

Channel 4 and the Paralympic Games

Paralympic
Case Studies



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Introduction

Channel 4's remit has always been to champion unheard voices, to innovate and take bold creative risks, to inspire change and to celebrate diversity. The Paralympic Games embody everything that we stand for.

We saw London 2012 as a huge opportunity to challenge stereotypes and champion minorities by bringing disability into the mainstream – and to do it with style and a sense of fun. We saw a chance to reach new and bigger audiences with high-quality, dramatic, elite sport.

We knew it wouldn't be easy. We'd have to cut through public indifference towards disability sports and low levels of awareness of the Paralympics. We'd have to overcome potential audience fatigue following the success of the Olympics. And we'd have to confront some people's discomfort towards watching people with a disability on television. But we never had any question in our mind that this was exactly the sort of event Channel 4 is made for.

We promised to provide the most comprehensive TV coverage ever of a Paralympic Games – and we delivered: we showcased more hours of Paralympic sport than any other broadcaster in history and broke global viewing records for a Paralympic Games. Our 'Meet the Superhumans' marketing campaign won every award it could. We made our Superhuman athletes into household names and we launched the careers of a squad of new disabled presenters and reporters. Crucially, our BAFTA award-winning coverage brought about a real change, improving society's perceptions of disabled people.

For the Rio 2016 Paralympics, we carried the revolution forward. Our award-winning 'We're the Superhumans' campaign was the most shared Olympics or Paralympics-themed ad ever, reaching more than 48 million people globally. We gave Rio 2016 even more hours of coverage, across more broadcast platforms, than our 'home' Games and we brought together the largest team of disabled on- and off-screen talent ever seen on UK television.

We know there's still a long way to go. Working with the International Paralympic Committee ('IPC'), we will raise the bar even higher for next year's Tokyo Paralympic Games, and the decision to award Channel 4 the rights to Paris 2024 enables us to continue to broadcast groundbreaking and innovative coverage of the Paralympics, continue to build athlete profiles and to further cement the careers of our presenters. I am delighted that we have the opportunity to build on our achievements over the next four years and to work in partnership with Paris 2024 and the IPC. We want to spark an even more radical shift in the way that disability is represented on and off screen, not just every four years but every day. Our mission is to put people so at ease with disability, they start not to notice it. Stay tuned...

▶ **Alex Mahon**
Chief Executive
Channel 4



We will raise the bar even higher for next year's Tokyo Paralympic Games. We want to spark an even more radical shift in the way that disability is represented on and off screen, not just every four years but every day.

Viewpoint



Channel 4 has created a blueprint for how broadcasters should cover the Paralympic Games. Every broadcaster around the world wants to know what Channel 4 is doing. It is regarded as the world leader.



Channel 4 has created a blueprint for how broadcasters should cover the Paralympic Games. Whether it's developing disabled on- or off-screen talent, creating international award-winning promotional campaigns, reaching record audiences or producing in-depth and compelling content, every broadcaster around the world wants to know what Channel 4 is doing. It is regarded as the world leader.

With London 2012, Channel 4 ripped up the rulebook. It gave the Paralympics its full and undivided attention, with the strongest broadcast coverage and marketing support it had ever received on UK television. For Channel 4, the Paralympics wasn't a sideshow: it was the main event.

It also recruited and trained a new generation of disabled talent. When we walked around the broadcasting studios during the Paralympic Games, only one broadcaster had disabled reporters and presenters: Channel 4. It was revolutionary to have disabled people presenting disability sport. Channel 4 broke the mould.

By the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, every single broadcaster had disabled people in front of and behind the cameras. By 2018, there were 3.85 million disabled people in employment in Great Britain, up by nearly a million in five years, according to figures from the Office of National Statistics. By bringing disability into popular culture, Channel 4 helped to raise awareness, transform attitudes and inspire real change.

Now we're working together in the build-up to the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, postponed by a year because of the coronavirus pandemic. Paralympians have been training in their homes and back gardens, pushing their bodies to the limit and smashing world records – even in lockdown. They are determined to put on the greatest Paralympic Games yet.

