



Community Case Study **Ealing 2025**

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

Created as a way for people with a learning disability, stakeholders and organisations to connect, network, seek training and provision, and access resources and funding.

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

Data sources

This case study was developed based on 7 focus groups and 15 interviews or conversations with 12 stakeholders and 29 people with a learning disability from remote consultations and a research visit.

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



A purple-tinted photograph of a park area with bare trees, a paved path, and a modern building in the background. The sky is overcast with clouds.

Community Overview

Community Background

Located in West London, Ealing is home to a vibrant and diverse community of approximately 350,000 people, with a significant proportion from global majority backgrounds.

The borough offers a mix of urban and suburban settings, featuring large parks and green spaces that serve as popular spots for outdoor activities.

While some areas are affluent, others face socio-economic challenges, highlighting the borough's varied landscape.

Ealing has nearly 7,000 adults with learning disabilities, with 1,500 individuals aged 14 and over on the Learning Disability Register.

However, only 20% of people with a learning disability receive formal care services.

Among children and young people, around 2.9% of primary and 2.3% of secondary school pupils have special educational needs and disabilities or an Education, Health and Care Plan, including those with learning disabilities.

This diverse demographic and geographical setting present a unique opportunity for implementing Mencap's Our Active Community.



Stakeholders

Our Active Community in Ealing is engaging with diverse stakeholders, with strong engagement from the Mencap Network Partner and community services.

The Community Partner has been engaging with stakeholders by attending various events and making connections. While progress has been steady, engagement across all stakeholders is still developing.

The Community Partner comments how engaging schools and day services has been a challenge and believes this may be because of staffing and competing demands.

One stakeholder reinforces this by saying, “a barrier for engagement for schools is the staffing” and

acknowledges while schools see the benefits of engaging, limited capacity prevents them from attending and supporting Our Active Community activities.

Stakeholders emphasise these challenges extend beyond this project, particularly in Ealing where schools have been increasingly difficult to engage.

As one stakeholder explains, “schools have been hard to engage in Ealing not only for this project but within Ealing in general...it’s just not feasible with staffing and timings.”

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

- › Day Services, Centres or Supported Living: Ealing Mencap
- › Service Providers: Everyone Active and Ealing Hockey
- › Community Organisations and Charities: Contact Ealing, Ealing Youth Service and Access Sport
- › Health Services: Ealing Services for Children with Additional Needs
- › Local Authority: Ealing Council

“I feel stakeholders have been receptive.”

Perceptions and Expectations

Stakeholders in Ealing hold positive perceptions of Our Active Community, viewing it as a vital initiative to improve community health by encouraging more people with a learning disability to engage in physical activity.

Many chose to engage in Our Active Community because its goals align with their priorities, such as increasing accessibility and inclusion, developing social cohesion and a sense of belonging, and promoting sustainable physical activity.

Collaboration is a key expectation, with one stakeholder emphasising, “we’re

all trying to do the same thing, so let’s work together!”

Others see it as a chance to expand networks, with one stakeholder noting, “I’d like to make some new contacts.”

Supporting underrepresented groups, particularly those with additional needs, is also a major priority, with a local councillor stating, “one of our biggest priorities is getting more people physically active, especially those who are underrepresented.”

Funding was also a motivating factor for some, as one stakeholder acknowledges, “one thing for us was the funding.”

Overall, stakeholders hope by “looking at gaps” Our Active Community will create long-term impact, ensuring greater inclusivity and leaving a meaningful legacy beyond the project’s duration.

“We would like shared collaboration and learnings.”



Current Provision

Existing Offer

Opportunities for people with a learning disability to be active include:

- ✓ Inclusive fitness classes
- ✓ Swimming sessions
- ✓ Walking groups
- ✓ Running
- ✓ Boccia
- ✓ Adapted sports
- ✓ Horse riding

Gunnersbury Park Sports Hub offers people with a learning disability sports such as:

- ✓ Football
- ✓ Basketball
- ✓ Badminton
- ✓ Table tennis
- ✓ Cricket
- ✓ Multi-sport sessions

Community sports clubs also offer opportunities for people with a learning disability:

- ✓ Brentford Community Sports Trust
- ✓ Ealing Trailfinders Rugby Club
- ✓ Ealing Hockey Club
- ✓ Middlesex Cricket
- ✓ AJ Sport London

At a local leisure centre, a weekly multi-sport session for people with a learning disability is offered with around 30 participants attending from day services, supported living and a Special Educational Needs school.

