**The GM Moving Podcast**

**Episode 5: Working across all layers in the system to enable disabled people to move more**

**Intro:** [00:00:00] This podcast has been brought to you by GM Moving, part of GreaterSport. We're here to help the people of Greater Manchester get moving and to improve lives through physical activity.

**Eve Holt:** [00:00:33] Hi, so I'm Eve Holt, I'm the Strategic Director at GM Moving. So this is about us sharing ways of moving, learning, leading, and staying connected during the Covid crisis. Thank you for joining us, will you tell us a little bit about you and about your role?

**Ben Andrews:** [00:00:51] Yeah, so my name is Ben Andrews. I manage, different schemes of work across Greater Manchester to support communities, or agencies to disabled people to lead more active lifestyles. So for the past five years, I've been delivering a programme of work called Empower You, which was originally delivered in Salford. But we've now got a replicable model so we're now delivering in Trafford as well. And that's to work at a community level and make physical activity provision more accessible for disabled people. While supporting the demand of disabled people to access these opportunities. And from that I've been involved in different pieces of work around looking at accessible walking and cycling schemes for disabled people and how we can create more accessible street design with infrastructure teams, how we can create more accessible parks and green spaces to encourage active play by children with different needs I've worked with, health teams within the council to look at their systems and processes around how they can better engage disabled people. So anything to do with getting disabled people more active really, but less so about... Certain aspects where I work directly involve supporting disabled people to be active. But the majority of it is sort of changing the system so that it becomes more accessible and inclusive.

**Eve Holt:** [00:02:14] Great. It's that sort of influencing the role and really designing for diversity and the different spaces and stuff that people are. So can you tell us a little bit about why is this important?

**Ben Andrews:** [00:02:26] Why is it important? So from a personal point of view, I've got a degenerative visual impairment called retinitis pigmentosa, which involves the gradual deterioration of my eyesight. And so personally, I don't really want to access specialist provision and a lot of disabled people don't. We're the same as everyone else, we just want to be able to access things in the mainstream. We want to be able to go down to your local mainstream gyms or sports clubs or whatever it might be. Or just simply access the street for some people, which is quite hard. From a more... It's still a personal point of view, but I suppose it's just doing what's right. You know, everyone should have access to whatever they want to do and at the minute people don't have. You look at the activity rates of disabled people; twice as likely to be inactive as non-disabled people. And a lot of that, some of it might be passed off, as, you know, it's the, it's the person's impairment, but the majority of it is the physical, social, and cultural barriers that disabled people experience. So, it's not the social norm at the minute for disabled people to keep active. And so a lot of providers don't perceive disabled people as part of their market. It's all pushed on to sort of specialist provision, and that's not really what disabled people want. But until disabled people present a demand it is unlikely that the mainstream will adjust to meet that demand. But disabled people can't access the mainstream unless it's adjusted in the first place. So we're in a bit of a chicken and egg scenario where something needs to budge first.

**Eve Holt:** [00:03:59] So it's quite a stark stat there in terms of say, did you say twice, twice as likely to be inactive if you're disabled. And then the work that you're doing to absolutely impact on the physical, the cultural, and the social kind of norms and structural barriers. So can you, what have you been doing so pre-covid, what have you been doing to shift those norms and sort of design for diversity?

**Ben Andrews:** [00:04:25] So Empower You has been a big part of that. So Empower You works by working with groups of disabled people to identify activities of interest. We will then go and source those activities, working with mainstream providers to adjust their provision so that a group with disabled people can attend. And that could be any activity from walking and gardening, intensive gym work, any type of sports. And so we work with the providers to adjust the provision and then we'll support the group to access that activity. And in doing so, we, sort of come at it from both ends where we create any adjustments to the activity, but we're also presenting demand. Because I think sometimes providers get training and then you don't come across a disabled person for five years, they forget their training and there's just no point. And so we sort of come at it from both ends. And then we work with the group as a whole, so including the activity provider, the group of people who were accessing the activity and those around the person or the groups so we work with, carers, family, friends, support staff to increase their confidence and supporting them into activity. It's been getting away from this mind-set around they're scared of breaking people or, the disabled people might get hurt, it's this mind-set we seem to have. And then we support the group for eight weeks and make sure everyone's comfortable, establish a routine of engagement, and then we slowly wean ourselves away and just allow the people to access the group in the same way as anybody else might. So on one side we've got a group of people who are now accessing opportunities that they want to that they weren't doing beforehand. And we've got an activity provider who's now incentivized by a new market if you like. So then, the ownership then is sort of on that provider to maintain that. And why would they? Because it's a different market and it's, and it's new income for a lot of providers.

