

# Next Steps for blind and partially sighted children

Motivators and influencers for children with sight loss to lead more active lives

British Blind Sport

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# Introduction to the research

British Blind Sport (BBS) ran a programme called First Steps for 2-11 year olds with sight loss, which aims to improve motor skills, increase confidence and encourage children to access sport, and which ended in March 2023. BBS commissioned this research, Next Steps, to build on insights from the First Steps programme, and the wider evidence base, to better understand how positive intervention and support for children and families can encourage participation in sport and physical activities at an early age, and beyond. The research was carried out by independent researchers Lucy Smith and Tim Bidey.

## Research background

The research was informed by a light touch rapid evidence assessment (REA) to identify relevant literature about the key influencers of children with sight loss in encouraging participation in sport and physical activity. The REA found that:

- there is extremely limited information on key influencers
- within the evidence available, three groups of influencers were identified: families (in particular, parents); schools and teachers; and peers.
- almost no information about the motivations of these influencers, and only a small amount of information about barriers (mostly, lack of awareness, knowledge, and confidence that limited access to, or the provision of, inclusive initial sport involvement).

Little is therefore known about the role of influencers and their motivations and barriers to playing this role.

## Research aims and scope

The research aimed to explore the following key questions:

1. Who are the key influencers that can encourage long term sporting habits for children with sight loss (e.g. family members, education and health professionals, community and wider networks) and how effective are they?
2. What barriers exist to potential interventions by influencers (e.g. lack of recognition of the importance of sport and physical activity for children with sight loss; financial constraints; negative perceptions of children's abilities)?

3. What are the motivations of influencers (e.g. to benefit children's health and wellbeing, to encourage family and social participation)?

An improved understanding of the roles of influencers will enable BBS to better support and influence parents, peers, professionals and others who can motivate and enable children with sight loss to participate in sport and physical activity.

## Research approach

The research involved semi-structured online interviews with 8 parents of a child with sight loss, and 8 professionals in roles supporting children with sight loss. All took part in the First Steps programme. Methodology can be found in **Appendix A**.

A summary of who we spoke with is below.

### Parents

Age of child	Ages 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10(x2), 13
Gender of child	4 female, 4 male
Type of sight loss	Range of conditions including nystagmus, cerebral vision impairment, microphthalmia  Some had other conditions including autism and learning disabilities
Education and support	7 in mainstream school, one in specialist school  Those in mainstream had 1-2-1 teaching assistant (TA); some also had support from QTVI and/or habilitation specialist
Region	Surrey, Suffolk, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, West Midlands

### Professionals

Role	Habilitation specialist/trainee (5), manager of regional habilitation specialist team (1), advisory teacher for children with VI (2)
Region	South West (2), South East (2), West Yorkshire (2), West Midlands (1), Wales (1)

## This report

This report summarises what we heard from parents and professionals in the interviews.

The first section provides an overall summary of the findings, identifying the key influencers and summarising the motivations, barriers and support needs which were common across the influencer types.

Each of the subsequent sections focuses in more detail on the role of a key influencer type, including their motivations, barriers and support needs, in relation to supporting and enabling children's participation in sport and physical activity. Each of these sections can be read as a standalone or 'pull-out' for those interested in a specific influencer type. The key influencer types identified through the research are:

- Parents (and other family members)
- Professionals in roles supporting children and families, including habilitation specialists and advisory teachers for children with visual impairment (VI)
- Schools and school-based professionals, including teachers, PE teachers and teaching assistants (TAs)
- Community sports professionals, such as coaches, instructors and club organisers

It concludes with a summary and some suggestions for British Blind Sport to consider.

# Summary: key influencers and common motivations, barriers and support needs

This section describes the key influencers – which people, in which roles – who can support and enable children's participation, and which of these have the most influence. It summarises some of the common motivations and barriers that interviewees identified to children's participation (motivations and barriers that are more specific to each type of influencer are explored in more detail in the relevant section). Lastly it summarises what interviewees said would help influencers to support and enable children's participation (again, focusing on common themes).

## Who are the key influencers of children's participation in sport and physical activity?

**Parents** were agreed to be by far the biggest influencer of their children in this age group (2-11), particularly at the younger end of this range, because they are the key people in children's lives, with them for the most time. Children of this age are generally dependent on parents to facilitate participation (taking them to activities).

**Siblings** also play a role, both as role models and playmates for children with sight loss, but also in partly shaping the share of parents' time and attention available to support and enable the child with sight loss to take part in activities.

**Schools and school staff** play a major role, again occupying a large part of children's time and in addition being where children have their peers.

**Peers** were thought to have an influencing role, which increases as children get older, but were talked about less than other influencers by interviewees.

**Professionals in roles that support children** to develop their independence and engage with daily activities – namely habilitation specialists and QTVIs – are also a key influencing group. However they felt constrained in terms of the extent of their influence, saying that while they could provide valuable encouragement, advice and expertise, it was ultimately down to those who are more central in children's daily lives – i.e. parents and schools – to support and enable them in leading more active lives.

**Community sport professionals** – coaches and instructors in sports clubs and leisure centres – were talked about by interviewees to a lesser extent than other influencer types, but were nonetheless seen as being important in terms of their potential to support children's participation by making activities accessible and inclusive.

**Wider role models** such as blind and partially sighted athletes and sportspeople, or role models on TV, social media and YouTube, were not mentioned frequently by interviewees. This may indicate that their influence is less than that of people close to children in this age group, but also that there is currently a lack of role models who could potentially inspire children to lead more active lives.

## Common motivations and barriers for influencers

There were some common themes around motivations and barriers from the interviews with both parents and professionals. It was notable that both groups of interviewees talked more about barriers and challenges, than motivations.

### Motivations

- **Social opportunities for children and parents** – sports and physical activities could provide a space for children and parents to meet other families with a child with sight loss. This was seen to encourage participation by demonstrating that their participation in sport is possible. It was also thought to be valuable in terms of the broader benefits of social interaction, relationship/network building and peer support.
- **Promoting independence** – both parents and professionals felt that participation in sport and physical activity could promote independence, by supporting physical development (e.g. gross motor skills), social interaction and, for older children, the opportunity to do an activity without their parent. All of these were thought to increase children's confidence and independence – a common goal for influencers.
- **Fun and enjoyment** – parents and professionals wanted children to have the opportunity for fun and enjoyment through sport and physical activity. This was seen as a key motivator for children and therefore for parents.

