

Disability Sports Master Plan Executive Summary

Sport has long been recognised for its ability to enable persons with disabilities (PwDs) to improve their quality of life and build a more inclusive society. In Singapore, it is estimated that about 3% of the resident population in Singapore have some form of disability, but sports may not feature widely in their daily lives for health and recreation. The 8th ASEAN Para Games (APG) served as a catalyst for a new movement to engage Singaporeans about the value of sport, inspire them through the spirit and abilities of our athletes, and uplift community participation in disability sports.

Committee for Disability Sports

In January 2015, the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) convened an inter-agency **Committee for Disability Sports** to recommend ways to raise awareness of and participation in disability sports, as well as engender greater inclusiveness and understanding of PwDs through disability sports. In parallel with the preparations for the 8th APG, the Committee embarked on a series of consultations and set out to propose a list of recommendations to ensure the Games would leave behind a strong and sustainable legacy for disability sports in Singapore.

Chaired by then Minister of State (Prime Minister's Office & MCCY) Mr Sam Tan, the Committee comprised partner agencies from the people, private and public sector, including the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), the Ministry of Education (MOE), Sport Singapore (SportSG), Singapore Disability Sports Council (SDSC), Special Olympics (SO) Singapore, National Council of Social Service (NCSS), National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre (NVPC) and Deloitte & Touche Management Services Pte Ltd.

The work of the Committee was divided into three Sub-Committees. MSF led the first sub-committee to identify factors affecting participation and ways to increase awareness of disability sports. SportSG and SDSC co-led the second sub-committee to look at increasing participation opportunities in the community, while MOE led the third sub-committee to focus on increasing participation opportunities in sports amongst students with disabilities in mainstream and special education (SPED) schools.

Public Consultation

The Committee consulted more than 500 PwDs and their caregivers to understand the barriers to sports participation for PwDs in Singapore, as well as to find out from the VWOs the challenges in promoting disability sports to the different disability clusters.

In addition, the Committee also consulted SDSC, SO Singapore and the Deaf Sports Association – the three main national disability sports associations providing sports programmes for PwDs – to identify ways to improve current provisions in the disability sports ecosystem to enable more PwDs to take up sports. A series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students with disabilities in mainstream schools, as well as a survey with SPED school teachers and students, were conducted to gather information on the level of participation in physical education (PE) and sports by students with disabilities, as well as to find out if more can be done to encourage these students to take up sports in schools.

Current Challenges & Opportunities

In 2015, only about one-third of PwDs in Singapore participated in sports on a regular basis (at least once a week).¹ Some PwDs need modified PE and sports programmes in schools to be able to participate. However, inclusive or adapted PE² and disability sports programmes remain a relatively new area in most schools.

Most VWOs providing disability services to PwDs focus on therapy, education and employment training for their beneficiaries. VWOs also rely heavily on their own fundraising efforts and volunteers (both individuals and corporates) to support ad-hoc sports programmes for their beneficiaries. Although there are disability sports associations that offer sports programmes for PwDs, knowledge and expertise in tailoring sports activities for PwDs and organising inclusive sports programmes is still not widespread within the local sporting fraternity.

Through the consultation process, the Committee identified nine key barriers to sports participation amongst PwDs in Singapore. Four of them, namely knowledge gap, health and safety concerns, feelings about sport and dependency are intrinsic

¹ Data from Sports Index 2015.

² Inclusive PE is aimed at mainstream schools, where PE teachers adjust teaching approaches and customise learning activities where necessary to help students with special needs benefit from PE lessons. Adapted PE is aimed at SPED schools where the PE programme is modified to meet the gross motor needs of SPED students, as these students with moderate to severe special needs require more intensive support from specialised staff.

barriers that relate to the individual. Five are environmental barriers relating to factors beyond the control of the individual – social attitudes, accessibility of public sports facilities, lack of transportation, financial costs of participation and inadequate manpower and expertise within the sector to deliver sports programmes for PwDs.

