

# IMPACT REPORT

2019

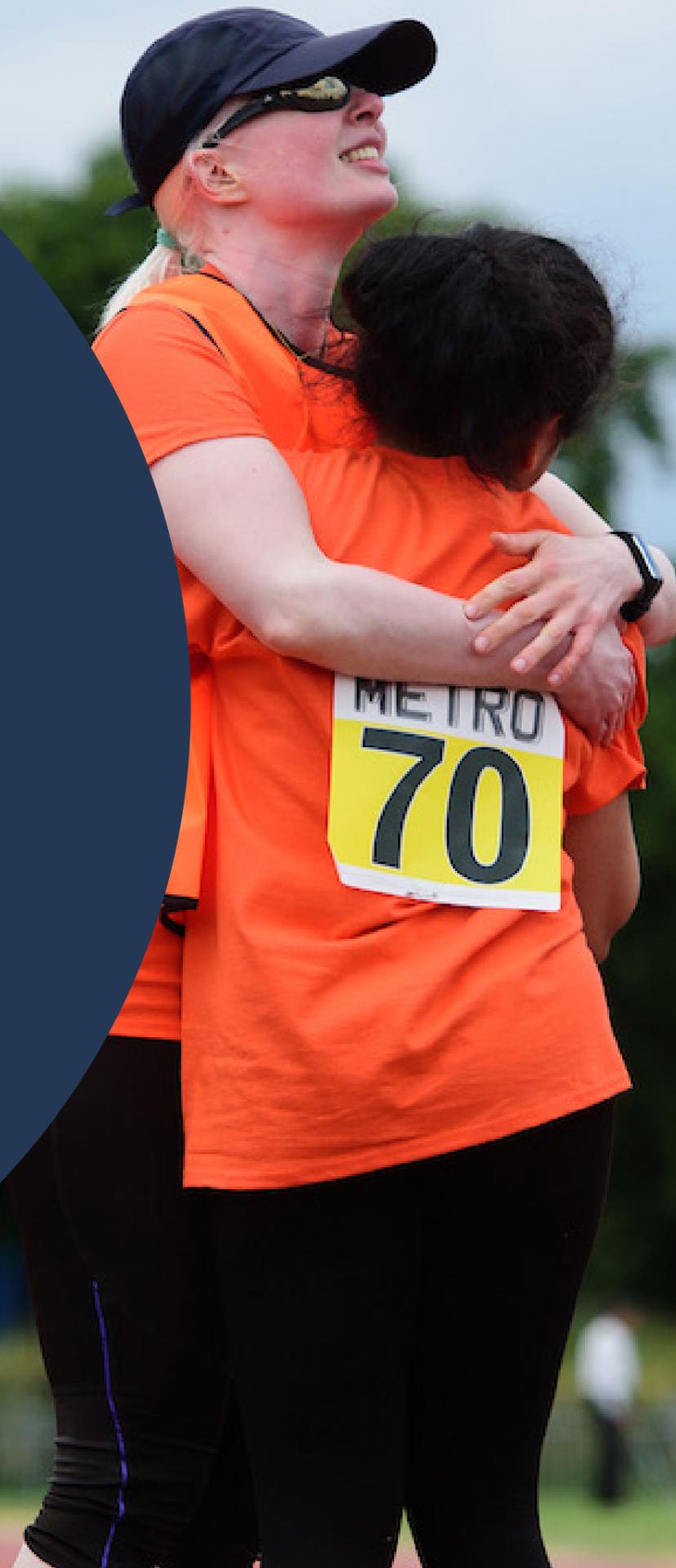


MetroBlindSport



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Metro Blind Sport is a registered charity which delivers positive, life-changing outcomes, through the creation of sporting and physical activity opportunities, to individuals with a visual impairment.**

This report demonstrates how Metro Blind Sport is supporting central government in its drive 'Towards an Active Nation', engaging a typically hard to reach demographic in meaningful and fulfilling physical activities which promote mental and physical wellbeing.

Metro Blind Sport is mainly focused on improving accessibility of sport and physical activity to individuals living in and around London, with opportunities for individuals from other parts of the country to benefit from national competitions organised and supported by the charity.

As part of this report, 60 Metro Blind Sport members with a visual impairment and 111 non-members with a visual impairment completed a survey, providing valuable feedback on their sporting habits, preferences, barriers to participation and the impact sport and Metro Blind Sport are having on their everyday lives.

It is extremely positive to learn that, thanks to the work of the charity, the clear majority of members surveyed (71 per cent) are achieving the Chief Medical Officer's recommended 150 minutes of activity per week, with 73 per cent taking part in activity more than once a week. This is a significant improvement on the statistics reported in the most recent Sport England Active Lives survey, which states that more than half (54 per cent) of people with a visual impairment are achieving less than 30 minutes per week and are classified as 'inactive'.

The survey responses, from both members and non-members, also reiterate the far reaching and diverse impact regular participation is having on everyday lives.

73 per cent of those surveyed, members and non-members, feel that sport improves their physical health. This is a great statistic but probably not surprising. What is, perhaps, even more encouraging are the peripheral benefits being cited.

Studies suggests that at least 30 per cent of all people with a long-term condition, such as sight loss, also have a mental health problem (Cimpean and Drake 2011). It is therefore encouraging that 55 per cent of those surveyed (combining the results from members and non-members) state that sport helps them to 'look to the future with a positive attitude' with half also identifying an improvement in mental health.

58 per cent also admitted to having developed new friendship groups because of participation in sport, helping to combat the threat from loneliness that affects a high percentage of people with a disability. Almost a third (32 per cent) also identify an increased independence in daily tasks which could have a significant impact on social care requirements.

It is also interesting that, for members and non-members, 'fun' ranks so highly as a reason people take part in activity, second only to 'general fitness'.

Whilst this is indeed great news, there is still much to be done to encourage more engagement. 94 per cent of those surveyed believe more could be done by government, leisure centre providers, sports clubs and national governing bodies to increase accessibility with 44 per cent believing more opportunities need to be made available to enable people with a visual impairment to achieve the recommended 150 minutes physical activity per week.

For obvious reasons, there are more complexities involved in a person with a visual impairment accessing physical activities than the rest of the population, yet a lack of specialist sporting provision forces blind or partially sighted individuals to travel many more miles to access sporting facilities.

According to the Leisure Database Company's 2018 State of The Fitness Industry Report, 84 per cent of people in the UK live within 2 miles of a leisure facility yet 66 per cent of our members surveyed travel more than 5 mile to take part in sporting activities. Three quarters of our members claim they would participate in more sport if they could access activities 'closer to home'. This was mirrored by 59 per cent of non-members surveyed.

Travel distance is not the only barrier to entry. Other factors such as 'activity timings', and 'poor venue location' affect our members with non-members also quoting 'nobody to go with' and 'sessions do not cater for people with a visual impairment' as participation obstacles.

