



Community Case Study 2025

# Worthing

## 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 3 focus groups and 13 interviews or conversations with 20 stakeholders and 36 people with a learning disability, from remote consultations and a research visit in November 2025

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





# Community Overview

## Community Background

Worthing is a coastal town in central South England, positioned between the South Downs National Park and the Sussex coastline.

It sits within a cluster of neighbouring towns such as Lancing, Shoreham-by-Sea, Littlehampton and Angmering, with residents regularly moving between these areas for work, services and social activities.

While Worthing includes a mix of urban and suburban neighbourhoods, it does not extend into the surrounding rural villages of West Sussex, many of which rely on the town for services and leisure opportunities.

The population of Worthing was 112,200 in 2023<sup>1</sup>, with an older age profile compared to England overall<sup>1</sup>. The town is less ethnically diverse than the national picture<sup>2</sup>, with 91.4% of residents identifying as White, 3.9% Asian, and 2.6% mixed or multiple ethnic groups<sup>1</sup>.

Worthing's landscape is shaped by both blue and green space.

Its position between the sea and the Downs provides accessible coastal paths, parks, and natural areas that are well-used by people with a learning disability.

Brooklands Park is a popular green space featuring open areas and a tarmacked section used by Cycall Worthing for adapted cycling sessions.

Socio-economic conditions vary across the town. While West Sussex overall ranks among the least deprived 20% of local authorities nationally<sup>1</sup>, Worthing contains five neighbourhoods within the most deprived 20%<sup>2</sup>.

Learning-disability prevalence is significant across the county, with estimates suggesting over 22,000 people in West Sussex had a learning disability in 2021<sup>3</sup>.

Worthing has a range of transport options, with buses and trains providing good links across the town and to nearby coastal areas; experiences however are mixed.

Some people rely heavily on funded minibuses and taxis, especially for places like Ferring Country Centre, with one person noting, "without access to the minibus and taxis I wouldn't be able to attend my day centre as I live outside Worthing."

Others find the local buses reliable and feel they help maintain community connections, while active travel options like walking and cycling remain accessible due to the town's flat layout.

Challenges for people with a learning disability in Worthing include travel costs, limited confidence when accessing unfamiliar spaces, and the need for trusted, welcoming environments.

Despite this, Worthing's strong community networks, accessible natural spaces, and increasing range of inclusive opportunities create a positive foundation for supporting greater activity and participation through Our Active Community.

1. West Sussex County Council. (2023). Worthing Integrated Community Team Population Profile Pack. [https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/Adur\\_and\\_Worthing\\_JSNA\\_2024.pdf](https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/Adur_and_Worthing_JSNA_2024.pdf)

2. Integrated Community Teams - NHS Sussex. (2023). Public Health Data Profile 2024/25 Adur and Worthing. [https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/ict-datapacks/Worthing\\_ICT\\_DataPack\\_2023.pdf](https://jsna.westsussex.gov.uk/assets/pdf/ict-datapacks/Worthing_ICT_DataPack_2023.pdf)

3. Sussex NHS Commissioners (2024). All Age Learning Disability and Autism Strategy. <https://www.sussex.ics.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Sussex-LDA-Strategy-2021-2024.pdf>

## Stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement in Worthing has grown considerably over time, helping to strengthen local networks and connections. Relationships have been built through consistent presence in the community, enabling visibility and trust among local organisations and residents.

### Engaging with stakeholders

Previous community partner Sarah built strong connections by being visible in local cafés and community spaces, making her recognisable to stakeholders.

Laura, the new Community Partner, and Matthew the Community Connector, are continuing this approach, visiting local organisations and promoting opportunities such as seed funding.

Their work has already led to new connections and ongoing engagement.

One stakeholder says, “Laura got in touch with me, and she and Matthew came to visit a class of mine in Brighton...helped me to put together an application and provided opportunities to keep connected.”

### Building relationships

As the current Community Partner, Laura has been building relationships by engaging with stakeholders at local events and strategic meetings.

One community stakeholder notes, “I met Laura at the Active Sussex engagement day and got to speak to her there, and she put me in contact with another organisation that would be good to partner with.”

Alongside this, Laura and the Community Connector have found attending the West Sussex Learning Disability Partnership Board meetings particularly valuable, providing opportunities to network and to present their work directly to the board.

Together, these interactions show how in-person engagement and personalised support can help build meaningful relationships with local stakeholders and organisations.

### Challenges

Despite progress, Mencap has not yet engaged schools, educational stakeholders, or health services within Worthing, indicating areas for future development.

In addition, Laura, as Community Partner, sometimes meets individuals or organisations whose work sits outside the Worthing area.

As the project is solely focused on Worthing, these conversations can occasionally reach a natural limit, as discussions about opportunities and emerging ideas are only applicable to those able to travel into the area. This presents an ongoing challenge for the project, as opportunities to build relationships are constrained by the project’s geographical focus.

### Next steps

Laura plans further stakeholder conversations and visits with Matthew, aiming to deepen understanding of people’s needs and interests, and to identify opportunities for increased participation and collaboration within the community.

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

- ✓ Day Opportunities, Services, Centres or Supported Living: Superstar Arts, Ferring Country Centre, Grace Eyre Foundation, Worthing Mencap
- ✓ Service Providers: Worthing FC, Worthing Table Tennis, South Coast Skate Club, Parable Dance
- ✓ Local Authority: Active Sussex, West Sussex Commissioning group

## Perceptions and Expectations

### Perceptions

Stakeholders in Worthing have shared a range of perceptions about Our Active Community.