The lead coach tailors sessions based on feedback, creating a relaxed, engaging and unstructured environment where participants choose their activities.

One attendee shares, “it gives me energy,” while another adds, “I feel happier.” Within these sessions, people with a learning disability appear to feel comfortable, confident, and safe to explore new activities.

Healthcare services, including physiotherapists, are also seen to play a vital role by referring young people with a learning disability to physical activity programmes and offering tailored guidance to support their engagement and wellbeing.

Challenges

This section explores the key challenges in delivering inclusive and effective physical activity provision for people with a learning disability in Ealing. While some provision exists, stakeholders highlight ongoing difficulties that limit its reach, quality, and accessibility.

Despite the existing provision in Ealing, stakeholders consistently note “there could be more,” with limited opportunities currently available for children. One stakeholder emphasises, “we want children with a disability to become more active because they don’t have the same opportunities, provision, or facilities.”

A key challenge noted in providing effective provision is the lack of centralised information. While some tailored sessions exist, parents, carers and people with a learning disability

often struggle to find suitable activities, as one stakeholder shares, “we haven’t cracked it for years across mainstream sport – having that one-stop shop where you can find information.”

While some community clubs accept those with mild disabilities stakeholders say they often lack the provision needed to support those with more complex needs.

Furthermore, the expectation to participate independently makes it difficult for those who need extra support.

Additionally, the reference to a shortage of inclusive swimming sessions presents a challenge, as a parent highlights, “there are very few swimming clubs for children with learning needs, the options are very limited.”

Another apparent issue is the shortage of trained or experienced staff to deliver inclusive sessions. Stakeholders and parents alike highlight how a coach’s skills and personality are key to sustaining engagement.

Some stakeholders express concerns about the difficulty of finding suitable coaches to deliver activity for people with a learning disability. One coach, reflecting on his own training experience, notes the lack of specific education on working with people with a learning disability within many coaching qualification pathways.

There is also a recognised need for broader staff training across leisure centres, not just for coaches but also for other staff. As one stakeholder mentions, “it’s not only the coaches who need this training; it’s the reception staff and everyone people with a learning disability meet at the gym.”

Top Challenges:

- ✗ Lack of centralised information
- ✗ Limited tailored opportunities
- ✗ Shortage of trained inclusive coaches and staff
- ✗ Gaps in coaching qualifications
- ✗ Limited inclusive swimming provision
- ✗ Mainstream clubs lacking inclusivity

Opportunities

Stakeholders voice the need to improve awareness of existing physical activity opportunities for people with a learning disability in the borough.

While new initiatives are emerging, many parents, carers, and people with a learning disability remain unaware of current opportunities, and strategic stakeholders struggle to find effective outreach methods.

Conversations with stakeholders stress digital platforms such as Facebook can be inaccessible to some, while traditional methods like flyers in libraries or GP surgeries are seen to be ineffective.

A council stakeholder notes, “some customers aren’t tech-savvy...flyers don’t work because people don’t visit those places often.”

Similarly, a charity stakeholder stresses the need for better communication between organisations, “we have all these contacts, but they don’t link up to create change.” The Community Partner should continue to connect stakeholders but focus on ways to foster collaboration in Ealing.

Many stakeholders seem to share key priorities and work toward similar goals; therefore, collaboration can be a powerful opportunity for greater impact.

Areas to improve:

- ✓ Informing people with a learning disability, parents, and carers
- ✓ Using varied and accessible communication
- ✓ Strengthening links between organisations
- ✓ Supporting inclusive practices in clubs

“We want to support coaches and clubs to improve their inclusive offer.”





Community Needs

Motivation and Confidence

People with a learning disability in Ealing describe engaging in sports and activities as fun and energising, and state feeling “happy” and share they “find it really fun to do.”

One stakeholder notes, “if the physical activity is something they like to do, they’re more likely to engage,” suggesting when the activity aligns with their interests, it can provide enjoyment and motivate them to participate.

The social element seems important to people with a learning disability in the borough, one stakeholder working in the council explains how, “young people with a learning disability are motivated to go to groups to see their friends.”

Whether it is cheering each other on or simply catching up with friends, these interactions appear to be vital for their wellbeing and motivation to engage.

