

SERVE, SPIN, SMASH!

Para Table Tennis
for the Community

Paralympics New Zealand
REGIONAL COMMUNITY
PARA SPORT PILOT 3 REPORT
September 2024



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About this report

This report contains information specific to the Regional Community Para Sport Pilot, a component of the Collectively Stronger Together project which is part of the Paralympics New Zealand (PNZ) Strengthen and Adapt Plan. The pilot took place between July 2023 – June 2024 and tested the operating approach to develop untapped regional community Para table tennis opportunities and enhance programmes in regions where they had been offered previously. The pilot engaged with Parafed members, and with sport organisations less established in Para sport throughout the course of the pilot period. The Strengthen and Adapt investment was focused on allocating human resources and programme resources to co-design, promote, monitor and evaluate a community Para athletics programme for a 20-week period (or 400 hours equivalent). The Parties collaborating on this pilot were:

- Paralympics New Zealand ("PNZ")
- Table Tennis New Zealand ("TTNZ")
- Disability Sport Auckland ("Parafeds or similar organisations")
- Parafed Canterbury ("Parafeds or similar organisations")
- Parafed Waikato ("Parafeds or similar organisations")
- Waitemata Table Tennis ("RSO")
- Table Tennis Canterbury ("RSO")
- Waikato Table Tennis ("RSO")

This report uses data collected from key stakeholders which included the above organisations, activators and participants. Survey data was collected after the pilot, whilst additional conversations and interviews were conducted to support findings and highlight areas of success.

Background

Paralympics New Zealand

PNZ is the National Paralympic Committee (NPC) for New Zealand with the vision 'Through Para sport, lives will be transformed'. The regional community Para sport pilot is aligned to PNZ's strategic outcomes of 'Equity is achieved when Para sport is recognised at all levels of sport in New Zealand' and 'A strong and sustainable pathway to the Paralympic Games'. PNZ believes collaboration with members and partner organisations to design, deliver and enable Para sport experiences across all levels of the pathway is integral to get more disabled people involved in Para sport.

Table Tennis New Zealand

Table tennis in New Zealand is in the process of modernising and growing capability across the sport, and this includes establishing more pathways for disabled people from foundation through to performance. The sport is played by a diverse range of

participants with different ethnic backgrounds, genders, ages, and abilities. Para table tennis has been part of every Paralympic Games since the first edition held in Rome 1960 and is a high participation sport internationally being one of three sports offering a Paralympic pathway for all 10 eligible impairments.

TTNZ's 2020-2025 strategic plan points to an opportunity to establish appropriate, inclusive, and unified delivery models for table tennis across New Zealand which includes a commitment to increase participation of disabled people. Therefore the regional community Para sport pilot was planned to complement this work by supporting Regional Sports Organisations (RSOs) on a journey to build further capability in offering table tennis opportunities to disabled people. Once established, these community environments have the potential to continue operating ongoing Para table tennis programmes through facilitation or delivery by the RSOs in collaboration with Parafeds or similar organisations, and local activator(s) that will be connected as part of the regional community Para sport pilot.

Pilot purpose

The objectives of this pilot included:

- Increased participation in Para table tennis;
- Enhanced operating approach for Para table tennis;
- Increased number of RSOs with inclusive organisational practices, and awareness of diversity and inclusion of disabled people;
- Addressed a geographical gap in the provision of Para table tennis in regions across New Zealand.

What did we do? The journey towards launching the pilot

Consultation

At the completion of a community Para sport landscape mapping exercise undertaken by the PNZ Para Sport Community Manager in 2022, PNZ welcomed applications from NSO Members to partner in the delivery of a regional community Para sport pilot. Applications closed in December 2022, with TTNZ selected and informed in 2023.

PNZ and TTNZ discussed gaps and opportunities to establish and deliver Para table tennis in the regions of Auckland, Canterbury, and Waikato. TTNZ also declared their need for a basic Para table tennis resource manual to support RSOs to build their knowledge and capability to deliver Para table tennis.

PNZ utilised and adapted a template developed in the previous regional community Para sport pilots with Boccia New Zealand and Athletics New Zealand as a Project Brief to present to Disability Sport Auckland, Parafed Canterbury, and Parafed Waikato. At the same time, TTNZ initiated contact with regional table tennis associations in the same regions to identify the potential scope of the RSOs to undertake the pilot.

Clarification

The Project Brief outlined:

- Purpose/Objectives
- Outcomes
- Description
- Approach
- Marketing and Communications Plan
- Timelines
- Resources
- Budget
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
- Relevant Insights/Considerations.

As was the case in the two previous pilots, it was agreed that the pilot's outputs could be fulfilled over a period longer than the initial 20 week plan, and the investment broadly factored in 400 hours of work per pilot partner allowing flexibility and time for the co-design, recruitment, training and delivery process.

One of the challenges in bringing this group of partners together was the availability of RSO representatives who were all volunteers which meant that all Parties had to agree on meetings and calls for the pilot taking place outside of business hours, typically from 6.30pm-8.00pm on a weekday.