Many recognise the value of bringing organisations together and fostering connections, though some have raised questions about how resources are allocated.

One stakeholder shares, “it has been nice to have the opportunity to get everyone into a room...but whether this provision is needed from Our Active Community and whether this has been the best use of funding, I'm not entirely convinced”.

These perceptions may, however, reflect a limited understanding of the project's goals and approach. Others emphasise the importance of direct engagement with the Community

Partner to strengthen strategic influence, with one stakeholder noting, “there is more of a need for that direct touch point between the Community Partner and us as the Active Partnership.”

Stakeholders also recognise the significant effort required to re-establish networks following the sad loss of the previous Community Partner.

At the same time, there is a clear sense of potential for further development, with one stakeholder noting, “there is a lot that can be done and a lot that is yet to be discovered.”

Together, these reflections offer a nuanced perspective on Our Active Community's current impact and the opportunities for future growth.

### Expectations

Stakeholders have clear expectations for the future of Our Active Community in Worthing, focusing on skill development, partnership building, and expanding inclusive opportunities.

Many hope that the project will facilitate new connections and learning that can be applied more broadly.

One community stakeholder explains, “we want to take learnings from this event and project about facilitating accessible events and opportunities back to our central team...as well as create new connections and partnerships in the community.”

Others emphasise long-term impact, hoping for sustainable activities, broader reach, and upskilling volunteers, with one stakeholder noting the need for “skill development around working with people with a learning disability and upskilling our volunteers and workforce, making them more confident.”

Stakeholders also highlight the potential for Our Active Community to create best-practice models that encourage inclusion, social interaction, and independence, ultimately influencing strategic advocacy.

These expectations can provide a roadmap for how the project can grow and deliver lasting impact in the community.

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**“To see examples of best practice and to use this as a case study”**

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# Current Provision

## Existing Offer

People with a learning disability in Worthing engage in activities that include:

- ✓ Football
- ✓ Cycling
- ✓ Skateboarding
- ✓ Horse riding
- ✓ Multisport sessions
- ✓ Circuit exercise sessions
- ✓ Open sports sessions

Local Mencap services offer:

- ✓ Attendance at gym and swim sessions
- ✓ A walking group
- ✓ Multisport activities within their Sussex Seals group, such as basketball, cricket, Zumba dance, arts and crafts, football, table tennis and trampolining.

Local clubs offer:

- ✓ Football with Inclusive Worthing FC
- ✓ Trampolining with Aiming High
- ✓ Inclusive cycling with Cycall Worthing
- ✓ Padel with West Worthing Tennis Club
- ✓ Table Tennis with Worthing Table Tennis Club
- ✓ Tennis with Worthing Tennis Club

Community stakeholders in Worthing consistently report that opportunities for people with a learning disability to be physically active are limited.

One stakeholder explains, there are “not enough activities available or at suitable times”, and overall “not enough opportunities to take part in sport.”

Currently, much of the available provision is delivered through day services and specialist sports groups.

For example, Worthing Mencap supports people to be active through daytime sessions and their weekly multisport group Sussex Seals.

Sussex Seals is a key part of the current provision for people with a learning disability in Worthing.

The organisation delivers weekly, term-time activities and also hosts an annual sports day, which is one of the largest events in the local calendar for people with a learning disability.

The sports day attracts hundreds of attendees each year, offering an inclusive and well-established opportunity for people to be active and connect with others in the community.

## Challenges

This section explores the key challenges in delivering inclusive physical activity provision for people with a learning disability in Worthing.

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

### Cost

Financial constraints are reported as a challenge by community organisations, with high venue hire costs, viewed as limiting the sustainability of sessions.

The local leisure centre notes, “hiring of the pool and spin room is likely to cost more than the money generated from the session.”

Another local provider shares, “our hire costs are more expensive than school rate hire or local community centres... but we try and help where we can with offering a discount”.

### Space and available times

Community providers identify the availability of accessible spaces as a barrier. Stakeholders report that peak times for gyms and group classes often clash with the needs of adult learning disability groups.

The local leisure centre comments, “a lot of organisations want evenings...but the main group exercise programme and gym use are at peak evening times.

It’s very hard to try and squeeze groups in, especially something like skateboarding, which takes up a lot of space.”

### Confidence to deliver

Some coaches are believed to feel underprepared to work with participants with diverse needs.

Stakeholders suggest that while coaches may have technical skills, they sometimes lack confidence in adapting activities for people with physical or learning disabilities.

Awareness, training, and experience are considered important factors in ensuring sessions are safe, inclusive, and enjoyable for all participants.

### Reach, promotion, and awareness

Reaching the wider community is suggested as an ongoing challenge.

Communicating about opportunities can be difficult, as suggested by a representative from a local charity supporting people with a learning disability: “how to promote and spread the word has always been a barrier... we normally email our partners, but that hasn’t always been successful externally”.

### Creating long-term partnerships

Sustainability is noted as dependent on building engaged partnerships.

A local charity shares, “at the moment it’s a lot of small-scale projects...we need to find the right people to be involved and have them buy into the project...consistent coaches are key.”

