An Historical Analysis of Disability Sport Policy in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Key words:

Disability, sport, policy, New Zealand, ableism

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Abstract

The role of central government in disability sport in Aotearoa New Zealand has never been reviewed in depth. In this paper, drawing on archival data we outline the evolution of disability sport policy, highlighting key initiatives of government sport agencies from 1937 to the contemporary disability sport policy landscape. Evolving with the rise of the social model of disability, these policies are considered a necessary response to an historical invisibility of disabled people in sport. We highlight a landscape that is complicated by significant diffusion of power between government and 'not-for-profit' organisations responsible for the provision of sport for disabled people. Within this contested landscape and with the historical weight of policy, disabled people in NZ continue to report exclusion, marginalisation and lower levels of participation, suggesting a disconnect between policy and its enactment. We introduce the concept of 'enlightened ableism' to illustrate that while progressive ideals are embedded in disability policy, there are still challenges for achieving true inclusive practice. Furthermore, lessons learned from previous policy failures suggest that while the future of disability sport in NZ looks well placed to facilitate increased participation, it is worth questioning the extent to which ableism is structured into the fabric of disability sport[1].

Introduction

In Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ), government agencies exert significant influence over the sport sector, shaping the provision of sport primarily through the investment of public funds both in relation to community and high performance sport (e.g. Lawrence 2008). Obligations in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) mean that disability should be central to government policy including those that relate to sport and active recreation. Since 1937 successive Government agencies have 'rolled out' disability sport policies[2] and numerous initiatives, grouped into four periods, to enhance access and opportunities for disabled people's participation.

In recent years there has been a considerable expansion in the number of non-for-profit organisations in NZ providing sport and active recreation opportunities for disabled people creating a somewhat saturated and fragmented market. Despite this notable increase in services, disabled people are consistently identified as less active than their able-bodied peers, a situation consistently observed internationally (cf. Darcy et al. 2017). As a result, in 2018 Sport New Zealand[3] commissioned an independent review of the disability sport sector (see Cockburn and Atkinson, 2018). This review reinforced that more than a third of disabled adults do not participate in sport at local, regional or high-performance levels, signposting a number of barriers to participation. In response to the review and in an attempt to rectify ongoing disparities in participation rates, Sport NZ released a new *Disability Plan* in late 2019 (Sport New Zealand 2019a). In this plan, Sport NZ reaffirmed their commitment to contributing to a 'non-disabling society', recognising inequalities in the participation of disabled people in sport, and focusing on improving "system wide capability" (Sport New Zealand 2019b). This latest intervention into the disability sport sector reflects an increased level of governance and management into sector

delivery alongside increased mobilisation of resources and funds to address the inequities that are routinely embedded within sports provision for disabled people. However, internationally, evidence suggests that policy change does not directly translate into increased participation or systemic change for disabled people (see Jeanes et al. 2019, Hammond and Jeanes 2018). Given the frequency of such 'strategic' endeavours combined with in-depth knowledge of the current disability sport landscape, this paper examines the nature and historical origins of government involvement in disability sport and active recreation in NZ.

Despite a growth in scholarship internationally related to disability sport, from community (Darcy et al. 2020, e.g. Allan et al, 2018) to high performance (e.g. Quinn et al. 2020), there is a paucity of research that has engaged with disability sport policy contexts (c.f. Hammond and Jeanes 2018). Not surprisingly, with the centrality of sport to the NZ national identity (Ryan & Watson, 2018), research has focused on making sense of the relationship between policy and practice in able-bodied sport. For example, work has centred on providing critical analysis of Government reviews of sport (e.g. Chalip 2006), elite sport performance targets (e.g. Piggin et al. 2009), sport and identity (e.g. Borell 2016) and the legacies of Government sport agencies (e.g. Sam and Ronglan 2016, Sam and Jackson 2004, Sam 2015). Despite some initial investigations into disability (e.g. Carroll et al. 2020), interrogation of the role of sports policy is absent (Thomas & Smith, 2009). With little dedicated research into disability sport policy this vacuum of review and critique provides an opportunity for clarity and consensus.

Aims and Purpose

The aim of this paper is to examine the historical evolution of disability sport policy in NZ understanding its impact on the roles and relationships within the disability sport sector as well as the various political movements that accompanied these shifts. In doing so, our purpose is to 'look

back to look forward', generating a historical and critical assessment to inform future policymaking as well as contributing to scholarship on sport policy practices through the lens of disability. We do so by combining archival and historical material related to various forms of social regulation (i.e., social policy) with a level of analysis informed by the sensitising concepts of disability models and ableism. Combining archival material with disability theory is critical in understanding how disability is understood and framed in policy, as well as enabling critique of the various state government responses to the inequities constituting disability. As such, this approach allows for reflection on the 'progress' made in the transformation of disability sport provision in NZ. In reading policy development with a critical lens, we raise questions about what history might tell us about new ways forward, linking historical insights to the contemporary debates as we seek to understand the underlying dynamics of disability, sport and social policy.

Context

Considering the historical landscape of disability policy in NZ requires an understanding of the context. NZ's small population of 5 million is unevenly distributed across the North & South Islands, with one third of whom residing in the Auckland region. While it is a well reported statistic that 1 in 4 people in NZ identify as disabled (Stats NZ 2013), fewer than 7,000 are believed to actively participate in sport, but no accurate record exists. Such low numbers dispersed widely creates natural constraints for any policy enactment. Furthermore, recent research has outlined how ableism is a significant factor in NZ, inhibiting sport participation for disabled young people (e.g. Carroll et al. 2020).