In addition to Empower You, Empower You sort of works across the board of the community and ideally for about a three to five year period, just to try it. Because it takes a while for one, the physical activity system as a whole in the community to adapt to this new group of people. And it also takes a lot of time for disabled people to feel comfortable accessing mainstream provision because they've been so used to only accessing specialist provision for so long. So the amount of people I have worked with over years who've said they love swimming, but there's no hydrotherapy facilities available, despite not needing any type of therapy. And it's just because they're that used to that being their go to, that they don't think swimming's for them. And it's the same for a lot of different, like... Green therapy to do with green spaces and gardening when actually they could just engage with a traditional gardening group or go out in a green space, but it's that real lack of association. So we're trying to influence the culture whilst generating demand. And then, other pieces of work that I've been involved in have been very much sort of, senior management and that type of level. So working with infrastructure organizations around accessible street design, because we can do all the work that we want to create that physical activity provision, but if people aren't actually able to get out on the streets and access it, then there's no point in it being there. And so we've done some of that with Salford, like I said, at the start, parks and green spaces we've looked at with Salford to design them so it'd be more accessible. And that's involved, everything that we do is sort all led by disabled people. So we do... For the parks and green spaces, we did a consultation with a special educational needs primary school and they designed what their ideal park would look like. And then from that we drew up some recommendations and put them to the council and now they've started to implement them. So we've just seen some accessible equipment be put in a park in Worsley Woods in Salford. The workshops that we deliver at sort of a senior level, which are around inclusion, they involve people with different needs or impairments coming in to the workshops from that area, just to thrash out how that organization or team can work towards a more inclusive offer. But it's always led by the people who that offer will be serving. And then I've supported the actions that have come out of the workshops, through sort of consultancy work that I've been bought in to do, so, yeah. That's been the work to date, Empower You and local pilot work mainly, that's included, what I've just talked about.

**Eve Holt:** [00:08:49] What's really stands out for me is how you go, and are working in each of those different layers of the system. So I don't know if you've seen, you probably have seen our GM Moving model in terms of the system change around physical activity. And I can picture that model now in my head and you thinking about this shift that needs to take place from a very individual level, in terms of people's perceptions and what they've been kind of told is okay, is accessible to them and be able to shift that so that they do feel that they can access, you know, swimming is something that is open to them. To then going, okay, well obviously that relies on those sort of social, informal networks, both potentially to support them and empower and enable them to actually access it for them to also not be that in that risk averse mode of going no, no, no, you can't do that, no no no you need to do something differently because there's this risk of, you know, X, Y, and Z, which often, you know, people, from a place of care and concern can limit actually and stop people doing things that they really want to do and that matters to the. To them this next layer of these organizations and institutions and, you know, needing to work with whether they are, you know, our anchor institutions in the community, our workplaces our sports and activities facilities and the people within them to open their doors. Absolutely and recognise, what are the things that would stop somebody from actually even getting over the threshold. Enable them to recognize that absolutely they should be, you know what they, the benefits they've gotten, and what they can bring to, to increase the activity of people who are disabled in the local community. And then you've got absolutely your physical environments, and I have so appreciated the fact that, you know, my little patch of garden feels like it's grown dramatically over the last few weeks of Covid because, you know, I really appreciate every little inch of space and the local park has been an absolute godsend for me and my three kids that, you know, we do have a green space in the middle of Manchester. So, you know, how important it is, that access to open space, to green space, to blue space. And you know, again, the additional barriers that are in your way if you're disabled and terms of being able to access that. And then you've got your policy and influencing on how we do that and then we've got our cultural norms, haven't we really. So it sounds like you really are working, influencing those layers.