The 8th APG not only generated greater public awareness about disability sports, it also demonstrated how sport can be a means to foster inclusive and accessible communities, which is a key thrust under the third national Enabling Masterplan.³ We saw the ability in our region's best para athletes instead of their disabilities, and were inspired by their tenacity and fighting spirit. Singaporeans came out in full force to give their support, and many volunteers were motivated to go the extra mile. The APG also provided many valuable lessons on the improvements that can be made to the disability sports ecosystem. One key aspect is the need to broaden the participation base.

Recommendations

The Committee for Disability Sports has since completed its review and developed 18 recommendations under 3 broad outcomes:

(A) *Expand Access & Opportunities for Participation*

To reduce the infrastructural and transport barriers to sports participation by PwDs and provide a range of sporting opportunities for PwDs to sustain participation in sports across the life stages, the Committee proposes to:

1. Pilot the set-up of Centres of Expertise for disability sports. At least one existing sports centre within each residential zone should be retrofitted to provide PwDs with enhanced accessibility to sports facilities and other amenities. Besides infrastructural enhancements, the Centres should also offer disability sports programming as well as training to centre staff to complement the 'hardware' provisions with 'software' capabilities.
2. Set up inclusive gyms. Adaptive sports and fitness equipment that can be used by persons of all abilities should be installed within gym facilities to allow PwDs to develop their fine and gross motor skills as well as improve their overall physical fitness as a step towards participating fully in sports.

³ The Enabling Masterplan is the 5-year roadmap that guides the development of policies, programmes, services and other support for PwDs. The first two Masterplans were from 2007-2011 and 2012-2016.

3. Expand range of sports programmes for PwDs. There should be appropriate programmes across the participation pathway in our schools and the community. These programmes, including those offered at the Centres of Expertise, would nurture and develop individuals to pursue sports at different levels. Sports with lower barriers to entry and suitable across a range of different disability clusters should be prioritised when developing these programmes.
4. Offer more competition opportunities for PwDs. There should be more sports competitions or leagues at the school, community and national levels for PwDs to participate in, including opportunities for unified sports where feasible. For example, the National School Games and Singapore National Games could support the participation of students and adults with disabilities where feasible. In the longer term, sport-specific regional competitions could also provide a platform for local athletes to compete with their regional counterparts.
5. Provide targeted support to identified schools. Given the diverse profile of students with disabilities in mainstream schools, targeted support from MOE, SportSG and SDSC could be provided to identified schools to: (i) facilitate the conduct of sports CCAs where practicable, (ii) strengthen inter-school collaborations (for instance through satellite partnerships⁴ between mainstream and SPED schools), and (iii) develop sports enrichment and learn-to-play programmes.
6. Tap on MSF's dedicated transport service. The existing fleet of specialised vehicles under MSF's dedicated transport service should be tapped to cater to the transport needs of National Sports Associations (NSAs), VWOs and other grassroots organisations when organising sporting events or participating in sports programmes organised or endorsed by SportSG and MOE.

(B) Develop Organisational & Professional Capabilities

To improve the processes and synergies between different players in the ecosystem and grow the pool of sports professionals and educators with the necessary expertise in disability sport, the Committee proposes to:

⁴ Satellite partnerships between SPED schools and mainstream schools have been established since 2008. The focus of these partnerships is to provide opportunities for purposeful and appropriate social integration between mainstream and SPED students. Currently, 12 SPED schools have established satellite partnerships with 17 mainstream schools.

