

Aiming High for Disabled Children in Sunderland

Project Report April 2010



Rachael

During the summer term of 2009, the Aiming High for Disabled Children programme in partnership with the Physical and Medical Difficulties team ran a 7 week Saturday Club with the charity Whizz Kidz. The club gave children and young people the chance to learn how to get around in their wheelchairs faster and more efficiently. The young people who attended the club were asked about the kinds of activities they wanted to do in their free time. One of the things they said was that, although they all attended mainstream school, they could not go on their school's skiing trips because of accessibility issues.

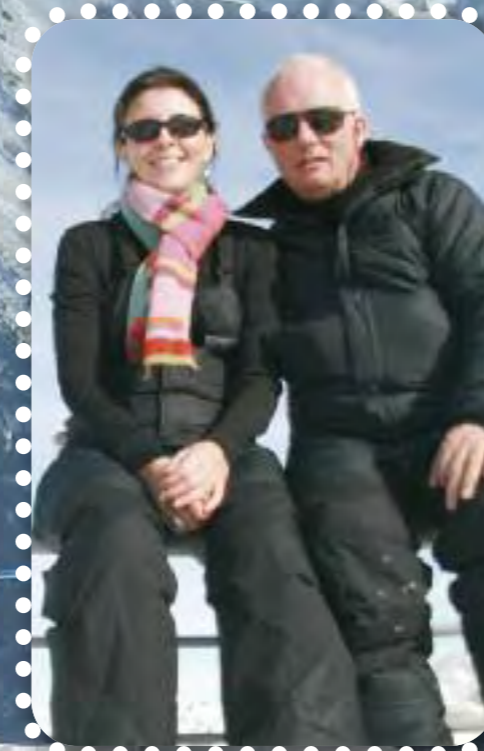
This set Karen Parry (Aiming High Programme Manager) and Mike Stansfield (Physical and Medical Difficulties Team Leader) a challenge... to take this group of young people skiing, to prove to them they could do all the things their non-disabled school friends could do!

The first step was to find an organisation that could make skiing accessible. Disability Snowsport UK (DSUK) are a registered charity who provide specially trained and qualified instructors and specialist equipment to make snow sports accessible to people with all forms of disability. Very quickly it became apparent that the young people's dream could become a reality. From October 2009, weekly trips to Xscape indoor ski slope at Castleford were arranged to give the young people a taste of what would be expected of them if they chose to sign up to come on the trip.

In November 2009, the Aiming High Programme Board approved a proposal to fund a trip to the French Alps for 12 physically disabled young people, accompanied by 9 volunteer care workers. Based on the types of disability the young people would have, DSUK recommended visiting the resort of La Plagne in the French Alps at the end of March, and staying at the Terra Nova Hotel.



Brandon



Karen Parry (Aiming High Programme Manager) and Mike Stansfield (Physical and Medical Difficulties Team Leader)

"I'd give it 100 out of 10"

Terri age 14



DSUK Team



Terra Nova Hotel - La Plagne in the French Alps



Daz



Dan



Ethan



Sophie



The Team



“its been nothing short of phenomenal”

Kea age 14

Lesley



By January 2010 the group of 12 physically disabled young people who would go on the trip had been selected using strict criteria and informed by the risk assessment of the facilities and accessibility of the hotel and resort. All needed specialist equipment and support to take part in skiing, all attended mainstream school in Sunderland, their paediatric consultant had to agree they were fit to travel, their school had to allow them to go, and all made a contribution to the cost of the trip.

The team of 9 volunteer care workers was then selected. A paediatric nurse, physiotherapist and physiotherapy assistant joined Mike and Karen, the two group leaders. A care worker, two youth workers and a learning mentor were then selected from the group of volunteers who applied to accompany the trip. Volunteers had to be prepared to work 24/7 and to do whatever it took to ensure the young people had the trip of a lifetime.

Two months of frantic planning followed. Passports were applied for, equipment was ordered, and care plans were drawn up. The group was named the Sunderland Adaptive Skiers and a cool logo was chosen by the young people.

On 20th March 2010, the Mayor and Mayoress gave the group a civic send off from Oxclose Community School. We flew from Newcastle airport to Geneva, then took a 3 hour bus ride to La Plagne using a specially adapted coach.



The young people then spent the next 6 days having one to one skiing tuition from a very talented, dedicated team of instructors from DSUK. Young people would ski for half the day, and then do curriculum activities for the rest of the day, including doing a daily journal and practising French. The ski instruction was so good that the young people developed skills beyond everyone's expectations, and became better skiers than the majority of the volunteer care workers. By the end of the week, all young people could ski independently and most were confident tackling the more difficult Blue slopes.

On the final night, the young people's achievements were recognised at an awards ceremony, and medals and prizes were handed out by Cath, DSUK senior instructor.

On 27th March 2010, a very tired group set off for home. All had had a brilliant time, had made new friends, had laughed till they cried, and had achieved more than any of us had ever dreamed of.

The 12 young people who came on the first Sunderland Adaptive Skiers trip were so enthusiastic, hard working and fun to be with, they have inspired us to take this further. Work is underway to get funding to make the group permanent, and to run regular trips to Castleford and an annual ski trip abroad. And when the indoor ski slope is built in Sunderland, it is hoped that this will become the official home of Sunderland Adaptive Skiers.



Terrie B

“a huge thank you for giving our daughter the time of her life and memories to last a lifetime”

“thanks for making the whole trip enjoyable for our daughter and stress free for us”

Quotes from parents



Terri W



“Last week in La Plagne we were privileged to meet a group of disabled young people from various schools in Sunderland taking part in their first experience of skiing. The children were joy to a watch and were both well behaved and exceptionally polite. Throughout the week the hard work and attention of their care workers and volunteer ski instructors allowed the children to achieve confidence and enjoyment from this activity.”

Quote from a fellow guest at the hotel



Care workers from top left to bottom right: Karen Parry, Mike Stansfield, Mary Robinson and Jill McDermott, Bryan Buckingham, Mandy Wardle, Deborah Atkinson, Peter Clark and Nicola Brown.

For more information contact the Aiming High Programme Team on (0191) 566 2190 or visit www.sundc.org.uk

