Canterbury Christ Church University

OUR ACTIVE COMMUNITY

Community Case Study 2025

Bradford & District

Our Active Community is an initiative across England dedicated to enhancing opportunities for people with a learning disability to be active, happy and healthy.

It has been created as a way for people with a learning disability, stakeholders and organisations to connect, network, seek training and provision, as well as to access resources and funding.

By fostering collaboration, harnessing a community-led approach, building networks and capturing the voices of people with a learning disability, Our Active Community promotes inclusion, encourages participation, and aims to empower people with a learning disability to access opportunities to be physically active in their community.

Data sources

This case study was developed based on 5 focus groups and 39 interviews or conversations, with 16 stakeholders and 25 people with a learning disability from remote consultations, and a research visit in August 2025.

The data informing this case study was collected between November 2023 – August 2025.

Community Overview

Community Background

"Transport to get to those smaller villages is tricky"

Bradford District is a vibrant and diverse metropolitan area in West Yorkshire, England.

As of mid-2024, the population stands at approximately 563,600[1] with a rich ethnic mix of 57% White British, 26% Pakistani, along with Indian, Bangladeshi, Black, and other communities[2]. Bradford District encompasses the city of Bradford and extends to surrounding towns and villages, including Keighley, Shipley, Bingley, Ilkley, Haworth, Silsden, Queensbury, Thornton, and Denholme.

The district features a mix of urban areas and rural areas, with a local stakeholder highlighting how the district's makeup affects residents' sense of identity and accessibility: "It's the makeup of Bradford, if you ask somebody from Keighley where they're from, they will say they're from Keighley, not Bradford." This suggests local identity could shape how people perceive and engage with services across the district.

Transport presents considerable challenges, particularly for people with a learning disability, as a local stakeholder states, "Transport issues are massive in Bradford; the public transport system is not great."

Another community stakeholder emphasises how these challenges are amplified in smaller towns and villages: "Unless something is on your doorstep, it's going to be trickier for you to get into Bradford City centre to be able to access things."

Underinvestment in transport infrastructure can also contribute to these challenges[3], creating barriers for people with a learning disability to access activities beyond their local area.

Bradford's designation as City of Culture 2025, a year-long celebration of the city, offers an exciting opportunity for inclusion, with a strong focus on people with a learning disability.

Such initiatives, alongside projects like Mencap's Our Active Community, can help bridge barriers, enabling participation and benefits for all, regardless of location or circumstance.

1 .City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council. (2025). Bradford Population. Retrieved 20 October 2025, from https://ubd.bradford.gov.uk/about-us/population/

2 .City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council. (2025). A Profile of Bradford District 2025 [PDF]. Retrieved 20 October 2025, from https://ubd.bradford.gov.uk/media/1892/bradford-district-profile-2025.pdf

3. Drake, C. (2024, September 3). Will better transport get Bradford back on track? Inclusive Growth Network. Retrieved 20 October 2025, from https://inclusivegrowthnetwork.org/ign-insights/will-better-transport-get-bradford-back-on-track

Stakeholders

Engaging with stakeholders

The Community Partner, Alex, has taken a proactive and relationship-based approach to building connections across Bradford and the wider district, as he explains, "I tend to just try and spark a relationship up organically".

This highlights an emphasis on trust and collaboration rather than transactional engagement.

Early in the project, Alex focused on understanding the existing system and mapping local networks, activities and key partners, such as International Mixed Ability Sports (IMAS), that already support physical activity for people with a learning disability.

Building relationships

The Community Partner meets with partners in person and visits community venues and day services to build strong relationships. One organisation shares: "He was great and was able to have half an hour with me...he did very well with the initial engagement and was proactive, which was great." This personable approach has been well received, with another stakeholder noting they are "looking forward to working with Alex."

Challenges

Despite progress, engaging across such a large and varied district remains challenging, as the Community Partner reflects: "Everyone works in their own communities and don't always connect up."

Next steps

Going forward, the Community Partner plans to reach more people with a learning disability through additional information sessions and surveys, as well as by creating a shared activity timetable.

New connections with schools and services, such as New Choices, should help strengthen the project's impact and reach.

