



PRESS RELEASE

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Mencap NI and Oscar Winning Ambassador Dr James Martin MBE, team up with Better to launch fitness challenge for Belfast City Marathon

Mencap NI, the learning disability charity have teamed up with Better to raise awareness of the benefits of physical activity and support people with learning disabilities to live happier and healthier lives within their local communities.

The exciting new partnership will see a group of people with a learning disability led by multi award winning actor **Dr James Martin MBE**, take part in a tailored physical activity and wellbeing programme to help them prepare for the Belfast City Marathon which will take place on Sunday 5th May 2024. The team will avail of physical health and wellbeing support by Better staff, which will be focused on encouraging the group to increase their strength and stamina with tailored work outs in the gym, access to swimming and a variety of physical activities across all 16 Better leisure facilities. The group will meet once a week across Better facilities to support each other, track their progress and boost their confidence to take on the challenge ahead.

Speaking about the exciting new partnership Karen Gilgunn, Communications, and Influencing Lead for Mencap NI said *"We are absolutely delighted to have launched this new partnership with Better to support people with a learning disability to take part in this year's Belfast City Marathon. Mencap NI's values are committed to supporting people with a learning disability to live the lives they want, and this partnership represents our drive towards developing inclusive communities. We are thrilled our ambassador Dr James Martin has accepted the challenge to lead the team and we look forward to seeing the progress in the coming weeks. Better's value's, highlight their commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment for people with a learning disability and we look forward to watching this partnership develop further."*

Karen Craig, People Business Manager for GLL, the social enterprise, who operates Better leisure facilities added *"Our purpose is to improve the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of local communities. Mencap NI's values align very closely with our own in promoting safe, welcoming, and inclusive spaces for everyone. Our team are really looking forward to welcoming James and his teammates and helping them improve their fitness for the Belfast City Marathon race day. We are wishing them all*



the best with their training and will be cheering for them all the way on the 5th of May.”

There are 33,000 people with a learning disability in Northern Ireland. Mencap works to support people with a learning disability, their families, and carers by fighting to change laws, improve services and access to education, employment, and leisure facilities. Mencap supports hundreds of people with a learning disability in Northern Ireland to live their lives the way they want.

The initiative is part of a wider campaign by Mencap NI in supporting and promoting healthy futures for people with a learning disability in Northern Ireland. Research has indicated that people with a learning disability are more likely to be at risk of a range of health and social care issues due to health inequalities and ability to access services within their local communities. It also shows the main barrier to participation in physical activity is their lack of understanding of its benefits. Mencap NI are focused on ensuring mainstream programmes are accessible to people with a learning disability so they can feel confident to participate in wellbeing initiatives and lead happy and healthy lives.

ENDS

For further information or to arrange interviews, please contact Karen Gilgunn, Senior Communications Lead at Mencap Northern Ireland on **07850568011** or email karen.gilgunn@mencap.org.uk

Notes to editors.

What is a learning disability?

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability which can cause problems with everyday tasks – for example shopping and cooking or travelling to new places – which affects someone for their whole life.

People with a learning disability can take longer to learn new things and may need support to develop new skills, understand difficult information and engage with other people. The level of support someone needs is different with every individual. For example, someone with a severe learning disability might need much more support with daily tasks than someone with a mild learning disability.



Learning disability is NOT a mental illness or a learning difficulty. Very often the term 'learning difficulty' is wrongly used interchangeably with 'learning disability.'