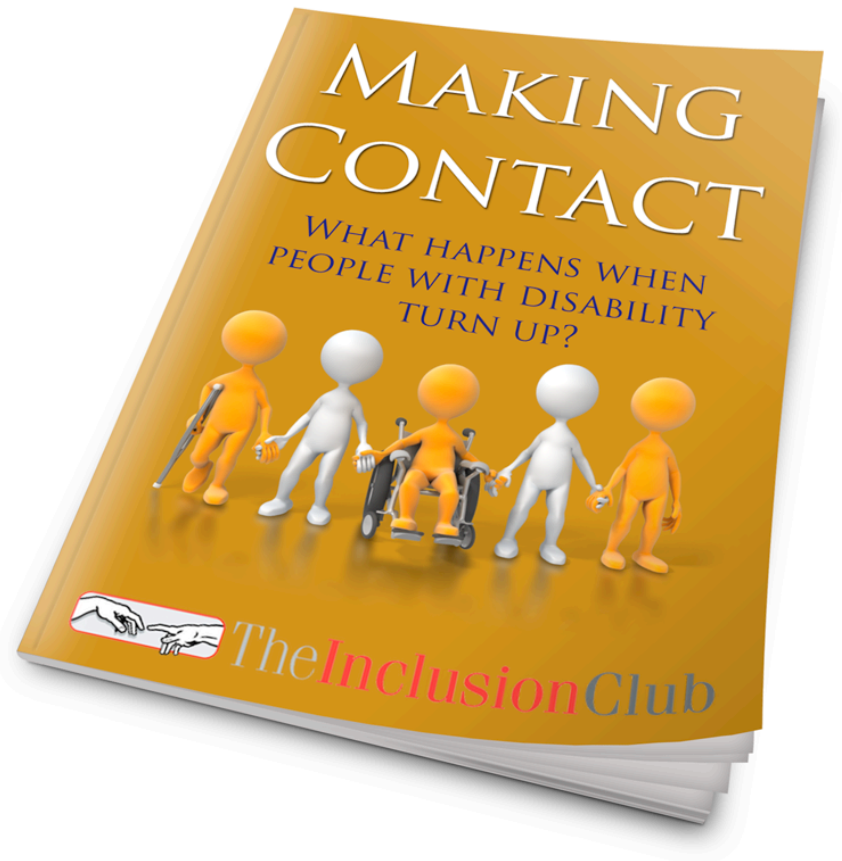


# MAKING CONTACT

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY TURN UP?



AN INCLUSION CLUB PRODUCTION 2012

[HTTP://THEINCLUSIONCLUB.COM](http://theinclusionclub.com)

## INTRODUCTION

This little e-book is a transcription from a series of interviews that were conducted with some of the worlds leading practitioners in adapted physical activity and inclusive sport in May 2012. You can find the video interviews on several places. Best place is here –

[www.theinclusionclub.com/episodes/making\\_contact/](http://www.theinclusionclub.com/episodes/making_contact/)

In the course of our work at The Inclusion Club we are fortunate to come across such people. People that have spent many weeks, months and years talking and writing about inclusion; designing programs for people with disability; studying how inclusion works and steadily building their expertise over time. This is why when you ask them a simple question, as we have done here, it is important to make a record of what they say. To understand what they say. To not underestimate the wisdom they impart because what they say is the result of a heck of a lot of trial and error and a great deal of thought.

We asked these experts

**“what do you think is important when a person with a disability comes to your program or service for the first time.”**

Because that first point of contact can be critical. It can make a difference between success and failure. Please keep in mind that all our experts here come from different contexts and all have different experiences and expertise. Also, for some, English is not their first language.

We would like to thank Liam McDonagh, Aija Saari, Tiina Siivonen, Mike Loovis, David Legg, Martin Mansell and Lauren Lieberman for their contribution and support of The Inclusion Club. Keep up the great work!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Black". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter Downs". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

## LIAM McDONAGH

(NATIONAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION OFFICER WITH CARA NATIONAL  
ADAPTED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CENTRE IN IRELAND)



A good example would be a program that I worked on called Surf2Heal which is a surf camp for children with autism. Surf2Heal started four years ago in Ireland and from one camp it's now expanded to ten camps around the country. So, it's primarily aimed at children with autism. In order to get them prepared for the camp we do a number of different roles. Over the years we've developed this further and further – so what we do now a lot is just to get them feel the wetsuit and get them used to that sensation. We actually get the wetsuit to the kids about a month before the camp. It's just to get them used to the getting into it, even if it's just going to the bath – just to get them used to the sensation of the wetsuit on their skin.

