

Helping children with upper limb differences live life without limits


# Within Reach

Winter 2024 | ISSUE 157




 **Reach Annual Family Weekend 2024**

Page 12

 **BBC Paul Carter on Accessible Gaming**

Page 19

 **Interview: Para Snowboard Coach Alastair Nasmyth**

Page 20

 **Parent Corner: Tracey's 12 Races in 12 Countries in 12 months**

Page 17



**Reach**

Front cover stars Pheobe and Katie

# Contents



News & Events



Celebrating our Branches



RAW 2024



Leaving a Legacy



Inclusion Matters



Representation in Action

# Events

DEC · 28th | Northern Branch | Soft Play  
 · 29th | Northern Branch | Pantomime

JAN · 4th | Northern Ireland Branch | Pantomime  
 · TBC | North London Branch | Farm Visit

FEB · 15th | East Anglia Branch | Roller Skating  
 · North West Branch | FUN-draising- February a month of local fundraising culminating in a Branch Quiz!

For details contact reach@reach.org.uk or your local branch coordinator



**STOP** Reach emails going into your junk folder!

Please add reach@reach.org.uk to your contact list.

## Hello!

**From the Editor & Designer of withinReach**

Within Reach Magazine has been sharing your lived experiences for more than 45 years, and it only grows stronger with every issue because of YOUR heartfelt contributions, fabulous fundraising and our branch coordinators' dedication. We hope you enjoy this issue; we always welcome comments, requests, or suggestions, so please get in touch with us at [withinreach@reach.org.uk](mailto:withinreach@reach.org.uk). Your Within Reach Creators, Max & Tom



## Reach Membership

Membership is open to parents of children with upper limb difference, and individuals of 18 years and over who are interested in furthering the work of the association. The UK and Ireland subscription is from £36 (£35 via direct debit) and the International subscription is £40.

*Views expressed in withinReach are not necessarily those of Reach and are not intended to reflect or constitute Reach policy, or in any way portray an official view.*

# Meet our Wonderful Branch Coordinators

**3 Counties Herts, Beds & Bucks**



Jennifer Jamieson  
[3counties@reach.org.uk](mailto:3counties@reach.org.uk)

**Berks, Oxford and Wilts**



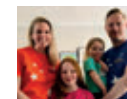
Joanne Taylor  
[berksandwilts@reach.org.uk](mailto:berksandwilts@reach.org.uk)

**East Anglia & Essex**



Chan Do Jung (Jay) & Navdeep Kalsi  
[eastanglia@reach.org.uk](mailto:eastanglia@reach.org.uk)

**East Midlands**



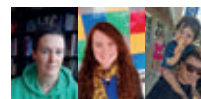
Andy & Becky Forshaw  
[eastmidland@reach.org.uk](mailto:eastmidland@reach.org.uk)

**Gloucestershire and Avon**



Sophie Ustahuseyin  
[gloucestershire@reach.org.uk](mailto:gloucestershire@reach.org.uk)

**Ireland**



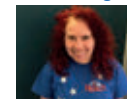
Hilary Barrett, Marianne Breen & James Conheady  
[ireland@reach.org.uk](mailto:ireland@reach.org.uk)

**Kent**



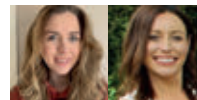
Branch Coordinator Needed  
[reach@reach.org.uk](mailto:reach@reach.org.uk)

**Northern England**



Suzanne Parker  
[northernengland@reach.org.uk](mailto:northernengland@reach.org.uk)

**Northern Ireland**



Ruth Hompstead & Siobhan McCrory  
[northernireland@reach.org.uk](mailto:northernireland@reach.org.uk)

**North London**



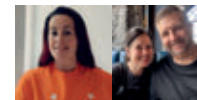
Shaheen Al Hassani  
[northlondon@reach.org.uk](mailto:northlondon@reach.org.uk)

**North West**



Chris Knox & Lindsay Wright  
[northwest@reach.org.uk](mailto:northwest@reach.org.uk)

**Scotland**



Mags Millar & Liz & Iain Lee  
[scotland@reach.org.uk](mailto:scotland@reach.org.uk)

**South London**



Hannah Harrington  
[southlondon@reach.org.uk](mailto:southlondon@reach.org.uk)

**South Wales**



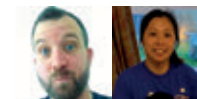
Melissa Beesley  
[southwales@reach.org.uk](mailto:southwales@reach.org.uk)

**South West**



Branch Coordinator Needed  
[reach@reach.org.uk](mailto:reach@reach.org.uk)

**Wessex**



Craig & Mei Luke  
[wessex@reach.org.uk](mailto:wessex@reach.org.uk)

**West Midlands**



Tracey & Jason Smith  
[midlands@reach.org.uk](mailto:midlands@reach.org.uk)

**Yorkshire**



Alexis & Richard Tibble  
[yorkshire@reach.org.uk](mailto:yorkshire@reach.org.uk)



Stay up to date

All event news is on our website [www.reach.org.uk](http://www.reach.org.uk) and facebook page [www.facebook.com/reachcharity](http://www.facebook.com/reachcharity).

## Guiding Principles for a New Era of Support

It's been a busy time with good things happening for us as a charity (see Chris's report on the next page). It's also been a time of reflection as a working group made up of Trustees and Branch Coordinators helped create a set of 'bylaws' to honour and sustain support for our members as we move into a new era, and a new Branch Coordinator Toolkit to serve the wonderful people who give their time to bring Reach families together where they live.

We've called our bylaws Guiding Principles, and these are they as of November 2024:

- Most of our Trustees are people with lived experience, either people with upper limb difference themselves or parents/carers of people with upper limb difference.
- We have systems in place to listen to our membership as well as to ensure that our community is represented at board level.
- As a charity we exist to support, enable and empower people with upper limb difference.
- Our primary focus is and always will be children and young people.
- We aspire to continue to provide support to our members for life.
- We have volunteer run branches across the UK – these are people with lived experience helping Reach families stay connected at a local level.
- We support an online community, providing a safe space for Reach members and their families to seek advice, share experience and connect with each other.
- As a charity we don't give advice, instead we share information and provide a platform for conversation and learning in person and online.
- We use a variety of means to share information as well as to develop and sustain a sense of belonging. Our magazine "Within Reach" is an example of how we do this.
- We are committed to exploring and adopting new means of communication to be relevant, and of service, to younger Reach members as we grow as a charity.
- We use our standing as a UK-wide charity supporting people with upper limb difference to advocate for equity, challenge ableism and raise awareness of issues encountered by our community.
- We are committed to making our branch and national events accessible to our members.
- Reach branch events are free at the point of delivery. Families can donate if they wish but they don't have to. Where the cost of the activity is high we may ask for a returnable deposit.
- Due to high delivery costs, we do make charges against our Annual Family Weekend and RAW (Reach Activity Week) but in both cases we raise funds to subsidise the costs, move the event around the country to enable participation and have a small bursary pot for families with low income.

Our volunteer Branch Coordinators are helping to deliver this in real life – with 12 events scheduled over the winter season, and plans afoot for a regional family weekend programme, they don't stop, and I would like to say thank you to them – for making it real!

With wishes for a wonderful festive season, and a very happy New Year,



Sarah-Jane  
Charity Operations Lead  
sarah-janel@reach.org.uk

## Reach Board of Trustees

Chair: Chris Creamer  
chrisc@reach.org.uk

Vice Chair: Gary Phillips  
garyp@reach.org.uk

Treasurer: Phil Robertson  
phirlr@reach.org.uk

Safeguard Lead: Julie Detheridge  
julled@reach.org.uk

Colm Creamer  
creamerg@reach.org.uk

Ella Dickson  
ellad@reach.org.uk

Emily Tisshaw  
emilyt@reach.org.uk

Esther Pounder  
estherp@reach.org.uk

Lee Harvey  
leeh@reach.org.uk

Rebecca Nind  
rebeccan@reach.org.uk

Ruth Lester  
ruthl@reach.org.uk

Steve Haynes  
steveh@reach.org.uk



## Reach is growing!

By the time we are reading our Winter Edition of Within Reach, the Annual Family Weekend in Portsmouth will have taken place and we should have decided the future of Reach. Will we (1) adopt new Articles of Association to enable the modernisation of Reach, thus enabling us to (2) broaden our Objects to continue to support children after the age of 18 as they step out into the world as adults?

