

## Learning about what works in Phase Two of the Mayor of London's Sport Unites Programme

### Spotlight: London Youth Games – inclusion and disability focus



*“It’s a great way to meet others and have fun whilst learning about sporting opportunities and encouraging others to take part. You feel part of a team which is really positive. Being part of LYG33 also meant that I had access to experiences that I didn’t before”* (Sam, LYG participant and LYG33 member)

*“The organisation actively promotes an environment where everyone feels valued, regardless of their background or ability. The events and activities are designed to be welcoming and I’ve seen a real commitment to ensuring that all young people can participate fully”* (Jack, LYG participant and case study)



#### Background

The London Youth Games (LYG) is a charity with a rich history with over 47 years of providing opportunities for young Londoners. Widely recognised as one of the Europe’s leading annual youth sports initiatives, the London Youth Games has continually evolved over this time, to drive both participation in school and community sport across London. A key part of this progress is the Game’s vision to create the largest and most inclusive city focused youth games through:

- All sports having an inclusive offer and catering for young people with additional needs.
- Upskilling the LYG workforce and a network of coaches in inclusive design and delivery.
- Increasing the number of LYG workforce and LYG33 Youth Board who have a disability.
- Creating a platform for young people to access inclusive community clubs and event pathways across the Capital.
- Elevating the profile of LYG’s inclusive and Para Games programmes.

## What's happened so far?

As part of realising this vision, the GLA's Sport Team, through Sport Unites, and LYG Board have invested in a three-year programme spanning the period between the 2022-23 and 2025-26 seasons, to create a sustained focus on inclusion in order to diversify the Games.

This programme includes key activities and areas of focus across the web of sporting opportunities that LYG offers, through their five core programmes:

- Open Games (community sport)
- School Games (school sport)
- Para Games (disability inclusive sport)
- Games Force (volunteering)
- Inclusive Coaches (coach development)
- LYG33 (youth engagement and leadership).

All these offers, associated activities and events, operate in a wide variety of locations across London at school, community, borough and London-wide levels.

New events and sports that have been introduced to the programme include: girls' inclusive basketball, multi-sports festival, pentathlon, hockey skills festival, sitting volleyball festival, learning disability and sensory tennis, inclusive dynamos, 3 Inspire Festivals and two adapted Inspire Festivals.

## What have been the impacts?

### Widening participation

This focus on inclusion is already paying off, as the [LYG website](#) shows:

***1,820** disabled people participated, volunteered and coached across London Youth Games's 5 core programmes in the 2023-2024 season. The 5 programmes include Open Games, School Games, Workforce, Inclusive Coaches and LYG33. This number is higher than ever before. This season, an additional 582 young people with a disability took part in London Youth Games events – boasting a **37% participation growth.***

Detailed activity data from the last 2 years of the programme provides a breakdown of this increasing participation, widening reach and growth of new events and opportunities for young disabled people across London.

### **By 2024:**

- **29** boroughs are actively engaged in YLG's inclusive programmes and activities
- **1,681** participants across all of the core Games offers identify as disabled
- **338** of this total were engaged in new events and sports introduced as a result of this programme
- **124** volunteers identify as disabled
- **21** inclusive coaches, who between them represent 15 different boroughs, identify as disabled;
  - **70%** of these coaches are completing bespoke coaching qualifications to meet their needs and aspirations.
  - **75%** have volunteered at YLG inclusive events, including a group leading a multisport station at the YLG Adapted Inspire Festive West
  - **55%** are female coaches
  - And **25%** of all YLG coaches identify as having a disability.

### **Strengthening the voice of young people**

**LYG33** empowers young Londoners aged 14–24 to influence youth sport across London. By participating in YLG33, young Londoners can build their confidence, leadership skills, and sense of community. By 2024:

- 9 young people (25%) within YLG33 identify as disabled, an increase of 7% from the 2023-24 cohort.
- The Leadership of YLG33 includes 2 inclusion leads whose focus is to diversify the workforce of the YLG and influence the shape of YLG para and inclusive events.

