



Higher level of motivation



– Integration is the most important thing. Children forget very quickly that they're disabled. They become „super-abled” – says Magdalena Majewska*, a sitting volleyball coach and participant in the “Sit2Play” project.

Can volleyball be a foundation for young people's health?

Of course it can. This is a sport that most of us are introduced to at school, during PE lessons. We learn the basics that can be developed at any age, even when our physical, motor skills are impaired.



We are talking about a specific form of volleyball – sitting volleyball. This is one of the sports that can be trained as part of the classes run by the Social Fair Play Foundation. Who are the participants?

They are both children and adults, with and without disabilities. But I must point out that this sport cannot be played with every type of physical disability. People with lower limb amputations or with upper limb deformities can participate – because these are, one could say, types of disability predisposed to train sitting volleyball. But there are also limitations – any bilateral limb paralysis, unfortunately, makes it impossible to play this sport.

Coaches at the Social Fair Play Foundation are also people with disabilities. What impact does this have on your contact with the participants?

The best answer is an observation I made when I was teaching at the swimming pool. Namely: everyone notices that I move in a different way. When I'm in my swimming costume, they see that my leg doesn't resemble theirs, and yet I'm able to swim any style and do turns. I think that really fuels people. Someone who sees that their coach is able to train at a high level, despite problems with their health and mobility, is very motivated. Especially the kids. Adults too, although they don't show it as much.

I asked at the beginning about volleyball as the foundation of health. Not coincidentally. The word fundamental in the English language includes the word fun. Now add ball from the word volleyball and you get FUNBALL: which is the acronym for “Building solid and healthy FUNdamentals for volleyBALL in early age (6-9) group”, a project your host organisation from Slovenia, Odbojgarsko Društvo Šempeter, implemented under the Erasmus+ Sport programme. Fun, health, sport – was it this approach to volleyball that convinced you to choose this organisation?

I wasn't directly involved in the process of selecting the hosting organisation, but I think it was one hundred per cent right. The important thing is that the partner aligns with the goals of the project, with what we want to achieve.

Magdalena Majewska – instructor, coach and representative of the Polish national team in women's sitting volleyball, participant in the “Sit2Play!” project implemented by the Social Fair Play Foundation under Key Action 1 (Mobility of Sport Staff) of the Erasmus+ programme in the field of Sport. Owner of Aquama, a company that supports socially excluded people and people with disabilities through sports and physical activity (she conducts, among other things, classes at the swimming pool). Coordinator of another highly rated sports mobility project: "Orienteering for Special Needs!"

PHOT. SZYMON LASZEWSKI

However, I don't think that in our case the selection process was complicated, because sitting volleyball is generally a very low-profile sport, both in our country and in the world. In Poland, many people still think that we use wheelchairs. Few people are aware that it's not the case, that we play on the court and move with the help of our hands. In the community of people playing sitting volleyball in Europe, it's hard not to know each other. It's an intimate group - we see each other at European or World Championships, at various friendly matches. Also, the choice is limited when it comes to organisations that are involved in volleyball for people with disabilities and meet all the requirements, especially those concerning travelling, adapting to our needs and limitations.

pass on a lot of interesting information to our partners, general human knowledge so to speak.

How did the implementation of the "Sit2Play!" project go? Which experiences have you found most valuable?

During our time in Slovenia, we observed training sessions on a daily basis, and we also watched several matches of kids and youngsters, with and without disabilities. We talked to the Slovenian coaches about what we saw at these trainings, consulted our observations. When we had any doubts, we asked questions. There were lots of presentations, too. We learned, for example, the importance of including the family – mainly the parents – in sports training.



Let's look at the project from another side. You go abroad, you gain knowledge, experience... But what does the hosting organisation get out of it? How do we convince our dream host to dedicate their time to us, to share their knowledge? What can we give in return?

No matter what organisation we approach, sharing the experience would be of mutual interest – especially when it comes to sitting volleyball, which is so unpopular. We all want the sport to grow in popularity. Our experience is, of course, a little different to Slovenia's – as coaches or instructors we've been involved in the sport for a much shorter period of time but even so, during the trip we could

Now I know how valuable this is. Parental participation in pool activities can be difficult to organise, but it's not a problem in volleyball, and the benefits shown by the hosting organisation are immeasurable.

Do you already have plans for how to do this back home?

The result and continuation of the "Sit2Play!" project at the Social Fair Play Foundation will be the implementation of a programme of activities based on the experiences and knowledge we have gained from the mobility. I think that without this trip I wouldn't have 80-90% of the knowledge that



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I have now and that I can use in training with kids with and without disabilities. I know how to spread the workload, what things to pay attention to, and I know – as I've already mentioned – how important the role of the parent is. I've gained key tips on how to run the whole training process.

When you say training, you mean comprehensive activities, contact with parents, a combination of activities for people without and with disabilities: an integrative dimension, not just a sporting one.

It's difficult to talk about the sporting dimension at all, especially for people who have suffered severe injuries, such as amputees. For them, integration is the most important thing. Through training, they feel included with their peers and don't feel that there is anything wrong with them. Children forget very quickly that they're disabled. They become "super-abled". From time to time, we even organise exhibition matches in which whole families take part. It's a fantastic thing.

Interviewer: Łukasz Smogorowski

Erasmus+ Sport Coordinator,
Polish National Agency of the Erasmus+ programme



FOT. SZYMON ŁASZEWSKI (3)



Magdalena Majewska with her teammate during training. People with lower limb amputations or with upper limb deformities can participate. The only limitations are any bilateral limb paralysis



The "Sit2Play!" project (1st Call 2023) is implemented by the Social Fair Play Foundation under the Erasmus+ programme, Key Action 1, Mobility of Staff in the Field of Sport (Mobility of Sport Staff). 10 coaches participated in the job shadowing mobility. Host organisation country: Slovenia. Duration of mobility: 8 days. Project duration: 6 months. Project funding: € 16 040.



Europe for Active People 1/2024

Host organisation website: [Oksempeter.si](https://oksempeter.si)



Do you want to implement a similar project? Polish clubs and organizations operating in the field of sports and physical activity can apply for funding under Action 1. All you need to do is submit an application to FRSE - the National Agency of the Erasmus+ programme. Next deadline: October 1st, 2024, <https://bit.ly/4adt9pps> // <https://bit.ly/4adt9p>