Long-term collaboration is believed to be critical to providing reliable, high-quality opportunities for people with a learning disability in Worthing.

### Top Challenges:

- ✗ High venue costs
- ✗ Limited accessible space
- ✗ Coach confidence
- ✗ Promoting activities
- ✗ Venue scheduling conflicts
- ✗ Sustaining provision

## Opportunities

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

### Training reception and coaching staff

Stakeholders suggest that training for reception staff at venues, such as leisure centres and community facilities, as well as coaching staff, is key to creating inclusive environments.

Staff are believed to benefit from guidance on meeting access needs, communicating effectively, and maintaining consistency, which can help participants feel welcomed and supported.

Coaches may require additional awareness and confidence to deliver activities for people with a learning disability.

One stakeholder comments, “reception staff need training to be more accessible...coaches often need to understand that consistency is needed and how to meet people’s needs, respond and communicate with them so people want to keep coming back.”

Community stakeholders also note that open communication and flexible approaches are essential for helping participants feel comfortable and engaged.

### Buddy system

Stakeholders report that a buddy or familiar point of contact can support participation, particularly for new activities or events.

Having a trusted individual present can help people with a learning disability feel safe, understand what to expect, and encourage repeat engagement.

One community stakeholder explains, “people need to have known faces at activities...to help them feel safe...so they can feel comfortable coming back.”

Another local organisation supporting people with a learning disability mentions, “buddying can be really useful for people to keep coming back.”

### Taster sessions

Taster sessions are viewed as an effective way to introduce new activities, build confidence, and encourage ongoing participation.

Community stakeholders suggest that offering opportunities to try an activity without commitment allows participants to explore interests and find activities they enjoy.

One stakeholder says, “taster sessions give them encouragement and confidence...if they like it then they can come again, and if they don’t, they can find something else to try instead.”

### Areas to improve:

- ✓ Training staff
- ✓ Having a buddy system
- ✓ Offering taster sessions

A photograph of a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark t-shirt with a Nike logo and a crest, sitting on a chest press machine in a gym. He is holding the handles of the machine. The image is overlaid with a solid purple color. The text 'Community Needs' is written in large, white, sans-serif font across the lower half of the image.

# Community Needs

## Motivation and Confidence

People with a learning disability in Worthing express a range of feelings about being physically active, with many describing it as “fun”, “exciting” and “freeing.”

Many express feeling “accepted,” as well as sometimes feeling “nervous” when trying new activities.

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**“To make new friends, build trust, friendships and build a community”**

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### Motivation

People with a learning disability in Worthing are understood to be motivated by enjoying social connection, staying healthy and having fun.

Many people with a learning disability speak about the health benefits of activity. Some share that they enjoy activities because it “keeps me fit and healthy,” while others note that being active helps them “stay healthy and manage my weight.”

Physical activity is also shared as being linked to independence, with one person explaining that it “makes me strong so I can keep being independent.”

Social connection and belonging are also seen as equally important motivators.

Stakeholders report that many people value activities because they provide a sense of community and friendship.

One community stakeholder explains that for the people in their service, participation is often about enjoying “playing with others,” while another stakeholder highlights that “community is really important...without it people would be isolated and bored.”

This is echoed by people with a learning disability themselves, who say, “I like coming because I get to see my friends and have fun.”

### Confidence

Confidence is viewed as a key barrier to participation. Stakeholders report that some people with a learning disability feel unsure or hesitant, especially when joining new groups. One stakeholder explains, “people often have a lack of confidence, and this can prevent them from joining groups to be active”.

Confidence, however, appears to grow where individuals feel supported, encouraged and included.

A stakeholder suggests that giving people time, clear information, and gradual introductions helps them engage, noting that “once they build their confidence...they would take part”.

People with a learning disability also highlight the importance of social encouragement, with one person sharing, “people encouraging and supporting me to do exercise helps me to be more confident and keep coming”, and another person explaining, “I like to do exercise with others, it helps me to feel more confident to try things.”

The presence of trusted support networks is also frequently mentioned.

One individual notes, “my support workers help me to feel confident trying new activities”, while another person adds, “I feel more confident to do activity when there is support from support workers and regular coaches

and carers, the routine is important to making me feel comfortable and confident to take part.”

Peer support and belonging also emerge as important factors.

A few people with a learning disability share how, “having a buddy or friend to go with to activities helps me feel more confident to take part,” and “I feel confident to be active when I’m a part of a team and feel like I belong in the group”, and this reflects how confidence can be closely linked to social connection and familiarity.

Some individuals also indicate feeling more confident in tailored or specialist settings, with one person explaining, “I feel more confident doing activity when I go to groups that are made for me, than mainstream groups.”

## Top Motives:

- ⬆ Social connection
- ⬆ Friendship building
- ⬆ Sense of belonging
- ⬆ Familiarity or trusted groups
- ⬆ Being part of something
- ⬆ Reducing isolation

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**“I think it is all about building friendships”**

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## Barriers to Participation

Conversations reveal how several barriers can prevent people with a learning disability in Worthing from accessing opportunities to engage in physical activities.

These include transport challenges, limited session timings, financial constraints, lack of inclusive and accessible activities, and negative attitudes or low expectations within the community.

### Travel

Transport is frequently viewed by community stakeholders as a barrier.

