

# pass it to me!

people with intellectual  
disability and inclusion in  
local sport and recreation



## about freedom solutions australia

Freedom Solutions Australia is a not-for-profit organisation that customises, designs and builds assistive technology solutions for people living with disability. We have supported over 50,000 people to live more independent lives and achieve their functional goals thanks to the clever ideas of our dedicated volunteers.



Visit [freedomsolutions.org.au](https://freedomsolutions.org.au) to find out more.

## about inclusion designlab

Inclusion Melbourne is Victoria's longest serving community-based support organisation for people with cognitive disability. With our core focus on social inclusion, we support people to build genuine relationships, discover and develop recreational and vocational skills, exercise full citizenship, and pursue meaningful opportunities for employment and further education.

Inclusion Designlab, our centre for policy, research and development, and systemic advocacy, brings together people with a disability, organisations, government, and researchers to develop new models of practice. We communicate our insights through training, digital media, peak bodies, and policy submissions. We also contribute to the continuous development of the disability sector through practice improvement, accessible materials, and innovative training for organisations and advocates in quality improvement, positive behaviour support, supported decision making, LGBTIQ+ inclusion, oral health, and political inclusion.



Visit [inclusiondesignlab.org.au](https://inclusiondesignlab.org.au) for more about our work.

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The authors acknowledge the Wurundjeri and Bunurong peoples of the Kulin nation as the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this book was written.

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### EASY PAGES

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## how to read this book

The first part of *Pass it to me!* is designed for supported reading. It works best if a person with a disability and a supporter read it together.

Most of the book is written in plain language. Some of the right-hand pages have a pink theme. These have been written using easy language. This means that the text uses larger letters and there are pictures to assist supported readers.

Supporters should read the **dark blue** left-hand pages before supporting a person with disability to read the **pink** right-hand pages. In most cases, the ideas on the left and the right are the same but with more information for the support person to facilitate a conversation around the material.

At the end of the book you can find:

- Stories about inclusion
- Tips and tricks for supporting people well

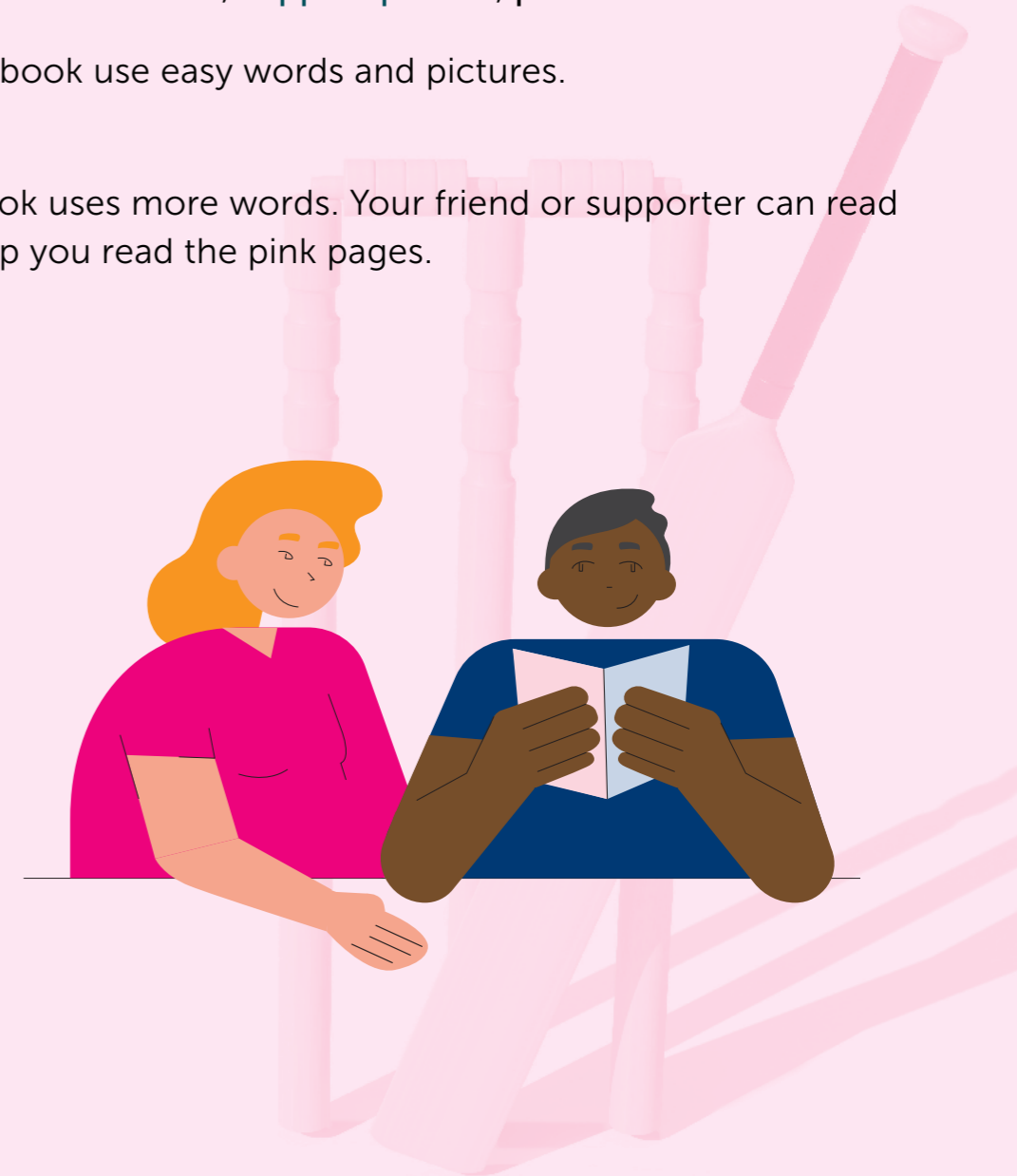


## how to read this book

This book is called *Pass it to me!* It is different to other books. You can read it by yourself or you can read it with a **friend**, **support person**, **parent** or **someone else**.

Some of the pages in this book use easy words and pictures. These pages are **pink**.

The other pages in the book uses more words. Your friend or supporter can read these pages. They can help you read the pink pages.



## introduction

Inclusion. It's a word that is used widely these days – from the playing field, to multicultural events, and even politics.

For people with disability, opportunities to get involved in sport, recreation, and active life have grown hugely in the past thirty years. In Australia, our Paralympic heroes, Wheelchair AFL and the ITF Wheelchair Tennis Tour are no longer in the shadows. All Abilities competitions are thriving around the country, and the NDIS and other funding has made it easier for people to find regular support to get to training, participate in recreation, and try new ways to exercise and make active friends.

People with intellectual disability have not had the same experience of inclusion in the world of popular sport – particularly mainstream local sport and recreation. This book is all about changing that!

### who is this book for?

This book is for two groups of people:

- People who need easy language materials to learn about their right to inclusion in sports and recreation groups. This includes people with intellectual disability.
- Leaders of sports and recreation organisations, including clubs, teams, and community groups who want to learn about the best and most efficient processes for supporting the inclusion of people with intellectual disability in their activities.

The book introduces:

- The barriers people with intellectual disability experience
- What good support looks like in regular sports and recreation settings
- How support works: support workers, funding, NDIS funds, accessible information, ongoing support
- Stories from people with intellectual disability
- Stories from clubs and organisations
- Tips and tricks for good support

## introduction

There are many ways to look after your body. One way is to do exercise. Exercise can help you get healthy and fit!

Some people like to go to the gym. Some people go for walks, ride bikes, go for a run, or play games outside together.

Another way to get fit is to play **sport**. Australians love sport. Australians play a lot of football, rugby, cricket, netball and soccer. These are really popular sports. Other sports are basketball, hockey, tennis, bowls, golf, and more!

The best way to play one of these sports is to join a group called a **club**. There are thousands of sports clubs in Australia.

Some clubs include people with intellectual disability. Some don't. Things need to get better!



This book is for two groups of people:

- It is for people like you! You can learn about your rights. You can learn about how to get involved in a sports club.
- It is also for people who work at sports clubs. This book can help them learn how to include people with intellectual disability.



## understanding the barriers

Australians with intellectual disability experience a range of barriers to participating in regular community activities. However, it doesn't need to be this way.

For sports and recreation clubs, the first step is to challenge assumptions about people with intellectual disability. Some of the most common assumptions are that people with intellectual disability:

- ✗ aren't capable of understanding the rules of most sports
- ✗ are fragile and need lots of protection
- ✗ can't be relied on to be on time, behave properly, or take games seriously
- ✗ need lots of extra support in order to play sport – and this support is really expensive for clubs
- ✗ need to play in segregated teams – like All Abilities teams – because they don't have the skill or talent to play in regular competition

Here's the reality:

- ✓ Some people with intellectual disability struggle with low literacy, but so do many other people. Some people with intellectual disability communicate in ways that others may not be used to. A little bit of learning, planning and support can make all the difference.
- ✓ Many people with intellectual disability need support. This can include support workers, communication devices, or help with transport. This usually doesn't have much (if any) cost to clubs, particularly if the person has an NDIS funded plan.
- ✓ People with intellectual disability have the right to an equal chance to participate, take risks, be included, and even take a bit of a knock on the field – even if a few small adjustments are needed.
- ✓ Club leaders who take a bit of extra time to learn a few tips and tricks about communication, breaking down concepts into small steps, and working with supporters, can make a huge difference for many people with intellectual disability.
- ✓ Good All Abilities teams and clubs will help people with intellectual disability build confidence, then support them to enter mainstream competition if they want this.
- ✓ Separating people purely based on their disability or the assumptions of other people means that clubs will miss out on great opportunities to build tighter teams. (It's also against the law in every state and territory.)