Current engagement spans a diverse range of stakeholders and organisations, including:

- ✓ Day Services, Centres or Supported Living: Skills Kitchen, New Choices
- ✓ Community Organisations and Charities: Summat Creative CIC, People First Keighley & Craven, Keighley Healthy Living, Exclusively Inclusive, Bradford Buddies, Activity Alliance, Down Syndrome Bradford
- ✓ Service Providers: Everybody's Cycling, Pinnacle Performance
- ✓ Health Services: Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust
- ✓ Local Authority: Yorkshire Sport Foundation (Active Partnership), Bradford City Council

Perceptions and Expectations

Perceptions

Stakeholders value Mencap's Our Active Community project for promoting activities and connecting people with a learning disability to opportunities across Bradford.

Many highlight Mencap's expertise and links with other partners, with one stakeholder noting that without the project, they "might have been digging in the dark".

Stakeholders recognise how the project is helping to build contacts, map local activities, and provide a platform for sharing ideas and collaborating.

One stakeholder also highlights how Mencap is managing the project effectively, noting that their own role is largely around signposting and offering support where needed for the project.

While some stakeholders initially felt the project was not fully tailored to people with a learning disability, with materials and activities lacking adaptation, it is suggested this has improved over time.

Limited capacity to engage however, remains a consideration, but overall, the project is seen as being responsive and supportive.

Expectations

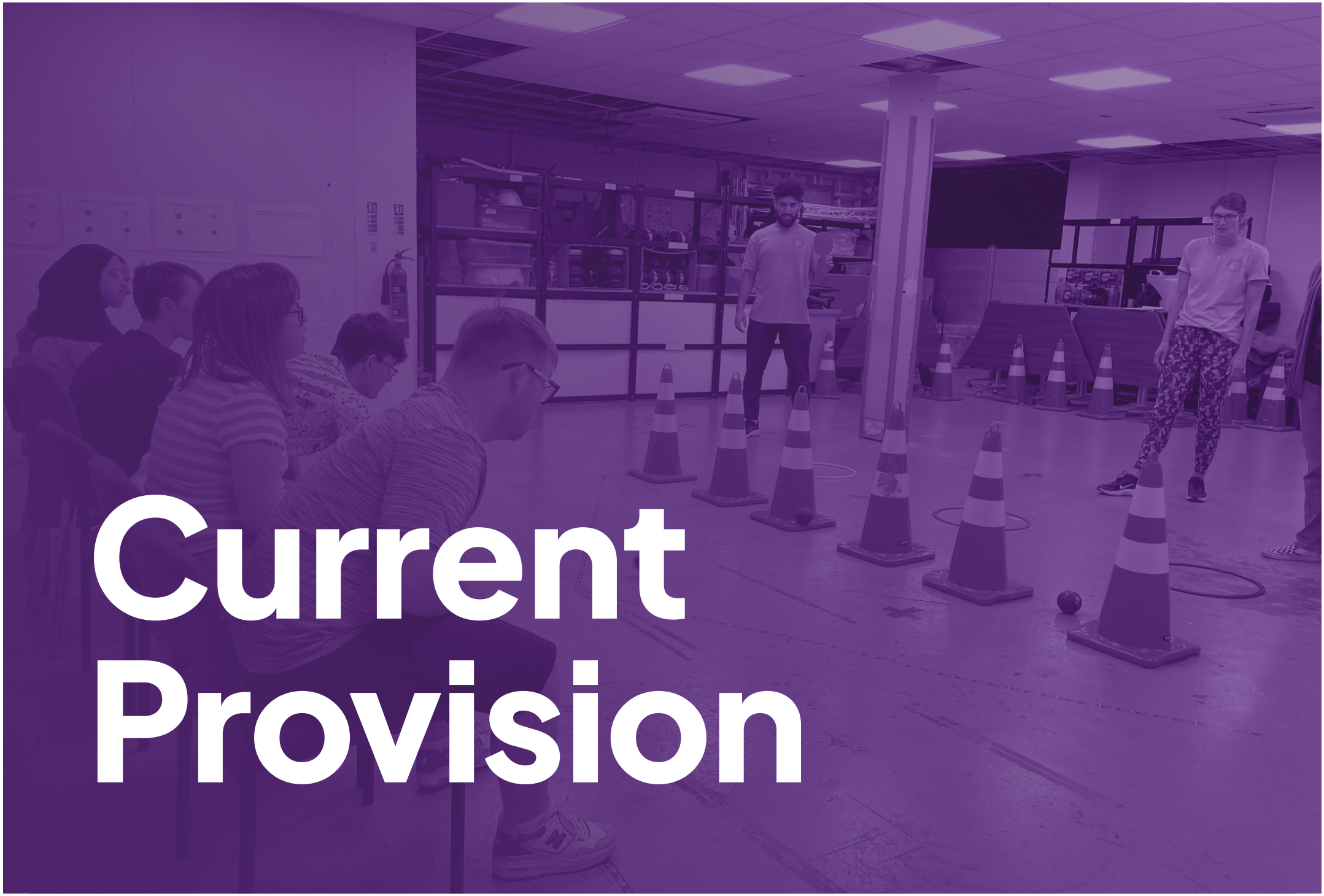
Stakeholders' expectations for the project focus on widening participation, improving access, and co-producing activities with people with a learning disability.

