

# We all belong

## Our strategy



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# Introduction by our Honorary President

We all belong in sports and activities. Yet many disabled children and adults don't feel that they do. At school, in the local park or working out in a nearby gym, we all have the right to welcoming, inclusive, and accessible opportunities. The right to choose how we want to be active. Be that taking part, spectating, employment or volunteering.

What matters is different for everyone. Some of us do not experience the barriers that others do and some of us experience more. There are many factors that affect how active we are or want to be. It can be based on where we live, what setting we prefer and the life stages we are in.

The reality is that society remains an unfair and unjust place for many disabled people. Every single day there are stories up and down our country of disabled children and adults missing out on the joy that being active can bring. We must not accept this.

Now is the time to be bolder and unapologetically ambitious. Disabled people must be included in conversations, listened to more, and their feedback acted upon. Policies and systems in our society need to work for and include everybody, not just the privileged few.

It should not matter how old you are or whether you are beginning an active lifestyle or a talented sports star. There must be a level playing field for everybody. Join us in making it happen.

## Tanni, Baroness Grey-Thompson



# Foreword from our Chief Executive

We asked questions. We listened. We challenged our own thinking. This strategy is the result of a powerful collaboration of knowledge, insight and consultation. We reviewed and updated our vision and mission to move with the environment we work in and to better meet disabled people's needs.

This strategy addresses the major barriers that disabled children and adults face when trying to be active or work in sports and activities. We must be responsive to the society we live and work in and adapt our solutions to what disabled people need.

Although long overdue, we cannot achieve meaningful inclusion for disabled people in a short period of time. It must be genuine and continuous. Uniquely, this is why our strategy does not have an end date. We believe our three key ambitions tackle the important broad issues and when addressed will drive meaningful change. We need space and time to embed and drive that change. We will develop yearly plans for the three ambitions with regular measurement reporting that allows us to focus deeper on the issues.

To truly shape a better society for disabled people to enjoy the benefits of being active, it will take collaboration and investment. It will take your passion and determination.

We believe this strategy shows the right next steps.

Thank you to everyone who got involved and helped us in shaping our strategy. Whether you have worked with us for years or are new to our work, collaboration is essential. We hope you join our movement and work with us to change lives.

**Adam Blaze**





# Our strategy

## Our vision

A future where all disabled people feel they belong in sports and activities.

## Our mission

To improve opportunities to be active, empowering disabled people to get involved in sports and activities in the way they choose.

We will work with disabled people and an alliance of committed partners to build a movement for change.

## Our ambitions



### Ambition 1

Sports and activities meet disabled people's needs.



### Ambition 2

Disabled people influence campaigning, policy and decision making.



### Ambition 3

Address inequalities by working with others.

## Our values

### We care

We are passionate about what we do, and who we do it for.

### We unite

We collaborate with others to achieve greater outcomes.

### We champion

We recognise everyone's voice must be heard if we are to provide equitable places to live, work and thrive.

# Insight snapshot

The number of disabled people in the UK is 16.1 million (24% of the population).

- 26% of women (8.8 million) and 22% of men (7.2 million) are disabled.
- 11% of children are disabled – a rise from 7% in 2012-2013.
- 23% of working age adults are disabled – a rise from 16% in 2012-2013.
- 45% of State Pension age adults are disabled – this figure has been between 42% and 46% in every year of the past decade.

**DWP Family Resources Survey 2022-23.**

Only 60% of disabled people, and 65% of non-disabled people, agree that physical activity and exercise is for disabled people.

**Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24.**

Four in 10 (43%) disabled people feel they have the chance to be as active as they want to be, compared to seven in 10 (69%) non-disabled people.

**Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24.**

Disabled adults are almost twice as likely as non-disabled people to be physically inactive (40.8% vs 20.7%).

**Sport England, Active Lives Adult Survey, November 2022-23.**

Only a quarter (25%) of disabled children say they take part in sport and activity all of the time at school, compared to 41% of non-disabled children.

**Activity Alliance, My Active Future: including every child, March 2020.**



Nearly a third of the adult population in England (around 12 million people) are in a lower socioeconomic group. Disabled working-age adults are more than twice as likely to be in poverty than non-disabled adults.

**Joseph Rowntree Foundation,  
UK Poverty Report 2021-22.**

Disabled people are less than half as likely to 'see people like them' working, and volunteering in sport and physical activity.

**Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24.**

Six in 10 disabled people (59%) say they rely on their benefits or financial assistance to be active.

**Activity Alliance Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24.**

Around a third of disabled people report having difficulty physically accessing outdoor spaces like parks, countryside, or woodland (32%).

**Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24.**

Almost half (47%) of disabled people fear losing their benefits if they are seen to be more physically active.

**Activity Alliance and Dwarf Sports Association UK, The Activity Trap 2018.**

Two-thirds (66%) of disabled people who felt lonely agreed that being active could help them feel less lonely.

**Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24.**

Eight in 10 (81%) disabled people agree they should have more of a say in policies that affect them.

**Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23.**

The wellbeing benefit for disabled people meeting the Chief Medical Officer's weekly 'active' guideline (150+ minutes) is high; +0.406 in life satisfaction, a social value of £6,200 per person per year.

**Activity Alliance, Social value of disabled people's physical activity 2024.**



# Ambition 1

## Sports and activities meet disabled people's needs.

We will make a noticeable change so disabled people can access and feel the benefits of taking part.

“ Thanks to Get Out Get Active, playing wheelchair basketball has changed my life. My social life improved as a result, as I made friends with my teammates, who also had a variety of impairments and could understand what I was going through. The coach, Rob, also became more than just a mentor, and is now a firm friend. ”

**Lucas, Get Out Get Active participant**

### What we know:

- **Opportunity:** Four in 10 (43%) disabled people feel they have the chance to be as active as they desire, compared to seven in 10 (69%) non-disabled people (Activity Alliance Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24).
- **Representation:** Disabled people are less than half as likely to 'see people like them' working, and volunteering in sport and physical activity. (Activity Alliance Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24).
- **Perceptions and attitudes:** Only 60% of disabled people, and 65% of non-disabled people, agree that physical activity and exercise is for disabled people (Activity Alliance Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24).

### We will use our expertise and insight to embed inclusive practices.

Disabled people are not as active as non-disabled people and remain the least active group in our population. This is due to many reasons, and often not through choice. These include systemic inequalities (the wider issues like finance, health, education) and negative attitudes (like stereotypes and fear).

Choice and independence are crucial, yet disabled people tell us in our research that there are not enough opportunities to be active. We must improve the availability, variety and affordability of activities.

Our training and expertise will support the people who make activities happen to feel confident and skilled. These people can be the makers and breakers for disabled people to take part, whether teachers, instructors or coaches.

### We will better understand and act on inequalities within the workforce.

Representation matters. Even with the little data there is for disabled people working across sports and activities, we know it is far from good enough. We must address the deep-rooted development and employment barriers that prevent disabled people starting or remaining in roles. Recruitment should be as inclusive as participation opportunities, and we will support employers to tackle the inequalities.

## We will address and challenge perceptions.

Negative perceptions and attitudes hold people back. These can be our own psychological barriers or stereotypes formed by others. They create fear, mistrust and put disabled people off wanting to be involved. Disabled people told us they felt there can be a lot of misconceptions and lack of empathy by some members of the non-disabled public towards disabled people.

We will grow our insight portfolio, share good practice and support others to improve their plans, so disabled people feel less excluded. As we continue to challenge views and biases, we will push for disabled people's needs to be prioritised at every level, in every community.



## Connecting the community with wheelchair basketball coach Rob in Nottingham.

A thriving wheelchair basketball club in Nottingham was made possible thanks to dedicated sports coach Rob and Activity Alliance's flagship programme Get Out Get Active (GOGA).

“ I had been coaching wheelchair basketball at Nottingham University during my degree. Funding became available thanks to GOGA and I was approached to set up a community wheelchair basketball club. There was never any doubt in my mind about doing it.

Ten years on, the club is still going strong with disabled people of all ages and abilities taking part. What's great is that they bring their families along too. Everyone gets in a wheelchair and plays together. It levels the playing field.

There are so many social and physical benefits. People come, not just to get fit, but to make friends, have a good time and be part of a community. ”

Rob, who is a wheelchair user, says his entire life has been shaped by sport and activity.

“ Sport and physical activity has allowed me to meet people, learn new skills, improve my physical and mental health, compete at an international level, and improve my own confidence.

We can't underestimate the support we've had from GOGA. Without it we wouldn't have the club. The funding provided the sports wheelchairs, the equipment, the sports hall time, the marketing material, but they also gave us the advice, knowledge and motivation to get it off the ground. ”

Led by Activity Alliance and made possible by founding funder Spirit of 2012 and additional investment from Sport England and London Marathon Foundation, GOGA has reached over 55,000 disabled and non-disabled people. It brings people together to be active in creative and innovative ways.



# Ambition 2

## Disabled people influence campaigning, policy and decision making.

We will champion disabled people's voices to advocate for change.

