

## Introduction to inclusion in sport and recreation

### Abstract

*It is often mentioned that sport and recreation should be inclusive to all, including those with disabilities. However, it is also often the case that individuals with disabilities still face barriers to participation. As a result, individuals are limited in what they can do and experience. Therefore, this article aims to give readers an introduction to why inclusion in sport and recreation matters. The article will explore why different barriers occur and how inclusive sports and recreational spaces can become more inclusive to individuals with Cerebral Palsy and similar neurological conditions.*

**Keywords:** Inclusive sports, inclusive recreation

### Introduction

The previous CPISTRA research article was on understanding Cerebral Palsy. However, whilst it is important to understand Cerebral Palsy and acknowledge that individuals with Cerebral Palsy have different abilities and personalities, it is also important to acknowledge why inclusion matters and, specifically, why it matters in sports and recreation. For individuals with Cerebral Palsy or related conditions, engaging in any form of sport and recreation can be difficult. This might be because of a lack of opportunities and awareness made by providers or policy makers (Bush and Silk, 2013; Purdue and Howe, 2012), poor attitudes towards individuals with disabilities from others in society (Devine, 2004) or from psychological barriers such as feeling like there is little point (Dattilo, 2012). Consequently, having a critical understanding to the whats, whys and how of inclusion is important in letting individuals with Cerebral Palsy and similar neurological conditions experience sports and recreation effectively. Therefore, this article provides an introduction to inclusion in sport and recreation where it will discuss the importance and meaning of inclusion in sport and recreation, as well as ways of making inclusion effective.

## The human right to sport and recreation, but why?

Goodley et al. (2016: 772) explain that even though everyone might be different:

*“...[the] desire for the normative stuff of everyday human life (education, employment, rights to be ‘independent’, part of a community, rights/access to sex, marriage, family) marks what it means to be considered human”*

In addition, Goodley et al. (2016) described how even though an individual might have a disability and impairments, the individual is still a person with different human needs to learn, participate within different aspects of life and to be educated. As well as these human needs, all individuals with disabilities (including ones with Cerebral Palsy and similar neurological conditions) have needs to socially interact with others, to have friendships, to have relationships as well as the ability to make their own choices and to experience their life how they want to (Dattilo, 2012; Goodley et al., 2016; Shakespeare, 2014). As a result, the idea of seeing individuals with disabilities as just having some impairments overlooks, ignores and assume individuals, disregarding their human need for relaxation, friendship, health and self-determination (Goodley et al., 2016; Shakespeare, 2014).

Individuals with disabilities still have the same basic human needs as individuals without disabilities. Shakespeare (2014) illustrates, despite having a disability, all individuals still have emotional needs which must be satisfied in everyday life. Regardless of the level or type of disability that someone has, individuals with disabilities still have needs to feel included, that they can make choices and decide about different aspects of their lives (Bullock and Mahon, 2017). Sport and recreation can become important in the individual fulfilling these needs, not just because sport and recreation allows individuals to do activities which they enjoy and that they can find some satisfaction from (Kleiber et al., 2011). The experience of choosing an activity and experiencing the enjoyment of the activity can lead the individual in experiencing freedom and the ability to self-determine different aspects of their life (Dattilo, 2012). In everyday life, people engage in a range of recreational-based activities whether that is playing sport, travelling, participating within exercise or enjoying time with friends or family (Henderson, 2010). However, with this, comes the importance of recognising that despite having a disability,

individuals with Cerebral Palsy and similar conditions also have a right and need to feel happy, satisfied within life and satisfied with what is happening within life. Being denied this is a way of the individual being denied to be themselves and in being another human being who is the same as anyone else (Shakespeare, 2014; Singleton and Darcy, 2013).