Information availability is also cited as a barrier. Whilst 81 per cent of our members say the Metro Blind Sport website is a 'very useful' source of information, supported by other sites such as RNIB Connect and British Blind Sport websites, 'finding information about activities on offer' is still cited as an issue for 15 per cent of members and non-members.

What is encouraging is that when we asked which activities members and non-members would like to get involved with, the top three responses in both groups were; cycling, swimming and the gym. According to the 2018 State of The Fitness Industry Report, there are 2,708 public leisure facilities in the UK all with the facilities in place to offer these services.

So, if the facilities are already available to service this demand, and research by the RNIB reports that 64 per cent of people with a visual impairment would like to be more physically active, why are more people with a visual impairment not taking advantage? This is an area of work the charity intends to focus on, working in close collaboration with leisure centre operators and trade organisation such as ukactive and Activity Alliance over the coming months. It is intended to follow up on the research carried out by the Thomas Pocklington Trust, RiCA (now RiDC) and Metro Blind Sport with regards to inclusive gym equipment. Further exploration on the workforce matters, such as training will also be explored.

In conclusion, this report details the valuable contribution Metro Blind Sport is making towards the government's bid to get more of the nation engaged in physical activity. Whilst our survey responses show that we are providing a 'good' or 'excellent' service in 71 per cent of cases there is so much more that can be done.

Getting more blind and partially sighted people active will be dependent on some significant changes to improve accessibility and access to information. This will only be achieved through cross-organisation collaboration and this is something that Metro Blind Sport intends to drive in the months and years ahead.



# COMMENT FROM THE CEO

I am in the incredibly fortunate position to be able to witness, on a regular basis, the positive impact that sport and physical activity has on individuals involved. It is my belief that the opportunity to play sport on a regular basis should be the right of every individual regardless of ability, location or wealth.

This report has been compiled to highlight how Metro Blind Sport, through a network of delivery partners, is supporting a significant segment of the community widely under represented when it comes to involvement in sport and physical activity. The charity is perfectly positioned to deliver against the government's ambition to encourage an active nation. There are 194,000 Londoners living with a visual impairment and each one deserves the same opportunities as the rest of the population when it comes to getting involved in sport and reaping the many physical, mental and social benefits an active lifestyle has to offer.

Through direct feedback from our members and our network of blind and partially sighted individuals, this report explores not only how the work of the charity is changing lives, but also the work that still needs to be undertaken to increase sports participation amongst this segment of the population.

Our ambition is to give every individual with a visual impairment the chance to play sport. To experience the camaraderie of being a part of a team. To develop new skills. To develop new friendships. To improve physical and mental health. Reduce isolation and gain confidence in the ability to take part in a wide range of activities. To challenge themselves and others. To have fun. To improve spatial awareness and to enjoy what so many of us just take for granted.

The founders of Metro Blind Sport created the charity for four principle reasons;

To create sport **PARTICIPATION** opportunities for blind and partially sighted people;

To share **INFORMATION** on the sporting opportunities available to blind and partially sighted people;

To **COMMUNICATE** the benefits of sport and physical activity on the lives of blind and partially sighted people to participants, national governing bodies, operators and the wider sport and leisure sector; To have **FUN**.

46 years later, those same four principle reasons remain firmly at the heart of what we do. Visual impairment does not have to prevent people from playing sport.

I very much hope you enjoy this read. If you have any comments or wish to discuss any of the content, feel free to contact me directly.

*Martin Symcox, Chief Executive,  
Metro Blind Sport*



## PARTICIPATION



## INFORMATION



## COMMUNICATE



## FUN

# INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT THE CHARITY

**Metro Blind Sport is a registered charity creating sporting opportunities for individuals with a visual impairment**

Established in 1973 by a group of passionate blind and partially sighted individuals keen to break down barriers to sports participation, the organisation has a current membership base of 389 and offers opportunities to get involved in a wide variety of sports, primarily located within Greater London. Membership is free for under 25's and a one-off payment of £10 for all other adults. Such low fees have gone a long way to increase participation and our membership numbers.

In addition to core sports, which include Archery, Athletics, Bowls, Cricket, Football, Tennis and Swimming, Metro Blind Sport plays a vital role in the provision of information about wider sporting opportunities to members and the extended blind and partially sighted community.



## METRO BLIND SPORT AS AN INFLUENCER

Metro Blind Sport has played a pivotal role in the growth of sport for blind and partially sighted people, with several key achievements detailed in our timeline. Many members have worked tirelessly to support participation and provided their time voluntarily to lead inclusion in sport for blind and partially sighted people. In such regard, Metro Blind Sport Members have been a lead for, or played an advisory role within, the British Paralympic Association, Blind Cricket England and Wales, British Blind Sport, International Tennis Federation, British Ski Club for Disabled, UK Anti-Doping Agency to name but a few. For the past 5 years we have worked closely with local and national organisations to encourage members in every borough to take part in activity, from Parkrun through to dancing.

Metro Blind Sport has been at the forefront of promoting blind and partially sighted sport since it began over 40 years ago. It has initiated the adaptations to sports, influenced National Governing Bodies, advised on equipment developments and supported coaches and volunteers to get involved. One such example is the introduction of visually impaired tennis to the UK. Metro Blind Sport took this demonstration sport from Japan in 2007, and in just over ten years transformed it into a national and international sport.

“  
Metro Blind Sport changes lives. Sport delivers many social, physical and mental benefits helping participants lead a more fulfilling, healthy and happy life, both on and off the field of play.  
”  
**Mark Russell, member and Trustee at Metro Blind Sport and chair of KPMG's Disability Network**

“  
What I really love about tennis is that I can play a sport that other people do, and I think that being on the tennis court is a really safe environment. The enjoyment comes from being able to socialise with other people, the ability to stay fit, not having to take it seriously unless you want to. The thing I love about tennis is that, obviously being blind, I have never previously participated in a team sport and this is first time I have been able to do it.  
”  
**Masuma, member and tennis player from Ilford**

# METRO BLIND SPORT AS AN INFORMER

The Metro Blind Sport website has become a trusted source of information, posting daily information about sporting opportunities and events hosted by Metro Blind Sport and an array of external providers. Monthly, the website attracts more than 7,000 visits from more than 5,600 unique users and the two monthly newsletters are sent to 700 subscribers. In many instances, our sources of information may well have been the first time blind and partially people have accessed information about sporting opportunities. Metro Blind Sport offers 3 accessible options of our newsletter, including a large printed version for those not online. Subscribers also receive regular ad hoc newsflashes, ensuring they are kept right up to date with new sporting opportunities and other relevant developments.

