

The Inclusion of People with Disability in Sport and Recreation



Athy Triathlon Club - Junior Duathlon - Aug 2016

Background

Policy context

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities sets down the rights of people with disabilities and the obligations placed upon the state to progressively realise these rights, including the right to *attain and maintain maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and vocational ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life.*

Healthy Ireland: *A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025* states that people with disabilities should be as active as their ability allows – a statement that could be either expansive or limiting without further clarification, which the National Physical Activity Plan 2016 fails to provide. Sport Ireland lists people with disabilities among its target groups for coaching education and training in its Statement of Strategy 2012 – 2014.

The National Disability Authority in a major study *Promoting the Participation of People with Disabilities in Physical Activity and Sport in Ireland* identified five main factors as essential if quality experiences in physical exercise and sport are to be had by

people with disabilities. These are stronger leadership; improved and inclusive community facilities including playgrounds; the provision of adequate PE and physical activity experiences in the school and in the community; adequate and accessible information services; and comprehensive education, training and coaching programmes that provide PE teachers, coaches, trainers and managers with the required inclusive PE, sport and physical activity training and expertise.

In its locally developed strategic plan 2012- 2016 Kildare Sports Partnership seeks to increase participation in physical activity by people with a disability through information, education and the implementation of interagency approach. The plan specifically mentions leadership courses for people with a disability with the intention of building capacity and enhancing demand. The Sports Partnership cites a figure of 14,986 people with a disability (8% of the county population) from the 2006 census. This figure increased to 24,369 (11.6% of the county population) following the release of data from the 2011 census – a remarkable increase in numbers (62.6% increase) by any account.

The project context

Following the loss of the Sports Inclusion Disability Officer to Kildare County in 2010 County Kildare Leader Partnership (CKLP) focused on disability awareness as a key action to maintain momentum on matters of priority for people with disabilities. Funding under the Local and Community Development Programme was provided for an *Inclusive PALS (Physical Activity Leaders)* programme with Jumping Jelly Beans, a Foroige youth group supporting its members with disabilities to engage in a full range of activities, including sports.

County Kildare LEADER Partnership is the designated Programme Implementer for the national Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) in Co. Kildare. SICAP aims to tackle poverty, social exclusion and long-term unemployment through local engagement and partnership between disadvantaged individuals, community organisations and public sector agencies. In co. Kildare SICAP is funded by Kildare Local Community Development Committee. The programme was rolled out on the 1st of April 2015 and will run until December 2017. SICAP focuses on the most marginalised in Irish society. The three goals of SICAP are focused on: community development; education and training; and employment.

Conscious of the benefits arising for participants in the project, CKLP felt compelled to move inclusion for people with disabilities in a more strategic direction and subsequently collaborated with Kildare Sports Partnership to co-fund a part-time worker to initiate a series of considered leveraging actions. An overarching objective of these actions was to make apparent the need for reinstatement of the Sports Inclusion Disability post on a permanent basis. During this period significant engagement was undertaken with sporting bodies, including governing bodies, to ensure their support for the strategy and for its important ambition of opening up sports access for people with disabilities.

A sports inclusion disability worker was engaged from 2014 to the end of 2015 on a contract for service basis and was directed by a steering committee comprised of CKLP, Kildare Sports Partnership, KARE (a local organisation that promotes the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities) and a number of parents of children with disabilities. This steering group agreed a Sports Inclusion Disability Programme with the aim of increasing the number of people with disabilities participating in sport and physical activity in the county through programmes targeting

young people with disabilities through focused training for sports coaches, volunteers and teachers and through engagement with key stakeholders within the sports/physical activities sector. This programme was implemented in 2014 and 2015.

The programme had 4 distinct objectives:

- **Partnerships:** create effective partnerships to underpin the development of sustainable participation for people with disabilities in sport, fitness and physical activity;
- **Sustainable participation:** support sustainable participation opportunities for children with disabilities through the provision of quality initiatives, engaging with existing clubs and the wider community;
- **Capacity building:** encourage clubs and volunteers to support participation for people with disabilities through facilitation, training and awareness raising;
- **Awareness:** provide information and promote all opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in sustainable sport, fitness and physical activity.

Activities

Specific actions included collaborations with partners on development plans, getting service agreements in place with sports groups and activity providers, development of a county wide data base and disability inclusion training courses for 22 coaches, teachers and volunteers. Other actions included 'Hockey4All', 'Learn2Cycle' 'Powersoccer Come & Try', 'Rugby4All' and 'Learn2Swim' initiatives with almost 80 participants benefiting.

Outcomes of the Sports Inclusion Disability Programme

The main outcomes of this programme included the development of strong collaborative relationships with sports groups, the identification of interagency approaches as strategically crucial, securing the commitment of sports bodies to disability inclusion training for staff and setting down good practice models of sports participation for people with disabilities. A significant increase in both awareness and expectation of inclusion in sports activities for people with disabilities was an important overarching outcome.

