Leisure and recreation

E White

Many hobbies and pastimes may be enjoyed by disabled people, and being disabled should not mean being inactive or bored. Unfortunately, participating in a sport or pastime is often restricted as much by environmental barriers and unimaginative attitudes as by the disability itself.

Aids and appliances described in this and the previous series (such as splints and wheelchairs) may enable disabled people to take full advantage of the many leisure opportunities available. In addition to identifying what disabled people can and cannot do, it is most important to know what they find interesting and enjoyable. For many activities all that is needed is enthusiasm, for others it is usually a matter of finding alternative ways of doing something rather than designing new equipment. If a disabled person is unable to enjoy a particular leisure activity despite the provision of conventional aids, non-standard aids may be the answer. The Disabled Living Foundation may be able to help; often a solution to an individual problem has already been found. If a suitable aid is not available the Rehabilitation Engineering Movement Advisory Panel (a part of the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation) has volunteer engineers and other staff who can design or adapt one off aids.

Access

A British Standards Institute code of practice covers requirements for access, and legislation now requires provision for needs of disabled people in public buildings and many new premises. Guides on access to various towns and areas are available from the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation, which also produces the *Spectators' Access Guide for Disabled People*.

The National Trust's handbook indicates properties suitable for wheelchair users, and *The National Trust—Facilities for Disabled and Handicapped Visitors* gives further information. The English Heritage guide also lists properties with wheelchair access, and a separate guide gives more details, such as the number of steps.

The National Key Scheme provides access to special lavatories specifically for use by disabled people; there are many of these throughout the country, and a key and list are available from Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation or local social services departments.

Facilities for the disabled in public and historic buildings are slowly improving, but it is still wise to inquire in advance about provision for people with a specific disability.

Aids for leisure activities

Many games, such as chess, backgammon, and draughts, have been adapted for the blind, and the adapted versions are available from the Royal National Institute for the Blind. Playing cards for the visually impaired are also available. Card holders for those with difficulty holding the cards can be obtained, but a scrubbing brush will often serve as well (fig 1). Many games are available on microcomputer, and a joystick or other adapted control can enable disabled people to play individually or compete with others, including able bodied competitors.

Cinemas, theatres, and similar places can greatly help people with impaired hearing by installing induction loops as most hearing aids have a T setting.

Gardening

Gardening is one of the most popular recreational activities in Britain. It is important to consider the general design of the garden, such as the width of the beds, use of raised beds (fig 2), and layout of paths (fig 3). Many garden tools, though not sold specifically for disabled people, are designed to reduce physical effort—for example, by having longer handles to reduce bending. *Gardening*, a book in the series *Equipment for the Disabled*, has information on topics such as garden design, safety, and weeding; a range of tools is illustrated, and it also has a section on gardening for those with visual impairment. The Royal National Institute for the Blind produces a booklet (also in braille and on audiotape) *Gardening without Sight*, and the Society for Horticultural Therapy offers advice and help both to individual disabled gardeners and to professionals concerned with horticulture as a therapeutic activity.

FIG 1—Scrubbing brush used to hold playing cards

St Luke's Hospital,
Bradford BD5 0NA
E White, MB, consultant
geriatrician

BMJ 1991;302:461-3

FIG 2—Raised flower beds

WILLIAM MERRITT DISABLED LIVING CENTRE, LEEDS

WILLIAM MERRITT DISABLED LIVING CENTRE, LEEDS

FIG 3—Garden designed for the disabled

Sport

The potential of disabled sportsmen and women was well demonstrated in the para-Olympics at Seoul; many sports may be adapted to take account of a disability—such as wheelchair basketball—and sport can offer an individual challenge no matter what the degree of disability. The British Sports Association for the Disabled promotes sport among disabled people and strives to improve facilities. Many bodies representing individual sports or disabilities can also help.

Angling is said to be the most popular participation sport in this country, and the Handicapped Piscatorial Association offers an advice service on all aspects of the sport and provides information on aids and equipment for the disabled. It also has a specially designed boat (Wheelyboat (fig 4)) which allows easy access for disabled people, including those in wheelchairs, and these are available at various locations throughout Great Britain.