### Barriers

- **Provision** – all interviewees identified a lack of accessible provision as a barrier for children with sight loss to take part in sport and physical activity. Many noted that as it is a low incidence condition, it is difficult to justify provision of

activities specifically for children with sight loss, on a sufficiently local basis to enable children to get to them easily. Activities for disabled children or mainstream activities that were sufficiently inclusive were also said to be rare and hard to find.

- **Logistics** – transport, finances and time were all widely flagged as barriers to families enabling their children with sight loss to access sport and physical activity.
- **Attitudes** – attitudes towards children with sight loss participating in sport and physical activity acted as a barrier for influencers. Professionals interviewed said that some parents, school staff and community sports staff did not believe that a) children with sight loss had the ability to take part, b) that staff had the necessary skills to support children to take part and/or c) that children with sight loss being active was important, or was as important as other things (such as school work).

These and other motivators and barriers, and how they are experienced by different influencers, are explored further in the subsequent sections.

## What would help influencers to better support and enable children's participation?

Across the main types of influencers there were some overarching themes in terms of what would help address barriers and enable them to better support children's participation, as follows:

- **Funding and resourcing** – to cover transport, special equipment and staff time
- **Provision** – more activities, more locally – and for it to be easier to find about what's available
- **Accessibility** – better knowledge of staff around how to adapt activities for children with sight loss; adapted equipment and facilities
- **Guidance** – materials to support this knowledge
- **Role models** – to inspire and normalise participation of children with sight loss.



# Parents and other family members

## Parents: summary

Parents were said to have the most significant role in influencing children's participation in sport and physical activity.

Their motivations were around helping the children to live a happy and healthy life, with sport and physical activity being thought to contribute to children's social development as well as their physical wellbeing. Taking part in activities could also provide a social opportunity for parents.

Barriers for parents included worries about their children's safety and enjoyment while taking part, difficulties in finding local accessible activities, and challenges around transport, finances and time to take children to activities.

What would help parents included more provision of accessible activities, more positive mindsets amongst school and community sport staff around facilitating children's participation, and more opportunities to find out about activities.

## Role of parents and other family members

Parents were thought to be the key influencers of children's engagement with sport and physical activity, during this phase of a child's life (ages 2-11), and professionals focused a lot of their work on influencing parents, in order for them to influence their children.

“Parents are so key – the child spends more time with them than anyone else. We do a lot of work in terms of home visits, getting the parents on board, getting them to trust you and accept what you say. Because they are going to have the biggest influence on the child.” (Professional)

Their role in terms of enabling long term sporting habits encompassed **encouraging the child's interest, facilitating participation** by finding out about activities and taking the child to them, and **advocating for the child** to be able to take part with other influencers, namely, school and community sports providers (i.e. educating staff about their child's sight loss and how to support them).

“VI has so many different forms, so you need to explain what works for your child.” (Parent)

Siblings were described as having an influencing role too, in terms of motivating the child with sight loss by acting as a role model and spending time with them playing sports or practicing skills. In some cases where the sibling is older, they might have a facilitating role by taking them to activities. The influence of siblings depended on the relationship in each specific case – only in one parent interview, the child's sibling was the person he most looked up to in general, not specifically in relation to sport. For most families, parents were seen as far more significant than siblings by those interviewed.

## Motivations of parents and other family members

Some of the motivations of parents echoed those of their children, with parents and professionals both noting that the child's wellbeing was paramount for most parents and therefore they wanted to enable the child to do what they wanted to.

“She's our child – I want her to be happy and healthy.” (Parent)

Most motivations described by parents centred around benefits to their child, as follows:

- **Social opportunities for child**, a chance for them to make friends and interact with peers. This was especially important as children got older and this became more important to them.

“We really want her to develop her social skills and be able to interact with peers... sport is a really good way to do that.” (Parent)

- **Confidence and independence**, with parents being mindful of the need for their children to develop independence (“We won't always be there to support him”).
- **Having the same opportunities as others**, and being included.

“I want that inclusivity for her, I don't want her to feel like she is different and to feel like, 'I can't do that'.” (Parent)

- **Physical fitness and development**. Parents mentioned the benefits of physical activity in terms of their child's gross motor skills, co-ordination, balance, stability, core strength and fitness.

“It definitely helps with sense of awareness of his body, spatial awareness, because he doesn't grasp it in the same way as others. It helps him to understand his body and environment.” (Parent)

- **Safety.** This came up in relation to swimming; parents want children to be safe in the water, including on family holidays.

There were a few motivations focusing on the parent or family, as follows:

- **Social opportunities for parents.** Parents interviewed did not tend to mention this, but professionals felt it was important for parents whether or not they were conscious of it. They observed that having a child with a disability could be isolating, and that going to sports or activity sessions was a good opportunity for parents to meet others in similar situations.
- **Respite for parents.** Only one parent mentioned this, perhaps because parents often have to be active in supporting their child to participate, so the time is not necessarily a 'break'.

"It gives us an hour's break when they're in a club, where we can sit and have a chat and catch up on things that are important to us as a couple, you know... finances or making decisions about what we're going to do, or anything." (Parent)

- **'Sporty family'.** A few interviewees said that where the parents or family are into sports, they want their child to be able to be part of this. A couple of parents noted the influence of this themselves: ("we are a sporty family"; "I am not very sporty myself, so..."). A few said they made a conscious effort to be more active, in order to offer positive messages around and to normalise physical activity for their children. This could be either in terms of the parents going to the gym or other activity, or as a family, going on family walks, and getting a dog to encourage children to go on walks.

## Barriers for parents and other family members

Barriers for parents in terms of supporting and enabling their children with sight loss to take part were as follows:

- **Fear about child's safety, health and enjoyment** while taking part, particularly where they had had a bad experience, for example being hurt or injured, or upset, during PE or other physical activity, because the activity had not been adapted appropriately to make it safe and enjoyable for them. One parent mentioned having to carefully monitor the child's energy levels. Parents might feel conflicted between wanting to protect their child and wanting to let them take risks, in order to learn and develop and have experiences.

"I can't tell you how many times he came home [after PE] with a black eye or grazes on his knees, teeth knocked out - it just put him off really... he's like, why would you do something that's going to hurt you." (Parent)

- **Child's confidence and self esteem.** If the child is reluctant, fearful or stressed about taking part of the prospect of taking part, parents may not want to push it and upset the child further. Children's concerns were mostly identified as relating to how others see them, with negative attitudes or perceptions acting to discourage children and diminish their confidence and self esteem.

