



Press Release

00.01 GMT on 29 January 2019

## **Mencap and Sport England join forces to help 4,000 people with a learning disability to get active**

- People with a learning disability are nearly twice as likely to be inactive, twice as likely to become obese, and have shorter lifespans.
- Mencap and Sport England launch £1.7 million *Round the World Challenge* to address this - supporting over 4,000 people to get active over 3 years through 27 'participation hubs' across England.
- £1million of National Lottery funding from Sport England will go towards the scheme.

Mencap and Sport England have joined forces in a partnership to enable people with a learning disability in England to get active. The *Round the World Challenge*, launched today (29 January 2019) at Kensington Sports and Leisure Centre in London, is a £1.7 million programme with Sport England contributing £1 million of National Lottery funding. It aims to reach over 4,000 people in 27 communities across England.

Participation in sport and physical activity is exceptionally low for people with a learning disability - with Sport England's Active Lives data showing that 43.1% of adults with learning disabilities are inactive compared to the national average of 25.2%.

You are also twice as likely to become obese and five times more likely to be morbidly obese, dying on average 17 years earlier, if you have a learning disability.

To turn these figures around, Sport England and Mencap are launching the *Round the World Challenge* which hopes to inspire and assist people with a learning disability to get active in a way that is flexible, fun and empowering. Participants will take part in a variety of activities including

zumba, boccia, walking rugby and more traditional sports like football, cycling and tennis. Participants then register the time spent on any type of exercise each week and this is converted into miles. This can be either 20, 40, or 100 hours depending on how far someone wants to go 'around the world'.

The sessions will be guided by specially trained staff and volunteers to ensure those who take part feel welcome, are encouraged to try new activities and inspired to continue being active. People with learning disabilities can face greater challenges in getting active, including being unable to find sports centres or having low confidence following bad experiences of sport in the past. The scheme has been designed to be inclusive and is working in partnership with a range of local sports providers to ensure that many of the sessions will take part within existing sport centres.

As well as the health benefits of increasing physical activity, research has shown that getting people with a learning disability involved in sport can help boost their confidence in other areas of life, including securing employment, reducing loneliness and building friendships and playing a full part in their communities. By week 20 of a pilot scheme, none of the participants said they felt worried, sad or unhappy. Sue Wignall, a member of Mencap Liverpool, lost seven stone, trained as a run leader with England Athletics and now leads a running club every Wednesday evening.

**Vijay Patel, who took part in a pilot scheme said:**

"Taking part in *Round The World Challenge* has made me so confident and helped me get a paid job. I feel so much fitter and I've made loads of friends. I now play in a 5-a-side Football team where I am the top goal scoring striker! Thank you to players from the National Lottery for giving us the money to help more people like me get involved."

**Tim Hollingsworth, Chief Executive of Sport England said:**

"Sport has such a powerful role to play in building confidence, overall health, employability and strengthening communities. So, it is unacceptable that people with learning disabilities are more than twice as likely to be inactive.

"Sport England is determined to play its part in reducing this gap and we believe our unique partnership with Mencap, supported by National Lottery funding, will go a long way in doing just

that. We must make sport and physical activity an attractive and accessible lifestyle choice – through traveling *Round the World* for example – so many more people with learning disabilities can lead active lives.”

**Jan Tregelles, Mencap Chief Executive, said:**

“This unique partnership between Mencap and Sport England offers the chance for people with learning disabilities to become more engaged with other people and social activity, something Mencap strongly believes in. Exercise is for everyone and can have positive benefits including extended social interaction. Thank you to Sport England, the National Lottery and Garfield Weston for their generous support.”

**-Ends-**

**Notes for Editors**

If there is a specific location that you would be interested in, filming and recording opportunities can be made available.

**For further details please contact** [madeleinem@blj.co.uk](mailto:madeleinem@blj.co.uk), [jonathang@blj.co.uk](mailto:jonathang@blj.co.uk) or [jonathan.jones@sportengland.org](mailto:jonathan.jones@sportengland.org).

**London Event Information:**

The national launch of the *Round the World Challenge* will take place in London at the Kensington Leisure Centre (W10 6EX) on the 29<sup>th</sup> January between 1- 3pm. Mencap Chief Executive, Jan Tregelles and Sport England Chief Executive, Tim Hollingsworth, will be in attendance and are available for interview alongside those taking part in the day’s activities and other beneficiaries of the programme.

**About Mencap**

There are 1.4 million people with a learning disability in the UK. Mencap works to support people with a learning disability, their families and carers by fighting to change laws, improve services and access to education, employment and leisure facilities. Mencap supports people with a learning disability to live their lives the way they want.

In 2017/18, Mencap provided direct support to 5,231 people with a learning disability in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and advised nearly 13,000 callers through the Learning Disability Helpline. The charity celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2016.

[www.mencap.org.uk](http://www.mencap.org.uk)

For advice and information about learning disability and Mencap services in your area, contact the Learning Disability Helpline on 0808 808 1111 (9am-5pm, Monday-Friday) or email

[helpline@mencap.org.uk](mailto:helpline@mencap.org.uk).

### **What is a learning disability?**

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability where people might need some help with everyday tasks – for example shopping, managing finances or travelling to new places. The level of learning disability varies from individual to individual, but usually affects someone for their whole life.

Learning disability is not a mental illness or a learning difficulty, such as dyslexia. Very often the term 'learning difficulty' is wrongly used interchangeably with 'learning disability'.

### **About Sport England**

Sport England is a public body and invests up to £300 million National Lottery and government money each year in projects and programmes that help people get active and play sport. It wants everyone in England, regardless of age, background, or level of ability, to feel able to engage in sport and physical activity. That's why a lot of its work is specifically focused on helping people who do no, or very little, physical activity and groups who are typically less active - like women, disabled people and people on lower incomes.