

Presented by iChope Events CIC

**IS-vid**

**I**nclusive ice-**S**kating sessions for individuals who experience **v**isual **i**mpairment or **d**eaf blindness.

Authored by the IS-vid Project Advisory Group who are (at the time of publication):

Alison Evans, iChope Events CIC

Luke Anthony, Independent Member

Cathy Williams, Independent Member

Ansley Workman, RNIB Cymru

Leif Throbroe, Disability Sports Wales

Bethany Merriman, SENSE

Lucy Strange, Freelance Ice Coach

Gavin Thomas, Vindico Arena

Claire Nollett, Independent Researcher

Copyright iChope Events CIC

22 January 2025

References are numbered and full citations are provided at the end of this document.

**“Eight out of the ten most deprived towns in Wales are located in the South Wales Valleys.”** Bennett Institute for Public Policy 2020 reference Goodair, B. & Kenny M 2020 Bennett Institute for Public Policy, Policy Report Series Townscapes 3. Wales. January 2020 University of Cambridge.

**BACKGROUND**

Residents in the South Wales Valleys and Cardiff experience socioeconomic deprivation, social isolation and high levels of unemployment (Welsh Government 20191, Welsh Government 20232). This deprivation was felt even more so during the COVID19 pandemic and the resulting cost-of-living crisis (Welsh Government 20213) with the share of individuals residing in Wales who experienced severe mental health issues increasing from 11.7% pre-pandemic to 28.1% (Cardiff University4).

Members of the visually impaired (VI), blind and deafblind community face further socioeconomic deprivation, social isolation and high levels of unemployment due to their impairment and the inability of society to be able to successfully offer solutions of accessibility and inclusion for everyone in everyday life. Communal spaces, cities (Cushley, Galaway & Peto 20225) and transport services (Research Live 20236) are designed by sighted individuals for sighted individuals.

**“61% of disabled people say they are experiencing ‘chronic loneliness’\*, feeling lonely ‘always’ or ‘often’.”** Sense 2021 reference SENSE Fear of mental health crisis as loneliness rises dramatically amongst disabled people 25 February 2021 online at https://www.sense.org.uk/media/latest-press-releases/loneliness-rises-dramatically-among-disabled-people/

**IS-vidDEMOGRAPH**

IS-vid welcomed VI, blind and deaf blind skaters, and their companions, who were resident in the local authorities of Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Swansea and Torfaen. Public transport is available from all of the named local authorities to Cardiff.

**“250 people in the UK start to lose their sight everyday.”** RNIB 2024 reference RNIB 2024 Key information and statistics on sight loss in the UK online at https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/health-social-care-education-professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/key-information-and-statistics-on-sight-loss-in-the-uk/

**IS-vid COMMUNITY**

The IS-vid geographic area comprises ten local authorities and is home to 53,960 people with varying levels of sight loss. 7069 of those people are registered blind or partially sighted with 11,190 experiencers aged between 0-64 years (RNIB 20237). IS-vid was the first feasibility project of its kind to be delivered in Wales*.* IS-vid*,* originally aimed to provide twenty weeks but ultimately, delivered twenty-three weeks of exclusive one hour on-ice sessions for members of the VI, blind and deafblind community, aged 5+ years. Research shows that participation in an adapted physical activity can provide a multitude of benefits including improved self-confidence and quality of life, happiness (Maher, Toohey & Ferguson 20168, Dursun et al 20159) and muscle strength (Swedish National institute of Public Health 201010).

**“Around half of people living with VI are not able to take part in physical exercise, hobbies or social activities as much as they would like.”** V I Lives Report September 2022 reference Good Innovation & Insight Angels report produced in collaboration with RNIB, Thomas Pocklington Trust and Guide Dogs. V I Lives An in-depth understanding of the experiences of people living with vision impairment (VI) in the UK September 2022 online at https://www.pocklington.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/VI-Lives-Report-Sep-22.pdf

**EXISTING BARRIERS TO INCLUSION**

The VI community face barriers in accessing leisure activities (British Blind Sport 201411, Hillan, Smith, Bishop et al 202312) due to a plethora of reasons including a lack of opportunities for inclusive sessions**,** a lack of coaches with adequate and relevant training in sight loss and inclusion**,** unsuitability of the physical environment for people with sight loss even if the environment has been designed to be disability ‘inclusive’**,** a lack of accessible information**,** a lack of accessible travel and the cost of participation and/or travel.This unconscious discrimination coupled with architectural disability (Goldsmith 196313) pose significant barriers to the VI, blind and deaf blind community.

**STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION**

IS-vid worked with the VI community across all elements of the project as members of the IS-vid Project Advisory Group (PAG) which also comprised representatives from RNIB Cymru, Disability Sport Wales, SENSE Cymru, the Vindico Arena, freelance ice coaches and an independent researcher.The PAG advised on everything related to the project from accessible communications to physical environment considerations, consent procedures to advertising and training opportunities. The IS-vid project received £20k from the National Lottery Community Fund Wales. The IS-vid project was led by iChope Events CIC, co-created with stakeholders, and the first project of its kind to be trialled in Wales.

**“A scan of 40,000 websites across media, travel and retail revealed that only 3% were considered accessible.”** AudioEye 2024 reference Jensen, M. (2024) Web Accessibility Stats and Data 2024. Audio Eye 14 February 2024 online at https://www.audioeye.com/post/accessibility-statistics/

**COMMUNICATION**

The PAG and VI community advised the project on its communication preferences and accessibility. iChope Events CIC adapted its website to include an accessible section where project information was detailed in large font size, white font colour against a black background and the option to listen to the page via an audio button. The website is compatible with screen readers. Skaters had their own page on the website detailing vital information that would help them be safe at sessions as well as a consent and disclaimer section.iChope Events CIC communicated with skaters via advertisements through local VI networks, digital leaflets via social media platforms, email, schools hard-copy leaflet distribution as well as via telephone, email and WhatsApp.IS-vid was advertised primarily via social media and through electronic channels of iChope Events CIC, supporting organisations and other interested parties.Information about the project was available in both Welsh and English.

**“I tried something I never thought I could do.”** IS-vidSkater

**IS-vid SETTING**

IS-vid sessions were held at the Vindico Arena in Cardiff Bay. The 6000m2 Vindico Arena (formerly Ice Arena Wales) was opened in 2016. The Vindico Arena is home to the UK-based Elite Ice Hockey team, the Cardiff Devils, and houses an Olympic size ice pad (60m x 30m with a corner radius of 8.5m), a 3000+ capacity spectator area, café, private events space and indoor climbing centre.Patrons of the Vindico Arena have access to a Council run two-section car park. Section one is tarmac whilst the other comprises uneven compacted hardcore. Designated disabled spaces are within the tarmac section. The Vindico Arena is served by Cardiff Bus (routes 9, 304 and 305) and Transport for Wales (routes 91, 92, 92B, 93 and 94) services (correct at the time of publication). The nearest train station to the Vindico Arena is located at Cogan which is approximately a fifteen-minute walk (Google Maps 202414).

**“More than one-third of blind and** **partially sighted people say that they** **sometimes or frequently experience** **negative attitudes from the general** **public because of their sight loss.”** My Voice 2015 reference Slade J and Edwards R (2015) My Voice 2015: The views and experiences of blind and partially sighted people in the UK. RNIB.

**PURPOSE OF IS-vid**

IS-vid explored whether members of the VI community across South Wales would welcome an opportunity to participate in on-ice sessions designed exclusively for their needs. Ice-skating was the chosen vehicle to facilitate the project due to its multitude of benefits from the positive physical and emotional benefits to the nature of the activity being a leveller. No matter the nationality, age, background or disability, most people are apprehensive the first time they take to the ice. Very few people who experience VI, blindness or deaf blindness have an opportunity to participate in ice skating due to the environmental barriers and safety implications for themselves and others (Thorslund & Rosberg 202315). There are seasonal opportunities to experience ‘ice’ skating such as pop-up council-led and private Winter Wonderland type rinks in local areas which tend not be VI inclusive.

**“it’s a lot quieter, the music doesn’t sound as loud, the lights are not as bright um and just the number of people that you have to try and constantly kind of watch all the time on that rink has just made a massive difference and I hadn’t really fully appreciated how challenging public sessions are until I’d experienced a different way.”** IS-vidSkater when talking about the IS-vid sessions compared to public sessions or temporary rinks.

**PURPOSE OF IS-vid**

Due to the physical environment posing significant challenges, persons who experience VI continue to be unconsciously excluded from independent participation even during specific ‘inclusive’ sessions at such rinks which usually run SEND, particularly neurodivergent, sessions as well as wheelchair inclusive sessions.

There appears to be a lack of specific VI inclusive sessions at permanent and temporary rinks in the UK.IS-vid provided an opportunity for members of the VI community to enjoy a new leisure activity with people who encounter the same challenges as themselves.

IS-vid provided an opportunity for skaters ages 5+ years to enjoy a physical activity, usually inaccessible to them, that would challenge their concentration and their physical abilities such as coordination and balance, renew or grow self-confidence, whilst offering opportunities to socialise and have fun (Powrie 201516)!

