

Moving the West Midlands Forward

Improving Physical Activity
for Disabled People

Summary Document

April 2020



West Midlands
Combined Authority



Disability Rights UK

Introduction

In 2019/20 Disability Rights UK (DR UK) was commissioned by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to find out how disabled people in the West Midlands feel about access to physical activity. This was with a view to discover disabled people's ideas about how these opportunities could be improved and to create a mechanism by which the Include Me West Midlands (IMWM) programme could be led and supported by disabled people. IMWM aims to improve access to physical activity for disabled people through a number of approaches including; improving access to transport, creating a network of supporter organisations and through the development of a 'Citizens Network'. DR UK was asked to engage with disabled people and community organisations in the West Midlands to scope out the interest and appetite in Citizens Network amongst disabled people, as well as provide a potential plan to make it happen.





This report comes from the voice of disabled people within the West Midlands and takes a social model approach. It is their experience of physical activity in their local areas, real examples of barriers they are facing and their suggestions of how things can be improved. We will set out what people told us through sharing the main findings from a series of Knowledge Café's and survey results. We will also highlight the emerging themes coming from Knowledge Café discussions about a potential Citizen's Network. We will bring all the above together to outline what we believe should be the Building Blocks for engaging disabled people and co-producing solutions to inactivity in the West Midlands.

This document is for disabled people, groups and community organisations in the West Midlands, colleagues working on IMWM and sport sector providers.

There is also a full version available to gain a more detailed insight into the work that was carried out.

What we mean by co-production

Disability Rights UK is a disabled people led organisation and exists to create leadership and power amongst individuals and organisations to build a movement for change. Co-production is embedded in our approach and practice and this inspires us to work with others to create understanding and commitment to co-production. We believe that co-production is the key to unlock opportunities to tackle the inequalities that disabled people face when it comes to being active.

There are many definitions of co-production we have chosen one definition which we think supports the purpose of the proposed Citizens Network. Think Local Act Personal (TLAP) explains co-production in this way:

Co-production is not just a word and it's not just a concept, it is a meeting of minds coming together to find a shared solution. In practice, it involves people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them.

Co-production is linked closely to the Social Model of Disability, which says that society disables people through barriers in the environment, in organisations and through other people's attitudes.

Disabled people are the best people to make decisions about their own lives, and when disabled people work together, they can make changes in a society

that currently disables them. Removing these barriers creates equality and offers disabled people more independence, choice and control.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) asserts that it may be helpful for organisations and groups to assign a set of principles to co-producing outcomes rather than try to define it. The below principles are seen by SCIE and others as critical for making co-production happen positively and constructively.

Equality – everyone has assets

Diversity

Accessibility

Reciprocity



Co-production in social care:
What it is and how to do it (SCIE)

Summary of our findings

Our Approach

To begin our engagement work, we connected with a range of non-sports sector groups and organisations working with local disabled people and went on to visit five of these organisations, engaging with a total of 60 people. We called the engagement events ‘Knowledge Cafés’, and they were in the style of interactive workshops with a range of different activities created to find out views and experiences. As well as our face to face work, we also created a survey so that we could expand our findings of experiences around the West Midlands.

Creating engaging activities that linked in with a topic guide helped us to create a structured session in the knowledge cafés in order to collect information.

The information gathered from all the workshops was then synthesised and summarised into the separate topics, which enabled us to see the main responses and feedback to include in this document.

Living a good life

When thinking about physical activity it is important to look at a person’s wider life and what they value. We therefore began all our knowledge cafes with the aim of finding out what participants value in their lives. The most common responses were around **spending time with loved ones, and being part of the community.** Participants also liked to be **independent**, whether that was having a job, being in education or being able to take part in activities as independently as possible. Participants also valued being able to **pursue hobbies or interests** in their spare time.