We also ensure that we present information in a format that is accessible to those with a visual impairment. The Metro Blind Sport website was designed from the ground up to be accessible to blind and partially sighted people; it integrates four different high contrast page viewing options as not everyone's vision works in the same way, for example, "yellow on black". Our visitors also have the ability at the same time to increase the text size on all past and future news and event articles. From launch our website has used the Browse Aloud system, that helps users without a screen reader to have the pages read to them, it can translate web pages into 99 languages and speak translated text aloud in 40 languages with a choice of different accents.

In addition to its website, the charity has over 2000 followers on Twitter. Activity on Twitter occurs 7 days a week, sharing information about Metro Blind Sport upcoming activity as well as reports on matches or tournaments that members have taken part in. Similarly, it is used to share information on many partners sport and physical activity projects to widen the opportunity for participation. Based on recent survey results, Metro Blind Sport is planning the launch a Facebook page.



“

The website is brilliant, it is very accessible with the software that I use.

Matt, a member and tennis player from Buckinghamshire

”

# METRO BLIND SPORT AS AN ENABLER

Metro Blind Sport supports all ages and abilities. For most members, the joy of simply being able to participate in sport is life changing. The charity engages qualified coaches, trained to incorporate specialist equipment and small adaptations, that enable blind and partially sighted individuals to enjoy meaningful participation and reap the many social, mental and physical benefits that sport delivers.



I didn't just discover cricket at Metro Blind Sport, I discovered independence, freedom and a new lease of life. Cricket became the vehicle to greater things in life, such as university, volunteering, employment, living on my own and the greatest achievement of all, representing my country.

Hassan, member and cricket player from Wandsworth



For competitive individuals who demonstrate a talent, there are opportunities to represent a team at regional, national and even international level. Metro Blind Sport not only provides encouragement in this regard, but also financial support. The organisation has a tremendous record of Metro Blind Sport members representing their countries. Members have participated for their countries in the following sports:



- Winter and summer Paralympics
- International football
- International cricket
- International bowls
- International sailing
- International cycling
- International swimming
- International golf
- International tennis
- International pool

It is no exaggeration to say, Metro Blind Sport has been the difference for so many blind and partially sighted people being active and taking part in sport since 1973 through to today.

## METRO BLIND SPORT VOLUNTEERS

Metro Blind Sport supports a volunteer sport leader assigned to each of the six core sports: archery, athletics, bowls, tennis, cricket and football. The role of each volunteer is to grow participation and engagement in their sport, to successfully integrate new participants and to provide logistical support at tournaments, training sessions and events.

Volunteering support is not just restricted to the UK. Through a partnership with Ridderrennet, Metro Blind Sport offers a members' trip to Norway for a full programme of guide-assisted, cross country skiing. In 2019, 20 members attending the event, not only taking part in skiing but also trying snow shoeing, alpine skiing, cross-country skiing, tobogganing snowboarding and kiting.

For those who prefer the sunshine there have been organised overseas trips for a week of sport-themed activities.

The charity also supports many other sporting initiatives through partnerships with a vast array of community providers. For example, the charity offers one to one coached and subsidised swimming lessons, via a partnership with Ealing Swimming Club. Tandem cycling is also offered in association with Merton Sports and Social Club.

Metro Blind Sport is a partner of the Thomas Pocklington Trust. The Thomas Pocklington Trust is a registered charity, committed to increasing awareness and understanding of the needs of people with sight loss and to developing and implementing services which meet their needs and improve lives.

This partnership has allowed Metro Blind Sport to utilise existing networks from the larger charity enhancing its ability to create sporting opportunities for blind and partially sighted Londoners.



It's a chance to meet people, volunteers and players and have a joyful day. Through volunteering, I had a different outlook on VI individuals before, I thought that they would need a lot more assistance. They really surprised me, in the best way possible, that they could really do anything that anyone else could do. They just prove to me how able they are.

Serena, Tennis Volunteer for Metro



# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS FOR METRO BLIND SPORT

1975  
Metro Blind Sport members attend the British Sports Association for the Disabled games at Stoke Mandeville

1973  
Metro Blind Sport is launched  
Cricket became a Metro Blind Sport core sport

1974  
Metro Blind Sport becomes a registered charity  
Metro Blind Sport members attend their first Riddernet Ski trip to Norway (still running today)

1976  
Metro Blind Sport members make up half of the first winter Paralympics team in Örnsköldsvik, Sweden with 3 members attending

1977  
The Metro Games – 1st Annual Athletics Open meet launched. This was the first national athletics event for blind and partially sighted people in the UK (still running today)

1979  
Metro Cricket Team wins the inaugural British Blind Sport Cup

1990  
Roy Smith, Chairman of Metro Blind Sport, awarded the MBE for Services to Disabled Sport on the Queen's Birthday Honours List

1983  
Three Metro Blind Sport members complete 3 marathons in 30 days by taking part in the Ski Marathon in Oslo, the Canoe Marathon between Devises and Westminster and the London Marathon

1992  
Metro Blind Sport members make up the majority of the summer Paralympics athletics team in Barcelona with 10 of the 12 athletes being members

1994  
Bowls became a Metro Blind Sport core sport

1998  
A delegation of Metro Blind Sport members visit South Africa to introduce blind cricket in to the country due to a lack of organised visually impaired sport

2007  
Metro Blind Sport is the first organisation to bring VI tennis to the UK

2005  
Mike Brace, one of the founders of Metro Blind Sport, awarded the OBE for Services to Disabled Sport in the New Year's Honours List

2009  
Mike Brace awarded the CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list 2009, again for his contribution to Disabled Sport

2012  
Archery became a Metro Blind Sport core sport  
Roy Smith MBE official Paralympic Torchbearer for the opening of the London 2012 Paralympic games

2013  
Football becomes a Metro Blind Sport core sport, with London Metro Futsal team joining

2014  
Roy Smith MBE becomes a full time Director of Metro Blind Sport

2015  
VI Tennis becomes integrated into the Tennis Foundation's core offering

2016  
40th Anniversary of The Metro Games  
1:1 Swimming Programme launched

2017  
Metro Blind Sport partners with the Thomas Pocklington Trust

2018  
Metro Cricket Team and Metro Devils Cricket Team win their BCEW leagues  
Research undertaken on the inclusive nature of fitness equipment  
Martin Symcox appointed CEO to drive sports participation from the VI community

2019  
Metro Blind Sport launch videos to support growth in VI sport  
Metro Blind Sport becomes the first Elevate 'Charity of the Year'

# SUPPORTING GOVERNMENT

## **Metro Blind Sport is fully supportive of the Government's strategy to increase participation in sport and physical activity**

In December 2015, central government outlined its strategy for sport and physical activity in its 'Sporting Future' report. This document represents a sea change in the way the success of sport and physical activity delivery is measured and funded. Success is now defined by the 'social good physical activity can deliver not simply the number of participants', with a focus on 5 key outcomes; physical wellbeing; mental wellbeing; individual development; social and community development and economic development.

This agenda has been further promoted with the release of Sport England's 'Towards An Active Nation' strategy which committed £250 million, over five years, to tackle inactivity and engage hard to reach groups, including those with a disability, and the same five outcomes.

