

Meet Accessercise, the first fitness app for people with impairments

As part of our quick founder questions series - or QFQs - we spoke to Sam Brearey, Founder and CEO of Accessercise about making exercise accessible to all, the importance of partnerships and being a finalist across 3 categories with Empact Ventures.

As Ali Jawad PLY was getting ready to take on his biggest challenge of his life at the Tokyo Paralympic Games, he was already thinking about what to do next and how to fulfil his biggest passion of all, helping the disabled community having greater access to health and fitness, greater inclusivity, more independence. After some research it became evident that the disabled community were wildly underserved and something need to be done, it should be tech focused and it was needed now! Believing in action, we birthed Accessercise there and then, with the promise to not just talk about the issues and possible solutions, but to deliver a tangible and permanent solution.

Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work

with, how you reach customers and so on?

Accessercise is the worlds first complete fitness app for the disabled community. Offering bespoke content, specific to each users impairment/disability. All of our content is tailored to each impairment, the exercises are demonstrated by somebody with the relevant impairment and all content is based on evidence and science. We are a unique product in so many ways. Firstly even the concept and just existing is the worlds first and unique. Our exercise library is unique in numerous ways and we are proud of our entirely unique, market leading rating system for fitness facilities based purely on accessibility. Accessercise is leading the way and setting the standard for accessible venue ratings.

We aim to remove the barriers to exercise for over 1.2 billion people around the world.

We are extremely proud and great to be working with some amazing organisations, groups and people. Our development team (Tallium) based in Ukraine have and continue to be amazing in their work building an accessible, user friendly experience. Some of our key strategic partners include Future Fit with whom we are designing the worlds first accredited course for personal trainers coaching the disabled community. Project Fenix who are our charity partner driving our Ukraine expansion and veteran support. From an educational side Loughborough University are a key partner for both scientifically validating Accessercise to work as well as to develop future research and scientific evidence for impairments moving forward.

We reach our customers in a number of ways, our primary route is reaching them directly through social media channels, via ambassadors, word of mouth etc. We then also reach them through our strategic partnerships, for example with Google Ireland to support their employee DE&I initiative's, these parternships also extend into the medical and educational sectors via hospitals, clinics, insurance companies and universities. We are also working with some governments to provide Accessercise nation wide.

Can you tell our readers about your engagement with Empact Ventures?

We've been great fans of Empact Ventures and working closely with Kosta and the team on a number of avenues. They have been so supportive and proactive in supporting via their super connections and other ways. We have even been fortunate enough to be shortlisted in various categories of their awards over the last 2 years along with some other amazing companies. Their connections are helping us solve various challenges we face as a startup with a small team and limited budget, from partnerships, to marketing and even some fund raising. We really appreciate their time and care taken to help our journey. A special mention here to Kosta who has been brilliant with understanding our needs, our styles and working with us on feedback to streamline even more impactful connections, we are really thankful.

Tell us about the working culture at Accessercise

Ali and I have been good friends and colleagues for around a decade, we both share common values, drive and ambitions, which we want to embed at the core of Accessercise, globally, across the whole team, day by day. Empowerment is at the heart of Accessercise's promise to the users, and at the heart of our team culture. We empower each other, ourselves and the wider team to do what they are best at, what they believe is right and to have the confidence to make decisions by themselves. We believe that failure is great as we can learn, improve and develop. We believe in supporting each other and covering any gaps not because we have to but because we want to, to support our team mates.

One of our favourite 'quotes' to live by is "The most valuable player is the one who makes the most players valuable".

How are you funded?

The founding team bootstrapped the market research, the product design, the development, the build and the public release of Accessercise. This is important because we believe in what we have built. We have put our savings into making this because we believe it is desperately needed and we are here for the long run, we won't abandoning the disabled community. We have also taken a small external investment from the Cerebral Palsy Alliance. We are now in our first external funding round where we have already closed out some

investors including Tom Weddle (private individual) and Oggin Holdings, with 66% of the round committed already, due to close in January.

What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

Startup life is full of challenges, from balancing personal life with work life, finances (of the company and personal), stress, pressure, speed of decisions/work, facing rejection, stress and much more. Perhaps the biggest challenge is remembering to pat yourself on the back and celebrate the small wins and great work you and the team achieve against the odds. However, I think the biggest challenge so far for me personally has been balancing fleeing the Ukraine war, delivering support to Ukraine and running the charity I'm a director for in Ukraine while also running Accessercise. Both are so hugely important to the world and I wish I had time to work 24 hours a day on both of them, but alas that isn't how the world works. To overcome this I have ensured I carve out dedicated time to do my charity work and Ukraine support, accelerated the Accessercise support of Ukraine and continually remind myself that Accessercise is going to be a corner stone of rehabilitation support to tens of thousands of injured soldiers and civilians as a result of this horrific Russian terrorism. From an Accessercise specific stand point, outside of funding, I would say our biggest challenge has been the process of scheduling what to release when. We would love to be able to do everything all at once, but time and money don't allow this. So ensuring we are helping as many people as possible, as quickly as possible, while keeping track of spending has been a big stress.

