

Club Matters Testimonial

My husband and I have set up Cumbria's first Wheelchair Rugby club. My husband Gary Pettit is a Royal Navy Veteran who was medically discharged after 12 years of service and last year got involved in the Invictus Games through Help for Heroes. After attending the UK's first Trails in Sheffield and playing Wheelchair Rugby for over 12 hours he went onto win Gold in the finals. On his return home, he looked for a local club to train with to further his knowledge and skills in the sport, however the nearest club was over 100miles away. So, I said why not start our own club and in January 2020 Penrith Pumas WRC was created as an Unincorporated association, which was following the guidance of Great Britain Wheelchair Rugby Limited Regional Development Officer for the North.

We have introduced the sport into Cumbria to enable individuals with a Disability or Physical Impairment to access a thrill seeking, adrenaline rush, full contact, all-inclusive sport. But it is not only players who are welcome; there are lots of opportunities to play your part on the side-lines too. We are constantly looking for Referees, Officials and Volunteers to help at training sessions and tournaments.

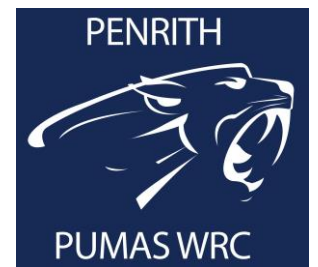
The club had been running 11 weeks prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic where we like the rest of the Country went into Lockdown. For a new club this has been a strange time especially as many of our players are also wounded or injured veterans who have found a new purpose in life attending our club.

My background is in Charities and working in the third sector after completing a pioneering leadership programme "The Aspiring Leaders" in 2014. Therefore, I already had the knowledge of different structures for community organisations although not being a sporting individual due to my own disability I knew that I had to do a lot of learning to ensure that I can support my husband to make the Pumas a success. So, lockdown could not have happened at a better time.

I came across the Club Matters website after looking at Sports England page to keep informed regarding the pandemic on sporting activities. Along with, looking at their resources to be able to share across our social media platform and our team.

I decided to sign up to the newsletter initially and create an account so that I could always go back to it. After seeing how easy the site was to use and the different sections that it has available such as the Resource Toolkits, Online Sessions, Workshops and Club Improvement tool I decided to have a look at the online sessions initially. I was blown away about the variety of the course they had available so with plenty of time on my hands I thought I would click on the ones most relevant for myself. After doing other online training from different organisation I was expecting a "stereotypical presentation," however this was not the case. The online training is interactive, breaks every aspect of the topic up into small chunks and at the end it gives you the link to the relevant resources needed for that module. I also like to aspect of getting a certificate at the end as they are great to have on file and show proof of being on a specific course and you can be held accountable to your organisation.

Then I came across the workshops, again after being noseey at what they were about and what learning you can get from it, I signed myself up to all of them that was available. The registration process was simple and easy to follow, the timings worked well for myself being on a Thursday evening as Gary is also disabled so it allowed me to sort him out before joining the workshop. On the week of the Workshop a member of the Club Matters team sends out an e-mail with the joining instructions along with a workbook which contains in depth detail of what the session will cover. Within the workbook



there are some useful tools that can be taken and implemented into your own club which I have benefited from.

I have been lucky that it has been the same trainer for each session, Simon Kirkland and he also assisted another member on their first virtual delivery session, and we wouldn't have known it was their first time if they hadn't of mentioned it.

Simon has been a fantastic trainer. He has a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience in managing different sporting organisations at different strategic levels. During the workshops Simon gets the group off into break out rooms to do a simple ice breaker which helps us all get to know each other and identify why we are on the course. When we all return, together everyone is more comfortable in using the tools on the training platform, confident in speaking as no one wants to be the first person to speak, especially on a virtual platform.

At the start of July, I was a participant on the Introduction in Legal Structures which followed on from the online session "Step by Step guide to Incorporation" I had previously done. The pumas were initially set up as unincorporated to enable us to start delivering the sessions and build the club. However, both Gary and I were going into it blind and had not looked at the pro's and cons of unincorporated and incorporated. After attending the workshop on legal structures, I went back to our committee and members of the club and discussed our current legal structure and explained about the unlimited liability and the lack of security if anything serious was to happen and then went onto explain the positives of becoming incorporated. Then after another conversation with a member who has recently set up their own CIC for Veterans community project, I went back to the committee and spoke to them about the option of CIC and they were all in favour of this happening. So, we are now Penrith Pumas WRC CIC!!!

Without the online training, workshops advice and guidance learnt through Club Matters we would still be unincorporated. As well as, I feel I have personally developed a wealth of knowledge of skills since attending these workshops, that I am ready to implement into the Pumas to make it the best club it can be for individuals with a physical impairment and or disability and the wider community.

I will definitely be recommending Club Matters to any new or existing sporting organisation who need help to re-vamp their club or looking to start their own club to know exactly what they need to have in place to be a successful club.

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Penrith Pumas Wheelchair Rugby Club

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