Everyone has different emotional and personal needs to escape from everyday life and feel energised and rewarded from participating and experiencing a pleasurable activity (Kleiber et al., 2011). This is because as human beings whether with or without a disability / an impairment, we have psychological, social and emotional needs which need to be satisfied (McCormick, 2015; Shakespeare, 2014). It can be stated that within and throughout life, all individuals get regular feelings where they need to experience or feel something (such as feeling loved or ability) which can help them to feel like they are their own person (Godbey, 2016; Kleiber, 2001). Having personal, social and emotional needs are therefore not brought from a shop, but are influenced by the individual's own identity, wants and desires, as well as by the want to attach or dis-attach themselves from different situations (Kleiber et al., 2011). As a result, McCormick (2015) talks about the biological need for leisure and summaries that the body produces different feelings and emotions that causes different emotional reactions, feelings and sensations. Therefore, sport and recreation can be seen as an outlet for individuals in satisfying these emotional needs (McCormick, 2015), due to how sports, leisure and recreation can allow the individual to control, create and experience what they see as pleasurable, satisfying and rewarding experiences (Dattilo, 2015b; Kleiber et al., 2011; McCormick, 2015). However, these experiences can be limited if any individual experiences barriers to their engagement in sports and recreation.

### **Barriers to leisure: affecting the individual's experience**

The vast nature of leisure and recreational activities is wide because individuals' choices in activities depends upon what they desire to do, how and in what way. In other words, what they feel would be a satisfying experience and meets their needs and desires, influences their leisure choices and behaviours (Kleiber et al., 2011;

McCormick, 2015). For example, individuals might choose to participate in a sport as they may have the desire to be active, to have a continuous challenge, to master a skill or to be part of a community / group of friends (Chalip, 2015). Whereas other times, the same individuals might choose to travel, visit a specific destination or to go on holiday (Gibson, 2015). Additionally, the engagement in different recreational activities can give individuals specific intrinsic and extrinsic rewards such as feeling self-fulfilled, losing a bit of weight, developing friendships and being / feeling more physically active and mobile (Broach, 2016; Henderson, 2010; McKenney and Wolfe, 2016). Likewise, participating in leisure and recreation is driven by the individual's need to do different things on their own terms, with their own reasons (Bullock and Mahon, 1997; Henderson, 2010). Research has indicated that while participating in leisure and recreation is a fundamental human right (Singleton and Darcy, 2013), leisure and recreation is also a fundamental human need in order to feel fulfilled, satisfied and happy in life (Dattilo, 2012, 2015a; Stumbo et al., 2011). This is because to feel positive within ourselves and satisfied with life, individuals need to feel like their own person and that they have control of what they do and how they do it (Dattilo, 2015a).

Whilst the value of sport and recreation cannot be underestimated as any form of leisure and recreation can give individuals that ability and time to personally experience and benefit from an activity (Dattilo, 2015b; Kleiber et al., 2011; Mock et al., 2015). Barriers to experiencing sport and recreation can hinder, limit or even prevent individuals from experiencing sport and recreation to the optimum. Barriers such as a lack of finance, negative attitudes from others, environmental barriers such as stairs, a lack of opportunities to participate and even the way in which individuals think that '*I can't*', can limit their ability to participate fully in sport and recreation (Darcy et al., 2017; Dattilo, 2012; Kasser and Lytle, 2013). Hence, if some individuals face barriers to participate within sport and recreational activities - whether that is psychological, physical, societal, environmental and / or attitudinal barriers, then this goes against the idea of inclusion and limit / totally prevents individuals from participating in sport and recreation (Dattilo, 2012). This is because being:

*“...**included** is to be considered a part of the whole, a part of a group. **Inclusion** then involves the presence of someone or something in a group”*  
(Dattilo, 2012: 30 - the bold wording is presented as occurred)

As a result, if an individual with Cerebral Palsy or a similar neurological condition face barriers to participation, the principles that they are fully involved and part of a group / activity is not true. In essence, the individual is still being limited / prevented from experiencing the activity to the optimum. But for us to understand clearly the nature of how we can remove barriers for individuals with Cerebral Palsy and similar neurological conditions, it is firstly important to understand more about what are barriers and why they occur.