**Ben Andrews:** [00:11:04] In it's simplest form it's sort of that supply and demand model, in you're sort of influencing the supply chain and then generating a demand to access that chain. So that's how I describe it in its very simplest form. But yeah it's trying to work through all those levels and making sure we're having input at every stage.

**Eve Holt:** [00:11:22] So that is the kind of big picture, I suppose, in terms of, in our normal world as it stands and trying to design moving back into that, that normal world really for the long term. Obviously that's all shifted and lots of things have sort of gone out the window in the last three weeks. And so I'm really interested to hear from your perspective, what both the challenges are, the very real challenges, I think that that presents if you are somebody who is disabled. Where you know the care that you may have relied on the support, there may be additional, you know, physical barriers, anxieties. There's a whole load of reasons why it's even harder potentially for people to move at the minute. But what we're also hearing, there's lots of opportunities as well for some people at the minute that you know, new ways of working, new ways of living. That, you know, have enabled some people to shift habits in a positive direction. And so, it'd be great to hear your insight into, I guess the barriers, but also with the potential opportunities with an eye on the future of things that we want to shift and what you're doing and what you would like to do really, I guess to adapt in this moment.

**Ben Andrews:** [00:12:30] Yeah. I suppose for me, although we didn't have time to plan, it was just, Covid was just sort of dropped as it is, cause no one can plan for anything like this. But it is a real good opportunity for people to keep active together, even though we might not be physically together. I think the way we're doing now, we're still socially interacting and no matter, at this stage whether you're disabled or non-disabled, I think that's something that could have been done together. But it's not really been, and this comes down to that lack of association thing, I've just talked about, disabled people because they're not associated with being physically active or not associated with mainstream provision, that I feel like in some areas they've been left out a bit. So for example, if we look at the thing what's got children moving most during this period is Joe Wicks, for example, which has been absolutely fantastic and I take my hat off to him for doing it. But if there's children from special educational needs provision, who might have limited levels of mobility, then it's just, is there any equivalent or anything that could have been done to support Joe to adjust some of those exercises to ensure that everybody is able to participate? Cause at the minute the good opportunity that we've got is that Covid takes all of the... it doesn't take away the adjustments needed to society, but a lot of it, we don't need to access the streets at the minute, we don't need, or, for long periods of time. So a lot of the exercises people are doing from home in an environment that they can control. So, disabled people have generally made adjustments to their own homes to enable them to access it in whatever way they need. So we had a really good opportunity where things could be done online if people are given the right support to access that everybody could do it together, no matter their level of mobility. So at the minute I'm working on a video with about seven exercises, but with four different variations of the same exercise. So one's standing, one's supported, one's seated, and then one's a passive type exercise for people who have no mobility at all, and that way it's something that everybody can do, no matter level of mobility, and you could do that, if you know, alongside your carer or support staff, if they was there at the same time, somebody could do it who can perform standing exercises. So it's just trying to really utilize this time when we can ignore some of the barriers, if you like, that go on externally and just try and bring people together by doing something that's accessible for everyone. So I think that's a good opportunity that we could look at.