Ableism is defined by Campbell (2001)as a network of beliefs and practices that privilege the able-bodied 'norm'. Ableism, as Wolbring (2008) argues, is embedded firmly within culture; a set of social structures that value and promote certain abilities. For example, in disability sport,

ableism has shaped, and continues to shape the impact of social policy, with recent evidence suggesting that ableism can inhibit the enactment of inclusive policy in sports clubs and programmes (cf. Jeanes et al. 2019), perpetuating a view of inclusion whereby disabled people can participate insofar as no changes are required to accommodate them. As such, ableism is an incisive conceptual tool to understand the social and cultural production of ability preferences underlying social policy. Ableism allows for a heightened awareness of how disabled people are understood in policy, as well as exploration of the types of responses to diversity proposed by policymaker.

'Enlightened ableism' (cf. Lyons 2013), extends this concept arguing that despite the widespread rhetoric of inclusion and equality in policy, such endeavours mask the continuation of practices that marginalise disabled people. While we are not suggesting that organisations, teachers, coaches and programme managers deliberately exclude disabled people from sport, it is necessary to acknowledge that despite the historical weight of disability policy promising inclusion, ableism acts as a regulator of inclusive policy and its enactment in sport. As such, it is timely to consider whether the foundations upon which previous disability sport policy has developed is pertinent for the future of disability sport.

Methodology

This paper draws from a broader project on equity and access in disability sport. An archival research method[4] was adopted for this study, providing insight into the historical development of social policy and its impact on the provision of disability sport in NZ. The primary data source was grey literature from official government archives from 1935 until 1986 (held by Archives New Zealand). Files from the Ministry and Council of Recreation and Sport, Department of Internal Affairs, the Hillary Commission (1986-2001) and SPARC (2001-2008) were reviewed and

analysed.

For expediency, data collection from the archive was limited to disability sport related files only. Policy statements, legislation, memoranda, government reports, minutes, and correspondence as well as commissioned reviews of government agencies charged with oversight of sport were included within the archival records reviewed. Four pieces of legislation (see Figure 1) provided the foundation for guiding this research, signposting key periods in which successive Labour Governments articulated their concern for disabled New Zealanders and the subsequent enactment, of lack thereof, was reflected in the archival data. Notably, the majority of the policies reviewed focused on physical disability, representative of government policies and initiatives underpinned by an instrumental view of inclusion and a hierarchy of disability. These are explored further in the next section.

The NZ Disability Sport Policy Landscape Through Time

Over the last few years, awareness of the importance of providing opportunities for disabled people to choose to participate in all facets of society including sport has increased. NZ, as a signatory to the CRPD, is obliged to take appropriate measures to encourage and promote disability-specific sport and must be held accountable for our performance in this area. However, few would realise that government enquiry into disability started in the early 1860s.

Census data as far back as 1864 was used to report and track the progress of NZ societal development as well as the status of the Pakehā[5] population. Early census not only sought information relating to "the domestic condition" of the population (e.g. sex, age, marital status), but also the number of "deaf and dumb or blind" (Statistics New Zealand 1866). Latter census expanded the enquiry to sickness, debility, and accident, and by this time disabilities were couched as "infirmities" and were identified by "affliction" – "deaf and dumb", blind, paralysis, "crippled"

and “deformed, lunatics and idiots” (Statistics New Zealand 1874). Definitions and distinctions of impairments were blunt and clinical by today’s standards and contextualised around the notion of a person’s ability to work and create economic value (cf. Oliver 1996). As such, initial government interest in disability reflected the “capitalist social relations of industrial production” (Thomas, 2004, p. 37), placing disabled people in a socially devalued role. This primarily biomedical, deficit framework provides the background for social policy as it related to disabled people (see Figure 1) and had implications for their participation in non-economic aspects of society, such as sport, where their right to participate was not officially recognised in government policy until the 1930s. According to Ryan and Watson (2018), by this time “few could doubt that New Zealand was a land of sporting opportunities to suit most tastes. But the question in some minds was whether everyone was willing and able to pursue these opportunities”. This question provides the basis for our findings and analysis. The following discussion outlines the government initiatives from which the current sport system evolved and the impact on those who were, extrapolating from Ryan and Watson, unable to pursue the opportunities and the successes or otherwise of their outcomes.

[Figure 1: Key Government Legislation, Policies, Strategies and Plans are reflective of how disability was contextualised within general policy and how this shift impacted on disabled sport within NZ.]

A positive start

As with all disability sport initiatives, the recognition of the need for change was championed by a Labour-led Government focused on improving the lives of New Zealanders and credited with establishing the “welfare state”. The Physical Welfare and Recreation Act 1937 heralded the beginning of an eighty-year journey of Government commitment to improving the physical and

mental well-being of New Zealanders through sport. Not to be misled by the title of the Act, the purpose was to "provide for the development of facilities for, and the encouragement of, physical training, exercise, sport and recreation" (Anon. 1937). The Minister of Internal Affairs noted at the time "it must be recognized, not only in New Zealand, but in the world over, notwithstanding the great advancement made in scientific surgery and medicines, the average illness of the people, generally, is gradually on the increase" (Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives 1937b). Although not directly referring to disabled people, the benefit of sport participation was arguably reflective of a general dominance of the medical model, alongside an individualistic perspective, that was at the forefront of parliamentarians' thinking at the time and regularly reiterated since (Lawrence 2008).

