

Sport Without Limits



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Project: Inclusive Sport Case Study - partnerships
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This document provides a case study of the Sport Without Limits project, managed by the Royal London Society for Blind People (RLSB) as part of the Inclusive Sport Programme. The project was selected as an example of an area that has generated, fostered and developed excellent partnerships. Interviews were undertaken with RLSB, Fit for Sport and Middlesex County Cricket.

Background

The Royal London Society for Blind People (RLSB) is a charity which has been running for 175 years providing a wide range of advice, support, education and developmental services for blind and partially sighted people. The charity operates within London and the South East previously providing sport within an educational setting but it has now expanded its services to include monthly clubs, residential programmes and holiday courses in the last two to three years.

The 'Sports without Limits' projects covers all 32 London boroughs and represents a significant increase in scale and volume of sport-related activity for RLSB. The project aims to provide opportunities for a minimum of 150 blind or partially sighted people in a range of different sports. It will do this by running a series of engagement events for groups of around 15-30 young people and adults (aged 14-30) who can try a range of sports, meet professional athletes and learn what provision is available.

This increase in service provision has provided the opportunity to forge new partnerships with a range of organisations in the sporting field.



Partnerships created

As a charity focusing on disability, RLSB would require partners for referrals and delivery; prior to Inclusive Sport the organisation had only a limited number of 'active' partnerships for sporting activities. Generally, contacts were based on past relationships and were very informal. The commencement of Sport England funding for Inclusive Sport led to a significant process of sourcing and obtaining partners to deliver sporting provision for vision impaired people. This process began with 'mapping out' available provision and facilities across London. As part of this exercise, project staff gained an understanding of local authority strategic priorities and challenges as each borough is run differently.

Sport without Limits: Active created partnerships with a variety of sporting organisations, from those with a national focus – UK Athletics¹, Tennis Foundation², Fit for Sport³, to those with a specific focus in the local area and/or on disability sports, such as Metro Sports⁴. It was estimated that only around a fifth (20%) of partnerships existed prior to Inclusive Sport. The figure below illustrates some of the key partnerships the project has forged.

Figure 1: Examples of forged partnerships



¹ <http://www.britishathletics.org.uk>

² <http://www.lta.org.uk/Tennis-Foundation/Home/>

³ <http://www.fitforsport.co.uk/>

⁴ <http://www.metroblindsport.org/>

Operational partners assist with the delivery of the 20 engagement events and provide mentoring for individuals engaged with the project. Referral partners recommend participants to the project and strategic partners assist with links to wider organisations and contacts outside of the RLSB's current network.

Partnership utilisation

Each partnership brings skills and strengths to the project to ensure its success:

1. **Utilisation of high profile organisations, such as Premier League football clubs:** These partners enhance the visibility and attractiveness of the project to both participants and other partner organisations. They help facilitate engagement with local sports clubs and grass-root level sporting enterprises. Their involvement is crucial because it helps ensure sustainable partnerships are formed at grass-roots levels providing more locally accessible opportunities for disabled participants;
2. **Partnering with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Education establishments and Local Authorities:** Disabled people will utilise established organisations, with whom they have direct contact, to become aware of opportunities to them. Working with such organisations is imperative to ensure that potential participants hear about and are duly referred into the project. Receiving a 'recommendation' or 'referral' from a known organisation provides a more personal (and often face to face) approach which is proving key to engaging participants;
3. **Accessing the skills and knowledge of sports clubs and national sporting organisations:** The expertise, resources and knowledge of different sports clubs and organisations can be encompassed into the project to ensure that participants have access to not only a variety of sports they can choose from but also a 'quality' offering.

One vision impaired individual who attended our second event in Whitechapel, came to us with both limited English and learning difficulties. He was referred to us by the Newham sensory team as he has engaged very little in the past in activities and never in sport. We had discussions with him before the event and through the use of our volunteer buddy system we were able to assist him in getting to the venue. It was clear from the outset that he struggled to engage in all the activities due to his impairment but he really excelled in the cricket. After the session he expressed an interest in attending cricket on a regular basis and we managed to find him a cricket club in Middlesex. After attending the first session at the club he found the interaction very enjoyable and is now regularly participating in the cricket. [In terms of measuring impact] 'How many hours a week do you do activity in the last six months, would you estimate?' His was zero, so we've managed to increase his regular physical activity by a couple of hours.

-Sports without Limits

As an organisation with relatively limited experience in the sports sector these connections bring in new learning opportunities for the charity which longer term allows them to improve the quality and effectiveness of the service provision they can offer to the individuals that access their sport services. At the same time, sporting organisations engaged with the project, gain



greater disability awareness and can learn new ways in which to encourage participation of disabled people into their sporting activities. For example, Tottenham Hotspur Foundation has already benefitted from engaging with individuals on the programme:

We manage the Blind and partially sighted centre of excellence and player development centres for the FA for London and Middlesex, and the access that we get to individuals through the engagement events is beneficial and complementary to these. We are only a small part of the project financially, but the stake in it is fantastic for us, because not only can we develop our work with disability charities, but we are able to increase membership on our own programmes. An individual may come to the engagement day, and through that process, realise that they want to become a blind or partially sighted footballer for England.

-Tottenham Hotspur Foundation

Meeting the intervention outcomes

Clearly a great deal of work has gone into creating sustainable and effective partnerships between the disability and sport sectors. This should provide a robust infrastructure which brokers the links between disabled people wanting to do sport and organisations wanting to engage with more disabled people. The project has only been referring young people into programmes from 27th October 2013 but there is emerging evidence of impact in increasing participation amongst disabled people.

