

## Royal Mencap Society – Written evidence (NPS0130)

### About our representation

1. Mencap welcomes this timely inquiry and the opportunity to feed into the development of the National Plan for Sport and Recreation.
2. People with a learning disability, who make up 1.5 million of the UK population are nearly twice as likely to be inactive; twice as likely to become obese; and have shorter lifespans than the general population. To help turn these figures around we provide a range of support and programmes targeted to help get inactive people with a learning disability participating in sport and physical activity within their communities.

### Round the World Challenge

3. Our central programme to increase rates of activity among people with a learning disability is the *Round the World Challenge* which is delivered in partnership with Sport England and The National Lottery. The programme launched in January 2019, following piloting between 2014 and 2017, and to date has engaged over 2900 people with a learning disability.
4. The Challenge is currently running in 27 locations over four years. Currently we are delivering in;
  - a. North Yorkshire
  - b. Merseyside
  - c. Lancashire
  - d. Leicestershire
  - e. Nottinghamshire
  - f. Coventry and Warwickshire
  - g. South Essex
  - h. South London
  - i. East Cornwall and Devon.
5. The initiative is all about turning hours of sport and physical activities into distance and 'racing' round the world, the more hours you do the further you go. Participants will take part in a variety of activities including Zumba, boccia, yoga and more traditional sports like football, rugby, cycling and tennis. Participants then log activity time and convert this into miles. Participants can choose to complete 20 hours for the UK route, 40 hours for Europe, or 100 hours for the World route, or even all three. Once completed participants have the option to progress onto doing a sports leadership course, becoming a volunteer or joining one of Mencap's Employment programmes. You can see the project in action in a BBC Midlands segment [here](#).
6. Through the local participation hub model, Round the World Challenge has built strong community links to ensure people can access more sport in their community at the end of their Round the World Challenge journey. This was achieved through us acting in an enabling role to bring together the right people and ensure that organisations worked together towards joint outcomes.

7. Since starting *Round the World* we have worked with almost 200 partner organisations, including grassroots clubs and leisure centres, providing guidance and expertise to allow people to be active in a time and setting of their choice.
8. *Neel, Ashton Mencap Group, Young Volunteer: "They (RTWC participants) have started not only getting more involved in the Mencap sports activities but have started joining sports disability teams and activities outside of Mencap, like swimming and football and other things, really increasing sports participation."*
9. As well as the health and community benefits of increasing physical activity, research and Mencap's projects have shown that getting people with a learning disability involved in sport can help boost their confidence in other areas of life, including: securing employment, reducing loneliness, building friendships and playing a full part in their communities.
10. *Qasim, 30 who has just completed his journey in Manchester said: "Round the World Challenge has been able to introduce me to subjects that I had not looked at recently so that helped me when I was thinking about what type of work I wanted to do. I have realised that I want to develop my photography skills so I have been able to look at courses that could help me develop those skills. I would like to work as a camera assistant in the future."*
11. We agree that these are broadly the right priorities. To increase our knowledge base we partnered with Sport England to launch a research project with Spear, Canterbury Christchurch University. They found that our outcome priorities to work and moreover that mental health was the biggest beneficiary from our work as was physical wellbeing and individual development. Building on this, we are currently delivering research to investigate the impact of our programmes on economic and community development.
12. As with many other policy area, data on learning disability is very thin. Whilst there is some good research on disability taking place, participation of people with a learning disability is typically low, therefore the findings from the research are often not representative of people with a learning disability. In order to improve data, it is crucial that all research is accessible, and adapted methods, such as focus groups, are considered to enable more people with a learning disability to take part. We would like to see better segmenting of impairments from the start when targeting disabled people, to make pan disability findings more reflective of disabled demographics.

### **How can racism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny and ableism in sport be tackled?**

13. People with a learning disability face significant barriers to playing an active role in their community. We know that children with special educational needs (SEN) are twice as likely to be bullied regularly than children with no SEN<sup>1</sup> and only 6% of adults with a learning disability known to their local authority were in paid employment in England<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://repec.ioe.ac.uk/REPEc/pdf/qsswp1411.pdf>

14. To help tackle this we delivered a series of leadership programmes with StreetGames. This aimed to train 500 people with a learning disability to become leaders in the sector and deliver sports sessions. We hope that this programme will increase awareness of learning disability, ensuring people with a learning disability are leaders rather than just beneficiaries, and affect positive change in local communities.
15. Elite and professional sports have an important role to play in supporting grassroots clubs. We are pleased to say that there has been improvement in this relationship over the past few years in their approach to disability, which has been highlighted by the recent improvements in physical activity amongst disabled people. This has been particularly through community sports clubs with rugby league being one of the best examples. However, there is a real risk of this progress being undone as the sector has been adversely impacted by lockdown and the closure of facilities. .
16. While there are significant gaps in pathways from grassroots to the elite level for people with a learning disability, we are concerned about the growing movement towards elite bodies self-regulating. A move towards having elite bodies in essence evaluating their work, could lead to a higher focus on programmes supporting the elite level of the game, rather than more resource intensive interventions to increase participation amongst disabled participants whilst decreasing accountability for the sport providing community benefits. This lack of accountability and whole sport approach risks seeing current levels of support for grassroots sports reduce or removed entirely to focus increasingly on programmes supporting the elite level, rather than developing opportunities for everyone.
17. As a result of few elite level competitions for people with a learning disability, for example only 3 sports are available at a Paralympic level, there is a lack of role models for aspiring athletes. Without increased visibility at a professional level, supported by the sports organisation and sector, increasing the number of athletes with a learning disability at grassroots and their talent pathways will remain a challenge.

**Should there be a national plan for sport and recreation? Why/why not?**

18. We agree that there should be a national plan for sport and recreation and at its heart should be a clear vision and framework to break down historic barriers such as disability. However, it cannot be ridged in prescribing directions of travel. The strategy should rather be flexible with a focus on supporting the development of local initiatives and engaging local communities. This would ensure that local needs are met and that the strategy has the best possible opportunity of reaching disadvantaged communities.

*2 February 2021*

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/people-with-learning-disabilities-in-england/chapter-2-employment>