In terms of what we're doing, so we've taken our approach online. So our approach has always been around working with mainstream agencies or mainstream providers to adjust the provision to make it more accessible. So we've stuck to that approach, we've not really... I've been putting videos out personally, but as Empower You, we've taken the approach that we'll support mainstream coaches, who are also finding this time quite hard because they've not got their classes that they'd normally be running and stuff like that. There's a lot of competition out there in terms of people just putting free stuff online, which is really good, but for coaches, it means that their income might be quite limited. So we've supported them to transition to an online platform. And then through our networks we're... with social care, with day services, we've supported tenancies where people are now going to be really isolated and stuck in a lot more, where they'd traditionally be seeing their friends or out at social clubs and stuff. We're supporting them to promote through our network so that then we can get some of the people that we've supported, or referrals that we've had onto accessing the online platform. And that's not, we've not gone down the route of doing Facebook live and stuff like that, just because, a lot of people that we work with really want that interaction. They want to see other people at the same time as doing the activity, they want to be able to talk. So we've opted for a platform which allows us to do that. I suppose one of the barriers with that is traditionally, I would be able to go out into the community and promote through presentations, get people excited about it, and we could just deliver the sessions there and then we'll support them into it there and then. Whereas now we're sort of relying on people, downloading the right technology, downloading the right apps. There's integrated apps out there, but it's still quite difficult for some people to navigate that. So we're not just dependent on the person being motivated to get active and access all the online platforms. For some of the groups that we work with, particularly with learning impairments and autism, we're also reliant on those around them to be motivated to do it.

So, for example, a person could be as motivated as they want to get online and they see our sessions and get really excited. But if their support isn't motivated or willing to support them to get online then it's unlikely that they'll do it. So a lot of them are the same barriers, cause you see that in the community. If support staff would prefer to go to a cafe rather than to a boxing session, then that's where that person would end up going. And so it's the same barriers, it's just being put across in a different way, if that makes sense.

**Eve Holt:** [00:17:32] Absolutely we're back again, aren't we to our concentric circles really. And yeah, it's one thing having an individual completely motivated, but the if people around them want to do something different and you're reliant on them, then yeah, it's a big challenge.

**Ben Andrews:** [00:17:46] It's not just that relationship you're building up with a person, you've got to get the buy in from those around the person. But I think that there's good opportunities there in that, in a lot of cases, these people who, some of the people that we work with are quite reliant on, they are controlled to a certain extent, because they're funded by councils or they're funded by day services or supported housing. You have a commitment to support health improvement for the people that you're supporting. So to some extent we are dependent on them, but if we could influence that layer of, the council saying, actually, you need to be getting everyone online. You need to be accessing, it doesn't have to be our sessions, it could be anything. But people have got a remit to be getting people online and supporting people through that process. Otherwise, we're going to have a lot of very inactive, frustrated people with not much to do. Because traditionally the days might have been in day services all day seeing their friends and then you'd go to social clubs of a night. Or if they wasn't accessing day services, they'd be going to cafes in the day and shopping and stuff like that. So a lot of that's been cut out now.

**Eve Holt:** [00:18:50] Obviously there's platforms now that enable us to be socially connected and for some people possibly more connected, but you have to pick and choose the right ones you know in terms of digital exclusion. Who, are there people, are there particular communities, any patterns you're seeing around people that are really unable to engage, you know, online at all? And what do we do in those circumstances?

**Ben Andrews:** [00:19:15] The first point around what platforms we're using, we've done a lot of sort of messing around and looking at different ways that we can do this. But the simplest way, in terms of our model, because it'd be very easy if we were just coaches and said, we're just going to deliver the activities for you. But the whole point of Empower You as a service is to reduce dependency on specialist services like ours. So we always try and engage mainstream coaches. So, cause we've done that we can just... We've, tried to do it so that we don't just get all the payment, coming to us and then send it out to the coaches because then long-term that's going to build a dependency up on us to take that payment. So we've done it so that the coaches are all paid individually, which adds a different, another layer of complexity. So we've used Bookwhen to advertise the coaches who have signed up, with us to say they're gonna deliver dance, boxing, yoga, and circuits. At different times throughout the day, so that their service is advertised through Bookwhen, which we've sent out to everyone within our networks. And it's a case of them booking onto whichever session, once they book on, the coach gets a notification with their email address and sends over whatever method of payment you've chosen. And then once the payment has been made, they receive a Zoom link to just a session like ours, but you might have 50 people rather than two. So there's sort of three layer's there. They've got to log on to Bookwhen, they've then got to wait for the confirmation from the coach to make payment and then they receive the Zoom link. So we've opted for them free platforms and it's just all learning for us at the minute. We've not done any online work before, so we will be taking some learning from it, and just adjusting as we go. So yeah, that's where I'm up to at the minute, and I'm not seeing this as something that we're just implementing for Covid, because a lot of people that we work with, especially people with autism or people with really sort of limited levels of mobility, they sometimes either can't leave the house much because of the way that the physical environment is all because of the capacity of staff, or they don't want to leave the house at all if they've got really severe social anxiety.