This report showcases how Metro Blind Sport is delivering key outcomes for those with a visual impairment.

# SUPPORTING GOVERNMENT ON A LOCAL LEVEL

The Mayor of London has outlined his sporting vision for the capital in his 2018-2022 Sports Strategy 'Sport for all of us'. Three key ambitions are identified:

- **Sport for Social Integration:** use sport to bring Londoners together from different ages and backgrounds and/or to cater specifically for Londoners who are isolated or lonely as well as people from low- income households
- **Active Londoners:** Create more opportunities for local participation in sport, specifically targeting groups who are not sufficiently active (for example, disabled people and people with mental ill-health)
- **Workforce, Tech & Capacity Building:** support those working and volunteering in sport. This includes nurturing the very best in sport tech developments, which promote good use of data, innovation and evaluation in community sport

Metro Blind Sport is fully supportive of all ambitions and is well placed to make a valuable contribution to all, especially 'Active Londoners'. Through the continued work of the charity and its partners, Metro Blind Sport creates and promotes opportunities for those with a visual impairment to participate in a wide variety of fulfilling sporting and physical activities.

To deliver the vision for sport, The Mayor's office will work closely with London Sport, an independent charity, funded by Sport England. London Sport has outlined its strategy in its 'Blueprint for a physically

active City' report and is committed to getting 1,000,000 more Londoners active between 2015 and 2022.

Metro Blind Sport supports this physical activity target and plans to play a vital role in its delivery through engaging more of the visually impaired community.



# THE INACTIVITY CRISIS

**54 per cent of blind and partially sighted people are inactive.**

Around two million people in the UK, including 194,000 Londoners, are living with sight loss that significantly impacts upon their life.

According to the most recent Active Lives Survey by Sport England more than half of people with a visual impairment (54 per cent) are inactive, compared to just 21 per cent of the rest of the population.

Research by the RNIB also reports, 64 per cent of people with a visual impairment would like to be more physically active. 57 per cent state that sight loss is a barrier to being physically active.

## WHY ARE PEOPLE WITH A VISUAL IMPAIRMENT INACTIVE?

There is very little research investigating barriers to participation for this specific demographic group. Insight comes mainly from anecdotal evidence based on individual case studies.

In 2014, British Blind Sport commissioned Sportswise to produce a report entitled: 'Overcoming Barriers To Participation'. Findings were based on 200 phone interviews and four focus groups with blind and partially sighted individuals. The main barriers were reported to be:

-  Lack of information about sporting opportunities
-  Perception. A belief that people with a visual impairment cannot do sport
-  Lack of quality, adaptive equipment
-  Inaccessible and inhospitable facilities
-  Travel can be expensive, especially when adding in the cost of a guide

Other reasons have been provided within other research and anecdotally, which include:

- Lack of participant confidence
- Awareness/attitude of people including: other participants, staff, coaches, tutors, volunteers
- Lack of role models
- Lack of competition and access to competitive pathways

## HOW IS METRO BLIND SPORT HELPING?

**Through its work with community partners and the information provided via its website, Metro Blind Sport is working hard to reduce these barriers.**

### Improving information delivery

The charity's website provides a rich source of up to date information on the sporting opportunities available to individuals with a visual impairment. We also ensure that information is made available to make it as accessible as possible to those with a visual impairment, giving consideration to colour, font type, font size, layout and format. In 2019, Metro Blind Sport have launched a series of videos to showcase four sports. These are used to demonstrate the power that sport can bring and are aimed at raising awareness for school teachers, parents, referral agents, partners and blind and partially sighted people.

### Changing perception

Through promotion of member case studies and improving the visibility of Metro Blind Sport as a valuable support to the visually impaired community, the charity is fighting hard to change perceptions, promoting the fact that, given the right environment and support, anybody and everybody can enjoy meaningful participation in sport.

### Improving the availability and quality of adaptive equipment

Metro Blind Sport works with organisations to help secure grants for the purchase of adaptive equipment and provides information regarding trusted suppliers. The charity also funds coaches trained to support those with a visual impairment

### Creating more accessible and welcoming environments

Metro Blind Sport works with many organisations including leisure operators, Active Partnerships, community sports clubs, National Governing Bodies of sport, the NHS, other health organisations and other charities to improve accessibility. In many cases, small changes can make a big difference. In 2018, Metro Blind Sport in partnership with the Thomas Pocklington Trust and RiCA (now RiDC) carried out research on the inclusive nature of fitness equipment.

### Reducing costs associated with participation

The cost of travel is the most difficult issue for the charity to influence. So, rather than try to reduce this cost, Metro Blind Sport works hard to gain participation subsidies for those with a visual impairment to reduce the overall cost of engagement. The charity can also help organisations access grants to enable the purchase of adaptive equipment, again helping to keep participation costs to a minimum.

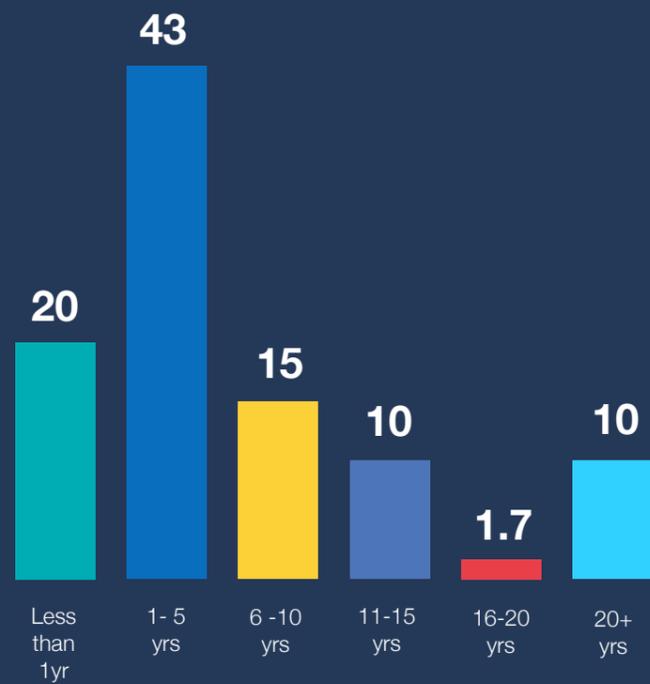


# MEMBERSHIP

Metro Blind Sport is a member organisation. The annual membership fee is £10, for life, for those aged 25 years and above, with free membership for the under 25's. This provides members with a monthly newsletter as well as an opportunity to apply for subsidies to support their activities.

There are currently 389 registered members. 63 per cent are female, 37 per cent are male. Of the total membership, 83 per cent are aged 18 and over, with 8 per cent over the age of 65.

## HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A METRO BLIND SPORT MEMBER?



These are indeed enviable statistics when compared to the average term of membership experienced by gyms in the UK. A recent study by The DataHub and GGFit found the average term of mainstream gym membership to be just 10.9 months. The same report showed that, on average, mainstream fitness facilities turn over 48 per cent of their membership every year.

# RESEARCH RESULTS

As part of this report, Metro Blind Sport conducted a survey amongst members and non-members to explore activity levels, activities undertaken, information sources, barriers to participation, and outcomes experienced.

Surveys were conducted online or over the phone with a member of the Metro Blind Sport team. 60 member surveys and 111 non-member surveys were completed. Non-members were selected from the Metro Blind Sport extended community so all those questioned already had a connection to sport and physical activity at some level or other. We feel this is important to highlight as the results reflect the fact that all individuals surveyed are already participating in sporting activities. Therefore, this group is not representative of the national blind and partially sighted population, many of whom (54 per cent) are classified as 'inactive'.





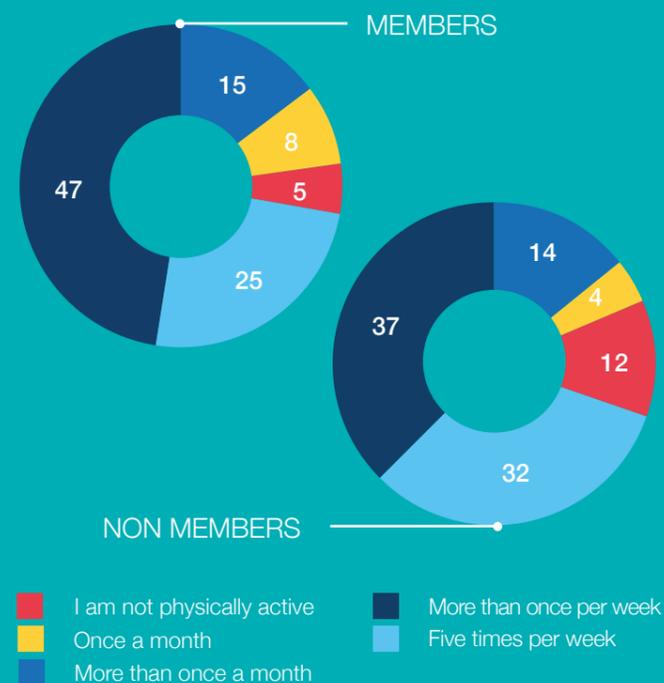
# SUMMARY OF RESULTS

## ACTIVITY LEVELS

71 per cent of members achieve the recommended 150 minutes of activity per week compared to 54 per cent of non-members

72 per cent of members are participating in activities more than once a week, with only 5 per cent classifying themselves as 'inactive'. Of the non-members surveyed, 70 per cent are participating in activities more than once a week, with 12 per cent classifying themselves as 'inactive'.

### HOW OFTEN DO YOU TAKE PART IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?



These statistics show a high level of sporting engagement, certainly significantly higher than reported in the most recent Sport England 'Sporting Lives Survey' which reported 54 per cent of people with a visual impairment are 'inactive'. This suggests that, through the provision of information, access and support, it is possible to positively influence engagement levels.



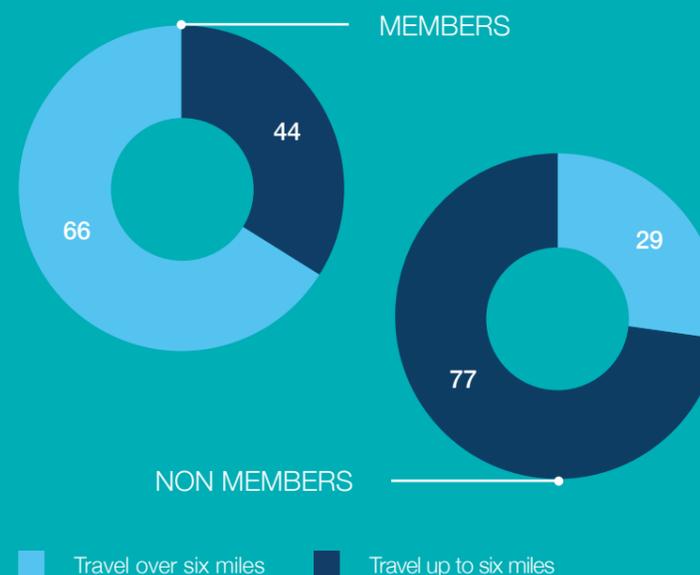
I was pretty sedentary and mainly in the house all of the time as I worked from home. Cricket with Metro has allowed me to get out and about and to have social interactions and be part of a team. I love it, I find it really welcoming, a good bunch of people and great support. Cricket has helped me to get out more and not worry so much about travelling. It's bought me out of my shell.

**Nick, member and cricket player from Brixton**

## PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY

66 per cent of members have to travel more than 5 miles to access their sports sessions, with 59 per cent of non-members having to travel more than 2 miles.

### PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE THAT TRAVEL OVER SIX MILES TO TAKE PART PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

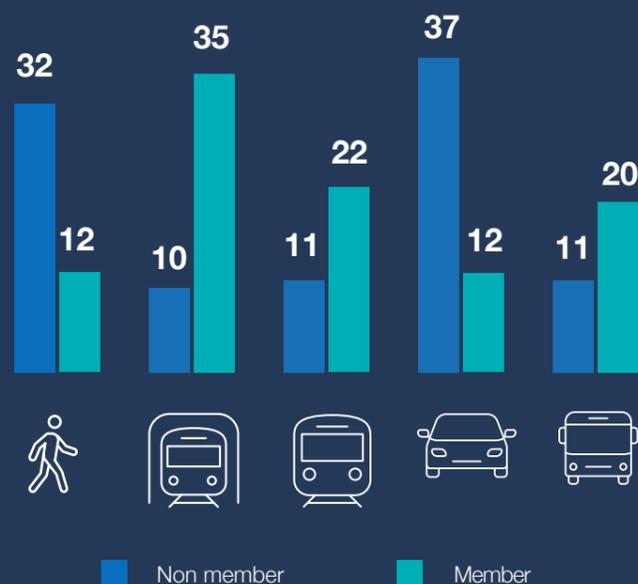


Even though 84 per cent of the UK population now lives within 2 miles of a leisure facility, those surveyed are still having to make long journeys to access sporting opportunities. If opportunities were available 'closer to home' 75 per cent of our members would be more active, compared to 50 per cent of non-members (see the 'what encourages participation' section for more details).

Also, it is interesting to note that 27 per cent of members and 42 per cent of non-members are unable to travel to sessions independently, creating a further barrier to participation.

## TRAVEL METHODS

HOW DO YOU TRAVEL TO YOUR ACTIVITY?



## INFORMATION RESOURCES

81 per cent of members find the Metro Blind Sport website to be 'very' useful with Facebook being cited as the most popular destination for finding out about available opportunities. The RNIB Connect and British Blind Sport websites were also popular destinations for those seeking information.