## you can join in!

You can do any of these things if you want to:

- Play sport
- Go to the gym
- Join a sports club
- Be part of a sports team

Some people with intellectual disability play sport and join sports clubs. They get support to join these clubs. They get help to learn about being in a team. You can do all of these things too!

- ✗ Some people with intellectual disability find it hard to join sports clubs. This is because they don't have enough support. This is not good!
- ✗ Some people think people with intellectual disability can't learn how to play sports. This is not true!



Do you want to play a sport? You can get help to learn about different sports. You can get help to try different sports and talk to sports clubs. You can ask for help from one of these people:

- A friend
- A family member or a carer
- A support worker
- A person who works with you at home
- An advocacy group. You can ask a friend to help you get in touch with an advocacy group

## breaking down barriers

All of these difficult experiences mean that sports clubs may need to think a little differently about inclusion.

Including people with intellectual disability is not about modifying buildings or creating new versions of existing sports. Instead, it's about challenging assumptions, thinking creatively, coming up with clever ways to help people learn, and building new relationships with people.

The diagram below shows the main ideas that clubs need to consider in order to make things better for members with an intellectual disability. These ideas underpin most of the concepts and recommendations in this book.

### assumptions

Sports clubs need to take seriously the many ways that people with intellectual disability have had their capacity and potential challenged or disregarded. To be truly inclusive, clubs need to become clear about their values and their commitment to seeing the potential in a person – even if everyone else around them thinks otherwise.

### communication

It's important to learn about how a person with intellectual disability might communicate their thoughts and feelings. Do they use words often? Do they use a device? How do they communicate frustration? However, communication in sport is about so much more than many leaders may realise.

There is a maze of spoken and unspoken words and phrases that we use to communicate with people we trust – including how we communicate to our teammates during a game or when we feel frustrated about unfair expectations. Some sports and sports clubs are like another culture with a completely unique language. It can be easy to confuse a person's ability to use the language of a team or club with their potential to play a game or think strategically. These things are not the same. It is important to start building conscious awareness about how club members communicate on the field and during activities.

### building capacity and making a plan

Embracing inclusive values and challenging assumptions are only the first step. The next step is to work with a person with intellectual disability to work out their goals, the skills they want to learn, and what they want to get out of being involved in a club or team.

You can read more about building capacity on [pages 12 and 14](#).

### support

Support needs and availability vary in every situation. Most important is recognising that:

- ▶ Many people with disability (and their families and friends) may not be aware of the support that is available. Club leaders who know a little about support options may be able to suggest these to a person with disability.
- ▶ Many club leaders and coaches may not be aware of the support that is available. In this case, people with disability or external advocates may be able to inform them about support options.
- ▶ Support can be surprisingly natural and straightforward and, in many cases, may be funded or resourced through external means.

You can read more about support on [pages 12 and 14](#).

### building connection

Inclusion is built on relationships and genuine connection. Making sure a person with disability connects with other club members is vital because these relationships can lead to a natural sense of support during club activities. New friends can also stand guard against undue assumptions about the person. Relationships also drive communication and much of the capacity building journey.

Another aspect of connection is supporting people with disability to get involved in a range of different activities. Supporting people to connect in two or three ways in addition to the core sport activity – such as through volunteering, getting involved in social events, or attending functions – contributes to all of the other considerations outlined above.

## joining a club

One of the best ways to play a sport is in a group called a club.

Clubs can be large or small. Some clubs are about one sport. Some clubs are about many sports.

Some sports have teams – like football, netball or baseball.



Some sports don't have teams because you do the sport by yourself. Swimming, running, and cycling are sports like this.



Here are some different types of club:

### ▶ Health and fitness clubs

A large place that has lots of activities. Some of these clubs have a pool, a gym, and yoga classes. Some of them also have teams that play sports like basketball, tennis and sports that you can play inside.

### ▶ Sports clubs

These include football clubs, soccer clubs, cricket clubs and more. There are lots of things to do in sports clubs. Most clubs have:

### ▶ Teams for young players

### ▶ Teams for older players

### ▶ Events for people to spend time together. Many clubs have parties or dinners.



### ▶ Lots of ways for members to help out! For example, people can be volunteers to help make food that people can eat during sports events.

### ▶ Coaches. These are people who help players become better at their sport.

Sometimes it is hard to join a club. You might worry that you won't be good at the sport. You might worry that people won't understand you.