And before this, I was always quite keen and we was keen as a team to try and get people out of their houses. We were sort of like, this should be our goal. If you are saying you don't want to get out then we should pick up and now I'm reflecting on it and thinking about people's needs and people's preferences and actually I don't think that we should be pushing that all the time. If people... Because I think we've always perceived social interaction as needing to be face to face, but I think this has sort of brought us round, and it's strange because I'll always use FaceTime and stuff to thinking, actually we can still do that, social stuff, but it can be on an online platform as long as people are supported to access it. So a lot of the people that we've supported in the past, for example, who might have dropped off from Empower You at some point because without our support they just don't want to access the community. Will now be able to maintain activity levels at home. So it's definitely going to be part of our offer going forward, which will just enhance it. And will obviously, you know, engage different people in different groups.

**Eve Holt:** [00:22:33] So it's really interesting to hear how it's shifted your own perception as well. And then around kind of, I guess yeah, what’s seen as right. You know, I think there's lots of... It's been quite embedded, hasn't it, that somehow interacting face to face is good and interacting online is bad. And I know that I sometimes feel that as a parent in particular. So I've got three teenage boys and they often challenge me because they'll be going, you know, pre-Covid I'm kicking them out the door, going "Go see your mates, go out", you know, and they're like, but we are seeing our mates, we are socializing. We're doing it through chatting on a whole range of different platforms that, because that involves a screen, it's involved, for me, a kind of, a negativity because it isn't really interactive.

**Ben Andrews:** [00:23:15] Yeah, I've just written a blog about this.

**Eve Holt:** [00:23:18] Okay. Oh well there you go. You'll have to give that a plug. And that's from somebody, you know, I've been using Zoom in my work for five years now, and introduced it to various organizations. So I, and do lots of work as a facilitator and a coach to say, actually, there's loads of things we can do to facilitate great connection online. It's particularly, sort of my work around gender, it's been really helpful because it's enabled people living, you know, really busy lives, caring community people to connect with others and to share their learning and support each other in a way that just wouldn't be possible if you had to physically meet, you know, and all the barriers. So it is helpful thinking, you know, I really love the way you put that, but it does, it's shifting our perceptions as well of things that maybe we didn't realize we were categorizing as good and bad and maybe enforcing on people as you know, that you should get out the house. And this is something "thou shalt go outside", and actually getting to listen to what matters to them and what do they really, what's important to them and important for them. And it might not always need to be going outside. I personally still naturally think that there's something about fresh air and being outdoors, there's a balance isn't it. It's having that whole mix and maybe thinking about going forward, what does that mix look like? And getting that in a way that balance, the balance is there for everybody in the way that they need it. So the particular platform, did you say it's called Bookwhen?

**Ben Andrews:** [00:24:40] It's called Bookwhen.com and that's just basically a platform that coaches can advertise their classes on. So it, and it works well if it's just direct, like a coach doing it because it's completely integrated. So you could have, Bookwhen complete the booking form so that the coach has some information and it takes you to payment, and then it takes you to release the Zoom link once you've made the payment. And that can all be done on one platform. And now it's integrated with Zoom, which makes it even easier. The issue that we have is because we're working with external coaches and we want to reduce dependency on our services long-term after that eight week period, we can’t, it's not as integrated as it would be if one coach was just advertising their services on there. So we've, we'd have four different payment methods, which for now Bookwhen doesn't allow, it only allows you one payment method. If we had four payments methods, it could all just be done on one site, which would be really easy.