Right from the beginning, despite the well-meaning rhetoric of participation, ableist practices and discourses underpinned sport policy and provision, that by inference places disabled people as passive recipients of able-bodied values and preferences (cf. Lyons, 2013). While most Members of Parliament agreed in principle "to the necessity of improving the physical well-being of every man, woman, and child" (Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives 1937a), there was an acknowledgement that some of the population were missing out, including physically disabled young people. Findings from an Auckland Primary Schools Sports Association investigation, presented in Parliament at the time, summarised the benefits of participation as physical, social and moral. The report went further identifying that 15 percent of school children were debarred from participating for a range of reasons, including having a physical impairment. To address those non-participants solutions proposed included showing those "suffering physical disabilities ... how to participate safely in some form of game activity" (Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives 1937a). The language of these policies at the time illustrate the dominance of a deficit view of disability contributing to ableist significations of ability, suggesting

individuals who did not fit the 'norm' (read: able bodied) required improving and 'fixing'. The presumption that physically impaired young people were incapable of participating in school sport as other young people perpetuated issues of segregation and discourses of dependency while at the same time restricting opportunities for inclusion and integration. Subsequently, under the Department of Internal Affairs, a National Council of Physical Welfare and Recreation, and latterly district committees, were established to provide advice and guidance on sports provision. Understandably these committees' efforts were redirected towards the war effort during WWII, but the post-war period saw all initiatives essentially disappear entirely through a lack of leadership and engagement with sporting organisations (Lawrence 2008).

Reflective of the heightened attention to physical impairment during this period, the Crippled Children's Society (now CCS Disability Action) was established. In 1935 the civic minded members of Rotary had identified over 1000 "crippled" children in need of support such as vocational training, and the provision of residential and sanatorium facilities, all provided by private benefactors (CCS Disability Action 2020). By the 1960s, this support had expanded into sport provision (Schorer 2012) and by the mid-1970s was a catalyst for an Advisory Committee for Recreation for the Disabled (ACORD).

The 1960's – Dedicated Support

Although during the earlier period the necessity for disability sport provision was recognised, the resulting 25+ year absence of Government involvement in sport was reflective of the predominantly centre-right governments which favoured for a non-interventionist approach to sport (Sport NZ 2021). Efforts to enhance the provision of sport for disabled New Zealanders, who were being neglected by national sports organisations, created the impetus for community-led, dedicated disability sport organisations and initiatives, which continue today as the main providers

of disability sport. The mid-1960s witnessed the establishment of national and regionally based organisations providing dedicated opportunities for paraplegic and physically disabled New Zealanders. Embodying the "for us, by us" edict, these organisations were established by disabled people to facilitate community sport and to provide a pathway enabling members to represent NZ internationally. Seventeen regional organisations affiliated to Paralympics New Zealand (PNZ) were incorporated, ten of which remain operational today providing a range of sports such as boccia, wheelchair sports and disability opportunities including youth groups. National, impairment-specific organisations catering for vision, hearing or impairment were also established during this period. Since this time, a further 100+ national and regional disability sport organisations have established to cater for the needs of disabled sportspeople.

While this provision has been described by many as a plethora of organisations creating a complex and fragmented system for disability sport (see Cockburn and Atkinson 2018, McKinley Douglas Limited 1998), the establishment of dedicated disability sport organisations was a "bottom-up" community-led response to the lack of government policy and the culture of exclusion and marginalisation of disabled people from 'mainstream' sporting structures. As such, there existed a policy climate characterised by a largely uncoordinated and differential commitment to disability sport in which disability occupied a marginal status and was kept 'at arm's length' from direct government intervention (Thomas & Guett, 2014). This runs counter to a body of evidence in Europe whereby 'mainstreaming' and integration is often the dominant policy approach to disability sport (Thomas & Smith, 2009, e.g. Thomas & Guett, 2014).

By the early 1970s sport was re-established on the government agenda. A new Recreation and Sport 1973 Act created a new Ministry and Council for Recreation and Sport to replace the now redundant National Council. ACORD was also created, replacing ad hoc decisions by the

Ministry with a committee of representatives from within the sector to advise on matters relating to disability sport. This policy was the first to signal a shift in how disability was understood, mirroring the disability rights movement in the 1970s (Finkelstein 1980) and later the birth of the social model of disability (Oliver 1996). However, this initiative placed disability sport as an adjunct to, rather than integrated part of, sport. Members of ACORD were selected for their general knowledge and interest in disability sport, rather than sector representation. This initiative, albeit specifically designed to increase participation by disabled people and provide more representation of those working within the sector (ACORD n.d), did little to initiate change within national sports organisations or local authorities. For example, a policy paper to ACORD members, acknowledged the "lack of access to the majority of public recreation facilities is one of the greatest barriers to social integration of the disabled ... that they [people with disabilities] have a place in society and share the same recreational interests as the 'average' New Zealander" (Lavender 1979)

While ACORD was positioned to advise on "all policy matters relating to recreation for the disabled, and also on Ministry proposals for grants and subsidies to organisations seeking assistance for the disabled under the National Scheme of the Recreation and Sport Programme" (Lavender 1979), there is little evidence of its successful implementation across the sport sector. Serving as the principle point of reference for disability sport policy in NZ between 1979 and 1985, subsequent ACORD projects placed emphasis on professional development seminars and workshops for those working in disability and sport, and the production of a film "The Fun Gap" (ACORD n.d). Support for the professional development of those working and volunteering in sport was identified as means of overcoming the lack of opportunities for disabled people, who were "hampered by the low expectation of their potential by parents and professionals working in the field of disability" (Lavender 1979). As such, early efforts towards professional development recognised that sets of values and attitudes favouring able-bodied norms (i.e., ableism) were held

and acted on by various groups including teachers, coaches and administrators and that these social relationships and attitudes constituting restrictions of activity were open to change.