One stakeholder explains, "I want to be involved as much as possible in shaping and supporting more inclusive provision", while others highlight the potential to share information and promote activities.

Stakeholders also anticipate using seed funding and future collaborations to expand opportunities: "With the seed funding that's available, it would be great to get some things up and running in some of the areas where there's less going on, and work with other partners."

Across stakeholders, there is a strong expectation that the project will encourage activity, be led by people with a learning disability, and create sustainable partnerships within the community.

"I'm really keen to think about how we get people to have more to do"



Current Provision

Existing Offer

Activities at a local day service include:

- Walking groups
- Use of adapted bikes
- Trampolining
- Cheerleading
- Forest school activities
- Exercise and movement

Community organisation activities include:

- Walking
- Tennis
- Boxing
- Yoga

Most opportunities for people with a learning disability to be active include:

- Swimming
- Dancing
- Cycling
- Football
- Kinball
- Table Tennis
- Bowling
- Gym sessions

Some individuals also take part in activities with family or social groups, such as swimming or walking together.

Other activities mentioned include gardening, darts, and crazy golf, with one person noting, “my favourite is gardening and swimming”, another shares, “I love darts”, highlighting some of their main interests.

Stakeholders acknowledge that opportunities for people with a learning disability to be physically active in Bradford and District are limited and unevenly distributed, with some areas being well served whilst others, particularly rural locations, have fewer options; as one stakeholder notes, “I don’t think there is adequate provision for people with a learning disability”.

Previously, organisations such as Bradford Disability Sport and Leisure (BDSL) and IMAS played key roles in delivering and coordinating disability sport locally.

BDSL however, are no longer operating, hence there is now a possible gap in consistent provision and coordination, particularly outside the city centre.

Challenges

This section explores the key challenges in delivering inclusive physical activity provision for people with a learning disability in Bradford and the wider District.

While some provision exists, stakeholders highlight ongoing issues that limit its reach, quality, and accessibility.

Providing an inclusive offer

Some stakeholders note that many clubs and organisations label themselves as inclusive, but stakeholders feel this does not always meet the needs of people with a learning disability.

One community stakeholder explains: "You can't just run a mainstream session and then when somebody with a disability turns up, you can't just slip them in and make them feel comfortable, it requires a lot of thought and a lot of skill, and some basic knowledge about their needs."

Stakeholders express how the quality of provision is closely tied to the people delivering it, with staff requiring the right experience, training, and understanding of individual participants.

Some stakeholders also highlight that activities need 1:1 or 1:2 support and that staff must "know the person they support well, know their triggers and how to support them."

Raising awareness

Accessibility is another key challenge. One stakeholder points out the difficulty of raising awareness: "How do we make sure people hear about it and that people are aware of the options, especially for those who are maybe not in typical day services?" They also highlight how there are language barriers for people who do not speak English as a first language, and this can make it harder to deliver truly inclusive physical activity opportunities for people with a learning disability.

Top Challenges:

- ✕ Staff expertise and knowledge
- ✕ Adequate staffing
- ✕ Raising awareness
- ✕ Providing genuine inclusivity

Opportunities

Stakeholders identify several opportunities to enhance physical activity provision for people with a learning disability in Bradford and District, emphasising the potential to expand both the reach and inclusivity.

