

GIVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE A SPORTING CHANCE: A DRAFT STRATEGY FOR SCOTLAND



RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM

Please Note this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately

1. Name/Organisation

Organisation Name

Down's Syndrome Scotland

Title Mr Ms Mrs Miss Dr Please tick as appropriate

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3. Permissions - I am responding as...

Individual

/

Group/Organisation

Please tick as appropriate

(a) Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site)?

Please tick as appropriate

Yes No

(b) Where confidentiality is not requested, we will make your responses available to the public on the following basis

Please tick **ONE** of the following boxes

(c) The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Government library and/or on the Scottish Government web site).

Are you content for your **response** to be made available?

Please tick as appropriate

Yes No

Yes, make my response, name and address all available

or

Yes, make my response available, but not my name and address

or

Yes, make my response and name available, but not my address

(d) We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Please tick as appropriate

Yes

No

(e) We would like to be able to identify responses that have come from children and young people. You are not required to do so, but if you are **26 years or under** and content to provide details of your age then please **answer the question** below.

What age were you on your last birthday?

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Vision

The draft Strategy sets the following vision: “We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow up actively”.

Q1 Is this the right vision for Scotland?

Yes No

Down’s Syndrome Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation from the Scottish Government. As a charity, we work to improve the quality of life for children and young people with Down’s syndrome. We therefore have a particular interest in the draft strategy on youth sport proposed by the Scottish Government. This evidence is a combination of our professional experience, of the lived experience of our member families,

and members of our Policy Panel who were consulted for this submission.

Down's Syndrome Scotland is of the view that the vision outlined in the draft strategy is the right vision for Scotland. We agree with the overall aim of the strategy to ensure that there are a range of opportunities which motivate and support young people to reach their fullest potential. However we believe that it could emphasise the plight of children and young people with disabilities more strongly.

Due to their condition, children and young people with Down's syndrome are more likely to suffer from health problems such as sleep apnoea or obesity. For them, being involved in sport not only provides an opportunity to socialise and exercise, it also becomes a key element to improve their quality of life and maintain a healthy lifestyle which will work towards diminishing the impact of these problems in the longer term. The earlier children and young people with Down's syndrome learn the importance to be and stay active the more likely they are to enhance their health and wellbeing now and later in life.

People with Down's syndrome need continuous involvement in physical activities from an early age and throughout their life. A strategy on youth sport is therefore welcome but we agree with Patricia Ferguson MSP who declared in the Chamber in the Scottish Parliament last December that she hoped 'the final version of the strategy will acknowledge the additional benefits of physical activity to young people who have disabilities and will ensure that that is recognised and supported' (See Scottish Parliament, *Official Report*, 10 December 2013, p.25504. Available at: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=8837&mode=pdf>).

Q2 Does the draft Strategy provide the right framework to achieve this vision?
Yes No

The framework presented in the strategy does make sense and the five groups outlining the main priorities of the strategy encompass the main issues all partners need to focus on. Nonetheless, the content of this framework remains limited and more information and details would be welcome on the proposed steps to achieve these targets and the resources that will be allocated to these projects.

We would also welcome an addition to the strategy on the benefit of early intervention. This concept is often used with regard to education or childcare policies but it also applies to the issue of sport. It is important to emphasise the need for children to get involved in sport at a very young age. As indicated previously, the sooner children with Down's syndrome and their parents are involved in sport and aware of the benefits it provides, the more likely they are to pursue any physical activity as they grow older.

Q3 How does/could you/your organisation contribute towards achieving the vision?

As a charity, Down's Syndrome Scotland aims to help all its members to reach their full potential. With regard to sport, we began a partnership with the Celtic Foundation in 2011 to provide football coaching courses to children aged 5 to 16 through the 'Ability Counts' programme. These sessions allow children and young people with Down's syndrome to practice an activity which helps them developing their speed and agility skills, as well as their social skills by playing with other children and interacting with staff.

Our Family Support Service team also provides training on Down's syndrome to health and education professionals upon request. We would thus argue that similar training sessions could be run for Physical Education Lead Officers for example or other members of staff within sport facilities as part of the PE Disability Inclusion Training Programme led by Scottish Disability Sport. Down's Syndrome Scotland is thus keen to support new partners in developing activities for children and young people with learning disabilities across Scotland.

Furthermore, along with children taking part in the Celtic Foundation's programme, several of our members are highly accomplished sportsmen and women who are members of the Highland disability swimming team www.facebook.com/pages/Highland-Disability-Swim-Team/237274906315574, of a taekwondo academy or who work as a gym coach for example. Their accomplishments should be more widely recognised and by promoting success stories like these, we may also encourage more children to get involved in sport and perhaps consider some activities that they and their parents had not thought about before.

Great opportunities

Young people told us that they want opportunities to be involved in sport in a range of ways: opportunities to learn; opportunities to have a go; opportunities to develop; opportunities to take part in events and competitions; opportunities to lead; and opportunities to celebrate sport and attend significant sporting events.

Q4 How can we build on the existing opportunities?

