

Video transcript: Ben's Story [Co-design Group Member]

Ben:

My name is Ben, I'm 25. I have a dog called Joe who is the best dog to ever exist. I work in community engagement at Thriving, which does sports programmes that focus a lot on inclusion.

I have never considered myself a particularly sporty person. I often underperformed in comparison to my peers so I just assumed that it wasn't a space for me.

I've gotten a lot more comfortable being very bad at the sports I do and having a lot of fun whilst being bad at them. As a young child I think I had quite a lot of fun doing different sporting things and didn't really think much of it. I was never particularly good at them as a kid either.

I played AFL in that my parents signed me up for a team and then bribed the other children to pass me the ball on occasion. My mom came with gold coins ready.

As I got a bit older I started to realise that I wasn't able to perform at the same level as my peers and then as I got older from there I just started disengaging more and more because I felt very embarrassed to try to participate as an adult.

Being able to re engage in sport on my own terms and being able to find community sport groups that don't mind if you're not the best and are willing to accept you as you are and accept what you bring has really changed the game for me.

The primary Sports Club I'm LinkedIn with at the moment is the Perth front runners and I look forward to seeing the people as much as I look forward to doing the activity, which is very alien for me.

Sport as a teenager was go along because you're supposed to do exercise and hope that the people aren't too mean to you this week. Whereas now I know people's names, I know their hobbies, I meet their dogs.

One of the things that clubs can do to help me feel more included is make an effort to know who I am. Know a little bit about me, but my running club, there's a fellow who always

makes a real effort to remember the names of newcomers to the club and then when he sees them again he will call them by name and ask them a little bit about their week.

And it's amazing the difference it makes. Walking up to a place for the second time and seeing someone turn around, smile at you and greet you by name.

The feeling of, OK, this is a place that I already am a part of. I think I've felt the most confident and comfortable when I see other people with disabilities or other people from marginalised groups participating with me.

So within my running club there are other people who are managing different chronic illnesses or disabilities. So I don't feel that I'm the odd one out. I often see disabled people as somewhat of the Canary in the coal mine in that when there are additional challenges to participating in something, we're often the first group that falls away.

Because one of the biggest things that comes with disability is that you've got more things to manage. And so if something's going wrong, like if there's a Sports Club where maybe a vice captain is a bit of a bully or where the times for games change all of all of the time so it's difficult to schedule medical appointments around them, I will be the first person to drop off because I don't have buffer space in my day that maybe able bodied, able bodied people have more of.

So when it comes to us being Canaries in the coal mine, when we stop singing, when we stop being there, it can be sometimes because there are obstacles to playing that sport. And so if you don't see any disabled people within your club, are there barriers to access that are making it impossible for us but are making it more difficult for everyone else to?

I think if a club has been willing to make the accommodations to bring disabled people in, then they are the kind of club who is willing to make accommodations and when you include us it lowers the barrier for entry to everybody, including able bodied people.

If you don't see disabled people within your club, why don't you see disabled people within your club? Because there are so many of us that are socially isolated and we want to engage and we want to be involved.

And if you are, if you have the capacity to reach out and intentionally invite us, we will be stoked.