"She doesn't want to turn up with a headtorch when no one else has one. And there's the emotional barrier, if she's struggling, falling over, getting hit in the face, she will ask to be a sub... she has good days and bad days." (Parent)

"We've had a few comments from people along the line of, 'why can't [Child] do that, this other 5 year old can do it... comparisons that show they don't understand the challenges she has. She's heard a few of those comments. She's internalising this view of herself... this person could walk that far, kick that ball.'" (Parent)

- **Challenges relating to child's other health/developmental needs.** Where children have other conditions alongside VI, this can make it even more difficult to find appropriate, inclusive provision. For example, they may have a developmental age that is lower than their chronological age and therefore unable to take part in age-specific groups; having autism or other neurodivergent condition may impact on the type of adaptations necessary for participation; their energy levels may be lower than their peers'.

"There is a gymnastic club after school, but she gets tired very quickly, and there's not much additional provision to help manage the consequences of this... lots of her friends will go to that session, and it makes no difference to their energy levels, whereas with [child], we will struggle to get her to school the next day." (Parent)

Where parents are focused on supporting or trying to get support around the child's needs, especially if this is around other conditions as well as sight loss, they may not be able to prioritise support for sight loss issues or indeed prioritise participation in sport and physical activity.

"To be honest for us [Child's] VI has taken second place to his other issues, mainly his autism and I will tend to focus on that rather than VI. So there might be things in terms of ways to support him with his VI that I haven't discovered." (Parent)

- **Availability of provision.** A widespread issue was the lack of appropriate sport and physical activity provision in the local area, with many interviewees noting that specialist provision tended to be further away and therefore harder to get to. This applied to one-off events (run by BBS or other charities) and regular sessions (especially for team sports – where there may not be sufficient numbers of people in a local area to make it viable – and when a child gets to a more advanced level in a sport).

“She comes home [from boarding school] on Fridays for the weekend and it's a 3 hour drive to get home, so she doesn't really want to get back in the car on a Saturday morning to drive an hour to goalball.” (Parent)

- **Suitability of provision.** There was a theme around children ‘falling between the gap’ in the sense of not being able to take part in mainstream activities but feeling that disability-specific groups were not right for them either (“they’re for more severely disabled people”). When considering trying a new activity, parents might be unsure whether the activity would be suitable for their child, and if further away, whether it would be worth the journey - especially if they didn't have detailed information in advance about what it would be like and therefore be unsure whether their child would enjoy it and be safe taking part. Parents were wary of placing their child in a situation where they may not feel comfortable, or supported to take part fully. They were afraid of their child feeling discouraged, frustrated or embarrassed, and thereby put off from trying new things.
- **Understanding and attitudes of providers.** Experiences with staff who had not been willing to accommodate and adapt activities to children's individual needs acted as a barrier for parents. They felt frustrated where staff did not show ‘common sense’ or take on board simple tips and advice that would enable them to support children.
- **Cultural factors.** Some of the professionals interviewed reported that cultural attitudes towards disability acted as a barrier to parents supporting their children's participation in sport and physical activity, specifically within some south Asian communities. They observed that disability was stigmatised and therefore families may hide or not acknowledge their child's VI, and may not seek or accept help and support for their child's participation.

For other families the issue may not be cultural attitudes, but practicalities such as language barriers and knowing where to find out about activities.

“Where English isn't the first language, they might not have access to the information about what's on, and then there's also fear – parents might not be comfortable in those sorts of situations, that are outside of their culture, worried they won't be able to communicate. There needs to be more support in the form of people, staff or volunteers to take children to things, when the parents can't. I can only do it in my working day and sometimes events are at the weekend.”  
(Professional)

- **Parent fatigue.** The parents interviewed for this research were all motivated to support their children, most to a high degree (as evidenced by their engagement with First Steps, and this research). Nonetheless several admitted to getting tired of looking for activities suitable for their child, explaining to staff how to support their child, and providing practical and emotional support to their child to take part.

“Parenting a blind child is really hard, especially if you have other children – it is the effort, and the mental load, of finding out about things and organising the getting there.” (Professional)

- **Transport.** With children in this younger age bracket, and with provision not tending to be local, children are reliant on parents (or other family members) to take them to activities. Transport can be a barrier for parents where they do not have a car, or there is inadequate public transport.
- **Finances.** As well as transport costs, there can be other financial barriers to parents enabling their children to be active, such as costs of sessions (especially if the child needs 1-2-1 rather than group sessions), and specialist kit (many mentioned the cost of prescription goggles for swimming).
- **Time.** Parents' time is a barrier to taking children to activities outside of school - they may be working, have other commitments and have other children's activities to take into account. Some pointed out that it is much easier to take their other (sighted) children to activities because they are much more likely to be local.

## What could help parents and family members

There were a range of ideas and suggestions about what could help parents to influence their children to lead more active lives.

- **Support at school.** Parents wanted to experience more positive attitudes from school staff at all levels (Head, PE lead, external PE provider if relevant, class teacher and TA supporting child). They would like schools to demonstrate more willingness to adapt PE lessons to make them safe and inclusive. Parents want their child to be able to join in with other children, and not made to feel left out or different, and this means schools adapting PE activities so that there is a 'level playing field'. For example, one interviewee talked about a game where all the children close their eyes. Schools should place importance on children's participation in PE, not treat PE lessons as an opportunity for the child to 'catch up' on other areas of the curriculum.

*"What helps me is staff including school staff who are open to listening to me and taking my advice about supporting [my child]." (Parent)*

Some wanted more specialist support in schools, i.e. a professional such as a QTVI with a focus on PE and sport specifically; others just wanted everyday school staff to have better awareness and more willingness to adapt and support.

- **Local provision.** Interviewees acknowledged the challenge of VI-specific provision being available locally, and recognised that pan-disability activities, or mainstream but explicitly inclusive activities, could help expand the number and range of opportunities for children to participate. Many had attended BBS events or events organised by other organisations supporting blind and partially sighted people (Guide Dogs, VICTA) and all said they would like more events like these, within easier reach of where they live.
- **More accessible provision,** led by staff who are able to support participation of children with sight loss. This included positive mindsets amongst sports providers – as with school staff – being willing to learn and implement adaptations, listen to parents' advice and expertise on their own children, and seek out guidance, resources and training. It was often noted in the interviewees that leisure centres and other facilities may be badged as 'accessible' or 'disability-friendly' but that this did not necessarily indicate VI-

specific provisions ("people tend to think about wheelchairs") and therefore was not genuinely accessible.

- **Knowledge and awareness of provision.** Parents would like it to be easier to find out about provision of sports and physical activity suitable for children with sight loss, for example, via an online portal.