**Eve Holt:** [00:25:40] Okay, so there's still tweaks to be made in all of it, but getting there. And, thinking about, and we had a GM Moving round table just before Covid and I remember Andy Burnham making a point of, you know, when will we have the sort of, the equivalent of Just Eat, the Just Move. And it does feel that that's happening in all these different apps and testing out all these different ways and how that makes it easier for people who want to just move, to find the support and to do that in a way that is sustainable. And I really like your model of let's make sure that we're not creating further dependencies for anybody either as somebody that wants to move or somebody who wants to be able to support somebody, where, you know, avoid it becoming highly centralized really. Enable that to happen as quickly as possible and empower everybody to give what they can and I guess take what they need in the mix of all of this, which feels so, so important. And distributing all of that. So before we wrap up, if anybody is, I guess, listening or watching and wants to find out more, what should they do?

**Ben Andrews:** [00:26:42] Yeah, so we're on, Unlimited Potential and Empower You into Google will bring our page up you can learn more there. We're on social media, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook; @EmpowerYou\_UP. And you can drop me an email ben.andrews@unlimitedpotential.org.uk for any information about the online service or anything else. So yeah, they're the best methods.

**Eve Holt:** [00:27:08] Ok so, final question, so how do you like to move Ben?

**Ben Andrews:** [00:27:15] At the minute?

**Eve Holt:** [00:27:16] And well, yeah go on, how do you generally like to move? And how has that shifted or adapted in Covid?

**Ben Andrews:** [00:27:23] Yeah, so I usually go to the gym, I'm quite active, go to the gym four times a week. Do resistance training and then I'll run on Wednesdays and Saturdays. So I'm training like six days a week. So at the minute, and I have had some mild symptoms over the last two weeks, so I've sort of been taking it easier. I've transitioned to homework outs, I've not got any sort of weights or anything like that, so we're just doing body weights or using things around the house, hand towels, mop sticks, whatever it might be. And then I'm hoping, because I'm just conscious of if I have mild symptoms with sort of finding it difficult to breathe, I've not been doing any running. So I'm hoping to get out on Saturday because then it would have been two weeks since the symptoms first started. So yeah, hopefully get a run in on Saturday.

**Eve Holt:** [00:28:13] Well, if you've not seen it already, Pete from our Moving Forces team did a great little, social media video of creative alternatives to dumbbells, and he put out the ask for anybody else to come up with their own creative alternative to that. So have a look, and I'm sure if you were up for doing a little video with your mop or whatever else. I did do it, I did a Chorlton, I live, I live in Chorlton, well I'm a councillor in Chorlton I live just outside of Chorlton, and I did a very Chorlton alternative with quinoa and chickpeas and sourdough bread. So yeah, he would love, I think he's desperate for some people to interact, but it's quite a fun video, so yeah, great.

**Ben Andrews:** [00:28:54] I have got a video that's been included on the GreaterSport newsletter with the hand towel. It was sort of assisted exercises for people who might be performing them seated, so I'll send that over to Pete if he can get use out of it.

**Eve Holt:** [00:29:04] Great, do, please do. And we'll keep signposting people your way, definitely. And really keep an eye on what this all means for the longer term really, so we can really shift that figure from, you know, it's quite shocking really, that people are twice as likely to be inactive if you're disabled and obviously we need to close that gap. Because it shouldn't be a gift, really should it for some people, it's about all of us being able to live healthy, happy, active lives, and be able to flourish really and get about our day to day. You know, in a way that enables them to interact to use all those opportunities and spaces, and in a way that works for us. So, you know, really thank you. Stay in touch. Yeah, I look forward to hearing more about your learning as you go and keep passing stuff on to us. Much appreciated. So I think we'll finish there. Cheers.

**Ben Andrews:** [00:29:56] Thanks a lot

**Outro:** [00:29:59] If you've enjoyed this podcast, why not share it or tell a friend about it? And if you've got feedback or ideas for future episodes, please get in touch with our team at GreaterSport using the links that you'll find on our podcast page.