

## Inclusion of people with disabilities in and through sport

Becoming more inclusive for sport organizations requires willingness, motivation, and more than anything else: a plan! We did it. You can do it too.

Is sport really accessible to all?

Jen Browning, International Relations Advisor at UK Sport, member of ENGSO EWS and gold medalist in wheelchair basketball in the 2004 Paralympic Games: "There are an enormous amount of barriers for people with disabilities to take part in sports and we know that in the UK, 78% of people with disabilities say that they find a wide range of barriers for them to take part in sports (UK, Activity Alliance, Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2022). We know that this is a huge problem. They are very different things like transportation, the lack of accessible transportation. You can't get to where that sport activity is happening. It might be around the lack of opportunities to take part in your local clubs, so your local club might not have coaches who know about adapted activities so you have to travel much further, and that transportation isn't accessible. Some of it is attitudinal. You don't feel welcome, you don't feel like people want you to be there. Sometimes it's just about fears and anxiety, and often that's just information. There's just very little information out there so you can't find out where is there a club or an opportunity for you to take part."

Evanthia Bournia, Greek Table Tennis Para Athlete: "I think it's not only the sport as sport, it's not only the win or the loss, it's much much more than this. Sport is about the people that are in it, the things that surround it. Sometimes, it makes you a better person, improves your mental health, improves so many things. And you change the way that you see people, treat people, make friendships, and all this."

Jen Browning, International Relations Advisor at UK Sport, member of ENGSO EWS and gold medalist in wheelchair basketball in the 2004 Paralympic Games: "The first recommendation I would say to any sports club is: usually it starts because you have a disabled person or a person with disabilities who approaches you and says: "Can I take part?" So, the first thing is to ask them: "What do you need? What can we do to help you? Start from the point of listening, don't think have to have all the answers; listen, and then look for other experts. Look for your national federations, contact whoever it is in your country, the lead organisation nationally on disability and sports. They would want to help you. And jump right in, have a go, and the last thing I'd say is don't worry about being perfect. It doesn't have to be perfect; it's for all of us who are on this journey to get better and better, so start with something, learn and that's how you get started."

We did it. You can do it too. For more information, feel free to reach out to ENGSO, the European Sport NGO, its Equality Within Sport (EWS) committee, and the EQUIP partners, and visit the project webpage.