We've even gone as far as to send them sand so that they can get used to that sensation of sand underneath the feet because for some children with autism they don't like it. So we just get them used to walking on sand. There are even suggestions coming out about sending seaweed to them, but we're not sure about how that will travel or how they will go with the smell.

I suppose the most important thing we would find is that it should look seamless. Somebody can come along and we should have everything in

preparation – we should have our staff trained and make sure the access is right – but it should look like it just happens. We don't want to make and to look happen is that we are rushing around when a person arrives at our sessions and things have to be retro-fitted afterwards – it must look seamless when they come along and they are just included. It should look simple.

Another program that we heavily involved with at CARA is Camp Abilities. Our recent camp in Easter, 2012, we had 34 children. For those 34 children we had 70 volunteers because we need a number of roles. There are Camp CARA's, CARA is Irish for 'friend', so each camp receives a CARA – all through to people who look after cleaning the pots and pans – we did four full days of training with these people. Parents come along and they say it's great, the guys are really in tune with the kids. But this doesn't happen by accident, you need to provide the training and a code of ethics, how to be a guide – that kind of training. And that makes it look seamless all the way through. Kids arrive, they meet their CARA, they sit down and they plan their week – so that's the main thing. If you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail. That's the main thing.

## MIKE LOOVIS

(CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY, OHIO, USA)



When someone comes to our program for the first time typically I've had first communication with the parent. Secondly, when they arrive, say the first evening, for our program, I always meet with the family and with the individual separately. I welcome them and try to make them feel at home. We will, many times, walk them around the facility. Let them see other things going on. Take them to the aquatic facility, for instance, where they can view other people enjoying the facility. They can ask questions. If the child is non-verbal the parent will serve as a conduit, asking questions perhaps for their child. We always work one to one so then we'll make the connection with the teacher who will be in charge of that's child's program for around 15 weeks. And then that student may spend some time with that family. So it's not just 'grab the child and rush off to start doing activity', it's much more of a socialising process to get them interested in the environment.

**MARTIN MANSELL**  
(MJM ASSOCIATES, UK)



One of the things that we can do as practitioners for integrating someone into a new situation is provide a policy of inclusion that actually gives them a link person in the school or the activity so that there is a friendly person to come down to. Because part of the problem sometimes is actually about self confidence and embarrassment and not knowing the environment they are walking into. That is something that we could look at developing. From my own experience, the one thing I love is the friendship thing that evolved that allowed me to have the confidence so that I could be integrated in the first place. So the link person is important. We should look at developing that.

Also, I think one of the things that we could do to make it more inclusive in a club environment is actually having that direct link person at the club as a friendly face but is also because you have made contact with the person beforehand and maybe even then making sure they are there in the initial couple of visits to make sure that everything is okay and that everything is sorted out and that they are comfortable and are prepared to deal with any barriers that you might come across in the club so that they can be easily removed.

**AIJA SAARI**  
**(FINISH SPORTS ORGANISATION FOR THE DISABLED)**



What we try to do is make the person feel welcomed by letting them know who their coach or leader is. Maybe they get some previous information about the facilities and how to go in and about accessibility. We want all the sports clubs to put this information on their website. How people with disability really have access to the facility and who they can contact if they have any questions before, any hesitations or any special needs.

We try to give some kind of experience beforehand, so they know what to expect so that they can visit by themselves or with their friends and family and see if the activities are suitable for them. We have tried to contact the disability groups, for example, there can be parents of disabled kids who have their own groups and activities – so we go there to tell them what kind of activities they can participate in – what is possible and where to get equipment and how we can assist. So we try to go to them to invite them to us. This is how we try to do it – to smooth the path into mainstream activities. But sometimes the parents really prefer to stay by themselves with their disabled peers and this is also okay – so it's their choice.