One young person with a learning disability sums it up saying, “I go to see my friends.”

Knowledge of healthy outcomes is also acknowledged with many people with a learning disability understanding how being active supports overall wellbeing, including healthy eating and hydration.

Conversations with people with a learning disability, their parents and stakeholders also highlight they feel confident with one parent remarking their child “is very confident” during activities and a young person with a learning disability remarks, “I’m good at it”.

Confidence however is suggested to grow when supported by carers or family.

“I feel happy when I run around and jump as I feel free.”

Top Motives:

- ⬆ Enjoyment
- ⬆ Social connection
- ⬆ Health and wellbeing

Barriers to Participation

Stakeholders and people with a learning disability in Ealing reveal multiple barriers to engaging in and accessing physical activity.

High costs emerge as a significant hurdle, with many advocating for more affordable options; one parent notes, “price per session is also a barrier.”

Transportation challenges further complicate access, one parent state, “sessions were taking place too far away and it was taking too much time.”

Furthermore, social factors also seem to contribute, with people with a learning disability reporting a lack of friends or buddies to join them at activities.

Parents also stress the limited session availability and inconvenient timings hinder participation, with a want for more after-school options, however, providers face difficulties in securing accessible venues, with one describing the task of finding a suitable location as, “a massive challenge.”

“It’s definitely an accessible and safe space that is needed.”

Unmet Needs

Currently, some needs of people with a learning disability to access physical activity opportunities are being met, but gaps remain.

While some provision exists, there is a clear need for travel training and support to help people with a learning disability get to activities.

Many individuals require an accompanying person, such as a family member, carer, or friend, to participate.

Additionally, parents report a limited range of inclusive activities. One parent notes, “the activities were not appropriate for my children,” demonstrating the mismatch between available options and the specific needs of people with a learning disability.

People with a learning disability express a notable openness to new experiences, often inspired by sports and physical activities they have seen on TV or witnessed among friends and family.

People with a learning disability want more access to:

- + Swimming
- + Football
- + Cricket
- + Basketball
- + Martial arts
- + Dancing

“I want more activities for my son.”



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. Ealing stakeholders value this role for mapping existing services, engaging harder-to-reach groups, and bringing together those who can contribute to a more connected and active community.

As one stakeholder mentions, “there’s a bit of a lack of awareness, it’s about connecting those dots.”

By working with the Community Partner, stakeholders hope to:

- ✓ **Highlight existing activities**
- ✓ **Identify new opportunities**
- ✓ **Expand access for people with a learning disability**
- ✓ **Strengthen community connections**

The Community Partner, has been instrumental in strengthening relationships and collaboration across the borough through regular communication, attending events, meetings, and groups to connect stakeholders, and more recently by creating the forums.

Described as “great” and highly engaged, she is playing a key role in increasing awareness and developing partnerships.

Her work mapping existing services and identifying gaps is helping stakeholders better understand and improve accessibility for people with a learning disability.

While engaging harder-to-reach groups like schools, parent/carer networks, and day centres has been challenging, the Community Partner remains committed to developing these connections.

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.

Ealing Mencap, the only organisation to express both interest and capacity, was always keen to be the host organisation for the Community Connector in the borough.

The role has been met with both enthusiasm and concern. Stakeholders see it as a crucial bridge between people with a learning disability and the wider community, ensuring lived experiences shape the project's development.

One stakeholder describes it as a, "really positive thing to start doing in the borough."

They appreciate its potential to enhance engagement and address knowledge gaps about available activities, with one stakeholder noting, "we don't know all of the activities, so having the Community Connector share them is a really positive step."

Concerns were raised about the varying levels of skills being required therefore the host organisation welcomed the decision to remove the IT literacy requirement, which initially excluded many potential applicants, with them noting, "opening it up to more people to be a connector means we're going to get a range of skills and abilities."

While optimistic, stakeholders acknowledge it is too early to comment on long-term sustainability and stress the need for collaboration with councils and community groups.

Despite some concerns over support and oversight that might be needed, there is strong backing for the role's long-term success as a key step toward

greater inclusion for people with a learning disability, especially as Ealing Mencap hope to integrate the role into ongoing community inclusion work.

There is now an individual in the role and are cited as having a positive impact with stakeholders expressing offering a paid role to an individual with a learning disability is bringing meaningful representation and advocacy to other people with a learning disability.