Tokyo 2020 will be an extra special display of humanity uniting as one and a global celebration of human resilience. For many of us, it will be the light at the end of the tunnel.

► Andrew Parsons

President

International Paralympic Committee

The story so far

London 2012



The campaign

When Channel 4 was awarded the London 2012 Paralympic Games UK broadcast rights in 2010, we promised a bold approach that would change attitudes towards Paralympic sport and reach new and bigger audiences.

The odds were stacked against us. Only 14% of the British public said that they were looking forward to the Paralympic Games, while virtually no one could name a Paralympian. So we launched 'Meet the Superhumans' – the biggest marketing campaign in Channel 4's history. Set to a soundtrack by Public Enemy, the centrepiece was a hard-hitting and goosebump-inducing 90-second TV commercial, showcasing our extraordinary British Paralympian athletes. Aired concurrently across 78 different UK channels at 9pm, it was viewed by 86% of the UK population.

As the Olympics came to a close, we also ran a cheeky 'Thanks for the Warm-up' poster campaign, making it clear that the Paralympic Games aren't an afterthought; they are as exciting, thrilling and culturally important as the Olympics.



The Superhumans campaign really makes people think.

David Cameron

Prime Minister
of the United Kingdom
(2010-2016)

Almost 40 million people

more than two-thirds of the
UK population – tuned in.

76% said

‘Meet the Superhumans’
opened their eyes to what
disabled people can be
capable of



The coverage

The Paralympic Games took over the entire channel, from first thing in the morning to last thing at night. Channel 4 provided more than 500 hours of coverage across all platforms, four times more than the coverage from the Beijing Paralympics in 2008.

We put together a group of talented and experienced presenters, including Clare Balding, Jonathan Edwards and Rick Edwards, who were joined on screen by a group of new faces – recruited through a training scheme specially developed for Channel 4 to ensure that 50% of the on-screen presenters were disabled.

Working with Paralympic gold medallist Giles Long, we also developed LEXI, a graphics-based system to help viewers understand the classification used to distinguish different levels and forms of disability amongst Paralympic athletes.

The Opening Ceremony audience peaked at 11.6 million, giving Channel 4 its biggest audience in more than a decade. When British athlete Jonnie Peacock stormed to T44 100m victory on ‘Thriller Thursday’, 6.3 million people watched, the largest rating ever for a Paralympic event in the UK.

The impact

In post-Games research, 83% of viewers agreed that Channel 4’s coverage of the Paralympics improved society’s attitude towards people with an impairment, while 64% of viewers felt more positive towards people with a disability. Nearly three-quarters of young viewers (aged 12-16) felt more comfortable talking about disabilities after watching the Paralympics.

Rather than just being ‘the bit after the Olympics’, the Paralympics became an event in its own right, selling out for the first time. Disability became a mainstream topic of interest in the media, with admiration displacing sympathy and pity.

Rio 2016



During Channel 4's broadcasts, almost half a million tweets were posted about the Paralympics

The campaign

Following the success of London 2012, preparing for Rio 2016 was no easy feat. We had set the bar high. The Rio 2016 Paralympics also lacked the halo effect of the home Games and prime time-friendly schedule. So we decided to go bigger and broader, making 2016 our Year of Disability.

A new campaign, 'We're the Superhumans', took the baton from 'Meet the Superhumans' but extended the concept beyond athletes. The uplifting three-minute ad, set to a cover of Sammy Davis Jr's 'Yes I Can', involved more than 140 people – with just as many non-athletes as Paralympic stars – showcasing people flying planes, playing in bands, raising children, tap-dancing, rock-climbing and even driving a wheelchair through a wall.

Signed, subtitled and audio-described versions of the clip ran across the Channel 4 network, in cinemas and on YouTube and Facebook, making it the most accessible campaign we'd ever produced.

'We're the Superhumans' was the most-shared Olympics or Paralympics-themed ad on social media of all time, won the Grand Prix for Film at the Cannes Lions Festival and was named 'Global Advert of the Year' by Shots.

We also launched a £1 million 'Superhumans Wanted' competition to get UK advertisers to think differently about how they represent disability. More than 90 brands and agencies entered the competition – and the crown went to AMV BBDO's submission for Maltesers. The brand's brilliantly conveyed ads led to a 8.1% sales uplift, double the target they had set themselves.