"I feel overwhelmed by the internet - there is so much to look up. Obviously if you were signposted to one place where it is all succinctly displayed what you can do, that would be great and maybe there is a place but I haven't found it."  
(Parent)

They also need more detailed information in advance about the provision, so they can be confident they understand whether it will be appropriate for their child. It should be easy to contact the organisers to ask questions and discuss an individual child's needs in advance.

"Parents are worried about whether the activity is really 'for everyone' and whether they will be able to cater for your child. It's not always clear from the poster or whatever, whether it's going to be suitable for them or not."  
(Professional)

- **Funding for sport participation.** Funding available to families for swimming goggles and eyewear for ball sports, as appropriate for individual children, depending on their condition. Some also mentioned free carer tickets when taking their child swimming (previously but no longer provided).
- **Peer support networks.** More support for formal or informal networks and groups of parents to develop and grow would enable parents to support each other, in a number of ways. For example, being able to meet other families where a child with sight loss is already participating in sport and physical activity, and therefore can act as a role model showing what is possible; being able to share knowledge about what provision is available, and feedback on how good it is; supporting each other in practical ways such as sharing lifts to sport and physical activity sessions and events.

"I feel better after the BBS events, I come away thinking 'it's not just me' after those events."  
(Parent)

Some interviewees mentioned networks or groups for specific sight loss conditions (such as nystagmus) as a source of support and advice that had helped them, for example, to have the confidence to let their child try things:



“The support from that group has been a big influence in terms of us allowing him to try everything he wants to try.... to understand his capabilities and understand that by stopping them, you're not allowing them to explore what they can actually achieve, you're limiting their success.” (Parent)

Other interviewees talked about local sight loss charities as important sources of support, information and opportunity to meet other families.

Parent support groups could be face to face or online. Parents said they valued 'forums' where they can ask questions of other parents, and online sessions such as webinars on specific topics. Some said that groups should ideally be moderated by professionals, to ensure that advice being shared is correct.

- **Opportunity to familiarise with venue and staff in advance.** Parents and children could be reassured by having the opportunity to visit the venue for the sport or physical activity session in advance, learn to navigate around the venue, and talk to the staff about how best to support the child to participate. Professionals shared examples of where they had worked at a very slow pace with children and families, to build up the confidence of both.

“We had to take it very slowly. Break it down into little steps. So we did a lot of familiarising in school, like practising the route to the pool. Sit in the changing room. Then walk into pool room, smell the chlorine. Get a sense of the changing temperature and lights. Within 2 weeks she was sitting with her feet in the water, then got in and now she can go on holidays to centre parcs and have a brilliant time in the pool with her dad.” (Professional)

- **Resources to share with professionals.** Some parents talked about providing or referring staff to resources and guidance on their child's condition, such as videos by Thomas Pocklington Trust.
- **Support for parents to be more active themselves.** This could help them to inspire and motivate their children to be more active, by acting as a role model and normalising physical activity as a part of family and adult life.

# Schools and education professionals

## Schools: summary

Through PE lessons, schools have the opportunity to act as a positive influence on children with sight loss in terms of sport and physical activity.

Levels of motivation to ensure that children with sight loss can take part in sport at school were found to be mixed, with interviewees tending to say that it depended on there being a motivated individual - often the child's teaching assistant - to advocate for and support the child's participation.

Schools' barriers included not knowing how to adapt activities to make them inclusive for children with sight loss, and not perceiving PE to be as important as other lessons. They may not have time/resources to commit to staff taking part in training.

In terms of what would help schools to better influence and support children with sight loss in PE, they need training and advice from professionals such as habilitation specialists, both in terms of practical tips for adapting activities and in terms of building more positive attitudes towards inclusion.

## Role of schools and education professionals

Schools were universally agreed to have a very important role in children's sporting habits, via PE lessons. PE was seen as a key influencer of how children experience sport and physical activity, being universal (it is part of the national curriculum) and in theory, every child should take part. It is also where children experience sport and physical activity alongside their peers. Some professionals noted that when children start school, parents might tend to see the responsibility for physical activity shifting away from them and into the remit of school, through PE lessons. Interviewees were not always satisfied with the extent to which schools enabled children with sight loss to participate in PE.

## Motivations of schools and education professionals

We did not interview any school staff, so insights here are from parents and professionals supporting children, who go into schools to support children's participation in this setting. Some schools were reported to really take on board their

responsibility to support children with sight loss to take part in sport and physical activity, while others did not do so at all, despite efforts to support this by parents and professionals. Both parents and professionals interviewed struggled to identify why this variation exists, feeling that it depended on the motivation of the Head, SENCo and/or individual teachers and TAs.

“If your child has a TA, it is very much down to how motivated they are. [Child] has had a few and the one he has at the moment is very clued up and motivated to support him, she has a lot of common sense. At this school, they are good at getting to know him.”

“If you have a SENCo who is on it, you are OK! When we have had meetings and I have described things - she understands where I am coming from and she makes changes, she just gets it and is really proactive.” (Parent)

## Barriers for schools and education professionals

The overriding message from interviewees around barriers to schools in supporting children to access sport and physical activity was that the key barrier is attitudinal – not about skills, or equipment. Misconceptions and lack of understanding about the importance and benefits of physical activity, coupled with the context of schools' overstretched staffing and resources, led to many schools falling short in terms of their support for children with sight loss when it came to PE lessons.

- **Attitudes and understanding of how to include children with sight loss.** Some schools did not think that they could include children with sight loss in PE lessons. Instead the child would do something separately with their TA, which may involve physical activity (such as go for a walk or spend time in the gym) or spend extra time in the classroom focusing on other schoolwork.

“[Some schools] think that because a child has VI, that if they ‘can’t’ join in with PE, they should use that time to focus on catching up with their braille or whatever. That is the attitude and mindset of many schools – physical activity is not a priority, not valued like other aspects of education.” (Professional)

“In a PE class she just gets, ‘no, you can’t join in, you will have to do your own thing’. So she is separated from the rest and she hates that.” (Parent)

Parents and professionals interviewed were extremely frustrated by this. Both tried to explain and educate school staff to be able to make - often simple - adjustments to enable inclusivity, but met with reluctance or resistance from school. Schools also need to listen to children directly:

“The other thing I think that really needs to happen in schools is teaching children with a disability to speak up and say, I can't see, I can't hear or that's difficult for me. Without being penalised.” (Parent)

One parent said their child's school employed an external company to deliver PE, and again their attitudes towards inclusivity and willingness to adapt activities was reported as a barrier.

