



Community Case Study **St Austell and the Clay Country 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 5 focus groups and 43 interviews or conversations with 25 stakeholders and 31 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 photograph of four people standing in a forest, overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. From left to right: a man in a dark jacket, a woman in a dark jacket, a man in a puffy jacket and cap, and a man in a jacket, cap, and glasses. The background shows trees and foliage.

Community Overview

Community Background

St Austell, one of Cornwall's largest towns, has a population of around 20,000, rising to 34,000 with the surrounding Clay Area.

The community faces notable socioeconomic challenges, such as pockets of deprivation, unemployment, and lower income levels, especially in the Clays.

The area's geography also presents unique challenges. The Clay Area, north of town, is rural and isolated, with limited public transport.

One stakeholder notes, "Cornwall struggles with population numbers and its geography," stressing difficulties in serving a dispersed population.

Limited transport options make it hard to access community resources such as sports and leisure facilities with another stakeholder remarking, "it's hard for people to get to places."

Despite this, St Austell's coastal location offers opportunities for outdoor activities like walking, cycling, and water sports.



Stakeholders

Our Active Community in St Austell and the Clay area is engaging a wide range of stakeholders, especially people with a learning disability.

Central to this effort is the Community Partner, who has been instrumental in building relationships with local day services and centres. Through consistent visits, he has established trust and rapport with service users, laying the groundwork for meaningful collaboration.

The local leisure centre has shown support, particularly because of Our Active Community's alignment with their disability strategy.

A local radio station and media group have been proactive in promoting activities, while a dance school and performing arts organisation have generously provided a venue for community forums.

Despite these positive engagements, the Community Partner occasionally faces challenges in sustaining momentum. He plans to deepen connections and broaden outreach to maintain support, ensuring continued progress and development.

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

- › Day Services, Centres or Supported Living: Blantyre, Mid Cornwall Hub, Cornwall Day Opportunities and Mencap Services.
- › Schools, Colleges, and Area Resource Bases: Doubletrees School, Brannel ARB and Cornwall College
- › Service Providers: St. Austell Leisure Centre, Cornwall Bicycle Project, Par Track, C4 Studios, Studio 4, St Austell Table Tennis Club and walking groups.
- › Community Organisations and Charities: Active Cornwall, Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change, Volunteer Cornwall and CHAMPS Team, Healthy Cornwall
- › Media and Outreach: CHAOS group
- › Health Services: St Austell Healthcare
- › Local Authority: St. Austell Town Council, Cornwall Council and Mayor's Office

“They’ve been really happy for me to come in and talk to service users, get to know them and build a rapport.”

Perceptions and Expectations

Stakeholders in St Austell and the Clay area perceive engaging with Our Active Community as an exciting and worthwhile opportunity to create positive change for people with a learning disability.

They see their involvement as a way to help “join up the dots” between support services, local groups, and activities, ultimately opening doors to experiences that may have previously been unavailable or inaccessible.

One stakeholder expresses, “we’re really grateful for any opportunities,” capturing a shared sense of appreciation for what Our Active Community may offer.

