

Supporting the wellbeing of disabled children and young people: the benefits of accessible recreational activities

The [‘VOCAL’ study](#) was based on children’s “*right to rest, leisure, play and recreation and to take part in cultural and artistic activities*” (United Nations Children’s Fund 1989, p.10). This research authentically represented the voices of disabled children about their participation in recreational activities.

Children and young people who were involved in this study had limitations with walking and talking. They were observed participating in their preferred recreational activities and their parents produced a photo-diary. Participants attended Cubs and Brownies, walked in the park, watched fireworks, visited the cinema, theatre, and musical events, and engaged in a range of sports activities.

Where adjustments had been made for the children and young people their enjoyment was evident in their non-verbal responses, reflecting their positive well-being. This ‘VOCAL’ picture illustrates a ramp with activities that the participants enjoyed. Importantly, all of these were easier if there was access to a changing places toilet and a mobile hoist (see also [Changing Places Consortium](#)).



This ‘VOCAL’ picture, created by the artist Hannah Pickering, illustrates a ramp with activities that the participants enjoyed. If consideration had not been given to how to adjust the activity for the disabled child their participation was limited, and any potential wellbeing benefits were reduced. As illustrated by Poppy’s exclusion from the Bat Crawl, which could have been adapted to enable the wheelchair to enter with some modifications to the fence.



The findings from the study were presented to the children in this PowToon video.

<https://www.powtoon.com/c/eh8O41X6xP1/1/m>

Further research is being carried out to develop a reliable wellbeing indicator scale for children and young people with communication limitations. For more information on this work please contact:

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These links may help families with disabled children to explore activities that their child might like to try in Wales, Bristol and Gloucester.

- Surfability- <https://surfabilityukcic.org/>
- Ice Cool Kids- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/icecoolkids/>
- Pedal Power- <https://www.cardiffpedalpower.org/>
- Touch Trust- <https://www.touchtrust.co.uk/>
- RaceRunning- <https://www.facebook.com/racerunningdragonscardiff/>
- Gympanzees <https://www.facebook.com/GympanzeesUK/>
- Chamwell Centre <https://www.chamwellcentre.org.uk/>

Euan's Guide also helps families to plan visits by reviewing accessibility at venues <https://www.euansguide.com/>

References

Pickering, D. M. 2021. [*Beyond physiotherapy: voices of children and young people with cerebral palsy and their carers about 'Participation' in recreational activities \(VOCAL\)*](#). PhD Thesis, Cardiff University.
United Nations Children's Fund. 1989. *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* [Online]. New York: UNICEF.