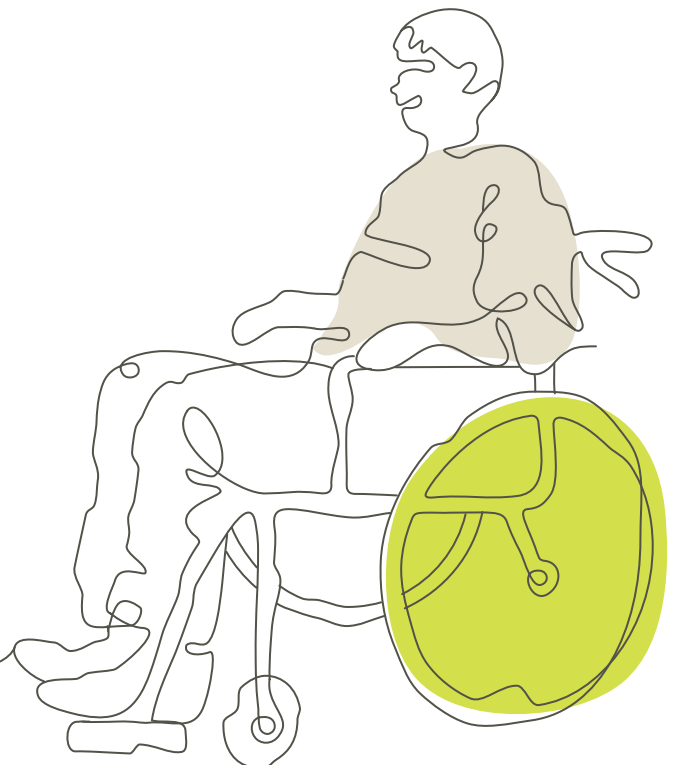


January 2009

Action for Children Scotland policy briefing

Disabled children and young people

All children and young people reach their fullest potential when they have access to good education, an adequate family income, adequate housing, health and social care, and the opportunity to live an independent and fulfilling life as they grow into adulthood. Unfortunately, some disabled young people face barriers that prevent them making the most of their lives, including poverty and poor access to services, especially during the transition from childhood to adulthood. Action for Children Scotland is firmly committed to breaking down barriers and finding creative, person-centred approaches to ensure disabled children and young people have the same rights and freedoms as their non-disabled peers.



What Action for Children Scotland wants to see

Action for Children Scotland believes that disabled children and young people have the right to enjoy the highest possible quality of life, and to be fully supported to participate in valued childhood experiences and opportunities.

We think much more must be done to make housing, education, leisure and support services fully accessible to disabled children and young people. With appropriate support, the vast majority of disabled children could be educated in mainstream schools, although parents, children and young people should still have the right to choose a specialist school, if they wish.

More needs to be done to ensure disabled children and young people are consulted about matters that affect them, and in the design and delivery of support and community services. Action for Children Scotland is committed to equal access across a wide range of its services, while continuing to provide more specialist services to children and young people with severe and complex impairments.

We believe disabled children, young people and their families should have easy access to information and advice, integrated assessment and review, care co-ordination and key working, support with transitions, and independent advocacy and representation.

Key legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 can play a significant role in tackling discrimination against disabled people and increasing their life opportunities. We believe, however, that cultural change across our society is also necessary to ensure young disabled people are treated with dignity and respect and get the same opportunities in life as non-disabled people. Action for Children Scotland believes the Commission for Equality and Human Rights should give urgent consideration to launching campaigns to raise public awareness about disability and to promote cultural change in Scotland, focusing on equality of opportunity for disabled people.



What we would also like to see

Action for Children Scotland would also like to see a national mentoring initiative to provide one-to-one support for young disabled people; increased funding to support initiatives that increase social contact between disabled and non-disabled young people; and a campaign to highlight to employers the positive aspects of employing disabled people and the positive contribution they can make.

Adequate early intervention for disabled children/children with additional educational needs

Action for Children Scotland recognises the benefits that disabled children and/or those with additional support for learning needs can gain from early intervention services. However, the availability of these services varies significantly, and there is a lack of co-ordination between education, health and social care. We support the call for adequate early intervention services, particularly for disabled children from birth to age five. Better training for staff in all settings is also required so they are more able to recognise the needs of disabled children, and to assess and respond to them appropriately.

Suitable living accommodation for disabled children

Action for Children Scotland is calling for the abolition of the means test for the Disabled Facilities Grant. This grant helps parents of disabled children pay for alterations to their home to enable their child to have a decent quality of life. Currently, one in three families who have been assessed for the grant cannot afford their contribution, resulting in no alterations taking place. We believe this means test is highly unfair, particularly as many families with a disabled child are already living in poverty, and we are campaigning with other organisations to end the means-testing element.

