

Sheffield City Trust – A Focus on Disability Sport

Background

In 2010, the charity 'Within Reach' was formed in partnership with Sheffield City Council (SCC) to support a range of disability sport and physical activity programmes across Sheffield subsidised by funding from Sport England. Between 2010 and 2018 over 7,000 people engaged in hundreds of activity sessions organised via Activity Sheffield¹ and many of these groups and clubs are still operating today as a legacy of this work.

Funded Disability Officer Post

When the Sport England funding for 'Inclusive Sport Sheffield' which was run by Activity Sheffield came to an end in 2018, SCT committed to continue and develop this valuable work. SCT used the opportunity to recruit for a disability officer post to ensure opportunities for disabled people continued to grow within Sheffield. The disability officer role included protecting, sustaining and growing activities which were happening in SCT venues, increasing income streams and ensuring the offer of inclusive activities was on the agenda of the SCT board.

In 2018/19 a new Disability Officer post was created by SCT for 1-day per week. The aim of the role was to coordinate disability sport in the City and act as a point of contact for disabled sports clubs in Sheffield. Dawn Wood was successfully recruited and brought with her a wealth of experience working in disability sport in Sheffield. Previously she worked in a similar role within the Council, as a teaching assistant, as a teacher and then as a Sports Coordinator delivering sessions within a special school. Currently, she works three days a week within a School Sports Partnership, and one day a week as Disability Officer for SCT.

"Dawn's knowledge of disability sport in Sheffield is incredible. She's the 'go-to' person in the city, she's influential and her experience is invaluable." - Tom Hughes, Yorkshire Sport Foundation (YSF)

"Without Dawn having that link to some of these groups, we probably wouldn't have had the opportunity to get into some of these groups, so it's enabled us to do that and she's been influential in setting a lot of those groups up." - Gareth Hayden, SCC

The remit of the Disability Officer role includes:

- To chair and drive the Sheffield Disability Network meetings and coordinate events
- To visit and support club activity across the city, specifically SCT hosted / led activities
- To support and promote SCT to be more inclusive and supportive of the wider disability network
- To encourage greater integration and partnership / cross-sector working and propose funding opportunities

There are additional benefits derived from having the Disability Officer role positioned within SCT, as there is greater freedom, less onerous paperwork and red tape to negotiate. This enables the work that Dawn does to be organic and develop where the conversations are happening and where the energy is. As a result, things happen more quickly and spontaneously which, when it comes to voluntary organisations and funding opportunities, is often needed.

¹ Activity Sheffield was the former leisure department within Sheffield City Council.

“She’s an encyclopaedia of knowledge of people, she’s not afraid to take on the powers that be and be that disruptor in the system. In the most positive way she’s a loose cannon, she’ll just float around, go anywhere, go where the conversation is. She’s an invaluable asset that anyone can call upon, she’ll work with anyone, at any time. She’s incredibly well trusted.” - Tom Hughes, YSF

The Disability Sports Network

As part of Dawn’s work with SCT, she has been influential in allowing the work of the Disability Sport Network to continue, which has been developed to continue the work of Within Reach and progress disability sport and activity.

“Ultimately people are around the table and have attached themselves to the Network because Dawn is involved. She’s infectious.” - Tom Hughes, YSF

The network is also supported by SCC who work with Dawn and SCT to bring together disability sport partners from across Sheffield (and wider Yorkshire) in pursuit of the overall common goal of increasing opportunities for disability sport in Sheffield. The network aims to ensure that people are not working in isolation and provision is coordinated across the city. The network meets three times per year in a coordination and facilitation role, and to help build and strengthen partnerships.

“The Disability Sport Network links into all the other movements and ‘Move More’... so it links in, it’s not just a standalone group.” - Gareth Hayden, SCC.

The network is responsible for identifying funding opportunities and bid writing, providing information and support to establish new groups and clubs, as well as coordinating networking opportunities, marketing, and training for volunteers. The network also enables greater awareness of what is going on in the city for disability sport and how it can be linked up and developed with people and organisations working collaboratively.

“It’s (the network) the catalyst. The stone in the pond analogy with the ripple effect. We have the networks in the city that exist and when funding opportunities come to increase participation in sport our respective roles and the pieces of the puzzle that we play, that’s how it feeds in... You probably couldn’t attribute it just to SCT or Dawn but if you track the whole journey back it probably comes down to the work that Dawn and the Within Reach project did.” - Tom Hughes, YSF.

An impact of the network and the benefit it can create is demonstrated by the partnership with YSF. Tom Hughes, Sport Development Manager at YSF was approached by two disability charities who wanted to deliver annual events in Sheffield.

“I don’t think it’s a coincidence that they, one want to host in Sheffield and two want to host it at EISS. We’re victims of our own success to an extent that we can get large numbers of their target audiences into the city and doing it. After consulting with Dawn and David Bly at SCT about venues I’ve been able to turn around to those organisations and say yes, we can do it...but it’s in my mind, it’s built on the back of the success of the annual event that’s been created since 2017.” - Tom Hughes, YSF.

Annual Celebration Event

After the funding of Activity Sheffield came to an end, the Disability Sport Network wanted to celebrate the work that had happened so far for disability sport in Sheffield, and in particular the work

that Mike Elliot and others had done with Within Reach. It was here that the annual celebration event was born.

