



Engage, support, inspire
through Sport & Physical Activity

DISC **SPORT OUTREACH** **SWIMMING PROJECT**



BACKGROUND

Developing Initiatives Supporting Communities (DISC) promote social inclusion, are committed to reducing deprivation and exclusion and, overall, aim to improve individuals' well-being.

A number of young transgender people who regularly use DISC's services had expressed an interest in taking part in regular physical activity, particularly swimming sessions.

The DISC Sport Outreach Swimming Project was developed and delivered in order to meet the young people's requests and six weekly sessions were delivered at a private swimming pool in Durham City Centre.

After the initial block of six sessions, the objective of the project was to sustain the young people in physical activity by using Satellite Club funding to continue running the weekly swimming sessions.

ACTIONS

Previously, DISC secured funding for a private 'Safe Space' swimming programme to run in Newcastle upon Tyne for a group of young transgender people who accessed their services. This programme proved to be very popular and the young people in County Durham expressed an interest in replicating these sessions as they wanted to take part in swimming but many of them suffer from anxiety and are very body conscious so do not have the confidence to attend a public swimming pool.

The target audience for the project were young transgender people, aged between 11 and 25, across County Durham with DISC advertising the sessions to the groups they already work with. The sessions were developed following consultations with the target audience and aimed to minimise the young people's barriers to participation by providing a relaxed and informal session, at a convenient time for the participants, at a privately hired pool with gender neutral changing facilities and allowing a flexible dress code where the participants could wear whatever they felt most comfortable in. By taking into account and addressing the young people's concerns, the sessions made the participants feel comfortable and encouraged them to take part. The project aimed to overcome issues such as body consciousness, lack of confidence and fear of judgement by providing a safe space for these young people to participate in physical activity.

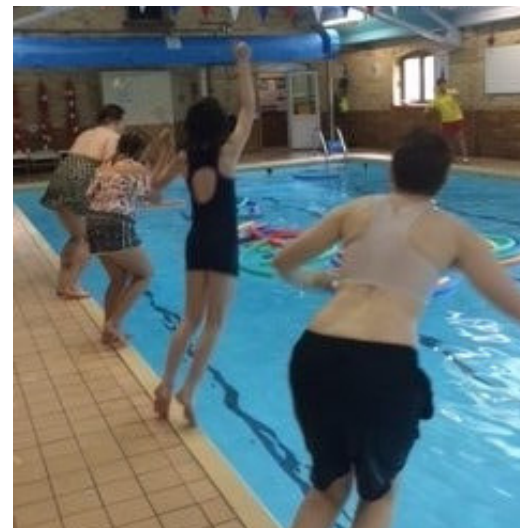
Once the six weeks of Sport Outreach sessions had ended, County Durham Sport awarded Satellite Club funding to DISC to allow the sessions to carry on running during the same weekly slot and in the same format. The participants were provided with a free pair of swimming goggles to reward them for their engagement in the sessions and encourage them to continue with their participation.

PRIOR TO THE SWIMMING GROUP:

- 90% of the young people did not take part in any exercise
- 100% of the young people would not access their community swimming pool or other activities
- 70% of the young people had disengaged from sport within their schools

Billijean Summerbell, DISC LGBT Team Leader

"The young people have all benefitted so much [from the swimming sessions]. It was really overwhelming to see the change in self-esteem and confidence from the first session to now."



IMPACT

After initial consultations with DISC around the number of young transgender people they currently work with, it was expected that 8-10 young people would engage in the sessions overall with approximately 5 young people attending on a weekly basis. To date, 19 young people have taken part in the sessions with an average of 10 attending each week and 17 of the 19 participants who took part in the project were classified as 'inactive' before attending the sessions. After the initial six weeks of swimming sessions, the project was sustained by Satellite Club funding for one year, allowing the young people to continue with their participation and develop their confidence further. The success of the project can be attributed to the sessions being based on the young people's requests and taking their feedback and opinions into account when delivering the weekly activity.

The majority of the young people who attended the sessions had totally disengaged with any kind of sport in the past but one young person stated "I am really enjoying the swimming, it's awesome! I look forward to it every week" then went on to say that taking part in the sessions is motivating them to exercise more. A Youth Worker from DISC also commented that they had never seen this young person so happy during the time they have worked with them. Other young people commented that the swimming sessions "helped make me more confident and relaxed" as well as "helping to make new friends and get me out of the house."

A second young person, who had previously suffered from severe mental health problems due to his transition, explained that the sessions have really helped him to become more body confident and said "the swimming has made me feel liberated and has helped me so much with my suicidal thoughts and anxiety".

Most of the young people who have attended the swimming say that they wouldn't have got back into sport if it was not for this service, with all 19 reporting that they feel that their confidence has improved since the swimming started.

ONE YOUNG PERSON'S EXPERIENCE...

'L' has suffered from low self-esteem and confidence since he came out as a Trans male around 5 years ago. 'L' has had top surgery and would never dream of taking his top off in public or to access sports. When he first attended swimming he was so nervous that he just sat on the side with his shorts and T-shirt on then after about an hour he got in the water and started swimming.

This was the first time he had been swimming since he was little. The look on his face was one of pure happiness. He had a smile from ear to ear and in the end did not want to come out of the pool. This young person has hardly missed a session and now has the confidence to come into the pool with just his shorts on. Every week he just jumps straight in and he has even started using his local gym, something which he would never have thought about. His self-esteem has gone through the roof and he has also found his passion which is that he wants to become a youth worker so he can help support LGBT+ young people in the future.