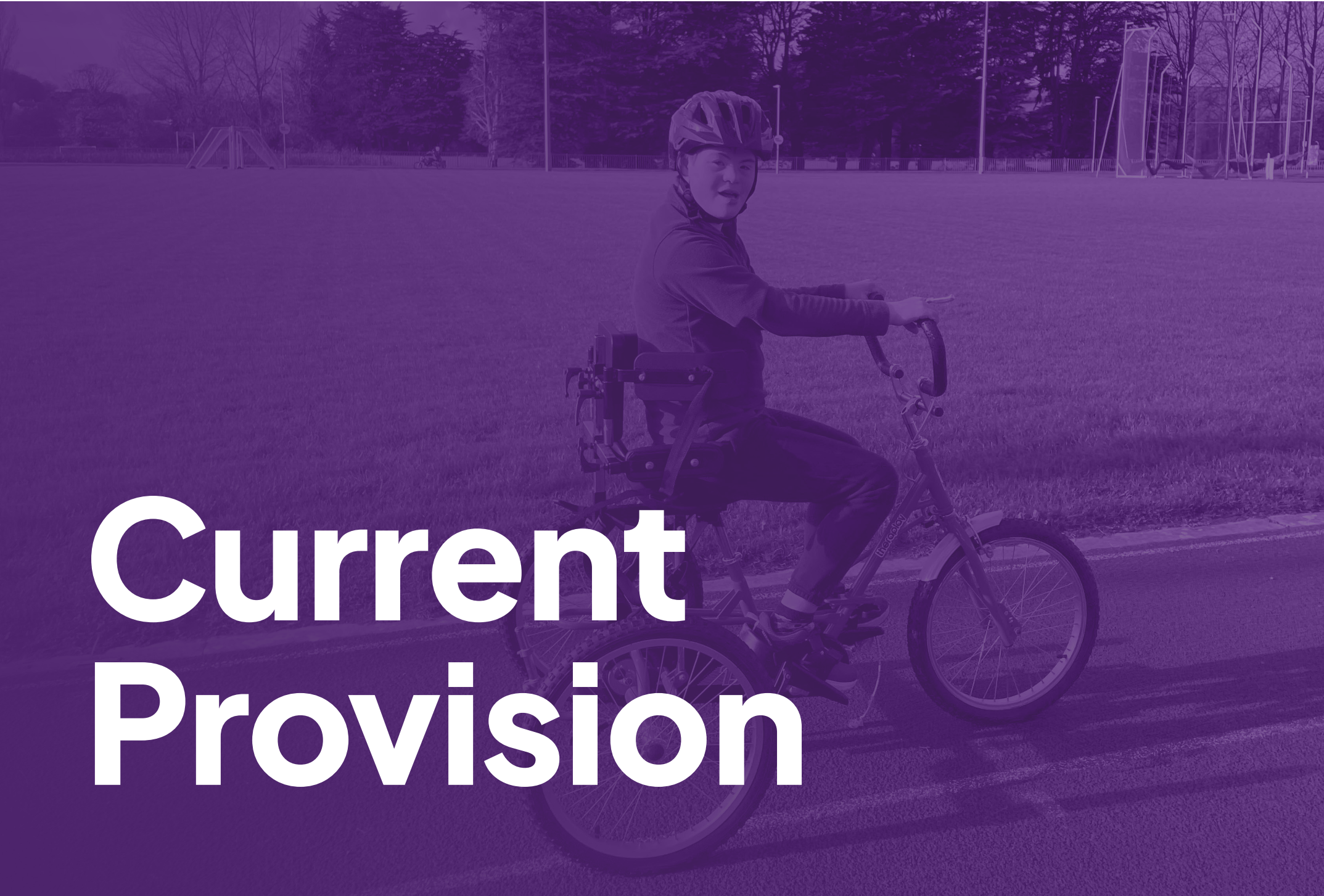
Others reflect how engaging with the project could empower individuals by placing their voices at the centre: “It’s about ensuring those we support are listened to and heard, and then they can achieve what they want to achieve.”

Key expectations include expanding community access, improving activity inclusivity, and forming connections. As one stakeholder notes, it’s about “just expanding that little bit more into the community and be able to access the facilities that they might not have been able to before.”

Another emphasises the importance of “making sure there are enough accessible activities for everyone.” Some organisations are also reflecting on their own accessibility, with one mentioning, “we want to understand better how accessible we are.”

Stakeholders perceive their engagement with Our Active Community as contributing to greater inclusion, enhanced collaboration, and improved opportunities for people with a learning disability to be active, happy and healthy.

“We would like shared collaboration and learnings.”



Current Provision

Existing Offer

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

- ✓ Adapted cycling
- ✓ Walking groups
- ✓ Inclusive circuits
- ✓ Cricket
- ✓ Climbing
- ✓ Gardening

Some Special Educational Needs schools offer activities such as:

- ✓ Table cricket
- ✓ Swimming
- ✓ Yoga
- ✓ Multi-sport sessions provided by Go Active

The local leisure centre hosts:

- ✓ Weekly multi-sport sessions
- ✓ Badminton
- ✓ Football
- ✓ Swimming

Adapted cycling in St Austell area is a highlight, with sessions attended by local day centres, services and a Special Educational Needs school.

A variety of adapted bikes, including hand cycles, trikes, and tandems, promote accessibility with one user saying, “I have a problem with balancing, these three-wheeler trikes really help me.”

People with a learning disability can also access activities through social prescribing via GP practices, and self-referrals.

“The handles make it easier for me to cycle.”

Challenges

This section highlights the challenges in providing inclusive physical activity opportunities for people with learning disabilities in St Austell and the Clay area. While some services exist, several barriers hinder growth and development.

