

Sports push at special education schools and disability centres

Sazali Abdul Aziz

National agency Sport Singapore (SportSG) will ramp up efforts to promote sports at special education schools and disability centres by linking up these institutions with specialised coaches.

It hopes to reach out to 10 schools and centres by April next year.

Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Culture, Community and Youth Baey Yam Keng said in Parliament yesterday: "Currently, plans are under way to build the capabilities of teachers and staff at special education schools and disability centres in conducting sporting activities."

"They will work with sports coaches to co-create and tailor activities that meet the needs of their students."

The Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) will also extend Play Inclusive, Singapore's largest unified sports competition, to two days this year. The inaugural edition last year drew over 450 students from special education and mainstream schools.

Recreational sports programme Play-Ability will be expanded to reach more homes and day activity

centres that serve people with disabilities.

According to the National Sports Participation Survey 2018, the percentage of people with disabilities who exercise at least once a week increased from 34 per cent in 2016 to 51 per cent last year.

This is a result of the Disability Sports Master Plan, launched in 2016 to expand opportunities for participation in, and build awareness for, disability sports.

Mr Baey and Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu also updated the House on several ongoing sports-related projects:

- A report on the Vision 2030 national sports masterplan will be released in the second quarter of this year.
- Four more Active Health Labs – in Bishan, Jurong East, Sengkang and Woodlands – will be set up by the end of the month, bringing the total to six.
- Canoeing and gymnastics ActiveSG academies will be introduced, bringing the total of such academies and clubs to 18.
- Fifty-two new indoor school sports halls and 32 new free-to-play school fields under



the Dual-Use Scheme will open, as well as two new Play Fields – community sport spaces in the heartland – in Jurong Lake Gardens and Yan Kit.

A \$3 million fund for national athletes preparing for the 2019 SEA Games, Asean Para Games, Olympics and Paralympics next year will be available.

Swimming coach Danny Ong, 43, was a special education teacher at the Cerebral Palsy Alliance Singapore for four years and now runs the Aquafins swim school, which trains able-bodied swimmers as well as persons with disabilities.

Encouraging this community to play sports was a good step, he said. "People with cerebral palsy or

spina bifida may find it very difficult to walk on land, but... (swimming) helps increase their physical mobility, and also increases the self-esteem of these individuals."

Paralympic gold medalist and Nominated MP Yip Pin Xiu, who raised the topic of integration of national sports systems for able-bodied and disabled athletes in the

House yesterday, praised the move to create more opportunities for persons with disabilities.

She said it will keep young people with disabilities physically active, adding that it is also important to cultivate greater coaching knowledge and expertise in disability sports.

msazali@sph.com.sg

A floorball game at last year's edition of Play Inclusive, co-organised by Special Olympics Singapore and SportCares, with the support of the Ministry of Education. The event drew about 450 students from special education and mainstream schools who teamed up to play a variety of sports. This year's edition will be extended to two days. SHIN MIN FILE PHOTO