One community stakeholder notes, "I think there could always be more opportunities", while another adds, "There's so many things that we can do to hopefully open up more opportunities."

Inclusive general offer

A key theme is ensuring a general, inclusive offer that allows access to mainstream activities.

One community stakeholder highlights the need for inclusion: "I feel it needs to be more around it being a general offer for people…making sure that's inclusive." Reaching harder-to-access people with a learning disability is also a priority. One stakeholder observes: "I think it's not the challenge that we need to provide more. I think the challenge is getting to those people who are harder to reach."

Training

Upskilling staff is seen as a vital step, ensuring those delivering sessions feel confident supporting participants and using appropriate equipment.

Activity directories

Stakeholders also highlight tools to improve awareness, such as the council's Activity Finder which covers a wide geographical area.

Stakeholders however note that it can sometimes be out of date and how there is not "a comprehensive list of all the different activities".

Buddy system

Finally, buddy or befriender schemes are suggested by stakeholders to increase participation.

A stakeholder mentions that attending with someone familiar can help people with a learning disability feel comfortable and confident: "If somebody's already going to that session that they can see in themselves, you're more likely to get them there because they can see themselves fitting in."

Areas to improve:

- ✓ **Creating an inclusive general offer**
- ✓ **Upskilling staff**
- ✓ **Activity directories**
- ✓ **Reaching harder-to-access**
- ✓ **Buddy or befriender schemes**

"It's about upskilling people to a level where they feel comfortable"

Community Needs

Motivation and Confidence

People with a learning disability in Bradford and District express a range of feelings about being physically active, with enjoyment and fun frequently highlighted.

Many describe activities as enjoyable: “Being active is fun”, “I do it because it’s fun”, and “Dancing is exciting”.

Some value the competitive element, while others prefer more calming activities: “Table Tennis is relaxing” and “Yoga is calm”. Participants report positive emotional and physical effects, noting “Swimming makes me feel tired, but I get strong”, “Cycling makes me feel strong”, and “Walking makes me feel calm”.

Motivation

Motivations for engaging in activity are often social. One stakeholder notes, “The social aspect is important; once they’ve left school or adult daycare, they might not see anybody except their carer.” People with a learning disability also emphasise friends as a motivator, saying, “I like doing it with friends”, “Get to see my friends”, and “My family tell me off, but I like to do it with my friends”.

Personal motivations, such as staying fit and healthy, also play a role for people with a learning disability.

Community stakeholders also explain how familiar spaces encourage participation and note that while interest is present, attending activities can be challenging.

Confidence

Confidence in participating varies among people with a learning disability. Some describe feeling happy, supported, and valued when engaged in physical activity. Several enjoy the challenge and the social aspect, with a day service stakeholder noting, “they do get a little bit competitive, which is fantastic.” Others feel nervous, particularly in performance-based activities, as one participant shares, “I feel nervous when I do dance as I like to please people.”

“Make it a familiar space to go and bring in the social aspect”

Top Motives:

- Social connection
- Interest and enjoyment
- Familiar spaces
- Personal health and fitness

Barriers to Participation

Conversations reveal how multiple barriers prevent people with a learning disability in Bradford and the wider District from accessing opportunities to engage in physical activities.

These include cost, transport, support, accessible information and scheduling of activities.

Cost

Financial constraints seem to be a major barrier, as one stakeholder explains, "For us, physical activity is the first thing that gets dropped if we can't afford it, so for somebody with a learning disability, who's got less money and has to think about paying for carers, it's harder for them to decide to pay for it."

Costs related to taxis or transportation can also make attendance difficult for day centres and services to support individuals.

Transport

Transport was also identified as one of the biggest challenges. One community stakeholder shares how "access and transport issues are even more difficult because they definitely can't all get on a bus on their own."

Once people with a learning disability move beyond parental support, stakeholders mention how attendance can drop sharply due to limited independent travel options.

Support

Stakeholders comment on how important support workers are for people with a learning disability to access opportunities in the community, and how the availability of support workers or personal assistants is inconsistent and can often limit access.