**“Wales has the highest poverty rate** **among disabled people of all UK** **countries.”** Wales Centre for Public Policy 2022 reference Carter, I, Hill-Dixon A & Roberts M 2022 Poverty and social exclusion in Wales September 2022 Wales Centre for Public Policy.

**AIMS OF IS-vid**

IS-vid was a feasibility project designed exclusively for the needs of the VI community, affording individuals who experience VI a safe and accessible ice-skating experience. IS-vid was designed in conjunction with lived experiencers to ensure the needs of its community were identified, and any adjustments made accordingly, which resulted in more inclusive sessions. IS-vid used the vehicle of ice-skating to:

* reduce barriers to participation
* offer opportunities to improve physical and emotional health and wellbeing
* offer opportunities to socialise
* offer opportunities to increase self-belief, self-worth and self-confidence

**“Half of blind and partially sighted** **people are always or frequently** **limited in the activities that they** **would like to take part in.”** My Voice 2015 reference Slade J and Edwards R (2015) My Voice 2015: The views and experiences of blind and partially sighted people in the UK. RNIB.

**IS-vidDELIVERY**

The IS-vidfeasibility project began in April 2024 and was designed to deliver twenty on-ice sessions. IS-vid delivered a total of twenty-three on-ice sessions to the VI community of South Wales.

IS-vid sessions were held at the Vindico Arena located in Cardiff Bay. The project was managed by iChope Events CIC, who applied for and were awarded grant funding from the National Lottery Community Fund Wales.

The IS-vid application was supported by RNIB Cymru, Disability Sports Wales and SENSE. These supporting organisations were also represented on the Project Advisory Group (PAG) who steered the project through its life cycle. The PAG also included members of the Vindico Arena, freelance ice coaches, an independent researcher and lived experiencers.IS-vid engaged freelance ice coaches appointed to the project via iChope Events CIC. Coaches were the only paid staff on the IS-vid project. Coaches were registered with the governing body for ice-skating disciplines in the UK, British Ice Skating (BIS). Registration of BIS includes enhanced DBS checks, public liability insurance, First Aid at Work certification and Safeguarding certification.

**“The coaches and volunteers go above and beyond.”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidVOLUNTEERS**

IS-vid relied heavily on on-ice and off-ice volunteers. Volunteers were recruited through social media, word of mouth, freelance coaches and the Vindico Arena. A total of ten volunteers were recruited at various stages of the project lifecycle. Due to the nature of volunteering, not all volunteers attended every session.

On-ice volunteers undertook specific duties such as collecting and returning skates, lacing skates correctly for skaters and guiding skaters onto and off the ice-pad whilst providing specific skating advice and encouraging skaters during the sessions.

Off-ice volunteers were predominantly tasked with ensuring assistance dogs were well cared for during their time at the sessions. Off-ice volunteers also assisted with collecting and returning skates.Volunteers were trained in IS-vid specific processes and procedures encompassing safeguarding and reporting harm, as well as in iChope Events CIC specific modules including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Data Protection and Sight Loss. Volunteers were provided with a description of their duties and responsibilities. Volunteers were able to undertake training from external providers, including courses delivered by our supporting organisations, that enhanced their knowledge and furthered their ability to converse effectively with and widen inclusion for the IS-vid community of skaters.

**“I noticed that the coaches and the volunteers were just very knowledgeable and well prepared for people and children specifically with visual impairment.”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidCOACHES**

Coaches were recruited through adverts placed at the Vindico Arena, via word of mouth, via social media and through the Vindico Arena Head Coach directly.Coaches were trained in IS-vid specific processes and procedures encompassing safeguarding and reporting harm, as well as in iChope Events CIC specific modules including Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Data Protection and Sight Loss. Coaches were provided with a description of their duties and responsibilities which included ensuring the ice pad and skates were of a suitable standard, ensuring the safety of everyone on the ice pad for the duration of sessions and tailoring the sessions to the unique needs of each skater. Coaches enjoyed the unique opportunity to undertake training from Disability Sport Wales and RNIB Cymru that was not only tailored to the IS-vid project but delivered at the Vindico Arena, allowing coaches to practice what they had learned in the environment the project would be delivered.

**“They’ve taken the effort to go and learn you know and not just expect someone to be a certain way .. they are very good at what they do.”** IS-vid Skater when giving feedback on IS-vid coaches.