58% of on-screen talent and 19% of the production staff had disabilities

The coverage

Taking on the ratings challenge of an overseas Games with a notable time difference, we broadcast more than 700 hours of coverage across all TV and online platforms, including the opening and closing ceremonies live in full.

LEXI was given a complete revamp for Rio 2016: we replaced much of the on-screen text with 3D animation and announced superstar actress Julie Walters as the new voice of the system.

We also made a groundbreaking commitment to on- and off-screen diversity, assembling the largest ever team of disabled presenters on UK television and training 20 disabled production staff who worked on coverage of the Games.

Channel 4's coverage of the Rio 2016 Paralympics was watched by 28 million viewers, nearly half of the UK population. Our average audience share leapt 50% during the Games. And more 25-34-year-olds tuned into Rio 2016 than London 2012.

The impact

If London 2012 was a watershed moment for Paralympic sport, the Rio 2016 Paralympics went even further in improving public perceptions of disability.

Exam board AQA named 'We're the Superhumans' as one of the best examples of how the media can represent people with disabilities, recommending it for study as part of GCSE and A-level media studies qualifications.

Its impact was felt beyond the UK, with Australia's Channel 7 using the ad as part of their own promotion of the Paralympic Games coverage and both the US State Department and the United Nations using the campaign as part of disability initiatives.

Overall, the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games were the most viewed in history attracting a cumulative global audience of more than 4.1 billion people, smashing all broadcast records.



Channel 4 has taken the profile of the Paralympics to a whole new level. It's a prime case study for how the media can represent disabled people in a way that doesn't smack of box-ticking.

Sandra Allan

AQA Head of Curriculum for Creative Arts



Four athletes tell us about their personal journeys and share their take on the Paralympics legacy.

Ellie Simmonds OBE

Paralympic swimmer

DISABILITY



Rio 2016 Paralympics
Superhumans Return 7 Sept

Channel 4 is paid for by advertising and owned by you.

Ellie shot to fame when she won her first Paralympic medal at the age of 13. Despite being the youngest member of the British team at the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games, she sprung a surprise to win the 100m freestyle gold, before breaking her own world record by more than seven seconds to claim a second title in the 400m freestyle.

It was the start of a string of firsts for Ellie, who was born with achondroplasia (dwarfism). She went on to become the youngest-ever winner of the BBC Young Sports Personality of the Year in 2008, as well as the youngest-ever recipient of an MBE at the age of 14.

In the build-up to London 2012, she starred in Channel 4's 'Meet the Superhumans' campaign and became the poster girl for the Paralympic Games. "Channel 4 elevated us from unknowns to equals in the sporting world," Ellie says. "To actually be recognised for being elite, professional and 'real' athletes is something Channel 4 contributed to in a big way."

Ellie won four medals in London – two golds, a silver and a bronze – rubber stamping her status as a figurehead for British Paralympic sport. Royal Mail postboxes in Swansea (where she now lives) and Aldridge (where she grew up and went to school) were painted gold in honour of her 2012 medals.

"As a broadcaster, Channel 4 simply led the way at London 2012. No one had given the Paralympics that kind of exposure before or used that tone of reporting. They didn't feel sorry for us, they celebrated us," says Ellie, who was awarded an OBE in 2013.

"Channel 4 showcased the Paralympic Games like it was the main event of the summer. It wasn't a one-hour highlights show. It wasn't an early morning slot when no one was awake. It was prime time, fantastically produced, groundbreaking television," she adds. "I can say without any hint of exaggeration that Channel 4's coverage changed many lives for the better, including mine."

Ellie defended her gold medal (and set a new world record) as well as picking up a bronze in the 400m freestyle at Rio 2016, before hanging up her goggles for a year to travel around the world. Now she's back in the pool preparing for Tokyo: her fourth and final Games.



I can say without any hint of exaggeration that Channel 4's coverage changed many lives for the better, including mine.

Ade Adepitan MBE

Channel 4 TV presenter and wheelchair basketball player

Ade was just 15 months old when he contracted polio while playing outside the family home in Lagos, Nigeria. The virus caused paralysis of his left leg and left him with only partial use of his right leg.