You can ask someone you trust to help you talk to leaders at the club. A good leader can help you learn more about the club. They can help you make a plan. You can talk with them about the support you need. You can take time to try different activities at the club.



## who gets to decide?

Most clubs and organisations have leadership teams and committees that make a large number of decisions. With tight funds, time pressure, staff management needs, a need to keep up momentum, and competitions to plan around, it can be easy to run out of time and to resort to rapid or instinctive decision making.

Some of this rapid decision making can lead to discussions among leaders, particularly in committee meetings, that involve:

- Deciding if a particular person with intellectual disability has the capacity to be part of a particular team based on the general observations of one or two committee members
- Making conclusions about whether or not other club members might be willing to assist a person with intellectual disability to participate in activities
- Making decisions about a person's suitability to participate in events based on interpretations of the person's communication methods or past experiences of concerning behaviour

These discussions may be motivated by good intentions and a sense of logic, however they often lead to reinforcement of unhelpful assumptions and low expectations. A little bit of planning, preparation and input from supporters could lead to very different conclusions. (These kinds of rushed discussion also risk crossing lines of confidentiality.)

Some easy ways to avoid this approach include:

- Having a rule that these kinds of conversation will not happen unless the person with disability has been engaged first to discuss concerns directly.
- A standing agenda item that redirects these kinds of conversation toward external meetings that focus on updating (or developing) a support plan with the direct involvement of the person with disability. A plan could be developed with leaders, coaches, or someone else at the club. Plans might outline consistent approaches to communication, participation, modifications, adjustments or the involvement of support workers.
- Ensure two or three people in the club or organisation take responsibility for serving as a liaison with club members who need extra support. (Note: The role of these people is not to 'do all of the work' but to consistently spotlight and address opportunities and needs relating to inclusion and support.)

## who gets to decide?

Most sports clubs have leaders who make decisions about many things. They make decisions about who can play in a team. They also talk together about problems in the teams. They have a lot of decisions to make!

Some people with disability need extra help to learn new things. They might need support to get to know other people in sports clubs. Sometimes other people think people with intellectual disability can't play in a team. Some leaders don't understand that good support can make a big difference!



Other people should not treat you differently because you have a disability. Other people should not guess what you can or can't do in a sports club.

Leaders and coaches should talk to you before they make decisions about you. They should learn about you. They should learn about the support you need.

They should support you to learn. They should believe in you.

You can tell leaders at your sports club that they need to listen to you first. You can ask a friend or family member to help you.



## supporting people to reach their goals

Planning is central to including people with intellectual disability in the life of a sports club. The best way to do this is to think through each of the following steps, making sure the person is supported to be actively involved in planning.

### 1. what does the person want?

What is their goal and what are their priorities? Is the person focused on fitness and getting healthy, or are they more focused on social connectedness, or a combination? Are they focused on athletic success? How much time does the person have to spend getting involved in your club or group? Have they had a broad range of options to choose from in the past, or do they need a chance to try a few things?

### 2. what might the person's path forward look like?

If they want to play in an All Abilities team, and they have had some experience with other options, then it's time to start planning this. For some people, All Abilities or disability specific activities might be a great long term opportunity.



However, if they haven't had a chance to build their capacity, or if they really want to be involved in mainstream opportunities, then it is vital that planning is undertaken to reach this goal in the mid to long term.

### 3. how else might the person be involved in the club?

There are so many ways to get involved in a sports club beyond playing in a team, swimming in a squad, or taking part in regular training. Supporting a person to try out a range of new experience might be helpful. For example:

- Helping to make a banner in a cheer squad
- Being a superfan!
- Volunteering to help with club events
- Getting involved in social events
- Joining committees and boards

### 4. what support is needed to bring everything together?

Support is what holds plans together. Here are some pointers:

- **Communication:** agree on the best methods for conversations and correspondence, as well any necessary prompts, devices, visual guides, or document formats
- Who are the point people at the club who can be contacted by the person? Can they help the person debrief after club activities?
- Who are the regular supporters going to be?
- Is some extra work needed in the background (see Capacity Building notes on the next page)
- Who is going to follow up the plan?

(See more about planning on the following pages)

### All Abilities teams

A new kind of competition has emerged in recent decades called all abilities competitions. The teams in these competitions are usually linked to mainstream, non-disability specific clubs and organisations. They feature:

- A mix of people who identify as having a disability and people who don't
- Usually some slightly different rules and specifications to make it a bit easier for everyone to understand and enjoy the game.
- Great opportunities to connect with other people across the club at social events
- Coaching and mentoring from leaders and even some of the other team members

For more about the power of great All Abilities teams and competitions, see stories from Jack and Cam on pages 16 and 17 of this book.

## being in a club

There are lots of good things about being in a club.