One community stakeholder explains, "If they're in supported living, they might have one carer for three people. If that carer takes one to an activity, two are left without care."

Accessible information

Many people with a learning disability struggle to find out what's available, and inaccessible marketing and a lack of representation mean they can "think it's not for them".

Scheduling of activities

Finally, stakeholders report that many sessions take place in the evenings or at weekends, when support hours are limited, which can prevent participation.

They also emphasise the need for more community sessions designed with people with a learning disability in mind, as most current offers are not tailored to their needs.

"The opportunity to have somebody support them to do it"

Enabling Participation

While some needs are currently being addressed, people with a learning disability highlight additional support and opportunities that would enable them to be more active.

Many highlight the importance of skilled coaching and structured guidance, with comments such as "having a sports coach because I want to learn" and "some coaching for bowling".

Others emphasise the need for reliable support from family, carers, or friends to help with travel and encouragement, with some saying, "Family helps me get to places", "My mum would drop me off", and "Friends to help me".

People with a learning disability want more access to:

- Bowling
- Tennis
- Swimming
- Horse riding
- Sailing
- Climbing
- Football

"It's a real challenge once people get past that age where parents were taking them around. We find that we don't get people"

Developments

Community Partner

Each Community Partner involved in Our Active Community plays a vital role in identifying community strengths by listening to local individuals, engaging with stakeholders and organisations, and facilitating meaningful connections that support growth.

By increasing awareness, bridging gaps in accessibility, and promoting inclusion, the Community Partner plans to ensure more people with a learning disability can engage in physical activity.

Their role focuses on support, utilising seed funding, capacity building and ensuring sustainability.

"We'll be really happy if he wants come in and work on any projects with us"

Views of the role

Stakeholders across Bradford and District speak positively about the role of the Community Partner, recognising the value of having a dedicated link to connect organisations, share opportunities, and strengthen local networks. One stakeholder explains, "Hopefully, the work Alex will be doing will be connecting the dots."

Others echoed this optimism, with one noting, "we've had really good conversations with Alex very recently", and another describing him as "lovely" and "keen".

Progress

Through his role, the Community Partner has built relationships and raised awareness of the project.

He has visited community organisations such as Skills Kitchen to explore the use of sports facilities, attended funded sessions to see how they are progressing, and shared information about seed funding.

He has also engaged in the West Yorkshire Disability Sports Network, and disseminated opportunities through Bradford Briefing, a community volunteer centre with an extensive local network, Summat Creative's parent and carer WhatsApp group, and seasonal newsletters produced in collaboration with the Community Connectors

Challenges

Despite these successes, some challenges have emerged.

The geographical spread of the district has made it difficult for the Community Partner to connect all communities, with one reflection being that it may be more effective to focus on specific localities.

Moving forward, there are plans to work within individual locations rather than across the entire Bradford district, allowing for deeper engagement, stronger relationships, and more tailored support within each community.

Other challenges include supporting day services to open provision to the wider community.

Community Connector

"It's all about making sure that we're involving these people in the decisions on what they want to do"

Mencap's Our Active Community is recruiting a Community Connector in each community to identify and advocate for the needs of people with a learning disability, share lived experiences and help shape inclusive activities and opportunities.

Recruiting the Community Connector

Bradford and District recruited two Community Connectors, hosted by Summat Creative.

They reflect, "We knew we needed to employ a role like the Community Connector, but we were trying to tell people about a job that we didn't really know what it was until Our Active Community wanted to employ someone with lived experience."

Applications involved videos, emails, and voice notes, with easy-read information, reasonable adjustments, and support offered during interviews.

The host organisation notes, "It's just taken us a while to work out what their job is and how best to support them", highlighting the potential need for clearer guidance.

Views of the role

Community stakeholders value the role highly, describing it as "all about voice" and emphasising lived experience.

One stakeholder says how it's beneficial "for people with a learning disability to see someone out there doing the work…and give them something to aspire to." The role is being perceived to break down stigma, provide guidance, and involve people in decisions about activities and "something we should all be doing".

Hopes and concerns

Stakeholders hope the role enhances engagement, such as attending meetings or supporting events, while concerns remain about sustainability after Mencap funding ends and employment or benefits implications.