"It's about celebrating what there is in the city and showcasing what and how people can get involved." - Gareth Hayden, SCC

The event is hosted at the English Institute of Sport Sheffield (EISS) over a weekend. One day is for adults and one day for children with around 250 people attending each day. Coaches from a variety of sports travel from across the country to be a part of the weekend and often offer up their time and deliver activities for free. This enables participants to take part in new activities and sports at the event and see what the city and disability sport has to offer. A number of partners are involved in organising the event and Dawn's role and influence with SCT has ensured that the group are able to have discounted rates from SCT facilities.

"She's been influential with people like David Bly from SCT, talking about the event with them and enabling us to give it as a reduced rate so we can make it affordable to people who come and attend. She's influenced that but Sheffield City Trust have supported in making some of that happen and continue to do so and without that it wouldn't be possible." - Gareth Hayden, SCC

The organisers of the event have seen numerous examples of people coming to the event, getting involved and trying new sports whilst they are there. One example of this was a lady who came along for the first time last year and took part in Wheelchair Rugby.

"She absolutely loved it and she's now playing for the Eagles wheelchair team but without having that there (the opportunity to play Rugby at the celebration event) she would never have tried wheelchair rugby and never had that opportunity to take part. And obviously now she's going from strength to strength and she's playing for the Eagles wheelchair team." - Gareth Hayden, SCC

The future:

Build on their key successes

The Disability Sport Network and its partners, and the annual celebration event have created a solid foundation on which to build on. They have the potential to grow the awareness and influence of disability sport in the city and act on the opportunities to create that change. Going forwards the Disability Sport Network hope to continue the work that they do within the city and involve more partners to ensure they continue to work collaboratively and efficiently.

SEND Schools

As a result of targeted work by the Disability Officer, there has been an increased use in facilities by SEND schools. The Disability Officer has been able to build up trusted relationships and improve confidence in using the facilities. In addition, the increased usage has also allowed feedback to be provided to venues resulting in small improvements being made at an operational level which has further enabled the all-round experience for SEND schools.

A Focus on disability Cycling

In 2017, the Special Olympics National Summer games returned to Sheffield for the first time since 1993. It was during this time that Julie, a local resident, had a chance meeting with Dawn Wood and attended some events taking place at Forge Valley. The family were keen cyclists and wanted to

explore opportunities for their children to participate in cycling in a safe, traffic free environment. That initial meeting with Dawn and introduction to Forge Valley cycle track has led to a thriving disability cycle club which is ever expanding. Dawn has assisted Julie every step of the way, from helping with funding applications for new bikes, equipment and storage space, affiliating the club with British Cycling, recruiting coaches and volunteers, and ensuring all the necessary safeguarding procedures are in place. Over 30 participants currently take part on a weekly basis and during the winter months when training can't happen outside because of the weather conditions, a separate extension of the club has now been set up providing Pilates sessions with a trained Pilates teacher. The Pilates teacher has experience with neurological disabilities, and she now runs sessions to help members build up and strengthen their core which is all essential for learning to ride a bike.

"I'm not a sports club person, I cycle but running a sports club was not in my blood. Dawn could see my enthusiasm though and she's helped and guided me every step of the way. Without that chance meeting with Dawn none of this would have happened, she has a true understanding of our young people, and she has empowered me to be creative."

"Dawn goes into schools and gets to know families very well, she has signposted many of our members to us."

A focus on DanceStars

DanceStars is a dance class for young people with learning and physical disabilities which started in 2015. Initially the class was able to run with funding from Activity Sheffield. In 2016, the funding for the class ran out and so a group of parents decided to form a constituted group to help ensure the class continued. The class was able to run for a few years by charging participants enough to cover the costs of the room hire and the dance teacher and relying on parents to volunteer.

One of the parents involved in organising the class met Dawn, disability officer at SCT who suggested and helped the group apply for funding. *“When I met Dawn, she said ‘Well, you should go for this funding and what about this and how about you expand the group’. She worked with me to get that awards for all application and what she also managed to do for us was she exposed our group to all sorts of different activities.”*

The group was awarded the funding which has helped to expand the dance group and given them opportunities to do more activities and diversify to include a drama element.

“When we got the funding and we really started promoting it, we were able to offer free dance classes and vouchers for swimming...we got t-shirts which the kids designed. It really took off. We also run a drama group, actually on the success of funding from the dance group, we set up a drama group.” - Community club volunteer (Dance Stars).

“It gives our kids the opportunity to try different activities, indoors and outdoors, things that they probably wouldn't try or have the confidence to try.” - Community club volunteer (Dance Stars).

In addition, Dawn has signposted the group to opportunities which have enabled the group to perform at events such as the opening ceremony of the Special Olympics and half time at Bramall Lane during a Sheffield United match. This has raised the aspirations of the young people and given them opportunities they have never had before.

“It's given our kids some brilliant opportunities and the opportunity to perform, you know, in a bigger arena in front of an audience.”

The funding also enabled the class to introduce a younger age group and since 2015, the class has grown in capacity. The dance teacher now delivers two classes for different age groups and abilities each week. With 15/20 participants taking part over the two weekly classes. There are now discussions about introducing a third class, as the demand for the classes has grown. In turn, this has increased the demand on the parent volunteers who are now in the process of handing the management and organisation of DanceStars over to the dance teacher who delivers the classes.

For more information about DanceStars and the work it does, and to hear from the participants and people involved please see two links below, one to the DanceStars website and one to a film about DanceStars and the people involved.

DanceStars website: [Dancestars Sheffield](#)

DanceStars film, Breaking Glass Ceilings: [Dancestars - Breaking Glass Ceilings - YouTube](#)