- You can have fun.
- You can meet people who like sport and make new friends.
- You can learn new skills.
- You can choose what type of team to join:
- You might want to be in a team for people with disability.
- You might want to get help to be part of a team that anyone can join – not just people with disability.



**No one can tell you what to do. It is your choice. You get to choose your goal!**

Joining a team means you need to go to training. This is where you learn skills and get a chance to use them with other people in your team.

Your team might also play matches – or games – with other teams. You might get to play with teams from other clubs.

People at the club will celebrate with you when you do well. You might win an award, certificate or medal.


As well as playing sport, you can help set up equipment, raise money for the club, or help in other ways.





## how support works

Many Australians with intellectual disability get support every day to live a healthy, equal life. People get support from disability support providers, and from family, friends, and advocates. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has led to many more options for quality paid support.

However, when it comes to getting involved in local sport, it's important to remember that there are a number of players on the field when it comes to support. 

Sometimes, ideas about support might come from the person themselves, however other times the ideas might come from family members, the coach, or other players. It's important to make sure there is room for good communication as ideas about good or better support emerge.



People with intellectual disability can get support from disability support professionals. Here are just some of the different types of workers that can be funded in a person's NDIS funded plan:

- **Support professionals (or 'support workers')**: People who provide support for personal care, getting from place to place, helping people connect with new people in new environments, helping people prepare for new activities, and anything in between. Support professionals might come to training or sports events with the person as needed.
- **Support Coordinator**: A person who has the responsibility to connect a person with disability with the supports and services they need to reach the goals in their NDIS funded plan.
- **Capacity building supports**: Capacity building funds are approved by an NDIS Planner in detail and can be used to help people with disability achieve major outcomes like finding a job, sorting out issues with behaviour, or finding a new place to live. Capacity building funds can also be used in areas that greatly influence their inclusion in local sport and recreation, like:
  - getting help with speech and communication
  - getting help with using assistive technology and communication devices



- having guides and processes developed to assist sports and recreation clubs to provide good support
- getting fit
- being supported to navigate complexities associated with joining a team or club
- much more!

Capacity building funds in the NDIS can be spent on:

- occupational therapy
- speech pathology
- exercise physiology
- specialist behaviour support
- and a wide range of other personalised specialist supports

### Informal and natural supporters

The support a person might need will change from place to place, over time, and depending on the strength of relationships. Unpaid carers and family members might come along to support a person when they start getting involved in a club, however later the people at the club might make it clear that they want to help 'fill in the gaps' and support the person in natural ways when needed. This is one of the best parts of inclusion in local sports and recreation.

## you can get support

You can get help and support to be part of a sports club! There are lots of different types of support. This page has information about some of them.

### help to make choices

There can be lots of new things to try at a sports club. Other people can help you try new things. You can take time to work out what you like and what you don't like.



### support workers

You can use money in your NDIS plan to pay for support workers. Support workers can come with you to training, help you get to the sports club, or help you remember new skills.



### communication devices

You can use a device like a phone or tablet to talk to other people. If you don't speak a lot, you can ask someone to put new words about sport into your device. You can use these new words when you need them.



### easy language

You can get information in easy language. This includes written information or pictures. You can ask a family member, your Support Coordinator, or someone at the club to plan this for you.



### support for learning

Everyone learns new things in different ways. You might need people to speak slower. You might need people to remind you about new things. You can tell people at the sports club about how you learn.



### other support

There are so many other ways to get support. Ask someone you trust to help you find the support that works for you!



# meet our inclusion champions

## meet jack!

*I'm Jack. I'm 27 and I love sport.*

*I live in Melbourne and I play basketball, cricket and Aussie Rules football.*

I used to play in a mainstream cricket competition, from when I was 16 until I was 25, but I left the club I played for because I felt I didn't fit in. I have cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability. I didn't like talking about my disability openly in my cricket team because I didn't want to be treated badly by other players. I played in the lowest divisions. Even though I had the best bowling average and won an award, the coaches didn't think I had potential for higher divisions.

Some friends got me involved with a great All Abilities cricket team at Mazenod Cricket Club. They are really great. I feel accepted and supported. I play in an All Abilities Aussie Rules team with the Mazenod Panthers Football Club. I also play in an All Abilities basketball team called the Ashwood Jets in a competition run by Power Assist.

Great All Abilities teams support you to work out your strengths and the areas you need support in. They have a few people who don't have a disability, and the stronger players mentor the new players. They are a mix of genders. People feel comfortable but they also teach you new skills. Sometimes the rules are a bit different from mainstream competition. All Abilities competition can be good for people to learn about the sport before they go to mainstream. My football team sometimes trains with the mainstream teams. I really like this!

I don't think my disability gets in the way as much as some people think. I don't have problems on the field or learning rules in mainstream teams – it's the stuff off the field that can make things difficult! I have seen some clubs underestimate people with intellectual disability. Don't judge people with disabilities. Learn from them. The best teams make me feel part of the family.