A request was made to alter fee arrangements on the Service Delivery Agreement to immediately enable organisations to allocate the necessary personnel, time and resources on the pilot. A percentage of the fees were subsequently agreed as a downpayment and following this update, the Service Delivery Agreement was signed by all the Parties to confirm the commencement of the pilot partnership. The remaining fees were disbursed following the completion of the co-design phase of the pilot.

Co-design approach

During the first online meeting, all Parties were asked to share an understanding of their responsibilities on the pilot and clarified the intended outcomes including the targeted audience. After sharing expectations for the pilot, the Parties considered and progressed the following approaches together to help co-design the tasks:

- An online resource link via Google Drive to document shared reflections, meeting minutes, communication toolkits, marketing templates and other resources relating to the pilot;
- A review of various programmes and the associated resources to determine what may be suitable for the Para table tennis community in New Zealand. This process considered a recently launched TTNZ programme for youth called TTKidz, along with Smash Down Barriers and Bounce It Back which were programmes developed by the International Table Tennis Federation - Oceania to support social inclusion through table tennis;

- A discussion with Table Tennis Australia to check their structures and learnings over the years in supporting and developing their Para table tennis pathways. It was interesting to learn that Table Tennis Australia partners with and directly target hospitals, rehabilitation centres, disability organisations and allied health organisations to actively promote their opportunities to disabled people through those channels;
- A determination that the pilot programme should be designed to enable any stakeholder within table tennis to increase their knowledge and confidence in activating Para table tennis in the community, and include people of all ages from 8 years old and with different impairment types;
- A confirmation that the term 'Activator' could be used within the table tennis community to describe any person who may organise, initiate, or help deliver Para table tennis sessions and maintains the positive engagement of participants. This term removed any perception that the programme required coaches with sport specific qualifications, expertise or skills to deliver the sessions. For the purposes of this pilot, this term also encompassed committee members, coaches, officials, teachers and other volunteers who typically support or engage in table tennis club environments;
- A full day of regional education workshops led by TTNZ featuring an introduction to the pilot programme's practical components and upskilling of activators;
- An equipment wish list along with a stock take of existing inventory in each region to allow for the delivery of a community Para table tennis programme;
- A consolidated list of external organisations that all Parties may wish to connect with to support the recruitment of new activators and volunteers for clubs.



Image above: Serve, Spin, Smash! activator resource in print form.

Resources

Based on prior experience and learnings from previous pilots, All Parties determined that 8 weeks would be an ideal timeframe for a community Para table tennis programme to maximise participation and enjoyment. The programme would be delivered using a bottom-up approach to teach skills and adaptations required for table tennis movements where participants can learn in an inclusive and supportive environment.

Through consultation with table tennis coaches, TTNZ pulled together a Para table tennis resource manual which contained classification content, activator tips, basic table tennis terms and rules, and lesson plans. Further research of existing Para table tennis resources from Table Tennis Australia and International Table Tennis Federation - Oceania and took place, while resources from the Boccia and Para athletics pilots were also used as reference and inspiration. Table tennis participants including Para athletes also contributed to the naming of the programme and resource manual, "Serve, Spin, Smash!".

Brand new character and lesson illustrations were designed for this resource manual with an intention of enabling TTNZ to use the same illustrations in other resource development in the future. The assortment of characters included different ethnic backgrounds, genders, ages, and impairment types. Blind Sport New Zealand also contributed to the development of the resource manual and activator education workshop, where a number of considerations were added for participants with visual impairment.

After considering the existing range of equipment in each region available for community table tennis programmes, TTNZ ordered a range of table tennis specific equipment and generic supplies to support the regional access and capability to adapt and deliver Para table tennis programmes. Equipment included:

- Table tennis tables
- Table tennis balls
- Automatic robot feeder
- Adjustable nets
- Swish wooden bats
- Sound balls
- Plastic balls
- Balloons
- Ball baskets
- Ball collectors
- Scoreboards
- Wrist straps for handgrip
- Various size and colour targets (e.g. field markers, flexible cones, cups, lily pads, marking rings, flat hoops)

PNZ received a grant from Trillian Trust Limited which helped cover the cost of table tennis tables that were designed to ensure the parts were particularly accessible for

wheelchair users. Other equipment included ball collectors while the Swish wooden bats and sound balls were valuable for participants with vision impairment.



Image above: A participant with vision impairment using a Swish wooden bat to push a sound ball (credit: Murray Finch).

How well did we do?

Activator recruitment and education

As a result of an inherent motivation and commitment to providing more table tennis opportunities to disabled people, TTNZ and the RSOs attracted a high number of activator registrations. Recruitment of activators took place within existing regional table tennis associations through their mailing lists and social media. At the point of registration, most activators expressed interest in improving their coaching skills and others wanted to learn new organisation skills in order to support their association in offering Para table tennis to a wider audience. Registered activators included development managers, an operations manager, coaches, umpires, and volunteers who held committee positions such as treasurer, secretary within their RSOs and/or clubs. Activators had a range of experience in the sport, with some having little to no coaching experience, while others had over 10 years experience.

