

We know how important community groups and organisations are in supporting people in our communities to get active and STEPS in Derby are a great example of what can be done.

STEPS are a CIC based in Allenton, Derby and have a unique approach to enabling young people and adults (team members) with learning disabilities and other support needs to achieve more and have greater independence, choice and fulfilment and physical activity in their lives

The group runs full day sessions from Monday to Friday and are there to support their team members to be independent and gain lots of life skills. They do this through so many activities and projects, including their training kitchen, **Chatterbox Cafe** which is open Wednesday to Friday to the public and is staffed by team members.

Rachel and Jayne, who started STEPS have a strong history in the area. They run a nursery in Sinfen and realised that there wasn't much provision locally for young adults with learning disabilities once they had left education. They worked with **Transition Two**, another local organisation, to set up STEPS.



They are passionate about empowering young people to transition into living more independently and have embraced using physical activity and healthy lifestyles to do this. They reflected that it helps their team members to build confidence and support their mental health as well as the physical benefits.

Since COVID restrictions affected community activities for the team members, STEPS team looked at alternative ways to continue their support with healthy lifestyle and independent living skills. They worked with the Move More Derby team and decided to hire the adjacent church hall and utilised funding to buy a range of indoor gym equipment for that space and also had some outdoor gym equipment installed in their garden, providing daily access to this type of physical activity opportunity. Other key equipment they got as part of the funding was adapted bikes. The team members had some bike sessions with Cycle Derby to increase their confidence and now regularly use the groups adapted bikes to actively travel within their local community to get to different activities and expand their life skills. One team member enjoyed their cycling experiences so much that they now have their own adapted bike which they independently use to travel to STEPS. There have been some challenges with storing this equipment as the church hall is used by other groups in the evenings. The key was buying equipment which could fold to allow for storage in their office space. The team do have to pack it away and put it all out each day but recognise how important it is for their team members.

As well as the traditional gym equipment, the team members spend a lot of time at a local allotment. They make their own decisions about what to plant and where. The STEPS team mainly support them with the planting but then team members are responsible for watering and weeding, as well as making decisions about when the vegetables and fruit they grow are ready. This collaboration between STEPS and the team members has really grown and empowers team members to make decisions, take responsibility and gain confidence. They also walk or take the adapted bikes to the allotments to carry tools and bring back produce.

Jayne and Rachel often reflect on their partnership with parents to empower the team members to become confident and independent.

Some of the team members also spoke about their experiences of being active.

Sam said "I've been coming here for three years and I like the gym, it gets people moving. I didn't like being at home [during COVID], since I've come back here, I feel better"

Erin said "I like to walk my dog and look after my puppy. I like to walk but I can get tired if I go out for a long time"

Erin's Mum also spoke about some of her experiences in supporting Erin to be active and said that some of the traditional fitness classes don't work for Erin but they have difficulty finding something more gentle for her. They do have the resources to support her to go out but they wouldn't know where to go if they wanted support with this.

STEPS are working hard to embed physical activity wherever possible but space and funding continues to be an issue. They utilise their green space which now houses their outdoor gym equipment but this is a small section of their site and so the allotment is a great resource for them.



Some of what we've learnt from their experiences

- Rachel and Jayne have found it useful to start the day with activity in the gym, so team members immediately feel less stressed and ready for the day.
- After activity sessions, they find that's a good time to talk about current affairs and things which may be worrying team members in a relaxed setting.
- It's vital to collaborate and work with team members as much as possible, creating as many opportunities for them to make their own decisions.
- Rachel and Jayne spoke about the ongoing funding for their work. They noticed that there was lots of funding during the height of COVID but this has since dried up and it's an ongoing concern for so many community groups, particularly those who need space to grow physical activity.