

‘Leisure Centres and People With Disabilities’

A fact sheet for Disability Sector Staff, Carers and People With Disabilities

This fact sheet has been developed by Inclusive Leisure Victoria, in partnership with Aquatics & Recreation Victoria, as a resource for the Inclusive Leisure Initiative, funded by VicHealth. It has been written as a step by step guide, to assist disability organisations, carers and people with disabilities to learn a little bit about how to get active at leisure centres in your local area.

People with disabilities are entitled to participate in leisure centre activities. Participation can have social, community inclusion, self-esteem and health benefits. The following tips have been developed to:

- Empower people with disabilities with the knowledge to initiate participation in leisure centre activities.
- Assist staff at disability organisations and carers when supporting people with disabilities to access leisure centres.
- Ensure people with disabilities participation at leisure centres is an enjoyable and successful experience.

Step One: How to find out about leisure centres:

- Do a ‘Google search’ on the internet by typing in the name of your suburb, followed by the words ‘leisure centre’ (eg: Coburg Leisure Centre)
- Contact the Access for All Abilities (AAA) provider in your local area to find out about inclusive leisure centres and the opportunities they provide. Also ask to sign up to their quarterly newsletter for upcoming opportunities. See: <http://www.dpccd.vic.gov.au/sport/Access-For-All-Abilities> . Then click on the: ‘Access for All Abilities provider contacts’ link.
- Go to the local leisure centre and ask for a tour, to see the facilities, programs and services they have to offer (eg: swimming pool, gym, group fitness classes, café) and enquire about membership.
- Look for advertisements promoting come and try days or new programs in local newspapers or council websites.
- Consult the YMCA website. See: http://victoria.ymca.org.au/cpa/htm/htm_home.asp or 9403 5000
- Consult the Belgravia Leisure website. See: <http://www.belgravialeisure.com.au> or 8727 7777
- Ask your council for a directory of local leisure centres and other sporting opportunities.
- Contact Leadership Plus. See: www.leadershipplus.com or 9489 2999
- Contact Aquatics & Recreation Victoria See: www.aquaticsandrecreation.org.au or 9271 3800.
- Ask within your own networks (friends, family, co-workers) about inclusive leisure centres, and what they enjoy about them.

Step Two: When thinking about leisure centre participation for you or your client:

- Create an awareness of leisure centre facilities by:
 - Attending the local leisure centre to meet staff, see the facilities and the different activities in action.
 - Talking to others and sharing your own positive experiences of leisure centre participation
 - Research different leisure centres and what they have to offer on the internet.
 - Try some of the activities as a ‘casual’ member, to see if you like it.
- ** Most leisure centres will accept the companion and carers cards.**



- Discuss the cost of attending a leisure centre to see if you / your client can afford leisure centre fees and on-going costs such as; appropriate clothing, transport to and from the leisure centre (including membership and joining fees, casual rates for the swimming pool, gym or group fitness classes, personal training sessions, socialising at the café after a workout), any specific equipment and other expenses.
- Discuss leisure centre options you / your client would prefer to pursue – disability specific, integrated, group or individual activities.
- As appropriate, discuss the need to join a leisure centre which meets your / your clients accessibility requirements (ramps, hoists, adult change tables, showers and accessible toilets).
- Discuss that leisure centre involvement is not limited to 'working out'. It can also include catching up with friends at the café, volunteering, providing feedback to the leisure centre about your needs and attending special events.
- See if you and/or your client can take a tour of the leisure centre and try some of the leisure centre activities being considered prior to committing to membership fees and other costs.
- Enquire about the rules in place at the leisure centre. This could include such rules as taking a towel to wipe down gym equipment or wearing runners in the gym. Ask leisure centre staff if this information is available for customers to take away.

Step Three: Getting ready to participate:

- Research on the internet and discuss the physical, mental health and community inclusion benefits of physical activity / leisure centre participation, considering all areas of a leisure centre (swimming pool, gym, café, group fitness classes).
- As required, check with GPs about your / your client's capacity to participate in physical activity.
- Determine if car, bus or public transport is available to attend the leisure centre.
- If appropriate, determine if rostering arrangements are sufficient to support leisure centre participation (at the same time ensuring adequate cover is available).

Step Four: Getting leisure centres prepared for your visit:

- Enquire about their experiences of supporting people with disabilities.
- Discuss issues specific to you / your client such as preferred communication and support styles.
- Ask if there are communication cards / aids at the leisure centre (if required)
- Ask if leisure centre staff have undertaken disability awareness training.
- As appropriate, identify a key staff contact with whom the leisure centre can liaise.
- As appropriate, be clear about carer roles and responsibilities and offer to document these for the leisure centre.

Step Five: When deciding to become a member of a leisure centre:

- Talk to the customer service staff at the leisure centre. Ask for any assistance in filling in the required paperwork (including membership forms).
- As required, implement a phased approach by providing intensive support initially (until you / your clients feel comfortable and understand 'the ropes').
- As appropriate, ensure you take personal communication aides to the leisure centre.
- As appropriate, ensure the leisure centre knows how to use your communication aids and offer to provide advice or training regarding their use.



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- Find opportunities to improve physical activity levels outside of the leisure centre.
- As appropriate, support clients to attend leisure centre events or promotions.
- Make leisure centre involvement fun and, as appropriate, encourage friends and family to attend and participate and/or provide encouragement and support.
- Take photographs of your / your clients' participation and show these to people.
- Regularly talk with others about what you enjoy at the leisure centre and if any additional support is required to ensure it remains a positive experience.
- Where appropriate, ensure clients involvement at the leisure centre is documented (and updated) in client support plans.
- If appropriate, discuss clients' leisure centre participation at on-going team meetings.

Step Six: How best to support the leisure centre:

- Browse the leisure centres website or call the leisure centre and ask them to send you some information in the mail, such as timetables, programs available, and any information on accessibility.
- Arrange to visit the leisure centre for a tour of the facilities, to get a sense of what it has to offer and the 'feel' of it.
- Where applicable, ensure staff support is provided as discussed and, as appropriate, document this for the leisure centre.
- Show an interest in the leisure centre by actively engaging staff in discussions about programs, what you / your client enjoys and any needs you / your client has (including accessible equipment)
- Make information about the leisure centre available to friends, family and where appropriate staff.
- As appropriate, provide general information about your organisation/ service/ house to the leisure centre – (Remember your expertise and knowledge is an invaluable on-going resource for strengthening the leisure centres capacity to support people with disabilities and improve their facilities and programs).
- Provide advice to the leisure centre about ways it can modify equipment, improve policies and procedures, market opportunities, develop programs and engage with people with disabilities, carers or disability organisations, to improve leisure centre inclusion.
- Help the leisure centre to recognise and celebrate the successes of people with disabilities (Eg: suggest a come and try day or an open day which involves people with disabilities).
- Look for ways that demonstrate the leisure centre is a better place because of the involvement of people with disabilities.