OTHER THAN METRO, DO YOU USE ANY OTHER RESOURCES TO SEEK OUT OPPORTUNITIES. IF SO WHICH ONES?

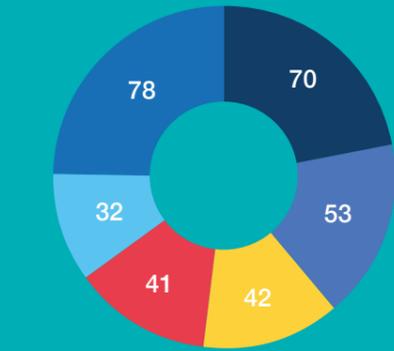


“ I had about 2 hours of 1 to 1 swimming coaching, improving my breast stroke and learning front crawl. I had previously had 2 terms of trying to learn this but achieving nothing! The instruction I received this time was brilliant which meant that I made a good improvement during the session. Please pass on my thanks to all who were involved in making it such an enjoyable day for me. ”

Linda, member and swimmer from Harrow

# REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING

## WHY DO YOU TAKE PART?



- To improve general fitness
- For fun
- To compete against others
- To socialise with others
- To reduce stress
- To lose weight

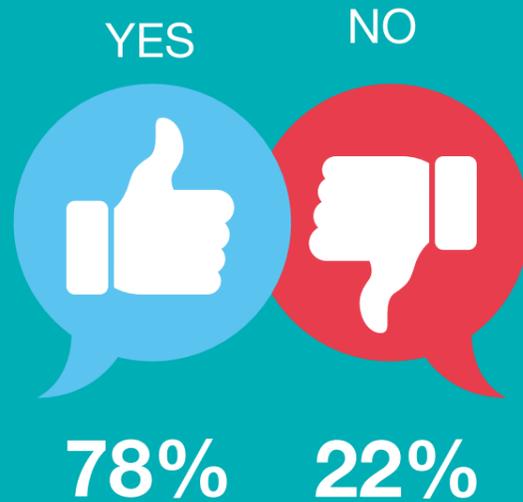
Whilst it is probably no surprise that most respondents take part in physical activity to improve general fitness, it is interesting that ‘fun’ features so high up the rankings in second place, followed by an ‘opportunity to compete’. The latest insights from the Sport England documents, Active Lives and Young People from March 2019 highlighted that enjoyment was the single biggest factor in motivating children and young people to take part in sport.

“It’s very exciting, you get to meet a lot of people and it is fun. At this tournament, the volunteers and staff are excellent, it’s a very thrilling process to play my first match. Tennis has made me go out much more, my family can now join in, it’s revolutionary. If you are thinking about tennis it’s definitely something to try and it could change your life like it has mine.”

**Ivan, youth member and tennis player from Watford**

# OUTCOMES

88 per cent of members report that the sporting opportunities offered by Metro Blind Sport enhance their mental, physical and social wellbeing.



The results clearly show that whilst the physical benefits of being active are significant, with 78 per cent of members stating that sporting opportunities offered by Metro Blind Sport improve their physical health, many experience much wider life-changing benefits.

“Playing futsal has improved my fitness, my discipline and improved my confidence by moving around the pitch with a visual impairment. It is something that allows you to interact with others positively. Everyone welcomes you, you immediately don’t feel like a stranger. It’s improved my confidence to play a sport I love. It’s all about having fun.”

**Everton, member and cricket and futsal player from Barnet**

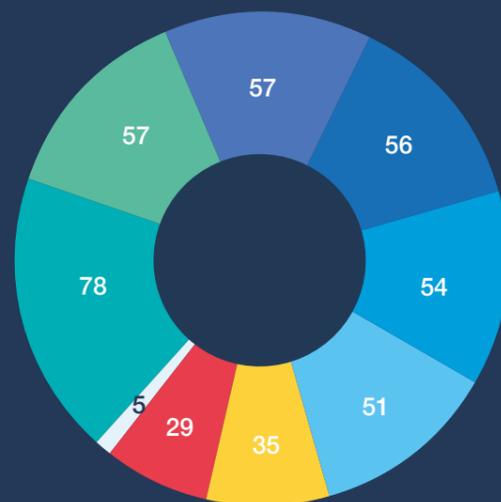


In 2016, the Thomas Pocklington Trust, in collaboration with South West London & St George's Mental Health NHS Trust and the South West London Academic, Health and Social Care System, commissioned a [review of literature on visual impairment and depression](#). In the report, reference is made to the fact that: 'Epidemiological studies indicate that the prevalence of depression in visually impaired older adults living in the UK is 13.5% compared to just 7.4% for those without a visual impairment' (Evans, Fletcher & Wormald, 2007). It is therefore encouraging that more than half (55 per cent) of members state that sporting opportunities provided by Metro Blind Sport helps them to 'look to the future with a positive attitude', 42 per cent says it improves their mental health.

In 2014 the Thomas Pocklington Trust commissioned a review of literature entitled Loneliness, Social Isolation and Sight Loss. One of the key findings was that 'difficulties in communication and social interaction can contribute to feelings of isolation.' It is therefore encouraging that 65 per cent of members have found that sport accessed through Metro Blind Sport has helped them to establish new friendship groups. Regular social interaction can have a hugely positive impact on loneliness, which the recent Jo Cox Commission states is as threatening to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

The non-member group was asked what benefits they experienced from physical activity and the results were equally as far reaching. 78 per cent stated that activity improved physical health with 57 per cent citing an improvement in mental health. Just over half (51 per cent) valued the ability to form friendship groups whilst 35 per cent also quoted increased independence in daily tasks.

### WHAT HAS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PARTICIPATION HELPED YOU ACHIEVE?



- Improve physical health
- Improve mental health
- Improve self confidence
- Develop a friendship group
- Lead and active lifestyle
- Look to the future + positive attitude
- Increase independence in daily tasks
- Improve communication skills
- Find employment

I love bowls because it gets me out every day if I wanted to. It makes me meet lots more people. The advice I would give someone taking up bowls is come along and give it go but be aware it might take over your life like it has for me!