I'm really pleased to report that our new Articles of Association were unanimously accepted by the members and we have now lodged them with Companies House, prior to sending them to the Charities Commission. This then opens the way for us to submit our new Objects for approval. The Charities Commission will question us about the inevitable expansion of Reach that will arise from these changes. I wish we could have had them attend our Annual Family Weekend.

If the Charities Commission could have seen the level of activities, experienced the energy, or heard the contributions of our young adults actively participating, there would be no doubt whatsoever that this broadening of our Objects was not just desirable but necessary. Why would Reach pass up the opportunity to learn from the experiential knowledge of our young adults, each making their own way in the world with impressive levels of commitment and consequent success? As we speculated before the AGM, "our Role Models in multiple Sports, various Social Media, Arts, Theatre and Television, not to mention Professions and Trades – are all willing to play a Role in the future of Reach".

Our young adults already produce our Within Reach magazine, our social media and much of our website content; they act as Leaders and Mentors to our children for the Reach Activity Week and increasingly at Branch Activities; they have stepped forward as Branch Coordinators and as Trustees to bring new ideas to Reach and, they enthusiastically offer to participate in Working Groups and consultation to develop new initiatives for Reach.

Looking forward, Reach will undoubtedly enter a period of growth as young adults stay with us as Individual Members, as we attract back young adults who were excluded until now and as we encourage former members to return, thus giving us the benefit of their varied life experiences.

Invariably the growth of Reach will require investment for the future. As we have always been a charity driven by volunteers, the fundraising efforts of our members are key to our growth and development. We will also be working hard to attract funding from trusts, legacies, and sponsorships. Every member, every Branch and every supporter has a contribution to make, no matter how big or how small. Whether that effort is a coffee morning, a round of golf with some friends or a family member's legacy, it all adds up. If I may paraphrase JFK, "Ask not what Reach can do for you, rather ask what you can do for Reach?"



Chris Creamer  
Reach Board of Trustees Chairman  
chrisc@reach.org.uk



## Become a Branch Coordinator!

**As we all know, we thrive when our members come together to share experiences and celebrate as a community. Could you be the one to unite us and support your local area as a Branch Coordinator?**

**We require coordinators for: South West, Kent, 3 Counties & Yorkshire.**

**To find out more write to: reach@reach.org.uk**

## Contact Reach

Address: Room 4, The Library Rooms, First Floor,  
59 The High Street, Totnes, TQ9 6PB

Phone: Ashley Blackburn (Business Support) on  
07932 747654 or Sarah-Jane Lowson (Charity Operations &  
Safeguarding Lead) on 07932 747652

Email: reach@reach.org.uk

Office hours: Monday-Friday 9am - 5pm

Website: [www.reach.org.uk](http://www.reach.org.uk)

Twitter: [@reachcharity](https://twitter.com/reachcharity)

Instagram: [@reachcharity1](https://www.instagram.com/reachcharity)

Facebook: [facebook.com/reachcharity](https://www.facebook.com/reachcharity)

LinkedIn: Reach Charity Limited

Registered charity in England and Wales no.1134544

Registered charity in Scotland no.SC049805



## Changes for the good!

In October Reach held the 2024 Annual Family Weekend and AGM. At the AGM members were asked to vote on the proposed changes to the Articles in a special resolution vote. A unanimous agreement means those proposed changes have now been submitted to Companies House.

What does that mean for Reach? It means a change in Reach's Object: 'For the advancement, relief and support of people, and carers of people, with upper limb differences. In particular but not exclusively children and young people who are either born with an upper limb difference or who acquire an upper limb difference in childhood.'

Read more on page 12



**Colm Creamer**

"I'm Colm. I live in Madrid, Spain, with my wife and our two dogs. I have been a lifelong Reach member. I grew up with this charity supporting me, helping me overcome issues and building my confidence.

Reach is growing and evolving as a charity and it is wonderful to see. It's been amazing seeing how much we can do, and the impact it has on everyone from new parents, up to people who discovered us in adulthood. I've always been passionate about doing more to help kids and adults become more comfortable in their own skin and realise nothing can stop them achieving. Being on the trustee board is an honour and I look forward to getting involved as best I can."

## Meet your new Trustees...

**Rebecca Nind**

"I was a member of Reach as a child and I know my family benefited hugely from the support, community and optimism the charity provided us. My dad was the Reach treasurer in the early 90s and then the Yorkshire branch's treasurer for 15 years, so I'm keen to follow in his footsteps and give back to the charity in my own way as a trustee with the insight I can bring as someone with an upper limb difference.

Once I became a teenager I remember turning away from Reach because I felt it was too "childish" for me, so I'm passionate about strengthening the opportunities for, and the engagement of, Reach's teenagers and developing the 18-25-year-old cohort."



**Ella Dickinson**

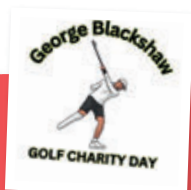
"I've been a member of Reach from birth and love the community spirit of the charity. Reach has helped me truly accept my limb difference and the events and friends you make are truly the best part! For those with upper limb differences, Reach allows you to share your unique story, meet people who relate to your experiences and most importantly, celebrate your achievements and make friends for life. I live a very 'normal' life and happy to chat about anything!"

## He did it again!

George Blackshaw has hosted a charity golf day for the second year running - 96 players, 24 teams at Delamere Forest - raising a whopping £15,551 for Reach & Alder Hey Children's Hospital Trust.

Thank you George!

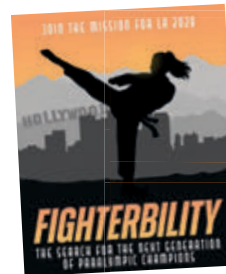
@ - @theamputeegolfer



## Welcome to North London Branch Coordinator Shaheen Al Hassani!



"As the mother of an 11-year-old boy with an upper limb difference, I have found incredible support, understanding, and connection in Reach. Thanks to the Reach organisation, our family, especially my son, have benefited from educational resources, confidence-building opportunities, and continuous support. The kind and supportive environment at Reach has not only made us feel like part of a community but also provided us with the chance to meet other parents and children who are in similar situations. Taking on the North London Branch Coordinator role in this volunteering opportunity felt like the perfect moment to return and show gratitude for the support we have received over the past few years. Reach is a fantastic place for members to connect and learn, and I hope to provide support where possible and help make a meaningful impact"



## WANTED! Fighterbility candidates!

GB Taekwondo's Fighterbility is aimed at interested parties from 7 years and up with an interest in taekwondo. Fighterbility is a call to action for upper limb different individuals who were inspired by the Paris Paralympics and are looking to find a sporting community. The programme will also provide a path for individuals to join the sport and benefit from the fun, fight and fitness of Taekwondo.

## Into the jungle for Immie & Chris!



Reach member Immie and her Dad Chris have been on an adventure, you can catch them on 'Into the Jungle with Ed Stafford' on Channel 4.

Mum, Francie said she saw a post about it online and the rest is history.

"I applied on their behalf and then told them after! Immie was very keen, Chris less so, but he agreed to go forward for casting. They had to complete interviews and physical checks before they were asked to be on the show. Initially they were told they were a backup; I think this was because Chris was nervous. But once they arrived in Belize they were informed that they were going into the jungle with Ed and the other dads and children. The idea of the show was to help modern day dads connect with their child in a wild environment away

from modern tech and looking at building relationships. Immie was super keen to show everyone how capable she was and how her limb difference doesn't hold her back. The physical challenges were difficult especially in such a humid environment and being filmed 24/7. Christian was very supportive and wanted to give Immie the chance to do this. He was nervous but I think he did a great job."

