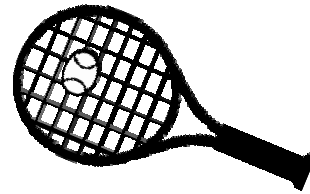


## Barriers & facilitators to physical activity & community sports for children with disability

Between February and June 2010, we held 10 focus group discussions in metropolitan and regional Victoria. We spoke to 63 people including children and adolescents with disability, parents of children with disability and people who work in the sport and disability sector. We asked them to tell us about the barriers and facilitators to participation in physical activity and community sports experienced by children with disability. Their stories centred around five main themes, which are presented below.

### People make the difference

- Access barriers can be overcome; it's attitudes and support of others that counts. Societal attitudes towards disability are often negative.
- Parental support is vital. Parents provide encouragement, transport, and money. Parents need to be proactive to get their child involved in activity.
- Instructors, coaches and PE teachers need to be understanding and skilled in teaching children with disability.
- Children with disability enjoy activities with their peers.



*"The biggest barrier is not physical access, it's not having a wonderful disabled toilet, it's not having a ramp; the biggest barrier is attitude."*

*"If coaches understand the situation then they will cater for it and give children with disability the attention they need."*

### One size doesn't fit all...it's about choice

- What is a meaningful and appropriate physical activity is different for each child.
- Local activities make it easier: transport can be a barrier.
- There are a limited number of activities for children with disability. Sometimes available activities run at inconvenient times, or have long waiting lists.
- 'Come and Try' days don't work but inclusive pathways that allow a progression through a sport do.
- Asking children with disability and their parents about what, how and when they would like to participate is important.

*"They're running hit and giggle, 'come and tries' and not actually trying to set up proper pathways"*

*"The location is a problem. They offered all ability football, which is around 30 minutes away. It was just too far to drive after school."*



## Sport can be expensive but flexible pay options help

- Cost is a barrier for many families of children with disability.
- Extra costs make it hard for organisations too.
- Offering flexible payment schemes (like pay as you play) or subsidised programs can help.

*“I’d put my son in half a dozen activities, but by the time you pay for speech therapy, occupational therapy there’s not a lot of money leftover.”*



## There are similarities and differences between children with disability & children with typical development

- Children with and without disability face many of the same barriers and facilitators to physical activity
- But, it’s harder for children with disability: there are extra costs, medical appointments, and sometimes poor motivation & behavioural issues.
- It’s harder for children with disability as they get older; other children tease, the physical gap widens and sports are more competitive.

*“When he was younger [the other children] accepted him very well. But then as he got older his movements became more awkward ”*

*“He needs always extra positive encouragement which he doesn’t get normally when it’s a team sport.”*

## Communication & connections between parents & organisations

- Parents often don’t know about local physical activity opportunities. Word of mouth and special schools often provide the best sources of information.
- Some physical activity providers have trouble finding enough children with disability for their programs.
- Partnerships between the sport and recreation sector, disability groups, local Councils and local schools are important to help promote programs and to share expertise and resources.

*“You won’t get proper information sometimes; they already started and then we receive the pamphlets”.*

*“If you establish those partnerships early and identify what strengths they can bring to it and what people they can actually tap into then you’re more likely to reach more people without running around.”*

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