The education workshop for activators kicked off in Christchurch on 6 April. 15 people attended, including new staff from Table Tennis New Zealand, committee members from Table Tennis Canterbury, a regional coordinator from Special Olympics New Zealand, and staff members from Parafed Canterbury who also shared their

experience and knowledge at the workshop. The education workshop activators took place in Auckland was attended by 18 people from Auckland, Northland and Waikato on 12 April. Staff members from Disability Sport Auckland, Parafed Waikato and Blind Sport New Zealand also supported the workshop by sharing their experiences and knowledge. Table Tennis New Zealand utilised learnings from PNZ's Boccia and Para athletics pilots in order to maximise activator education. This included giving activators a number of opportunities to plan and deliver lesson plans based on a variety of scenarios including people with different impairments over the course of a full day.



Image above: Activator discussion around a table tennis table.

Marketing and communications

A key consideration for planning were the number of sessions per week, and whether they were to be inclusive, integrated or in a safe space. Each RSO had to determine the balance between the capacity of their table tennis venues, number of likely participants and availability of activators. In general, each RSO was prepared to have a mixture of integrated and inclusive sessions, meaning that the programme was able to take place during an existing session time instead of having to create new timeslots.

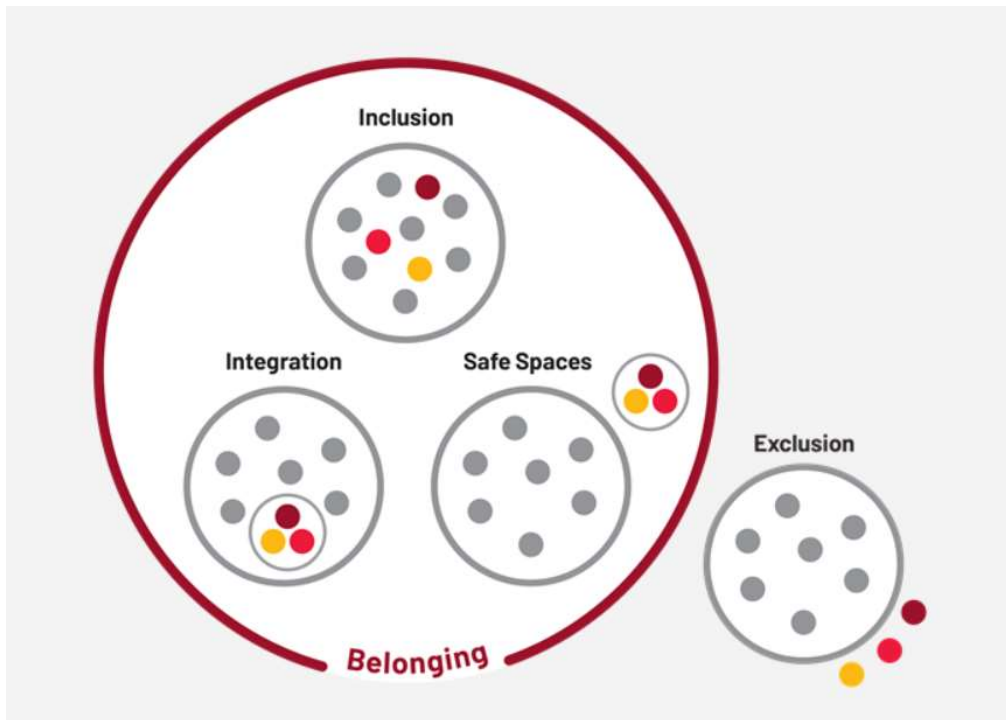


Image above: Variety of sport environments (from Sport NZ website).

The Halberg Foundation, Parafeds and similar organisations contributed to a selection of Para athlete images used for both the resource manual and marketing campaign. Registration forms and ‘Get Involved’ flyers were regionalised so that logos and information about the organisations collaborating were distinctly showcased. RSOs, Parafeds and similar organisations also had direct access to participant details and were able to tailor their communications with participants leading up to and during the programme. Although the imagery on flyers and social media tiles were consistent, the terminology used across different Parafeds and similar organisations on their social media communications resulted in different pitches. The range of social media tiles can be seen below:



Parafeds and similar organisations planned to share information about the programme to a range of local, regional and national stakeholders, listed in the table below. Following the identification of duplication and gaps in the list, PNZ worked with each Parafed and similar organisation on extending communications to a range of other national and regional disability support services organisations in order to target more disabled people.