Children's toys and play

Play is a vital part of a child's development, through which physical and social skills are learnt and practised. In general, standard toys should be provided for disabled children, together with the range of household items most children adopt for their play. Help and advice may be needed from the physiotherapist about posture and balance. Special chairs can be used to help support the child; these usually have an attached table at which the child can play. Many towns now have toy

HANDICAPPED PISCATORIAL ASSOCIATION

FIG 4—"Wheelyboat"

libraries, where a range of well tested toys may be borrowed. Play Matters—the National Toy Libraries Association gives details of local libraries and also publishes *What Toy*.

Holidays

Many tour operators now offer facilities for disabled people in their standard packages. It is important to check early that they can accommodate people with specific disabilities. *Holidays for the Physically Handicapped*, published annually by the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation contains much detailed information on suitable accommodation. Other bodies, such as the Automobile Association, also produce helpful guides. Many activity holidays are available at special centres (for example, the Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Activities Centre, Hampshire), which offer residential activity courses for people who are mentally or physically disabled. Organisations that cater for people with specific disabilities run holidays themselves or can offer advice. Local social services departments may offer financial help with holidays for registered disabled people, but the amount varies greatly among districts. In the case of severely handicapped children aged under 16 and living at home the family fund, a government financed fund administered by the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust, may be able to provide financial help.

Obtaining help

A wealth of information and help is available. Most hobbies, sports, and pastimes have national representative bodies which provide information for disabled enthusiasts. There are also organisations specifically for physically and mentally disadvantaged people, many of which are listed in the *Directory for Disabled People*, which also includes self help groups. The Disabled Living Foundation has information notes on leisure activities and sports and physical recreation (information list numbers 6 and 6a) with addresses of helpful organisations. Disabled living centres can also offer specialist advice, and libraries and sports centres can help with information about local clubs. Information is also available from Disablement Information and Advice Lines, an independent advice service run by people with direct personal experience of disability.

Appendix

FURTHER READING

- British Standards Institute. *Access for the disabled in buildings*. BSI, 1979. (BS 5810.)
- Cochrane GM, Wilshire ER, eds. *Gardening*. Oxford: Oxfordshire Health Authority, 1987. Available from Mary Marlborough Lodge, Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre, Oxford OX3 7ZD.
- Corrad OJ. Hearing aids. In: Mulley G, ed. *Everyday aids and appliances*. London: British Medical Journal, 1989:1-8.
- Darnborough A, Kinrade D. *Directory for disabled people: a handbook of information and opportunities for disabled and handicapped people*. 5th ed. Cambridge: Woodhead-Faulkner, 1989. Available in most main libraries for reference.
- Chamberlain MA. Disabled living centres. In: Mulley G, ed. *Everyday aids and appliances*. London: British Medical Journal, 1989:96-101.
- Jay P. *Coping with disability*. London: Disabled Living Foundation, 1984.
- Thomson N, ed. *Sports and recreation provision for disabled people*. London: Disabled Living Foundation, 1984.

ADDRESSES

British Sports Association for the Disabled, 34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1 3ND (071 383 7277)

Disabled Living Foundation, 380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU (081 289 611)
 Disablement Information and Advice Lines (DIAL) UK, DIAL House, 117 High Street, Clay Cross, Derbyshire S45 9D2 (local addresses supplied)
 English Heritage, Fortress House, 23 Savile Row, London W1Y 1AB.
 Handicapped Piscatorial Association, 29 Ironlatch Avenue, St Leonards on Sea, East Sussex TN38 9JE (0424 427931)
 Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust, PO Box 50, York YO1 1UY
 National Trust, 36 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AS.