Jane, member and bowls player from London

## ACTIVITY PREFERENCES

### TOP 5 METRO SPORT ACTIVITIES MEMBERS TAKE PART IN



TENNIS  
**39%**



CRICKET  
**19%**



BOWLS  
**19%**



ARCHERY  
**12%**



ATHLETICS  
**11%**

### TOP 5 ACTIVITIES NON MEMBERS TAKE PART IN



WALKING  
**63%**



GYM  
**35%**



SWIMMING  
**33%**



CYCLING  
**17%**



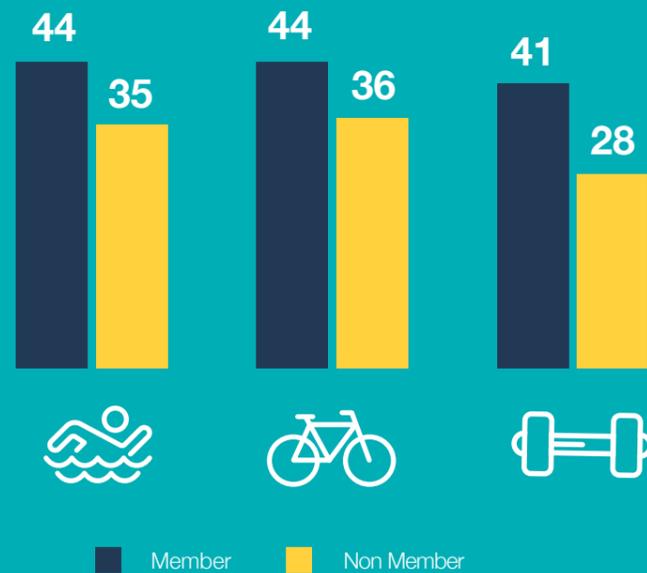
GOAL BALL  
**12%**

Gym, swim and cycling feature highly in both surveyed groups. Most mainstream leisure facilities are already offering these activities. It therefore raises the question – why are more individuals with a visual impairment not already engaged? Some insight to be gained from the 'what limits participation?' section.

# ACTIVITIES FOR THE FUTURE

The top three activities that members and non-members indicated that they would like to get involved in were very similar. 44 per cent of members indicated that they would like to take part in swimming, 44 per cent indicated cycling and 41 per cent wanted to use the gym. The three activities were the same for non-members, although at 36 percent, cycling was the top choice. It is worth noting, that all of these activities can be undertaken at leisure centres.

## ACTIVITIES FOR THE FUTURE

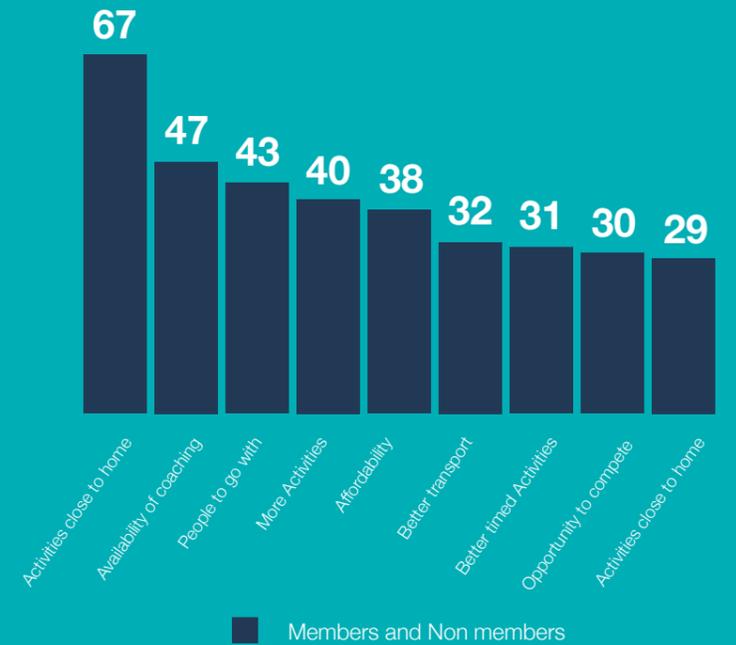


“I like to think as the ‘Stoker’ we do all the work, we are like the engine room of the tandem, we’re setting the pace for the bike and the ‘Pilot’ is always steering and doing the gears. What I like about cycling is the whole experience. I know that when on a tandem I can let myself go and put my foot down. I especially like getting out in to the countryside on the roads, I love it.”

**Matt, member and tennis player from Buckinghamshire**

# WHAT ENCOURAGES PARTICIPATION?

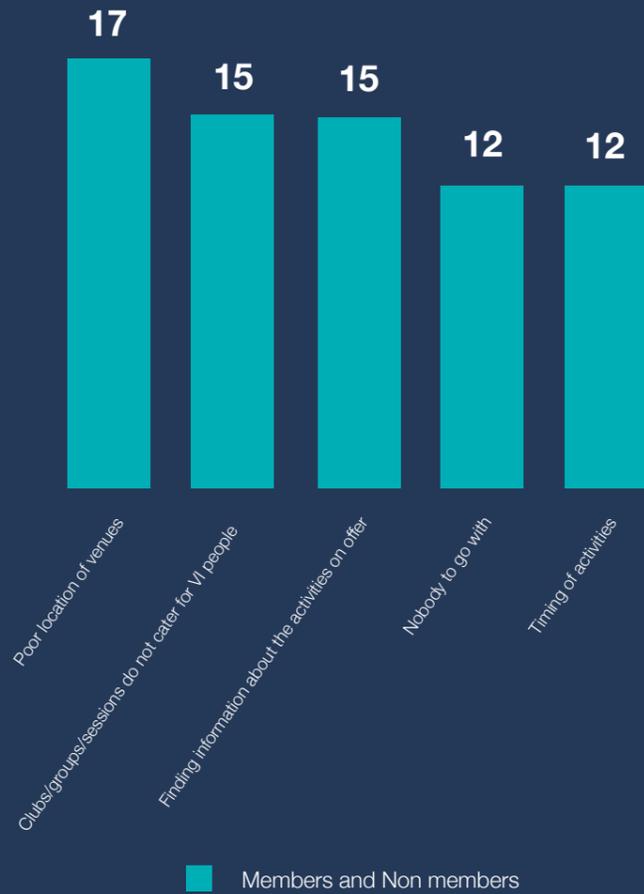
## WHAT WOULD ENCOURAGE YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY MORE OFTEN?



‘People to go with’ would encourage 57 per cent of respondents to be more active. This suggests a ‘buddy’ systems could work well to encourage more people to participate. It also emphasises the importance of an effective on-boarding process for new participants. Whilst ‘affordability’ is a factor it only ranks fifth. The introduction of a ‘Buddy system’ was highlighted as a recommendation in the RiCA report of 2018 titled, ‘Inclusive Fitness equipment for people living with a visual impairment’. Equally this report highlighted that assistance in and around the gym was the main issue of contention.

# WHAT LIMITS PARTICIPATION?

## TOP FIVE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION



The biggest barriers to entry remain a lack of information on available opportunities, venue availability and timing of activities. Interestingly, cost is only a barrier for 6 per cent of those surveyed.

With regards to the 'lack of information' barrier, this finding has also been supported by research based on an evaluation of the [Get Yourself Active programme](#), a four-year initiative run by Disability Rights UK and funded by the National Lottery through Sport England.

The programme highlighted that three quarters of disabled people are simply unaware of what facilities are available to them.