Auckland	Canterbury	Waikato	National	Additional Suggestions
Aktive	Achilles Christchurch	Adapt MTB	Achilles New Zealand	Arthrogryposis
Achilles	Amputee Society Canterbury & Westland	Auckland Powerchair Football Club	Blind Low Vision New Zealand	ACC
Athletics NZ	Blind Low Vision NZ	Basketball NZ	Blind Sport New Zealand	Workbridge
Auckland Cricket	Blind Sport New Zealand	Blennz	Cerebral Palsy Society of New Zealand	Vaka Tautua Ltd
Auckland Wheelchair Basketball	Burwood Hospital	Blind Low Vision NZ	Disabled Persons Assembly New Zealand	Manawanui
AUT - Sport and Rec	Canterbury Secondary School Sports	Blind Sport NZ	First Port	Aspire Canterbury
Basketball NZ	Cerebral Palsy Society of New Zealand	Boccia NZ	Halberg Foundation	CCS Disability Services - Christchurch
Bays Athletics	Halberg Foundation	Croquet NZ	Invictus Games	Choices NZ - Christchurch
Blennz-Homai Campus	Halberg Youth Council	Extreme Edge Rock-climbing	Little People of New Zealand	IDEA Services - Christchurch
Blind Low Vision NZ	High Performance Sport New Zealand	FIFA Womens World Cup	Muscular Dystrophy New Zealand	St John of God Hauora Trust
Blind Sport New Zealand	Laura Fergusson Brain Injury Trust	Halberg Foundation	New Zealand Spinal Trust	Enabling Good Lives Christchurch
Blowkarting Auckland	Little People of New Zealand	Hamilton Pistol Club	NZ Rugby Foundation	BrainTree Trust
Boccia NZ	Melrose Kiwi Concept Chairs	Hamilton City Hawks	Peke Waihanga - Artificial Limb Service	Aspire Hamilton
Cerebral Palsy Society of New Zealand	Ministry of Education	Kiwi Tennis	Special Olympics New Zealand	CCS Disability Services - Hamilton
CLM	New Zealand Spinal Trust	Morrinsville Wheelers	Sport New Zealand	Enrich+ Hamilton
Counties Manukau Rugby	Newstalk ZB	Northern Districts Cricket & Northern Brave	Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People	Community Access (sponsors in Hamilton)
Countrie Cricket	North Canterbury	Rapid Relief	Women in Sport Aotearoa	Your Way - Kia Roha
Croquet NZ	Origin Sports	Riding for the Disabled		EGL - Enabling Good Lives

Ellerslie Cricket Club	ParaFed Network - Chairperson	Sport Waikato
FIFA Womens World Cup	Peke Waihanga - Artificial Limb Service	Swimming NZ
Halberg Foundation	Primary Sports Canterbury	Swimming Waikato
Halberg Youth Council	Special Olympics New Zealand	Waihi Beach Surf Life Saving Club
Laura Fergusson Trust	Sport Canterbury	Waikato Table tennis Association
Ministry of Education	Star Media	Waikato Tennis Trust
MIT - Sport and Rec	Tātai Whetū Waitaha	Wanderers Football Club
Muscular Dystrophy	TVNZ	Wheelchair Basketball NZ
New Zealand Spinal Trust - Auckland Spinal Unit	University of Canterbury - Sport & Health	
North Harbour Sport		
Parafed Shooting Club		
Pickleball NZ		
Rapid Relief		
Special Olympics NZ		
Sport Auckland		
Sport NZ		
Sport Waitakere		
Swimming NZ		
Tennis NZ		
Warriors Foundation		
Wheelbreakers		

Life Unlimited
Taikura Trust

Delivery

Table Tennis Canterbury and Waitemata Table Tennis offered more than one session per week during the pilot in order to cater for different age groups and provided more individualised coaching support for beginners. Each session ran for one hour. The delivery of the 8-week Serve, Spin, Smash! programme started on the following dates for each region:

- Waitemata Table Tennis, 72a Seymour Road, Sunnyvale, Auckland
 - Session times: 8 May; 11 May
 - Number of activators engaged: 6
 - Total participants engaged: 13 (average age 27)



Image above: Serve, Spin, Smash! in Auckland.

- Table Tennis Canterbury, 294 Blenheim Road, Upper Riccarton, Christchurch
 - Session times: 7 May (under 19); 11 May (all ages)
 - Number of activators engaged: 11
 - Total participants engaged: 20 (average age 29)



Image above: Serve, Spin, Smash! in Canterbury (credit: Lilian Exton).

- Waikato Table Tennis, Edgecumbe Street, Whitiara, Hamilton
 - Session times: 9 May
 - Number of activators engaged: 9
 - Total participants engaged: 35 (average age 33)



Image above: Serve, Spin, Smash! in Waikato (credit: Murray Finch).

The disabled participants who experienced Serve, Spin, Smash! across all three regions had at least one of the following:

- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual impairment
- Neurodiversity
- Physical impairment
- Vision impairment.