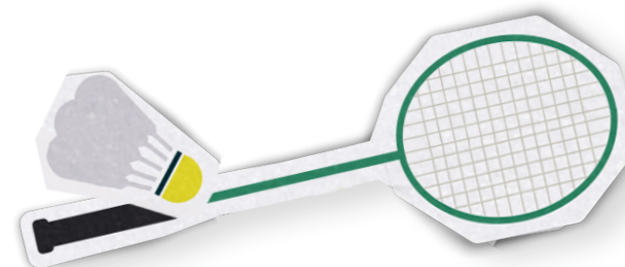
Reasons to be active

Getting active has many benefits for disabled people and those with long term health conditions. Participants spoke about a variety of benefits from their experiences of taking part in physical activities. Their experience of physical activity ranged from taking part in sport, to joining local discos or gardening. Participants were able to discuss a wide range of benefits that arose from taking part in activities. The most frequently occurring benefit was the fact that taking part in activities allowed them to be more **present in the community**, which resulted in them **meeting new people** and expanding social circles. As well as this, they discussed the benefits for both their **mental and physical health**, from getting fit to having something to help focus their mind. Physical activity was also seen as a way to **try new things and learn new skills**, and a lot of the time it was seen as something that was **fun and engaging**.

Reasons for not taking up physical activity

It is essential to consider what barriers people in the West Midlands face when taking part in physical activity. Despite the many benefits of getting active, many disabled people find the barriers they face mean taking part in activity is sometimes not possible for them. The most frequently occurring barrier was **lack of information**, and people not knowing where to go to access physical activity. There were sports people were willing to try, and wanted to take part in, but did not even know where to begin in looking for these activities. Another barrier was **public perceptions and stereotypes**, which included being treated negatively, being spoken down to or people speaking to support workers instead of the person, and concerns were raised around lack of training. Feeling unwelcome also resulted in participants feeling **less confident** to take part in activities. Some felt fearful of injuring themselves or not confident to take part without support.

As well as this, there were physical barriers that prevented people from taking part in physical activities, such as finding **activities or venues inaccessible** or not knowing where to find activities that were accessible for them. Concerns were raised around some venues not having the correct equipment so that they could take part, or staff not having the right training to help them. Some participants said there were no activities local to them, and that there was a **lack of transport** to attend activities that were further away. As well as this, some people spoke about **funding issues** and activities ending due to lack of funding. Lack of funding was also found to be a barrier for people with complex disabilities.



Support networks

Participants spoke about a variety of help to get active, however, this was dependent on the area the person lives. For example, those in Birmingham found it easier to find out information relating to physical activity than those in smaller areas such as Dudley. However, the ongoing theme running through all the engagement events was that it is **difficult to get this information**.

Participants spoke about not taking part in as many activities as they would like to simply because they don't know where the groups are in the first place. When they do try to find the information this can be challenging, which was also found by support workers who attended the events. Many individuals said the only way they find out about information is through word of mouth. Suggestions for ways to get information included disability organisations, which were seen as valuable as individuals were already attending, the internet, local carer's centres, local libraries, youth clubs, GP surgeries, and the Jobcentre.

Suggestions for engagement

There are a variety of ways that people like to be engaged with, and it is essential to look into various forms of contact. One of the most favoured forms of engagement was **face to face contact**, and most individuals spoke and valuing personal contact and being able to build relationships. It was also seen as essential this face to face contact continues in the longer term in order to build and maintain trust. As well as this, the **internet** was a valued resource for finding out and feeding back information. However some people may struggle with using the internet, so it is important to engage through connecting with local organisations, newsletters, and leaflets. In addition, participants spoke about the importance of also **speaking to family, friends and carers** in order to build a full picture of that person's life and gain a well-rounded view of how disabled people experience physical activity. It was seen as essential to **involve people with a range of experiences**, such as older people, a range of cultures, genders, and sexuality, as well as taking into account hidden disabilities.