His parents decided to move to the UK where it would be easier to bring up a child with a disability and they settled in Plaistow, East London. "Being the new boy who was black, had a funny name, and had a disability was when it first hit me that I was different, that life was going to throw all sorts of challenges at me," says Ade.

He was taught how to walk using Forrest Gump-style iron callipers and discovered wheelchair basketball when he was 12. "At first, I wasn't keen on the idea of wheelchair sport. It seemed a backward step to go into a chair and I thought my friends would take the mickey," he says. "But then I went to the junior wheelchair games at Stoke Mandeville Stadium – the birthplace of the Paralympics – and I was hooked."

Ade went on to be part of Great Britain's wheelchair basketball team, winning bronze at the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens and scoring the winning basket that clinched gold at the 2005 Paralympic World Cup.

Ade has presented build-up programming as well as London 2012 and Rio 2016. He is a regular across lots of different channels.

"Back in my day, when you competed in the Paralympics, there were very, very few people who came out and watched you," he says. "To fill a stadium for a Paralympic sport was unheard of. London 2012 just made me think, 'We've finally arrived. We've made it. We're at a stage where we can never afford to go back.'"

He also became an established documentary-maker, with shows including BBC Two's *Africa with Ade Adepitan* and Channel 4's *Ade Adepitan: Journey of My Lifetime*.

"I had no TV experience, came from East London and sounded it, and used a wheelchair. I never thought that I'd have a TV career, I didn't think about making money from my sport," he says. "But now these kids are looking at wheelchair athletes like David Weir and Hannah Cockcroft and they're thinking, 'That could be me.' That's just a wonderful legacy, that disabled kids think they have as much opportunity as able-bodied kids."



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Liz Johnson

Channel 4 presenter and Paralympic swimmer

"I can't change or hide my disability, so I've just learned to be comfortable with who I am – and that's the most liberating thing in the world," says former Paralympic swimmer Liz Johnson, who has cerebral palsy. "Being different gives you a competitive advantage."

Liz is impaired down the entire right side of her body. "From brushing my teeth to doing up buttons, it impacts everything I do – but I never felt like I was missing out," she says.

Liz's mother started taking her to swimming lessons when she was four to help strengthen her muscles. Liz started training with Cerebral Palsy Sport and was selected for ParalympicsGB when she was 14.

So began a gruelling schedule of studying at her local comprehensive school in Newport, and training at the Welsh National Pool, nearly 55 miles away. Her dedication paid off: Liz won a silver medal in the Athens 2004 Paralympic Games and passed the A-levels she needed to do a business degree at Swansea University.

Four years later, at the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing, Liz won gold in the 100m breaststroke. She dedicated the trophy to her mother, who died from cervical cancer just days before the race.



Liz was an official ambassador for the London 2012 Paralympic Games, helping to design the team kit, laying the last tile in the Aquatics Centre and reading the Athletes' Oath at the Opening Ceremony.

"Channel 4's 'Meet the Superhumans' campaign was really thought provoking, encouraging people to view differences with a fresh perspective," says Liz.

"Channel 4 was the first broadcaster to put disability front and centre-stage – and that had a hugely positive impact."

After adding a bronze medal to her collection, Liz retired from international swimming in 2016. She became an athlete mentor for the Youth Sport Trust and Dame Kelly Holmes Trust, and joined Channel 4's broadcasting team for the Paralympics in Rio. "We had a very authentically inclusive team throughout the entire production," she says.

Two years ago, she launched an employment consultancy called The Ability People, staffed exclusively by disabled people. The aim: to close the disability employment gap, which currently stands at 28%. "It is vital that the attitudes and principles applied during Games time are maintained and developed year-on-year, day-on-day," she says.



Channel 4 was the first broadcaster to put disability front and centre-stage – and that had a hugely positive impact.



Jonnie Peacock MBE

Paralympic sprinter



Jonnie became a household name during the London 2012 Paralympic Games when he scorched to victory in the T44 100m final.

Described as “the Usain Bolt of blade running”, Jonnie contracted meningitis at the age of five, affecting the tissue in his right leg and resulting in an amputation just below the knee.