A key issue is the lack of accessible facilities and activities, as well as trained staff. The local leisure centre has made some efforts to improve accessibility and recognises the need for further changes. Although open to offering more inclusive activities, it lacks the capacity and qualified staff for effective delivery. Popular adapted activities, like cycling, are limited by the absence of wheelchair-accessible bikes.

The lack of promotion of existing services is a recurring issue, meaning even when suitable activities are available, many people with a learning disability are unaware of them. In addition, stakeholders acknowledge gaps in provision, especially for children.

The insufficient promotion of existing services means many people with learning disabilities are unaware of available opportunities. Additionally, stakeholders identify gaps in provision, particularly for children.

Costly activities and limited school budgets exacerbate the challenges. Schools also report difficulty in finding suitable activities, as children often struggle to join mainstream clubs due to a lack of inclusivity, support, and experience needed to cater to their needs. One stakeholder reflects the frustration felt by parents and educators: “We’ve got a couple of kids. They’re desperately keen on football. They can’t join in with the mainstream football here because they just get crushed. They get crushed physically and emotionally because they operate in a completely different league.”

Top Challenges:

- ✗ Limited trained staff
- ✗ Poor service promotion
- ✗ Costly activities
- ✗ Budget constraints
- ✗ Accessible facilities and activities
- ✗ Mainstream clubs lacking inclusivity

“Making sure there are enough accessible activities for everyone.”

Opportunities

Stakeholders highlight collaboration with the leisure centre presents a key opportunity, particularly through possible additional training for leisure assistants from Mencap to enhance inclusivity.

To further improve accessibility the 'Helping Hand' app used by social prescribers and patients, could be adapted into an Easy Read format.

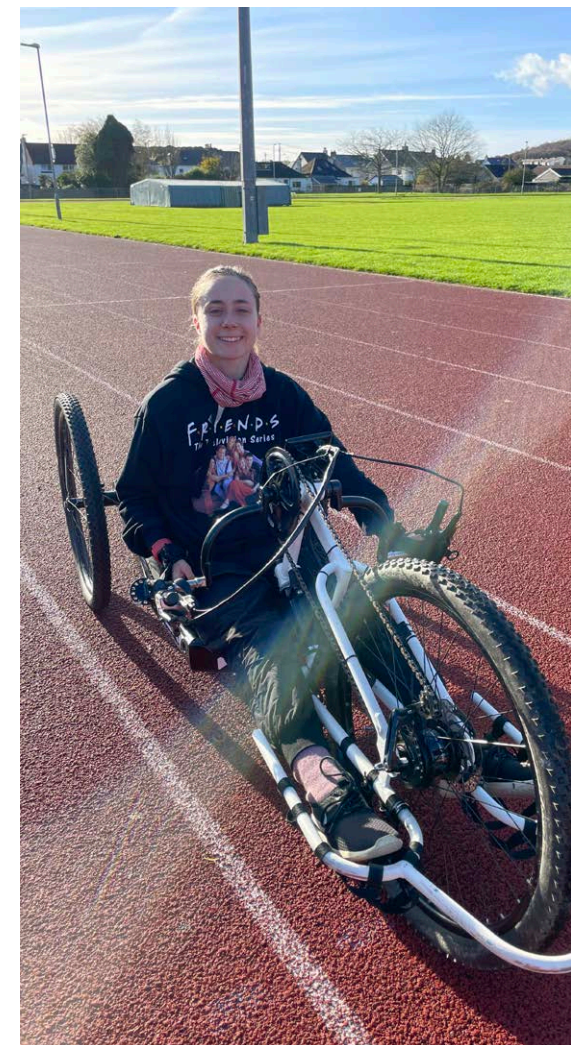
There is an additional capacity building opportunity with workforce development within day services, especially by integrating staff into multi-sport sessions in the community.

Building on this, further training opportunities, such as yoga qualifications for day service staff, would expand the range of available activities and enhance activity diversity for service users and the community.

“With Chris here there’s an opportunity to really understand the specific provision for people with a learning disability and map that.”

Areas to improve:

- Enhancing inclusivity through training
- Adapting ‘Helping Hand’ app to Easy Read
- Upskilling day services staff
- Mapping community provision



A person with curly hair is holding a ball in front of a net. The image is overlaid with a solid purple color. Large white text is centered over the image.

Community Needs

Motivation and Confidence

People with a learning disability in St Austell and the Clays reveal they engage in sports and activities for enjoyment, social interaction, and emotional wellbeing.