**IS-vidSKATERS**

Primary Skaters were aged 5 years old and upwards with no upper age limit. It was important that Primary Skaters could stand unaided for a brief period and walk two steps unaided. This reduced the risk of injury due to equipment such as wheelchairs on the ice. Companion Skaters were aged 16+ years with no upper age limit. Skaters were aware of the project through awareness raised by supporting organisations and their networks, word of mouth, social media channels and local broadcast media. All initial enquires were made via email to iChope Events CIC.IS-vid attracted a total of eighteen Primary Skaters whilst Companion Skater attendance fluctuated. The number of skating places were limited due to challenges in coach recruitment and initially low volunteer numbers.Skaters were predominantly female, non-Welsh speakers with ages ranging between six to fifty-nine years. Skaters were resident in the local authority areas of Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Swansea, Caerphilly and Bridgend.We are grateful to the schools for supporting their pupils in experiencing a new activity by allowing the children to attend the IS-vid sessions during the school day.

**“it brought a lot of different kinds of people together which is a great thing and that the coaches were so positive, kind, friendly and aware of different needs which is such an enabling thing for all the different levels within the group – I was very impressed!”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidWHEELCHAIRSKATERS**

IS-vidsession eighteen onward, brought the inclusion of wheelchair skaters to the project.Working closely with SENSE, IS-vid coaches, IS-vid volunteers and existing IS-vid skaters, it was decided that a safe number of six wheelchair skaters and six companion skaters would experience the quieter IS-vid sessions.Comparisons were quickly made between the IS-vid sessions that were directed by a coach, had volunteer support, sensitive noise and lighting levels and support of the staff at the Vindico Arena, and the sessions the wheelchair skaters had experienced previously at temporary rinks, such as seasonal pop-up rinks.Skaters fed back that they benefitted from suitable rink access, high levels of support from rink staff, a much quieter and less busy session and access to coaches and volunteers to help, advise, guide and answer questions.

**“As a blind skater the accessible session has enabled me to attend on my own and be supported by some great coaches and support assistants”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidDATA COLLECTION**

IS-vidundertook three formal feedback data collection sessions. The first data collection session was a brief questionnaire administered via email after the first on-ice session.The second data collection session was a comprehensive confidential questionnaire comprising thirty-seven questions of multiple choice and free text which skaters self-administered online at the mid-point of the project.The third data collection session was in the form of a focus group for skaters facilitated by an independent researcher. Informal feedback was collected at every session via conversations skaters had with coaches and volunteers. This information was acted upon immediately where necessary and fed back to the PAG for discussion and decision-making. Informal feedback from coaches and volunteers was also obtained during and post each IS-vid session.All feedback provided opportunities to improve sessions for skaters.

**“Registered blind and partially sighted people with a degree or higher have the same chance of getting a job as someone with no qualifications.”** RNIB - Employment Facts & Stats 2020 reference RNIB Employment facts and stats 2020 8 March 2021 online at https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/health-social-care-education-professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/reports-and-insight/employment-facts-and-stats-2020/

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Reduction of financial barriers**

IS-vid supported its community, who face economic inequalities due to their impairment and geographic location, by providing free sessions to all IS-vid skaters thus removing a direct financial barrier to participation. The Vindico Arena is located in Cardiff Bay which may involve one bus or one train or a short car journey for Cardiff residents. For residents in the Valley’s and the Greater Cardiff area, transport for non-driving, VI individuals often involves a combination of buses, trains, and taxis which results in high costs. The IS-vid sessions ran weekly over twenty-three weeks which could have cost some participants over £1000 to attend. This would have made participation extremely difficult for skaters. Free sessions were only possible due to the generous funding provided by the National Lottery Community Fund Wales.

Example Costs A return train ticket from Treorchy to Cardiff Central Train Station costs £11.40. A return taxi from Cardiff Central Train Station to the Vindico Arena costs £20. The Vindico Arena general admission with skate hire costs £13.50. The total cost per session is £44.90 making the total across 23 sessions £1032.70.

**“The sessions are free, so this slightly reduces the financial barrier that most blind people face as many of us are unemployed and/or on low incomes. However, we rely on public transport (usually the rail network as buses are inaccessible for many reasons) and train fares continue to rise.”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Reduction of financial barriers**

Skaters were asked how much they thought the IS-vid skating sessions were worth. Out of twelve respondents, five respondents believed that the sessions were worth over £10, four respondents believed the sessions to be worth between £5-£10 and three respondents believed the sessions were worth £1-£5. Skaters were also asked how much they could afford to pay for IS-vid sessions if they were not free. Half of respondents could afford to pay between £1-£5 and the other half of respondents could afford to pay between £6-£10. Therefore, no skater could afford to pay the general admission and skate hire charge (correct at the time of publication) of £13.50. Skaters were asked how much they spend on travel to the IS-vid sessions. The majority of respondents (Cardiff based skaters or those with access to accompanied travel) spent between £5-£10 whilst others (reliant on public transport and resident in the Greater Cardiff area or the Valley’s) spent £11 or more per week to attend sessions.