### Immie and Chris loved their experience:

"It was incredible, I wanted to show everyone what I can do. The hardest thing was the 160ft abseil into a sinkhole, the height was like nothing I'd experienced before and controlling the descent with one hand was challenging but my dad really supported me. I really learnt to push past my limits in the jungle, having a limb difference did not hold me back! I made some amazing memories and friends." - Immie

"It was an amazing experience, I'm really pleased we did it. Ed and the other dads were great company and all the children were absolute troopers. Immie really impressed me with her resilience, especially when the kids went into the jungle by themselves to retrieve food, they climbed a water fall, trekked through the jungle in extreme heat and humidity and even carried the food back to camp, all by themselves without any adult support. She really showed everyone - especially me, how capable she is!" - Chris



Celebrate our branches & coordinators

## West Midlands Sports Day



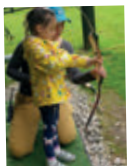
**Tracey & Jason** "We had a great day! 15 families, 39 children and the sun shone throughout. We had running races, beanbag races, egg and spoon races and the long jump, followed by a fab McDonald's lunch and a game of rounders and football. Great to meet new families and see old friends. Thank you to everyone who attended."



## Patterdale Family Weekend

**Jane Crook:** "I have always loved the Patterdale weekend away; being with the families and seeing new faces."

I always wanted Reach children to be able to try new activities and not feel embarrassed knowing everyone is in the same position. The Patterdale team are really supportive in helping the children whether it be canoeing or rock climbing. It's a very special place!"



**Win:** "I was unsure if we would go to Patterdale or not. My friend whom I had Guardianship died and we had just moved house. It was very stressful but we went anyway and I'm so glad we did! It was beautiful. We had a great time and met so many nice people. I saw Ayla's future and what she can achieve. I'm just so happy we found Reach. Ayla has had a very hard start in life, these little trips keep us going and make us share real quality time together instead of the day-to-day."

The archery instructor tutor was so lovely with Ayla, I was worried she wouldn't be able to do it and would get frustrated and upset but with patience and understanding she was like Robin Hood. I was very proud!"

**Amy Roche:** This year was our first time at Patterdale and what a wonderful time we had! We didn't really know what to expect, but any expectations we did have were greatly exceeded. We didn't know anyone attending prior to the weekend, as we are fairly new to Reach, but were made to feel welcome as soon as we arrived. The whole weekend felt like one big family holiday! Everyone chatted, shared stories, advice and encouragement. We watched in awe as all of the children participated in the activities with such determination. The weekend was truly invaluable to us as a family and we cannot wait to attend next year!



**Emma Baker-Rand:** All in all, from the support of the Reach team present to the Patterdale Hall dining experiences, the other wonderful families, exciting activities and stunning landscape, our weekend was magical. We fully intend to go again!

Since Patterdale, Sophie is noticeably more confident. Now if children ask her about her hand she will show them, she says "I'm just born like it." And gets on with playing. Meeting other Reach children was and will continue to be invaluable to her. Her sisters also saw proof that our determined little Reach people will grow to be able to do everything they set out to do, they have learnt not to baby Sophie who really can "do it herself," and if she can't, she'll work out the way forward.

We are so grateful to everyone involved in the planning and execution of the Patterdale Hall weekend, thank you.

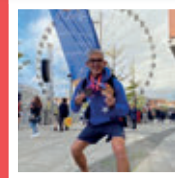
**Vikki Emmet:** "2024 was our first year and it certainly won't be our last. It was amazing to see all the children and young people interacting with each other and running around, playing games without judgement whilst us adults relaxed and chatted. The whole thing was exceptionally organised and honestly it was so much fun!

We, as a family, have been members of Reach since our little girl was born with a limb difference on both arms, she is 10 now and loves all the meet ups and Reach weekends we attend. These children, young people and adults are truly inspirational and we can't wait to do more Reach events in the future!"



## Reach BCs Tracey & Jason Smith

**Hello everyone!** Jason and I live in Birmingham, we got married in April 2022 and have been together for nearly 6 years. I work in Sales and Jason is a 6th Dan Karate instructor and Pilates teacher. We work hard and play hard 😊 – we enjoy weekly ballroom dance classes, Karate (of course!) and motorsport.



I have been a branch coordinator since January 2017 and Jason joined me in the role in 2018. My amazing nephew, Jacob (we even share our birthday!), arrived in the world in 2007 – he has just turned 17 and he is an absolute credit to us. He was a much-anticipated arrival! He was born with small fingers on his left hand, which was a surprise to everyone. We discovered Reach quickly and it was reassuring to know that there were many families who had experienced similar situations. Nothing has ever stopped Jacob, he plays golf, rides a bike and is learning to drive and was even goal keeper in his football team!

Reach was looking for volunteer branch co-ordinators and I decided that as I had some spare time, this was something that I could help with – we've not looked back. We organise 3 meet ups every year. One in Spring, one Summer and then the Christmas party. We have done everything from trampolining, mini golf, rock climbing, abseiling, science party, sports days, leaps of faith (!), the list goes on. I have seen with my own eyes how important these events are – very often it is the first time a family or Reach child will have met someone else with an upper limb difference. It's wonderful to see new friendships made! It can be a little overwhelming at your first event, but everyone is very welcoming and open to chat and share experiences. I also manage the West Midlands Facebook page – adding news and event information.

We love to organise the Reach events simply because we know what a difference it can make! It's always a little stressful on the day, however, when our families leave with big smiles on their faces and are so very grateful for us organising such events, it makes it so worthwhile.



We do enjoy fundraising as part of our role – although this is not absolutely necessary. We have raised over £7000 ourselves, whether that be running marathons, organising a charity disco or speaking at events, alongside picking up supporters along the way with donations from employers of friends and family and applying for local grants to help fund our events. We are also very lucky to have an extremely supportive family who help us with set-ups, fetching and carrying, tea and coffee making at our events. Jacob is always a very welcome attendee and is more than happy to speak to new families and expectant parents of which we are very proud!

If you are considering becoming a volunteer coordinator then please give it a try! It's so rewarding and you are absolutely making a positive difference. The first call to introduce a new family (or even parents whose Reach child has not yet arrived) can sometimes be a little emotional (for everyone!), but again this is so important so that members understand that they are not on their own and everyone has similar concerns about the future. The Reach Team will always help with lots of the organisation of the events and will send out invites and emails and cover all the Health and Safety, Insurance and Risk Assessments etc. SJ and Ashley will give you as much help as you need – along with knowing that you have the support of other branch coordinators.

We've made some great friends within Reach over the years and we are proud to represent Reach whenever we can. You are obviously reading this as you have been touched somehow by our wonderful charity. I can highly recommend giving up a little time to get so much back!



## Chris & Lindsay's first meet-up!

### North West Branch

#### An Air-Raising Good Time.

On a rather grey day in Manchester 10 families met at a lively inflatable park. This North West September meet up could only be described as hot, sweaty and loud! Newly appointed Branch Coordinators Lindsay and Chris certainly kicked off their first meet up in style!



The children thoroughly enjoyed exploring the venue and discovering which of the inflatable activities was to be their favourite. They couldn't decide whether it was the ginormous Blue Lagoon ball pit, the 11m tall mega slide, a double tipping slide or the ball pit blaster which could only be accessed via a secret tunnel!

Whilst all of this was going on our members had the opportunity to catch up, make new friends, and even learn all about an Open Bionics arm. Very kindly one of the families brought it with them. With its Iron Man design everyone was wanting to take a look and watch the arm in action!

The meet up ended rather unexpectedly at a Krispie Kreme! Chris and Lindsay are very grateful to all the staff at the Trafford Centre location for serving them all at such short notice. With doughnuts in hand, this was the perfect calm contrast to the previous location. Here conversations flowed and deeper connections were made.

Chris and Lindsay would like to thank all the families which came along. It was wonderful to meet everyone, and they cannot wait to host the next meet up in the New Year.







RAW 2024

## The RAW Effect

**As a mentor, once you've been on a Reach Activity Week and you've seen the big wins, the special moments and the unforgettable memories made – you just know.**

You have experienced the RAW effect and you know that these weeks could be life-changing for our Reach young people.

I can only hope that for Reach's 10 – 17-year-olds, once they've spent a week surrounded by "their people", they understand that they are wholly welcome and a special part of the Reach community.

I hope that after one RAW, going into their second, they know they can do it. They know they have friends in what can be an intimidating world. They know there are Reach mentors out there to talk to if they need support or help. They know there will be challenges to face but that they will do it together, with zero judgement and only Reach love.