Many describe feeling “calm,” “happy,” “confident,” and “excited” when active, particularly with friends, family, or support staff.

Social connection appears key, as one participant shares, “I like playing with friends, it makes me happy, and I listen to them and learn skills.”

Many value the walking groups for exercise and social connection as one support worker shares, “he enjoys the walk, he often doesn’t smile on the way, but he starts smiling and chatting on the way back.”

Family support also plays a crucial role in boosting confidence and motivation, with one noting, “Mummy doing it with me makes me feel confident.”

Conversations with people with a learning disability and stakeholders highlight varying levels of confidence, with some feeling capable, while others find it difficult if they are not immediately skilled.

Stakeholders who work closely with people with a learning disability reveal to support them in accessing opportunities to be physically active, it is essential to provide guidance, clear communication, ongoing support, and encouragement.

Top Motives:

- ⬆ Enjoyment
- ⬆ Social interaction
- ⬆ Emotional wellbeing

“I like cycling because it gives me lots of freedom and I get to meet lots of new people.”

Barriers to Participation

“I would like to come down here again and do more cycling and get involved.”

Conversations reveal how multiple barriers prevent people with learning disabilities in St Austell and the Clays from accessing opportunities to engage in physical activities.

Some stress barriers include issues with accessibility, such as those requiring adaptive equipment like three-wheel bikes. Mainstream provisions are often experienced to be inaccessible and high-pressure, making it difficult for people with a learning disability to fully participate.

Transport difficulties, especially in the Clays, is also a barrier to engaging as many rely on family members or support workers for travel, which makes independent access difficult. Safety concerns also affect participation, with some feeling more secure when accompanied by a trusted adult, “going with a grown-up makes me feel safe.”

The role of trained, inclusive coaches is also considered important in increasing

participation. While some stakeholders perceive support workers and parents can unintentionally hinder participation due to risk aversion, they are also known to be vital for communication and building confidence of people with a learning disability.

Day services additionally report how many activities clash with service hours, while evening sessions are unsuitable for most day centre users, further restricting opportunities.

Unmet needs

Currently, some needs for people with a learning disability to access physical activity opportunities are being met, such as efforts to include people with a learning disability in community activities.

Conversations with people with a learning disability reveal they want more opportunities to take part in activities they enjoy, which

could promote physical activity by incorporating their passions. For example, one service user expresses, “I like singing and performing in musicals,” suggesting that integrating movement and performance into their interests could help encourage more physical engagement and activity. Others also share how they would love to try activities like yoga.

Mostly, they express wanting to enjoy the outdoors, have spaces to be active with friends, and feel a sense of freedom and inclusion.

People with a learning disability want more access to:

- + Swimming
- + Football
- + Cycling
- + Dancing to music
- + Yoga



Developments

Community Partner

“Chris is quite good at dealing with all the information and sending it out to everyone, and always sends an Easy Read which is really helpful!”

Each Community Partner involved in Our Active Community play 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, though some stakeholders in St Austell remain unclear on the Community Partner’s responsibilities other than signposting.

By working with the Community Partner, stakeholders hope to reach more people with a learning disability, with one stakeholder reflecting, “I think

the Community Partner’s role is to pick up those people in the community who aren’t accessing support, which we can help with.”

Stakeholders also think the Community Partner will highlight existing activities and help identify new stakeholders who can offer additional opportunities, while enabling the sharing of ideas and insights to better understand the needs of people with a learning disability.

Stakeholder expectations of the Community Partner:

- ✓ Expanding access for people with a learning disability
- ✓ Highlighting existing activities
- ✓ Identifying new opportunities
- ✓ Sharing insights for better inclusion

Stakeholders highlight the Community Partner for St Austell and the Clay’s strengths as openness and adaptability and describe them as “very personable and very accessible.”

His proactive support, particularly with Easy Read materials, has also been praised. He is actively engaging with the community, attending co-design groups, speaking with individuals at day services and schools, and joining community walks to better understand local needs.

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.

In St Austell and the Clays, one of the initial hurdles was identifying a suitable host organisation willing to support the Community Connector role.

Many organisations expressed interest but cited a lack of capacity to take on the role, though some indicated they might be open to hosting in the future.

Regardless, some organisations wish to engage and offer support, particularly the Active Partnership and a group within the local authority.

After some discussions, a local community charity, Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change, was selected to host the Community Connector role. Though new to them, they are excited about the opportunity and see the benefits for both the Community Connector and their outreach to people with a learning disability.