Determined that his disability would not stop him, he would still compete against able-bodied children in school races and play football until his stump hurt. Then, aged 15, his prosthetist suggested he attend a talent scouting day for the British Paralympic Association. He was soon competing in major sporting events.

When London 2012 came around just four years later, Jonnie knew he could win. “I knew I had the capacity in me to be the fastest runner there, even though I wasn’t the favourite,” he says.

Jonnie was one of the stars of Channel 4’s ‘Meet the Superhumans’ campaign. “I was blown away by the scale of it. This wasn’t just a couple of people pitching up with a camera: this was a big, bold production with a huge crew,” he recalls. “Channel 4 took the Paralympic Games to a whole new level and they weren’t in any way patronising in their coverage. This was gritty, hard-hitting and cool. I felt like an athlete, not a disabled person.”



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Four years later in Rio, Jonnie became a double Paralympic champion, defending his title and setting a new 100m Paralympic record in the process.

Jonnie became the first amputee Paralympian to compete on BBC One’s *Strictly Come Dancing*, and he is the presenter of *Superhuman Summer: The Paralympic Rewind*, a prime-time nostalgia show on Channel 4, which looks back at London 2012 and Rio 2016.

In the build-up to the Tokyo Games, he’ll also be fronting a new prime-time Channel 4 programme called *Jonnie’s Blade Camp*, working with a group of disabled children to show them, and their families, that there are no barriers to participating in sport and physical activities given the right support and tools.

The Last Leg

***The Last Leg* started out as a comedic wrap-up of the day's events at the London 2012 Paralympic Games. Fronted by Adam Hills and Alex Brooker, both of whom were discovered as part of Channel 4's search for disabled talent, alongside able-bodied sidekick Josh Widdicombe, the programme was initially only supposed to run for two weeks. Guests were invited into the studio to talk about the Paralympics, review the highlights and tackle some of the intricacies of disability sport.**

Crucially, the show celebrated and poked fun at disability in equal measure. Viewers were invited to tweet in their awkward and often inappropriate questions about the Paralympics using the hashtag #isitok ("Is it OK to ask how a swimmer without arms gets out of the swimming pool?"), which were then answered on air.

"The show had a kind of magic to it," says Steven Handley, Channel 4 Commissioning Editor. "Disability had always been treated as delicately off limits by mainstream TV. By confronting it head on with comedy, *The Last Leg* broke down barriers."

More than one million people watched *The Last Leg* every night, becoming so popular that Channel 4 re-commissioned it for a longer run in 2013. Described by Adam as "three guys with four legs talking about the week", the show takes a satirical spin around the week's news with a live studio audience and celebrity guests.

Eight years and 218 shows on, *The Last Leg* has become one of Channel 4's biggest hits, attracting on average 1.6 million viewers and a 10.8% share. The latest series, called *The Last Leg: Locked Down Under*, saw Adam, Josh and Alex hosting the comedy show live from their three respective locations (Melbourne, London and Huddersfield) – a TV first.

"The show has fundamentally changed perceptions about what you can achieve with a disability," says Steven. "It has given viewers the space to think about it and discuss it in a way that feels honest and fun."



I wish I'd seen someone with my hands or my leg on TV when I was young. I'm one of the first people with disabilities to break through. It's a lot of pressure but I'm so proud when people tell me I've given them hope.

Alex Brooker



I loved *The Last Leg*. They had great guests, weren't afraid to talk about disability and made it great fun. We also allowed our 9-year-olds to watch and I am sure that their perception of people with disability changed as a result.

The Last Leg viewer, Rio 2016



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Paras Production Trainees

on

► Alicia Dalrymple

Occupation:
**Senior
Production
Coordinator**



Having studied media production at Derby University and built up work experience as a runner, production assistant and live event coordinator, Alicia moved to Sheffield in the hope of finding a full-time job.

Instead, she found herself unemployed, stuck in a bad relationship and struggling with anxiety and depression.

"It was a tough time," she says. "I've always been independent and really wanted to make something of myself so I took myself off to the library, found a local charity called Nomad Opening Doors and emailed them asking for help. They got in touch straightaway and found me accommodation. They were my saving grace."