Running parallel to the establishment of ACORD were two major international initiatives, both of which may have provided significant impetus for disability sport. Firstly, the *4th Commonwealth Paraplegic Games* were held prior to the 1974 Commonwealth Games in NZ (McDonald 2017). These games were not only successful in terms of showcasing performances and raising the profile of disability sport through media coverage they also created a legacy fund for disability known as *Paraloan*. While this fund continues today the focus is directed to health and access related needs rather than sport development. The second initiative was the *1981 United Nations International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP)*. The tenet of the IYDP was a call to action to raise awareness and understanding of disability and improve disabled people's lives, however this was heavily criticised by disabled people for their minimal involvement in its key events. In NZ, the "One kiwi in ten is disabled" campaign (Figure 2) was rolled out, including a 24-hour televised fundraising event to raise money to support the lives of disabled people. Disappointingly, none of the $5.8 million raised by the telethon was ever allocated to ACORD or disability sport (O'Brien 1983). With the legacy of the 1974 Commonwealth Paraplegic Games and the proceeds from the 1981 IYDP telethon both excluding sport as a beneficiary (O'Brien 1983), it was little wonder disability sport organisations felt aggrieved and the momentum created slowly dissipated.

[Figure 2: 1981 International Year of the Disabled Person poster]

A review of the IYDP initiative found that while the regional committees worked to promote participation of disabled New Zealanders in 'normal' sport, and sport deliverers became more aware of the needs of disabled people, areas for improvement were identified. Specifically, more inclusive physical education, accessible sport facilities, and increased funding were required

(Brereton 1982). While the campaign, and even the IYDP, signalled increased visibility and awareness of disability in society, the extent to which such initiatives are able to drive long-term and sustainable societal change in the social, cultural and attitudinal structures of sport is questionable. While the work of ACORD focused on addressing barriers to participation for disabled people signalled a shift from an interventionist focus in policy, nationally the momentum was unsustainable as a key group – NSOs – were still not considering disability sport as part of their mandate.

In 1984, the *Sport on the Move* report under a newly elected Labour government signalled a change in direction, disbanding the Council for Recreation and Sport (and consequently ACORD) and establishing the Hillary Commission (The Sports Development Inquiry Committee 1985) alongside increased funding for the sector. Two key functions of the new Commission were to facilitate equal opportunities for participation by all New Zealanders and encouraging people to make the most effective use of their abilities and aptitudes (Anon. 1987). Fifty years on, the Parliamentary debates and the issues raised were reminiscent of the Physical Welfare and Act 1937, illustrated by the Minister of Sport's, acknowledgement that sport opportunities for the disabled were being denied and the Sport, Fitness and Leisure Bill was "for the disabled who are locked out" (OCHR, 1987). By this time, international disability rights movements had begun to gather momentum in particular in the United Kingdom (The Disabled Persons Act 1981) and the United States (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990). Furthermore, widespread lobbying of Government to encourage disabled peoples' involvement in policies meant to serve them (cf. Dargan 2016) was observable.

In NZ, progress was drawn-out, and it wasn't until the inaugural board of SPARC, which replaced the Hillary Commission in 2001, that a disabled person was appointed to a governance

position. It took another two decades before the second disabled person was appointed to a (now rebranded) Sport NZ board position. Despite the political rhetoric and legislative obligations for inclusion of all New Zealanders being clearly articulated in the 1987 Act, and the establishment of UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities in 1992, no specific initiative from the Commission for engaging disabled people in sport was realised until a decade later.

No Exceptions Policies - 1998 & 2005

In 1998 following a number of reports into disability sport and physical activity (McKinley Douglas Limited 1998, Hillary Commission and Workbridge Inc 1994), the Hillary Commission produced their *No Exceptions Strategy*(Hillary Commission for Recreation and Sport 1998). The strategy's mission was to "improve the quality of life for all people with a disability through participation and achievement in sport*"* (Hillary Commission for Recreation and Sport 1998). This shift in social policy contained competing and not necessarily compatible expectations reflective of a neoliberal, individual health responsibilisation and a socially liberal recognition of the barriers constituting disability. The Hillary Commission defined *No Exceptions* as "(d)eveloping a culture that gives people with a disability access to sport ... in their choice of segregated or integrated environments; developing an environment where all national and community organisations support the involvement of people with a disability; and creating an environment where people with a disability have the same opportunities as all New Zealanders to participate, enjoy and achieve in sport." (Hillary Commission for Recreation and Sport 1998).