Stakeholders have shown strong support, emphasising the role's potential to empower people with a learning disability and create meaningful change as one stakeholder shares, "I'm hoping it will inspire. It could be a groundbreaking role."

It is hoped the role will actively link stakeholders and represent peers, with suggestions such as a dedicated forum for the Community Connector to speak with people with a learning disability.

Concerns however remain about adequate support with some stakeholders noting people with a learning disability may need time and assistance to adapt to the role.

While the new Community Connector is settling in well, the host organisation have said additional training from Mencap would improve staff confidence in supporting the role, alongside the Community Partner.

"I'm quite interested to see how it will work, but totally supportive."

Community Connector Profile:

Wendi

Joined in January 2025

Receives support from:

- + Chris (Community Partner)
- + Line manager at host organisation

Personal motivation:

- ✓ Overcame a negative gym experience to become active
- ✓ Wants to challenge perceptions about people with a learning disability and exercise

Early achievements:

- 🏆 Created her one-page profile
- 🏆 Attended the local walking group
- 🏆 Planned upcoming activities
- 🏆 Designed a community engagement poster
- 🏆 Attended community hubs

Future plans:

- + Engage with social prescribers
- + Work with the local leisure centre to improve accessibility
- + Help more people with a learning disability join dance activities
- + Meet with other Community Connectors
- + Co-facilitate a community forum
- + Note-take at a seed funding panel meeting
- + Complete a radio interview

“I am enjoying it so far – I went home buzzing last week! My mum said I’ve learnt a lot already.”



Network Developments

The forums have been essential for networking and collaboration.

Initially, progress was slow, but they are now well-attended and widely valued.

People with a learning disability have also attended the forums and been able to share their thoughts and experiences to help shape discussions; one of those attendees describes the forum as “brilliant” and voices “I really enjoyed it!” This is expressed as everyone had a platform to share and engage.

The forums have provided a valuable network place as one stakeholder notes, “I think the forums have been fantastic... it just needed someone to bring everyone together.”

Some school staff however have been unable to attend due to staffing constraints, though they remain eager to stay informed about developments.

The forums have also enabled services, such as one of the day centres to engage with adapted cycling, table tennis and the local leisure centre.

The development of the network and forum as part of Our Active Community has improved awareness and engagement with one stakeholder highlighting “there’s a crazy amount of things going on but not everyone knew about it.”

The Community Partner’s role in facilitating connections has been widely acknowledged, with one stakeholder highlighting, “it’s great someone like Chris has got some of the people that need to be involved, not just those who want to be.”

A social prescriber has even referred patients to the Community Partner to join the forum.

Additionally, another stakeholder notes how the Community Partner’s efforts in organising the network sessions have directly contributed to increasing engagement for their new pan-disability football sessions, inclusive for those with a learning need.

Our Active Community forum has:

- ✓ Increased networking and collaboration
- ✓ Provided a platform for people with a learning disability to share experiences
- ✓ Improved awareness of available activities

“It has really opened up doors and I think it’s given an opportunity to other people.”

A photograph of a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a black t-shirt with 'MILANO' and a geometric pattern. He is standing in a sports hall with a brick wall and a net in the background. Another person is visible in the background to the left. The entire image has a purple overlay.

Successes

Seed Funding

Two successful applications:

- ✓ **Inclusive table tennis**
- ✓ **New adapted bike**

Day service users valued being part of the decision-making because “they enjoyed considering the reasons why organisations were applying for funding,” and are excited for another opportunity to be part of the seed funding panel.

Table Tennis

The table tennis application is designed to focus on outreach efforts and the creation of a learning disability table tennis league.

So far, table tennis sessions with a day service and day centre have been positively received, one stakeholder voices, “I’m really impressed with how table tennis is considering all service users, not just those who can easily access the community.”

A notable success is how they engage users with complex needs.

One individual, initially unable to hold objects and with little interest in the activity, was encouraged to try the sport.

After a few sessions, they were not only holding the paddle but also laughing and engaging for longer periods.

More sessions are planned utilising the seed funding, and there is a push to move to the leisure centre for a more sustainable, cost-effective model, that reaches more people with a learning disability in the community.

Key staff at the local table tennis club are driving rapid progress, with plans to purchase tables and equipment to use the leisure centre as a community focal point.

“It’s given them the opportunity to get them back in their community and meet with their friends.”

