Methods A literature review was performed to investigate the benefits of exercise for adolescents with disabilities, as well as the barriers and facilitators to participation. PubMed was searched for eligible articles by expanding the following search terms to include synonyms, and combining them with the Boolean operator ‘AND’: adolescents; exercise; disability; benefits. Resultant articles were screened for eligibility by abstract and full-text manuscript.

Results This review included adolescents with the following conditions: neurological disabilities, particularly spinal cord injuries; cerebral palsy; epilepsy; other physical disabilities. The benefits conveyed to those teenagers engaging in sport firstly included emotional improvements: a higher sense of self-worth and improved self-esteem, improved relationships with family members. Furthermore, physical benefits of exercise were reported in these populations: increased aerobic capacity, and a general improvement in physical health; improvements in teenagers’ gross motor functions; better seizure control for adolescents with epilepsy, and improved cognitive function.

Despite these potential benefits, the literature emphasised that these teenagers faced numerous challenges which hindered their participation in sport. The first barrier to exercise was due to advice from healthcare professionals, teachers or family that their exercise should be limited or stopped due to their disability. Similarly, it was reported that confusion and conflicting advice created an uncomfortable environment for adolescents in which to explore an interest in sport. Secondly, teenagers were reported to limit their own exercise participation due to their own fears of exacerbating or worsening their physical health. Finally, embarrassment or fear about how their sporting performance would be perceived by others was a social barrier.

In order to combat these barriers to participation in sport, several facilitators were identified in the literature that increase teenagers’ likelihood to exercise. Firstly, social factors, such as exercising in a group, finding an encouraging sports coach, or having family support to exercise all increased physical activity levels. Furthermore, introducing an aspect of fun into sport increased participation; examples included exercising with people the adolescent considered fun, or including animals into exercise, for example through therapeutic horse-riding. Finally, a teenager’s self-motivation to exercise greatly increased their engagement.

Conclusions Teenagers with disabilities face numerous barriers to participation in sport, however the potential benefits of exercise are substantial. Higher levels of physical activity are associated with better mental and physical health. Several facilitators exist to improve adolescents’ involvement with exercise. Key strategies include making exercise fun, encouraging self-motivation to exercise, and creating a positive social environment around sporting activities.

THE ‘CREATE’ PROJECT: CREATING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT FOR ADOLESCENTS AND TEAM EMPOWERMENT

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Objectives The paediatric landscape for the care needs of young people is rapidly evolving. Traditional models of care pathways and team colleagues in our acute hospital settings need to advance at pace. Colleagues have come together locally to reflect upon shared experiences & to co-produce ideas about how to ‘CREATE’: Create the Right Environment for Adolescents & Team colleagues, to Empower teams caring for young people on our children’s unit.

Methods Following complex cases on our acute unit, a joint reflective open session was held in September 2021 with paediatricians, CAMHS, lead nurses, medical directors, chief medical officers, occupational therapists, head of resilience/training, social workers, psychologist, physiotherapists, playteams, security and mental health nurses. The huge response clearly demonstrated the desire to influence productive, supportive change for our environment and to explore how best to support distressed young people. The CREATE team was born: ‘an umbrella concept’ representing a multidisciplinary group leading change for the young person’s voice, training, supporting colleagues, culture, our clinical care and physical environment.

Results The CREATE workstreams include:
1. Clinical Care/Young Person & Family Experience Individualised daily care plans; optimising care introducing ‘tell it once’ and ‘this is me’ documents; exploring nurse led HEADSSS screening (identifying risk of trauma/adverse childhood experiences); identifying young persons advocate; exploring ‘therapeutic education’.
2. Workforce planning Successfully leading business cases for expansion of children and young people social, emotional and mental health nurse team; band 3 nursing support; youth worker; occupational therapist; activities co-ordinator; consultant (specialist interest in adolescent health).
3. Engagement/Culture Capturing colleague experience: ‘Your Voice - Behaviours that challenge’: powerful feedback created collaborative improvements; reframing language used; recognition of re-traumatisation for young person/colleagues; continued development of monthly ‘drop -in’/safe space for MDT to share feelings with CAMHS staff regarding complex/traumatising cases.
4. Environmental Improvements Children & Young People National Survey results used to create a ‘sanctuary space’ for young people on the acute unit, utilising local funding bids in liaison with ‘Arts For Life’ and co-production from young people/colleagues.
5. Training/Education/Quality Improvement Recognition of trauma informed care underpinning experience/training with the development of a generic module and specific multi-disciplinary simulation situation learning; trauma informed workstream created to support the trust strategy process; The ‘We Can Talk’ QI project has been rolled out across whole acute colleagues.

Conclusions The CREATE project has developed over 10 months and demonstrates what can be successfully achieved with listening to the voices of colleagues and experiences of children and young people on our acute unit, alongside the desire for change to meet the evolving and sometimes complex needs of young people presenting to an acute hospital setting. Further development is in progress including the concept of true co-production of this project, understanding and changing the landscape for restorative clinical and managerial supervision for acute colleagues in line with mental health colleagues.