Some local authorities have excellent schemes in place to facilitate access to leisure facilities to children and young people with learning disabilities like the Highland Council Plus One Scheme (<http://www.highland.gov.uk/healthandsocialcare/carersupport/plus-one.htm>). There is also helpful guides such as 'A Leisure Guide to Edinburgh for People with Learning Disabilities' published by the Family Advice & Information Resource (FAIR). Moreover, some sport facilities also have excellent staff, willing to support children with disabilities and their work could be more widely recognised. Examples of best practice should be promoted throughout the country and be accessible in various formats to be able to reach as many people as possible.

One parent also told us that Self-Directed Support (SDS) has provided him with more possibilities for his children to take part in sport. His SDS package has for example allowed him to pay for a carer who is a qualified swimming coach to accompany his daughter to the gym and to the swimming-pool.

Q5 Are there other opportunities which should be considered to encourage children and young people to participate in sport?

Yes No

If there are examples of best practice, it is important to recognise that much more should still be done to facilitate the inclusion of children and young people with disabilities into sport. As Gavin Macleod, Chief Executive of Scottish Disability Sport, argued in front of the Health & Sport Committee in January: 'There is a fear factor when it comes to working with disabled athletes and players' adding that 'work could be done to ensure that clubs are open, welcoming and inclusive of athletes with disabilities' (See Scottish Parliament, Health & Sport Committee, Official Report, 14 January 2014, p.4713. Available at: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=8800&mode=pdf>).

One of our members explained to us that her son, who has Down's syndrome, used to play football in a club. However due to the fact that it was expensive and that the staff did not seem to have any patience or enough time to work with children with additional support needs, her son withdrew. He is now playing rugby; staff and other players in the rugby club are very supportive and her son now feels very much part of a sporting team which includes boys of his age. He attends training twice a week and plays games on Sundays. Importantly, the subscription is also significantly less costly than for the other club. As well as emphasising the issue of cost, this case study demonstrates that more training also needs to be undertaken to make staff aware of disabilities and of what conditions like Down's syndrome may entail.

Moreover, another of our members also advises that supportive teachers and personal support assistants are essential in and out of school to keep children motivated and encouraged them to develop their interests. According to him, access to sporting activities could form part of a Child's Plan because such addition would work towards achieving the SHANARRI's aim of 'being Healthy'. Down's Syndrome Scotland supports this suggestion and hopes that the Scottish Government will consider it in greater detail.

It is also important for children and young people to be exposed to many different sports. One father explained to us that he would never have thought that his daughter could become interested in Taekwondo. One session was held at his daughter's primary school and seven years later she is a member of a Taekwondo academy and about to be graded for her blue belt. School is a crucial medium to expose children to a variety of sports available to them and it is important to ensure that they receive as much encouragement as possible to find a sport that they are interested in and will enjoy.

Great people

We agree with young people that to achieve our vision we need to develop and support leaders and workers who are committed, capable and confident.

Q6 How can we build on what we already do to develop and support leaders and workers to provide high quality experiences for children and young people?

As indicated previously, leaders and workers need to receive more training about supporting children and young people with learning disabilities. Kim Atkinson from the Scottish Sport Association declared at the Health & Sport Committee's session on the community sport inquiry that 'it is a case of enabling and empowering people. The community empowerment agenda is enormous' (See Scottish Parliament, Health & Sport Committee, Official Report, 14 January 2014, p.4717. Available at: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/28862.aspx?r=8800&mode=pdf>).

Not only is it important to enable and empower children, it is also essential to empower people who work with them so that children and young people receive the best support possible.

It is also worth noting the issue of competitive sports and community clubs. Not everyone is interested in competitive sports and it is important that those who do not wish to compete are still given opportunities to practise the sport they like. One of our parents noted that recreational level sport seems to be easier to accommodate at primary school level but that things change as children grow older and some young people might be led to withdraw from an activity because they cannot or do not want to train for competitions. This draft strategy is focused on children and young people but ultimately we also want these children to continue to get involved in sport as adults. The continuous practice of a physical activity is even more crucial for people who are more at risk of obesity or dementia like people with Down's syndrome. The aim of the strategy will be limited if children are ultimately led to

give up an activity because they no longer feel welcome and the issue of competition is therefore worth considering. Opportunities must be given to both children who are interested in competition and those who are not, without 'assessing' each group against each other.

This issue also gives an opportunity to raise concerns about transition into adulthood. As mentioned, the need for young people with Down's syndrome to pursue physical activity as adults is significant in order to prevent other health problems from developing. The importance of sport should therefore be part of transition into adulthood and may be worth mentioning in the strategy at one point to stress that the benefits of sport and physical activities should not be lost as young people move into adulthood.

Q7 Are there sufficient opportunities for leaders and workers to develop the right skills?

Yes No

Training packages for schools and sport leaders are necessary and will increase the chances to get children involved in sport. Young people need to be supported by competent people and Down's Syndrome Scotland supports the need for enhanced training about disability inclusion.

Down's syndrome affects approximately 20 per cent of the learning disability population and is the single biggest diagnosed cause of learning disability. Consequently if the current PE Disability Inclusion Training Programme run by Scottish Disability Sport does not include a section on Down's syndrome, we would be happy to work with them to fill in this gap.