Another key shift evident in policy, and in stark contrast to the 1960s was the move towards integration–focusing in particular on the school PE curriculum, partnerships with national and regional sporting organisations, and developing resources for junior sport (Hillary Commission for Recreation and Sport 1998). As noted earlier, while integration and 'mainstreaming' is often a

default policy response (Thomas & Guett, 2014) it is not unproblematic as Kitchin and Crossin (2018) argued "endeavours to achieve integrative capacity do not always lead to the desired state of integration". Despite this shift in policy goals and values evident in the Hillary Commission's approach towards disability sport provision, there appears to be a general reluctance of mainstream organisations to accept new responsibilities for disability sport. A SPARC-funded review of the Commission's *No Exceptions Strategy* noted a lack of capacity and capability of sport deliverers to accommodate disabled people, a lack of disability understanding and awareness, and limited financial resources to expand delivery to disabled people (Cockburn 2003). As such, disability sport organisations continued with a primary responsibility to manage and implement *No Exceptions* regionally aimed to increase opportunities and participation of disabled people.

In response to this review, SPARC updated their *No Exceptions Strategy and Implementation Plan 2005-2009* (SPARC 2005) anchored against fulfilling the Government's vision of the New Zealand Disability Strategy (NZDS) which would see "a society that highly values our [disabled peoples'] lives and continually enhances our full participation" (Ministry of Disablility Issues 2001). This revised *No Exceptions Strategy's* outcome - *"*all people participating in the physical recreation and sport activities of their choice" (SPARC 2005), was indistinguishable from the earlier Hillary Commission strategy with the exception of extending the role of organisational infrastructures across the sport sector enabling them to exert considerable influence in shaping the policy landscape. Six principles aligned to the NZDS embedded the agency of disabled people in the process including the right to access sport opportunities, collaboration and partnerships, leadership and expertise by disabled people were admirable and aspirational.

Unlike the Hillary Commission's strategy which placed responsibility for achievement in the hands of the Commission, the SPARC strategy diffused responsibility across the disability sport sector. The SPARC strategy addressed sector functionality; 1) organisation and sector development; 2) best practice examples, tools and information; and 3) training and education. However, gone was the centrality of the participant, the disabled person, in their place came a sterile and more clinical strategy as SPARC pushed towards uniformity across the sector reflective of the "economic rationalist model pervading the public sector" (Lawrence, 2008, p. 125).

Acknowledging SPARC was only one agency, and in line with the diffusion model of governance at the time (Sport NZ 2021), the strategy signalled that "other agencies will need to take their share of the lead, recognising the significant benefits to be had from getting all New Zealanders participating in the sport and recreation activities of their choice" (SPARC, 2005, p. 4). The efficacy of SPARC to implement the strategy was recognised as less than ideal (Rushton, 2007). Multiple lead agencies - Paralympics New Zealand (PNZ), Halberg Trust[6], Special Olympics New Zealand (SONZ), National Sports Organisations, Regional Sports Trusts, territorial local authorities, NZ Recreation Association (now Recreation Aotearoa), NZ Olympic Committee and Parafeds – were identified by SPARC as integral to the success of the strategy, yet it was unclear how and where funds and resources were mobilised during this period to enable policy enactment. As Piggin *et al* (2009, p. 464) recognised, "in a policy setting, the construction of truth not only affects identities of those written into (and out of) policy but will determine the distribution of resource such as status, funding, and access to power", as evidenced by the omission of any disability sport references in the 2008 SPARC annual report. The opportunity to reset and rebuild the sport sector to effectively include disabled people was an overreach, lost to an excess of priority actions which required significant buy-in from a vast array of partners, for many of whom disability sport was not a priority. Perhaps best described as a 'scattergun' approach this

policy continued to position disability sport as an adjunct to mainstream sport, paying lip-service to ensuring all New Zealanders had the opportunity to participate in sport while SPARC collaborated with other government agencies to improve health, educational outcomes and improvement in the NZ lifestyle (Sport NZ 2021). Here a clear example of enlightened ableism is evident, where policy documents guiding sports provision are replete with discourses of equity and inclusion, yet the significant diffusion of responsibility across the sector diluted the power of the rights focused stance of this legislation (cf. Lyons, 2013).

A plethora of partners many of whom still appear to operate from an ableist or assimilation perspective (cf. Kitchen 2018); the lack of systematic linkages between outcomes for disabled people, investments and programmes; and no explicit relationships between the *No Exceptions* strategy and SPARC's response to their obligation under the NZDS (Gourley and Dwyer 2005, Rushton 2007) failed to achieve the traction needed to create systemic change and improve disability sport opportunities in NZ. Surprisingly, in spite of these shortcomings of the strategy, *No Exceptions* remained a funded initiative of SPARC and latterly Sport NZ until 2020 albeit through a simplified financial investment model partnering with only three national organisations – PNZ, Halberg and SONZ. These organisations were identified as delivering opportunities at different ends of the sports pathway and the gap between, while seen as the purview of NSOs, was acknowledged as unfilled (O'Neill 2005). Regional disability sport organisations, despite being repeatedly identified as key partners, were precluded from direct financial support until the mid-2000s when autonomous management of the *No Exceptions* fund was delegated to Halberg. In the absence of any Government strategy or plan Halberg directed funds towards organisations and programmes focused on their target audience – physically disabled young people. While issues were raised regarding the marginalisation of disabled adults, and those with learning or sensory impairments, as well as a lack of coordination, funding and direction, no obvious sustainable

change from the multitude of strategies and various organisations, disability sport organisations continued to respond to community need Sport NZ's focus at this time also changed from a diffusion model to participant-centric approach, again recognising they were just "one of several key players in the sport … system around the participant" (Sport NZ 2021, p8) yet a significant financial player.