Monitoring and evaluation

From brand new participants to returning Parafed members, there were a diverse range of people of different ages, experiences and impairments who attended the sessions. TTNZ also welcomed their first ever group of participants with vision impairment who became regulars in the Serve, Spin, Smash! programme, with activators describing them as having the most ‘hilarity’ because of the constant noise and laughter being made on their table.

“The whole hall was humming, with lots going on between participants, parents, and carers who are all involved.” – Activator

Activators, Centre/Club administrators, along with staff from Parafeds and similar organisations sourced verbal feedback from disabled participants and/or their caregivers throughout the programme. Although Para table tennis was not new to the regions, Auckland-based participants and families appreciated that this opportunity was extended in the west area of Auckland for the first time as sporting opportunities for disabled people were limited in that area.

The Parties came together at a midway point of the 8-week programme to share their observations and reflections from the programme, and discussed what approaches and learnings they may have put into practice since being together at the activator education workshops.

Newer activators were surprised at how quickly the participants were able to learn table tennis skills, and at the same time they were also having to learn to quickly re-group participants accordingly to ability. All activators experienced great satisfaction seeing participants achieve success while adapting to more challenging targets.

"I applied the STEP principle after realising the person I was throwing balls to was good enough to rally close to 30 shots." – Activator

Activators who worked with participants with autism tested what colours that worked best for their participants. A participant with limited range of motion made significant progress and was then determined to purchase a bat, net and balls to practice at home.

Overall, there was an average of 5 activators able to take turns to lead and support the programme in each region. Activators noted that the time passed too quickly and wanted to offer participants more. They used the Serve, Spin, Smash! resource manual to help get started with pre-planned activities but were able to move on and be creative generally after the first quarter of each session. Other members of the table tennis community who were exposed to the programme were also happy to assist when they were in and around the session.

The RSOs, Parafeds and similar organisations celebrated the positive way people with physical impairments, vision impairments and intellectual impairments interacted together. They also discussed which session days and times were more popular and began planning for the future. Some initial thoughts were made around ensuring equitable support for a Para table tennis programme which involves nurturing new and existing relationships between pilot partners and keeping participants involved post-pilot. Another was around levelling the table used by people with vision impairment to enable them to push the ball across the table without falling or bouncing through gaps on the table. With so many activators involved in the programme, they were also asked if they might be interested gaining experience and honing their skills in other Para sport supported by Parafeds.

At the end of the programme, the RSOs led the collection of activator survey responses, while Parafeds and similar organisations led the collection of participant survey responses. PNZ also led 1-1 discussions with contacts from all Parties to evaluate the responses and consider the collaborative impact, learnings and future opportunities. The following case study video was also developed to capture key features of the pilot and the Serve, Spin, Smash! programme:

<https://youtu.be/vR3KxE7LIXE>.

What impact did we have?

Responses from post-pilot surveys and discussions with participants and activators revealed plenty of learnings and appreciation for the programme. Participants and activators in all three regions also wanted more of Serve, Spin, Smash! with many indicating that the hour allocated for each session was too short.

“I would enjoy having it slightly longer as in 90 mins instead of 60 minutes, I just get in the groove and then have to wrap up.” – Participant

Impact on participants

From 23 participant survey responses collected:

30% were non-members or new to Parafeds and similar organisations

43% were new to Para table tennis

78% were very or extremely satisfied with Serve, Spin, Smash!

74% were motivated to participate in Para table tennis further.

Participants learnt new skills in a fun and sociable environment. For example, the introduction of cup targets in the programme motivated participants to ‘smash’ them down and gave them a sense of achievement when successful.

“Even while I was constantly learning during the program, it was still fun, and I had lots of laughs.” – Participant

“The use of cups was a great way to train accuracy and was very satisfying to knock them down.” – Participant

However, there were some challenges, as better skilled participants felt that they received the least help as the programme mostly catered for beginner participants. Some wheelchair users also found that navigating around the court fences and bench seating proved to be a physical barrier. In addition to requests to extend the session times, disabled participants also wanted to integrate more with non-disabled participants. Many were also seeking to advance their skills and transition to more competitive environments.

“Just some language barriers, no one asked me what I wanted, also because I was a better player I got the least help, others did need more 1 on 1 help though.” – Participant

“It has certainly given me some new goals and experiences which is great.” – Participant

The programme also had an impact on newer participants' confidence and perceptions of their own ability, as highlighted in the following quotes:

“Noticeable improvement in fine motor skills, both in sport and daily life.” – Participant

“Before this program I had never participated in Para sport but I have had a disability for 8 years, this program has opened my eyes to the possibilities out there for people with disabilities.” – Participant

“It allows me to see my capability and potential in Para sports which has been pretty awesome to my mana and self-confidence. I'm so much more open to trying other Para sports now since this programme.” – Participant

It was also clear that participants appreciated how well the activators built relationships and delivered during the programme, with comments such as:

“First time how very very helpful and skilled the staff were. Their patience and caring made an impact on how I felt and then made me want to return time and time again.” – Participant

“I really appreciated all the support from the volunteers helping. Bringing a sport that I love and seeing it in NZ that I can compete in. I'm so appreciative to see it and excited to keep it going and growing.” – Participant



Image above: Four participants with different impairment types playing doubles (credit: Lilian Exton).