**LAUREN LIEBERMAN**  
**(SUNY BROCKPORT, USA)**

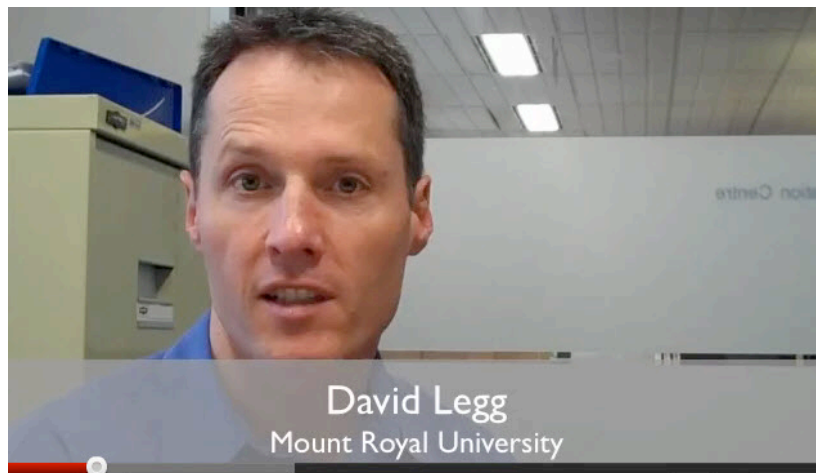


If you really want to set you and your participants up for success I would call way ahead of time and I would send them information, or do a workshop. Especially if you plan on being there for a long period of time. You want to start on the right foot. You want everybody to be comfortable. You don't want the participants to be afraid, or embarrassed, or never try to be in a public facility. I think that once you establish that relationship, the people that come behind you already have an open door. If you don't do that you're risking people being apprehensive or nervous or even shutting the door before they even know what they are getting themselves into. I think it's so important to get people with disability out into the communities because the more we get people with disabilities out into the communities participating, the more the public knows what they can do and accepts a wider variety of people with disability. Social constructivism is alive and well and we must set the stage for everybody.

The same principles goes for programs when you bring the public in. Whether you are bringing in a dance group to teach dance or whether you are bringing in an archery group to teach archery, they have to understand about the disability before they get there. I've had several programs where the kids have actually refused to do the activity because it would go too fast or the instructors didn't modify the activity for them because they did not know. So it is really our job to educate out in the community and when we bring people in. And I think that once you do that, spending the time and energy doing that, the next group that they go to it will be easier and easier.



**DAVID LEGG**  
**(MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY, CANADA)**



I guess there's a number of elements that would encourage a successful first contact experience. Number one is the availability of programs so that there is the awareness that the programs exist. I think though that the most important element, and this is one that we are aware of from a Canadian Paralympic Committee perspective, is the coach. Not so much in my personal opinion, but that the coach has specific expertise in working with a person with a disability, but has a willingness and an openness to coaching an athlete with a disability. Certainly as an instructor that teaches adapted physical activity for students who may not perhaps go in to the realm of working specifically with people with disabilities, they may just work with the able-bodied population, that's really one of my goals, to simply get that student through that level where they feel comfortable and they feel excited and challenged by welcoming a person with a disability into their facility and into their program.

And then begin that process of trying to determine what is going to best suit that person. I guess in part that's why I say I don't think it's necessary that they have specific expertise because each disability is going to be so variable and the individual is going to have such a variety of abilities that I don't think it's reasonable to ask that every coach be able to adapt to every single disability and every permutation of that disability. For me, first and foremost, I think it's the attitude and the welcoming nature of that coach that's so important.

**TIINA SIIVONEN**  
**(REGIONAL COORDINATOR, FINISH SPORTS ORGANISATIONS FOR**  
**DISABLED)**



When new people come and if the other group know each other already – so what is the easiest way that they can come in – as a new person it is sometimes hard – and if the people are just talking and they don't know the new person – it could feel very weird because they don't know the easy way to get in – it's a real good question to think about – how to welcome the people in? Sometimes what we do is just to start a new game and everyone just plays, so after that it makes it easier to know each other because you have that experience of doing something together.

Also, sometimes what we have done is have a link person who maybe just gets to know the person first. It's much easier when you know someone and they just talk. Maybe the person just makes it easier for them to go with him or her to do something. Even if the person with disability knows other people in centres, the link person is maybe the first person there as he knows the others, but after a while he does not need to be there anymore. These link people acts as a kind of introduction to the environment for the person with a disability.

This ebook has been written by Peter Downs as an Inclusion Club special report.  
I would like to thank the contributors to this little project Mike Loovis, Lauren Lieberman, Aija Saari, David Legg, Tiina Siivonen, Liam McDonagh and Martin Mansell.

#### Giveaway Rights

You may give this ebook away to your friends and colleagues you think would be interested in the ideas here. Please encourage them to check out The Inclusion Club (<http://theinclusionclub.com>) if you do. The only restriction is that you may not modify this ebook or any of its contents in any way.

#### Legal Disclaimer

The author has strived to be as accurate and complete as possible in the creation of this report, notwithstanding the fact that he does not warrant or represent at any time that the contents within are accurate due to the rapidly changing nature of the world around us. The author will not be responsible for any losses or damages of any kind incurred by the reader whether directly or indirectly arising from the use of the information found in this report.

Reader assumes responsibility for use of information contained herein. The author reserves the right to make changes without notice. The author and contributors assume no responsibility or liability whatsoever on the behalf of the reader of this report.

For general enquiries please contact:  
[admin@theinclusionclub.com](mailto:admin@theinclusionclub.com)

© Peter Downs 2012