Co-producing Include Me West Midlands

A Citizen's Network – Emerging Themes in the West Midlands

There was a consensus in the knowledge cafés that having a Citizen's Network would bring about benefits for disabled people in the West Midlands. Talking through the variety of topics helped participants to see what may prevent them from being active and what changes can be made. This in turn helped participants to start to develop ideas around what the Citizen's Network could look like in practice.

Below we highlight the key themes arising from these discussions.

Flow of information

The purpose of the network for most participants was to receive information and to feedback about physical activity. For example, there were suggestions of creating an online website similar to TripAdvisor. Having a system like this could also be a way of making

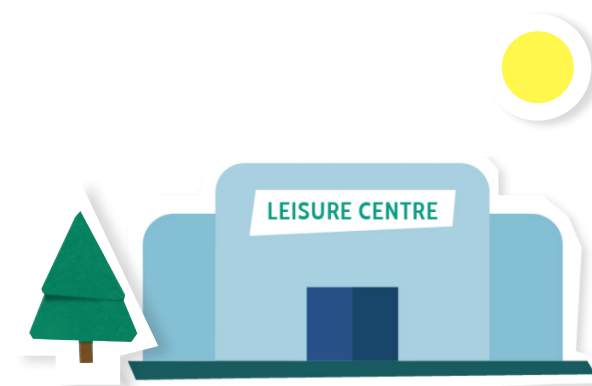
suggestions or comments, as well to feedback what changes are necessary to make activities more accessible for disabled people. Working together with local sports organisations, venues and groups alongside disability organisations can also ensure that information is being better communicated to all members of the local community.

Sharing lived experience

As well as a significant focus on sharing information, the network is also seen as a way to provide training to different organisations and venues around the West Midlands. For example, local gyms. Many participants found they were not welcome to take part in physical activity, whether that is due to accessibility or lack of awareness. Participants felt that providing co-production or disability awareness training would raise awareness and offer the opportunity to build positive and collaborative relationships between the sports sector.

A stronger, combined voice

Participants spoke about the fact that, when it comes to physical activity, there is currently no mechanism enabling people to feedback and be involved in. Participants spoke about wanting to have a stronger combined voice, and to change the way physical activity is run in local areas. Engaging a diverse range of community and grassroots organisations could be a way to engage with decision-makers and commissioners, for example, local councils. Disability organisations can act as local partners supporting the agenda to increase levels of activity amongst disabled people.



Accessibility

Improving accessibility was also seen as a main aim of the network, and a way of creating a larger variety of accessible options for getting active. The network could be a way of feeding into the development of new venues and activities and ensuring disabled people are able to access them. In one knowledge café, there was a discussion around the development of new leisure centres in Dudley but that these are not accessible for disabled people. Participants felt that they could support the development of more accessible venues if they were involved in the early stages of design. Another barrier to accessibility was also the timing of activities and available support, which can mean activities being inaccessible to people who are working. The network would support the sport sector in the West Midlands to consider these issues at the early stages of development.