Participant benefit

Outcomes for people with disabilities included enhanced mobility, better physical coordination (preserving or improving function is important for people with a physical disability) and access to a range of new experiences - matters that impact positively on family, friends and the wider community. Parents spoke of the increased independence and personal fulfilment their children gained through being able to cycle, swim or partake in group activities - in 2015 25 children between the ages of 5 -15 participated in the Learn2Swim programme and 38 children between the ages of 5 – 18 took part in Learn2Cycle. Confidence, motivation and a noticeably improved quality of life were other benefits noticed by parents, teachers and physiotherapists.



Training for coaches, teachers and leaders brought an improved understanding of disability, and the equally important confidence and assuredness to embark on the inclusion of people with disabilities in sports and recreational activities. For sports bodies there was better sense of how disability inclusion can be implemented and how integration strategies can be planned and programmed.

Mainstreaming

In 2016 the strategic objective was achieved with the appointment of a full time Sports Inclusion Disability Officer (shared with South Dublin Sports Partnership), funded by the Irish Sports Council (now Sport Ireland) and employed by the Kildare Sports Partnership. This places the inclusion of people with disabilities in sport within the body set up to coordinate and promote the development of sport and physical activity within the county.

The role of the Sports Inclusion Disability Officer (SIDO) is to support the strategic development and implementation of sport and physical activity for people with disabilities within the county. A key focus being to address current gaps in the provision of sport and physical activity for people with disabilities, as highlighted in Kildare Sports Partnership Strategic Plan 2012 – 2016.

The coordinated approach previously identified as an efficient and effective way of working has been incorporated into the SIDO work-plan alongside other contextual changes such

as the introduction of the National Physical Activity Plan, the restructured County Kildare HSE Children's Disability Service and the increasing number of people with disabilities indicated by the CSO from the 2011 census.

Specific actions include:

- Come and Try It' Sports days
- Supporting the development of initiatives promoted by national governing bodies and local sports clubs to increase participation among children with disabilities aged 2 – 18 years.
- Develop a structure for engagement on the development of ideas and information exchange with and between established provider agencies
- Opening up local sports club sessions and facilities to promote the participation of people of all abilities
- Building strong partnerships with sporting bodies, the health care sector and other interested parties in the county
- Develop information and marketing mechanisms to highlight the growing opportunities for available to people with disabilities in the county

SICAP Outcomes

With SICAP support the strategic objectives of this initiative have continued to be implemented. Since the beginning of 2016 the Sports Inclusion Disability Officer (SIDO) has been in position with SICAP support. Specific SICAP outcomes in 2016 have included the participation of children with disabilities in sport and recreation, engagement with National Governing Bodies to develop opportunities in sport and recreation and the establishment of a Sports Ability Forum. The first Sports Ability Forum in October 2016 was a showcase for good practice in sports inclusion and was funded by SICAP.

Achievements

Impacts on people with disabilities

The participation of children with disabilities in sports and recreational activities optimises physical functioning and enhances overall well-being, including health. Physical activity is also associated with increased self-confidence and social connectivity, attributes that promote social inclusion and combat isolation. The increased activity gained from the various programme actions has provided participants with a platform to live an integrated and active life within their community.

Collaborative working

Building relationships with national governing bodies and local sports groups was a central part of all the sports inclusion phases and was successfully achieved. This sets down a foundation upon which to expand and sustain the inclusion of people with disabilities in sport and recreational activity into the future.

Building leader/coaching capacity

Setting down a deliberate objective to target leaders, teachers and coaches for training in order to embed a culture of participation of people with disabilities in the programmes and activities of local sports groups, and sustaining this focus throughout the various phases of the sports inclusion project, proved to be a very enlightened strategy. It broke down barriers, shifted existing notions of ability and possibility and changed institutional attitudes for the better.

Learning

Strategic impact

Having a long term strategy to ensure the sustainability of the initiative was important. From the very beginning there was a clear intent to mainstream the initiative by reinstating the sports inclusion officer post and locating it within the Sports Partnership, the body with the appropriate authority and remit to ensure the future of disability inclusion in sport and recreation.

Partnership with sporting bodies

The need to build partnerships with clubs and to seek the support and cooperation of governing bodies was a sensible approach that optimised the cooperation received from local sporting groups. It was especially beneficial to the development and tweaking of guidelines and contributed to development of universal good practice in the inclusion of people with disabilities.

Interagency approaches

Cross-agency approaches were always an integral part of the strategy and this allowed different stakeholders – parents, caring organisations, health authorities, governing bodies and sporting groups - to contribute to setting goals that were informed, appropriate and effective. This approach also enabled difficulties to be overcome and participation to be maximised.

Continuity

The wisdom of securing the involvement of the same social inclusion disability worker in the various initiatives meant that project knowledge was retained and could be harvested to inform new actions and strategies. It also ensured consistency and a seamless continuity of purpose.