BREAKING THE BARRIER

A TOOLKIT
How to Make Adventure Sport Accessible for All

Life
works

2016 Winner
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Introduciton

Breaking the Barrier started with a big idea 10 years ago.

Inspired by specialist surf instructors in the USA working to introduce learning disabled young people to the joys of surfing, we set the plans in motion to introduce this unique experience to the UK – and Breaking the Barrier was born.

Over the years we have introduced over 1000 learning disabled young people and their families to the joys of surfing – encouraging them to develop an “I can do it!” attitude. We have seen friendships form and families meet at the events, creating support systems that reach far beyond the beach.

10 years have seen us team up with a wide range of surf schools and instructors, working together to develop the skills to best suit the needs of the young people. Breaking the Barrier is about enabling every young person to develop the confidence to have a go – and to achieve. Our aim has always been to provide the supportive and inclusive environment to make that happen.

I am so proud to see this project expand to include a wide range of adventure sports – and to be a part of making them truly accessible for all.

I would like to say thank you, on behalf of all of the team here at Lifeworks, to the huge number of supporters and volunteers who step up and help make this project a reality every year.

And thank you to every single young person who has joined us. Your courage and enthusiasm is what makes every event so special.

Richard Hanlan
CEO, Lifeworks
What is Breaking the Barrier?

Our aims and why it works:

Breaking the Barrier serves to introduce learning disabled young people to adventure sport;

1. To make it as easy as possible for learning disabled children and young people to ‘have a go’

2. To make it as easy as possible for learning disabled young people to participate on their own terms

3. To take away the worry of being judged.

4. To help families participate together.

5. To spark an interest and connect families with opportunities for regular engagement.

Breaking the Barrier starts with two questions:

What can we do to make it easy for learning disabled young people and their families to participate?

- Provide high ratio support but find a way that this doesn’t cost the earth.

- Provide ‘on the beach’ support in whatever context - one of the biggest things that keep families away is the logistics they face to get ‘kitted out’ to participate.

- Provide the opportunity for the young person to succeed - to sit, kneel or stand up on a surfboard or get on a bike for the first time...

What can we do to support learning disabled young people take up adventure sport regularly?

- Work with adventure sport providers who deliver accessible sessions all year round e.g. Discovery Surf School lead on the delivery of the Wave Project in South Devon.

- Map the idea of participation with the young person, show them what’s possible, get them used to the environment – for some just the feeling of sand between their toes or putting a safety helmet on can be intolerable at first.

- Break down personal barriers to provide a positive experience; provide surf shoes, a changing space on the beach, a tandem bike or tricycle, the lend of a beach wheelchair.

- Know how best to communicate with each young person.

- But most of all show them and their families, with all the local voluntary community support that each Breaking the Barrier event attracts, that they are welcome in that space.

“It was great for him to cycle with a ‘proper cyclist’”
Parent of a young person cycling with a Mid-Devon Cycle Club volunteer
Over 10 years Breaking the Barrier (BtB) has changed the mind-sets of:
- Participating families
- Local people
- Community Volunteers
- Adventure Sport Providers

Case Study:
Finlay first saw Breaking the Barrier in a news report on TV in 2007, he has been coming ever since. Finlay has Global Development Delay and for him everything is a sensory experience to be tested - when he first came surfing with Breaking the Barrier he couldn’t even bare the feeling of sand between his toes or the waves lapping over his body – for Finns dad - who had grown up doing water sports - this felt totally alien - but bit by bit Finns confidence grew and he began to accept those challenges, much to the annoyance of his sister at times when it involves him chucking sand at her! Another love for Finn started with his family being told when he was two that he would never ride a two wheeled bike – watching the Tour of Britain and having a member of the team come and talk to him inspired him to take up the challenge, first he had a trike and then he went to Speedway and he has never looked back...

In 2017 Finlay cycled from Dartington to Bigbury to promote the idea of cycling becoming a regular Breaking the Barrier Calendar event - with the right equipment and the right people there to enable learning disabled young people and their families Break the Barrier. Finlay was presented with his BtB certificate by Paralympian Triathlete, David Hill and got a well done video message and signed T Shirt from the JLT Condor team at the BtB Celebration event in the autumn of 2017. As the BtB celebration event wrapped up, attended by over 70 young participants and their families:

“We didn’t feel different. Surfing instructors, BtB staff and volunteers were amazing, patient and respectful.” Parent

“The attitude that the children had was testament to what you are achieving. Well done.” Community Volunteer at the BtB Celebration event, 2017

- Over 1130 learning disabled children and young people have been introduced to adventure sport;
- Over 50 community groups have been supported to get involved to make the events happen
- Over 350 volunteers have pitched up to help on the events
- Over 10 Adventure Sport Providers have lent their expertise and learnt how best to enable.