## B's story – finding her voice

*B is one of the young people who has held an Inclusion Lead role on LYG33, and shared her experiences of being part of the change taking place through this forum. "I didn't know anything about LYG33 before I applied to be on it but my uncle encouraged me to go for it. I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> form at school and had held similar roles but nothing like this. I went for it! Because of this experience I've become much more assertive with my creativity and finding my voice, and it's really opened my eyes to different parts of London, I've been to Twickenham, Wembley, different places and venues. I've interviewed different people about their experiences of sport, I've been on panels, hosted energisers and delivered workshops. I've been pushed and nurtured to do this and it's given me confidence and self-belief. My mentor, Emma, really helped me, she connected with me outside of LYG33, helped me spread my wings and encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone. This experience has allowed me to be authentically myself. My advice to others is, find your niche, nurture it, think outside the box and most of all believe in yourself!" B is now at university studying clinical psychology and mental health*



## S's story – Supporting young disabled people of colour to participate



*S has been involved with the para and inclusive games for a number of years – as an actively participating athlete in primary and secondary school, borough and London-wide games, as an active member of LYG33 including as the LYG33 Chair last year, and now as an intern with LYG. Throughout all of her involvement she has worked hard to support other young disabled people of colour to be involved, and to shape the opportunities and events that enable black disabled people to participate. This change to directly impact the involvement and mindset of other young people is a strong motivating force for R, who is passionate about the need for LYG, and sport in general, to take an intersectional lens to young people's engagement. "The games are now more relatable and cultural, they align with what young disabled people of colour want. These changes have been possible because of the opportunities through LYG in London and networking events in other cities, meeting other people and learning from, being influenced by them. My advice to others is to be proactive, open minded and be aware of the practical, transferable skills you have, they are interchangeable. There are so many different roles and opportunities in the sports sector – it's amazing."*

**The Inclusive Coaches** programme provides opportunities to upskill young people through officiating, coaching, leadership, sport development training, mentoring. This element of YLG promotes inclusivity in sports by ensuring all individuals, regardless of ability or background, can benefit from physical activity, and was created to provide inclusive coaching for disabled young people, helping them develop and enjoy sport and physical activity in a safe and supportive environment. It offers training workshops, CPD qualifications, and mentoring to help coaches create supportive environments where every young Londoner can thrive, with the ultimate aim of ensuring more disabled young people can compete in sport and in the London Youth Games generally.

By 2024, **21 young people who identify as disabled** have been through the inclusive coaches programme.

### **R's story - From feeling lost to finding his place**

*When R graduated from university in 2022 he was feeling lost, confused and unsure of his future. His degree was in sports coaching and performance with a passion for wheelchair basketball, football and teaching, all of which he loved but he really didn't know what he wanted to do or how. Getting onto the YLG Inclusive Coaches programme was transformational. As part of this programme he attended a two month workshop: "It's one of the best workshops I've even been on, it gave me a massive perspective on disability sports, and I've learned so much about coaching, being inclusive, equipment, inclusive sports like blind football. People at YLG were so welcoming and warm, and pushed me to join YLG33. I applied for and got the Vice Chair position last year, and I'm hooked, I'm still involved. I'm around people with shared values and experiences. Every day in YLG33 is different – events, networking, communicating with all kinds of athletes, teachers, politicians. Every single day is new and I've learned so many new skills that have helped me in my personal life as well as professionally. I'm a full time coach and teacher now. My advice to others would be to be as proactive as you possibly can be, maximise your strengths and focus on the positives, build on what you can do".*

## What's helping these changes?

- **Warm, welcoming and supportive staff within YG:** Jack, a YG33 Ambassador says:

*“I thought the staff were really engaged, inclusive and responsive. They were very supportive of my disability. I felt as though my thoughts and opinions – specifically on inclusion and disability – were understood and applied in all sessions. I participated in several interviews in regards to disability in sport, and the more that I did, the more confident I became”.*