**“Taxis are unable to drop people off directly outside the venue as there are barriers in the way.”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Reduction of physical barriers**

Whilst buildings are designed for physical inclusivity, the needs of the VI community are often overlooked. To ensure the IS-vid skaters could navigate with a greater degree of independence, we worked with our lived experience members and the Vindico Arena to make temporary and permanent changes to the environment. Due to the scope of this project, we were unable to make adjustments to areas outside of the venue. Public transport is not very user-friendly to persons who experience VI or who are blind (RNIB 202217). We found skaters would benefit from a sighted guide who could accompany them from Cardiff Central Train Station to the Vindico Arena and back to the station.

**“I am disappointed that no arrangements were put in place to meet people at [the] train station to assist them to the event.”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Reduction of physical barriers**

Skaters found difficulties in travelling from the taxi rank, bus stop and car park to the Vindico Arena. This was due to the multiple silver-coloured bollards that are ‘invisible’ to the VI community as they blend in with the colour of the pavement, as do curbs. Not every person who experiences VI uses a cane or has an assistance dog. Nor do they have unlimited access to a companion. It would be a recommendation to Cardiff Council that the bollards are partially painted or taped with a contrasting colour.

The introduction of NaviLens18, as used on the Metropolitan Transport Authority (New York Metro), could improve independent navigation for VI visitors to the area. NaviLens uses large codes, similar to QR codes, that are linked to specific apps that provide contextual information about the surroundings, and guide using augmented reality.

**“The whole project was designed for blind people and companion skaters, but the reality is that a lot of blind people just haven’t got someone who can accompany them everywhere.”**  IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Reduction of physical barriers**

Skaters found the signage on both the Vindico Arena and Cardiff International Pool and Gym unhelpful. One skater was led into the Cardiff International Pool and Gym by a taxi driver even though they had been informed that the destination was the Vindico Arena.

The signage on the doors of the Vindico Arena is white on a transparent background which is invisible to partially sighted visitors. The building signage is not at eye level therefore invisible to visitors who experience VI. Contrasting colour signage at eye level and/or the use of NaviLens could improve navigation for visitors who experience VI.

Directions to the Arena were detailed on the iChope Events CIC IS-vid skaters webpage and skaters were also informed via email. Where possible, a member of the IS-vid delivery team assisted skaters into and out of the Arena. This posed its own challenge due to the Arena’s energy efficiency and noise reducing design which limits internet and mobile phone signal for those already inside. We are grateful to the Vindico Arena staff who helped guide skaters into and out of the venue.

**“One day I didn’t have my car so I made the over an hour journey with children on three different public transport and I have full vision”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Reduction of physical barriers**

The Vindico Arena reception team were welcoming and assisted skaters in navigating their way to the cafe area and ice pad. Where this was not possible, a member of the IS-vid delivery team provided guidance. Effective guidance was possible due to the in-person training provided by RNIB Cymru, the RNIB Cymru How to Guide People with Sight Loss19 publication, and from listening to the needs and preferences of the skaters themselves.

Contrasting black and white tape was used to mark edges and ‘invisible’ surfaces such as benches, walls, floors and doors. This contrasting tape was used as a direct contrast to the existing-coloured surface and also provided a tactile difference for skaters to use to help themselves navigate around the Arena more independently.

Permanent toilet signage was implemented using black background with white icons and braille placed around 1400mm from ground level.

Lights were dimmed, music played at a lower volume and the big screens turned off for IS-vid sessions on the advice of the skaters.

**“I didn’t need the white taping showing the route but was good to see that some thought had been put into the experience.”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Reduction of physical barriers**

Skaters were guided to the ice pad where volunteers and coaches would help skaters lace skates correctly. This reduced the burden of skaters navigating their way from skate hire, through the cafe area to the ice pad whilst wearing skates. Where possible, skates with fluorescent yellow laces were used to contrast the blue of the skate for skaters with some level of vision.

For skaters who were building confidence on the ice but wanted to remain independent, Tyke Skate R20 aids (supplied by Tukimet Oy) were used. The skate aids were fully adjustable in height with alternative elbow supports for those who preferred being more fully supported. We found that the Tyke Skate R aids were vital in affording independence to skaters who had extremely limited vision and were reliant on ‘feeling’ their way around the ice pad. The Tyke Skate R aids were also beneficial to all skaters for all or part of sessions.