In 2017 52% of participants confirmed that taking part in Breaking the Barrier encouraged them to participate in adventure sport more regularly. This figure doesn’t seem remarkable but when you compare it to the national average for young people (whole population) participating in adventure sport cited by Sport England in their Outdoor Participation Report (2015) which equals 43%, it is.
In the water, on the beach or on the Velopark having support in the shape of individual volunteers, local businesses and community groups makes it work:

**In the water:**
One Instructor – expert in their sport, expert in their local environment
One ‘In the water’ volunteer – able to chase an escaping surf board and give a big thumbs up help make the most out of that young person’s surf session – working together to get them standing up if they can.

**On the beach:**
Lifeworks staff co-ordinate the event: registration, getting groups to the pass, providing first aid and sustenance for participants and volunteers. Community volunteers work on each section; fitting kit (buoyancy aids, safety helmets), escorting groups of surfers to the water’s edge, running wet suits back to the surf hire company for a rinse and recycle.

**On the Velopark:**
In 2017 we added a new sport to the BtB offer – cycling - we’re not expert in cycling so we found a local community group who are: The Velopark Veterans, regular users of the Torbay Velopark, guided us to design a practical event course, contributed to the risk assessment, helped us plan the event and then got their volunteers to the event to help families participate:

“Mixing with other young people provides a social event. These guys get to socialise through activities organised for them and this is as essential as the activity.” Parent

Work with local community organisations to create a social event: Breaking the Barrier events are not just about the adventure sport on offer, there are always activities happening around the edges to make the event more of a social occasion. 9 times out of 10 these are provided by local community group’s e.g.

- Energia Samba band playing on Saunton Beach
- The Totnes Rotary Club running a BBQ at Bigbury
- Rocactive, local social care charity who provides regular accessible sports at local leisure centres, running a drop-in multisport session on our events:
  - Good promotion for them
  - A great activity for us

Families appreciate the opportunity to socialise, to hang out. BtB creates a safe space for them to be, to relax, to talk to each other and to make connections with local groups that can support regular participation.

“It was an amazing event, and such a pleasure to be part of. Great to see so many young people enjoying cycling, both indoors and on the Velopark track. I do hope that we will have the opportunity of supporting future sessions at the track.” Velopark veterans cycle group volunteer 2017
Volunteer Support

Volunteers make the event accessible
Fantastic Supporting
Supportive
Proud
Patient
Respectful
Respectful
Safe
Didn't feel different
Thank you everyone
We felt safe
Friendly

Why volunteers are an essential ingredient.

The first thought that comes to mind is cost and it is true – over 50% of the BtB workforce on any one event are volunteers - often time more - that’s a HUGE cost and would be a huge barrier but it isn’t the only reason.

Most important is how that volunteer support makes participating families feel: And they’re not the only ones feeling the benefit…

In 2017 over 125 people volunteered to make Breaking the Barrier happen. Volunteers are drawn to the events for all sorts of reasons: Because of their love for the adventure sport e.g. Local Community Surf Group the Saunton Hotdoggers who fetch up every year on mass to put the event up, help participants in the water & take the event down when all is done.

Encouraged by their work example, the staff at JLT who have volunteered on BtB events for over half a decade come rain, shine, wind or hailstones and are now expert in event delivery or the NHS and Local Authority staff who volunteered for the first time in 2017. BtB provides the opportunity for professionals to connect, participate and be part of the solution.

To support their charity: Lifeworks Trustees, staff and parents and carers of service users volunteer on Breaking the Barrier every year.

“Thanks too for all the other things which made today good, the football and Bobby. The Punch and Judy, the hot dogs and most of all the huge and total acceptance and friendliness of everyone.” Parent

Turning up at the crack of dawn with trailer on tow, rash vests at the ready, homemade cakes in tins – why? Because BtB brings us together, reminds us of why we do what we do and it boosts our spirits to see the pleasure the event brings:

To learn new skills: The event always attracts young volunteers, they come from local surf clubs, cycling groups and school enrichment programmes because it’s something they can do to give back in their local community and have a great time doing it.

