

## WHITE PAPER

### 12 key recommendations to make sport more accessible to those with disabilities emerging from Liberty's AccessAbility symposium

*"We have collated 12 key recommendations, as voiced by our contributors on the day, to help move this conversation from awareness to action" – Liberty spokesperson*

On 20 July, Liberty Insurance hosted the AccessAbility Symposium in Croke Park, Dublin. This event was part of a wider campaign which aims to explore how the Irish sports community and its stakeholders can grow participation rates amongst individuals with disabilities.

As part of the campaign, Liberty commissioned a survey of 230+ sports clubs around Ireland to better understand the challenges in this space. The findings were discussed on the day by disability advocates, including The Irish Times columnist Joanne O'Riordan, health professional and speaker Jack Kavanagh.

It was hosted by Newstalk Off The Ball's John Duggan, and included contributions from Minister for Disability, Anne Rabbitte TD, Sport Ireland, Active Disability Ireland, Vision Sport Ireland and Irish Wheelchair Association. Representatives from major sporting organisations such as the GAA and IRFU, as well as members of Local Sports Partnerships from across the country, were also in attendance.

As part of the campaign, Liberty has collated a series of recommendations, as identified by contributors and attendees to the AccessAbility Symposium. These recommendations include:

#### ***Recommendations for clubs***

1. Players, coaches and volunteers **don't need to know everything** about disability. Instead, just **be open to asking questions** and learning from those with disabilities.
2. Sign up to Active Disability Ireland's [Sport Inclusion Disability Charter](#). The charter supports clubs to remove barriers facing people with disabilities in their participation in sport and physical activity
3. **Can't see it, can't be it.** There is a need for more positive imagery and visibility of people with disabilities. By doing so, it demonstrates that sports clubs are welcoming to people with disabilities and want people of all abilities among their memberships.
4. Many people with disabilities have a **fear of being made to feel like they are a burden**. Get them involved in your club and remind them **they're an asset**.
5. Sports clubs to make a concerted effort to **get people with disabilities involved** in the fabric of the club. The nature and level of this involvement will vary from

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club to club and from sport to sport, but ensuring real involvement should be the starting point. Active Disability Ireland have published their Sports Disability Inclusion Charter\* which clearly outlines key areas for organisations to consider in making active and healthy lifestyles possible for people with disabilities.

### *Recommendations for governing bodies*

1. National governing bodies to **build a culture of diversity and inclusion** into its charter and **all levels of the organisation**. Appointing D&I officers is a positive step, but D&I must be at the centre of an organisation, as opposed to a peripheral function.
2. Government funding is available to subsidise and/or fund universally designed infrastructure. Many grassroots sports clubs do not know how to apply for public funding, in any capacity. There is a **responsibility on governing bodies** to proactively engage with their members to educate them on the availability of funding and **how to make such applications**.
3. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability and Integration has placed a greater strategic emphasis on **redirecting funding** from disability support providers to **existing bodies including schools and sports clubs** at the epicentre of the community. This is a positive development for grassroots sports clubs, but news of this and other **relevant policy changes don't always reach their intended audiences**. Communicating this message to volunteer-led sports clubs is vital to the success of this change in strategic direction.

### *Recommendations for Government / local authorities*

1. **Make it easier for people with disabilities to exercise** in local amenities. Undertake an audit of what amenities or facilities are currently available. Are they accessible by public transport? Is it a dirt track or properly surfaced?
2. **Access to universally designed bathroom facilities** should be a non-negotiable in all public parks, playing fields and greenway cycling routes.
3. **Wheelchair accessible car parking facilities** and public access points, including gates, should be a non-negotiable in all parks and playing fields.
4. County councils have a unique bird's eye view within the community. There is an opportunity to do more to **connect the dots between existing service providers**, local sports clubs and people with disabilities.
5. **Agility matters**. The needs of individuals and a community change over time. It is important that those with decision making capacity and budgetary oversight remain agile and able to pivot to the changing needs within the community.

Speaking in advance of the **AccessAbility symposium**, **Sylvia Coldrick, of Liberty Insurance**, said:

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“Ireland is fortunate enough to boast an incredible network of volunteer-run sports clubs that do brilliant work in the community on a weekly basis, particularly for young people. Many of these clubs represent the very heartbeat of their communities, and their existence is only made possible by the good-will, enthusiasm, and generosity of spirit of their volunteer coaches and administrative support.

“Our research demonstrates that there is a clear appetite on the part of these clubs to do more to support new and existing members with disabilities, and to ensure that they feel welcome and involved at all levels of the club.

“However, there are practical barriers at play, and resource-thin clubs need greater support on this journey. There is clearly a need for greater Government investment at all levels of Irish sport, but particularly in making sports facilities more accessible to those with disabilities. There is also an evident disconnect relating to what Government grants are currently available and how to go about applying for this funding.

“The AccessAbility symposium created a platform to discuss some of the practical and cultural challenges at play, and to identify potential solutions relating to how we can make organised sport more accessible and inclusionary to everyone in the community.

“We want to build on the momentum of the symposium in the year ahead. To do so, we have collated 12 key recommendations, as voiced by our contributors on the day, to help move this discourse from awareness to action.”

### **Run’n’Roll – 3 September, 2023**

On 03 September 2023, Liberty Insurance, in partnership with the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA), will host its annual Run’n’Roll 2.5k/5k in St Annes Park, Raheny. The purpose of the race is to demonstrate solidarity and allyship with individuals with disabilities.

For more information and to register, visit <https://www.popupraces.ie/race/iwa-run-n-roll-2023-proudly-supported-by-liberty-insurance/>

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