

Building Stronger Communities Playbook



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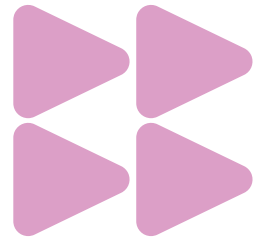
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Introduction



Based on the Building Stronger Communities research report, created by the University of Bath and commissioned by Access Sport, this playbook provides examples of inclusive sport club practices that increase a sense of belonging and community engagement for club members.

The reason this is important is because having a sense of belonging is key to unlocking the wider benefits of sport, including improved health, wellbeing and life prospects. Community clubs have the power to change lives if they get this right.

Despite being a central pillar of community sport club development, too many organisations fail to recognise the value and importance of proactively creating a sense of community. Centred around shared interests and experiences, our research shows that sport clubs can build stronger communities that often extend beyond a place.

We strongly encourage clubs to adopt the five features of an inclusive club as set out in this playbook.



Features of an Inclusive Community Sport Club

To support clubs, this Building Stronger Communities research highlights five key features that contribute to creating an inclusive community-focused environment:

- 1. Know your participants** – investing time and effort to get to know and understand the needs, preferences and challenges facing the participants at your club enables deeper social connections.
- 2. Be flexible and responsive when session planning** – a sense of belonging is improved when participants are involved in the design of activities or are afforded opportunities to take ownership of how they engage.
- 3. Focus on individual, incremental improvement in participants** – inclusive sport clubs encourage opportunities for participants to develop and improve their sport skills at their own pace.
- 4. Provide support for club volunteers** – volunteers are the lifeblood of community sport, so making volunteers feel valued is essential.
- 5. Integrate parents/guardians into the club** – sport clubs act as ‘community hubs’ and provide families with valuable opportunities to build friendships, share information and connect with their community.





1. Know your participants

Investing time and effort to get to know and understand the needs, preferences and challenges facing the participants at your club enables deeper social connections to be made. Providing explicit opportunities within sessions to build authentic relationships is essential and combining these with more informal opportunities for quality interactions can create an environment to build social bonds and support belonging.

Case Study: Partington Multisport Club

Supported by Access Sport, Partington Multisport Club supports local disadvantaged young people and was founded by club leader Kevin to address the anti-social behaviour in the area. Making connections with participants and building trusting relationships with the coaches has been central to the club's success. As club leader Kevin explained:



“I like to just go round and just keep an eye on the kids. And, if one's had a tough week or they've had an incident ... I'll pull them to one side and just make sure that they're okay, you know, just to get them out of that for an hour or two hours, but it's a safe space for them ... So, yes, it is more now than just the football. It's looking out for the kids, getting them friends and just anything else we can add to support them”.



2. Be flexible and responsive when session planning

Sense of belonging is improved when participants are involved in the design of activities or are given opportunities to take ownership of how they engage, provided it is safe. Focussing on play is important, as is offering space for participants to be expressive and/or creative during sessions.

Case Study: Trafford Handball Club

For many of the participants who join Trafford Handball Club, playing handball is a new experience for them. Therefore, developing engagement with the sport is a critical step to ensuring that participants stay engaged. By focusing on play, the club has developed a deeper sense of belonging for its participants and, in turn, opened up the wider transformational benefits of community sport. As coach Yebilla described, allowing participants the freedom to learn about the sport through their own experience is central to his coaching philosophy:



“Everything we do is based on play. I think maybe at an older age technique and fitness is more important, but at a younger age, especially with a speciality sport that’s not very popular, there is no need to drown people in technical jargon ... play, play, play and let their imagination run wild, allow them to be creative and try new things, letting people be free (with some direction) to show to themselves what they can do ... that is the priority”.





3. Focus on individual, incremental improvement in participants

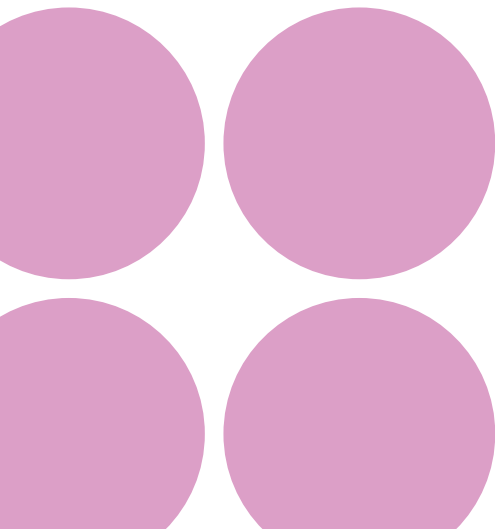
Inclusive sports clubs encourage opportunities for participants to develop and improve their skills at their own pace. Integrating a learner-centred approach to sessions, where participants set their objectives, prolongs engagement and helps to create a sense of belonging.

Case Study: Ballers Academy

Ballers Academy in London is a perfect example of a club adapting its approach so participants can develop at their own pace. As coaches Richard and Claire explained, they have experimented with their planning and delivery of sessions to ensure that there is a choice for participants regarding what they engage with and for how long:



“When we started our programme it was quite a structured sports activity, in terms of we start off, everyone’s doing basketball, right then we’re going to go and do football. Whereas now, we accommodate so many different activities, so many different children’s needs within that session. So, it’s almost like a fun youth club. The way we design the session is to have three or four different stations and there’s the opportunity for the carers to go around, providing that one-to-one support for those who need it. Everyone was being social and having a laugh. It was just like this is just so much more than a sports session - you’re literally ticking every single box in terms of being social, making new friends and being active”.



