

Travel retail supports new three-nation wheelchair sports programme

FRANCE/INDIA/CAMBODIA. Travel retail is playing a key role in a new three-nation sports programme which aims to break barriers to social inclusion through wheelchair sports.

The wheelchair sports exchange programme is being organised by French and Indian non-governmental organisations [XLability](#) and [The Soucial Trust](#), which was founded by Asia Pacific Travel Retail Association (APTRA) Executive Officer Michael Barrett. The main objective is to raise awareness on the many challenges people with disability face in developing countries such as India and Cambodia.



Stade Toulousain is one of three French wheelchair rugby clubs taking part in the programme

Swiss research agency [m1nd-set](#) and Indian distribution company [Bommidala Group](#) are supporting the programme, which involves teams from France, India and Cambodia.

The initiative includes coaching by the participating teams in wheelchair sports including rugby, basketball and tennis. The aim is to empower them by learning new skills and encourage them to empower other disabled people who do not yet practice any sport to take up an activity.

The project brings together the wheelchair rugby teams of major French clubs Stade Toulon, Stade Toulousain and Montpellier Sharks, the Delhi Warriors from India, and the women's wheelchair basketball team from Battambang, Cambodia. The teams will train each other in their respective sporting discipline and the first exchange will take place in Cambodia in November.



Coaching time for members of Cambodia's Battambang women's wheelchair basketball team

According to the organisers, the wheelchair sports exchange is part of a global sustainable programme which involves the creation and management of an 'all ability' sports club in Siem Reap and focuses on sensitising the communities in each country on the issues through an educational programme in schools.

Soulcial Trust Programmes Director Roxane Hervé said educating local communities at grass roots level about social inclusion was essential.

"In developing countries, disability is heavily stigmatised and often means confinement at home, either due to family shame or lack of appropriate infrastructure to circulate freely. There are still enormous sociological and psychological barriers to integrating disabled people in society in places like India and Cambodia," she said.



Roxanne Hervé: “We are looking for corporate partners who are committed to the cause of reducing social exclusion for disabled people and share the values of this project”

“Sport gives people with disability a real motivation in life and a purpose beyond their daily tasks which are often limited. The international exchange is an effective way of raising public awareness through the international media coverage, but the core of the project is the ongoing work with the education programme in schools and the sports club which involves both able-bodied and disabled people to facilitate the social inclusion of people with disability.”

Wheelchair rugby team Delhi Warriors’ team captain Nikhil Gupta commented: “In India it’s never easy to live a life in a wheelchair. After a spinal cord injury (SCI), it’s common to go through emotional and financial breakdown; all the team members have faced the same issue.

“For most of us there was no hope to escape this mental trauma. Wheelchair rugby has given us a new hope to live a more fulfilling life in a wheelchair. It has given us the means to interact with each other, to know how to cope with SCI-related issues and to rebuild our strength and confidence by giving our best to this game. At every training session, we encourage each other and we discover skills we never imagined we had. Before, our disability was depressing, but thanks to the sport we’ve got over the depression. We want to live!”

Toulouse Wheelchair Rugby Club member Jérôme Larduinat added: “Sport was a revelation to me. I didn’t think I was capable of such sporting achievements. Practicing wheelchair rugby enables me to become more autonomous and brings another dynamic in your life, giving hope for a better future.”

Fundraising for the sports programme through crowdfunding and corporate sponsorship totals US\$10,000, a third of the required budget.

Hervé added: “We are looking for corporate partners who are committed to the cause of reducing social exclusion for disabled people and share the values of this project.” Individuals and companies who are interested in supporting the initiative can contact Roxane Hervé by email: roxane@socialtrust.org or tel: +855 61 221 105.