This year RAW took place at Calshot Activities Centre in Southampton, Hampshire. And quite honestly, it was exhausting but absolutely amazing. We climbed and abseiled, tackled shooting, archery, windsurfing and sailing; we took on Aero Trek, orienteering, the crate stack and problem-solving. And we spent hours skiing, snowboarding, skateboarding, track cycling... And more!

This year was my second RAW as a Mentor and I had the wonderful privilege to be able to witness growth. Seeing the young ones blossom in their second year, indebted to a confidence that was forged during their first. Knowing what to expect, they were able to leave any fear or worry at the door. Once they stepped on that bus or said goodbye to their families, trepidation quickly passed and chatter turned to excitement and friendship-building.

It's a hard feeling to explain but even Reach strangers don't feel like strangers. They feel like family you've not met yet and so quickly, introductions done, we all click into the RAW pace of life and get stuck into the brilliant week ahead, together.



By Max Swinhoe



## Welcome to our newest Reach Mentor – Liam Murphy



**Liam it was wonderful to have you as a mentor at RAW, what was it like being back but as an adult?**

I loved it! It was very rewarding for me yet very challenging at times (a bit like herding cats!). It was great being able to revisit Calshot also, after attending when I was maybe 12 or 13 years-old, definitely one of my favourite camps from memory.

**Why did you want to become a Reach mentor?**

Honestly, it was a mix of things, I wanted to give back to Reach after my experience at RAW as a kid, it's a big-time commitment for mentors but it's all worth it knowing that we're making RAW possible for young people. I'm proud to also share my experiences having a limb difference and listen to others too, I believe both the kids and mentors leave RAW with a different insight to when the week starts.

**Was the experience what you expected?**

It was to be honest! I knew what to expect with the centre and schedule being familiar to me, and also the responsibilities I'd be taking on at the same time. The surprising part for me was the sense of reward as the week progressed, I'd never done anything like this before where I've volunteered or mentored so I was really taken off guard by how good I felt at the end of the week!

**What was the stand-out highlight for you?**

Definitely the water activities! They're always the longer activities and it was fun getting everyone thrown into the sea!

**Did you find anything in particular challenging?**

I think the biggest learning curve was the responsibility of watching over young people of quite a broad age range; it can be quite daunting meeting so many people at once and trying to stay on their good side!

**You went to RAW as a child – why do you think it's considered such an important part of Reach?**

I can't stress enough the amount of value that RAW attendees are getting by spending a full week with others who have limb differences, and also learning to overcome the activities. Living in the UK it can often seem like there aren't many people with limb differences, and RAW is brilliant for getting so many like-minded young people together. Your younger years are so crucial for your development, and I'd definitely say RAW holds some of my best memories.

**What advice would you give to parents worrying about their kids going to RAW for the first time?**

It simply couldn't be a better environment, there's absolutely nothing to worry about! It's a great independence booster for kids being away from their family for a week, and the Reach team do such a fantastic job bringing the whole experience together. Everyone is made to feel included, and the days are far too busy to even think about missing home!



## Take the leap!

**I have hazy memories of attending the first-ever RAW week when I was about twelve. I remember the feeling of freedom and ease that came from being part of the majority for once. I didn't have to think about how my little arm set me apart because, in that group, it didn't. I remember marvelling at how some other girls had adapted to tasks I was yet to figure out - like putting my hair in a high ponytail!**

Reflecting on it now, it's such a shame that, despite feeling so at home there, I didn't go back. I spent my teenage years and my twenties hiding my limb difference, trying to fit in with the two-handed people around me. It felt easier to try and blend in, rather than embrace what made me different.

The turning point for me came at age 30, when I decided I wanted to cast off the cosmetic prosthetic arm I'd hidden behind my entire life. Letting go of the safety blanket of my prosthetic was both a physical and mental transformation. It meant gradually letting go of the fear of how others might perceive my arm - a process that took countless small steps over time, but was the most liberating change I could ever have made.

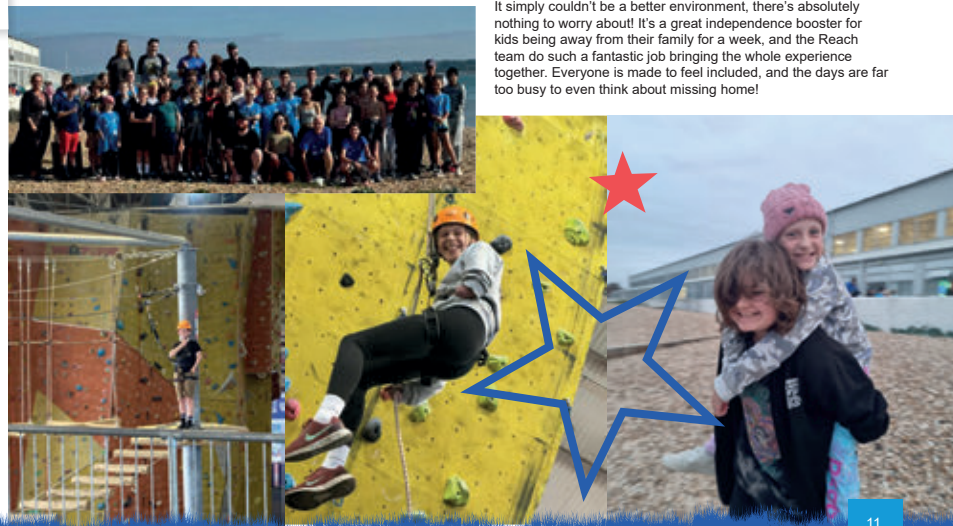


I'm 36 now, and for the past few years have lived completely free of worry of what others may think of my arm; it's not even a thing. I wonder if it would have taken me so long to get here if I'd stuck with RAW, and spent that sacred time each year among people who truly understood and lifted me up. That's why I returned as a mentor - to encourage others to keep coming back and to show them that embracing their uniqueness can bring so much confidence and joy. I don't want any other Reach children to wait 30 years to accept this beautiful part of themselves - I want them to grow into adulthood feeling proud and empowered in who they are - and truly believe RAW can play a huge role in making that happen.

For anyone considering joining the next RAW - whether for yourself or your child - take the leap! The support and acceptance you'll find is unlike anything else. Those little moments of connection - whether it's wriggling into wetsuits, helping each other with ponytails, or sharing stories in the corridors - are every bit as powerful as the big experiences, like abseiling down walls or racing down ski slopes. I couldn't be prouder to contribute to a space that lets young people dive into exciting new challenges while feeling completely themselves - a sense of freedom and belonging I hope they carry into life way beyond RAW.



By Lou Devlin





# Annual Family Weekend 2024

By Max Swinhoe

## Where to begin when it comes to writing about one of the biggest events in the Reach calendar?

Over 50 volunteers came together to make the weekend possible and 103 families came to share, connect, be inspired and have their hearts filled.

For those who haven't attended a Reach Annual Family Weekend there's always plenty going on; exhibitors to meet, Reach merchandise to buy, a whole conference, which starts on Saturday morning after the kids have been whisked off to creche or workshops and activities with Reach mentors, with an array of guest speakers sharing life stories and journeys. The weekend is also where the ever important Annual General Meeting (AGM) takes place, to inform members of the latest charity updates and figures, and then on Saturday night it's the Gala dinner and auction!

Adventurer Elmarie O'Brien kicked off the show with her tale of hiking the 3000km Te Araroa trail in New Zealand which included the use of her bursary-funded One-Arm Freedom paddle for the canoeing section of the trail.

Then Lucy Sherrington took the stage to share her story of studying medicine with a limb difference so far and how her positive hospital experiences growing up became a source of her motivation, so she can help others.

Charlotte Fielder MBE, took us back to her time with Border Force and how she ended up at Battersea, detailing just how empowering it was to learn how to put handcuffs on with one hand.

Then it was time for the AGM, during which our Chair, Chris Creamer, detailed the proposed changes to Reach's Articles of Association with the help of our Trustees on stage, sharing why they believe it's an important progressive move forward for the charity, then Chris outlined his own report before welcoming Treasurer, Phil Robertson, to share his.

Before we knew it was time to vote and it was with joy that we witnessed a unanimous vote for the changes which

means the charity and its members support the notion of expanding so our support encompasses young people and Reach adults too.

At lunch on Saturday, it was clear that our guest speakers had done their job to move their audience because the wonderful buzz flowing through the air was palpable.

