

TopGolf Surrey: Improving Access and Facilities for Disabled Golfers

At a Glance ...

- + TopGolf Surrey worked with the Surrey County Golf Partnership and England Golf to improve facilities for people with disabilities.
- + An action plan for improving facilities and marketing the Centre to people with disabilities was developed.
- + The Centre reviewed its accessibility and facilities and identified and implemented staff training needs.
- + The initiative has had a significant impact on numbers of players and visitors to the Centre.
- + Other English TopGolf centres are now following Surrey's best practice example.

TopGolf Surrey is a premier entertainment and event venue conveniently located at Addlestone, just inside the M25. This is one of three TopGolf sites in the UK. The Centre's central attraction is its innovative digital driving range. Players score points by hitting balls, equipped with microchip technology, into a range of targets. The Centre also boasts a nine-hole par 3 pitch and putt course. As well as its regular members, TopGolf Surrey attracts large numbers of visitors and occasional players.

The Issue:

The Centre is highly successful in attracting large numbers of golf enthusiasts and other visitors, but its facilities were not designed to promote easy access and participation for people with disabilities. The Centre's Lead Golf Pro had a strong background in coaching people with disabilities, and was concerned to break down any barriers to participation and ensure that these groups could take advantage of the Centre's facilities. This was also a concern of England Golf which,

in partnership with the Surrey County Golf Partnership, selected TopGolf Surrey for the development of an initiative to help attract more people with disabilities to golf, and to improve access to the Centre for all visitors with disabilities.

The Solution:

The first step was a meeting between Surrey County Golf Partnership's Development Officer, England Golf's Regional Manager, TopGolf Surrey's Lead Pro, and TopGolf Surrey's Manager. They agreed and set in motion an action plan listing local disabled persons' groups and identifying disability awareness training requirements for the professional and hospitality staff at TopGolf Surrey. TopGolf Surrey's three Pros each participated in the PGA Inclusive Golf Coaching training course.

An internal audit was carried out to review and assess the accessibility of the Centre's facilities. A number of issues were identified for improvement, including a requirement for large-print menus and improvement to the parking signage. The Centre installed parking signage and the number of blue badge parking spaces was doubled. Information and guidance on access and facilities for the disabled was added to the Centre's website.

In order to raise awareness of the improved facilities and market the Centre to people with disabilities, the Surrey Sports Partnership contacted local disability support groups which were asked to disseminate information to their members. This proved to be a highly successful way of attracting new customers. Advertising within the Centre also took place, in the form of posters highlighting the ways in which the Centre's facilities had been made more accessible to people with disabilities.

The Challenges

As TopGolf is a busy venue with a strong emphasis on social facilities and entertainment, numerous changes were

found to be necessary to make the Centre and its facilities suitable for people with disabilities. These included modifications to lighting and to the use of music in bays, and in the colour schemes used in graphics around the Centre. A great deal of additional signage was necessary, relating to disabled toilet facilities and parking, for example. As well as significantly increasing the numbers of disabled car parking bays, an additional drop-off, pick-up zone was established. A further challenge was in the area of staff training; many staff had little experience of interacting with and serving people with disabilities, and lacked confidence in this area.

“ Disability Awareness Training has armed the reception, bar and catering staff with the skills and confidence they required to provide high quality customer service. ”

Impacts:

Since implementing the initiative, TopGolf Surrey has enjoyed a significant increase in numbers of players and visitors to the Centre. Its monitoring activities indicate that there are more than 20 regular players, around 70 to 80 occasional players and more than 100 additional visitors with disabilities. An unexpected positive outcome has been the finding that many existing members and longstanding visitors to the Centre have various forms of disability, and the improvements are benefitting them as well as newcomers.

Disability Awareness Training has armed the reception, bar and catering staff with the skills and confidence they need to engage with disability groups and individuals and ensure that they receive the highest quality customer care – thus enhancing their experience of TopGolf Surrey.

Next Steps:

TopGolf Surrey continually reviews its accessibility and facilities and will continue

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to improve its customer service for people with disabilities. Future plans include the recruitment of one of its existing disabled customers to act as an “ambassador” who will liaise with and reach out to more disability groups and potential customers. The Centre also intends to initiate a marketing campaign through national disability organisations.

TopGolf Surrey’s good practice example is being adopted by other TopGolf Centres in South-East England. Staff at these Centres have been participating in Disability Awareness Training and the Centres are following Surrey’s lead in looking into possible improvements to their facilities.

“ TopGolf’s Lead Golf Pro advises other clubs: “Work closely with the local Sports Partnership and take advantage of their existing links with disability groups.” ”

Tips & Advice from TopGolf Surrey:

The Centre’s Lead Golf Pro emphasises the importance of staff training when implementing a disability initiative, since a lack of staff confidence in this area may undermine its success and affect the quality of customer service. Frontline staff must have a good understanding of the needs of people with disabilities and how to provide a good service to this group.

The second main piece of advice to other clubs embarking on a similar initiative is to work closely with the local Sports Partnership and take advantage of its existing links with disability groups to raise awareness of the initiative.

Based on surveys and follow up interviews, the UK and Ireland’s Golf Home Unions have identified and showcased examples of “what works” in golf club management in a series of case studies. The focus has been on clubs that have been successful in achieving more players, more members and stronger clubs. The intention is to share information and guidance on effective practices in business planning, customer service, membership, and women’s and girls’ golf. For further information about this and other case studies and for further support, please go to www.golfcasestudies.businesscatalyst.com.