Stakeholders report that public transport routes are often limited, taxis are expensive, and some people lack support to get to sessions.

One stakeholder notes, “public transport and how safe people feel are really big barriers”.

Free bus passes or support when travelling on public transport are believed to improve access for some people with a learning disability to be able to engage in opportunities in the community.

### Session timings

The timing of sessions is also understood to affect participation.

Many activities seem to run during daytime hours, which can be difficult for working-age adults or those attending day centres.

Stakeholders suggest that there is a need for more evening and weekend opportunities, with one community stakeholder noting, “we have daytime activities and not evening...people who are working age are accessing services, so they don't really get to access the provision in the day.”

### Costs

Financial constraints are also viewed as a common barrier. Costs associated with clothing, equipment, club fees or accessing a venue may limit participation.

A community member shares, “one of my friends...can't do activities because of the cost of it all”, while others highlight the lack of discount schemes as limiting opportunities.

### Inclusive and accessible activities

A lack of inclusive provision is believed to restrict engagement in opportunities to be active in the community.

Stakeholders emphasise the importance of accessible venues, plain-English communication, and digital support.

One community stakeholder shares, “we need to make it more inclusive for everyone looking at accessibility

on websites, easy reads, imagery and making sure it's representative”, with another stakeholder commenting, “how do we make it easier for those people who have less digital literacy?”

Accessible, tailored sessions are viewed as essential to encourage participation.

### Attitudinal Barriers

Negative perceptions and low expectations may also prevent engagement.

Stakeholders report that some participants feel intimidated or underestimated in community spaces.

One community stakeholder shares, “sometimes people are being told they are not able or capable of doing sport... when their needs are met, they can take part”, highlighting the importance of awareness and understanding among the wider community.

## Enabling Participation

Whilst some needs are currently being met, people with a learning disability and community stakeholders highlight further support and opportunities that would help people with a learning disability to be more active.

### Accessible transport

Travel is understood to be a barrier, particularly when public transport is limited or taxis are expensive.

Stakeholders suggest that sharing information about different travel options, including public transport schedules and taxi routes, could help participants plan and feel confident attending activities.

One stakeholder comments, “knowing the courses, how much they’re going to cost and five ways they can travel may help them be able to attend”, emphasising the importance of practical support.

### Inclusive staffing and training

Consistent, trained staff are believed to be essential for building trust and ensuring enjoyable experiences.

Stakeholders suggest training should be for both reception and coaching staff to meet access needs, communicate effectively, and deliver adapted sessions.

One stakeholder highlights, “coaches often need to understand consistency to help build rapport and how to meet people’s needs”.

Long-term staff relationships are viewed as helping participants feel comfortable and motivated to return

### Buddying and familiar faces

Having a trusted point of contact or buddy at sessions is suggested as a strategy to reduce anxiety and encourage repeat participation. Stakeholders note that familiar faces help people with a learning disability feel safe and supported. One stakeholder explains, “people need to have known faces at events of people they trust...so they can feel comfortable coming back.”

### Participant-led and adaptive activities

Opportunities are believed to be most effective when they are flexible and responsive to individual needs.

Stakeholders report that prescriptive sessions can limit engagement and suggest adaptive coaching and personalised approaches.

Lived experience is considered valuable in shaping activities and providing encouragement, with one community stakeholder noting that sharing experiences helps others understand what to expect and can boost confidence.

### People with a learning disability want more access to:

- + Tag rugby
- + Football
- + Archery
- + Climbing
- + Running
- + Triathlon
- + Trampolining
- + Swimming
- + Cricket

The background image is a photograph of a gym interior, overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. On the left, a person with glasses is on a treadmill. On the right, another person is also on a treadmill. In the center background, there is a water fountain area with a sign that reads "Water Fountain" with a downward arrow, and another sign below it that says "Water Fountain for Bottle Filling Only". There is also a hand sanitizer dispenser and a paper towel dispenser in this area.

# 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

### Value of the role

Stakeholders highlight the value of the role in connecting organisations, providing support and reducing isolation. One community stakeholder observes, “Laura’s role has been really good...having her there finding out this information has saved me the workload, as well as brought us all together.”

Another stakeholder adds, “the role of the Community Partner has really supported us in bringing everyone together”, emphasising how the position can strengthen collaboration across the community.

The Community Partner is also viewed as instrumental in translating local insights into practical support, helping organisations access funding and develop inclusive activities.

### Hopes for the role

Stakeholders hope the Community Partner will help solidify priorities and provide a clear focus for development.

One community stakeholder notes, “I think their role will help solidify our work and our priorities, and give us a target to focus on, which is always good to help us develop.”

There is also a strong sense that the role can create and strengthen connections across the community. As one stakeholder adds, “it is such an important role, and I hope this role can

highlight the challenges and successes in the community and how groups have also navigated challenges.”

Others hope the Community Partner will act as a bridge between organisations, particularly linking those who are connectors rather than direct deliverers, to foster stronger relationships and create more opportunities for activity within the community.

Improving access to information and opportunities is another key hope.

One stakeholder expresses, “I hope the Community Partner can help us find out about opportunities that are accessible for the people in our service as most opportunities are spread through word of mouth.”

Similarly, there is hope that the role will help break down barriers to accessing opportunities, particularly for individuals with higher levels of need, by identifying and promoting inclusive activities that are accessible to everyone.