"It's great people with a learning disability can have a voice and share what they think."

Community Connector profile:

Ibraheem

Joined in December 2024

Receives support from:

- + Kaylee (Community Partner)
- + Employment Services Manager and Community Inclusion and Influencing Officer at Ealing Mencap

Personal motivation:

- ✓ Enthusiastic about learning new skills and gaining work experience
- ✓ Passionate about supporting people with a learning disability to be physically active
- ✓ Enjoys meeting new people and engaging with the community

Early achievements:

- 🏆 Planned and delivered a PowerPoint presentation
- 🏆 Engaged with people with a learning disability at activity sessions and day centres
- 🏆 Learned how to write emails with support
- 🏆 Enjoyed reviewing seed funding applications
- 🏆 Visited schools and delivered talks, helping to engage stakeholders
- 🏆 Part of filming for the Our Active Community website

Future plans:

- + Continue reaching out to people and making contacts
- + Improve independent working
- + Continue being part of videos and creating content to support the project
- + Promote activities
- + Create and lead seed funding panels
- + Support future Ealing Our Active Community forums

“I can definitely help them and understand their disability a lot more.”



Network Developments

The development of partnerships and networks within the community progressed gradually, as building relationships with new stakeholders required time and effort, especially due to the community-led approach.

However, over time, these connections have strengthened, leading to numerous collaborations as “different people have now been talking and working together” demonstrating the expanding reach of Our Active Community in Ealing.

The Our Active Community forums have also played a role in fostering dialogue and collaboration.

The first forum held in October was well-received, with around 15 attendees, including people with a learning disability from the Mencap Network Partner.

Held in a local youth centre, the forums seem to be a success with stakeholders, “it was great to see how many people turned up from different organisations, parents and carers, and young people.”

The connections established through these efforts have already yielded tangible outcomes, such as upcoming sports days.

The forum and development of networks have also resulted in the forming of a working group by the Community Partner, led by a national charity, and included key stakeholders such as representatives from local authority.

One stakeholder expresses enthusiasm for this next step, stating, “she is planning to set up a steering group next. The aim of this is to make sure the project is fulfilling what the community wants, a guiding panel really, a sort of self-checker.”

Our Active Community forum has:

- ✓ Strengthened community partnerships
- ✓ Facilitated stakeholder collaboration
- ✓ Led to a working group in Ealing

“This relationship is supporting and complementing both ours and Mencap’s offer.”

A person wearing a white hoodie with 'USA' on the chest and large headphones is gesturing with their hands in a large, modern hall. Other people are visible in the background. The entire image is overlaid with a purple tint.

Successes

Seed Funding

Similar to other communities the funding panel comprises people with a learning disability, in the borough these were mainly service users from the Mencap Network Partner.

The seed funding process in Ealing is described as “smooth” and “easy to access” by stakeholders completing the applications.

Approved applications:

✓ Multi-sport sessions

Notably, an additional application from a local Youth Services is being co-produced with their youth panel, which includes young people with a learning disability and those with special educational needs and disabilities.

This approach should ensure those who will benefit most from the initiative are directly involved in shaping it.

One of the key proposals is a gaming and physical activity day held throughout the year for young people with a learning disability.

Rather than pushing traditional sports, the initiative leverages existing interests to create an accessible and engaging way to be physically active.

They are proposing to host it at the youth centre ensuring an inclusive venue while also introducing attendees to spaces for accessible physical activity, as one stakeholder mentions, “it’s supposed to act as a magnet to bring them to the youth centre that has a gym, outside basketball and football.”

“We have signposted providers to the funding to support their delivery.”

Other Partnerships and Activity

Inclusifit Activity Taster Session

This initiative was founded by a physiotherapist working with children with special needs and is supported by the Community Partner, the local authority and a local leisure facility. It was established to address the barriers young people with a learning disability face in accessing sport and physical activity.

The goal is not only to provide more opportunities but also to raise awareness of opportunities in the borough. Inclusifit was formed in response to the challenges people with a learning disability face in accessing provision and to help promote opportunities.

The vision is to also ensure leisure centres or other facilities require minimal adaptation so a wide range of people can participate without difficulty.

The event was hosted at a local leisure centre, where different physical activity providers showcased their offerings. Families attended to learn more about inclusive sports, while young people with a learning disability participated in taster sessions such as mini trampolining, football, karate, and sensory play.