Adapted Bike

Without seed funding, purchasing a needed adapted bike would have required fundraising by the local adapted cycling organisation.

This process could have taken over a year, delaying access; however, seed funding meant the organisation could purchase the bike immediately, allowing people to enjoy it from the start of the year.

The new bike is incredibly adjustable, which will benefit more people with a learning disability, especially those who struggle with mobility. In addition, the bike features an electric motor for pedal assistance, making the ride easier for people with a learning disability and others in the community.

Plans are in place for a launch event and to create Easy Read information and video content to promote the bike.

Other Partnerships and Activity

New Pan-Disability Football Hub:

A collaboration between the local leisure centre, county football club and a learning disability charity has led to a pan-disability football hub on Wednesday afternoons at the leisure centre, providing an inclusive space for football at a reduced cost.

One mother has seen improvements in her son's interaction with his non-verbal cues such as fist pumps and high-fives.

This partnership has been supported by the Community Partner, who is helping promote engagement and provide support.

They have engaged over 35 participants so far, with plans to expand further potentially involving students with special educational needs and disabilities from a local College and exploring funding from Mencap to support further coaching.

Dance and Chat Initiative:

A Dance and Chat initiative aims to create an inclusive and engaging space where individuals, especially people with a learning disability, can participate in dance while taking on leadership roles to shape the project's future.

The first session at a dance school and performing arts organisation included a movement and street dance session, followed by discussions on how to develop the initiative, prioritising co-production.

A man with a beard and a slight smile is standing in a sports hall. He is wearing a grey hoodie with a festive Christmas design featuring a reindeer, Santa Claus, and a snowman. He is holding a large bell in his right hand. The background shows a brick wall with a banner that reads 'FOLKYTH JUDO CLUB' and signs for 'Court 5' and 'Court 6'. There is a net in the background and some equipment on the floor.

Challenges

Overview of Community Challenges

Conversations with stakeholders and people with a learning disability highlight how St Austell and the Clays face a range of challenges impacting community participation to be active.

Stakeholders underline how pockets of deprivation exacerbated by limited access to services, including transport, are suggested to limit the ability of people with a learning disability to access opportunities to be physically active.

Stakeholders are keen to distinguish between challenges systemic across Cornwall and those hyper-local to St

Austell.

Our Active Community-specific challenges

For organisations and individuals engaging with Our Active Community barriers, such as capacity and time, can limit involvement.

While some stress the importance of creating long-term, sustainable initiatives rather than one-off projects as this could influence their willingness to be involved.

“Cornwall is quite poorly resourced.”



Conclusion & Next Steps

Summary of Key Findings

- ✓ The community-led approach has been effective in promoting collaboration and co-production
- ✓ Stakeholders agree that the approach works, with one noting, “when there is a need for something, and you get enough of the right people in the same room, it works, it’s just not done often enough”
- ✓ The Community Partner has played a key leadership role in strengthening networks and increasing engagement
- ✓ New events and activities have emerged in St Austell and the Clays, improving accessibility and inclusion for people with a learning disability
- ✓ Challenges remain, including transport limitations, financial constraints, and the need for greater awareness of available provisions and accessibility
- ✓ Addressing key barriers, fostering ongoing partnerships, and implementing sustainable initiatives will be crucial for maintaining progress
- ✓ Ensuring community-led efforts remain well supported is vital for long-term inclusion for people with a learning disability

“Definite feeling amongst organisations that they want to provide more opportunities. This is where Our Active Community really gives us a chance because it puts this at the front of our mind.”

Next Steps

- ✓ Continuing to focus on offering activities that are specifically wanted by people with a learning disability
- ✓ Expanding inclusive opportunities by introducing new activities such as football, cycling, table tennis, dance, yoga, and swimming
- ✓ Addressing transport barriers and exploring solutions to improve access to activities
- ✓ Enhancing communication through Easy Read materials and digital platforms to raise awareness of available provisions
- ✓ Increase collaboration with stakeholders like schools and healthcare providers to create more accessible opportunities
- ✓ Deepening engagement through the Community Connector's role, strengthening community connections
- ✓ Implementing planned workforce training to support accessible and inclusive activities
- ✓ Continuing to develop independent access to activities
- ✓ Expanding engagement beyond St Austell into the Clay areas, focusing on increasing participation
- ✓ Exploring the possibility of using local village halls for activities, particularly for older individuals who may be socially isolated
- ✓ Launching a walking challenge and multisports, and increasing provision for table tennis

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