4. Provide support for club volunteers

Volunteers are the lifeblood of any community sport club and are often the key point of contact between participants and the club. Making volunteers feel valued is essential and can be achieved with appropriate supervision and recognition from more senior club personnel. Regularly checking in on their mental and physical wellbeing, and where possible, providing opportunities to access training and qualifications that support their developmental needs will help volunteer engagement.

Case Study: Bristol Inclusive Climbing

The volunteer community have been a strong focus for Bristol Inclusive Climbing since its conception. Regular training is provided for the volunteers and there is an emphasis on creating a supportive environment where everybody can come together as a community to build strong, authentic relationships. Both Tom and Jess, co-founders and volunteers, explained the importance of developing such an environment and its benefits towards the wellbeing of volunteers, as well as the sense of community it creates:



“Our role within the community is not just for disabled children and, you know, their access onto the wall, it’s actually about the volunteers as well ... We really celebrate those relationships, and we try and make sure that if there’s particular volunteers that work really well with particular kids, they get put with them regularly. And they build up their own little relationships and then they [volunteers] come away and say all these lovely things”.



5. Fully integrate parents and guardians into the club

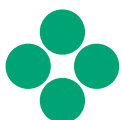
Making parents and guardians feel welcome in your community sport club is equally as important as making young participants feel accepted, supported and connected. Sport clubs act as 'community hubs' and provide families with valuable opportunities to build friendships, share information and connect with their community. By engaging parents and guardians, clubs can ensure participants' ongoing involvement. In addition, parents and guardians often possess important transferable skills which can be put to good use by the club.

Case Study: Nova Sports

Including parents is a major consideration for Nova Sports, an inclusive coaching not-for-profit in Bristol and Somerset. They typically design sessions to enable parents to either be active participants in the sports activity or use facilities that provide a social area outside of the sports hall for parents to congregate and connect. This provides a critical space for parents to decompress, take some time out from their parental responsibilities, and informally connect with other parents facing similar daily challenges. As the club leaders Jenny and Alex explained:



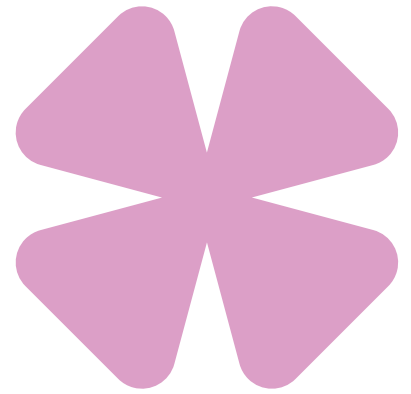
“The parents consistently rant with each other about the system that they’re in, about access to supporting their needs at school, about doctors, all different things like that...which just massively helps them. They get an hour off from their kids and they get the shared commonality of, ‘I’m not the only one in this boat’. I think it’s really important though, that our spaces are very natural. Like, we’ve not made any of that happen. And, if we said to the parents ‘here’s a table, here’s a coffee each, chat’, it wouldn’t happen like it happens”.



Put the five features of an inclusive club into practice:

- 1. Know your participants** – prioritise building trusted relationships between coaches and participants. One way to achieve this is to build in time for coaches to provide one-to-one support during sessions.
- 2. Be flexible and responsive when session planning** – provide space for play, this allows participants to express themselves and be creative. Focusing on play give participants the opportunity to take ownership of how they engage where they can experiment and try new things.
- 3. Focus on individual, incremental improvement in participants** – set up different stations with an activity, drill or skill at each. Give participants a choice of which station they want to work on and how long they work on that station for. Participants are then taking ownership of what they want to work on and how long for, allowing them to go at a pace that works for them as a individual.
- 4. Provide support for club volunteers** – where possible implement regular check ins with volunteers on their mental and physical wellbeing and training to support their development.
- 5. Integrate parents/guardians into the club** – design sessions to enable parents to either be active participants in the activity or use facilities that provide a social area outside of the sports hall for parents to congregate and connect.



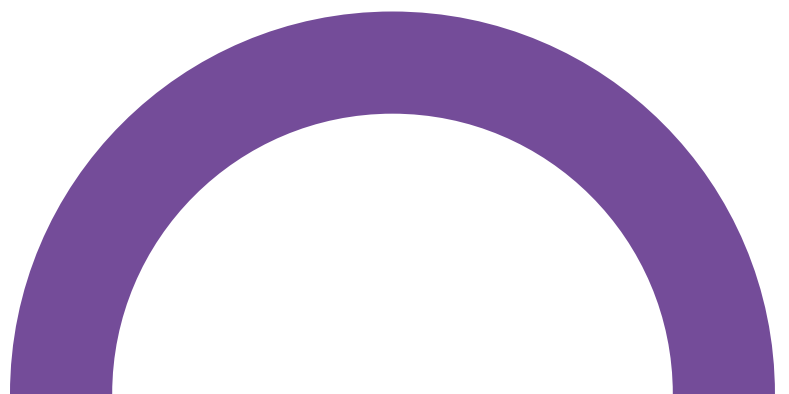


Thank you

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Aquila Taekwondo
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COG BMX
Moss Side Fire Station ABC
M31 Boxing Club
Nova Sports
Partington Multi-Sports
Stockwood BMX
Trafford Handball Club





**We would love to hear how you have used this research.
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