2018 Disability Sport Review and 2019 Strategy – Deja vu

As noted earlier, renewed focus and political lobbying by the disability sport sector led to another review (see Cockburn and Atkinson 2018) which again reiterated low participation rates of disabled people (Sport New Zealand 2018) and resulted in disabled people being identified as one of two priority groups in the new Sport NZ strategic direction *Every Body Active* (Sport New Zealand 2019b). Segregated plans, including a 'Disability Plan' underpin this overarching strategy with the intention of creating "a system that is equitable and where disabled people can be as active as non-disabled people (ibid, p.1). The similarity of the plan's objectives and the rhetoric used by Sport NZ to herald this plan mirrored the exact language used in the 1998 Hillary Commission's *No Exceptions Plan* – 30 years earlier.

While the disability sport sector was initially enthusiastic with the recognition of disability sport as a priority area by Sport NZ the lack of response from mainstream sports organisations was indicative of broader perceived structural obstacles and prioritisation of other government imperatives embedded within the sport development sector (cf. Lyons, 2013). Despite the commitment in policy, the disparity in funding for disability sport vis-a-vis the articulated concern for low participation rates of disabled New Zealanders remained a point of contention. Unlike the *Women and Girls* strategy where one compliance measure is a quota of women in governance roles within sport, Sport NZ has chosen not to enforce minimum obligations on sports organisations

receiving Sport NZ investment. Currently there is no obligation for sport to challenge the ableist culture which dominates sport whether in the playing field, coach education or around the board table, indicative of where disability in general is positioned within NZ society.

In recent years Sport NZ's total investment in sport has been approximately $25m per annum (Sport New Zealand 2020). Of this, only $1.5m has been invested directly into disability sport, primarily to Halberg and SONZ. Committed to redress sector resourcing and acknowledging a wider sector interest in disability sport provision, Sport NZ has commenced the rollout of a 3-year $7 million investment into disability sport. Focussing on regional and national disability sports organisations with the aim to assist in improving capacity and capability at the community level, the expectation is this will result in increased participation by disabled New Zealanders. Only time will tell whether this investment achieves the outcomes where the preceding strategies have failed.

Looking back to look forward - lessons learned

As is evident from the historical account presented, it is clear that broader changes in disability policy and the increasing politicisation of disability have impacted the context within which disability sport in NZ has developed (cf. Thomas & Smith, 2009). In particular, the analysis presented in this paper suggests that the history of disability and the disability policy process has been shaped by a number of key factors, including government agendas, engagement of the disability sport sector and the various ways that disability is positioned in policy impacting on sector responses. A significant change was the shift from a medical, individualised perspective towards a social model perspective, resulting in Government policy recognising inequities embedded within sports provision for "others", such as disabled people, women, ethnic minorities, and addressing perceived social barriers rather than continuing to place responsibility on the

individual to be active. This shift in foundational discourse underpinning social policy has had major implications for contemporary sports policy (e.g., Every Body Active) and disability (e.g., Disability Plan). Even before the NZ Government became a signatory to the CRPD, government rhetoric and discourse had changed to better recognise the disabling aspects of society for people with impairments. For government sport agencies leaving behind the neoliberal healthism agendas which perpetuated individualistic sport policy (e.g., teaching disabled young people how to play sport safely) towards more socially inclusive initiatives (e.g., advocating for well-designed, inclusive and fit for purpose facilities), was imperative to reconstruct the subject position of disabled people as 'other'. While progressive discourses of inclusion and equity permeate recent social policy, the impact of such policies have is affected significantly by a sector comprised of many organisations responsible for disability sport provision, and a lack of clarity about the distribution of budgets, funding and resources to these organisations (cf. Lyons, 2013). Equally, as Carroll et al. (2020) noted, the disparity in provision for disabled people is more than a sport issue, it "is also a matter of social justice" (p. 9). Overcoming the ableist dominance in NZ sport is still a 'work in progress' and remains pertinent today (see Carroll et al. 2020, Kanagasabai et al, 2019).

One significant challenge for the disability sport sector is the lack of a critical mass of people identifying as having a disability in NZ. In 1981, the IYDP, it was estimated 1 in 10 New Zealanders identified as disabled. Nearly forty years on, this number is now 1 in 4 (Stats NZ 2013) and would suggest the need for a more nuanced support and provision of disability sport remains essentially unchanged. While there continues to be a lack of available data on participants in disability sport in NZ, in line with the evidence from Australia (Darcy et al. 2020), the disability

sport population could be best described as niche. The inability to respond more directly to the needs of the disability sport sector reflects the continued lack of 'visibility' of disabled people informing policy. The Hillary Commission's benchmark survey *Life in New Zealand Survey* in 1990 established baseline information on physical activity and leisure patterns in NZ (now known as *Active NZ*) and has been used to track participation rates and direct policy. Not until the 2013/14 survey were questions relating to disability included. These surveys do not provide a census of disabled participants, rather a 'snapshot' of participation patterns and the changing landscape of participation (Sport New Zealand, 2019a), suggestive of a lack of longitudinal research tracking disability access, participation and retention. The only census-style information comes from archival records during the Sports Development Inquiry in 1985 where, in the ACORD submission to the Committee, provided background information on national disability organisations' membership. The ACORD submission also included a recommendation that research "should be carried out as to the extent of participation by disabled people in sporting activities and administration and how this can be increased" (ACORD 1985). To date, no such research has been undertaken.