“

Metro allows you to play a sport that had previously been inaccessible. Until I was 16 or 17 I went to a mainstream school and only knew one other Vi person. Since then, I could name 200 people I have met through playing sport.

**Matt, member and tennis player from Buckinghamshire**

”



# CONCLUSION

There are several take home findings from our research as follows:



Finding information about available opportunities remains a challenge

Regular participation leads to far reaching benefits including physical and mental health, a positive attitude, the formation of friendship groups and improved independence in everyday tasks



Venue location and session timings make access difficult

Individuals would be encouraged to participate if activities were available closer to home, if there were people to go with, if more coaching were available and if the number of activities on offer were more extensive



The highest ranked activities individuals would like to take part more in are cycling, the gym and swimming

**66%** of people agree that not enough opportunities are available to help people with a visual impairment to achieve the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity per week



94 per cent of people believe that more could and should be done, by government, leisure centre providers, sports clubs and national governing bodies to increase accessibility to sport and physical activity for blind and partially sighted people



# CALL TO ACTION



**This research demonstrates that more can and should be done to increase accessibility to sport and physical activity for blind and partially sighted people.**

If you are an operator, owner or manager of a leisure facility then can you be certain that your facility, your equipment, your marketing collateral and your staff and activity encouraging blind and partially people to visit?

The 'Purple pound' is worth an estimated £212 billion, but findings from our survey and from surveys and research from other disability organisations continue to highlight that barriers remain for disabled people to get into sport. This survey demonstrates that blind and partially sighted people want to spend their money on sport, using gyms and swimming pools to get active. It may be time to pause talking, pause researching and implement action.

Being blind or partially sighted should not limit a person's access to sport and physical activity. Our survey demonstrates that Metro Blind Sport members are extremely active when good, quality provision

is made available. Simple changes can be made to increase participation of the blind and partially sighted community and these changes do not have to break the bank.

Simple changes to how activities are advertised, basic visual awareness training for front line staff, changes to session times and increased access to opportunities, could and would increase participation of blind and partially sighted people in sport and physical activity.

The landscape is changing, since Metro Blind Sport was formed most blind and partially sighted children now attend mainstream schools. Physical activity starts at school and therefore we must ensure that inclusive provision is available. Often PE and other teachers do not have any experience of visually impaired sport or recreation and therefore getting the information to the children and the teachers is crucial. With an estimated 25,000 children with a visual impairment, it is crucial that sport and physical activity provision is available and known about outside the school setting.

Organisations in the sight loss and physical activity sectors must collaborate and share information and best practice to bring about change. Metro Blind Sport will use this research to educate the wider sector, alongside partners, on changes that need to be made to support blind and partially sighted people to take part in sport and physical activity.

## USEFUL RESOURCES

- [Loneliness, isolation and sight loss](#) – Report by the Thomas Pocklington Trust
- [Visual Impairment, Depression and Access to Psychological Therapies](#) – Report by the Thomas Pocklington Trust
- [Inclusive Fitness equipment for people living with a visual impairment](#) – RiCA and Thomas Pocklington Trust
- [Overcoming Barriers To Participation](#) – Report by British Blind Sport
- [Mapping on Access to Sport For People with a Disability](#) – European Commission
- [State of the Fitness Industry 2018](#) - Leisure Database Company

- [Delivering activity to disabled people: The workforce perception gap](#) – Activity Alliance
- [Increasing participation in physical activity and sport: Evaluation of Get Yourself Active](#) – Disability Rights UK
- [Coaching People with a Visual Impairment](#) – UK Coaching and British Blind Sport

# CASE STUDY

“ One morning, Hassan Khan woke up blind. Neither he nor his family knew it, and wouldn't for several years yet, but he was suffering from a genetic disorder. His optic nerves had been damaged and he had lost his sight overnight. He was three. Roll forward several years and with a continued passion for sport, in particular cricket, in 2014 Hassan was the first Asian player to play for the England blind cricket team. Hassan Khan has represented the England blind cricket team at 4 different world cups and has won the Blind Ashes in Australia.

He continues to play for both of the Metro Blind Sport Cricket teams, as well as sitting on the Metro Cricket committee.

Hassan was part of the successful 2018 cricket teams where Metro had one of their most successful seasons. Metro won the league and reached the final of the cup competition and the Metro Devils won the South and West regional league.

Hassan says: 'I didn't just discover cricket at Metro Blind Sport, I discovered independence, freedom and a new lease of life. Cricket became the vehicle to greater things in life, such as university, volunteering, employment, living on my own and the greatest achievement of all, representing my country.'

As part of his role within the Metro team he has a responsibility for development new players in to the team. Last year Hassan supported the development of new players at nets session carried out at Lord's. In addition, Hassan has also coached Cricket to students At Linden Lodge School in Wimbledon, working with people who have a visual impairment and people in wheelchairs. Encouraging and raising awareness of sports for disabled people.

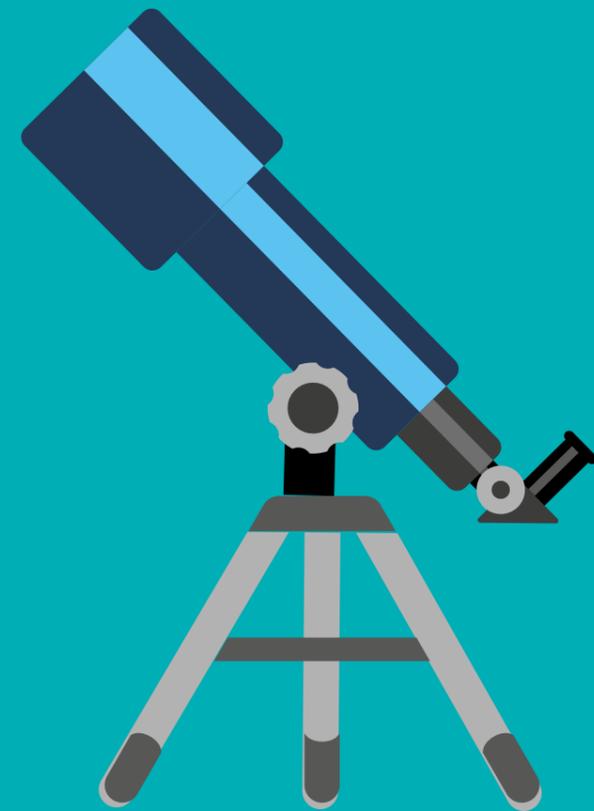
Hassan continues to speak at charity events, to schools and colleges in Wandsworth to encourage disabled people to part take in both sporting and social activities.

**Hassan Khan, member from Wandsworth**



## THE CHARITY'S VISION FOR THE FUTURE

**ENABLE BLIND AND PARTIALLY SIGHTED LONDONERS TO LEAD A MORE ACTIVE, FULFILLING LIFE THROUGH IMPROVING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF SPORTING OPPORTUNITIES**





Metro**BlindSport**