Impact on activators

From 13 activator survey responses collected:

85% found the resource easy to follow, learn and use

92% increased their skills by being part of Serve, Spin, Smash!

100% were confident in delivering or offering Serve, Spin, Smash!

100% were very or extremely satisfied with Serve, Spin, Smash!

As TTNZ provided free access to the new Serve, Spin, Smash! resource manual, activators were able to familiarise themselves with the overall programme goals and lesson plan structure ahead of the activator education workshop and prepare any questions ahead of time. Activators applauded the overall design and simplicity of the content but some preferred a hard copy due to ease of readability on print as opposed to a mobile device. Activators also suggested further improvements to the resource manual by building a bigger array of exercises and activities in the future.

During the programme, activators learnt to simplify terminology and adapt activities which they realised was no different to helping beginner participants. Some activators even preferred to spend more 1:1 time with participants to enhance their skills. They also considered more ways of combining disabled participants with non-disabled participants, including training and competition environments where this might be possible. New activators were more motivated to be involved with coaching Para athletes as a result of this programme.



*“My biggest learnings are the skills of adaptability and communication. This programme has helped me develop my flexibility as it is important to be able to cater for all abilities. In order to do so, communication plays a big role.” –
Activator*

Image left: An activator looks on at a ball being pushed by a participant (credit: Murray Finch).

What has been learnt from the pilot?

Reflections from RSOs

RSOs found the connection with PNZ, the Parafeds or similar organisations, and Special Olympics New Zealand valuable as this was formally established for the first time for some organisations. Feedback on the co-design phase was also consistent, as one RSO felt that meetings could have been shorter, and another RSO felt that although there was value meeting as group with all pilot partners, there could have been more touch points on a regional basis. In addition to individual calls, there were eight Teams meetings as a national group and two Teams meetings in regional groups. Each meeting took place for a period of 1 – 1.5 hours.

“Really impressed with the support and organisation of this pilot.” – RSO

All RSOs felt that the activator education workshop was effective and very valuable. A suggestion to further improve this was to engage disabled participants throughout the activator education workshop could support learnings more effectively. This is also consistent with another suggestion for established Para table tennis players to be invited to their sessions to share their experiences and meet with new participants from time to time. One RSO specifically recognised that they needed to increase the ratio of activator to participants due to the popularity of the programme.

“Confirm how many activators we need at each session so that it is effective and for every session to provide good value for the participants.” – RSO

Overall, RSOs built a better awareness and understanding of the diverse capabilities of their disabled participants, and the need to be flexible to accommodate various needs which is no different to delivering a programme for non-disabled participants.

“Whilst there are some specific differences in designing the resource manual so that the activities cater to the disabled players (for example wheelchair users), the overall theme is the same for providing a good, well thought out table tennis programme for the participants and ensuring that the participants enjoy and take something away from each session. To promote inclusive environment and that it is important to deliver the programme professionally and to the best of our ability so that the participants want to return and to build a stronger community in the long run.” – RSO

A significant outcome of the pilot for RSOs has been to evaluate their membership options in order to make it attractive and welcoming for new members with health conditions and/or impairments.

“As a club, we will continue to offer a Para programme. We have added a Para membership option to our club (free for members for this year) and will look to continue working with Parafed and Special Olympics.” – RSO

From involving current coaches, to other activators and volunteers in each session, an RSOs believed that enabling groups of non-disabled junior athletes to support the programme was also a positive move.

“We are really reinforcing inclusion (for everyone - able bodied, disabled, gender, race etc) and the Association is heading in the right direction being involved in such a pilot with Paralympics New Zealand, Disability Sport Auckland, Parafeds.” – RSO

There was also realisation that marketing and promotion should be ongoing so that more people are aware of the opportunities, that the RSOs can ensure the sessions continue to welcome new players and develop existing players.

“We have expanded an existing small Para program from 2-4 athletes to 20. We have already decided to continue both weekly sessions (Tuesdays and Saturdays) for Term 3 with Table Tennis Canterbury and ParaFed Canterbury providing 50:50 funding. The intent is to start charging a small fee from Term 4 to make this a sustainable program. Also for the first time we have included 2 Para events in the Canterbury Open in 2024.” – RSO



Image above: A group of activators observing a skill demonstration at an activator education workshop in Canterbury.

Reflections from Parafeds and similar organisations

All Parafeds and similar organisations gave the resource co-design and activator education workshop a very positive review whilst also enjoying the process of helping to upskill activators.

Two Parafeds or similar organisations gained value from being part of the pilot as they utilised the level of investment to bring an increased focus to Para table tennis in their regions. They also observed that there was a significant level of commitment from TTNZ and the RSOs to grow the sport and their people. They nurtured relationships with key individuals within the RSOs to enable an increased level of enthusiasm and

partnership, which resulted in an increase in the number of participants and number of activators or coaches.