“She struggles to join in, even though her TA is with her, it's too busy, too much going on. School use a company for PE and they have no inclusivity for additional needs. And the school just says 'sorry, we just have to go with what works for the majority of the class'.” (Parent)

- **Maintaining skills and knowledge.** Even when a school has some knowledge around sight loss, there is the risk it is lost when staff, or the child with sight loss, moves on from the school. So schools have an ongoing job to maintain awareness and skills around supporting children with sight loss.

“Primaries will not have large numbers, there is staff change, there is so much else that staff have to do in terms of training that VI training will not be prioritised. [Even when there is training], the skillset might be lost when the child moves on.” (Professionals)

- **Communication within the school.** Parents and professionals did not always have access to the relevant person within the school, with whom they wanted to communicate their child's needs.

“We inform the school about what is needed, but if they don't inform the PE teacher...” (Parent)

- **Capacity.** The ratio of staff to children in a PE lesson may make it difficult to adapt activities, depending on the child's needs.

“It's difficult because there are 34 kids in the class, and everyone is moving – [Child] really struggles with that, she can't process everything. If there was opportunity to do more small group work, that would be more beneficial.” (Parent)

- **Time and resources for training.** Challenges for schools in enabling their staff to take part in training included lack of resources to provide cover for this. In relation to TAs in particular, it was noted that TAs are required in the classroom at all times; they often supervise at lunchtimes; and are not paid beyond the end of the school day – so there is little opportunity for training. Schools have

so many other training requirements, they may not prioritise VI-specific training, especially when numbers of children are small.

- **Facilities.** The sports facilities at school could present challenges to children with sight loss, with several interviewees referring to noise or light levels as a barrier.

“The hall was really noisy, he relies on hearing, he couldn't locate the sounds in the same way.” (Parent)

“The way the pitches are laid out, autumn onwards is really difficult, dusk arrives earlier, there are no floodlights.” (Parent)

## What could help schools and education professionals

Interviewees had plenty of suggestions for what schools need in order to increase their positive influence on children's physical activity levels.

- **Training for staff.** If schools could be resourced to enable staff such as TAs and PE teachers to take part in training, this could increase their knowledge and understanding of how to support children with sight loss to take part in PE. This training can be provided in schools by habilitation specialists. Another option is for staff to attend external events and bring the knowledge and learning back into school – there was an example of when a teacher had attended an event run by Goalball UK and then started running goalball sessions with the whole school.

Enabling staff to take part in training may need to involve funding for backfill, or scheduling training as part of inset days. It could contribute to teachers' CPD (continuing professional development).

- **Listening to parents.** Parents often know their child best and, if they are encouraged and given the opportunity to, they can explain their child's needs to school staff and this can help school staff to understand and work to meet these needs.

“They have been sensible – once you point out the simple things like, say your name when you are speaking to him – they don't need hours of specialist training.

Individual VI needs need to be described to someone and then they should be OK with it. Sometimes I have found stuff or written stuff and sent it to the class teacher or SENCo. I don't want to be a busybody mum, so not too much! But the current school are good, they are interested when I do share things with them.”

(Parent)

Professionals pointed out that not all parents have the confidence (or time, or language skills) to play this role of advocating for their child with school. For this reason they cautioned against relying solely on parents to get what they need from school. But where parents are able and keen to do this, schools should welcome it.

- **Relationships with other professionals supporting child.** Relationships and joint working between schools and in particular TAs (who are usually not specialists in sight loss) and habilitation specialists were identified as an important factor in enabling children's participation in PE. One example of this was where a child's physiotherapist had met with her TA.

"One of the things that helped [Child's] 1-2-1 was her being able to meet with her physiotherapist. They had a session, they talked about what she can do, her limitations, how to support her to access things - that kind of training was really helpful. I know time of staff is limited, and would rather 1-2-1 was with my child, but still it was very useful." (Parent)

Professionals said that in order to educate and support TAs, they need access to them - which is down to the school to enable.

"One of the biggest factors is if you have a proactive TA who is willing to learn and listen, who understands the child and is a real advocate for them. A lot is down to that individual. The TA might get support from a habilitation specialist and that's very helpful. It helps if they are sporty themselves. But even if not, we can educate them, e.g. through VI awareness sessions. Once they have the understanding, they tend to be on board." (Habilitation specialist)

- **Responsible role.** Interviewees recognised that teachers and TAs were often overstretched. They wanted a specific person within the school to take responsibility for children with sight loss being enabled to participate in PE, whether this would be the SENCo or the PE lead within school, or an external advisory teacher for VI, covering a number of schools.
- **Promoting understanding amongst children.** Schools could ensure that children are educated about the experience of having sight loss, encouraging understanding and empathy and thereby making it easier for children to join in with the rest of the class during PE lessons. One parent reported that this happened in the classroom, but not in relation to PE/sport.

“The QTVI did a presentation with her class so they can see what [she] sees... it gives them understanding if she stands on their foot etc., but it's still in a classroom setting, it's not sports.” (Parent)

- **Role models.** Schools could host visitors such as sportspeople with sight loss to assemblies, to talk about blind and partially sighted people's participation in sport and inspire and raise awareness.
- **Staff ratios in PE.** More staff available during PE lessons could help to enable small group work or differentiation of activities that would better enable the child with sight loss to take part.
- **Support for PE teachers to adapt activities.** For example, using a red ball instead of a white ball, playing a game where all the children close their eyes. Professionals suggested that a combination of providing guidance documents and going in to talk to teachers was the most effective approach.

“PE teachers – especially the newer ones coming through - don't have the experience of working alongside someone with a VI. They want them involved but don't know how. We developed a quick reference doc for PE teachers – key points on how different activities can be made accessible. It's something they can grab quickly.” (Professional)

- **Collaboration across schools.** While numbers of children with sight loss in a mainstream primary school will likely be low, across an area it may be viable to run adapted sports days, where children can compete and parents can meet other families.

“Some schools have got together and are doing adapted sports days, with young people going out and representing their school. Parents are floored that their child is picked to go to a sporting event. And it's an opportunity for them to meet loads of different people.” (Professional)

- **Inclusive sessions in schools by BBS.** Interviewees suggested the BBS could run taster days or sessions in schools, including activities that everyone could join in with.