In the afternoon, with post lunch coffees kicking in, the conference began once more, this time with a video message from Reach Ambassador Frank Letch. We were sad not to see Frank in person this year but we wished him well and it was lovely to see him and hear his message, encouraging parents as always - to let their children try!

BBC reporter and presenter, Paul Carter, then spoke about accessible gaming and the future of gaming capabilities such as Motion Input technology which will allow gamers to use any part of their body to play, including eye movements.

Next up, I (Max) hopped on stage with a box of props and shared what I called 'the layers of life, so far'; a talk about ups and downs and challenges overcome, whilst adding layers of clothing as I went.

Pilot, James Thompson, then flew to the stage to demonstrate what it takes to become a pilot with an upper limb difference, showing the intricacies of his adaptations and prosthetics.

Then it was time for Paralympian Claire Cashmore MBE and young athlete, Meghan Willis, to take to the sofa for a chat about all things competitive swimming, with Meghan's wonderful confidence and positivity shining through for all to see.

To finish off the conference, Reach Ambassador Melissa Johns welcomed Reality TV Stars Jay Howard and Mollie Pearce to Orange Sofa to talk all things representation, body image and facing the teenage years.

(You can catch up on all the talks from this year's conference on Reach's YouTube channel: Reach Charity Ltd.) [www.youtube.com/@reachcharityltd4660](https://www.youtube.com/@reachcharityltd4660)



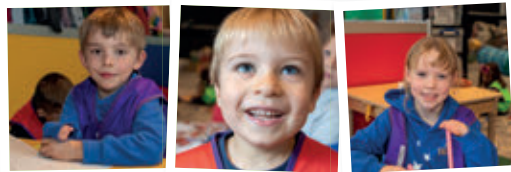
At the close of the conference, hearts full and tears of understanding and connection shared throughout the day, it was then time for parents to collect children, Family Supper Club and then getting glammed up for pre-drinks, jazz, and the fabulous Gala Dinner.

Dinner was superb, accompanied by a live band and there was even a quiz and raffle in between. After dinner Melissa Johns channelled her inner auctioneer and then, dancefloor cleared, DJ Matt Howes took to the decks to see the party to the end of the night.



Sunday came round too quickly, but the fun wasn't over. After a hearty breakfast buffet there was still time for the kids to try a mini triathlon put on by Triathlon Pathway Coaches Emma and Tom, for parents and youngsters to chat to Claire Cashmore MBE, little ones to take on a BOLDKID's Problem Solving Challenge and the rest, to burn off any residual energy before fond farewells and goodbyes as families made their way home.

I think I can say on behalf of everyone who attended, a huge thank you to the Reach Team for their incredible dedication and commitment to putting together such a wonderful weekend for us all.



## So, what did 2024 hold in store for us:

This year we descended upon the Portsmouth Marriot Hotel, beginning the fun on Friday with long-awaited catch ups as families and members arrived from all over the UK and Ireland. It never takes long for people to relax and start chatting, connecting and sharing stories, then enjoying a delicious buffet and drinks into the evening.

Saturday started early with hotel breakfast and then it was time to wave goodbye to the excited Reach children and siblings as they went to the creche, some to in-house workshops (including a gaming and VR session, a Games Maker workshop, yoga with Koalaa, and a DJ Masterclass with Matt Howes) and others headed off-site to Fort Purbrook Activity Centre to take on Lazer Quest, Shooting, Archery and a mini Paralympics!

With the kids suitably entertained it meant the Reach parents and Reach adults could sit down for the conference and listen to the tales, lessons and advice of our guest speakers, guided as ever by wonderful friend of Reach, MC Alastair Greener.



**"My experience of the weekend was wonderful. It's always great to be surrounded by people who just get it!"**  
Emily Tishaw, Reach Member & Trustee

**"I had SUCH a lovely weekend! The first of many for the Sherrington's I think! We had such a great time and it was rather emotional for me to finally meet the wider community for the first time (other than Bockett's farm I haven't been to an in person Reach event since I was much younger!)"**  
Lucy Sherrington, Reach Member & Guest Speaker

**"Knackerin' in quite a warm and exciting way!"**  
SJ Lowson Reach Charity Lead

**"Another amazing AFW, great speakers and lovely to see Reach members that haven't been to an AFW for a while reconnecting."**  
Julie Detheridge, Reach Safeguard Lead

**"I left the Annual Family Weekend 2024 with a happiness hangover!"**  
Max Swinhoe, Within Reach Editor



# Make it Monthly Monthly Donations

Visit [Reach.org.uk](https://www.reach.org.uk), click 'Support us', then select 'Make this a monthly donation' and follow PayPal's instructions.



## Donations

- £800 BoldKids
- £10 Jennifer Garbutt
- £20 Amanda Crossland  
Pleased to be supporting an important charity.
- £500 First Wealth  
From First Wealth where Ru Natarajan's godmother works and suggested Reach as they have really helped Ru and her family ahead of her big op. Keep up the amazing work you do!
- £80 Barnaby's Great Granddad  
This family have opted for donations to their favourite charities instead of Christmas presents
- £5 Annette Gabbedey Goldsmiths
- £10 Heather Nash
- £10 Jonathan McGee
- £50 Rebecca Cox  
From Greenock Police on behalf of India Craig.
- £100 Frank Tarrant
- £100 Joanne Leigh
- £10 Ian Davidson
- £25 Catherine Simpson
- £30 Lesley Landall  
For Barnaby Austen our dear friend's beautiful grandson xx
- £100 David Petherick  
From the Granary Dumfries

## Fundraising

- £165 AJ Hart  
Mini North Run
- £215 Laura Malloy  
Lloyds Cake Sale
- £134 Ken  
Gave Reach all his loose change he's been collecting over the years.
- £929 Lynne Stevens  
Sponsored swim - She has swam a total of 34,000 metres, 1352 lengths of the pool, and 22 miles, she aimed for 12 weeks and finished in a total of just 7 weeks an 2 days
- Vanessa  
Reach members who is holding a Santas grotto over the Christmas period in Oxfordshire



## A collection in memory...

Carl Rugen passed away 4 days shy of his 90th Birthday after what he described, in his own words, "a wonderful life". A considerate and proud man, Carl was forever singing the praises of all his family.

His first grandchild, Mika, was born with an upper limb difference in 1985 and he was always so supportive. He had every faith that she would do well and go far in life. Forward on 30 years and he proudly welcomed his first great grandchild, Melita, who was also born with an upper limb difference. Once again the same love, support and positive outlook was shown and when he passed away we all knew he would have wanted donations in lieu of flowers to go to Reach, as this charity was so close to his heart.



£535 Raised in his memory

## 'It's time to start the conversation: Leaving a gift in your Will'

By Lesley Goodfellow

With our 'kids' now aged 24 and 21 we realised earlier this year that it was time to revisit our Wills and update them. While doing this we talked to our solicitor about leaving money in our Wills for charity, and the various ways this can be done.



It got me thinking more generally about legacies - money left to charities in Wills - and I asked the question to the trustees of how important this is for Reach. It turns out the answer is VERY, as a significant legacy left to Reach in the last couple of years is being used right now to sustain Reach activities and keep the charity operating!

When asking this question to the trustees, Lee also kindly agreed to share his very personal story:



"My Father, pictured with Rue, sadly passed away from Dementia in June 2023. It was only after, when making the funeral arrangements listening to his wishes I was made aware he had asked for any donations at the funeral service to be given to Reach Charity.

My Father had tackled many medical issues throughout his life stemming some 30 years of major operations and would often make him very depressed. When Rue arrived, it was as if he had a new lease of life and something to stay around for and as I understand around his 1st Birthday in 2015, my parents decided to adjust their Wills to make this contribution to Reach upon their passing.

This picture from Rue's 1st Birthday will always hold a special memory with me as it was the making of a great relationship that flourished and my father never had any worries about his arm as he could see how well supported we all were from Reach from day dot."

Legacies are one element of fundraising not talked about much. It's obviously a tricky subject area and no one wants to think about dying. And of course, considering leaving money in your Will is a very personal matter but it is important to plan ahead and recently, with this information, it's been brought home to me that who you remember in your Will can make such a positive difference.