This hands-on experience gave both participants and providers insight into how to make sport more accessible. One of the organisers explains how the event was designed to “get sport providers, parents and their children to come and experience a particular sport.”

The success of Inclusifit has sparked momentum, with a national charity expressing interest in scaling up the initiative. They aim to host a larger event with more activities and expanded access for individuals up to 25 years old, signalling a growing recognition of the need for inclusive opportunities.

The long-term goal is to ensure leisure centres and providers routinely offer accessible provision, rather than relying on one-off events.

The success of Inclusifit has been recognised as it won the Prevention Innovation of the Year Award (2024), honouring its contribution to wellness and accessible fitness.

With 90 attendees at last year's event, the organiser hopes to expand Inclusifit further this year, continuing to bridge the gap between sport providers and people with a learning disability.

The initiative's success shows coordinated efforts between communities, leisure centres, and funding bodies can drive meaningful change to make physical activity truly accessible for all.

A photograph of a person playing table tennis in a gymnasium, overlaid with a solid purple color. The person is in the foreground, wearing a dark jacket and pants, holding a paddle and looking towards the right. In the background, other people are visible on the court, and a basketball hoop is mounted on a wall. The word "Challenges" is written in large, white, sans-serif font across the lower half of the image.

Challenges

Overview of Community Challenges

Conversations with stakeholders highlight local and individual challenges affecting people with a learning disability to engage in physical activity.

People with a learning disability face challenges such as limited awareness of available opportunities and a lack of tailored, inclusive sessions.

Other barriers include insufficiently trained staff, inaccessible timings, high costs, and inadequate transport and support.

While limited access to popular sports like swimming, due to a shortage of accessible swimming pools, is also reported to affect engagement.

Our Active Community-specific challenges

Barriers to engaging in Our Active Community are apparent among smaller organisations in Ealing, which seem to face resource and capacity constraints.

In particular, there have been difficulties engaging schools and it will be important to expand the reach and explore new ways to engage the wider community, mainly children and young people from Special Educational Needs schools who may face additional barriers to participation.

Some stakeholders express initially lacking an understanding of the project, which posed a challenge given Our Active Community's reliance on stakeholder engagement and community development.

However, improved communication has helped overcome this and keep the project on track.

The background image shows the entrance of a building with a modern design, featuring a large overhang and glass doors. To the right is a textured stone wall. In the foreground, there are metal bike racks and a paved walkway. The entire image is covered with a semi-transparent purple filter.

Conclusion & Next Steps

Summary of Key Findings

- ✓ Stakeholders play a crucial role in the success of Our Active Community, with meaningful relationships beginning to form despite gradual engagement
- ✓ The Community Partner is now ready to expand outreach to more organisations, helping to increase the project's overall reach
- ✓ Many parents remain unaware of physical activity opportunities for people with a learning disability unless they are already connected to day centres
- ✓ The Community Connector role provides vital lived experience insights that should be fully integrated as the project evolves
- ✓ This role also enhances advocacy efforts and helps ensure people with a learning disability remain central to decision-making
- ✓ Raising awareness and improving access to clear, accessible information for people with a learning disability and their families is a key priority going forward

Next Steps

- ✓ Continuing to review and approve new funding applications to support the development of inclusive activities
- ✓ Ensuring people with a learning disability remain central to all project decisions to strengthen engagement
- ✓ Addressing practical barriers—such as limited transport, staff training needs, and financial constraints to improve access to inclusive activities
- ✓ Raising awareness of existing physical activity opportunities to increase participation among people with a learning disability
- ✓ Exploring clearer, more inclusive communication strategies to address the lack of centralised, accessible information and help people with a learning disability, their families, and carers find suitable activities more easily
- ✓ Strengthening community connections and promoting local physical activity opportunities more widely
- ✓ Continuing and expanding regular forum meetings and the new working group to strengthen stakeholder collaboration and build on relationships developed since the project began
- ✓ Increasing engagement with underrepresented groups, particularly schools and day services, which have been harder to involve due to staffing challenges
- ✓ The Community Partner and Community Connector will play a vital role by:
 - Mapping existing services
 - Advocating for the needs of people with a learning disability
- ✓ Building stronger community networks

“Everyone cares about the work we are doing.”

Report produced by SPEAR

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