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**“We were working really well with Sarah and building some good connections”**

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## Progress

Stakeholders reflect on the efforts of both Laura and her predecessor, Sarah, noting their success in connecting with sports groups, exercise providers, and local organisations.

One stakeholder says, “Laura and Matthew have been visiting local organisations and groups...this connection and relationship building is what has led me to go for seed funding and become a part of Our Active Community.”

## Views of the Community Partner

Stakeholders praise the work of both Laura and her predecessor, Sarah, for their engagement in the community. Sarah was recognised for establishing strong local connections, with one community stakeholder noting, “she often works from a community café, and so she’s become a face in the community now, which is important.”

Laura is described as “really supportive in bringing together the research and understanding and has helped me with my seed funding application.”

Together, their presence and efforts are understood to have helped strengthen relationships and visibility across Worthing’s community networks.

## Challenges

Key challenges for the Community Partner include building connections with educational stakeholders and clarifying the purpose and scope of the role in the community.

One stakeholder notes, “I am probably still a little unsure as to what the role of the Community Partner is.”

When this uncertainty arises, Laura has arranged follow-up conversations with stakeholders to share more information about the project, including examples of seed-funded activities the project has supported where this is of interest.

Despite these challenges, the role is widely recognised as essential for developing local networks, understanding community needs, and creating opportunities for sustainable, inclusive physical activity for people with a learning disability.

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**“Sarah and Laura’s role has been great for understanding what is in the community, discovering opportunities and building those connections; they have both done a fantastic job”**

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## Community Connector

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.

### Views of the role

Stakeholders are enthusiastic about the role of the Community Connector.

Many highlight the importance of lived experience in shaping activities, with one community stakeholder noting, "I think the role's going to be fantastic... someone in a paid capacity to be able to speak to their peers and really pull out what people need and want...It's a really exciting opportunity."

Others emphasise advocacy, inclusion, and confidence-building: "it's a brilliant position, and I think it is vital for shaping the project and getting the right activities in place in the community."

### Hopes and concerns

Stakeholders hope the role will strengthen feedback from the community, improve participation, and ensure sustainable, inclusive opportunities.

Central to this, is the role being able to help people with a learning disability feel listened to and confident that their views influence decisions about activities and provision.

Challenges include clearly defining the role and managing expectations, particularly around the balance between advocacy and activity delivery.

One stakeholder expresses, "I hope they will have great success in getting feedback from the community about what is wanted and the activities we can put on."

### Recruiting the Community Connector

Worthing Mencap is the host organisation for the Community Connector role in partnership with Ferring Country Centre, Guildcare, and Superstar Arts.

Recruitment attracted strong interest, with several candidates interviewed for the position.

Some challenges arose in clearly explaining the role, as it focuses on advocacy and lived experience rather than delivering sessions, which was a common misconception among applicants. Host organisations are also considering the long-term sustainability of the role and are developing a portfolio to evidence the Community Connector's impact in the community.

There is hope the role will continue beyond the project, and this is a key focus for the Community Partner.

### Feedback on the Community Connector

The Community Connector role has been positively received, with stakeholders highlighting its value in ensuring that people with a learning disability feel they can have an influence in the community.

One stakeholder shares that "Matthew's role has been great, and it is helping people with a learning disability get their ideas heard."

The importance of representation, especially in a paid role, has also been noted, with another stakeholder commenting that "having a person with a learning disability as the Community Connector is important representation..."

Matthew's role is changing my perceptions of what people can do, and I think it is making a big difference in the community."

Community Connector profile:

## Matthew

Joined in March 2025

### Receives support from:

- + Laura (Community Partner), Charity Director at Worthing Mencap

### Personal motivation:

- ✓ Seeking paid employment and independence.
- ✓ Interested in supporting people with a learning disability to overcome barriers to work
- ✓ Motivated to develop personal skills and wellbeing through meaningful activities.

### Hopes and aims:

- ✓ Increase physical activity among people with autism and a learning disability.
- ✓ Connect individuals with local clubs, groups, and sports they may not have tried before.

- ✓ Encourage community engagement and help people discover activities they enjoy.

### Early achievements:

- ✓ Built strong connections by listening to the community.
- ✓ Spoke at a community event to explore activities, interests, and barriers for people with learning disability.
- ✓ Developed confidence in leading meetings, communicating via email, and public speaking.
- ✓ Supported others by understanding barriers and sharing lived experiences.

### Future plans:

- + Organise a triathlon in partnership with British Triathlon.
- + Attend more community events and outreach with the Community Partner.
- + Encourage participation in activities like Parkrun and promote inclusion in local sports and physical activities.

**“Laura has helped me to build skills and learn new things...I enjoy the job, and her believing in me helps me”**



## Network Developments

Networking and community development in Worthing is being led through regular engagement, forums, and community visits.

The Community Partner and Community Connector share project updates, build relationships, and encourage collaboration across organisations.

As a result, stakeholders report feeling more connected and increasingly aware of opportunities within Worthing, with a growing willingness to work together to support people with a learning disability to be physically active.

As Our Active Community has developed, local networks have strengthened, with stakeholders forming new connections and building on existing relationships across the community.

Organisations report greater awareness of each other's work and

increased confidence in reaching out, sharing ideas, and exploring opportunities for collaboration.