Alicia was then referred to Crisis, the national charity for homeless people, who helped her to look for work and ultimately get a place on Channel 4's Rio Paras Production Training Scheme in 2016.

"Rather than typing out my application, I could send in a video," recalls Alicia. "I'm dyslexic, so that made a world of difference. It brought out the best in me."

She became a Production Secretary for London-based Lime Pictures, working on shows including ITV2's *Educating Joey Essex*, MTV's *Geordie Shore* and Channel 4 documentary *Too Posh To Parent*. "I was eager to work and was always given a lot of responsibility," says Alicia.

After a stint in Rio working as a production coordinator on the 2016 Paralympic Games, she returned to Lime Pictures for a new series of *Celebs Go Dating*.

Alicia currently works as a freelance senior production coordinator, with recent projects including BBC Two's *Surgeons: At the Edge of Life* and BBC One's *Ambulance* and hopes to move up the ladder to become a junior production manager.

"Channel 4 is where I've felt the most comfortable and most nurtured," she says. "If it wasn't for the Production Training Scheme, I don't know where I would be. It was life-changing."



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► Ian Burnip



Channel 4's coverage of disability has been groundbreaking – and it just keeps getting better.

Ian had a passion to “tell stories” so he decided to swap his political ambitions, working as a parliamentary researcher for a former shadow minister and in the third sector. He did an MA in Journalism at De Montfort University and worked for local newspapers, before joining BBC Sport Wales as a Trainee Researcher. “I soon realised that TV was the medium for me,” he says.

As a wheelchair user with spinal muscular atrophy, opportunities in the industry were hard to come by and Ian was forced to drop out. It was while he was out of work – and with the dream career in tatters – that he spotted the advert for Channel 4's Rio Paros Production Training Scheme. He didn't think he stood a chance, but his application was successful.

Ian landed a role as an Assistant Producer at ITV Sport, working on projects including the Rugby World Cup 2015, Euro 2016 and ITV4's weekly Bundesliga highlights show. “The scheme was a great platform to meet important contacts and develop the vital skills I needed to work on the Rio 2016 Paralympics,” he says.

He went on to work as a freelance producer on a host of prestigious projects, including winning a BAFTA as part of the 2019 Rugby World Cup Final team for ITV, and edit producing the 2018 and 2019 Superhero Tri show for Channel 4, featuring highlights from the UK's only disability triathlon. He recently produced, wrote and directed *At Home Superheroes*, all done while he himself was shielding. “Channel 4's coverage of disability has been groundbreaking – and it just keeps getting better,” he says. “But we cannot think the drive for equality is finished. We must keep changing minds and influencing the conversation.”

Ian wants to continue working on the Paralympics, as well as World Cups and European Championships, with the “ultimate dream” of producing a documentary on Aston Villa's European Cup triumph in 1982.

Occupation:
Producer



► Chloë Kilby

Occupation:

**Freelance Editor and
Assistant Editor**





Chloë has always known she wanted to work in film and TV and initially had her heart set on becoming an actor but, at the age of 14, she was diagnosed with photosensitive epilepsy. “The lights and lack of support in my drama class at school crushed that pretty quickly,” she says. “This was before you could just Google ‘actors with epilepsy’ so I never saw or knew of anyone like me. I started making films in my free time to help channel everything I was going through.”

Inspired by her film studies teacher, she decided to study Film Production at Arts University Bournemouth and, despite being hospitalised from a seizure the week before her dissertation was due in, she got a First. She moved back to her home town in Cornwall in 2015 but struggled to find a job. “I was desperate to break into the industry but knew that being a runner wouldn’t be medically or financially viable,” she says. “I’d never had a job before as I couldn’t have kept up with my studies alongside it without causing fatigue triggers. I tried applying for Tesco and Boots just to get an income but couldn’t even get an interview.”

One month later, Chloë came across Channel 4’s Rio Paras Production Training Scheme advertising a Junior Edit Assistant role. “I sent in the application, got interviews with three different companies and found myself moving to London to work for Firecracker Films,” she says. “I couldn’t believe my luck.” Her first on-screen credit was on a documentary film for Channel 4 called *Secret Life of the Human Pups* directed by Guy Simmonds.

