

Briefing Paper 13

Disabled Children and Young People

National Assembly Elections 2007

“Disabled children and young people should be involved in helping to make services better. We should be asked about what we would like to see happen to us. Our views should be taken into consideration.”

Disabled young person
“Are You Listening?”
Barnardos Cymru and NCH Cymru, for WAG, 2003



Learning Disability Wales
Anabledd Dysgu Cymru



Elusen genedlaethol Cymru ar gyfer Awtistiaeth
Wales' National Charity for Autism



NSPCC 

Dim mwy o greulondeb i blant. DIM.
Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.


Barnardo's
Cymru
RHO'R DYFODOLYN ÔL I'N PLANT
GIVING CHILDREN BACK THEIR FUTURE

Disabled Children and Young People

Article 23 of The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child gives disabled children the right to be supported to lead full and independent lives.

Article 24 of the new UN Convention on for the Rights of People with Disabilities commits State parties to providing effective individualised support for disabled people to participate in the general education system and to fulfil their potential, “with the goal of full inclusion.” The social model of disability tells us that children are disabled by their environments and lack of proper support and equipment, rather than by their physical or learning impairments.

What has been achieved since 2003?

The Welsh Assembly Government and the wider Assembly have been very supportive of measures to improve the lives of disabled children, for example:

Consultation with disabled children and their parents to inform the NSF for Children, Young People and Maternity Services which was launched in 2005.; My Orange Book – a hand-held record for disabled children with complex needs; support for the international congress of disabled young people, held in Wales (this has led to a network for young disabled people and setting up of a reference group for the Equal Opportunities Committee); an SEN tribunal for Wales; development of more joint commissioning of services between social services and health (and education in some instances); joint equipment stores; more Welsh medium therapy services; more speech and language therapists, working more flexibly. The Children First programme has put a focus on disabled children and led to the establishment of more Children with Disability Teams in Local Authorities. There has also been a growth in key working. The Education and Lifelong Learning Committee has carried out a series of reviews on Special Educational needs and made recommendations for improvements. The Welsh Assembly Government has issued draft guidance on inclusion and pupil support.

The Equal Opportunities Committee recently launched a report on services and opportunities for disabled children moving into adulthood, with recommendations for improvement. A Strategic Action Plan for children with adults with Autistic Spectrum Disorder has been launched for consultation and there has been some investment in developing education practice for children with ASD.

The Welsh Assembly Government has abolished means testing for adaptations to housing for disabled children.

There is also a new disability equality duty on public bodies.

What are our Current Concerns?

Despite all these policy initiatives, the situation for many disabled children, young people and their families is little or no better than it was in 2003. Children, young people, families and professionals who contributed to the NSF were impressed by the standards set for services, but no funding accompanied the document and “flagged actions” were only set for the first year of a ten year programme. WE are pleased that a manager has now been appointed to oversee the NSF but disappointed at how long it has taken for this to happen. Her role will be very limited without a budget. Some of the issues still facing disabled children and their families are outlined below.

No agency has a statutory duty to provide child development services for preschool disabled children, so the availability of these essential services varies enormously, as do:

early counselling and support for parents; the quality of transition arrangements from children's to adult services; the availability of home support, and provision of equipment such as suitable wheelchairs. There is a deficit in the short breaks services which help to maintain families' physical and emotional wellbeing.

For children with emotional or behavioural difficulties and a learning disability, there is a serious gap in professional responsibility in some areas, where they will not be accepted for Children and Young People's Mental Health Services. Sometimes there is no psychiatric/psychology service for behaviour support whereas, in other areas, there is an intensive support service for these children. This makes a tremendous difference to them and their parents/carers and siblings.

Disabled children are still excluded from many everyday activities by lack of inclusive provision and lack of accessibility. The move to more inclusive education is welcomed but this has had a negative effect on some children where it has not been properly resourced. Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder face particular challenges in having their needs recognised and met. This is the most difficult group to match to cares for short breaks, for example. Special educational needs like ASD are often a factor in school exclusions, placement breakdowns and even involvement in the Youth Justice system, yet children have no statutory right to representation when excluded.

Disabled children with communication difficulties find it very difficult to have their views heard and advocacy services for them are under developed. Advocates need to be able to use the child's preferred method of communication, such as BSL, Makaton, PECs.

Recommendations

We call on the Welsh Assembly Government to:

- Review progress on the NSF and provide incremental milestones and a budget to implement the standards for disabled children.
- Use the Assembly's new powers to create a legal responsibility for Health, Social Services and Education to jointly commission and fund child development services for pre-school disabled children and children with learning disabilities.
- Support the Every Disabled Child Matters Campaign in Wales.
- Improve transition to adult services.
- Promote the use of key workers and a key health professional for all children with complex needs.
- Implement and properly resource the strategic action plan for people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.
- Adopt the UN Convention for people with disabilities.
- Ensure that inclusive education is properly resourced and that all school staff and pupils have disability awareness training. Learning Support Assistants need to have a clear and well supported role.
- Find ways to increase the level of home support and short breaks services provided in each Local Authority area, particularly for the children in most need.
- Ensure that play and leisure provision is accessible to disabled children and young people.
- Ensure that more professionals learn to communicate through a variety of methods.
- Look at the workforce planning issues across Wales in relation to psychiatric and psychology services for disabled children with emotional or behavioural problems.
- Ensure that every disabled child has the appropriate equipment to enable them to participate in education, training, play and leisure.
- Give children a right to representation when excluded from school.
- Ensure adequate safeguarding systems for disabled children.
- Improve the quality and consistency of data collection.

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