I am now thinking about getting involved in mainstream cricket again. Oh, and I'm really competitive and I hate losing!



The stories on the following pages are fabulous real life examples of Australians taking steps to break glass ceilings and challenge assumptions in inclusion in sport.

## meet cam!

*Hi. I'm Cam. I'm in my 30s and I work as a trainer and a peer worker. I work on projects with LGBTQA+ people with intellectual disability and I am a member of Rainbow Rights and Advocacy.*

Sport is about having fun, getting exercise, and not giving up.

I play for teams in different clubs in Melbourne. I play in a basketball team called the Thunders in a competition run by Power Assist. We made it the Grand Final this year! My partner got me involved in basketball. He encouraged me to play. I don't need to pay fees at my club so it makes it easier to get involved.

I also play as a goalkeeper in a soccer team at All Abilities Soccer Academy. I am on the committee for the club – I'm really proud of this. Recently we played against a Police team and we were on the TV news. I like being in All Abilities teams. I am not very competitive and I don't think I am the best player, but I'm not giving up.

My partner plays in an All Abilities team at Mazenod Panthers Football Club. I really like being involved in the Mazenod community. I don't play in a team there but I take photos for them during games.

If you are a leader in a sports club, don't assume that someone can't play sports because they have an intellectual disability. Take a bit of time to explain things to us. Help us learn the rules and give us a try.





INTERNATIONAL  
SPORTS  
MUSEUM

## meet narelle!

*I'm Narelle Thredgold, president of Mt Helena Junior Football Club in Western Australia.*

Mt Helena Junior Football Club is a small club with a big heart in the Perth Hills. We are an all inclusive club that operates entirely in mainstream competitions. We also run Auskick and the All Abilities Starkick program at our club, and this is where we have seen an inclusive pathway develop.

Making the decision to develop our club into an inclusive community for kids with disability was a big step for us.

We had a little boy with intellectual disability, Riley, in the Auskick program at the end of 2020 who was too old to register in Auskick. That's when we looked into how we could include him in the club. He has benefitted and grown, and his whole family has been able to stay involved in the community. Riley is now 10 years old.

In the first year of our drive to more actively include kids with a disability, we had three children with intellectual disability or autism in our programs. Many of their parents shared their concerns with us about potential limits and risks. We also had some pushback from other people in the club in that first year, but we told our members: "This is an inclusive club, and this is how we are going to do it."

We aren't perfect, but in just a few years, we have built something really special. Inclusion has translated into capacity building for everyone.

- ▶ One of our coaches is neurodivergent and has become a great source of encouragement for players with a disability. With our support he has facilitated training for other coaches on coaching children with ASD.
- ▶ Word has spread and several young players travel quite a distance to come to Mt Helena JFC.

- ▶ One of our players has support from his NDIS funded support worker to participate in Auskick. The support worker was able to get involved and blend in so well. It couldn't have happened without this support.
- ▶ One of the players with intellectual disability who was in Starkick in 2022 is now playing in mainstream junior competition in 2023.
- ▶ We noticed that another player with intellectual disability (who is also neurodivergent) really loved flags. We weren't surprised that he was able to start umpiring our Auskick grid games, but we were pleasantly surprised when an AFL umpire heard about him and came to the club one week to present him with an umpiring kit!
- ▶ A group of kids at the club (players who don't have a disability) felt so passionate about the Starkick program that they asked (demanded, really!) their school to run a fundraising initiative for the program.



## UWA west coast swimming club

*Told by Peter Foley, President, UWA West Coast Swimming Club.*

UWA West Coast Swimming Club Inc. (UWSC) is a not-for-profit organisation in Perth. Our inclusive swim program caters for swimmers of all levels from beginners through to School, State, and National Level athletes, and to aspiring and current Olympians.

Athletes participating in the UWSC program can enjoy the use of world-class facilities at HBF Stadium, Mt Claremont, with training pools also available at UWA Aquatic Centre in Crawley.

As a swimming club, UWSC aims to promote and encourage participation in swimming. The UWSC squad program offers junior development swimmers a four-tiered level of participation and a clear pathway to performance squad training and events. Club members enjoy a safe and fun environment to learn, train and compete at club nights and other targeted meets. We now have the largest Multi-Class (disability and impairment classification) swimming group in Western Australia.

We have always believed in the principle of giving every kid a chance to get in the pool and learn to swim, but it took some time to grow our culture of inclusion. It didn't happen overnight.

Our swimming coaches and club leaders have learnt to think outside the box. The parents at the club have embraced our inclusive values. Our squads swim at the same time, regardless of whether they are Multi-Class swimmers or not, and we often use wider lanes to make it easier for some of the swimmers who have a disability.

