”

Coaches and teachers must be suitably trained to deliver inclusive sessions.



“ The teacher insisting on playing sports that I can't participate in ”

“ Teacher learning how to adapt games and asking me how to make games inclusive for me. Being the referee is not fun or inclusive ”



Parent/Guardian Perspective

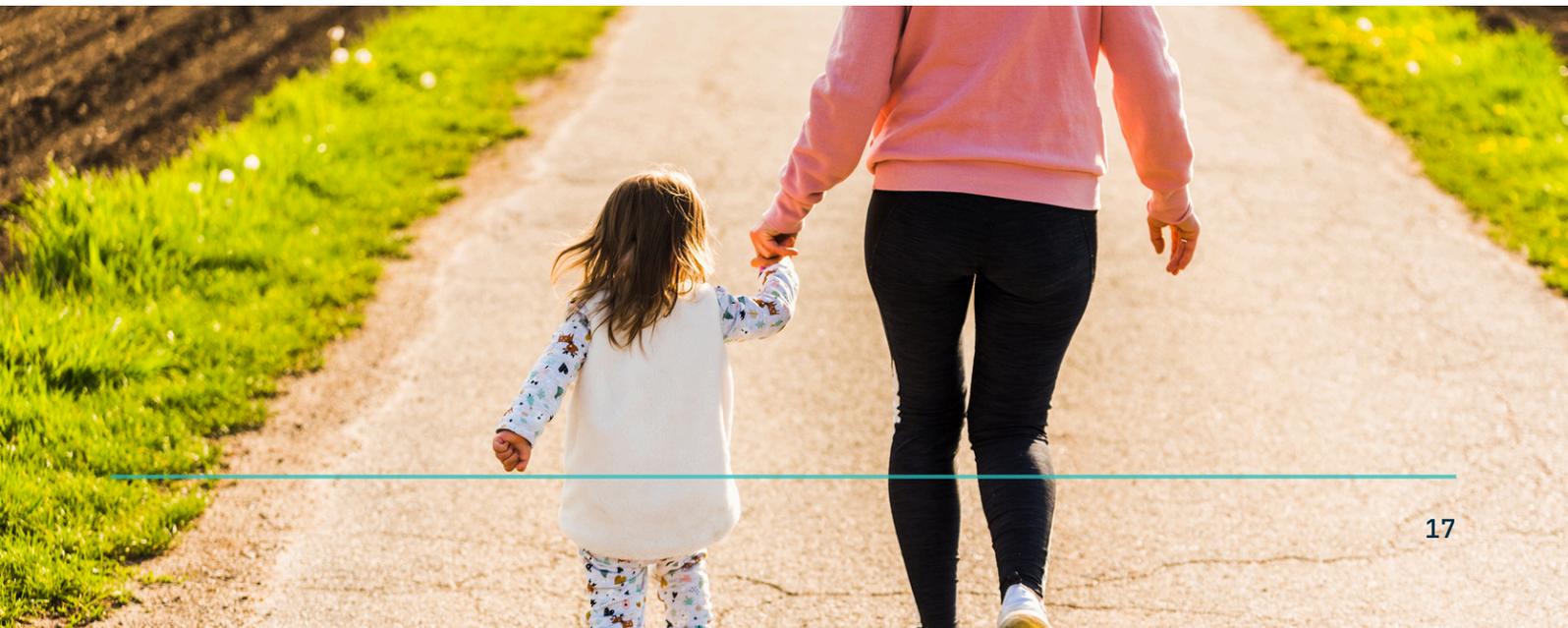
A key part of participation in physical activity for young people is their parents/guardians. With this in mind, we felt it was crucial to get the perspective of parents/guardians on physical activity as well as barriers which they face in getting their child involved and how they can be better supported. Interestingly, only 34.3% agreed or strongly agreed that their child did enough physical activity and only 10.5% agreed or strongly agreed that their child was able to do as much physical activity as they would like.

“ I’d love him to get involved more but I just don’t know where to go. ”

I feel my child does enough physical activity.



My child can participate in physical activity as much as they would like.



Parents/guardians who participated in the consultation felt that a lack of suitable places or facilities was the most prevalent barrier to getting their child involved in physical activity with 58.1% citing this as a barrier.

