Disability Sports Wales Case Study: Enhancing – Insights from PIWS Training

- **Delegate:**   Nathan Stephens | Head of Performance Development
- **Location:**   Royal Welsh Showground, Llanelwedd, Builth Wells LD2 3SY
- **Course:**   Piws 4-day Champion Training Course
- **Date:**   26/02/2025

4-day Champion Training Course

Background

Nathan Stephens, Head of Performance Development for Disability Sport Wales, attended the PIWS training course on event accessibility. Nathen's role focuses on ensuring pathways are inclusive for para and disabled athletes, supporting their development from grassroots participation to elite competition, including selection for the Paralympic and Commonwealth Games. Additionally, Nathan is responsible for bringing international para-sport competitions to Wales, making accessibility a key priority for his role.

Motivation for Attending the Training

Nathan attended the training with a really open mind, Nathan is aware of his personal knowledge gaps, and wanted to expand his knowledge on accessibility beyond his personal experience as an individual with an impairment. His primary goal was to gain a comprehensive understanding of accessibility needs across different impairment types, ensuring that future events and competitions organized by Disability Sport Wales remove potential barriers for participants. He also aimed to embed accessibility best practices into the organization's broader event planning, venue selection, and national governing body collaborations.

Key Takeaways from the Training

Key insights Nathan gained from the training include:

- **Language and Terminology**: Understanding how language around disability varies and ensuring that event organizers use inclusive, positive terminology. Nathan identified from that training that when we are trying to support other organisations it's important to provide key facts, what key terminology to use, and what to avoid, which has been beneficial.

- **Physical Accessibility Considerations**: Identifying common barriers such as inadequate toilet facilities, entranceways, and signage that must be addressed at event venues is very important and now views this from a very different perspective.

- **Standardized Accessibility Checklists:** Implementing checklists to ensure all events meet essential accessibility standards, enabling full transparency for participants before they attend.

- **Digital and Informational Accessibility:** Ensuring all accessibility details are

Impact on Accessibility Approach

The training has led to key changes in Nathan's approach, including:

- **Structured Accessibility Planning:** Instead of addressing accessibility reactively through participant feedback, Disability Sport Wales will use a standardized checklist to ensure venues and events meet necessary requirements upfront.
- **Improved Communication with Participants:** Ensuring that accessibility information is transparently communicated to attendees, so they are fully aware of what facilities and accommodations are available.
- **Integration into Organizational Planning:** Embedding accessibility requirements into the event management framework, ensuring every event coordinator within the organization has access to standardized guidelines.

Identified Areas for Improvement

The training highlighted several specific areas for improvement or further development:

- **Venue Accessibility:** Establishing clear criteria when selecting venues, ensuring accessibility is considered from the outset.
- **Participant Pre-Event Support**: Providing virtual venue tours and touchpoint screens to help attendees with autism or learning disabilities familiarize themselves with event spaces.
- **Guidance for Event Organizers:** Collaborating with national governing bodies to ensure accessibility requirements are met consistently across all sports events in Wales.

The Value of Industry Collaboration

Nathan emphasized the importance of working with other event professionals during the training, particularly in learning from large-scale event organizers such as the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society and Eisteddfod yr Urdd. Key benefits of this opportunity included:

- **Shared Solutions:** Learning about common accessibility challenges and best practices from other organizations.
- **Resource Pooling:** Exploring opportunities to share accessibility infrastructure, such as touch tours and accessible ticketing systems, across different events and organizations.
- **Cross-Sector Learning:** Recognizing the similarities between sports and event industries in terms of accessibility challenges and opportunities for mutual learning.

Implementation of an Accessibility Strategy

Nathan plans to implement a structured accessibility strategy for Disability Sport Wales, including:

- **Developing a Standardized Accessibility Framework:** Ensuring all events follow a consistent, well-documented approach to accessibility.
- **Educating Event Organizers:** Providing training and guidelines to national governing bodies, venues, and competition organizers on best practices.
- **Enhancing Digital Communication:** Creating accessibility-focused website sections to provide comprehensive pre-event information for participants and spectators.
- **Managing Arrival and On-site Expectations:** Review opportunities to implement touch tours, touch point screens, and virtual tours that can be sent out to individuals with autism or learning difficulties to enable these visitors to be familiar with the environments prior to arrival.

Immediate Benefits and Expected Outcomes

Although the full implementation of accessibility improvements is still in progress, Nathan has already observed:

- **Increased Awareness Among Staff:** Team members are more conscious of accessibility requirements and are actively considering them in event planning.
- **Positive Leadership Engagement:** Senior management has recognized the value of accessibility training and is open to further learning opportunities for the organization.
- **More Inclusive Event Planning Processes**: Early-stage event planning will look into further integrating accessibility considerations across all disabilities, ensuring a more proactive approach.

Further Support and Training Needs

Nathan identified additional training needs to sustain accessibility improvements:

- **Wider Organizational Training**: Expanding accessibility awareness training beyond event staff to all Disability Sport Wales personnel.
- **Online Learning Modules**: Creating accessible, self-paced training materials to ensure broader participation.
- **Sports Sector and Event Sector Collaboration**: Encouraging ongoing knowledge exchange between sports organizations and event professionals to share best practices.

Conclusion

The PIWS accessibility training has been instrumental in equipping Disability Sport Wales with the tools to enhance accessibility in its events and competitions. Nathan and his team are committed to continually explore improvements and embedding accessibility into their organizational strategy, ensuring that para-athletes and spectators experience fully inclusive events. By fostering collaboration between the sports and events industries, Disability Sport Wales aims to lead by example in creating accessible sporting opportunities for all.

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