Did you know that you - or your friends and family - could help Reach by remembering them in your Will?

The most usual gifts are a sum of money, which can be any sum of money that suits your circumstances, or a percentage of your estate. If even 1% is left to charity in your Will it means those closest to you inherit the remaining 99% and just 1% would be a fabulous gift! Every gift in every Will however large or small makes a difference.

It is easy to update an existing Will, and if you haven't considered writing a Will before it is straightforward to contact to a local solicitor and there are online Will writing services available too, some of which offer free Will writing.

The only information needed to include Reach in your Will is our registered charity name and address, and our registered charity number.

If this is the first time you are considering making a Will then just know it is good to start that conversation. Please visit the Reach website which has more information on Will making in general and legacy giving.

If you are a solicitor or Will writer who can help Reach members further with your expertise, please let the Reach team know; they would love to hear from you.

And if you are considering leaving Reach a gift in your Will - thank you! I know Reach would be truly honoured.





# Welcome to Reach

Autumn



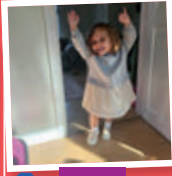
Idrees



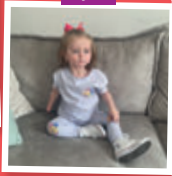
Ayla



Hope



Lyla



## Book Club!

We love sharing new books that have also chosen to represent upper limb difference, this one comes from a mum within our very Reach community.

### The Clueless Club Takes on the Mary Celeste by A. A. Roskilly

On November 25, 1872, ten people vanished without a trace from the deck of the Mary Celeste, leaving behind a ghost ship drifting aimlessly in a storm-tossed ocean.

Now, the Clueless Club meets every Friday after school to investigate history's greatest mysteries. Join club members Alice, Max, Freddie, and Gwen and find yourself catapulted back in time on that haunted ship to witness first-hand what took place. From pirate attacks to alien abductions, there's no shortage of wild and frightening theories.

Weigh up the evidence, follow the clues and decide for yourself what became of the missing crew and passengers of the Mary Celeste...

### Within Reach chatted with the author

**Why was it important for you to include a character with an upper limb difference in your book?**

**There's a brief, very realistic interaction about Gwen's limb difference in the book - why did you want to include that?**

So my daughter, Hero, was born without her right hand. When she was little we bought lots of books with limb-different characters in - it was always important to me that she saw herself represented in books and media. However, many of these books were about the limb-difference itself and they would discuss things that weren't relevant to my daughter yet - like bullying and ableism - and I found I didn't read many of them with her as I didn't want to introduce her to an unkind world that she'd had no experience of yet. As a writer, the natural next step was simply to write in the characters I wanted her to see. I wanted her to see real interactions, day-to-day ones, and I wanted her to see characters who happened to look like her but - also like her - they weren't defined by their differences, it was just something about them, like their hair colour or the language they spoke. Lately I've come across a few books like that, with fun, creative and strong characters who just happen to have a limb difference - and it was important to me to contribute to those - to bring about the representation I was looking for, for my daughter and children like her.

I didn't want the fact that Gwen had a limb difference to define her character in any way. She's fun, she's curious, she's fascinated by the weird, the strange and the macabre, and it was important to me to get her personality across more than her limb difference. I introduced it the way I did, with her being a bit sarcastic and perhaps a little darkly humourous about her limb difference because I wanted to capture the idea that Gwen gets these questions a lot, she's used to being asked about her arm and she's developed a quick way of shutting things down when she doesn't want to talk about it. She's also pretty comfortable with her limb difference and enjoys the odd joke! Right at that moment, when Freddie is shocked to see her hand, she's all set to tell her tale all about the aliens. She's thinking about UFOs and the supernatural, she's not interested in educating others about her hand. But I imagine, if we'd seen Gwen on another occasion, she'd probably have explained it to them properly, she'd have said she was born that way. But just like everybody in this world, there's a good time and a bad time to be asked and Gwen isn't always in the mood to educate others for the better!

**Does Gwen ever reveal the truth or does she let them think it's a shark attack until the end?**

The plan with Gwen in the books is that she's going to give a different excuse in every installment - she's got a bit of a wicked sense of humour and she enjoys messing with the boys! I wanted to make it obvious that it's a bit of a tall tale and that Gwen has the right to have a bit of fun with her difference! Alice, as you probably noticed, wasn't fooled but despite being a bit of a stickler for the truth, she's happy to let Gwen do it her own way in this situation.

# 12 Races, 12 Countries, 12 Months

## Live life without limits



By Tracey Atkinson

**When my daughter India was born, I had no idea that she was going to be born without fingers. Nothing was picked up in the scans during pregnancy. So, after 12 hours of labour, I don't think I really took it in. The next day hit me with questions and worries.**

The Biggest concern wasn't as much as what she couldn't do but a child's experience of loneliness. Fast forward to today, my daughter India Sasha is the bravest and most determined young lady you will meet. Nothing stops her.

We joined Reach when India was a toddler, went to an Annual Family Weekend, which to me is a vital opportunity for families to meet! I was a coordinator for a short period of time but I was ill and had to pass it on. Years later, India started TikTok and wanted to share her challenges and experiences with the world. Of course, I was nervous for fear of negativity but she had my full support.

**“India Sasha is the bravest and most determined young lady you will meet. Nothing stops her.”**

So, I had the crazy idea of 12 Races, 12 Countries, 12 months. My next challenge, January 2025, begins with a surprise location, my 3 daughters are now over 20 years old and hinted that Santa will be taking them on holiday instead of giving material items 😊. So, I found races in various countries, combined it with family holidays, and Santa also got my daughter India Sasha a race entry LOL!

This is a challenge financially, but also in terms of time, training, work and family commitments. January to March is booked so far and on a budget we will see where we go, who knows where the challenge will take us. But at each location we will be wearing our Reach vests, giving out flyers and updating you on what we are up to via Instagram and my JustGiving page.

📄 <https://www.justgiving.com/page/tracey-atkinson-1722257980893>

📍 @tracey123run



## Meet: Megan Bacon-Evans

### Reach Social Media Manager, advocate for LGBTQ+ community, Fertility Equality Activist

**Megan, you've been doing such a wonderful job with Reach's socials but we know that's just one of many things you do! Tell us a bit about you, where do you call home?**

Hi I'm Megan! I live in Windsor with my wife, Whitney, and our fur babies - a Pomchi and a cat. I have a limb difference to my left hand (called Handy).

**You wear a lot of hats and champion multiple communities... Where did it all start for you?**

Yes I sure do! I have been online since 2009, it all started when I set up a blog to document my long-distance relationship with Whitney - as she was living in Hawaii at the time. I also did it to provide lesbian visibility as growing up there was a lack of lesbian role models and I hoped that by showing our life and love as a couple, it may help others. This organically moved onto YouTube and we started to gain a following. Now we're lucky enough to be content creators full time, as well as running Reach's social media channels!

I actually hid my limb difference online for a few years as I was worried what people would say. I struggled for a while to accept and embrace my limb difference. Whitney loving me for who I am actually helped me a lot on my journey to acceptance. I was always very out and proud as a lesbian, but it wasn't until 2011 that I 'came out' about my limb difference. In fact, it was after watching Bethany Hamilton movie that gave me the final courage to be open. I was honestly shocked by the wonderful comments and reaction that I received. It opened up my eyes knowing that I am not the only one in the LGBTQ+ community with a difference or disability. Since then, I've been trying my best to also advocate and provide visibility for the limb difference community.



**What for you has been your biggest accomplishment on your journey so far?**

Ooh that's a good question! I think it's using our platform and 'influence' for good, campaigning for Fertility Equality. Speaking in Parliament about the change we want to see happen and the government listening and putting it in the Women's Health Strategy in 2022.

**Back in June you won an Attitude Pride Award – congratulations! Can you tell us a bit about the award, how it came about and why you chose Reach to receive the fantastic donation?**

Thank you very much! We won the award due to our Fertility Equality campaigning.

More info here: <https://www.attitude.co.uk/life/peugeot-attitude-pride-awards-2024-whitney-megan-bacon-evans-468069/>

We are incredibly grateful to have won an Attitude Pride Award for our advocacy and campaigning for fertility equality. Being acknowledged at the Attitude Pride Awards 2024 among numerous remarkable and inspiring individuals was truly an honour.