“I would like more things that everyone can do – so it is not just for those with VI, not singling them out, ‘this is something for disabled children’. Being inclusive. That has been more successful here because there aren't the numbers of children VI, and, if everyone is doing it, it isn't stigmatised.” (Professional)

# Professionals supporting children with sight loss

## Professionals: summary

Professionals in roles such as habilitation specialist and advisory teacher for VI felt their influence with children was limited compared to that of parents and schools. They saw their role as being to influence parents and schools to encourage children's participation in sport and physical activity.

Motivations for professionals were around the benefits of physical activity to children's all-round wellbeing and independence, with professionals aiming to foster a 'can-do' attitude around children's participation.

Barriers were around their ability to influence parents and schools, with barriers for parents and schools getting in the way (attitudes, resources, time). In addition professionals did not always know what provision was available for children in terms of accessible activities; or have the time or resources to support participation to the extent they would like to.

What would help professionals: better sources of information about provision, making it easier to signpost parents to potential activities; easier access into schools, enabling professionals to raise awareness and share knowledge with school staff, who in turn can support children in PE lessons.

## Role of professionals supporting children with sight loss

The professionals we spoke to were habilitation specialists or advisory teachers for VI; these were the type of professionals most mentioned by parent interviewees too. They go into homes and schools to support children, so have a broad, holistic view of children's experiences of sight loss and support needs. Their aim is to support children in both settings to develop skills for day to day living and independence and to thrive and achieve in all areas.

## Motivations of professionals supporting children with sight loss

Those we interviewed all placed high importance on physical activity and recognised its benefits across all aspects of children's lives, and therefore were highly



motivated to support children to be physically active. However they talked largely about their role as influencing and enabling parents and school staff, and - to a lesser extent - wider community sport professionals (e.g. swimming instructors), rather than children directly, because of their relatively limited time with individual children (compared to parents and schools). So their motivations were inherent in their role, and were underpinned by the following aims:

- **Positive mindset.** Professionals wanted to encourage a 'you can do it' mindset in children, parents and schools, in relation to children's participation in sport and physical activity as with all aspects of everyday life. Some saw their role as developing this mindset, as well as being a source of practical advice and expertise.
- **Holistic approach to wellbeing and independence.** Professionals saw physical activity as a key element of overall wellbeing, and believed that positioning it as such with parents and schools could help them move away from viewing sport and physical activity as a lesser priority than other aspects of education.

## Barriers for professionals supporting children with sight loss

Barriers for professionals were around the limitations to their ability to influence on children, with parents and schools effectively acting as gatekeepers between professionals and children.

- **Mindsets of parents.** As discussed earlier, professionals met with some parents who did not understand the importance or benefits of physical activity, or simply could not prioritise it over other daily activities and challenges.

"For families I work with there are other priorities, like can they get to school."  
(Professional)

"It just depends on the parents involved. If they are into activity that's great. I can model different play options when I visit a family, but I might not see them for another month. I don't know if they are doing it." (Professional)

While most parents are glad of help and support from professionals, there were some for whom there was fear and stigma around seeking help or receiving support, based on perceptions of social services.

"We offer respite arrangements where someone comes to take the child to the activity – so it's like a social care thing as well, support for accessing leisure activities. But getting that in place involves assessments etc, it's not easy. And a big barrier is the connotation with social care – people don't want to get involved

with social services. There is stigma and misconceptions around that. That is where the funding is for them to access leisure – just like school funding comes from education - but people have this stigma around it. They don't want to be seen to be needing a social worker." (Professional)

- **Mindsets of schools.** As discussed in the section about schools, professionals going into schools to support children and school staff often encountered misconceptions about children's ability and desire to take part, and schools tending to prioritise other areas of the curriculum over PE.

"If the child seems happy not joining in, [school] might not have thought there was an issue. But the longer you leave it, the harder it becomes for the child to join in – they will be nervous, feel like everyone can do it better than them." (Professional)

- **Resources.** For transport or spending more time with children to accompany them to sports activities (if parents can't or aren't willing to).
- **Information about local provision and events.** They don't always know what's on where or when, or they find out about things too late to organise for children to go (informing parents, gaining permission, arranging transport all takes time).
- **Remit of professionals.** Where professionals sit in terms of who they are employed by could act as a barrier. Habilitation specialists could go into schools to support school staff but may not have any remit outside of education – therefore going along to community sport activities with a child, to help staff understand how to support them, may not be possible. They may be able to go to a sports venue to support familiarisation, such as the child finding their way around, but not to support the participation itself.

## What could help professionals supporting children with sight loss

Professionals had a range of ideas about what could help them to better support children with sight loss, chiefly around supporting their influencing role with parents and schools but also around supporting children directly.

- **Access into schools.** Professionals found it extremely helpful to go into schools and work with staff to support children's participation in PE. But some schools would or could not make time for this, struggling to release TAs for training or awareness sessions because they could not afford to provide cover.

- **Funding and flexibility**, for professionals to provide more support and to have more say over how it is provided. For example, having funding to for staff to accompany children to activities, where parents can't take them.
- **Emphasising the benefits of physical activity**. This was how professionals tried to engage parents and schools as influencers, by promoting understanding that physical activity is not 'just' for fun, but impacts on physical and mental wellbeing, development, social skills and independence. Evidence – facts, figures, case studies – may help get parents and schools on board.
- **Showing what is possible**. Professionals trying to 'make the case' to children, parents and schools, that children with sight loss can be active and can achieve, would like more exposure for role models. This could be in the form of older young people with sight loss who have succeeded in sport, and could give talks or make videos to inspire others, and in the form of more high profile role models such as Paralympic athletes with sight loss.
- **Building trust**. Professionals felt it was key to have the trust of parents in order to be able to influence them. This required having time to get to know the family but also time to introduce changes (such as starting swimming lessons) in a slow and supported way.

“I had to say to mum, do you trust me? And she said yes, and we worked on it together and we took our time. Parents' confidence is key. Just because the child cries the first time, doesn't mean you shouldn't do it ever again! It's just kids, it's not always because of their VI. So I am always encouraging parents to be persistent.”

(Professional)

- **Overcoming stigma**. The way that services are 'badged' may help in engaging families who are uncomfortable with the idea of receiving social care funding for leisure and respite. One professional interviewed said that thinking was underway in their area about what they call these services and how to promote them in ways that do not discourage take-up due to stigma.
- **Support from BBS**. Many of the interviewees spoke positively of BBS events for children and parents, and one spoke about a training day, which they felt had had a real impact:

“Everyone who attended that left with so many ideas about how to run sessions, what needed to be done to make sport more accessible, and that enthusiasm has carried on... we are going into settings and they are still as enthusiastic. It had such a positive impact, and that flowed over to parents as well. I think it was partly

because of the team that delivered training – one person had VI and was very active with sport; but also it was the [design of the day], the theory in morning and then very interactive and practical in the afternoon - it got everyone together.”  
(Professional)

- **Roles of BBS and other national sight loss charities.** Clarity on the roles of sight loss charities may help professionals navigate to the right support.

