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Community Sport Initiative



## Wheelchair Curling at the Royal Caledonian Curling Club

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<b>Location</b>	Perth, Scotland
<b>Programme</b>	Active Futures
<b>Contact name</b>	Gordon Kennedy, Development Manager
<b>Address</b>	The Royal Caledonian Curling Club Cairnie House Ingliston Showground Newbridge, Midlothian EH28 8NB
<b>E-mail</b>	Gordon@royalcaledoniancurlingclub.org
<b>Website</b>	www.royalcaledoniancurlingclub.org
<b>Date of research</b>	October 2006

### Project description

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The Royal Caledonian Curling Club (RCCC) was established in 1838 and has affiliates all over the world. Though many countries claim to be the home of curling, Scotland can boast a stone with a handle attached to it, dated as 1315 AD. The oldest known curling stone.

In 1999, Kate Caithness, Vice President of the World Curling Federation went to Switzerland and saw for the first time, wheelchair curling. She established a wheelchair based club in Kinross. From here it developed to the point where the first World Championships were held in 2002, and it became a Paralympic sport in 2006

This Active Futures project aims to develop wheelchair curling, and indeed curling for other disabled groups.

### Project aims and objectives

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The aim of the project is to expand and sell the sport to younger people and to develop athletes of the future, and specifically to: -

- Introduce the sport to 17-24 year olds
- Get more people involved as a whole
- Create a competition structure
- Increase coach numbers and improve coaching standards
- Create a long term player development pathway



## Project delivery

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A full time project development officer has been appointed, formerly Women's World Champion. The RCCC has a series of Area Development Officers across Scotland and these are connected to the project.

All coaches work on a volunteer basis, and they are being specifically trained to understand the needs of disabled players. For example, coaches experience playing from a wheelchair and have to navigate themselves throughout facilities to understand the difficulties and how long movement takes.

Groups come into the centre for some coaching and play. The British Wheelchair Association runs talent ID sessions, and talented athletes go into a development squad for training days.

The Kinross group formed the epicentre and other groups grew out from there. Now they are talking to deaf groups and running sessions for people with learning disabilities and partially sighted people.

All coaches are volunteers. They are being specially trained to understand the needs of disabled groups, including understanding and analysing the different deliver methods (ways of launching the curling stone). Some people use a delivery cue, though not everybody uses it in the same way.

## Project performance and impacts

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Groups do two-hour sessions which involve getting their wheelchair into position and then launching their curling stone. This is a good, sustained workout.

Socialisation is a big feature, and the groups with most success in terms of membership are those that develop a strong social side, which is a big benefit for groups which could easily become isolated.

Because wheelchair curling is such a new sport, it offers a quick way to elite level for anyone with an aptitude and dedication.

## Issues or barriers to progress

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Transport has been and remains an issue. It is the responsibility of users to get themselves to the centre, and many people do travel very substantial distances to attend the sessions.

Another barrier is that some centres (there are 24 across Scotland) are not conducive to giving full wheelchair access. Advice is given to centres on how to make themselves more accessible, and sometimes wheelchair users go and do an access survey. They also try to help identify sources of funding for adaptations and recommend solutions. Sometimes it can be as simple as a centre providing a map of the layout and access points.



A larger grant would have made a difference. One of the biggest issues is transport for wheelchair users. One of the best curlers that they have ever seen lives in Ullapool and it is proving impossible to get him in to the centre. A grant for transportation costs would help to bring more people in.

## Good Practice

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People who are new to working with people with disabilities can become uncomfortable or tongue-tied, not knowing what terms to use and what not to use. To overcome this they have established a convention which has been universally adopted. Wheelchair users are known only as 'wheelies', others are known as 'standies' and coaches are referred to as 'walkie-talkies'.

Having coaches experience the game from the wheelies point of view is also an innovative approach to understanding the needs and limitations of players.

## Future

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The project is working hard to take away the stigma surrounding the game that it is for 'old people'. Where once 250 kids played, now there are something like 6000 coming through. Wheelchair curling has been featured on Blue Peter and Sunday Grandstand. This work is helping to broaden interest.

In 2007 Perth hosts the Paralympics qualifying event. This will be the year of Highland Culture, and they are working on the theme of bringing curling home in its new form.

The social bonds created help to maintain the groups. With the development of competitions across the East and West of Scotland, this will again keep groups together. Talented athletes will become part of a long-term athlete development programme.

And from a capacity building perspective, the coaches trained through the project will get new qualifications and continue to run disabled groups.