“The sport has certainly grown in this region and the number of coaches that are committed to Para table tennis is fantastic.” – Parafeds or similar organisations

Further collaboration also resulted from the programme as one Parafed is exploring a joint funding application with Special Olympics to hold combined sport sessions in their region in the future. Parafeds were also excited by the inclusion of Para table tennis categories in non-disabled table tennis tournaments being introduced in their regions following the programme.

“That we can combine with Special Olympics on certain sports and be a success.” – Parafeds or similar organisations

One Parafed or similar organisation had minimal engagement during the delivery phase of the programme but made some helpful observations around time on task and keeping participant attention that provided some learnings to the RSO. They would have preferred an enhanced correspondence with the RSO but overall did receive positive feedback from participants and believe there is potential for an extended program in the west area of Auckland. Although the execution did not meet their expectation, when asked what they would continue doing or do differently as a result of being part of the pilot, the Parafed or similar organisation would prefer to be more involved in the registration process and programme delivery in the future.

“Support Waitemata Table Tennis where they need it, advertise the programme and build on the relationship.” – Parafeds or similar organisations



Image above: A participant in Auckland pushes a ball over the net.

Reflections from Table Tennis New Zealand

Regarding the activator education workshop, TTNZ's reflections were similar to those of RSOs and activators, that is to include Para table tennis athletes who could speak about their involvement in the sport seeing as several activators enquired about real life examples and experiences. TTNZ also plans to include activator testimonials who were part of the pilot programme for use in future workshops.

As TTNZ have taken ownership of the Serve, Spin, Smash! programme, they have committed to facilitating additional training for new activators and/or helpers, as well as refresher workshops for those delivering in 2025. They plan to work closely with RSOs to ensure activators are provided with localised support, and are prepared to tailor their approach with each RSO as the pilot has demonstrated varied experiences and needs for each region. TTNZ also intends to maintain ongoing connection with activators by advising them of other community and/or national opportunities that may be of interest to them.

“All activators are being provided the link to LevelUp to continue learning.” – TTNZ

TTNZ reported a number of areas they found most valuable. Firstly, the pilot gave the NSO an ability to strengthen better connections between RSOs and equivalent Parafeds and similar organisations, and gain a better appreciation for the local and regional differences.

“Highlighted the need for TTNZ as an NSO to facilitate regional connections to ensure the best local opportunities can be provided through local promotion/relationships. Some RSO's are not connected with their local Parafeds/relevant groups.” – TTNZ

They learnt that the coordination required to promote the programme was important as the sharing of databases revealed where pilot partners could potentially connect local participants to the opportunities. Although PNZ facilitated a better awareness of other disability support services organisations, some pilot partners were unable to fully develop and engage in new relationships.

“This pilot did not establish as many new links as it had the potential to.” – TTNZ

TTNZ felt that the co-design process led to greater ownership and responsibility of the project tasks. The experiences and learnings from two previous PNZ regional community Para sport pilots also gave the group an ability to implement decisions quicker. As an example, the design of the Serve, Spin, Smash! resource manual took into consideration TTNZ's ability to utilise and adapt the same illustrations and graphics onto future assets. The use of simpler terminology has also been something TTNZ has learnt to implement and improve at community level.

“You can be surprised by who is willing to positively give back to community/sport if they know what is involved e.g. 'Activator' vs 'Coach', with former being more appealing with less responsibility - terminology is important.” - TTNZ

TTNZ was very satisfied with the number and quality of activators who were positively contributed to the in the programme in all regions. It was additionally positive to see a wide age range of individuals giving up their time (i.e. 15-70+). They also found that

RSOs being willing to test the integration of participants with physical impairment, vision impairment, and intellectual impairment in the same session times a learning and a success. This resulted in a significant increase in participation rates for all the RSOs and these increased opportunities for disabled people in table tennis is expected to be ongoing beyond the pilot period, especially since the RSOs in Canterbury and Waikato have committed to include Para table tennis categories in their Open tournaments in 2024 and beyond. However, like their non-disabled programmes, TTNZ struggled to attract females and youth to Serve, Spin, Smash! and wished to identify how to best address this in the future.

“Community programmes can be delivered for table tennis including both physical and intellectual disabilities - not a need to separate, it can work in our sport” – TTNZ

The biggest challenge for TTNZ to manage throughout the pilot programme was considering how to safely cater for participants with vision impairment. TTNZ plans to work closely with Blind Sport New Zealand to make further improvements to resource design. Some considerations noted were to have equalised table tops for participants with vision impairment to ensure the ball doesn't lift, spare gloves for participants to wear, an overhanging net to keep the ball under a certain height, and a clear set of rules for Swish.

Overall, TTNZ reflected on the larger impact this pilot will have on other regions wanting to provide opportunities for disabled people. Parafeds or similar organisations in Hawke's Bay and Northland, and Otago Table Tennis Association have indicated an interest in emulating the programme.