“There are so many charities and organisations in the VI world. Say a parent asks me about rounders, shall I ask BBS, or the RNIB, or the Pocklington Trust - I don't always know where to start. If it all came under one umbrella that would make it so much easier. VI is low incidence so why are there so many organisations doing things? They should be working together.” (Professional)

# Community sport professionals

## Community sport: summary

Community sport professionals such as coaches and instructors have the potential to encourage or discourage the participation of children with sight loss, depending on how willing and able they are to make activities inclusive and accessible – which was said by interviewees to be very varied.

The research did not identify much about the motivations of community sport professionals. Their key barrier to including children with sight loss was reported to be lack of knowledge about how to adapt activities and facilities.

Community sports providers could benefit from access to guidance and resources on how to adapt activities for children with sight loss, but also something to influence their attitudes and understanding of how easy this can be – with many interviewees saying that small adjustments could make a big difference.

## Role of community sport professionals

Interviewees did not tend to think of community sport professionals (those working in leisure centres and sports clubs) as a key influencer for children in this age group; they have a lesser role than those discussed above. However, they have a potentially important role, especially as children get older, and interviewees shared a range of experiences where community sport professionals had helped or hindered children's participation, and ideas about how they could play a more active role in encouraging and supporting it.

## Motivations of community sport professionals

We did not interview any community sport professionals so insights into their motivations are based on the perceptions of parents and professionals such as habilitation specialists. The strongest theme in this aspect of the discussions with interviewees was – as with schools – the variation in the engagement of community sport professionals with children with sight loss.

Some were found to be very supportive, demonstrating positive attitudes, an individual and child-centred approach, openness to learning from parents, willingness to adapt activities, and – crucially – a 'common sense' approach. By this, interviewees meant things like, not relying on pointing to tell a child where to go, or

expecting a child to be able to copy physical demonstrations; saying the child's name to get their attention; saying their own name so the child knows who is talking.

"We are not necessarily being picky about whether [the staff] have experience of working with kids with VI because I just don't think we would find that, and I don't believe it's necessary – we have found that staff learn quickly what [Child] can see or not see – you tell them, 'he can see within a metre quite well', and then they can pick it up pretty quickly and work around that." (Parent)

However, as with schools, interviewees said that some staff in sports centres and clubs were less open and willing ("they just seem to get it, or they don't").

## Barriers for community sport professionals

Insight into the barriers for community sport professionals in supporting the participation of children with sight loss was as follows:

- **Lack of knowledge and understanding of sight loss.** This was repeatedly raised in the interviews, and it manifested in a number of ways. Not knowing about sight loss and children's support needs around participation may mean that providers and staff are nervous about it, think they won't be able to support the child, or that it is too difficult or time-consuming (requiring specialist knowledge, expertise or equipment). This may mean that simple adaptations are not made, which could be very easily implemented if staff were aware.

"it's sometimes stupid things... not considering clearing up the floor space if they've had like a previous sport session in and the floor is all crowded so I'll go in and clear the pass for him. It's just it's little things like that that they still don't quite get, that I have to keep picking up on." (Parent)

Limitations to disability awareness, i.e. that awareness of hidden conditions is low, was seen to be reflected in the wheelchair symbol signage on disabled changing rooms. A broader understanding of disability and the range of visible and hidden disabilities would help staff to consider the needs of people with sight loss.

- **Lack of capacity.** In group sessions, staff may struggle to give enough individual attention to the child with sight loss while also running the session.
- **Profitability.** It may not be cost-effective for clubs to provide sessions that are disability or sight loss specific, because of low numbers; or to provide extra support for individuals to take part, because additional staff might be needed.

- **Concerns about insurance and liability.** A few interviewees said clubs had concerns about insurance (gymnastics and judo were mentioned).

“So basically you pay a monthly fee, but you also make an annual insurance contribution, I’m getting myself ready for a fight, any issues won’t be intentional on their part, it will be a lack of knowledge and understanding about if she can/can’t or what the issues are.” (Parent)

## What could help community sport professionals

Ideas about what could help community sport professionals to support children with sight loss were as follows:

- **Positive mindset.** Staff having a really positive approach to inclusion, making time to understand the child, and to encourage them to achieve – not just take part – made the biggest difference from parents’ perspectives.

“They’ve got time for him. I think that’s the biggest thing. They get him, they just understand him. And they want to see him progress.” (Parent)

- **Listening to parents.** As noted above in relation to school staff, parents of children with sight loss play an advocacy role for them and see themselves as well placed to explain their child’s needs to staff working with them. Often parents emphasised that supporting their child was not necessarily complicated or difficult, and that a few simple tips could make a big difference.

“It’s just a case of telling them the most obvious stuff, the basics – like, if you are pointing, then point in front of the child’s face so they can see it. VI has so many different forms, so you need to explain what works for your child.” (Parent)

They just need professionals to be open to listening to and taking this advice.

“I have to say it to people, sometimes over and again. I have found that some people wait to be told by another professional, rather than a parent. They will be like, ‘but it’s not in [Child’s] notes, so no’.”

- **Collaboration with parents.** Where parents want and are able to work with professionals, this can help staff to develop their ability to support the individual child.

“For some parents when they take their kids to these activities they see it as a chance to sit back and have a break, but I have to pay attention and be on it in case [Child] has a seizure. So I will watch and then I can see if the teacher is

picking up on things [cues from child]. So what makes it work best for her is a joint effort between me and the teacher." (Parent)

- **Collaboration with volunteers.** One parent observed that at a BBS event where children could try out different sports, having a good number of volunteers present meant there was good support for children to engage with the activities, even though the staff running the sessions were not specialists in working with people with sight loss. Another described an inclusive dance class, where older children acted as individual supporters for the younger children.
- **Allowing time.** Instead of expecting children with sight loss to just turn up and join in, community sport providers should create space and time for them to get familiar with the activity, at a pace that suits them. This might involve visiting the venue in advance, familiarising with the layout and sensory environment (sounds, smells, temperature). They may want to sit on the sidelines before joining in. It should be able to take place without the child being rushed or pressured, so they can build their confidence and staff can get to know them.
- **Access to advice and training.** It was suggested that community sports providers could benefit from having somewhere to go for advice and training around sight loss. This should include risk assessment. They could work towards some form of accreditation to demonstrate their ability to support participation of children with sight loss.
- **Challenge and support from BBS.** Interviewees wondered whether BBS could work with clubs at local level or the national governing bodies for sport, for example, to encourage them to consider sight loss as part of their inclusion strategies.