In 2017 two learning disabled young people with an interest in photography took on the challenge to work with a local adventure sport photographer to document the events.
Vital links and information sharing

Over the years we have learnt (sometimes the hard way) that communication is key – why?

When you’re delivering a large scale event things can change - change can be a challenge both in the context of logistics AND stress levels for learning disabled young people and their families:

“You were very thorough and followed through with regular email updates which was very reassuring (but I’m sure very time consuming for you guys so thank you for your time!)” Parent

Yes time consuming AND yes very important – if a child’s first experience of an adventure sport is a negative one because something has had to change there is the chance that that memory will be the one that sticks...

In 2017, because of the weather, events were postponed (re-arranged for another day) or delivered in a different way (activities split between indoor and outdoor spaces to give families a choice). Everyone got to hear in time and where they couldn’t attend a plan B was offered. With the cycling event because we were able to inform families the day before that, because of the rain, there was going to be an indoor option everyone who had signed up to the event came.

There is something very important about how we communicate whilst running the event. Remember each event involves a lot of people:
- Learning disabled young people and their families
- Adventure Sport Providers
- Volunteers
- Local Community Groups
- Local businesses

Each one of these is a link in the BtB communication chain - if everyone knows what’s happening when, then the chain is strong and the young person supported.

Where information is not shared efficiently then the chain might break and the potential for something to go wrong increases.

With BtB we have systems in place to collate relevant information and share it on a ‘need to know’ basis - with experience - we have learnt how best to do this:
Families register onto the event – information collated includes:

- Medical information and emergency protocols
- Media permissions
- Age, gender, individual support needs & how best they like to communicate

The event coordinator uses the above information to:

- Risk assess participation
- Allocate the most suitable activity time slot (in terms of preference, age, families participation)
- Create an event register providing summary information for each participating learning disabled young person.
Relevant information might include; emergency medication protocol, fears and phobias, how best to communicate with young person.

Each family receives joining information in plenty of time and steps are taken to remove barriers to participation in partnership with families where they have been anticipated:

E.g. reducing noise levels in a trampoline park or pairing a young person with a surf instructor with ‘in date’ epilepsy training or making sure a participant doesn’t have to wait.

“I finds waiting difficult as she doesn’t understand why she’s waiting – so talking with your coordinator was invaluable.” Parent

An event briefing just before we go live means all those participating in delivery on the day get an overview of the event and an understanding of roles and responsibilities/who’s working where - essential when working in such a big team.

For each event we have one person responsible for coordination on the beach or trackside (getting the right people kitted out at the right time) and another responsible for coordination at the edge of the activity (that might be at the water’s edge or trackside) to brief the instructors and activity volunteers about individual needs/preferred communication methods for each group and keep everyone to time.

Keep listening:
In 2017 we received feedback from one father who had come with his son for the first time to our first event of the season - surfing at Saunton - they had a great time in the water – but as first-timers they didn’t get the opportunity to socialise:

“I had anticipated networking with some other families, but that opportunity didn’t seem to happen. Is there a way to get parents and carers together? May I suggest some communication to get the

parents and carers to meet in small groups during the event?” Parent

So that’s exactly what we did. We organised a celebration event and invited all of the young people with their families who had participated during 2017 to celebrate their achievement. Our efforts were much appreciated by the same family:

“This was wonderful, and we were so proud of our son, and grateful for the efforts of the amazing team. We went upstairs after the presentation and enjoyed chatting to other parents.” Parent
Understanding what the barriers might be

When you listen to the feedback from families themes become apparent:

Adventure Sport Providers can’t always offer appropriate support:

“Finding instructors that understand learning difficulties rather than just physical.”

“Instructors not speaking slowly or clearly enough for him to understand instruction.”

“Lack of clubs for moderate physical and learning difficulties”

Opportunities to participate are limited:

“Finding activities that the whole family can participate in together.”

“Little opportunity to participate in our area”

“Unfortunately there hasn’t been any with school this year and no clubs here to join.”

The environment can present a barrier especially if families perceive there might be a problem in terms of how their young person might cope in that environment.

“Noisy, busy environments”

“Accessibility”

“Ordinarily unable to trampoline because of my spine abnormality.”

“Given that the forecast has worsened again, I don’t think the beach and sea is the place for my son today.”

“Time and money” is a constant theme. On the whole Adventure Sport providers offer sessions catering exclusively for the disabled young person which means a special trip just for them. Where they can participate as a family the cost of 1:1 support for the learning disabled young person together with the standard charge for the rest of the family can make regular participation unaffordable.

