



Transcript:

Narrator: Lewis and Megan are two twelve year olds from Derbyshire who are both autistic and have learning difficulties. Today they have come for the first time with their mum's and siblings to the Healthy Living Centre in Staveley near Chesterfield to do something that all children love.

Martin Mansell: Swimming has benefits for all abilities, whether it be someone with or without a disability. I think there are additional benefits for people with disabilities, because once you get in the water you actually remove some of the barriers that actually land transfer, or land mobility inhibits them on. Once they get in the water they become far more independent and free. And we recognise that swimming is probably the ultimate physical activity to do. Across all the sports swimming has such a huge physical benefit in terms of health related fitness. And fitness is not defined by elitism, fitness is defined by how you individually interpret it. I didn't take up swimming to become a paralympian, I took up swimming to do swimming, and that happened to lead me to the Paralympics.

Narrator: Derbyshire County Council is one of twenty-one pathfinder councils to be given funding from the governments ambitious "Aiming High for Disabled Children" programme. It's used a relatively small part of it's total eight million pound award to widen participation in swimming for disabled children and young people.

Jan Goodwin: We had a number of stakeholder events with parents. And we had a consultation with the children and young people themselves, to find out what sort of things they wanted to do. Swimming was something that came out as one of the strongest activities that the children and

young people wanted to do. Any child loves getting into the water, and some were finding it very difficult to access swimming sessions within their own community. It was the most popular activity that was highlighted by both families and the children and young people themselves.

Narrator: The council also wanted to find a way of getting disabled children and young people to use mainstream facilities.

Jan Goodwin: We realised that part of our spend should not necessarily be on specialist services, but we needed to be getting out more into the universal services and spending a good proportion of our money making those services more fit for purpose, in terms of children and young people with disabilities. For us it meant that we could actually reach a whole range of children with disabilities, not just those that met the aiming high agenda. Because by upgrading universal services that could only have a positive effect on disabled children and adults in general.

Narrator: To do this the council brought in a number of partners. Derbyshire Sport was the lead co-ordinating agency.

Catherine Slater: It's my job to ensure that other people are inspired to develop more opportunities for disabled people. So I am passionate myself about disabled people having the opportunity to have choice and opportunities locally to them whereby they can take part in walking groups and jogging groups, and go to the gym and swimming. And make sure that they have a real positive and exciting experience so they continue to participate in sport and physical activity.

Aiming High has a core funding to enable disabled young people to access opportunities. We saw it as an opportunity to collaborate together to really look at how we could increase the accessibility within the facilities in both physical but also in attitudes and cultural changes so between myself and Jan Goodwin who is part of the Aiming High project team at Derbyshire County Council we work together to look at how we could best do that.

Jane Carver: For children like Lewis and Megan they're ... the opportunities for them to exercise are quite limited because ... because they're not able to sort of run in the same way that any other child might so it's one of the few things that they can do that can give them you know a good amount of exercise.

Narrator: For Lewis and Megan the swimming experience can be greatly enhanced by the use of specialist equipment. Martin Mansell is a paralympian gold medallist, a Derbyshire resident and a manufacturer of a range of sophisticated buoyancy aids the New Age Floatation System.

Martin Mansell: Which is basically a range of devices that you can throw into a swimming pool anywhere in any depth of water and basically lie on or use as a support mechanism to create a floating sensation for all abilities. It specially has assets that lend itself really well to kids with disabilities particularly those kids with a more severe physical impairment or those that we now know in educational terms more complex needs. To me it doesn't look like a disability swimming aid that's the great thing about it, it just looks like some fun piece of equipment that can be totally inclusive.

Jane Carver: I think with the flotation devices it gives them that added support in the water and the security of knowing that they're ... they're safe in there which they quite enjoy.

Martin Mansell: This product is probably in about fifty to sixty percent of all special schools. When the kid goes to the school they can use it. The question is when they go out of school they might not go to a leisure centre because they've been used to using this and it's not there in a leisure centre so the real issue is how we make that transition now from the school use into the want of better words the community use and into a leisure centre and leisure recreational facilities is probably the next step for it to go.

Narrator: And what Derbyshire did next is what makes this project innovative. Working with Derbyshire Sport the County Council approached all of it's eight local authorities with a forward thinking deal. If the local

authorities would extend the existing free swim scheme for all children in their leisure centres to also include free swimming for disabled seventeen and eighteen year olds then the County Council would fund the purchase of the Floatsation equipment and the cost of training staff to use it.

Catherine Slater: It was a trade off with a lot of the leisure facilities that if they were to have an individual package of equipment per leisure centre we would deliver the training across leisure centres and the reason for that was that we could bring the people together from the various different leisure centres in a district or a borough so they could share skills and experiences about where they've perhaps previously worked with disabled people.

Narrator: For the County Council it was a big return for a relatively small investment.

Jan Goodwin: The whole cost of the Floatsation equipment was around twenty five thousand pounds. In terms of our overall budget and in terms of the number of children that are going to be given a short break activity within their own community that is a small amount of money really and, and the spin off from that is as well that as they reach adulthood and some adults are finding that they, they can also use it so the pools have found it not only useful to encourage families to come into the pools but also have been able to put on extra sessions for, for a variety of children, young people and adults with disabilities to be able to use the equipment as well.

Narrator: The deal hit several targets. It increases access and usage not only for disabled children and young people but also siblings and parents who come with them. This transforms a trip to the leisure centre into an everyday family experience.

Bryan Wibberly: Before they ... we really just used sort of used the woggles and the floats where we'd may be have to used two or three we can just put one of the Floatsation around ... one of the bands around them and off they can go. We can just get them floating a lot easier.

Narrator: It made access to those facilities for disabled young people free and it brought together a whole series of agencies in a successful partnership.

Catherine Slater: This project is a really good example of project working in partnership, working across a number of agencies both statutory and private and public sector. We've engaged Aiming High, Derbyshire Sport and the local authorities Education and the Primary Care Trust and it's been a long task to try and get this project off the ground and we've successfully done it.

Jan Goodwin: In terms of the project in general we are now getting a number of referrals in from families who haven't had services before and I think that is quite pleasing for us because we are starting to make a difference. We're also getting a number of individual stories back where children and young people are actually doing activities they never thought they'd be able to do.

Jane Carver: There are not many things again that Megan can do with her brothers because of the different abilities that they've got so, so swimming is again something that they can all participate in and have, have fun with. You know it's one of the very few activities that, that give them that opportunity.

[End of Recording]