One swimmer, Jordan, is an emerging national level swimmer who has an intellectual disability but has recently been reclassified based on physical impairment (S8) rather than intellectual impairment (S14). This is a significant step as it is a tangible demonstration that talent, with good support,



## meet jordan!

*Hi, I'm Jordan. I'm 17 and I'm just finishing Year 11 at school.*

I've been swimming since I was 5, so my whole life really. I love swimming because I get to be part of a team, but I also get to focus on what I am doing in the pool. This works for me.

I used to only swim under the s14 class for people with intellectual disability. These days I sometimes swim as an s8, which is for people with a physical disability. This has been a big step because it means I swim with people who don't have an intellectual disability. It's harder, but I still win races!

UWA is a really supportive club. I set my goals, then my coaches and supporters help me meet them. My mum has helped me by making visual aids that I can use to remember what I need to do. The club has made sure swimmers with disability can feel comfortable in the pool by spacing us out more. When I win races, the club celebrates me. It's also been a great place to make friends and meet other people.

I have an assistance dog named Beau. He comes with me to training and even to national competitions in the eastern states. He helps keep me focused and relaxed, and I think he makes me more confident as a person and as a swimmer.

I am open about having a disability. I don't mind talking about disability if it encourages other kids. It's sad that so many people have told me that I won't succeed. There are still some people – even other kids' parents – who have said I shouldn't swim outside of the intellectual disability class. It's really draining to listen to all of these voices, but I think I've proved them wrong!

It would be a dream to go to the Paris Paralympics in 2024!





## more about barriers

Barriers to inclusion in sport were discussed earlier in this book. Outside sport, the everyday barriers are even more complex. People with intellectual and cognitive disability face barriers to:

- accessing mainstream services and entitlements
- navigating systems – online portals, insurance, the NDIS, and more
- participating in community and the workforce
- having their identities respected, supported and celebrated

This is despite being more frequent users of support and government services than the general population. In addition, people with intellectual and cognitive disability are **more** likely to:

- ⬆ be victims of crime
- ⬆ experience social isolation
- ⬆ experience financial lack and have substantially fewer disposable funds
- ⬆ experience poor health, and have a significantly shorter lifespan

They are **less** likely to:

⬇ have the chance to talk about politics or vote



⬇ work in paid employment



⬇ visit the dentist



⬇ be included in LGBTIQ+ events



⬇ have good chances for adult learning about sex and relationships



⬇ have friends and confidants in their life



## tips and tricks for good support

Like all of us, people with cognitive disability can be best supported to achieve their goals when the focus is on the person: understanding who they are, what they like, what they want, and what they need.

Inclusive practices and techniques such as Supported Decision Making, Person Centred Active Support and Positive Behaviour Support are available to make sure that people with cognitive disability feel they are being heard and listened to.

### Person Centred Active Support (PCAS)

Person Centred Active Support (or 'Active Support' or PCAS) is grounded in the principle that everyone has the right, the potential and the ability to live the life they want and achieve goals of their choice regardless of their perceived abilities. If we do not fundamentally respect and believe in the potential and capacity of people, then we won't provide the right opportunities for people to flourish.

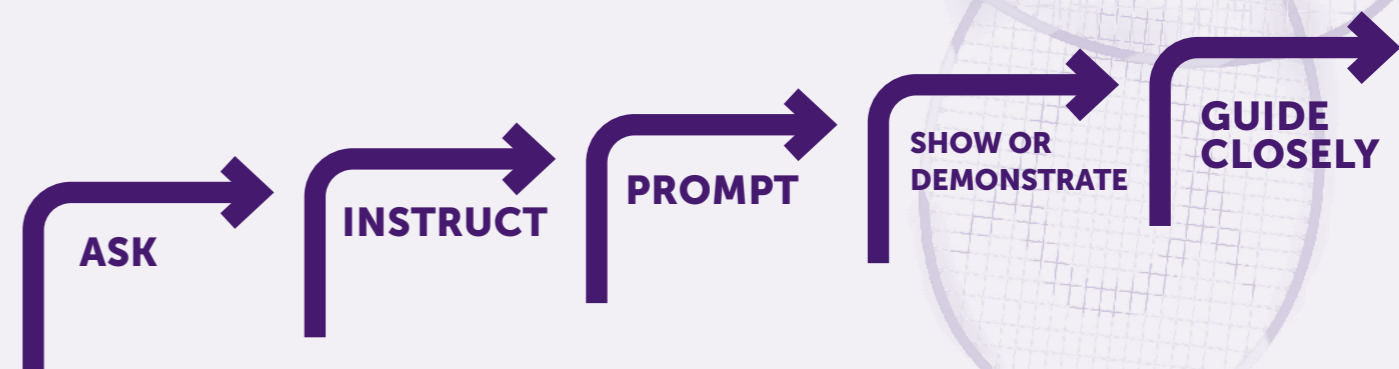
Fear of the unknown can stop people from doing new things. Finding the right balance of support for each person is crucial, and requires planning, communication and knowing the whole person. With too little support, a person may have trouble completing a task successfully. On the other hand, too much support could take away opportunities for the person to independently participate in the activity.