Ali and I both want to have every impairment in the app now, but realise that isn't realistic and so we have to prioritise and make tough decisions. Our focus remains on ensuring that we help as many as we can, maintaining as higher level of accessibility as we can. So we would ask people to have faith in us, trust what we have already done and know that we are working tirelessly to support every single one of you in every way we can! We are here for the long run.

How does Accessercise answer an unmet need?

There is a large gap in the fitness/leisure industry. The disabled community have a lack of knowledge, resource and support with regards to physical activity and exercising. There are over 1.2 billion people with an impairment/disability, 81% of them openly want to be more active, yet of the

75,000+ health apps available, not one sufficiently caters to their needs, before Accessercise. Accessercise provides bespoke content to each individual user. The exercises given to a user are at the level of exercise ability required, they are all scientifically valid to be beneficial and safe for that user's impairment and they are demonstrated by a presenter with the same impairment as the user. User's can filter exercises based on the equipment they have available, level, impairment, muscle group and even their location (at home, outside or in a Gym). This exercise library empowers the user, educates them on what exercises can be done and provides them the resource they are lacking. Our social hub provides a place for peer to peer support, where users can celebrate their achievements and those of others, they can post their progress, they can join groups of relevance (based on impairment, location, level, goals, veterans etc). This provides much needed support aspect which is currently underserved in the market. The Explore section provides a map of fitness facilities in the country, rated based on how accessible they are to the user. This both holds venues accountable for true accessibility as well as empowers the user with knowledge of which facilities to avoid and which to spend their time and money at. From start to finish, Accessercise is built and designed to empower, support and provide for the disabled community specifically.

What's in store for the future?

Accessercise has a huge road map of developments, user experience, new technology, more content and new exciting features to come. We can't do it all at once, but we are committed to having it all done! These include; Gamefication, a nutrition section with recipes and nutrition advice bespoke to individual impairments, an education hub for personal trainers/therapists and the wider community, an e-commerce shop accessible equipment and training aids, new explore functionality, wearable technology (current and new). We are working with both Apple and Google to streamline accessibility and user experience. We will be adding new impairments (our target is 198 in total). We will be adding clinical rehabilitation content with a new exciting partnership. We will also be launching in America and Brazil, followed by Canada, NZL, Aus, Denmark, France, the Middle East then further across Europe. Finally we will be looking to both expand our team and add new investors to our cap table.

What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

I think my biggest advice is be a goldfish! Failures, disappointments, closed doors and rejections from investors are inevitable in startup life and are

arguably crucial in the process of learning to ensure long term success. You need to be resilient and have a short memory with disappointment to ensure your focus remains on pushing yourself, your team and your company forward. No one will do it for you, so have thick skin, believe in yourself and do something amazing!

And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I live by the ethos of getting things done and tackling the big jobs head on! I always try to make my bed in the morning, so no matter what, I start the day by accomplishing something. I normally start the day with a big cup of coffee and start clearing some emails (spam, read only etc) to leave only actionable emails left. I like to create some structure, so I will often have a to do list in priority order written from the day before to ensure I stay focused. I make sure I always have some time mapped out in the day for myself to reflect, exercise, clear my head etc.

At present I make sure I have an hour or 2 a day (normally in the evening) to help support Project Fenix (a disaster relief charity I sit on the board of). I think one of the hardest things is to keep balance as a startup founder, its easy to always be online and everything be crucially important, from my time as a professional athlete as well as learning on the job now, I am getting better and better at ensuring some time is protected. For example, my phone always goes on airplane mode when I get to bed. I try to have a least 1 day of the weekend where I don't even check emails or do any work. I try to prioritise every day life things when I can (knowing that at some point I will be working 24 hours a day non stop). Creating and finding balance I think are my rules. Thens one basic ones like no work in bed, no caffeine after 3pm, no sugar after 9pm (normally), at least 4 workouts a week. Vegetables with every meal etc.

Sam Brearey is the Founder and CEO of [Accessercise](#).

Accessercise was selected as a Top 10 HealthTech, [MedTech](#) and Diversity & Inclusion finalist in the [Super Connect for Good Competition 2023](#) powered by [Empact Ventures](#) and [Hays](#).