Background

In spring 2014, the Council for Disabled Children was commissioned by the CBF/CDC Early Intervention Project to carry out a focus group with disabled young people under the age of 18 to get their views on what they like to do and what stops them taking part. This topic was identified as being key to informing the CBF/CDC Early Intervention Project about the needs of disabled children and young people were looking at preventative measures and early intervention for those at risk of developing behaviour that challenges.

The group of young people interviewed were at risk of developing challenging behaviour and were aged between 11 and 16. All of the young people were able to take part in a focus group situation. However several of the group had additional communication impairments.

We interviewed seven young people, all based in a special school for young people with learning disabilities in the north-west of England. All the young people were members of the school council they were used to having a say, however it was unusual to be asked about issues outside of school and they appeared to enjoy the opportunity.

This paper is a reflection of what they said during that focus group as well as our observations.
Questions that were asked

To aid access and communication at no point during the focus group did we make reference to challenging behaviour. The questions were designed to put young people at ease and place them as the experts.

- What do you enjoy doing (at home, at school, outside of school) and why?
- What makes it more difficult to do those things?
- What makes it easier to do those things?
- What things would you like to do in the future?

The question what makes it more difficult to do these things was too complex for the group so we focused on why they chose to do things.

During these questions we provided the young people with pens and paper to write or draw their answers. At the end of this document is the raw list of data.

The majority of young people we spoke to showed a preference for activities they could do alone. Whether this reflected their preference or their reality was unclear. That said several of the group did identify having difficulty interacting with other young people. These young people identified that they would like to engage with others but needed support.

Most activities the young people did were based in their own homes or connected to school. Several young people indentified the desire to play outside but expressed that they and in some cases their parents had concerns about their safety.

Key factors raised

Familiarity

A key factor as to whether the young people we spoke to positively engaged in activities was familiarity with staff running the activity. If they knew the staff they were more likely to get involved. The young people also indentified that if they knew another young person already doing the activity they would be more likely to try an activity out.

Some of the group had anxiety about being in activities with non-disabled peers this was for a variety of reasons including prior experience of being bullied and dislike of strangers/new people. A number also raise concerns that activities would become inaccessible to them by the inclusion of non-disabled peers.
Understanding needs

Related to familiarity young people identified the importance of feeling that those working with them understood their needs. This was important as they felt if someone understood their needs they would respond to issues before they became problems.

Siblings

Several of the group identified that their siblings were key to engaging in social activities outside of school as they had friends based in the immediate area to where they lived. Many of the group identified that currently their non-disabled siblings had a wider range of options available and got to do things like sleepovers with friends.

Having the opportunity to spend time with friends outside of school was raised repeatedly by the young people but this rarely happened most cited geography (living too far away) or transportation as the key barriers.

School

For the young people we spoke to they engaged in a wide range of activities. Most of these activities even those outside of school hours were arranged or facilitated by the school. The majority of these activities were sports based and included skiing, trampolining and football.

The dependency of the young people on the school for their additional activities raises interesting questions for what opportunities they will have access to upon graduating.

Preparation for adulthood

Asking what things you would like to do in the future caused several of the group to become quite anxious. Some were aware that services and opportunities were harder to obtain once you left school. A number of the group identified wanting more support so that they could develop their independence in preparation for adulthood.
Annex 1: Notes from group

There may be repetition this is intentional as it reflects all that was communicated

Things I like to do at:

Home

- Playing with other people
- Playing on my bike
- Playing on the swings
- TV
- Park
- Reading books
- Playing on my bike
- Music
- Laptop
- Playing on my Kindle Fire
- Playing with the dog
- Playing on my DS
- TV
- Playing with my dog
- Laptop/animate
- Help do jobs
- Go to cinemas
- 3DS

Leisure time

- Youth club
- Trampolining
- Skiing
- TV
- Football
- Music
- Art
- Animate (laptop)
- Playing on my 3DS
- TV
- Xbox
- Football
- Swimming
- Art

School

- Play times
- Football club
- Art
- Running
- Playing with school friends
- English
- Swimming
What would you like to be able to do in the future?

• Sleepovers
• Play with my friends
• Meet with real life wolves! (my favourite animals)
• Go to New York
• Mum, dad, dog, park
• Shopping on my own
• Shopping on my own
• Support to help me outside of school (to pay bills and things)
Annex 2 – demographics

The focus group took place in a non-residential special school with a group of 7 young people aged 11-16 years. There were 3 males and 4 females in the group.

All the young people were identified as having learning disabilities, including some young people on the autism spectrum. The group had a range of communication impairments. The focus group used pictures as prompts and encouraged young people to using a variety of methods to express themselves including drawing and speech.

The Early Intervention Project is run by the Challenging Behaviour Foundation and the Council for Disabled Children, with funding from NHS England.

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www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk/driving-change/early-intervention-project