Feedback of the Community Connectors

Feedback has been positive, noting personal growth and the value Community Connectors bring by sharing experience.

Their differing personalities and needs are acknowledged, and support has been provided to help them understand the project and their responsibilities.

Stakeholders also appreciate their insights; one funding applicant shares, "I think it's fantastic, and in a couple of the meetings he's made a suggestion that we then think back and go, actually, we're assuming something here."

There have however been delays in getting Access to Work arrangements in place. During this time, Mencap has provided interim support and funding to ensure Community Connectors can continue their roles while these arrangements are sorted.

Community Connector profile:

Barney

Joined in October 2024

Receives support from:

+ Alex (Community Partner) and Job Coach at Summat Creative

Personal motivation:

- ✓ Wanted a paid role and to be an ambassador for the community
- ✓ Enjoys helping and supporting people

Hopes and aims:

- ✓ Encourage others to get out and participate in activities
- ✓ Listen to people's views and help create inclusive opportunities
- ✓ Remove barriers so everyone can take part

Early achievements:

- 🏆 Developed a funded multi-sports offer at Skills Kitchen
- 🏆 Created a walking workshop

Future plans:

+ Plan the conference and engage with more organisations under New Choices
+ Expand multi-sport opportunities and continue supporting inclusive participation

"Best part is going to see organisations as it makes the job more interesting and not sat in the office all day, it also makes it exciting, and I get to see people I haven't seen before"

Community Connector profile:

Jason

Joined in October 2024

Receives support from:

- Alex (Community Partner) and Job Coach at Summat Creative

Personal motivation:

- Passionate about sport and helping others get involved
- Wanted to give back to people facing difficulties
- Keen to have another job contributing to the community

Hopes and aims:

- Support people who might not otherwise have opportunities
- Use personal experience and communication skills to advocate for others
- Help individuals get started in physical activities and "fight people's corners"

Early achievements:

- Explored options for setting up a parkrun
- Assisted in establishing Pinnacle Performance's funded gym sessions

Future plans:

- Launch an in-person running workshop
- Coach participants and encourage engagement in running activities

"Definitely enjoy it, the best thing is going out and visiting people"

Network Developments

"I think that's just a challenge in our sector because people just don't have time"

The development of partnerships and networks across Bradford and District has progressed steadily, with stakeholders highlighting the benefits of increased engagement and collaboration.

One stakeholder reflects, "I'm really happy with how everything is going", while another notes, "It's great that there's other stuff happening everywhere," demonstrating enthusiasm for the expanding activity landscape.

Forums, meetings and information events

No formal forums have yet been held in Bradford, with the Community Partner noting that the district's size and geographic spread make it difficult to bring organisations together in one space.

One stakeholder highlights, "It's just too big, there are very different needs in different parts of Bradford", while others highlight that limited time and resources could also restrict regular engagement in an Our Active Community forum.

Despite no formal forums, meetings and information events organised by the Community Parter and Community Connectors have provided key opportunities for engagement, with stakeholders commenting positively on these interactions: "Meetings have been really good…got a comprehensive review of everything that Alex has done… it's really positive" and "It was brilliant" reflecting the value of some of the shared learning and networking.

Despite the challenges of bringing people together, stakeholders emphasise the tangible benefits of network development.

One stakeholder reflects, "Just the fact of having those networking opportunities has increased our capacity, as well and motivation to do more", while another added that these connections have expanded their knowledge and opportunities for future collaborations.

Bradford and District meetings and network events are:

- ✓ **Increasing collaboration**
- ✓ **Expanding networks**
- ✓ **Sharing best practice**
- ✓ **Raising awareness**
- ✓ **Supporting opportunity**

Successes

Seed Funding

Seed funding has been welcomed by stakeholders, with one describing it as refreshing not to have to collect participant numbers, although some were initially hesitant to apply, as they were unsure how to sustain activities beyond the funding period.

The funding panel, intended to include community members with a learning disability, is currently made up solely of the Community Connectors and has faced recruitment challenges, possibly due to travelling between areas.

The Community Partner notes, "We've had a few interested people… fewer people than I wanted, so that's a priority."

Future plans include trying to recruit across different wards or districts.

