

SOCIALISING: BUILDING ACCESSIBLE OPPORTUNITIES LEADS TO STRONG COMMUNITIES

Orchard Vale Trust

Friends are the family we choose. They want the best for us, support us and care for us.

There are many benefits to having friends, but one of the most impressive is the impact it has on our health. Having friends and meeting them regularly means we live longer, lower risks of dementia, improve our mental wellbeing, strengthen our immune systems... the list goes on.

The way we make our friends, and keep them, is by socialising. This can be anything from going to parties or going on holiday, to meeting for tea and cake every now and then or walking the dog together.

For adults with learning disabilities however, it isn't always this simple.

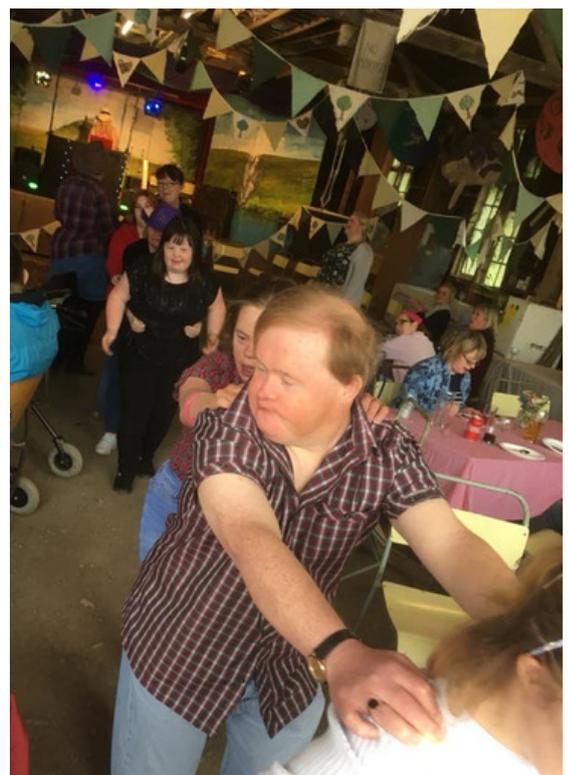
People with learning disabilities often have smaller social networks and have fewer opportunities to socialise. In many cases their social networks are made up largely by the people who support them (Mencap).

How can we change this?

Creating new social opportunities for people with learning disabilities is a good place to start. To do this it is important to include people in the design and delivery of these opportunities. Social activities can mean many different things to many different people. It is important to know what people enjoy doing together to be able to create social activities that people will engage with.

Another place to start is to understand the barriers to social engagement. If the opportunities exist, how can they be made more accessible?

Transport is a leading challenge, especially in rural areas. It is not always a possibility as people with learning disabilities may need support accessing it. It often is not even available at all, particularly for things like socialising.





For adults with learning disabilities, socialising is more than just recreational. It can make a huge difference to social skill development which in turn enables long term independence. Not to mention the difference it makes to health, it is important for people with learning disabilities to be included in the discussion.

Orchard Vale Trust places adults with learning disabilities at the centre of all our activities. This means we design our projects and activities based on what people want to do.

We have recently set up a Cinema Club for any one with learning disabilities to join. We hold them on the first Wednesday of every month in partnership with the Roxy Cinema in Somerset. This means we can offer a welcoming environment to specific needs and can show anything anyone wants to see.

Cinemas can often be too loud, too dark or too overwhelming for those with heightened sensitivities to sound and light. Because of this we make the right adjustments to make sure everyone has an opportunity to join us.

We are also in the process of obtaining our very own minivan to make sure those who are restricted by transport can reach us in the future.

By including people with learning disabilities in the design and delivery of social opportunities we make friendships possible, and with it improve health and wellbeing of a still vulnerable and left out group in society.