Play Matters—the National Toy Libraries Association, 68 Churchway, London NW1 1CT (071 387 9592)
 Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Activities Centre, Upper Hamble Country Park, Pylands Lane, Burlesden, Hampshire
 Rehabilitation Engineering Movement Advisory Panels (REMAP) and Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR), 25 Mortimer Street, London W1N 8AB (071 637 5400)
 Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB), 224 Great Portland Street, London W1N 6AA (071 388 1266)
 Society for Horticultural Therapy, Goulds Ground, Vallis Way, Frome, Somerset BA11 3DW (0373 64782)

Understanding Benefits

Benefits for people in hospital, nursing homes, and residential care homes

Simon Ennals

Contributory benefits

Retirement pension
 Widow's benefit
 Unemployment benefit
 Sickness benefit
 Invalidity benefit
 Maternity allowance

Non-contributory benefits

Child benefit
 One parent benefit
 Attendance allowance
 Invalid care allowance
 Mobility allowance
 Severe disablement allowance
 Industrial injury benefit
 Statutory sick pay and maternity pay

Means tested benefits

Income support
 Housing benefit
 Community charge benefit
 Family credit
 Social fund

As doctors are often concerned in arranging for patients to enter hospital or some form of residential care, either short term or permanently, they need to develop an understanding of how the benefit system provides for this. Going into hospital or residential care can be stressful, and reassurance about the financial aspects can make a great deal of difference to the patient.

Many of the community care aspects of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 concern the funding of residential care. Although the lead role in arranging, and paying for, residential placements will shift to local authority social services departments, the implementation of the changes has been delayed until April 1993. The present arrangement, whereby responsibility is split between the Department of Social Security and the local authority, will continue at least until 1993, and for some patients it will continue for some time after that.

This article explains the benefit rules relating to three main categories of care: local authority residential homes, private residential care and nursing homes, and hospitals.

Local authority residential accommodation

Local authorities provide residential accommodation for elderly or physically handicapped patients under

part III of the National Assistance Act 1948 (in Scotland the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968). Accommodation for mentally handicapped people or those with or recovering from a mental illness is usually provided under the NHS Act 1977. A patient who is in local authority accommodation provided under the 1948 act, or under the 1977 act if board is provided, either temporarily or permanently has a qualifying level for income support (applicable amount) of £46.90 a week. This is made up of £37.50 for the accommodation and £9.40 for personal expenses. This means that a single person would qualify for income support only if any other income that he or she has is not more than £46.90 a week. Local authorities usually charge fees linked to these income support rates. When the patient is one of a couple and the partner remains at home the income support level will be £46.90 plus the rate for a single person.

Housing benefit cannot be claimed on local authority residential home charges, but for people only temporarily in the home any housing benefit for the rent on their normal home can continue for up to a year's absence. The same applies for people receiving a contribution towards their mortgage as part of their income support. This can continue for up to 52 weeks of a temporary stay in local authority care. Most National Insurance benefits (such as retirement pensions or invalidity benefit) are not affected by a

Independent living fund

Another source of help for severely disabled people—other than social security benefits—is the independent living fund. As its name implies the fund makes payments to enable disabled people to live independently in their own homes. It was set up and financed by the government to go some way towards plugging the gap left when supplementary benefit, which included a range of weekly payments for the needs of the disabled, was replaced by income support in 1988. It operates as an independent trust fund and is administered by trustees, who have considerable discretion over how to allocate its budget. The budget has recently been doubled from £32m for 1990-1 to £62m for 1991-2.

The purpose of the fund is to provide assistance with the costs of paying for personal care and housework needed by severely disabled people to enable them to live in their own home. The current conditions that have to be met are that

- Patients are aged over 16

- They are receiving attendance allowance at the higher rate (that is, £37.55 a week for both day and night attendance) or constant attendance allowance under the industrial injuries scheme at at least the same rate

- They are unable to pay for all the care they need

- They are living alone, or with another person who is unable to provide all the necessary care, or they are hoping to move out of residential care or hospital if adequate care at home can be arranged.

This usually means that patients should be receiving income support, but others may also be eligible if their income, although above income support level, is not high enough to pay for the care they need. People will generally not receive any help if they have savings over £8000.

Further details and application forms can be obtained from The Independent Living Fund, PO Box 183, Nottingham NG8 3RD, tel 0602 290423.

Essential Rights,
 94 Chaworth Road,
 Nottingham NG2 7AD
 Simon Ennals, consultant in
 welfare law

*Written in association with the
 Child Poverty Action Group*

This is the last of 10 articles

BMJ 1991;302:463-5