Anecdotally, the number of disabled people participating in organised sport number less than 7,000, over 70 percent of whom are members of SONZ and the remainder are members of PNZ affiliated organisations. This lack of detail on the number of disabled people involved in sport creates a dilemma for determining the impact of any Government policy. As Sport NZ (and its antecedent organisations) have recognised, there have been failings in trying to establish a baseline of participation numbers, and this has led to a reliance on repeated assumptions on the effectiveness of initiatives without any critical analysis. Moving forward, it is incumbent on Sport NZ to determine the efficacy of policies to ensure the outcomes desired by the disability sport community

are being achieved through the initiatives and resourcing provided. If these outcomes are not being achieved, we encourage Sport NZ to be audacious and make radical and transformative change.

Finally, our analysis indicates that it is unlikely that policy for including disabled people in sport has translated to significantly more disabled people becoming more active more of the time (Cockburn & Atkinson, 2018a; Cockburn & Wither, 1997; Gourley & Dwyer, 2005). Despite progressive discourses and ideals, a lack of resourcing, sport buy-in and follow up have limited the potential for Government initiatives to create systemic change. Instead, it appears that policy and resourcing has consistently failed to achieve the desired outcomes of increasing participation of disabled New Zealanders in sport (Rushton, 2007). It is unsurprising the establishment of, and continued need for, dedicated disability sports organisations is a direct response to policies which positioned disabled people as 'other', creating a landscape of social exclusion evident in early NZ sport policy and practice (cf. Thomas, 2004). It might be feasibly argued that the concept of inclusion itself has been 'diluted' (Lyons, 2013), whereby organisations are provided with a policy-informed language to speak about inclusion yet are heavily reliant on government intervention and resourcing to make inclusion a reality.

Indeed, organisations have been instead reliant on 'ad hoc' funding for programme and service delivery and workforce development, making it difficult to initiate and embed disability provision over a prolonged period of time. From the funding administered by ACORD in the 1970s (NZ Council for Recreation and Sport, 1984) from a combination of Government Vote funds and Lottery profits (Ministry of Recreation and Sport 1983), such as the CCS grant in 1982/83 to employ two "recreation co-ordinators for the disabled" (Lavender c1985), to the recently announced Sport NZ investment, a pattern of resource co-dependency has occurred. This co-dependency between Sport NZ and disability sport organisations has created a multifaceted yet

unstable terrain for policy-making and is an indication of how government intention steers "policy sub-systems through the strategic control over resources" (Houlihan 2005). From the first author's sustained immersion in disability sport, the sector's reliance on funding directly impacts on its ability to achieve policy outcomes, that is, providing more opportunities for disabled New Zealanders to participate in sport. As such, the articulation between neoliberal discourses and inclusive policy rhetoric provides relatively little direction for practitioners to enact change. Initiatives such as this recent investment into disability sport acknowledge the inequities faced by those with impairments participating in sport and active recreation (Robertson and Sepuloni 2019), but requires significant investment to overcome the decades of under-resourcing and under-achieving. In their most recent review into disability sport Cockburn and Atkinson (2018) highlighted that key barriers to participation for disabled people are a lack of visible competition pathways, affordability of opportunities, and the availability of coaches. As such, this most recent funding initiative is part of a wider cross-government plan, designed to provide targeted support for: 1) professional development; 2) accessible fit for purpose facilities, such as playgrounds and parks; and 3) to enhance the capacity of Sport NZ and partner organisations for a concerted focus on inclusion.

Building on professional development seems logical. While the rhetoric of previous policies has been progressive - such as identifying training and development for volunteers, coaches and administrators - the lack of follow through and sector apathy have inhibited change. Despite a well-established research agenda in teacher and coach development in disability sport internationally (see Taylor et al. 2014, DePauw and Gavron 2005), there has been no research accompanying the delivery of professional training and development efforts in NZ, and their resulting impact on expanding opportunities for disabled people. It has been argued that the extent to which policies focusing on inclusion can 'filter down' and impact on disabled communities is

dependent largely on a well-trained workforce (Townsend et al. 2021). Effective inclusion in community sport remains an enigma as the constantly shifting policy landscape places demands on organisations and professionals to 'be inclusive' with limited support, training and professional development. It is unsurprising that many coaches, teachers and physical activity professionals feel unprepared to enact inclusive agendas (Townsend et al. 2021) and may explain why we see evidence of variation in the sophistication of and commitment to inclusion across different organisations.

Many of the issues raised in the 2005 SPARC *No Exceptions* consultation process were again raised in 2018 indicating little traction has been made in the intervening years. While the findings from the 2018 review laid the foundation for yet further Government intervention into the disability sport sector, whether the resulting outcomes will be transformational or not remain to be seen. Much work is still required by both the government agencies and sports organisations themselves to create a sporting system where opportunities for all participants are provided in an equitable and non-ableist context.