Stakeholders also highlight that involvement in Our Active Community, including forums and the recent conference, has helped them feel “more connected” and “tuned in” not only to developments in Worthing but also to activity in other communities, while strengthening relationships with national Mencap, particularly for network partners locally.

This has likely supported a more joined-up approach, where stakeholders are beginning to work together to enhance provision and create more inclusive opportunities for people with a learning disability.

### Community forums

The Worthing community forums have become an important space for fostering collaboration and sharing opportunities to support people with a learning disability to be active.

Hosted at different community organisations such as the leisure centre, library and Ferring County Centre, the forums provide a visible and accessible space where stakeholders, service providers, and community members can come together.

The sessions are designed to be welcoming and inclusive, with time for introductions, informal conversation and community updates, alongside project updates and shared learning from the Community Connector.

Forums also create space to discuss next steps, including emerging ideas and potential seed-funded activities, and for attendees to ask questions and contribute their own thoughts and perspectives.

New groups engaging in Our Active Community now attend alongside existing stakeholders, helping to broaden participation and strengthen networks. One attendee notes, “the Our Active Community forums have

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**“There are groups that are joining the forum from the broader West Sussex and Brighton areas, which is good.”**

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been amazing because there are companies out there, I didn't even know existed...it's a good place to share, build connections and hear feedback."

Forums are valued for networking and relationship-building, with attendees reporting that the forums have helped to connect organisations, identify venues, and support joint working.

One community stakeholder explains, "the forum meant I could contact people in the community as we actually had met and knew each other and form a partnership", which might help support a seed-funded activity by providing a venue so they "can use the space to deliver dance when the seed funding comes through."

No major challenges have been reported, though for some stakeholders, attending a weekday meeting can be difficult due to their schedules.

The next community forum planned for late January/early February, with a focus on insights and ideas shared at the Our Activity Community conference.

Conversations will also explore how the community would like to use remaining 2025/26 seed funding and plans for 2026.

#### Worthing community forums are:

- ✓ Building networks
- ✓ Sharing updates
- ✓ Promoting inclusivity
- ✓ Showcasing projects
- ✓ Generating ideas
- ✓ Sharing opportunities
- ✓ Discussing seed funding
- ✓ Supporting collaboration



A photograph of a group of people in a gymnasium, overlaid with a purple tint. In the foreground, a person with blonde hair and glasses is cheering with their mouth open and one arm raised. They are wearing a dark jacket with a small circular logo. To their left, another person is seen from the back, wearing a striped vest. In the background, other people are visible, some with their arms raised, and a woman is standing with her arms outstretched. The gymnasium floor has white lines, and the background is covered with dark curtains.

# Successes

## Seed Funding

### Funding process and panel

Worthing currently does not have a dedicated local seed funding panel, therefore applications for Our Active Community funding are reviewed by a group of local organisations that include people with a learning disability.

Stakeholders emphasise the value of involving those with lived experience in decision-making, noting that it helps ensure opportunities meet community needs and encourages broader buy-in.

One community stakeholder comments, “I think it’s really important to have people with lived experience making decisions that affect them.” Another stakeholder adds, “anyone within the community...has a right to have a say on what’s going on.”

Applicants report that while the process has not always followed a formal panel structure, it has been supportive and constructive.

One applicant shares, “the whole process was very supportive from the Community Partner and from Mencap, who provided ideas and ways to help make it sustainable.”

Funding levels are viewed as a helpful “kick-start” for new activities, such as supporting initial coach fees or venue hire, but some stakeholders note that higher funding would better support long-term development and training.

One stakeholder explains, “we can get projects up and running, but to develop them and really support those with lived experience to develop, more money is needed for longer-term sustainability”.

### Four successful applications:

#### Seated Exercise

Beginning in March 2025, weekly seated exercise sessions have been delivered on Tuesday mornings at Buddies Café, run by Worthing Mencap.

The sessions are led by a personal trainer employed by Worthing Mencap, who was supported through Our Active Community funding to complete additional training in seated exercise, building on her existing qualifications.

The sessions are designed to offer accessible, supportive physical activity within a familiar community setting. Alongside the café-based sessions, a further 100 seated exercise classes have been delivered across the community, extending reach and engagement.

Participants contribute a small fee to attend, which has supported the sustainability of the sessions beyond the initial Our Active Community funding.

As a result, the provision has continued independently, demonstrating both local demand and a sustainable delivery model embedded within the existing community infrastructure

#### Worthing Mencap’s Fit & Fun

These funded sessions take place at Worthing Leisure, which has supported the sessions by offering its facilities at a reduced cost.

The day includes a morning group exercise session, followed by lunch and a choice of activities in the afternoon.

The morning session, known as “Fit and Fun,” is held in the sports hall at Worthing Leisure Centre and consists of a guided fitness session, often delivered in a circuit training style. One participant shares, “Fit and Fun is amazing, it’s helping me to get so strong.

Sera and Daisy are very lovely and nice”, highlighting both the physical and social benefits of the sessions.

In the afternoon, participants can take part in a multisport session offering a choice of activities, which vary week by week and include activities such as basketball, netball, tennis and skateboarding provided by local club, South Coast Skate.

The sessions began in April 2025, supported by nine months of funding.

Although this initial funding period has now ended, the group continues to run and is sustained by Worthing Mencap.

