



## Anna's journey volunteering in sport after acquiring disability

### Profile

**Anna is in her 40s. She has been using a wheelchair since an injury at work led to her becoming disabled, with issues around mobility and dexterity.**

At that time, Anna was a children and young people's support worker at a local authority, but she had to give up the job.

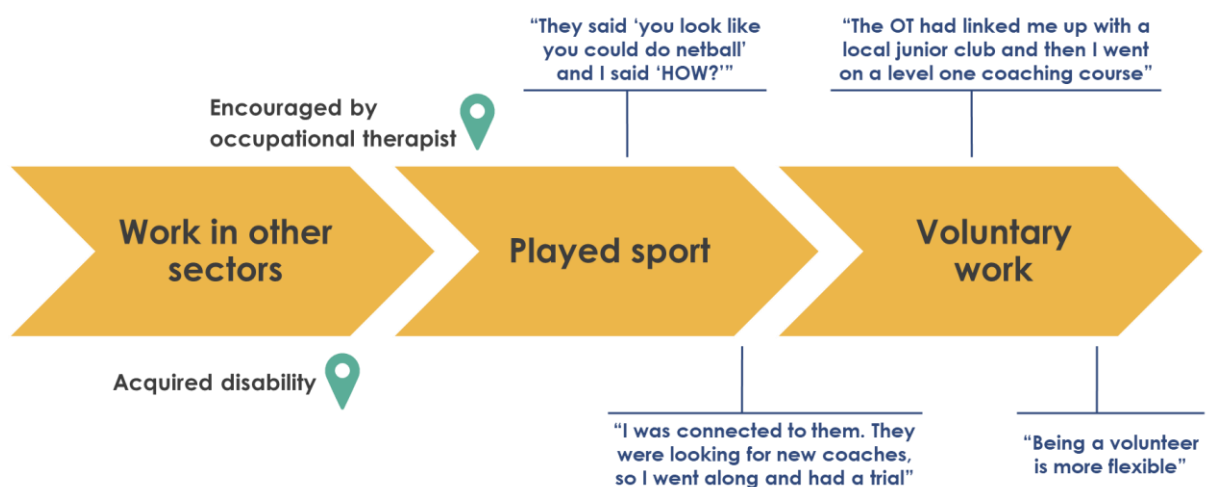
As part of her rehabilitation, Anna took part in a project at a leisure centre, and was able to access support from an occupational therapist (OT) to make adaptations enabling her to engage in sport. Anna didn't do much sport before her injury, but she enjoyed taking part in netball sessions, and with encouragement from the OT, began supporting the coach in sessions and building up her own coaching skills. Anna drew on her previous experience working with young people in order to start coaching disabled children from a local secondary school.

Anna now has a range of qualifications including coaching, officiating and umpiring in netball, and the Boccia Leaders Gold Award. She currently volunteers for 2 days a week, coaching boccia (with disabled participants) and netball (with disabled and non-disabled participants).



**"Before I did sport, I was not wholly me [following my injury]. Being involved in it has given me a purpose, something to look forward to, and a whole new circle of friends."**

### Anna's journey





## How volunteering in sport helped Anna to connect to her old self

Becoming disabled didn't only impact Anna in terms of physical impairment. She could no longer work, and her friends drifted away. She moved nearer to family to get support. All of this affected her sense of self and identity. Anna needed purpose and meaningful activity in her life.

Despite not having previously been a sporty person, participating in sport as part of her occupational therapy, and the support and encouragement of both OT and coaching staff, inspired Anna to get into coaching. Her main concern was what people would think - about 'old school' attitudes towards disability in sport, and stereotypes about having to be 'uber fit, muscly and athletic'. While she encountered some of this, more from parents than young people, Anna found that generally she is well received by the people that she coaches.

Anna doesn't see volunteering as part of a path towards paid work, because of the limitations of her physical health – she thinks she would struggle to manage the 'good days and bad days'. But volunteering is a positive, worthwhile use of her time, and rewarding to see the benefits to the participants she coaches – both disabled people, who she supports and inspires, and non-disabled, who may have their pre-conceptions challenged by seeing a disabled person delivering mainstream sport.



**“It exposed me to lots of fear and judgements. I didn't know if I belonged in the mainstream world. But at the same time, I thought, what's the worst that can happen? Instead of it being 'what if?', I wanted it to be, 'I've tried.'”**

### Barriers

- Negative perceptions of others towards her capability as a coach.
- Inaccessible venues and equipment for wheelchair user.
- Financial disincentive to work because of pensions and benefits rules.

### Enablers

- Support and encouragement from OT, as part of inclusion sport project.
- Positivity and determination to overcome negative perceptions.
- Link with previous professional experience (working with young people).
- Flexibility of voluntary role – less pressure, when compared to a paid role.



**“If it wasn't for that project and that OT, then I would be in a different place. I'd probably be a bit sad and a bit lonely. Because I used to think I didn't have much to offer.”**