**“they look after my guide dog…, that’s made a massive difference.”**  IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Reduction of on-ice and off-ice barriers**

Feedback from IS-vid skaters raised the importance of individual level support at sessions. Public sessions at most rinks do not offer support in navigating the venue for persons who experience impairment. Public sessions are often busy and noisy with no support for collecting or lacing skates. There is often no support for on-ice activities such as navigating the ice pad or learning how to perform basic skating techniques. *IS-vid* afforded skaters to learn if they wanted to but also offered the freedom to explore alone. This mixture of coaching, support and exploration allowed skaters the freedom to tailor the session to their needs for that specific day. It allowed skaters to feel safe that the coaches and volunteers were alert in ensuring there were no collisions. *IS-vid* also provided an opportunity for skaters to leave their guide dog safely supervised for the duration of the session.

**“I was terrified at first but now I look forward to them [the IS-vid sessions] each week. I enjoy meeting up with people and the atmosphere is very friendly. It’s really one of the only times I socialise.”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Social interaction**

IS-vidwas designed to provide an on-ice experience exclusively for individuals who experience VI. The skaters quickly bonded and formed their own natural groups on the ice. There were new friendships between children and friendships developed between adult skaters, coaches and volunteers. Social interaction could have been furthered by opening the cafe prior to and post sessions. Further sessions could introduce games and other activities for the whole group and smaller groups to encourage greater interaction. This would be a recommendation going forward. A WhatsApp skater group was established by and administered by skaters. Feedback provided by skaters demonstrated that the majority would like to stay in touch with each other outside of the IS-vid sessions.

**“Done great things for my core. Confidence in my own body has increased.”**  *IS-vid* Skater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Emotional & physical health and wellbeing**

Skaters indicated that the IS-vid sessions have improved their mood in general not just during the sessions. Skaters have a range of emotional challenges including depression and neurodivergence which alleviated somewhat during the IS-vid sessions. Skaters felt happy and excited to attend the sessions. This was evident from the encouragement, support and friendly nature of the skaters towards each other at sessions. Developing resilience in children and adult skaters has also been facilitated by the IS-vid sessions. Skaters’ physical health has improved due to the IS-vid sessions with the majority of respondents indicating this outcome. No skaters answered negatively. Skaters reported that their fitness, balance, coordination and stamina had increased as a result of theIS-vid sessions.

**“I feel it's had a positive impact by giving me more confidence and believing in myself.”** IS-vidSkater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Promote self-belief, self-worth & self-confidence**

IS-vid made good progress with improving the self-belief, self-worth and self-confidence of skaters. Feedback collected after the very first session demonstrated an improvement in self-confidence. Skaters are proud of their own achievements and the achievements of their fellow skaters. IS-vid has helped skaters of all ages agree that new things can be attempted, new skills can be acquired, and barriers can be broken. Children who experience VI have had the opportunity to meet other children who experience the same issues and face the same challenges as them. The children have also met and developed friendships with older role models, adult skaters, who also experience VI.

**“Doing some activities together on the ice would help us get to know each other/ who was there. Difficult to remember who was staff, who was VI and who was a carer.”**

IS-vid Skater feedback collected after the first IS-vid session

**IS-vid CHALLENGES**

**Recruitment**

Due to the lack of coaches recruited, skater numbers per session were limited. At the early stages of the project the low coach and volunteer numbers were significantly impacting on the quality of the sessions. Skaters needed one-to-one support which could not be provided for the duration of the session. As skater confidence grew, the need for one-to-one support lessened. However, volunteer numbers grew throughout the project which had a positive impact on skater support.

**Session structure**

Due to the lack of coaches recruited, and the timing of volunteer recruitment, plus the different learning preferences of skaters, sessions were semi-structured. This afforded skaters to do as little or as much as they wanted to at each session. As skaters gained in confidence and skills, the mixed abilities and session structure were sometimes frustrating for some skaters who were rapidly progressing. With an increased number of coaches and volunteers this is something that could be improved for future sessions.

**“Due to vision I can’t just copy what others are doing so need it to be described to me. No one has ever done this before.”** IS-vid Skater - feedback on the coaches’ communication with skaters at the first IS-vid session

**IS-vidDRIVERS**

**Skaters**

The enthusiasm, nervousness, willingness, trust and dedication of the skaters helped inform each session and made it easier for the coaches and volunteers to guide and assist skaters. Feedback from skaters has been invaluable to this project and will be invaluable to inform other VI specific on-ice sessions going forward.