Four successful applications:

Active and Able

Active and Able, delivered by Pinnacle Performance, runs twice weekly on Mondays and Fridays, with funding covering staffing.

The small-group sessions focus on fitness, coordination, and balance, adapting activities to each participant's needs: "We don't do anything differently, we just use our knowledge and expertise to adapt things to the needs of that person."

Feedback has been very positive, with one parent noting her son can now walk for two hours without stopping.

Participants are forming friendships and supporting each other in travelling independently: "They're waiting for each other and going to the bus station together. It's brilliant!"

Attendance and retention have been strong, and plans have been considered to sustain the sessions beyond initial funding.

Boccia and boxfit

Summat Creative run inclusive Boccia and boxfit sessions, funded to cover staffing, combining skill-targeted boccia with adaptive boxing activities.

Participants can choose between the two, allowing rest when needed while staying engaged as "most like being able to choose what activity to do".

Sessions include warm-ups, structured games, and small competitions, with adaptive equipment to ensure accessibility. Participants enjoy the social aspect, "I like boxing because it's social, I get to talk to people here" and have formed new friendships. Sessions also include simultaneous yoga for parents to encourage attendance. Challenges though, include recruitment and sustainability.

Attendance is lower than expected in some cases, and reliance on seed funding raises concerns: "Once seed funding runs out, the sessions will stop…there is no way we can cover our staffing costs."

Mixed Ability Cricket

The Mixed Ability Cricket sessions, run by Active Bradford in partnership with IMAS and United Response, began in April.

Sessions run outdoors and are pay-to-participate, mainly covering coach costs, with seed funding used to cover access to indoor space if it rains.

Weekly attendance is strong, with 40–60 participants, including support workers, taking part in games, mini-games, and practicing skills such as batting, bowling, catching, and fielding.

Participants value teamwork and confidence-building: "When I first came, I couldn't even hit a ball, now I'm getting more confident" and one adds, "It gets you out, because I suffer with anxiety, it helps clear my mind."

Sessions have acted as a catalyst to get inclusive cricket off the ground, with plans to try to expand to another club on the other side of Bradford to reach more participants.

Salts Hub Friday sports sessions

Sessions at Skills Kitchen began in August and take place on Friday afternoons. They use existing facilities that had not previously been regularly used for structured activities and focus on playing tennis and bowls

Funding covers coaches and volunteers, enabling safe, inclusive delivery.

For participants with higher support needs, ratios are gradually built from 1:1 to 3–4:1.

Sessions have had to pause during the autumn months due to the weather, as there is currently no alternative indoor facility, but there are hopes to run them again when the weather improves or an indoor option becomes available.

"I like to do boxing because I like to be with my friend, I like to be partners with him"

Other Partnerships and Activity

"We went to a recent event where it was a bit of a sharing and learning event"

Try it, Like it, Do it

The Try it, Like it, Do it event took place in January 2025 and was run by Mencap and the Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership, hosted at People First Keighley & Craven.

Attendees could try a variety of activities, including seated archery, seated fencing, boccia, rugby, golf, dance, mindfulness, and Kinball.

Guest speakers and information stalls provided details about local opportunities.

Around 100 people attended, at least half of whom were people with a learning disability, helping to build new connections.

Stakeholders highlighted the breadth of opportunities, noting, "We saw a real wide variety of different deliverers there doing different things…they're obviously engaging with lots of different partners and thinking about all the different opportunities people with learning disabilities would want to access."

Information and sharing events

Additional events have focused on encouraging collaboration and networking.

These sessions typically attracted around 50 people from 10–12 organisations and included opportunities to participate in activities such as rugby and Boccia.

Stakeholders valued meeting the Community Connectors in these settings, with one commenting, "It was nice to meet the Community Connectors, and see how confident they are to talk to people about the project and the work they are doing."

and those who are neurodiverse.
• Day Service
• Advocacy
• The People Fi
Caution

Challenges

Overview of Challenges

Bradford and District Community Challenges

As mentioned previously, people with a learning disability in Bradford and District face multiple barriers to engaging in physical activity, many influenced by the size, diversity, and geography of the area.

Transport is a major issue, particularly for those in smaller towns and villages, with limited public transport and high costs restricting access.