- **A strong sense of belonging, connections and friendships:**

*“Now that I’m part of YG33, I feel a strong sense of belonging and pride. I’ve built friendships and learned so much from my team-mates. The support and encouragement I receive have boosted my confidence, and I enjoy being part of something that celebrates diversity and teamwork”* (Jack, YG33 Ambassador)

- **Personal development and growth including leadership and teamwork skills and improved performance in specific sports :**

*“It is really important people can access sports, no matter their disability. A big part of that is coaches having the training for it”* (Hannah, YG Inclusive Coach)

- **Widening horizons through opportunities to develop and take up new roles:**

*“The organisation has allowed me to travel to places I have never stepped foot in, which is quite cool”* (Beth, YG33 Inclusion Lead)



## Challenges

- Some Boroughs have been engaged in LYG's vision to be the most inclusive youth games since the beginning of this investment period; others have been less engaged and the LYG leads put this down to the need for greater support and capacity to enable that engagement; those boroughs need support e.g. through more outreach and community engagement from the LYG inclusion and disability team.
- In a similar way, there are some schools who are able to support young people to participate and compete in games, and others need more capacity and support to achieve this. Greater resource within the LYG Inclusion and Disability Team would help these staff, volunteers and ambassadors provide more outreach to work more directly with schools and communities to enable more disabled young people to get involved and provide support both pre and post events.
- The LYG Inclusion and Disability team have also identified the ongoing need to continually develop and upskill the LYG workforce and wider networks across Boroughs, school games organisers and London-wide as well as national partners including National Governing Bodies (NGBs). This in turn would then provide greater capacity to the LYG Inclusion Team to run events and host competitions, thereby ensuring longer term sustainability of these increasingly inclusive games.

## Lessons

- Recognise the importance of **friendships, connections and the social aspect** of being part of the Games and LYG33. Feedback from participants as well as those occupying leadership and ambassadorial roles emphasises the importance of fun and socialising as a way of building bonds and confidence.
- Peer advice and support, and **peer mentoring** more explicitly. For example, the benefit of Beth's advice (one of the LYG33 Inclusion Leads) to other young people to consider what's involved before committing to an ambassadorial or leadership role on LYG33.

*“Read the roles you’re applying for and ensure that you are able to commit to it because leadership roles are demanding, and if you don’t have time (or you are unable to section time off) you’ll find yourself not growing with the role but away from it.”*

- The role of LYG staff, through their tailored support, modelling inclusion and providing consistent encouragement as well as brokering opportunities. Young people who have experience of leadership roles have all pointed to the **warm, inclusive approach of the staff** within LYG and the Disability Activation Manager in particular. This support has been invaluable to their own self-confidence and progression not only within LYG but in broader walks of life, employment and education.



- At the same time, there is a need to achieve a balance between a dedicated focus on and roles that provide leadership and expertise around disability and inclusion, and embedding inclusive design and delivery into every role and every element of LYG for the future. The aim is for inclusion to be seen as **everybody's business**.
- It is clear that LYG's inclusion and disability focus is an ongoing programme that is constantly **evolving and learning** year on year about what works, and making changes to the inter-related offers for disabled young people across London.
- Proactive relationships and **relationship building** underpin sustainable partnerships with different boroughs and the network of teams, schools and community leaders, disabled people's organisations and other sports providers. This is no mean feat for such a small team of staff within LYG even when working alongside the extremely talented LYG33 members and leads who are working tirelessly as ambassadors for inclusive sport for all.

## What Next?

The LYG team and LYG33 have many more developments planned for the remainder of the 2024-25 season, and are looking ahead to 2025-26. This includes a renewed focus on engaging more girls and young women, building on the small increase of 5% between years one and two. They are delivering five Inspire and five Adapted Inspire Festivals in 2024-25 with a focus on enabling the participation of more young people with disabilities and underrepresented groups more generally in sport and physical activity. This is doubling the LYG offer from the 2023-24 season, in which 541 young people were engaged across five Festivals. This goal will be achieved by working with around 22 partners to deliver 18 different sports across the 10 Festivals.