COVID-19 and disability sport

The future of disability sport policy cannot be discussed without acknowledging the impact of COVID-19. NZ, albeit isolated from the significant impact faced worldwide by this pandemic, has not been immune. Sport was interrupted and funding streams paused as the country locked down and entered a period unknown since WWII. Government support across all sectors, designed to maintain the economy and minimise the financial impact of COVID-19, included new funding opportunities as part of the 2020 Budget Sport Recovery Package. Tū Manawa Active Aotearoa and 'Strengthen and Adapt' initiatives are enabling new and targeted investment into disability sport. Tū Manawa is providing funding for programmes or projects delivering play, active

recreation, and sport experiences for tamariki[7] and rangatahi. Under the second initiative, Strengthen and Adapt, PNZ has received investment from Sport NZ to help the sector rebuild post-COVID-19, a positive indication of the need for sector leadership.

Despite this raft of policies centralising disability as a priority, Fitzgerald et al. (2020) herald a warning of the challenges that sports organisations will face post-COVID-19 for providing disability sport opportunities. It is timely therefore that Sport NZ now has the desire and resources to show leadership and shape the translation of policy rhetoric into identifiable and lasting change in this post-COVID-19 world. For Sport NZ, history would suggest equity remains an issue and additional support to improve disabled peoples' participation in sport is still required. With the operationalisation and funding of the Disability Plan being finalised, the impact of this initiative on the future of disability sport remains uncertain (cf. Fitzgerald et al. 2020).

Conclusion

In this paper we have examined the history of the NZ Government's involvement in disability sport, highlighting a succession of disability sport policies and repeated attempts to increase participation and improve opportunities for disabled participants. Albeit with a strong commitment to progress opportunities for disabled people, we argue the direct impact of Government policy and government agencies has been inhibited by shifting discourses related to disability, an overreliance on disability sports organisations and an absence of unified policy and provision, policy leadership or targeted funding. Evaluating the effectiveness of policy has been compounded by a lack of up-to-date evidence on sustained participation in sport for disabled people or on the articulations between policy and practice across the sector. In relation to inclusion, successive policies have touched on this as the ultimate outcome but with the majority of sport delivered through NSOs and their regional networks, disability sport delivery remains a segregated model.

While there are no clear or ‘one-size-fits all’ solutions, collaboration and co-production of solutions with disabled sports organisations and the sport sector as a whole is necessary. If the last 80+years have produced any lessons, it is the need to engage those communities in the planning process to ensure the desired outcomes are realistic and achievable. This is where further research is needed, particularly how sport sector engagement and commitment can be achieved, especially in the area of disabled young people outside the education and PE context.

There is also a need for further research to consider, aside from the financial resourcing of the sector, what else contributes to enhancing the likelihood of Government initiatives being successful. This will be no simple task, any solution cannot negate the complexity of personal decision-making, provision of opportunities and sport participation, and the size and distribution of the disabled sport population (see Darcy et al. 2020). Furthermore, the nature of the disability sport landscape creates challenges in and of itself. One truism of disability is that it is not a homogeneous group (The Sports Development Inquiry Committee 1985, Martin Ginis et al. 2021) and therefore the ways and means of providing effective policy outcomes may lie in the explication of the processes and mechanisms of inclusion that operate across different sporting environments. This may include implementing and evaluating multiple, integrated, segregated and inclusive programmes (Misener and Darcy 2014) catering to the diversity of interest, need, ability and locality rather than a universal “one-size fits all” solution. Of importance is the development of a nuanced approach, understanding of the ‘realities’ of inclusion for certain groups to be able to access sport in a regular and sustained manner, necessitating a bottom-up, community-led approach to connect practice to policy (Petrie and lisahunter 2011).

In this paper we have raised some significant and critical questions regarding the potential contribution of government policies to address the inequities experienced by disabled New

Zealanders in sport. As sport seeks to respond to the latest policy directive the future of disability sport is at a critical moment. With the impact of COVID-19, what is at risk is a return full circle to a long hiatus where disabled New Zealanders are again pushed aside, as they were post-WWII, resolved to watch and observe others participating in sport. COVID-19 has provided an opportunity to review and reset our future, providing a clear opportunity to ensure that the 'gap' between disability policy and practice in sport is addressed. We are cautiously optimistic the recent Sport NZ investments will result in positive outcomes and more disabled New Zealanders will participate in sport in the future.

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[1] Throughout the history of sport and recreation policy in NZ, the terms of sport and recreation have often been used interchangeably and without clear distinction, with the exception of high-performance sport, often leading to confusion and debate around focus and priorities. For the purposes of this paper, sport is used as a collective noun for community sport and recreation.

[2] For the purposes of this paper, policies include Acts of legislation, strategies, plans and policy documents.

[3] Sport New Zealand is the current Government agency responsible for sport and recreation in NZ. Hillary Commission (1987-2001) and SPARC (2002-2012) refer to previous Government agencies responsible for sport.

[4] As with much archival research, the availability of the data is reliant upon the relevant organisations' interpretation of what is valuable to file and save, and to archive. Records from the latter two organisations were limited, having been disposed of after a mandatory hold period of ten years. Sport NZ has acknowledged the lack of these historical records and believes the enacting of the Public Records Act 2005 will provide greater safeguards to future public records and archival information.

[5] In Te Reo Māori, Pakehā refers to New Zealanders of European descent.

[6] Halberg Trust (later renamed Halberg Foundation) is a private charitable organisation, established in 1963, whose aim is to enhance the lives of physically disabled New Zealanders through sport and recreation.

[7] Sport NZ uses Te Reo Māori to define tamariki - children (5 – 11-year-olds) and rangatahi - youth (12 – 18-year-olds)