So with Breaking the Barrier we try and make it so parents and carers can involve the whole of their family and avoid having to be in two places at one time.

We also ask families to let us know the best time slot for them and where possible we try and allocate to their preference.

“Set days and times. (Helped us get things in diary) Cost. Flexibility (helped when attendance was not possible) Endless enthusiasm from the team! Thank you!” parent.

Breaking the Barrier is free at the point of delivery - we do ask for a refundable deposit which people can donate if they wish but its primary purpose is to prevent places being wasted.
Venturing beyond comfort zones with assurance

Participating in adventure sport involves managing risk. Often it is our instinct to protect and avoid exposure to risk.

Breaking the Barrier provides a safe space for participants to try something new, to step out of their comfort zone in a controlled environment.

“I enjoyed cycling on a new track without worrying about traffic”
Participant

The overarching aim of BtB is to instil confidence:

“The support was fantastic and eased anxieties a lot.”
Parent

To achieve that we focus on creating the right environment, providing the right equipment and the right people to make an activity accessible e.g.

Running a closed session and reducing the number of young people using a trampoline park

Bringing in extra specialist bikes (trikes, tandems and recumbents) for young people unfamiliar with cycling

Giving each young person surfing a surf instructor and an in the water volunteers to enable their participation.

We try and follow the young person’s lead:

“We didn’t get a chance to see you to say thank you before leaving yesterday. Sam had a wonderful time, despite being a little reticent to go in at first. He had as much fun playing in the surf with Simon afterwards too – please would you thank Simon again from us for his patience with our son (although he looked to be having a good time too!).

We make sure there are enough of us to help young people to experience the new in a supported space.

“I was scared at first but I did it I got up!”
Participant

We make sure we know how best to communicate with each individual child and young person whilst they’re in a vulnerable space (trying out a new adventure sport with strangers) for most that’s hi fives and thumbs up but for some it might be avoiding eye contact and modelling or allocating an instructor of a specific gender.

“Our daughter (who cannot communicate very well) had a fab time and enjoyed every minute of it!”
Parent

We make sure parents and carers are close at hand either by the edge of the activity willing them on or participating alongside.
What next for the young people and how best to build on their achievements

Where there’s a gap in progression routes work with local partners to try and fill it. E.g. On the back of BtB 2017 Lifeworks went on to explore development opportunities with:

- The Mid Devon Cycling Club, and Lex Leisure re: a regular Inclusive cycle session with specialist bikes at Torbay Velopark
- Triathlete Paralympian David Hill re: coaching learning disabled young people to undertake elements of the Dartmoor Classic.

For many BtB becomes a family favourite, even a tradition - some families use the event to meet old family friends and socialise - it’s great to know that BtB becomes an important calendar event for many participating families:

“Thank you for today and all the wonderful things you all do for the children. We are so pleased to have found you guys – T has had the best summer and he so looks forward to the next.” Parent 2017

The best way to build on achievement is to map potential progression routes before you get to your event.

Know where families can go if an interest is sparked:

Might be specific times for those with additional needs or a local project that can offer subsidised training programmes or a future event where their learning can be celebrated.

Spend some time collating feedback on your events - get an understanding of where and how learning disabled young people want to progress.

“We would love an inclusive or SEND club/events for cycling – to be part of a cycling team.” Carer of participant
1. Find the local experts to make your event happen
2. Work with local community organisations to create a social event
3. Make your event inclusive that means make the activities available to the whole family not just the learning disabled young person.
4. Create a safe space for families to hang out and socialise
5. Understand why people volunteer and make your event the one people want to get involved with
6. Keep listening – understand the barriers for each family and work with them to reduce or remove
7. Provide a safe space for learning disabled young people to experience the new
8. Change can be stressful for learning disabled young people and their families - make sure you have strong communication links so changes can be mapped with ease
9. Instil confidence across the event with solid planning, preparation and delivery
10. Accept that inclement weather is a great British tradition - MAKE CONTINGENCY PLANS

“It may have rained, but it will always be a sunshine event in my memory” Parent

Thank you to all of the Breaking the Barrier veterans: parents, carers, young people and volunteers that have contributed to the development of this tool kit – the insight provided is invaluable.

If you are school or community group working with learning disabled young people and would like to learn more about the Breaking the Barrier model please do get in touch: breakingthebarrier@lifeworks-uk.org