#### **How do barriers occur?**

As identified above, there are different types of barriers (such as financial, attitudinal, environmental and personal barriers), which limit and sometimes totally prevent the individual from engaging in sport and recreation (Darcy et al., 2017; Dattilo, 2012). This is because to engage in sport and recreation, depending upon the activity, individuals might need some sort of finance, transportation, a space for them to do the activity in, people’s willingness to interact with them if it is a social activity, time and energy as well as a sense that they will enjoy the activity (Darcy et al., 2017). As a result, if the individual faces any constraint, this could affect the individual’s experience depending upon to how they are able to negotiate the constraint (Lyu et al., 2013). For example, on their study on parents’ perceptions of their children’s leisure experiences when participating in a recreational activity with a disability, Schleien et al. (2014) found that when recreational staff or volunteers do not understand the individuals’ needs and abilities not only the individual and their families’ experiences distress from the situation. The individual’s experience of the activity is also interrupted and turns negative by the issues experienced. Consequently, such barriers might be negotiated by the parent assisting their son or daughter in the activity instead of the recreational worker, or such distress has caused the child and family not to participate in the activity anymore (Schleien et al., 2014). Similarly, when talking to a Paralympic athletics coach, Bush and Silk (2013) discovered that the cost of the right equipment is a major hurdle that

individuals with moderate to severe impairments need to get over to participate in sport effectively and without any trouble. Likewise, leisure constraints might be negotiated by the individual from, for example, choosing another piece of equipment which is cheaper or choosing another activity which they find easier or more inclusive (Lyu et al., 2013). Therefore, for someone with a disability, negotiating constraints can be more problematic as their impairments may provide them with additional difficulties and, as a consequence, can act as a higher barrier.

Overall, barriers and constraints are not just things which get in the way of people. But, they can limit or prevent the individual from experiencing the activity as well as diluting the enjoyment and satisfaction in doing an activity (Lyu et al., 2013). Even in a competitive sports context, barriers to performing to someone's maximum can limit the athlete (Bush and Silk, 2013). As a result, it therefore becomes important to understand how inclusive sport and recreation can be created and effectively created (Dattilo, 2012; Darcy et al., 2017; Singleton and Darcy, 2013). Therefore, the next section will be based upon understanding how to create effective sport and recreation inclusion practices.

### **Creating effective sports and recreation inclusion practices**

As the previous section indicates, creating an inclusive environment does not just mean there is a requirement of a lift or a ramp. There is a requirement to understand what is needed to get the individual involved and to meet their needs (Dattilo, 2012; Singleton and Darcy, 2013). Whilst it would be difficult to meet the needs of a wide range of individuals, it is essential to meet these needs. As Kasser and Lytle (2013) points out, inclusivity is about not just making modifications but also making the activity accessible, adapting aspects of the activity where appropriate and creating a welcoming and respectful environment which makes the individual feel no less different to someone else. As a result, positive attitudes, understanding the needs and wants of the individual as well as adapting the activity when appropriate, are fundamental aspects in creating an inclusive environment.

The idea that inclusion is just about welcoming an individual with a disability is not totally true as whilst a welcome can be a positive thing, people's overall attitudes to individuals with disabilities can still affect the atmosphere, the delivery of an activity and the experience (Allison et al., 2016; Devine, 2004; Oliver and Barnes, 2012). This is because attitudes can be seen as beliefs or opinions that people have which influences them to think in a certain way, within certain situations (Devine, 2004; Devine and Lashua, 2002). Whether or not people's attitudes are true or not, as well as whether they can be argued against or not by someone else, depends on the nature of the beliefs, another persons' point of view and the context of the argument (Devine, 2004; Oliver and Barnes, 2012). However, what can be known is that different attitudes can have an effect on people, what they do, who they are, their wellbeing and their feeling of being accepted within a group or society (Devine, 2004; Devine and Lashua, 2002; Oliver and Barnes, 2012). Therefore, making assumptions about people and pre-judging whether they will fit into a group just based upon stereotyping rather than understanding their characteristics, opinions and interests, influences the disregard of individuals' needs, wants and desires, as well as their human right to choose and have autonomy (Devine and Lashua, 2002; Singleton and Darcy, 2013). This is because prejudgements just assumes the individual and what they may want, need and desire. Additionally, such situations can influence a state of control, controlling the individual and limiting them from wanting to do what they want due to making decisions for the individual without their consent or interests at heart (Devine and Piatt, 2013). Likewise, it becomes important to respect the wishes, wants and desires of the individuals with Cerebral Palsy and similar conditions and have an open mind about what the individual can do and want for themselves in life (Devine and Lashua, 2002; Devine and Piatt, 2013). Similarly, having a positive attitude encourages a sense of openness to learn what can be done and achieved (Devine, 2004; Devine and Lashua, 2002).