From the outset, participants contributed a small fee, enabling the seed funding to be used to establish the group and cover essential costs, with any remaining funds reinvested back into the sessions.

The group was developed following discussions at local community forums, where an opportunity was identified to make use of available space at Worthing Leisure Centre and create dedicated physical activity opportunities for people with a learning disability.

### **Parable Dance**

Beginning in January, Parable Dance sessions have run weekly for 12 weeks at the dance studio in Davison Leisure Centre as an evening community session, with the Community Connector volunteering to support the sessions.

Around 10 regular participants attend, each contributing £8 per session to help sustain future provision.

The group has already started fundraising together and has developed a plan to support further dance sessions, with a further seed funding application submitted to continue sessions into the summer and autumn terms.

Feedback collected by the Community Partner and Community Connector has been very positive, with participants sharing their enjoyment of the classes and expressing hope that the sessions will continue.

One participant shares, “I always feel better after dancing, and it helps me to come out of my shell,” highlighting the confidence-building impact of the sessions.

The sessions have created a positive and sociable atmosphere, with strong engagement and plenty of conversation inspired by Strictly-style dancing, helping to build enjoyment and connection within the group

### **Sports Buddies: Stay up late scheme**

Beginning in January 2026, the Sports Buddies scheme will pair 12 volunteers with adults with a learning disability in Worthing, supporting them to be active together two to four times per month.

Volunteers will provide encouragement and practical support, enabling individuals to access activities in their community while building confidence and independence.

The scheme is modelled on Stay Up Late's Gig Buddies project and builds on a previous Sports Buddies

programme delivered in Worthing between 2021 and 2024, which demonstrated high demand but ended due to funding constraints.

Interest remains strong, with continued enquiries highlighting the need for this type of support.

Sports Buddies offers flexible, person-centred opportunities, allowing individuals to choose activities that suit their interests, supporting long-term engagement in physical activity and wellbeing.

Funding will support volunteer training, DBS checks, coordination, and expenses to ensure effective delivery.

## Other Partnerships and Activity

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**“We are now running some of our wellbeing coaching programme with a number of participants in Ramsgate”**

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### Further funding applications

Several funding applications are currently in progress to expand opportunities for people with a learning disability in Worthing.

The Sports Buddies scheme is set to launch in 2026, with the Community Partner and Community Connector planning to meet to discuss the delivery of the six-month scheme, which has already generated strong interest and support within the Worthing community.

From January 2026 onwards, a key focus will be on encouraging further seed funding applications to continue growing local opportunities

### British Triathlon Event with Worthing Mencap

An adaptable mini triathlon was delivered in partnership with Worthing Mencap and British Triathlon, offering a swim, run, and bike experience for people with a learning disability at their local leisure centre during usual gym and swim times.

The event was initiated after a networking event, and together the Community Partner, British Triathlon with Worthing Mencap identified and addressed potential barriers, including managing competitiveness, making online booking accessible, and adapting activities to participants' needs, such as using spin or recumbent bikes, walking or running, and setting a 200m maximum for swimming with a buddy system to guide participants.

The leisure centre supported the event by making all relevant spaces available simultaneously. Stakeholders hope the event will be repeated in the future, as it successfully introduces people with a learning disability to triathlon in a supportive and inclusive environment.

### South Downs Leisure's Support

South Downs Leisure and Worthing Mencap have worked together for many years and have a long-standing, positive relationship, although this is not a formal partnership.

Mencap has regularly accessed South Downs Leisure facilities across Worthing to support their activities, and South Downs is also supporting Our Active Community by helping seed-funded projects, such as Parable Dance, to secure suitable venues, for example, providing studio space at one of their sites.

### Bramshaw House Sports Day

Bramshaw House takes part in an annual sports day that brings together homes across its parent organisation, Liaise, creating an inclusive and celebratory event for the people they support.

Many participants across the homes are non-verbal and have mobility needs, and activities are carefully adapted to ensure everyone can take part.

Staff describe it as “a lovely opportunity for people to come together and be active and have fun.

Activities are adapted so everyone can take part; it is a day each year that we look forward to.”

The most recent sports day, held in Worthing, included a range of fun and accessible games, from competitive tug of war contests to wheelchair relay races and dancing.

While there was plenty of friendly competition, with certain homes taking the tug of war very seriously, the focus remained on participation, laughter and connection.

On the day, colleagues and housemates from Bramshaw House delivered a standout performance, proudly claiming the overall title.

### Worthing Mencap Sports and Fun Day

This is a long-standing annual event that now attracts around 700 participants each year.

Fully funded by the charity, the free event is for people with a learning disability or autism and brings together the people they support, individuals, local schools, day centres and residential homes for a day of sport, fun and friendship.

Described as “an event that people look forward to every year and is unlike any other opportunity” and is widely anticipated across the community.

Another provider reflected, “we look forward to the sports day every year as it is a day to meet up with other groups and friends and take part in sports; the social aspect of sport is so important.”

Supported by volunteers, including students from Davison High School for Girls, the event continues to be a highlight of the year in Worthing, combining inclusive sport, laughter and community connection.



A group of seven people, including men and women of various ages, are standing on an outdoor basketball court. They are all holding basketballs. The background is a wooden slatted wall. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent purple overlay. The word "Challenges" is written in large, white, sans-serif font across the bottom half of the image.