# Other influencers

## Peers

Interviewees thought that children became more influenced by their peers as they got older (classmates, friends, older children and cousins). Children naturally want to do what other children do; seeing peers enjoying or achieving at sport influences and inspires them. Parents recognised a challenge as their children come to realise that they may not be able to participate or achieve in the same way as their sighted peers, and were keen to find activities that they can participate in more fully.

“When he gets older, I think his peers and friendship groups will be a big thing. That’s where I might struggle when all his friends are playing football, how can I help him? So I think they will be a big influence and also a big struggle.” (Parent)

Professionals such as habilitation specialists can support the role of peers as influencers, for example, by running awareness sessions with whole classes and by teaching peers to act as running guides for children with sight loss.

## Blind and partially sighted sportspeople

Interviewees thought that children would be encouraged by more visually impaired sportspeople on TV and social media (e.g. CBeebies, YouTube). Except for the Paralympics, there were few sporting role models with disabilities. Children were interested in role models with sight loss specifically, not just with any disability.

“Seeing blind athletes, seeing celebration of those achievements – via BBS, or the mainstream media as well. Any positivity with regards to blind athletes’ participation in the media, it drip feeds the message to parents that it is something their children can do. That it is there for them to access.” (Professional)

# Conclusions and ideas for action

Prior to this study, there was little to no existing research which considered the motivations and barriers for those who can influence children with sight loss to lead more active lives. Within this context of scarce evidence, the findings from this small, qualitative study offer valuable insights for organisations looking to understand and support those in influencing roles with children.

Who these influencers are is not a surprise – parents and schools play the largest role in influencing children during this period of their lives; professionals in supporting roles such as habilitation specialists are a major enabler to participation; and community sports providers have the potential to do more in terms of increasing access to sport and physical activity.

Broadly speaking the barriers to influencers of children with sight loss fall into two categories, attitudinal and practical. More positive attitudes towards the capability of children with sight loss to take part in sport and physical activity, and the capability of influencers to support them to do so, is key. Much of the challenge lies in perceptions, that is it too difficult, risky, time-consuming or requiring specialist expertise. If this mindset can be overcome then influencers can take more practical steps to enabling children's participation. Interviewees emphasised time and again that these could often be simple and straightforward, 'common sense' actions, based around understanding each individual child's experiences and needs - which can be supported by good communication between parents and all types of professionals around the child.

Understanding the motivations and barriers of key influencers will enable BBS – and other organisations – to design and target interventions that can help these influencers to do more to promote and facilitate the development of sporting habits, that we know can bring benefits to children's wellbeing and equality of access, not only during childhood but throughout their lives.

Suggestions for what would help to support each type of influencer have been covered within the relevant sections, but looking across all influencer groups, there is potential for BBS and others to support via:

- Developing campaigns (TV and social media) showcasing young people with sight loss participating in sports and physical activity, and highlighting the full

range of benefits (from fitness to friendships) to appeal to the motivations of different individuals and influencers.

- Working with local sight loss charities, for example around:
  - Attending, running and publicising sports events, ensuring that adequate information is provided in advance so parents can be clear on suitability for their child.
  - Information hubs/listings for parents and professionals to find out about opportunities to take part
  - Supporting peer support networks for parents.
- Producing and making available information leaflets/packs/videos that parents could share with professionals such as coaches and instructors, providing guidance on how to support children with specific sight conditions to take part in physical activity.
- Training TAs and PE teachers in supporting children to take part in PE lessons, in an inclusive way (focusing on joining in, not doing something separately). Consider how to resource or otherwise enable schools to enable staff to take part, given the pressures on schools' time and training budgets.
- Providing equipment like Jangles (the jangly ball from the First Steps programme) for professionals to take into homes and schools.
- Providing resource packs to schools, sports clubs and centres, with guidance on how to support children with sight loss. These could include advice on adapting activities, increasing accessibility of venues, inclusive language and signage, health and safety/risk assessments and legal/insurance issues.
- Acting as a point of contact and source of advice for education and community sport providers who want guidance or have specific questions about accessibility for children with sight loss.
- Working with national governing bodies or other sport sector bodies to influence clubs and leisure providers around increasing their focus on inclusion.

# Appendix A. Methodology

## Participant engagement

Both parents and professionals were targeted for participation in the research through contact lists held by BBS in relation to the First Steps programme. So they had expressed interest in and in most cases received resources through this programme.

BBS sent out an invite asking parents and professionals to get in touch with the researchers if they would like to take part.

From those that expressed an interest in the research, we selected participants with the aim of including a mix of characteristics. For parents this was the age of their child and type of VI, with location and ethnic group as secondary criteria. For professionals this was their job role and location.

## Research methods

Interviews of up to 45 minutes in length were held online or by phone, according to the participant's preference.

Parents received a £30 thank you payment.

Interview notes were subject to a thematic analysis that drew on both deductive (top-down analysis against pre-conceived themes) and inductive (bottom-up analysis for other themes).

## Limitations

The research findings are limited by the methods used and the context in which the research was conducted.

**Sample size.** The sample size of 8 parents and 8 professionals is small. This means it is unlikely the research findings provide a complete picture of the roles of influencers, and their motivators and barriers, across the population of children with sight loss aged 3-11.

**Representation.** We spoke to two key groups of influencers – parents and professionals, both of which could reflect on their own roles and the roles of others – but did not speak directly to all of the types of influencers.

**Self-selection bias.** It is likely that those who expressed an interest in the research differed from those who chose not to respond. Their interest in participating may well reflect their interest and motivation in relation to supporting children's participation in

sport and physical activity. We did ask interviewees to reflect on the motivations and barriers for those who are less likely to take part. Nonetheless, the research findings do not present a complete picture of motivators and barriers across all children and influencers.

**Lack of previous research on the topic.** A lack of evidence around the research questions meant that the research findings could not be interpreted in terms of other directly relevant research on this topic. This means that the findings, especially considering the other research limitations, should be treated with reservation until further research is undertaken on this subject.

Lucy Smith and Tim Bidey are part of the **Better Decisions Together Collective**.

Lucy and Tim are non-disabled and endeavour to act as allies to Disabled people. They worked in collaboration with staff at British Blind Sport to design



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