“ Being active and reaping the benefits from activity does not happen in isolation. Whilst some actions are long-term and will not happen overnight, there are things we can fix within the system at local and national level. These changes will make society better for everyone, including disabled people. ”

**Kamran Mallick, Chief Executive, Disability Rights UK's foreword in The Activity Trap**

### What we know:

- **Influence:** Eight in 10 (81%) disabled people agree they should have more of a say in policies that affect them. (Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022-23).
- **Access:** Disabled people are more likely to face structural inequalities. Six in 10 (59%) say they rely on their benefits or financial assistance to be active. (Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24).

- **Investment:** Increasing investment for disabled people to meet the Chief Medical Officer's weekly 'active' guideline (150+ minutes) would increase their wellbeing benefit; +0.406 in life satisfaction, a social value of £6,200 per person per year. (Activity Alliance, Social value of disabled people's physical activity 2024).

### **We will provide opportunities so more disabled people can be heard.**

It is crucial that we continue to champion disabled people and work as allies to undo biases. Disabled people tell us that they often feel overlooked and underrepresented in many ways. There are significant barriers that make equal access to sports and activities feel far removed from their everyday lives. Providing spaces and opportunities for disabled people, and parents, carers and supporters of disabled people, to share their experiences is important so that we can understand and improve activities.

### **We will lead on, contribute and respond to important policy discussions consultations and campaigns.**

We know that representation is not as diverse as it should or could be. For true inclusion to happen, disabled people belong in roles that make decisions or shape policy.

We need to widen everyone's access to, and our involvement in, policy engagement. It will take more than decision makers in sports and activities to fix inactivity and the deep-rooted inequalities for disabled people. We need government commitment and leadership, across education, health, employment, and transport. Our growing wealth of insight and lived experiences will help us to influence these conversations.

### **We will maximise our and partners' investment.**

Using our learning from previous programmes, we will push to influence more meaningful and accessible commissioning processes. We must maximise our and partners' investment, so we get the best for the people we champion.

Disabled people are more likely to consider sports and activities to be a luxury rather than a necessity. We must ensure being active is possible with the cost of living.



## **Turning insight into policy change and action.**

Our wealth of insight includes a powerful report, **The Activity Trap**. Commissioned by Dwarf Sports Association UK (DSAuk) in 2018, it highlighted an ongoing concern. It explored the fear among disabled people of losing benefits if seen to be active. Almost half (47%) of the disabled people who took part agreed that a fear of losing benefits was a barrier to them being more active. Over half (65%) also stated that they rely on benefits to help them to be active.

The fear is so prevalent that we included it in our asks within our manifesto for the Government in 2024. We continue to campaign for changes to the benefits system and the need for assessment and guideline reviews.

Our analysis of Sport England data helped to open further discussions around PE in schools for disabled children and young people. We saw front page coverage and

inclusion in a nationwide campaign led by ParalympicsGB. It was an example of the power our research can have in putting pressure on the leaders of not only sports organisations, but the country.

The process of policy change can be frustrating and slow, but we are in the room lobbying for and with disabled people. Our Vice President, John Amaechi OBE, highlighted how important this is:

“ Nearly two-thirds of disabled people told us in our research that the government should be focusing on making activities affordable to help more people to be active. We need the government to understand the wider challenges that people are facing around cost of living and match it with the level of investment, innovation and policy change that proves they are taking these issues seriously. ”



# Ambition 3

## Address inequalities by working with others.

We will build a powerful collective voice with partners to positively impact disabled people.

“ Football has the power to bring people together, remove social barriers and be a force for good across all communities. That’s why we teamed up with Activity Alliance to support grassroots clubs in growing disability provision, providing them with a toolkit and training opportunities to help clubs to become more inclusive of disabled people, both on-and off-pitch. ”

**David Reeve, The FA’s Senior National Development Manager**

### **We will work with, and grow, a movement of committed partners to tackle the inequalities.**

We cannot achieve our vision alone. Millions of disabled people are still missing out on significant physical, social, and health and wellbeing benefits. We know collaboration is best and sharing the challenge also means greater impact. This will include members, funders, and policy and decision makers – without them, change is not possible.

### **We will collaborate with expert partners to maximise our engagement.**

For some places and spaces, we know there are expert organisations who are more knowledgeable and skilled than us. Working with these other partners can improve opportunities for disabled people across a wide range of communities.

### **We will build our understanding in and add value to place-based activities.**

Where disabled children and adults live, work and learn can vary in experiences and investment. Our partnerships and programmes teams who specialise and engage with people across the regions are crucial. Through this work, we learn and share better practices.