Q8 How can more people be encouraged to become leaders and workers?

Great places

We agree with young people that as well as great people we need great places to be active. We aim to ensure that children and young people have a more accessible network of places where they can take part in sport and physical activity and that those places better meet their needs and expectations.

Q9 How can we build on the current use of facilities in schools and communities and ensure they are welcoming environments for children and young people?

In the strategy, it is claimed that the infrastructure for young people to have a go at sport is strong. However such statement ought to be qualified when it comes to facilities for disabled children and their families. For example, one of our members informed us that

she had to find another swimming pool for her son to go to because the one she used when he was a child does not have changing facilities available for disabled people. As her son grew older it therefore became inappropriate for him to continue to get changed in the ladies changing room with his mother. Moreover her son is passionate about sport and very sociable, he would very much enjoy being part of a swimming team however they have not found a team for him yet. Another of our member families has similar problems with finding a football club for their nine-year-old son. There is evidence that there is still much that needs to be done to ensure that there are great places for all children to enjoy and more work needs to be focused on inclusion.

Q10 Are there any areas where improvements could be made to encourage children and young people to participate in sport?

Yes No

The issue of cost was emphasised during the parliamentary debate on the draft strategy and Down's Syndrome Scotland raises the same concerns with regard to access to sport facilities and transport to venues.

It would also be helpful to gather further evidence on facilities available in each local authority as families may be faced with a postcode lottery in terms of the services and schemes available to them and their children regarding sport.

Higher profile

The final ingredient to achieving success is ensuring that the talents and success of young people will be celebrated and communicated. We should see, hear and read more about children and young people's sport in their communities and about people who have come from their communities who now compete on the world stage.

Q11 Do you hear or read enough about sport and sporting opportunities for children and young people in your local community?

Yes No

Down's Syndrome Scotland supports initiatives which encourage children and young people to take part in sport and recognise their achievements. It is important to celebrate and communicate the success and talents of young people and higher profile needs to be given to people with disabilities too. As indicated in questions 3 and 4, best practice ought to be widely promoted if we want to achieve a truly inclusive society.

Q12 How can the profile of youth sport be improved locally and nationally?

Down's Syndrome Scotland welcomes the work of the Young People's Panel and the Scottish Government's commitment to listen to the views of young people. We would be interested to know whether many applications were received for the Panel from people with disabilities, including learning disabilities. We would also like to know whether

information about the panel and application forms were distributed in various formats, including an easy-read version. If not, Down's Syndrome Scotland would suggest that these issues are being considered before setting up the next Young People's Panel as young people with Down's syndrome might be interested to take part in it. Down's syndrome affects approximately 20 per cent of the learning disability population and is the single biggest diagnosed cause of learning disability. Like anyone else, people with disabilities may be willing to share their experience with others on how to improve access to facilities and involvement in sport. Their voices will not be heard if they, or charities supporting them, are not aware of new initiatives like the Young People Panel until it is too late.

Furthermore, the strategy explains that Sportscotland's work is to ensure that every Community Sport Hub has young people as an integral part of their management team. Down's Syndrome Scotland supports such scheme, nevertheless we would welcome more information as to how this will be achieved and whether disabled people will have a chance to be part of the management team too. Moreover, we would encourage every management team in each of these Community Sport Hubs to get training on disability inclusion in order to improve inclusion in their locality.

The document also refers to 'Youth Legacy Ambassadors', 'Young Ambassadors' and 'Lead 2014' which involve around 1000 young people across Scotland. Again Down's Syndrome Scotland would welcome advice on whether these positions are available to people with learning disabilities.

General

Q13 Please give any additional views you have on any aspect of the draft Strategy.

The issue of 'physical literacy' was raised a few times during the Health & Sport's inquiry on community sport and Down's Syndrome Scotland believes that this concept might be worth including in the new strategy too. To our understanding, 'physical literacy' refers to children being aware of what physical activity means and how to achieve it. Whether a child is disabled or not, basic knowledge about physical activity and its benefits can only work towards the core aim of the Youth Sport Strategy of getting more children and young people active and involved in sport.

Finally, we support the £5 million Legacy 2014 Young Persons' Fund which will give up to 2500 young people the opportunity to gain employment and experience in major events that Scotland will host in the years to come. As detailed, the fund will assist 1550 employers with fewer than 150 employees who want to recruit modern apprentices. Since employment remains a serious concern for many young adults with Down's syndrome, we would welcome advice from the Scottish Government as to whether employers concerned are willing to hire people with disabilities and whether they have received many applications from disabled people. Such programmes could benefit young adults with Down's syndrome greatly and Down's Syndrome Scotland would support closer work between the Scottish Government and third sector organisations on this issue.

Q14 We would welcome your views on how sport can be made inclusive for all children and young people.

Comments

Q15 We would also welcome your views regarding the impact that the draft Strategy may have on business or the third sector.

Although the working group involved in developing the draft strategy included third sector organisations, the strategy itself could provide more details on how it entails to involve voluntary organisations in the implementation of new policies. Charities like Down's Syndrome Scotland play a vital role in supporting families and directing them to other relevant agencies depending on their needs.