

Edinburgh Leisure – Inclusive, not exclusive

For adults living with a disability, finding the motivation to exercise can be challenging as there are many additional barriers. The Edinburgh Reporter hears from Phil Trodden, an Active Communities Development Officer with Edinburgh Leisure how as an organisation they like to consider their offering as inclusive, not exclusive.

You may have seen that 'dreich' was recently voted the most popular Scots word. Sadly, it perfectly describes the weather here of late – grey, damp and altogether miserable. Gone are the long summer evenings when I'd go cycling, work in the garden or play on the beach with my wee boy. I'm sure I'm not the only one who now finishes work fighting the urge to go home, change into joggers and eat something warm and stodgy.

Luckily for me, I'm fit and healthy and the only thing stopping me from being physically active at this time of year is a serious lack of motivation. Through my work with Edinburgh Leisure's Active Communities Team, I know that people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, such as age, disability, gender reassignment and religion, often have a lot more to contend with when it comes to getting active.

Recently I met with Jane, a wheelchair user, who explained some of the accessibility issues she faces in her day to day life.

“Accessibility of venues is a major issue for me as a wheelchair user. There are so many things I need to think about when I’m going out, such as planning my journey in advance and phoning ahead to ask about disability access if I’m going somewhere new. When I’m out and about in Edinburgh, where there are so many old buildings that weren’t designed for people with physical disabilities, I often find myself relying on the kindness and goodwill of strangers to help me.”

While I was pleased to hear there are good Samaritans willing to give Jane a helping hand, sometimes it’s simply not enough.

People who face accessibility issues also don’t want to have to rely on others to get by. Where possible, they’d much rather be empowered to do things for themselves. I recently met with Harry, who has dementia, who explained how simple measures like clear signage can help people with dementia to maintain independence.

“I get nervous about going places for the first time. I get disorientated very easily, so if there isn’t clear signage then I don’t know where I’m going. I find toilet signage, with the similar-looking symbols for men and women, confusing and hard to distinguish. I have to stand outside the toilets and wait until somebody comes out to know which one to use. I’ve walked into the women’s toilet and been escorted out before, which was really embarrassing and degrading.”

At Edinburgh Leisure, a charity on a mission to help everyone in Edinburgh to lead happier, healthier and more active lives, we recognise the assistance that individuals need to access our venues can vary greatly and we pride ourselves in striving to make people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds feel welcome and valued.

We already deliver our Active Communities programme, which makes it easier for people like Jane and Harry to incorporate physical activity into their lives. Jane recently started

attending one of our chair-based yoga classes after a long period of inactivity.

“I was struggling to find opportunities that were suitable for wheelchair users and I didn’t have the confidence or motivation to exercise on my own, so I excited to discover chair-based exercise. The instructor was so welcoming when I went along for the first time and I immediately felt at home. I can do all the exercises sitting down and they’ve helped me to feel healthier and stronger.”

We understand that it can still be difficult for some people to get active, so we’re delighted that our new inclusive access statement which we will publish in the new year shows our continued commitment to providing opportunities for everyone. We hope that by making our venues as accessible as possible, ensuring our staff are trained to support people with a range of needs, equipping our staff with the confidence and knowledge to approach people who need assistance and offering a wide range of accessible activities, everyone will be able to escape the dreich conditions and enjoy getting active with us.



If you would like more information on inclusive access at Edinburgh Leisure, contact Phil Trodden at philtrodden@edinburghleisure.co.uk or 0131 548 2100.