In addition to having positive attitudes, it is also fundamentally important to understand the needs and abilities of the individual. As Singleton and Darcy (2013) as well as Dattilo (2012) suggest, different individuals will have different abilities which mean that they would possibly require specific adaptations whether that is physical (such as ramps or lifts), sensory (such as assistance in negotiating an

environment) or in the communication amongst a group of people. However, as Singleton and Darcy (2013) also suggest, it is important to understand what the individual can do and want in terms of assistance. For example, an individual might be able to do an activity which is adapted easily and want to do the activity with less adaptations next time so that they can experience the activity in more of its natural form (Bullock and Mahon, 1997). Also, as noted by Goodley and Runswick-Cole (2010) and discussed by Devine and Mobily (2017), an adapted activity which is underestimating the individual's abilities is patronising to the individual, assuming them and what they could do and want. As a result, when creating an inclusive environment, it becomes fundamentally important for anyone to understand the needs and abilities of the individual as well as what they want and do not want.

A final part of making an inclusive environment is the ability to recognise what adaptations have to be made and, as a result, in what way. This is because making adaptations is not necessarily about just adapting facilities, but is about understanding what and, if at all, needs adapting (Dattilo, 2012; Kunstler and Daly, 2010). Adaptations can be seen as appropriate changes that are made to an activity or an environment which help an individual to overcome physical, cognitive, sensory and communicative barriers that they would encounter, so that they can engage more effectively in that particular activity or environment (Dattilo, 2012; Kunstler and Daly, 2010). As a result, it is fundamental to understand what the individual or a group of individuals require and how the appropriate adjustments can be made (Kunstler and Daly, 2010; Singleton and Darcy, 2013). Such adaptations might be to do with the physical environment, the equipment or support which the individual could use, or the type of instructions that the individual receives from the possible leader of the activity (Dattilo, 2012). The adaptations might be big, small or none at all (Kunstler and Daly, 2010). The main point which should be emphasised is that the adaptations are only appropriate to the individual's or individuals' needs.

## Conclusion

The main aim of our research article was to provide an introduction to inclusion in sport and recreation, looking at why it matters in sport and recreation as well as how to create an effective inclusive environment. Similarly, sport and recreation participation can be seen as a basic human right that individuals with Cerebral Palsy and related conditions have, not just because leisure and recreation is a legal right under international law, but because recreation participation as a whole regardless of the shape and size it might be, can be seen as a human need. A need which can act as a space which in turn allows the individual to enjoy, relax, unwind, develop skills, pursue a challenge, visit a place or to socially interact with other people if they want to. Simply, recreation is a space for the individual. However, particularly for individuals with disabilities, barriers to sport and recreation can limit and, sometimes, prevent the individual from engaging in that experience, engaging in that fundamental human right to enjoy, be yourself and to have that recreational space.

To provide individuals with that sport and recreational opportunity, inclusion has to be created. Inclusion is not just about welcoming and making general adaptations. It is about three things - *having positive attitudes, understanding the needs and abilities of the individual or a group of individuals and creating adaptations which are appropriate to the individual or a group*. Within this approach, it can therefore be seen that the creation of inclusive sport and recreation is becoming inclusive through the emphasis being on the individual being seen as a person, the individual having the appropriate adaptations / support that they need and the individual experiencing an activity not as a 'special' person with a disability, but as an ordinary person.

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