# Challenges

## Overview of Challenges

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**“It has taken quite a while, but Laura's done a fantastic job and is really making and fostering some good connections in the community”**

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### Worthing community challenges

Worthing benefits from strong community networks, accessible coastal and green spaces, and established specialist provision.

Participation in physical activity for people with a learning disability, however, remains shaped by several interconnected challenges.

While public transport is generally described as reliable, the cost of travel, particularly for those living outside central Worthing, can restrict access.

Many people rely on funded minibuses, taxis, or support staff to attend activities, limiting independence and spontaneity. In addition, much of the current offer is concentrated within daytime services, leaving fewer opportunities during evenings and weekends for working-age adults or those seeking activity outside structured day provision.

High venue hire costs and limited peak-time space also constrain the

sustainability and growth of inclusive sessions, particularly where adapted equipment or smaller group sizes are required.

Awareness and communication also remain a challenge, with stakeholders noting that opportunities are often shared within existing networks but can be harder to promote to the wider community.

This can limit reach, particularly for individuals not connected to day services or established organisations.

### Our Active Community-specific challenges

Alongside these community-level barriers, some project-specific challenges are influencing the development of Our Active Community in Worthing.

Following the loss of the previous Community Partner, rebuilding networks and trust has taken time, and some stakeholders continue to seek clarity around the distinct strategic role of the project.

Engagement with schools, health services, and organisations operating just beyond the geographical boundary of Worthing remains limited, which restricts referral pathways and partnership potential.

There is also an ongoing challenge around sustaining provision beyond short-term funding.

While momentum is building again through renewed relationship development, ensuring long-term impact will depend on strengthening cross-sector collaboration, workforce confidence, and sustainable delivery models.

A group of young people, likely students, are sitting in a circle on the floor, holding hands. They are wearing casual clothing like hoodies and t-shirts. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The text "Conclusion & Next Steps" is written in large, white, sans-serif font across the center of the image.

# Conclusion & Next Steps

## Summary of Key Findings

- ✓ Social connection, friendship, and a sense of belonging appear to be the strongest motivators for people with a learning disability to engage in physical activity.
- ✓ Confidence appears to increase when individuals feel supported by trusted coaches, support workers, peers, and familiar routines, particularly in environments where they feel safe and included.
- ✓ Much of the current provision in Worthing is delivered through specialist services, particularly Worthing Mencap, with additional opportunities supplemented by local sports clubs and community providers.
- ✓ There are reported to be limited evening and weekend opportunities, particularly for working-age adults, restricting access outside of daytime services.
- ✓ Transport costs and reliance on supported travel may reduce independence and restrict participation, particularly for those living outside central Worthing.
- ✓ High venue hire costs and limited access to suitable space can impact the sustainability and frequency of inclusive sessions.
- ✓ Coaches, reception staff, and volunteers may benefit from further training to strengthen inclusive practice, confidence, and understanding of how to meet diverse needs.
- ✓ Awareness and promotion of activities beyond established networks is perceived as inconsistent.
- ✓ The Community Partner role is viewed positively, with stakeholders highlighting its value in building relationships, connecting organisations, and supporting access to funding and opportunities.
- ✓ The Community Connector role is also positively perceived, particularly for bringing lived experience into the project, strengthening engagement, and ensuring that the voices of people with a learning disability shape local provision.
- ✓ There is a strong appetite for sustainable, long-term, inclusive provision that continues beyond short-term funding, with stakeholders highlighting the importance of maintaining activities over time.

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**“It has helped strengthen my relationship with Worthing Mencap”**

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## Next Steps

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**“Training non-disabled people within the sector to be much more aware of being inclusive”**

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- ✓ Consider delivering targeted taster sessions to introduce new activities, build confidence, and support individuals to explore opportunities without commitment, helping identify what works best for sustained engagement.
- ✓ Strengthen engagement with schools, colleges, and health services to widen referral pathways and increase reach, particularly for individuals not currently connected to existing networks.
- ✓ Continue to raise awareness and understanding of the aims, approach, and purpose of Our Active Community to ensure stakeholders have clarity on the role and value of the project.
- ✓ Sustain and develop more consistent and direct touchpoints between the Community Partner and stakeholders to strengthen relationships, provide ongoing support, and maintain engagement.
- ✓ Develop and deliver targeted training for coaches, reception staff, and volunteers to build confidence, awareness, and experience in delivering inclusive activities for people with a learning disability.
- ✓ Explore opportunities to expand evening and weekend provision for working-age adults, supporting access beyond daytime services.
- ✓ Improve awareness and promotion of activities through accessible, varied, and coordinated communication methods to reach beyond established networks.
- ✓ Further map existing physical activity provision across Worthing to identify gaps, duplication, and opportunities for development and collaboration.
- ✓ Continue to explore and test the impact of buddy systems and the role of familiar faces in supporting participation, capturing what works well and sharing learning within Worthing and across other communities.
- ✓ Support mainstream clubs and providers to adapt and embed inclusive approaches, building confidence to work with people with a learning disability.
- ✓ Explore sustainable funding models and shared-resource approaches to maintain provision beyond current funding cycles.
- ✓ Continue visible, in-person engagement within the community to maintain trust, build relationships, and increase awareness of opportunities.
- ✓ Capture and share examples of best practice locally and across other Our Active Community sites to support learning, replication, and wider strategic influence.

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