**Learning**

The willingness of coaches and volunteers to learn about sight loss, safeguarding, and inclusion and inclusive communication significantly aided session delivery and had a positive impact on the skater experience.

**Coaches and volunteers**

The enthusiasm and support from coaches and volunteers resulted in them ‘going above and beyond’ at each session to ensure sessions were safe and skaters were supported. Coaches and volunteers delivered a unique experience for each skater and catering to their needs both on and off-ice.

**Vindico arena staff**

The support given by the Vindico Arena was outstanding. The IS-vid project could not have progressed without the unwavering support from all at the Vindico Arena.

**“Getting to the venue remains a significant barrier. The walk from Cogan Station requires crossing a very busy road and there is no proper crossing to assist.”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Existing barriers - transport**

Prior to the IS-vid project the PAG discussed the likelihood of skaters wanting to attend alone, without a companion. It was agreed amongst the PAG that this was unlikely. However, during the delivery of the IS-vid project, we quickly became aware of the fact that skaters wanted their independence from a companion whilst others did not have a companion who could accompany them to sessions.Skaters informed us how inaccessible public transport was and how costly it was for them to travel to and from sessions. In an attempt to alleviate the difficulties surrounding inaccessible transport, iChope Events CIC applied to a Community Fund established by a national taxi service requesting support in the form of a minibus and driver for return journeys from Cardiff Central Station to the rink for the remaining IS-vid sessions. Unfortunately, the request was not addressed during the life cycle of the IS-vid project.Future projects/events/sessions where VI visitors are welcome would benefit from having a dedicated taxi or minibus service with sighted guide. This would reduce barriers, improve accessibility and further social interaction opportunities for this community.

**“It’s a whole afternoon off school every week.”** Parent of IS-vid Skater

**IS-vidOUTCOMES**

**Existing barriers - time**

The IS-vid project was held 1:30-2:30pm every Thursday. This prevented potential skaters from attending. Enquiries to iChope Events CIC reiterate the need for sessions at a time when the Primary and Secondary skaters can attend, outside school and work hours. Potential skaters could not attend due to their own work or school commitments, or that of their companion. Consideration was given to the timing of the sessions to accommodate travel to and from sessions. Sessions were held outside of the local rush hours. Due to the limited availability of the ice pad and existing established skating commitments of the Vindico Arena, there is limited ice availability.

**Existing barriers - coach recruitment**

There is a small pool of freelance coaches operating at the Vindico Arena. IS-vid had poor response from potential coaches. One indicator was that the training requirement was burdensome. Yet the training has been proved to have made a positive impact on the skater experience. We would encourage BIS to incorporate a specific theoretical VI training module (as well as disability awareness in general) followed by a live session with skaters who experience VI, into their existing training framework. Some of the IS-vidskaters are happy to inform and work with BIS to develop training for coaches

**“As a family I find it hard to find activities I can do with my children and this has allowed me to spend that quality time doing something shared.”** IS-vid Skater

**IS-vid LEGACY**

**Ddall Cymru Sports**

Empowered by the response to IS-vid and the feedback from skaters, IS-vidPAG member, Cathy Williams, alongside IS-vid volunteers, have established Ddall Cymru Sports. Ddall Cymru Sports is an amateur sports club that will provide ice-skating sessions for VI participants. Ddall Cymru Sports are currently working closely with British Ice Skating to build on the IS-vid sessions and deliver safe ice experiences for more members of the VI community. Ddall Cymru Sports hopes to grow to include more sporting disciplines and activities catering exclusively for VI participants.

Email: ddallcymrusports@gmail.com

Facebook: @DdallcymruSports

**“it’s been a learning experience for everyone.”**  IS-vid Skater

**References**

1. Welsh Government Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (full Index update with ranks): 2019 27 November 2019 https://www.gov.wales/welsh-index-multiple-deprivation-full-index-update-ranks-2019

2. Welsh Government National Survey for Wales headline results: April 2022 to March 2023 11 July 2023 https://www.gov.wales/national-survey-wales-headline-results-april-2022-march-2023-html

3. Welsh Government A review of evidence on socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome (summary) 13 October 2021 https://www.gov.wales/review-evidence-socio-economic-disadvantage-and-inequalities-outcome-summary-html

4. Cardiff University Covid-19 in Wales: the mental health and wellbeing impact Wales Fiscal Analysis (Briefing Paper) https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/\_\_data/assets/pdf\_file/0010/2533762/COVID-19-Mental-health-FINAL-08-07-2021.pdf

5. Cushley l., Galway N. and Peto T. (2022) The unseen barriers of the built environment: navigation for people with visual impairment Town Planning Review 94:1 https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.2022.4

6. ResearchLive Inclusive journeys: RNIB research on making transport more accessible 21 August 2023

7. RNIB Sight Loss Data Tool Version 5 online https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/health-social-care-education-professionals/knowledge-and-research-hub/sight-loss-data-tool/

8. Maher CA, Toohey M, and Ferguson M. Physical activity predicts quality of life and happiness in children and adolescents with cerebral palsy. Disabil Rehabil. 2016;38(9):865–869. doi: 10.3109/09638288.2015.1066450.