“ We need more facilities in our community, in spite of living in a very large town we have no track, no pool, pitches are not accessible in damp weather GAA has no astroturf so cannot partake. ”

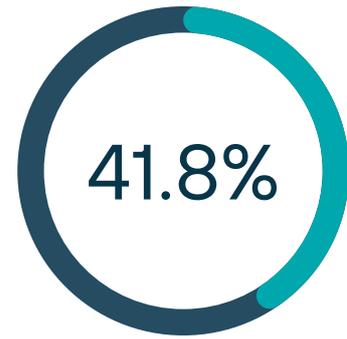
There is a lack of suitable facilities/places.



Respondents also felt that there was a lack of support or understanding from people working in sport and physical activity with 41.8% of participants reporting this barrier.

“ We need training for permanent staff and more special needs classes on a regular basis. Hiring young inexperienced people for the summer just perpetuates the myth that disabled people can't take part. ”

There is a lack of understanding from people working in physical activity.



Parents/guardians also frequently reported to worrying about their child. 32.5% of respondents reported that they worry about their child not being able to take part which acts as a barrier to them getting their child involved.

“ Sometimes I'd be thinking and I'd just worry about him. Like are they letting him play ? Because he's very quiet and he wouldn't tell me. ”

I worry about my child not being able to participate.



Parents/guardians also stated that they felt they did not receive enough support in order to assist them in getting their child involved in physical activity with only 25.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they received enough support..

“ Sometimes I feel overwhelmed about having to bring my child to the activity. The logistics of getting there, helping her during the activity and managing my two other children at the same time.

”

I receive enough support to facilitate my child to be active.



Active Disability Ireland Youth Forum

By understanding what young people with disabilities need, we can ensure positive physical activity experiences at a young age, setting youths on a path to being active and healthy for life.

One of the key features of the project was the development of the Active Disability Ireland Youth Forum. We recognised that it was crucial to not only gain insights acutely within this project, but to continue to engage with young people with disabilities as we move forward through our 2023-2027 strategic plan.

The Youth Forum will be utilised to guide us in our work and ensure that we are correctly engaging with young people with disabilities as well as accurately representing their voices. The Youth Forum will provide a platform for the group members to have their voices heard and advocate for greater opportunities and choice for young people with disabilities to participate in physical activity across Ireland as well as provide an opportunity for group members to benefit from educational and leadership opportunities through our organisation.



Active Disability Ireland Youth Forum

The Active Disability Ireland Youth Forum is built around four pillars ensuring that young people with disabilities who join the group have the opportunity to ensure our work is representative as well as to develop as advocates and leaders. The four pillars are:

Guidance

The living experience of young people with disabilities will guide the work of Active Disability Ireland, in both the development and delivery of programmes and projects as well as how we present ourselves as an organisation.

Education

The education and development of young people with disabilities is a key focus of the Youth Forum. Members will have the opportunity to engage in Active Disability Ireland training workshops as well as other exciting opportunities.

Advocacy and Representation

Forum members will act as a representative for young people with disabilities as well as for our organisation by attending events, conferences and advocating through social media.

Leadership

Members of the forum will be given leadership opportunities at upcoming Active Disability Ireland events and projects. Forum members will be enabled to develop as leaders and positively impact the culture of inclusion in Ireland.

For more Information on how you can be involved in the Active Disability Ireland Youth Forum contact: rpurcell@activedisability.ie

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research presented here indicates that for many young people with disabilities, there are many barriers to getting involved in physical activity. It is imperative that we remove as many barriers as possible to ensure young people with disabilities have equal opportunities to be active. To facilitate this, we put forward the following recommendations.

- Active Disability Ireland will continue to engage with young people with disabilities through our youth forum.
- It is recommended that any organisation that engages with young people should consult with young people with disabilities prior to making decisions.
- It is recommended that any organisation that delivers physical activity should ensure staff are sufficiently trained to ensure young people with disabilities can be included.
- It is recommended that any school teacher that delivers physical activity should receive training to ensure young people with disabilities can be included fairly.
- It is crucial that we enable young people with disabilities to make choices for themselves when it comes to physical activity instead of letting decisions be made for them.





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