As we said in our acceptance speech, our journey advocating for fertility equality since 2020 has been driven by the desire to pave the way for LGBTQ+ families in the future.

We decided to donate to Reach as the intersectionality of being LGBTQ+ and having a limb difference is an area that I'd love to explore and help others.

**What's on the horizon currently for you in terms of campaigning and/or life adventures?**

My wife and I have just been into the Parliament to have a meeting the Health Secretary, Wes Streeting, to share our experiences and to discuss how we eliminate the 'gay tax' same sex female couples face when accessing IVF.

We're pleased to announce that the Department for Health is now urgently reviewing how to remove unnecessary tests and additional barriers that disproportionately impact same-sex female couples.

Other than that, we're pregnant! Which is super exciting! It's been a 4-year long journey with 5 rounds of fertility treatments, so it still feels very surreal!

## Accessible Gaming

By Paul Carter

BBC Presenter & Reporter

**For many years playing video games as someone with a limb difference was at best difficult, and often downright impossible. But thanks to modern technologies and increased awareness, gaming is now more accessible than ever, writes Paul Carter...**

I grew up surrounded by video games. Living with two older brothers who already had a computer in the house, (a ZX Spectrum to show my age!) I was aware of games from a very early age and naturally, I wanted to play them. But as someone born without hands, it often posed challenges. Being exposed at such a young age meant I was able to learn and adapt, and find my own ways of playing those early games that often only required the use of one or two buttons.

As I got older and graduated onto better computers and ultimately games consoles, the games naturally became more advanced and so, more difficult for me to play. It became a fact of life for me that for many games, if there wasn't an option within the game itself to customise the buttons, then I wasn't able to play them. A lot of my youth was subsequently spent in game shops (remember them?) reading the back of the box or daring to try and open it to read the instruction manual inside to try and get a sense of how the controls worked.



Thankfully for the disabled gamers of today things have come on leaps and bounds from how they were for Nintendo-obsessed teenage me. Today, the majority of the major gaming platforms allow for controller layouts to be customised at a system-wide level, and also have the option for creating bespoke layouts and profiles for individual games and players.

But perhaps the most seismic shift in recent years has been in how the gaming industry itself has finally recognised that we, as disabled gamers, exist and are a market to be catered for. This hit new heights in 2018 when Microsoft, makers of the Xbox consoles, released the Xbox Adaptive Controller – a customisable device that allows gamers to connect a huge range of assistive devices such as joysticks, thumbsticks, switches and buttons to create a fully bespoke gaming setup.

The Adaptive Controller was designed with and by disabled people, something that would have been unthinkable even a decade prior. Then in late 2023 Sony followed suit with the release of the Access Controller for PlayStation a device with similar aims but a very different design.



Xbox Adaptive Controller



Access Controller for PlayStation

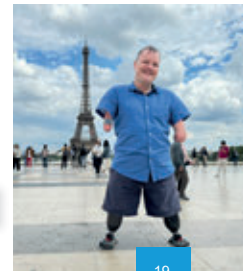
It's not just the console manufacturers who have finally woken up to the fact that we have money to spend. Many big games releases now come with a raft of accessibility features built in, enabling more people with a whole range of impairments to dive right in. Last year I spent time with a totally blind gamer playing the racing game Forza Motorsport, showing just how far accessibility features have come. There is still a long way to go before every game is accessible, but the direction of travel is promising.

Away from the physical hardware and games themselves, today's gamers with a limb difference have access to more resources and information than ever before, allowing people to make more informed decisions before they buy. No more reading the back of game boxes! Websites like Can I Play That? ([caniplaythat.com](http://caniplaythat.com)) feature accessibility information for a whole range of titles. Special Effect, the fabulous charity for disabled gamers, have a website containing videos and guides on motor accessibility at [gameaccess.info](http://gameaccess.info). Special Effect also provide a range of bespoke solutions for people who might need specialist equipment or setups to help them play more easily. There is also a thriving gaming accessibility community on platforms such as Twitch or YouTube, where people with a range of impairments share tips and experiences.

All of this is not to say that the outlook is entirely rosy. As I faced when I was younger, enhancing and emerging technologies can often bring their own problems and difficulties for those of us seen to be outside the 'mainstream'. The growth of new gaming platforms such as VR, mixed reality and augmented reality are already bringing challenges. I'm still struggling to find a way to fully interact with my new Meta Quest headset, which requires the use of two handheld controllers, or uses hand tracking; neither of which are things that work for me.

Despite the challenges ahead, I'm heartened by the fact that for the first time, the gaming industry now acknowledges that we as players need to be listened to, and our needs catered for.

Playing video games is now firmly established as a mainstream pastime, enjoyed by people from all backgrounds, ages, genders and cultures. It has the ability to bring joy entertainment, togetherness and excitement. And why shouldn't we all be able to fully experience that?





# Para Snowboarder & Coach

## Alastair Nasmyth

James Barnes Miller

Welcome to Within Reach Alistair, thanks again for the awesome session at RAW (Reach Activity Week) this year. It's safe to say the kids loved snowboarding and skateboarding!

Please tell us a bit about yourself, where do you call home and when did you start snowboarding?

I live in Edinburgh now but mainly grew up in the north west of England and Cumbria in particular which is where I fell in love with mountains. I went to Canada for a year before University and learnt to snowboard (badly) whilst working in a ski resort. After university in Nottingham, I went back to the mountains where I went on to work winters in Italy, France, Canada again, New Zealand, Scotland and Japan.

How did you become a para snowboard coach?

I'd been a snowboard instructor for 9 years and just moved back to the UK when the job came up. I knew one para snowboarder, Owen Pick, from my time in France and was excited by the opportunity to work with future potential Paralympians. I also liked the idea that I might be able to have a positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities.

Jack Silverwood

Did you have any preconceptions entering the world of para sport?

I've tried hard not to. I've always tried to assume that people with disabilities can do things and let them try then adapt if they can't. I suppose I assumed they had more support from the health service. From my experience it seems often if someone with a disability can "get by" then it's hard from them to get extra support to excel at things.

What's been a highlight for you as a coach?

The progress of the athletes I've coached, just seeing them improve and what it means to them. Some of which has led to medals which is even better. I've also helped set up a series of disability inclusive Snowsport races which has created a community and training environment which previously didn't exist.

Biggest learning curve?

The classification system for para sport isn't as straight forward as it seems initially.

What are the classifications for upper limb difference - is it just one or are there differing categories depending on elbows etc. like in other sports?

So, for snowboarding it's just one category of upper limb and everyone races together. That includes people with spasticity, dystonia, hypertonia, ataxia and muscle weakness as well as people missing parts of their arms. If you have limb loss, it has to be between the wrist and elbow broadly speaking.

For skiing and cross-country, the upper limb category is anyone who would struggle/can't hold a pole so that includes missing fingers too. These sports have factors that adjust the time they take on the course. The factor differs between the level of upper limb impairment.



What opportunities are available for Reach children wanting to enter the Snowsport world? Where should parents/children start?

The three Snowsports are alpine skiing (the one where you go downhill), snowboarding and cross-country skiing (the one where you go along the flat). For skiing and snowboarding they're more adrenaline sports. Cross country is an endurance sport. There are around 47 dry slopes across the UK where you can learn to ski and snowboard, and there are 5 indoor snow slopes. There are 9 Nordic clubs where you can try cross country. I'd definitely start with lessons at any of the above places. Most of the people I've met with upper limb difference would be fine to join a mainstream lesson, but if they would prefer or think they need support from people with more disability experience then they should contact Disability Snowsports UK.

Are there any presumptions/preconceptions from either parents or people outside of the world of sport about the para pathway that you've had to combat over the years?

Mainly just people not being aware of para snowboarding and the fact it is a paralympic sport.



In terms of support from Disability Snowsports UK, what kind of support is available...For example, is there funding available to get children to training if they need help?

Their private lessons are a lot cheaper than mainstream private lessons. They periodically have deals and discounts too. So, the Manchester slope had some free lessons available last month, for example.