9. Dursun OB, Erhan SE, Ibiş EÖ, et al. The effect of ice skating on psychological well-being and sleep quality of children with visual or hearing impairment. Disabil Rehabil. 2015;37(9):783–789. doi: 10.3109/09638288.2014.942002.

10. Swedish National Institute of Public Health. Physical activity in the prevention and treatment of disease. Stockholm (Sweden): Swedish National Institute of Public Health; 2010.

11. British Blind Sport (2014) Overcoming Barriers to Participation online: https://britishblindsport.org.uk/files/132133/overcoming-barriers-to-participation.pdf

12. Hillan, O., Smith, L., Bishop, S. & Allen, P.M. (2023) Barriers to and Facilitators of Physical Activity: A Qualitative Study from the Perspective of Individuals Living with Sight Loss Cambridgeshire Vision (Basel) 2;7(4):70 doi: 3390/vision704007013.

13. Goldsmith, S. Architectural Association (Great Britain) School of Architecture Designing for the Disabled: A Manual of Technical Information Royal Institute of British Architects, Technical Information Service, London (1963)

14. Google Maps

15. Thorslund, E., & Rosberg, S. (2024). The meaning of adapted ice-skating for children and youths with disabilities. Disability and Rehabilitation, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2024.2317998

16. Powrie B, Kolehmainen N, Turpin M, et al. The meaning of leisure for children and young people with physical disabilities: a systematic evidence synthesis. Dev Med Child Neurol. 2015;57(11):993–1010. doi: 10.1111/dmcn.12788.

17. RNIBVoice of the Customer Report: Transport & Travel (2022)

18. NaviLens (2025) online https://www.navilens.com/en/#main-section

19. RNIB 2024 online https://www.rnib.org.uk/living-with-sight-loss/supporting-others/guiding-a-blind-or-partially-sighted-person/

20. TUKIMET OY 2024 online https://www.tukimet.fi/en/products/tykeskater/

**Links**

Chope Events CIC: https://www.ichopeevents.co.uk/

RNIB Cymru: https://www.rnib.org.uk/nations/walescymru/

Disability Sport Wales: https://www.disabilitysportwales.com/en-gb

SENSE: https://www.sense.org.uk/

Vindico Arena: https://vindicoarena.com/

Ddall Cymru Sports is available on Facebook @DdallcymruSports or via email: ddallcymrusports@gmail.com

Inclusive Skating: https://inclusiveskating.org/

British Blind Sport: https://britishblindsport.org.uk/

**Training**

NIB: https://www.rnib.org.uk/events-and-courses/

Disability Sports Wales: https://www.disabilitysportwales.com/en-gb/education-and-training/uk-disability-inclusion-training/uk-dit-coaches-and-volunteers

**Thank You**

We could not have delivered this project without significant support. We want to thank everyone who supported the IS-vid sessions directly and indirectly. Most importantly we would like to thank the IS-vid skaters for participating in this project.

Thank you to the players of the National Lottery and the National Lottery Community Fund Wales, we could not have delivered IS-vid without your support.

A special thank you goes to:

Luke Anthony, Cathy Williams, Spencer, Lucy Strange, Cailin Evans, Sarah MacGibbon, John Donovan, Todd Kelmen, Gavin Thomas, Ansley Workman, Leif Thobroe, Lauren Heath, Claire Nollett, Bethany Merriman, Anum Munawar, Hywel Davies, Joanna Coates-McGrath, Rachel Newport, Ben Davies-Thompson, Bronwen Lewis, Maddie Wing, Emily Garside, Chris Tuthill, Bethan Ejiofor, Kath O’Brien, Emily Eveleigh, Emily Davis, Glyn Warren, Dafydd Weeks.

Thank you to all at:

the Vindico Arena - Lewis and Bec you are superstars! RNIB Cymru, Disability Sports Wales, SENSE, Tukimet Oy, RNIB Connect Radio, Wales Council of the Blind, Hoot Studios, GTFM, Braille Signs UK, Print Crowd.

Presented by iChope Events CIC

Visit www.iChopeEvents.co.uk

**End of document**