

Inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia

Submission to the inquiry from Disabled Wintersport Australia

The participation rate of disabled women in winter sports is influenced by the same factors effecting able-bodied females, with a few extra issues and benefits.

Participation - Limiting Factors

Few disabled female role models

While there have been some remarkably talented disabled female athletes such as wheelchair track star Louise Savage and our very successful male winter Paralympian Michael Milton, currently there are no elite winter sport Australian disabled female role models. It is well know that young people more likely to become involved in activities with a high profile. The identification and promotion of disabled women athletes through the programs run by DWA and APC will hopefully foster such a female winter sport star.

Competing sports for talented athletes

Some young disabled girls may try skiing, usually with their family or a sports group but retaining their involvement is difficult as year-round sports such as swimming or wheelchair basketball are more readily available and cheaper. Talented female athletes are such a rare commodity that they are frequently snapped up by non-winter sports. The challenge is to first substantially widen the pool of disabled female skiers then identify and train those with the ability to reach elite status.

Lack of funds

Disabled sports groups find it hard to get funds to participate in a sport that only lasts 4 months in Australia. Like all sports you must practice to succeed and skiing is perceived to be an expensive sport requiring travel to overseas resorts at the elite level. Without the generous support of our sponsors and in particular the resorts throughout Australia, the Australian Sports Commission and the Australian Paralympic Committee, the services and facilities currently available would come under severe threat.

Disabled women are not encouraged to participate in what is perceived to be a dangerous sport

Skiing is recognised as one of the more dangerous sports and females, particularly those from cultural groups that are not traditionally involved in winter sports, are not encouraged to ski. Methods of countering the negatives can be through presentations to targeted disability groups about the benefits of winter sport, inclusion of disabled skier links to DWA advice on resort websites and the afore-mentioned female role models.

Participation - Benefits

- Greater, quicker rehabilitation for women with acquired disabilities through the challenge and fitness provided by participation in winter sports. Women gain a sense of achievement, increased self-esteem and emotional growth. Their increased self-esteem carries over to their everyday lives, giving them more confidence to face the challenges life throws up. Women with disabilities are often praised for just participating in a sport. With trained instructors they can go beyond what they think they can do, to what they can actually achieve.
- *'All people learning on the snow are disabled'* - Women with disabilities who ski can enjoy the sport on a par with able-bodied skiers: everybody needs equipment to ski. Disabled skiers just use non-standard equipment.

- Winter sports are a great opportunity for increased social interaction which promotes more opportunity to meet and mix with people of the opposite sex.

Participation – Increasing numbers of Women in Winter Sports

Increasing the number of women in disabled winter sports starts at the recreational level with a readily available, supportive structure in place.

Continued support from the Australian Ski Area Association, the Australian Sports Commission, the Australian Paralympic Committee and others will enable Disabled Wintersport Australia to increase their range of programs –

- **Volunteer Ski Guide program** – Disabled Wintersport recruits and trains people to assist skiers with disabilities to enjoy snow sports.
- **Alpine skiing** – DWA raises funds to purchase and provide expensive adaptive equipment for use at ski resorts in Australia
- **Nordic skiing** – one of the most vigorous cardiovascular winter sports, originating in Scandinavia for people with visual impairments
- **Competitive events** - Disabled WinterSport Australia, in association with the Australian Paralympic Committee, conduct several domestic talent identification and competition programs highlighted annually at their National Alpine Championships. This showcase event is conducted annually at a major resort in Australia in association with the Australian Defence Forces Ski Association and incorporates the alpine disciplines of Super G, Giant Slalom and Slalom.
- **Promotional packages** such as targeted radio advertising and media coverage of events highlighting women with disabilities in competition.

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