

Case Study

Waveney Gymnastics Club

Dedicated Disability Gymnastics sessions



Who are we?

Waveney Gymnastics Club is a large gymnastics club in a dedicated facility in Lowestoft, Suffolk. The club offers a wide range of gymnastics disciplines and activities for people of all ages and abilities, and has grown from having 85 members in 2002 to over 1000 in 2015. Our club's aspiration is to increase participation in gymnastics, promote healthy living and support all gymnasts to achieve to the best of their ability, and our Disability Gymnastics programme forms a key part of this.

How did the club start offering Disability Gymnastics?

To start with, the club ensured that our mainstream classes were inclusive and some disabled gymnasts participated within these classes. However, due to the nature of our busy classes, many of the disabled gymnasts had difficulty integrating with other gymnasts, understanding instructions and learning new skills. To support these gymnasts, we began to offer specific dedicated Disability Gymnastics classes in 2004 – one in trampolining and one in gymnastics. Initially, we had 10-15 gymnasts within our dedicated sessions; mostly with learning disabilities, Autism and Downs Syndrome.

How has our Disability Gymnastics programme developed?

Since we started, interest in dedicated Disability Gymnastics sessions has grown and we now offer 5 trampoline and 5 gymnastics sessions specifically for disabled members, and have a Disability Gymnastics Development Squad. We offer some 1 to 1 sessions for individuals with more complex needs, and also offer a 'Disability and me' class for disabled gymnasts to burn off energy in the gym with their parents. Within our dedicated Disability Gymnastics programme, we now have 50 disabled members, as well as more disabled people visiting the club with schools and daycare centres. By offering a dedicated Disability session we are able to cater for more individual needs and now have gymnasts with impairments ranging from cerebral palsy and dwarfism (physical disabilities) to hearing and visual impairments, as well as people with learning disabilities and autism.



What do our Disability Gymnastics sessions look like?

Our Disability Gymnastics sessions take place in the gym at the same time as mainstream recreational and elite classes, but run slightly differently to ensure we are able to support the individual needs of our members. Classes are slightly smaller than other recreational sessions, with 4-7 children in a class, and at least one coach and 1 volunteer helper.



Why do dedicated Disability Gymnastics sessions work for us and our members?

By providing dedicated Disability Gymnastics sessions, we are able to welcome disabled members who have difficulties participating within a mainstream class. We've found that by having a separate disability class, we've been able to adapt to the needs of each individual more effectively; coaches have more time so they can work at the pace of each gymnast and ensure they understand. We're also able to adapt equipment set-ups more easily where a gymnast needs to learn a skill in a different way, and we tend to keep time on each apparatus slightly shorter to keep gymnasts with learning or attentional disabilities interested and focused.

Many of our disabled participants have developed extremely well in confidence, skills, language development and self-esteem by attending our sessions, and 2 of our disabled gymnasts have recently completed their first coaching qualification. One of our parents said her son was anxious and had difficulty learning in a mainstream class, but has come on leaps and bounds in his dedicated disability gymnastics class:

'The smaller group means more time is spent supporting each individual and they spend less time waiting to go on the apparatus. The coach can relate much better to each gymnast, giving them the time they need to learn a specific skill. This dedicated class is vital to allow Adam to do something he loves'.

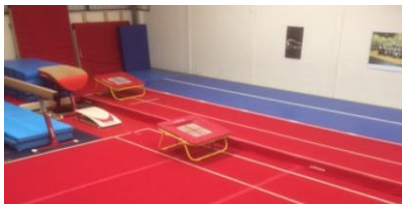
What would we tell other clubs hoping to get started in Disability Gymnastics?

Our advice to other clubs would be to offer the type of session that will best support your disabled members. If they need some additional support to fulfil their potential in gymnastics then a dedicated Disability Gymnastics programme may be the best way forwards. For us, Disability Gymnastics is just as enjoyable and rewarding for the coaches as it is for the gymnasts!

Case Study

Rowan Gymnastics Club

Disability Gymnastics as part of mainstream sessions



Who are we?

Rowan Gymnastics Club is an established gymnastics club based in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. Having previously trained in school halls, we recently moved into a dedicated facility and now have approximately 700 members; girls and boys of all ages and abilities. We are committed to providing opportunities for everyone within gymnastics, and excited to continue growing and support even more people to take part.

How did the club start offering Disability Gymnastics?

In 2001, the club started offering its first opportunities for disabled members. At the time, we had 4 disabled members who were all pre-school aged and had physical impairments including spina bifida and cerebral palsy. In order to support their needs, we offered a dedicated disability gymnastics class and were able to coach these gymnasts for a number of years.

How has our Disability Gymnastics programme developed?

Over time, we received more interest from other disabled people who wanted to try gymnastics. With a very busy club timetable and limited space, we found that we were no longer able to offer a dedicated session for disabled members, but we also found that this was not what they needed and all of the disabled members were able to integrate well into our mainstream sessions with a little support.

Now, we have around 20 disabled members, with a range of disabilities including both learning and physical impairments.

What do our inclusive gymnastics sessions look like?

All of our disabled members take part in inclusive mainstream sessions alongside non-disabled participants. All of our gymnasts are taught depending on their ability (whether they are disabled or not). We regularly speak to parents to understand how we can support each individual's needs and to check if they are happy with how they are being taught gymnastics. Some of our gymnasts need a little extra support in order to take part in mainstream sessions, for instance one gymnast who can only walk a short distance unaided and another with a learning disability who needs more supervision to ensure he understands instructions and does not miss his turn. Where additional needs are identified, we are able to provide some 1 to 1 help, and the local council has provided us with some funding to support coaching costs of doing so.

Why do inclusive gymnastics sessions work for us and our members?

For us, it's really important that all of our members are treated the same and can access the same opportunities. We've found that our disabled members have integrated really well into mainstream classes and enjoy feeling part of the group, making friends with non-disabled peers. Our disabled members are able to access the same opportunities as other people within their classes, including taking part in competitions. We're really pleased that some of our physically disabled members recently took part in an I'M IN Competition with great success; using the confidence they've developed within our classes to perform with very little support from us. Another of our disabled gymnasts with ADHD recently competed against non-disabled gymnasts to become the South West Tumbling Champion for his age.

What would we tell other clubs hoping to get started in Disability Gymnastics?

We would encourage other clubs not to be frightened – it is much easier than you think to include disabled gymnasts in your existing sessions. My top tip would be to get support from parents, as they are usually the best people to let you know how you can adapt activities and where the gymnast may need a little additional support. Keep talking to parents and the gymnasts themselves to get their feedback on what you are doing; after all, they want their child to enjoy Disability Gymnastics as much as you do!