TTNZ believes that the pilot also achieved the objective of increasing the number of RSOs with inclusive organisational practices, and awareness of diversity and inclusion of disabled people. Their members have been more welcoming to new participants (e.g. members have been reminded about correct usage of mobility carparks) and have changed their perceptions on what disabled people can achieve as a result of the pilot. The pilot has also helped TTNZ reinforce its value of 'inclusion' to its community which encompasses providing more opportunities and quality experiences for all, leading the integration of new coaches and officials frameworks, and ensuring that Para table tennis pathways are visible from community level through to performance.

“The coordination from PNZ and the support from all regional and national partners was beneficial in ensuring as a group the Serve, Spin Smash! programme was co-designed to a high standard, and that we are left with a wonderful manual for future use across New Zealand! THANK YOU!” – TTNZ

Image right: Staff from Table Tennis New Zealand and Blind Sport New Zealand in discussion.



Reflections from Paralympics New Zealand

PNZ has seen a significant impact from Table Tennis New Zealand's commitment to disability inclusion across the sport at national and regional level. From senior leadership, to staff in coaching and event management, community representatives, the teams are dedicated to ensuring that a culture of collaboration and inclusion is visible and practiced. With the support of Parafeds and similar organisations in Auckland, Canterbury and Waikato, all the pilot partners have worked together to strengthen the Para table tennis pathway and enabled more opportunities for all disabled people across New Zealand.

Not surprisingly, most pilot partners felt that one of the operating approaches to be improved is having shorter meetings or making the most out of regional meetings to ensure that the national discussions provide better opportunity for engagement and direction. This is a balance PNZ has to consider ensuring that its partners are able to carry out their obligations while receiving a fair financial investment. It was also useful to have pilot partners who brought other skill sets to the meetings, which reminded the group of the importance of having a diverse mix of knowledge and experience on decision making tables. One of the committee members from the RSO had limited table tennis knowledge but utilised her school teaching qualifications to support a very thorough review of the resource manual.



Image above: Three activators examine a printed version of the resource manual.

Another enduring legacy of this pilot is also having committee members from every RSO contributing to the co-design and being present at the sessions to observe the Serve, Spin, Smash! programme in action. It was reported that committees were making better decisions a result of being involved in the programme. As an example, RSOs took steps to develop a Para table tennis membership option, allowing for disabled people to attend participation programmes for free but pay for coaching, events and court hire just as other members do. Two RSOs, with the support of the relevant Parafeds or similar organisations, also announced a continuation of the Serve, Spin, Smash! programme in Term 3 before the conclusion of the pilot. One of the remaining challenges for this high participation sport is to find ways for disabled people to be integrated with non-disabled participants in club sessions as the sessions tend to be fully subscribed.

It was interesting to observe the raw emotions of participants and reactions of activators during the programme. A number of caregivers mentioned the immediate impact the programme had on participants who had never had the opportunity participate in sport. One participant who lived with cerebral palsy, autism and vision impairment squealed in happiness as soon as the activators helped him hit a ball across the table for the first time. Another participant with autism also kept repeating “I just want to hit the ball” despite reaching the end of the session time. New activators who flourished in the programme discovered the value of putting bats and balls in the hands of participants as they arrive, and also demonstrated that adaptations had no limits when they considered simple modifications such as repositioning themselves and allowing for unlimited bounces.

Future Developments

Education and training

Following the pilot, TTNZ plans to publish the Serve, Spin, Smash! resource manual on its website and share it widely with its Associations and members of the public to encourage a better understanding of how to get Para table tennis started around the country. TTNZ also believes there is an opportunity to create a set of video resources for Para table tennis activities to build on the Serve, Spin, Smash! resource manual. Also as noted previously, while TTNZ focuses an integrated pathway for its athletes, coaches and officials, they will also offer further opportunities for activators in the table tennis community to be upskilled in delivering Serve, Spin, Smash! programmes.

Other collaboration opportunities

TTNZ wants to develop a greater ability to cater for people with vision impairment or total blindness to access the sport. Given more time, their collaboration with Blind Sport New Zealand could enable more games and activities to be created, as well as develop a future pathway for athletes to the IBSA Games. This pilot has also fostered engagement and discussions between Parafed Waikato and Special Olympics

Waikato on applying for funding to hold combined table tennis sessions in the future, rather than duplicating theirs and the RSO efforts in delivering the same programme.

Enhanced operating approach

The operating approach across all three PNZ regional community Para sport pilots have evolved to a point where there are reliable plans and processes to ensure future pilots are co-designed and delivered to a high standard. Beyond the pilots, work continues through PNZ's Shared Initiatives with Parafeds and similar organisations to help address underlying sport governance, leadership and attitudes that can enable better quality Para sport opportunities and experiences for disabled people.



Image above: An activator guides a participant's hand and bat while another participant awaits their turn (credit: Lilian Exton).