

Halliwick Across the Lifespan

Honouring Our Roots, Embracing Our Reach

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James McMillan's vision was simple and radical in equal measure: that every person, regardless of physical or cognitive ability, deserved the freedom of water. What began at Halliwick Pool in London in 1949 grew into something far larger than one man, one pool, or one country. It grew into clubs and galas, into charities and communities, into the quiet confidence of a swimmer who was once told they would never manage it. That legacy is real, it is living, and it deserves to be named before anything else is said.

This article is written in that spirit — not to narrow Halliwick, but to show how wide it has always been.

A Concept Built for Everyone

The Halliwick swimming clubs across the United Kingdom have, for decades, offered something that mainstream aquatic provision rarely could: genuine inclusion. Children and adults with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, and neurodiverse profiles have found in those clubs not just the opportunity to swim, but the experience of belonging. The Foundation Course has always reflected this breadth. Swimming teachers, SEN educators, occupational therapists, rebound therapists, parents supporting children at home, and rehabilitation professionals have all sat side by side in Halliwick training — because water independence and the joy of movement in water is not the exclusive concern of any one profession.

That breadth is a strength, not a complication. And it is precisely that breadth — the rigour of the 10-Point Programme, the emphasis on active participation, the progressive withdrawal of support, the focus on the individual rather than the technique — that has drawn a new wave of attention from rehabilitation science.

“Halliwick did not change to become relevant to rehabilitation. Rehabilitation evolved until it caught up with what Halliwick had always understood.”

The Quiet Expansion

Over recent decades, physiotherapists, neurological rehabilitation specialists, and geriatric clinicians working with adults have begun to encounter the Halliwick Concept — often through a course attended out of curiosity, a colleague's recommendation, or a patient who arrived at clinic having already experienced it in a community pool. What they found was a framework that spoke directly to the problems they were trying to solve on land.

The principles of the 10-Point Programme — mental adjustment, progressive independence, rotational control, balance in stillness, dynamic balance and functional movement — are not swimming principles in disguise. They are movement principles that happen to be extraordinarily well expressed in water. A physiotherapist working with a person with Parkinson's disease recognises in longitudinal rotation control the very trunk mobility that is lost to rigidity. A clinician working in falls prevention sees in turbulent gliding the safe rehearsal of balance loss and recovery that land-based practice can rarely offer. An aquatic therapist supporting a person after total knee replacement finds in buoyancy-assisted standing the confidence that the operated limb can bear weight before that confidence is possible on land.

This is not Halliwick being repurposed. It is Halliwick being recognised.

“Evolution in any field follows curiosity. The growing use of Halliwick principles in adult rehabilitation is not a departure from the Concept — it is evidence of its depth.”

Why Evolution Matters

Every discipline that endures does so because it remains open to question. Halliwick has always been grounded in the physical properties of water, in the science of movement, and in the centrality of the person. Those foundations are not at risk from clinical research — they are confirmed by it. When rehabilitation science examines what aquatic therapy achieves in stroke recovery, in Parkinson’s disease, in post-surgical rehabilitation, and in falls prevention, it keeps arriving at the same conclusions: that water offers something land cannot, and that a structured, progressive, person-centred approach in water produces outcomes that matter.

The Halliwick Concept has been delivering those outcomes since 1949. What is new is not the Concept. What is new is the research curiosity, the clinical attention, and the growing recognition that a framework developed for water independence has always also been a framework for human movement, dignity and participation — at every age, and across every condition.

For that recognition to deepen, Halliwick needs both its communities and its clinicians. The swimming clubs and the galas are not a past the Concept is moving away from. They are the living proof of what the Concept achieves — and one of its most powerful arguments.

The Same Principles, a Wider World

A swimming teacher supporting a neurodiverse child to find confidence in water, and a physiotherapist using the same 10-Point Programme to help an older adult recover balance after a stroke, are doing something more similar than different. Both are using the properties of water with purpose. Both are following the client’s lead. Both are withdrawing support as independence grows. Both are holding, as their goal, not a technique but a person.

That shared foundation is Halliwick’s greatest asset — and the reason its reach continues to grow. The full article, Halliwick Across the Lifespan, explores in detail how the 10-Point Programme applies across neurological, orthopaedic and geriatric rehabilitation, and is available on the IHA website for clinical teams, course participants, and anyone curious about where the Concept goes next.

“The clubs gave Halliwick its heart. Research is giving it a wider voice. Both matter. Both belong.”

The full article — Halliwick Across the Lifespan — is available on the IHA website at www.halliwick.org