

## Summary

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### Young people and friendships – what matters to us?

#### About the DRILL Programme

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DRILL (Disability Research on Independent Living and Learning) was an innovative 5 year, UK wide programme led by disabled people, for disabled people and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Launched in 2015, the programme was managed by a partnership of Disability Action Northern Ireland, Disability Rights UK, Disability Wales and Inclusion Scotland.

The aim of the programme was to build better evidence about approaches which enable disabled people to achieve independent living. The findings from the projects it funded can be used to inform future provision across a wide range of policy areas, and give a greater voice to disabled people in decisions which affect them.

This is one of a series of summaries of the project supported by DRILL. Final reports, toolkits and summaries of all the projects are available from the DRILL website at [www.drilluk.org.uk](http://www.drilluk.org.uk).

#### Overview of the project

This project explored patterns of friendship change of young disabled people, aged 14-25, throughout school, college, post-education and in term-time and holidays.

It discussed what helps and hinders the formation and maintenance of friendships, interaction within community activities and whether young disabled people are at risk of social isolation.

## Approach

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The employed eight young disabled people to help carry out the research, as the pre-existing staff team were all non-disabled and aged over 45.

The project consisted of 8 regionally representative focus groups with 85 young people aged 14-25 with a learning disability from across Gwent. These included specialist schools, colleges, disability sport groups and youth clubs.

## Findings

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Two thirds of the participants only had friends within school or college, opportunities for socialising outside of school are very limited.

Participants who did socialise outside of school or college only did so through structured activities. They then became isolated once they stopped their involvement.

Difficulties in use of public transport, as well as parent's inability or unwillingness to take young people to see friends presents a barrier for young people in having contact outside of structured activities.

There seems to be a general lack of understanding about the skills and process needed to maintain and develop friendships. This stems from the level of social isolation participants had experienced.

Disabled young people are missing out on the informal learning that their non-disabled peers may take for granted regarding the processes of social relationships and growing independence.

Participants tended to identify non-standard people as friends, such as parents, family acquaintances and paid social care staff.

Social media has a huge role in enabling communication between friends. However, issues of emotional safety and understanding of different types of friendships were raised, alongside the continued face to face isolation.

Friendships offer sustained emotional wellbeing, a feeling of belonging, learning opportunities and use of community places and spaces.

## Findings (continued)

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Young people said they needed practical help, emotional support and communication skills to maintain their friendships.

Six of the eight peer researchers had experienced bullying. Usually, young people felt that this was directly related to their impairment.

Young people were reliant upon support from parents to help with travel either through driving them, or supporting them with public transport. Where there were negative family relationships, social isolation and loneliness was heightened.

## Recommendations

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The project outlined many recommendations, some of which are listed here. All recommendations are included in the full report which is linked below.

- A review of public transport with people of all ages with disabilities to create a county and region wide integrated system
- Address the systemic discrimination in both mainstream and specialist provision that individuals themselves are unable to change
- Support must be put in place to help young people learn the tools, or mechanisms, of friendships
- Inclusion of young disabled people must be facilitated through community connecting and disability awareness education of the public and specific community members
- The processes of reporting hate crime must be easier. Many young people with a learning disability do not use a mobile phone for calls. An app to report instances would be more effective
- Family support and key working in the early teen years could enable different family members to work together towards independence safely and confidently
- There must be recognition that not everyone will achieve qualifications and provide alternative plans and routes to employment for these circumstances
- Research the effectiveness of current independent living skills teaching.

## Final report

[Young people and friendships – what matters to us?](#)

Please click on report name to read the full report.

## Project partners

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### Carp Collaborations



### Building Bridges Project