7. Build a core of expertise with SportSG acting as the overall planning agency. SportSG should provide strategic planning assistance to co-drive the agenda for disability sports with key stakeholders such as the NSAs and disability sports associations. This will help stakeholders to identify areas of synergy, facilitate cross-organisation collaborations and provide a platform for the collective review of the effectiveness of disability sport programmes.
8. Partner healthcare institutions and disability-related organisations. SportSG should work with hospitals, rehabilitation centres, as well as prosthetics and orthotic clinics to promote sports as a form of rehabilitation for PwDs. Partnerships between sports associations, VWOs and other disability groups or movements can be strengthened, while mass events organised by disability groups or movements can be leveraged to promote disability sports.
9. Develop professional coaching and technical expertise in disability sports. Specific modules on disability sports and other coach education programmes should be introduced to help existing coaches in the industry adapt their programmes to suit the needs of PwDs. A “coaching buddy” programme could also be launched to help parents and caregivers understand the benefits of sport and organise safe and simple sporting activities for their children.
10. Enhance professional development in inclusive PE. To cater to students with disabilities across mainstream schools, PE teachers should be equipped with knowledge and skills to plan and deliver inclusive PE lessons, so that all students can be equipped with the fundamental motor skills and acquire basic competencies to lead active lifestyles. Professional development activities could comprise inclusive PE workshops.
11. Develop customised workshops on Adapted PE. Adapted PE is aimed at students in SPED schools. These students have moderate to severe special needs and require more intensive support from specialised staff to access learning. Adapted PE is a modified PE programme designed to meet the SPED students’ gross motor needs. MOE will build the capacity of SPED teachers in conducting Adapted PE through customised training workshops to help teachers design quality PE lessons to cater to students with diverse disabilities.
12. Set up professional networks amongst SPED teachers to facilitate sharing of good practices in Adapted PE and Sports. These platforms enhance the professionalism of teachers and build a culture of professional learning, sharing and collaboration among SPED schools, which in turn would enable the

development of customised PE and sports lessons and the cultivation of interest in sports and healthy living among students.

13. Enhance research on sports participation by PwDs. SportSG should work with relevant stakeholders and experts to better understand what drives participation in sports by PwDs, the effectiveness of its programmes, and how they can be improved.

(C) *Build Awareness & Strengthen Affinity*

To increase public mindshare on the benefits of disability sports, raise awareness of the opportunities for participation, and build a stronger support network for Team Singapore athletes, the Committee proposes to:

14. Develop a repository of information and resource toolkits on disability sports. The current ActiveSG portal can be expanded to provide one-stop access to information on the sports facilities and programmes available to PwDs. In the longer term, an interactive web resource could be developed to help family members, caregivers, teachers and companies to learn how to provide suitable sport and active recreation programmes.
15. Organise awareness and outreach events in partnership with agencies to promote inclusiveness through sport. Sports carnivals, community roadshows and inclusive sports days held in conjunction with disability-related VWOs, hospital rehabilitation centres, schools and other partners can help to expose PwDs to disability sports. Learning journeys to the Centres of Expertise and other disability sports training venues can be organised to introduce students with disabilities to the opportunities and support ecosystem outside of the school setting, for them to sustain sports participation through to adulthood. School engagement sessions in the form of assembly talks and roadshows by Team Singapore athletes can also serve to inspire students and help them understand how sport has changed the lives of our athletes.
16. Recognise the achievements and contributions of the disability sports fraternity. There should also be platforms at both the school and national levels to actively recognise the contributions of developmental athletes, their coaches, and even volunteers or sponsors in the local disability sports scene.
17. Profile disability sports more prominently through mainstream and social media. Social media and public relations channels should also be actively used to sustain public education efforts on disability sports and profile the involvement

of volunteer groups and corporate partners in disability sports, so that others will be encouraged to do the same.

18. Develop a network of support through community and corporate partners. SportSG should also work with the NSAs, schools, VWOs, corporate partners and other disability sports associations to promote volunteer opportunities in disability sport, and develop a pool of competent and committed volunteers capable of supporting disability sports programmes through Team Nila. SportSG and NVPC should also work with relevant agencies to publicise volunteer opportunities and fundraising campaigns, and engage corporate partners to support the development of disability sports.

Conclusion

The successful completion of the 8th APG in December 2015 heralded the start of a new chapter for disability sports in Singapore. To create a thriving disability sports ecosystem, the Committee for Disability Sports has identified key areas for improvement in the 'hardware', 'software' and 'heartware' of the current ecosystem. The proposed recommendations will help to foster more inclusive and accessible communities, and build on existing capabilities and networks to enable persons of all abilities to live better through sport.

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Committee for Disability Sports
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