Graded assistance is about adjusting the amount and type of support given to a person, so that they can succeed.

Use these steps of graded assistance, to work towards the ultimate goal of reaching the level of assistance that provides a person with the highest level of independence possible:

**tips**

- "Little and often" - break down larger goals and activities into smaller steps and introduce new things gradually to make them more manageable
- Give people the option to do things at their pace – they can join in as little or as long as they choose, even if it's only a few seconds, in order to help reach the next step of their activity or goal



## choice and supported decision making

Most of us routinely make many big and small choices and decisions – about what we want to wear or eat, how we want to build our skills, or how we want to spend our time. Our life experience informs and helps us make these choices.

Start with your commitment to upholding the person and their rights, including their right to be actively involved in decision making which reflects their preferences, needs and rights.

People with cognitive disability have the right to be actively involved in decision making which reflects their preferences and needs, however they may not have had the chance to try a range of options or experiences first. Take time to connect with the person and support them to grow their experiences and options.

## positive behaviour support

Genuine friendships and community connections are important to us all. Some people with cognitive disability have had harmful life experiences. Some have experienced isolation and exclusion from regular social and community interactions. This may have led to gaps in confidence, communication and community participation.

A lack of independence, choice and control, frustration, unexpected changes, anxiety and other factors can also have a negative impact on wellbeing and quality of life.

Sometimes, these circumstances can lead to instances of seemingly 'challenging' behaviour. If this occurs, it is important to understand the underlying causes or drivers of this behaviour in order to understand what strategies might be used to address it. Involve the person closely in your process of understanding. Think about the person's environment, context, needs, goals as you support them to think of alternative behaviours.

### tips

- Remember to approach your relationship with the person with consistency, connection, and a strong understanding of the person's needs, desires, and goals.
- Avoid "forcing" the person to do something, or agreeing with every choice they make. You can do this through planning, encouragement, offering reminders, discussion, and negotiation.
- Remind the person of their end goals to help them make choices in the here and now.
- Self-reflection builds self-awareness and empathy - reflect on your own values, influence and support so that you are not influencing a person's decisions based on your own values and preferences.

### tips

- Remember that people's behaviour can be a form of communication. Think about the person's context and environment - immediate or long-term. Is there something or someone in the person's environment or current activities that is causing distress?
- It may be necessary to engage people in the person's broader network or seek additional assistance in order to understand any underlying drivers and how to respond.

## resources for clubs and coaches

These organisations, websites and resources include helpful information about genuine inclusion of people with intellectual disability in mainstream sport and recreation.

### Sport4All

sport4all.com.au



The Sport4All program is a groundbreaking way for Australian clubs to take the journey to inclusion.

### Sport Inclusion Australia

sportinclusionaustralia.org.au



A national body advocating for the inclusion of people with intellectual disability in sport. Check out SIA's fabulous coaching guide that builds on some of the ideas in this book.

sportinclusionaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CoachingTipsFactSheet.pdf

### Sports for Everyone

A high quality, comprehensive guide to including young people in sport – particularly people with intellectual disability. Developed by University of Melbourne.



[https://gallery.mailchimp.com/13dc6fd7d292dce6a79f350fe/files/beceea36-1d9f-49ac-8727-4cfbb11df904/SportInclusionGuide\\_A4\\_v4\\_WEB.pdf](https://gallery.mailchimp.com/13dc6fd7d292dce6a79f350fe/files/beceea36-1d9f-49ac-8727-4cfbb11df904/SportInclusionGuide_A4_v4_WEB.pdf)

### Proud2Play

proud2play.org.au



A national body for LGBTIQ+ inclusion in sport.

### AAA Play

aaaplay.org.au



The Victorian Access for All Abilities sports and recreation connection website

### Access for All

City of Darebin's comprehensive guide to inclusion in sport. Note the section about adjustments and modifications.



<https://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/-/media/Council/Files/Community-and-pets/People-with-disability/All-abilities-around-Darebin/Access-for-All--Promoting-Disability-Inclusion-in-Sportpdf.ashx>

### Swimming Australia



Visit Swimming Australia's guide to Para Swimming, multiclass events, and classification.

swimming.org.au/get-involved/para-swimming/get-involved

### Disability Sports Australia

www.sports.org.au/  
accessibility-champion



The Accessibility Champion free online course is all about identifying, upskilling and supporting an Accessibility Champion or Champions to help grassroots sporting clubs and leisure providers start the accessibility journey.

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