Staffing and support are also key challenges. Many activities require 1:1 or 1:2 support, but the availability of trained staff and support workers can be inconsistent.

Effective provision depends on staff having knowledge of participants' needs and how to support them safely.

Other barriers include limited awareness of opportunities, especially for those not engaged with day services, and a lack of fully inclusive activities tailored to individual needs.

Timing and scheduling of activities, often outside standard support hours, can prevent participation.

Our Active Community-specific challenges

Our Active Community in Bradford and District faces several specific challenges.

The geographic spread of Bradford District makes it difficult to bring organisations together in a single forum, resulting in more localised meetings and events.

Recruiting a funding panel of community members with a learning disability has proved difficult, with the dispersed nature of Bradford's communities and the travel required between areas likely contributing to lower engagement.

Ensuring sustainability beyond Mencap funding remains a concern, as stakeholders are unsure how roles like the Community Connectors and funded activities can continue long-term without ongoing financial support.

"Definitely challenging when you go out into the wider district of Bradford"

Conclusion & Next Steps

Summary of Key Findings

- Physical activity opportunities include walking, swimming, cycling, football, dancing, tennis, bowling and gym sessions.
- Opportunities are unevenly distributed, with rural areas and smaller towns having fewer accessible activities.
- Transport barriers significantly limit participation, especially for people in outlying areas without independent travel options.
- Cost and the need for support workers restrict access to activities for many individuals.
- Many activities are scheduled outside support hours, such as evenings or weekends, making them inaccessible for some people with a learning disability.
- Activities vary in inclusivity; staff knowledge, experience, and support ratios strongly influence quality and accessibility.
- Community Connectors are valued for their lived experience, advocacy, and ability to build relationships with organisations and individuals.
- Meetings and information-sharing events have supported collaboration and increased awareness across local organisations and providers.
- Recruitment of a funding panel with community members with a learning disability has been challenging due to geographic spread.
- Stakeholders note the importance of ongoing engagement to sustain the project and encourage broader participation.
- Seed funding has supported inclusive activities, but sustainability beyond Mencap funding is a key concern.
- There is growing awareness of local opportunities and an appetite to expand provision, particularly more inclusive and accessible activities.

"Without a volunteer or without some support, they won't necessarily get involved in something"

Next Steps

- Explore wider engagement with schools to embed inclusive activity opportunities.
- Continue exploring plans to focus the project within specific localities rather than across the whole district.
- Consider hosting pop-up or mobile engagement sessions in local community hubs to reach people with a learning disability who may not attend central meetings.
- Explore digital engagement options, such as interactive online workshops or virtual "voice boards," to broaden participation, give more people a say in decisions, and help overcome time or travel constraints.
- Consider promoting activities using accessible formats to reach people not engaged with day services or support networks.
- Consider improving awareness of inclusive activities by enhancing local tools, such as updating the council's Activity Finder or creating a more comprehensive, regularly maintained directory of opportunities.
- Explore options to address transport barriers through travel training, buddy systems, and accessible travel guidance.
- Explore opportunities to enhance staff training to improve confidence and competence in supporting people with a learning disability.
- Consider peer-led activities where Community Connectors facilitate small group discussions, allowing participants to shape forums and events in ways that suit them.
- Continue to provide Community Connectors with mentorship, role guidance, and regular check-ins to support advocacy, confidence, and engagement across Bradford.
- Further explore ways to develop the lived experience seed funding panel and reduce barriers to participation to ensure representative input.
- Consider facilitating some collaboration between providers to share resources and create joint activity opportunities, particularly in underserved areas, to help create sustainable opportunities beyond initial funding.
- Encourage discussions with stakeholders about sustainability and explore potential long-term funding options beyond Mencap support.

"A really interesting time and lots of things we can do to support"

Canterbury Christ Church University

Report produced by SPEAR

@spear_news

www.mencap.org.uk/mencap-sport

@mencap_charity

sport@mencap.org.uk

SPORT ENGLAND

mencap

The Centre for Sport, Physical Education & Activity Research (SPEAR)
Canterbury Christ Church University
North Holmes Road,
Canterbury, Kent, CT1 1QU
SPEAR@canterbury.ac.uk
www.canterbury.ac.uk/SPEAR