

Raising Awareness of Asperger's Syndrome

Amongst Coaches and Athletes:

The Power of Virtual Support Networks

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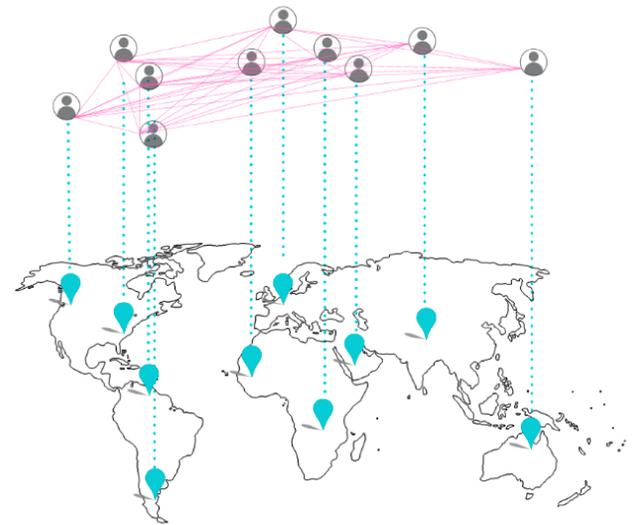


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1.0: Study Rational

The Virtual Alliance for Sport Technology (V.A.S.T) is an online tool utilised by a community of experts and practitioners to facilitate the generation and sharing of knowledge in order to promote participant inclusion in sport. The principal aim of the present study was to utilise this platform to create and evaluate an online teaching resource to provide support for coaches working with athletes with Asperger's Syndrome. At present little information is provided by National Governing Bodies (NGB's) about Asperger's Syndrome and as a consequence many athletes can be marginalised in sports provision.

Much research has been conducted on participant's with Asperger's Syndrome and according to some researchers (1) the brain is wired differently, not defectively and they prioritises the pursuit of knowledge, truth and understanding above feelings. This can be advantageous to Asperger's participants within sport. However, due to the perceived 'differences' participants and coaches with Asperger's Syndrome have to overcome more barriers, although these barriers are not discussed or supported by many NGB's.



2.0: Methods

Study Design: Case Study, Evaluative and Figurational Theory Framework

- Creating a case study of participants experiences within sport and transferring these to an online teaching resource.
- Gantt Charts, Program Theory and a Logic Model were created to plan and evaluate the project throughout, to ensure all measures were met and on time.
- Results were interpreted using a Figurational framework to investigate how information about the web-tool was disseminated and transformed through virtual networks of interdependencies which linked participants diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, their coaches and the online community.

Participants: Athletes and Coaches with Asperger's Syndrome

- Ages between 16-40
- A range of different sports

Instrumentation: Semi Structured Interviews

- Semi structured interviews were conducted to case study participants, involving questions regarding diagnosis, positive and negative experiences within sport and the support they received

Data Analysis: Triangulation of Statistical Analysis

- Regarding website, Blog and Twitter usage with interviews conducted with network users

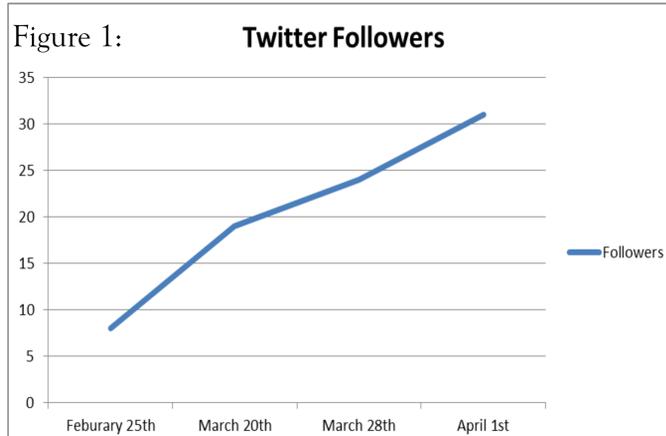
3.0: Results

3.1: Case Studies

Case Studies	Sport involvement	Diagnosed (Age)	Support	Experiences in Sport
Jason, 39	Coach & Co-founder of the Virtual Alliance for Sport Technology	37	None, I was discriminated against from youth through to today	Traumatic, I was left out, bullied, beaten up, no one wanted me around. Before anyone knew, I was at the top of my coaching, nominated for coach of the year and then after finding out they fired me"
Penny Andrews, 33	British Disability Athletics (BDA) Sprinter	30	Not officially. Sports officer and disability athletics were supporting, but none again now.	I had extra time to do things and have an understanding team at the BDA. Information regarding events were held from me, I wasn't really included.

"It was like Eminem, your hiding, your running, your trying not to get beat up" (Jason, 39)

"It was hard to get information before the day and during the event and they kept messing with the schedule so I was very anxious and not properly warmed up" (Penny, 33)



3.2: Twitter Followers

From initial set up of twitter on the 25th of February, there has been a constant increase in followers. This has enabled the contact of new case studies and support of the project.

4.0: Discussion:

Sport can be a traumatic event for children and adults with Asperger's Syndrome (2) and this is displayed through each of the case studies. Jason, 39 stated that he found it difficult to understand the rules of team sport games, and they were not detailed to him in the correct manner. This led to him quitting team sports in general alongside people not understanding him and wanting to beat him up. It has been suggested that (2) this issue stems from the communication of the coach to the participant, which is not reported on thoroughly by NGB's. For people with Asperger's Syndrome in sport they prefer things to be kept structured, therefore if a coach can develop a routine, it will allow the participant to feel more comfortable and have more of a chance in staying in that sport (2). Activities that are too chaotic can also discourage future involvement in physical activity (3) and teaching strategies such as organisation, clear language, visual cues and positive reinforcement is detailed to enhance and maintain participation of Asperger's Syndrome participants. However, this is not mentioned to coaches and workshops focused on this area are not a requirement. Results gained from this project highlight how web-based platforms have the capability to bring together otherwise marginalised groups with virtual networks of sports experts, athletes and practitioners. The implications of these results increase awareness of participants with Asperger's Syndrome within sport and provide coaches, athletes and policy makers with information that will enable them to effectively teach and support sports participants with Asperger's Syndrome in an athlete-centric manner.

5.0: References:

- (1) Attwood, T. (1998) Asperger's syndrome: a guide for parents and professionals. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- (2) Buzby, J. (2011) Asperger's Syndrome Should Not Eliminate Kids from Youth Sports. *Exceptional Parent*, Vol. 41(6), Pp. 16-17.
- (3) Borremans, E., & Rintala, P., & McCubbin, J. A. (2010) Physical Fitness and Physical Activity in Adolescents with Asperger Syndrome: A Comparative Study. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, Vol. 27, Pp. 308-320.