We will also continue growing our partnerships with the home nation disability sport organisations and international friends, raising awareness and tackling wider issues.

## What we know:

- **Collaboration:** Over two-thirds (68%) of our stakeholders say our support has helped them to change attitudes about disabled people. (Activity Alliance Stakeholder Survey 2023).
- **Intersectionality:** There are 16.1 million disabled people in the UK. Disabled people have a diverse range of backgrounds and are part of every age group and community. (DWP Family Resources Survey, 2022-23).
- **Place:** Sense of belonging and community underpin the wider transformational benefits of sport. (Building Stronger Communities, Access Sport, 2024).



## Teaming up to improve football clubs.

We were proud to work alongside **The FA** to improve football for disabled people in England. The partnership aimed to create and sustain a culture across the game, where disabled people have access to opportunities and feel they truly belong on and off the pitch.

With our support they created the **Disability Training for Clubs: Journey to Inclusion**. This is a training package to encourage more grassroots clubs to open their doors to disabled people, providing them with the opportunity to play and get involved with football in their local community.

Two core elements form the training: a disability toolkit for clubs and disability training workshop for clubs. The toolkit is filled with information, practical tips and resources to help clubs to create an action plan. This can be implemented to start or grow opportunities for disabled people at their club. The workshops, hosted both locally and nationally, bring the toolkit to life through knowledgeable tutors. They take a deeper look into the barriers disabled people face when accessing football and how clubs can overcome them.

Phil Heap, The FA National Development Manager (Disability Pathway) stated:

“ Our partnership with Activity Alliance has been integral to the development of our Journey to Inclusion toolkit and training programme. We’ve been able to access specialist knowledge and support ranging from the design, delivery and analysis of inclusive research which informed the project design, production of the toolkit content, through to tutor training support, embedding inclusive communication principles in resource design, and much more besides.

The toolkit and training launched in December 2023 and in the following six-month period we delivered a flagship national event at St George’s Park alongside 22 localised workshops, attracting 528 delegates, from 303 grassroots football clubs. Most importantly, the workshop is having a positive impact on attendees’ knowledge, competence and confidence to be more inclusive of disabled people. ”





# Measuring our impact

Everything we do at Activity Alliance is led by evidence and insight. As we work toward achieving our vision, our success will be measured through:

- Research and evaluation
- Project and programme monitoring
- Data and analytics

## Collaboratively as an alliance, we will grow our understanding of:



Disabled people's lived experiences of inequalities, barriers and opportunities.



Diversity of disabled people in the sport and activity workforce.



Upholding and advocating a person-centred approach.



Increased workforce competence and confidence.



Opportunities to be active for disabled people.



Strength, commitment and diversity of partnerships and networks.



Perceptions, behaviours and attitudes towards disabled people in sport and activity.



Influencing policy and decision makers.



Strength, scale and impact of investment.

# Who we are

We are the national charity and leading voice for disabled people in sport and activity.

We were formed in 1998 and previously known as the English Federation of Disability Sport. The alliance brings together organisations committed to closing the fairness gap between disabled and non-disabled people's activity levels.

We are proud to be at the centre of influential programmes for disabled people. Our teams specialise in various areas and drive change in disability, inclusion and sport.





# Our commitment to equity and belonging

We promise to ensure everyone feels included and respected.

Activity Alliance is committed to being an organisation where people feel they belong and a place they can thrive in. This is whatever your characteristics, background, or personal circumstance. We are proud to be an equitable employer and partner. We expect the same from our partners and colleagues, right across the board and staff team.

Our work uses the Social Model of Disability. This means people are disabled by the barriers that exist in society and the negative attitudes around them, not by the body or mind. This can include people who do not necessarily use the word 'disabled' themselves, including people who are Deaf, neurodivergent, or have visible or non-visible impairments, and long-term health conditions.

We understand how the different characteristics of a person's identity can also influence the barriers they face leading to inequality and privilege. By taking and promoting a person-centred approach we can understand our differences and use lived experience to improve our knowledge and influence our work.

We want to be a safe, welcoming, considerate, and responsible workplace. We value diversity as a strength, and we are better with greater equality and inclusion. Our ambitious vision and strong values are embedded in our governance and the development of paid and unpaid staff, trustees and volunteers.

The people who we work for and with make us a reputable organisation to know and trust. Nobody should miss opportunities or feel they do not belong at Activity Alliance.



Join the movement with Activity Alliance to ensure more disabled people feel they belong in sports and activities.



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