

Raising Awareness of Asperger's Syndrome Amongst Coaches and Athletes:

The Power of Virtual Support Networks

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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 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 about Asperger's, and as a consequence many athletes can be marginalised in sports provision.

A methods-driven evaluative framework was adopted in order to assess the impact of the web-tool. Gantt timelines and a programme theory were produced prior to the project, and programme processes were evaluated throughout. Website impact was assessed via triangulation of statistical analysis regarding website usage with interviews conducted with network users. 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 syndrome, their coaches and the online community.

Results gained from this project are expected to 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 will 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.