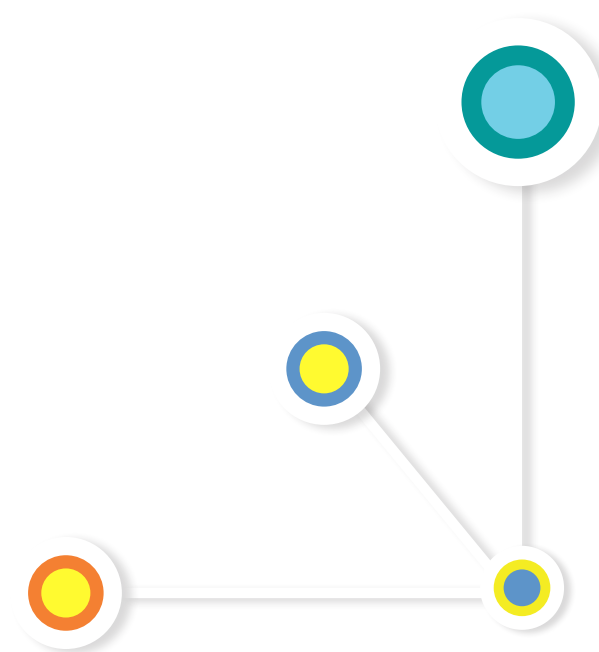
Utilising existing networks

It is important to acknowledge that not all participants were on board with the idea of a Citizen's Network. For example, at both Focus Birmingham and Queen's Cross Network some participants said they are already linked into networks that help them and that they would not engage with a new one. They also thought the development of a new network may cause confusion. There were concerns that there have been groups in the past with a similar aim, but these often disappear. Therefore, there needs to be a lot of thought and consideration around ensuring that the Citizen's Network be a constant and consistent mechanism for co-production.

Management of the network

Participants also spoke about the West Midlands being a large area and that it would be difficult for the Citizen's Network to cater for each borough. Participants in smaller boroughs felt they were not involved or did not have as many resources available as those living in Birmingham. Therefore, it may

work well to have a central hub to run the network and keep focus. This would be accompanied by smaller hubs in different parts of the West Midlands who would ensure that these smaller areas were included and represented. It is essential that the network is built on reciprocity and also feeds information back to disabled people. This is especially important as a significant concern from engagement events was people feeling they were not always listened to.



Citizens Network – Purpose and outcomes

Here we set out what we believe disabled people in the West Midlands would like out of the Citizen's Network. This is based on the above feedback as well as our knowledge and experience of models of co-production. Disability Rights UK is experienced with this way of working, and our work is based around supporting organisations to put disabled people's priorities at the heart of their policies and practices. The outcomes also link to the Social Model of Disability in relation to overcoming both physical and attitudinal barriers. See below our working statement of purpose.

The Include Me West Midlands Citizen's Network exists to improve the flow of information and knowledge about physical activity between disabled citizens, their communities, support networks and the sports sector.

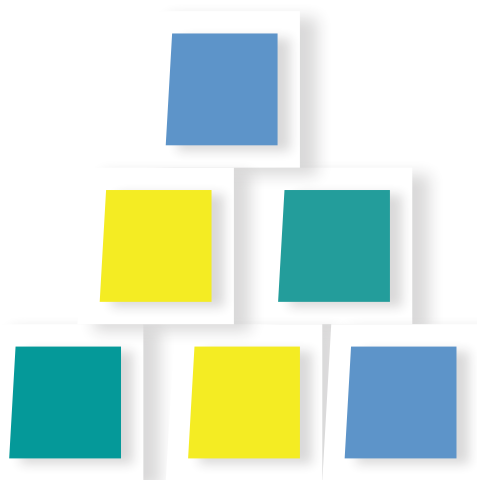
The outcomes of the network should be as follows.

- Disabled people receive information about physical activity through trusted channels.
- The sports sector workforce builds capacity to create inclusive opportunities for physical activity.
- Disabled people see an improvement in access to physical activity.
- The WMCA utilise existing networks and build strong links with community organisations.



Citizen's Network – The Building Blocks

Based on the statement of purpose and outcomes, DR UK has developed a set of recommendations or 'building blocks' for the Include Me West Midlands programme manager and advisory group to consider. These are all about how to create the environment needed to develop the Include Me West Midlands Citizen's Network.



- Create a hub for communication between disabled people, community organisations and the sport sector. This will ideally be delivered by an independent organisation.
- Agree a set of principles that underpin the work of the Citizen's Network and review these regularly.
- Build flexibility into the Citizens Network and be open to ideas and plans changing.
- Build trust and connections with the community sector, who are already a trusted source of information for disabled people.
- Be open to working in different and creative ways as a result of working alongside the community sector.
- Build awareness of the social model of disability and the principles of co-production.
- Create opportunities for the Sports Sector to learn from the lived experience of disabled people.
- Be aware that not all disabled people access community organisations and therefore create ways to communicate with diverse disabled people.



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