It was amazing to be surrounded by a group of people all working in the same industry, managing their disabilities in different ways and achieving their dreams.

As part of the scheme, Chloë attended workshops at Channel 4’s headquarters each month. “Those workshops were great, not just for the level of training but for bringing all the scheme members together,” she says. “It was amazing to be surrounded by a group of people all working in the same industry, managing their disabilities in different ways and achieving their dreams.”

Chloë worked as a Media Management Assistant on the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games and is now a freelance Editor and Assistant Editor. She landed her first drama gig on the BBC’s *Holby City* earlier this year and has cut a short film as part of BFI Network x BAFTA Crew Micro Shorts programme and is in the process of directing and editing another.

► Liam Holt

After studying at The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Liam worked as an Audience Research Assistant at BBC Wales – until he heard about Channel 4's Paras Production Training Scheme.

"It was a chance to not only work in production but to create content in the build-up to the London 2012 Paralympic Games. I play wheelchair basketball so that really appealed to me," says Liam, who has been paralysed from the waist down since he was three-months old after surgery on a cancerous tumour in his lower spine.

His application was successful and he joined Cardiff-based production firm Boomerang, working as a researcher on *That Paralympic Show*. He also joined Channel 4's Paralympics presenting team, previewing competitions, recording voice-overs and conducting interviews for the 2011 BT Paralympic World Cup and London 2012 Paralympic Games.

"Having the opportunity to work both off and on screen has been such an amazing experience – and to do it for such a forward-thinking broadcaster as Channel 4 made it feel even more special," says Liam. "Channel 4 does more than any other broadcaster to promote under-represented groups. The general public's positive reaction to disability is a testament to all the work Channel 4 has put in."

Liam moved into post-production and is now a freelance editor, working on a variety of shows for both daytime and prime time slots, including *Posh Pawn* and *Extreme Cake Makers* for Channel 4, *Ready Meals: Are They a Con?* for Channel 5 and the BBC's *Bargain Hunt*.

"I love creating and moulding stories," he says. "My background in music has taught me the importance of phrasing and timing when cutting sequences, as well as which types of music to use in order to set the right tone," he says. "I'm keen to gain more experience beyond Cardiff – and hope to be on the editing team for the Tokyo Paralympics next year!"



Occupation:
Editor



Channel 4 does more than any other broadcaster to promote under-represented groups. The general public's positive reaction to disability is a testament to all the work Channel 4 has put in.

Viewpoint

During the London 2012 Paralympic Games, for probably the first time in their lives, disabled people saw themselves on television around the clock. Long overdue conversations were finally being had about what it means to be disabled. Lots of big brands got behind the Games, and we saw more and more disabled talent on our screens. Channel 4 commissioned an entire suite of programming around disability which reflected the everyday life of disabled people, not just the athletes.

Disability had gone mainstream. The sense of optimism that we were on the cusp of change was palpable.

We know that you can't change attitudes in a fortnight, and a lasting legacy was always going to be harder to achieve. It's therefore vital that we use the momentum of the Paralympic Games all year round if we really are to shift attitudes towards disability.

One in five of us in the UK is disabled, but there is still far too little understanding about the everyday challenges we face, from difficulty getting into work, to shopping on the high street and using public transport. Improving attitudes and understanding towards disability is crucial to tackling these barriers.

The coronavirus pandemic has hit disabled people hardest, and there's a very real danger that it could turn the clock back on equality. Now more than ever, politicians, businesses, charities, the media and individuals need to work together to make sure disabled people and their rights aren't forgotten.

Next year's Paralympics will put disabled talent and achievement back in the spotlight. As brilliant as their achievements are, these elite athletes make up a tiny minority of disabled people.

We know familiarity is the key to breaking down barriers and increasing understanding about disability, yet disabled people are wildly under-represented in all areas of public life. Put simply, we need more disabled people on our screens as well as working behind the cameras. There are one billion disabled people in the world. Their stories need to be told.

► **James Taylor**
**Executive Director of Strategy,
Impact and Social Change
Scope**



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