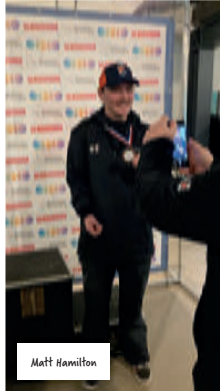
We're seeing more young female athletes being represented in parasport which is awesome, from your point of view, are they still under-represented and what can we do to encourage more girls to try/get into Snowsport?

Yeah definitely, it would be great to see a field as deep with female competitors as male. I think we have to listen to girls and women and find what stops them or turns them off sport and what would encourage them to take part. And provide some opportunities tailored to them. Also champion the female athletes we do have so they can see what's achievable.

Jack began snowboarding 4 years ago, what does it take to get to paralympic competition level?

So, over the summer he's at his local indoor snow centre at least once a week. Then over the winter he's spending at least 30 days on snow each winter.

He'll probably have to increase that a bit to get to Paralympics. It's hard to say how long it will take in general. It depends on so many factors that differ between individuals: age, background, access to facilities, access to funding. If you can spend the amount of time he has then around 6 years from beginner would be pretty quick.



Matt Hamilton

## Questions for Jack Silverwood

Have you always loved Snowsport? How/when did you get into it?

I got into it 4-ish years ago and I've loved it since the first lesson, but never really considered it before that.

How has having the support of a para coach changed things for you?

The para coaches have been brilliant as they not only just facilitate and deliver training and help improvement, but they quickly got me ready and into a good position to hold my own against other competitors.

What's been a highlight on your para Snowsport journey so far?

The highlight so far has been getting 2nd place in the Europa Cup, it came out of nowhere and has been a good bench mark to try and beat next season.

And your biggest challenge to overcome?

My biggest challenge has been the taking up of a brand-new sport, especially in the first 2 years. I had to ride faster than I was comfortable with to keep up with the navy lot, which resulted in snapping ligaments/tendons in my collar bone. But threats of injury are always good to force you to concentrate and ride better.



# The conversation of inclusion

**W**e often speak about the use of language and how to talk about upper limb difference within the Reach community, but it can be difficult for those not yet connected with us to know how to approach the subject, ask the right questions and know how to include us.

So, what does it take to delve into the world of inclusion? I think there needs to be an openness and a willingness; to be informed, educated, and at times, corrected. People need to approach difference with sensitivity. But we can also be aware of the environment we create, allowing people to feel they can broach subjects and talk to us. However, there must be a mutual respect and empathy; it isn't solely our responsibility to make others feel comfortable.

One difficulty I'm sure we can all recognise is that we are all different and we use differing terminology. Some don't like the word 'disabled', whilst others use the word 'missing' when referring to their hands or arms. So where does someone outside our community start? I say, with a conversation.

I first chatted to Pete Edwards, a climbing coach and instructor ([prowesscoaching.co.uk](http://prowesscoaching.co.uk)), at our local climbing wall. I mentioned I was struggling to figure out how to lead belay (controlling the rope and keeping a climber safe as they ascend and clip into bolts on their way up) because I don't have the grip or elbow functionality required.

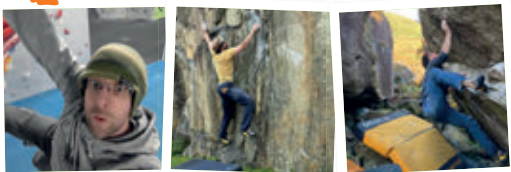
After this brief chat Pete reached out and offered me a session to help me figure it out, and we succeeded, thanks to a fab little device called the Petzi Neox. But that's not why I'm telling you this. I'm telling you because I was happily surprised at Pete's interest in learning about upper limb difference and his readiness to listen when I suggested the language he was using wasn't quite in line with our community. And so, a conversation was started, and it was one based on a mutual respect and good intentions.

**Pete, thank you for being a part of this discussion, what were your thoughts going into our session?**

"I wanted to offer my expertise to see if I could come up with a solution. I suspected that it was going to be solved by the new Petzi Neox, but I also wanted to chat about vocabulary. I became aware, from a chat with someone else recently, that using the term 'disabled' can be unpopular, so I wanted to know if it was a suitable term for you, and if not, what is. "My knowledge and experience of upper limb difference is scant, but I'm learning. I knew you weren't an amputee but I didn't know what the correct term was. You were really approachable and made me feel like I could ask questions without judgement, knowing you'd guide me in the right direction."



**In terms of inclusion, how did you want to direct the session?**  
 "Going into the session, I wanted to restrict the amount of equipment we used and make it as simple as possible, and honestly, as 'normal' as possible. I didn't want you to feel like you were doing anything out of the ordinary. I wanted you to feel like any other climber, belaying like everyone else, but I also wanted you to lead the conversation as much as possible."



**Had you worked with anyone with a disability before?**

"Yes, I have been working with another local climber, Sara, who has cerebral palsy. We've been having sessions for almost a year now, and that's been really enlightening for me. But I am always keen to work with different clients and people I've not worked with, hence reaching out to yourself. I hoped the session with you would help me to step up my game on how I coach and deliver sessions, and what I would learn would filter through to all of my sessions day-to-day, in the way I behave or use different language." During our session, Pete asked me how he should talk about my arm, and then after, I was happy to help when he asked me to proof a social post he'd written about the session. I advised him on the content of an email, including terminology that felt more aligned with Reach language; for example, adopting upper limb 'difference' rather than 'deficiency.'

The truth is, we'll never get it 100% and while I may be editor of this magazine, I'm certainly not the voice of Reach. So, my advice to those in Pete's position is: "if in doubt, leave it out" but don't let fear stop you from starting conversations. Talk to the people you are talking about, ask for their support and create a space that feels non-judgemental. Be willing to be advised, and be prepared to change your approach. It doesn't mean you were wrong; it just means you could be more aligned. It's about having those productive, inclusive conversations and bringing more people into the Reach community."

@ - @Prowess.coaching

📍 - Prowess Climbing Coaching

# Representation in Action

**A small toy that made a BIG impact to our community.**

Back in October, Aldi released 12 unique and inclusive dolls to their Specialbuys; the dolls represented visible differences, from upper limb difference, vitiligo to cochlear implants/hearing aids and birth marks.

The recognition by a big brand that representation of diversity and disability is important means a lot to our Reach community, and others, so much so, many took to social media to celebrate this win for representation to share photos of their Reach kids proudly showing off their new toys!



"As an adult it is incredible to see children's toys be inclusive and represent the diversity of our lives. I wish my younger self could have had a teddy that was 'just like me' but even 23-year-old me couldn't not buy it! Thank you Aldi for making our community feel seen."

**Reach Trustee, Ella Dickinson**



"It's lovely to find dolls with limb differences for Charlie to see as he's growing up and know it is normal for everyone to have differences. It's great that companies and other brands are making the effort for this type of awareness, as well as for other kids to see and become familiar with other children having all kinds of differences. I hope if there is more awareness like this in the future people won't have to ask Charlie as many questions when he is older and he'll feel that there's nothing wrong with the difference to his hand."

**Reach Mum, Ashleigh Collins**

**Aldi also chose to represent limb difference in their magazine, featuring a limb different model called Autumn (@Autumnkillinaul).**

**We asked Autumn how she felt when she saw herself in the magazine:**

"Happy! Because I was in a magazine because I'm a special, I'm special because I have a stump!"

**Autumn**

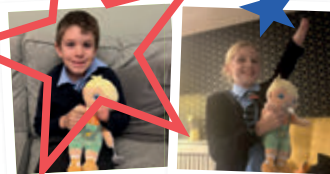
"As parents we felt extremely proud of Autumn, and so thankful she was given the opportunity to represent her limb difference."

**Autumn's mum Emily**



"As a parent of a child with a limb difference it is incredibly meaningful to see. For me it represents progress in promoting inclusivity and helps children like my son see themselves represented in everyday toys. Not only that but it fosters understanding and acceptance in other children, showing that differences should be celebrated. This representation is a powerful step toward embracing diversity and making every child feel seen and valued. Plus, the smile it gave my son Miles was amazing."

**Reach Mum, Emma Gilpin**





JOIN THE MISSION FOR LA 2028



# ***FIGHTERBILITY***

THE SEARCH FOR THE NEXT GENERATION  
OF PARALYMPIC CHAMPIONS