Appropriate short breaks for carers and for their disabled children

Action for Children Scotland believes that adequate and appropriate short breaks

should be made available for carers of disabled children as part of their support plans. These breaks can also be hugely beneficial to the children, allowing them to enjoy a wide range of activities that would otherwise be beyond their reach for a variety of practical and social reasons. A range of options is required in all cases because all disabled children and their families have different needs and preferences. Wherever possible, children should be consulted about the kind of short break they have, and where and with whom they have it.

High quality transitions

Action for Children Scotland aims to help disabled young people achieve high quality transitions from children's to adult services, so they can develop appropriate adult status, autonomy, roles and relationships through social interaction, community participation and meaningful daytime occupation. Many disabled young people and their families find moving on from children's education, health, social and leisure services confusing and stressful. Action for Children Scotland supports the concept of transition planning, and we strive to deliver this in a person-centred way.

We believe that providing information about timescales for changes and options available is central to this process, as is effective joint working between service providers. This must be underpinned by setting clear goals, reviewing targets and advocacy services when these are needed. Action for Children Scotland is committed to campaigning for more opportunities for disabled young people to continue education, undertake training and prepare for employment and living independently. The lack of such opportunities prevents many disabled young people fulfilling their potential.

Who we are

Action for Children Scotland is one of the leading children's charities in Scotland, working in partnership to run more than 65 services for more than 7,000 of Scotland's most vulnerable children, young people and their families. Across the UK, we run nearly 500 services. Action for Children Scotland's services include family centres and services for care leavers and young people who are homeless. We also support children and young people who act as carers and those with additional support for learning needs, and we offer alternatives to custody for those in trouble with the law.

Our services

Action for Children Scotland runs seven projects that provide support for disabled children and their families:

Gilmerton Road Project, Edinburgh

The Gilmerton Road Project was established in 1998, jointly planned and funded by social services, health and education. It provides a service across Lothian and supports 45 to 50 families affected by disability.

The children and young people who access the service have learning difficulties and complex neurological and medical and associated needs, and are aged 0–19. The service has a dedicated clinical psychologist who is able to create behavioural management plans and communication support, working with speech and language therapists, as well as relevant support and training to project workers, parents/carers and siblings.

The service ensures that individuals have access to inclusive facilities and provides the correct level of support to make this happen. Ongoing links with education, social services and health professionals help to break down the barriers faced by many families in accessing different services.

Lisalanna, Cumnock, Ayrshire

Lisalanna provides a respite (short breaks) service to children and young people aged five to 18, including children with moderate to profound learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities, multi-sensory impairment and complex healthcare needs, and those with challenging behaviour. The service helps children to realise their potential through communication, socialisation and interaction, personal care and life skills.

In addition, a dedicated out-of-school aftercare service is being developed with funding from the New Opportunities Big Lottery Grant Fund. It will support children and young people with additional support needs, while also allowing parents/carers to return to work or to take up training opportunities.



Our services (continued)

Stoneside Family Project, Glasgow

This service offers both residential short breaks and intensive support to families living in the Glasgow area. It works with children and young people who have a range of challenging behaviours and an associated learning difficulty.

All service referrals come through Glasgow City Council's social work services, and discussions then take place around the type of input required for each child. Some referrals require intensive support in the family home, while others involve a rolling package of respite care.

Renfrew Family Support, Loom Walk, Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire

Loom Walk provides short breaks to children and young people aged 5–18 with severe or profound learning difficulties and/or physical disabilities. It also aims to support those over 18 in the transition to adult services.

The support focuses on communication, socialisation and interaction, personal care and life skills. Each young person has a care plan that reflects their social, emotional and physical needs, and they are encouraged to contribute to this plan. Staff come from a mixture of backgrounds, and their specialist knowledge helps to make each child's stay a positive and enjoyable experience.

Silverton Short Breaks, South Lanarkshire

The service provides short breaks to children and young people aged 5–18 with moderate to complex learning difficulties. Some also have additional complex health needs, communication difficulties and/or challenging behaviour. The service offers 24-hour support.

It aims to ensure young people using the service experience positive and inclusive opportunities that are fun and enjoyable. Staff encourage the young people and their families to be involved in all aspects of service delivery and development, while supporting them to actively participate in their own communities.

There is also an early intervention group programme at Silverton Called EarlyBird, for parents of children recently diagnosed with autism.



Our services (continued)

Tayavalla, Falkirk

The service supports families who have a disabled child with complex needs by providing residential short breaks, family support and outreach in the child's home or community. The service is used by a minimum of 35 children and young people aged from five to 19. It offers experiences that help to expand children's life experiences and development and enable families to take a break from caring. The service aims to develop a partnership with the child, parent, carer and significant others, including involved professionals. This work is supported by volunteers, who bring new and stimulating ideas, opportunities and relationships.

Tayavalla also takes an innovative approach to supporting individuals with their communication needs, via a designated communication development worker post. This is a temporary position for a three-year period (2007–10) that has been funded via a Big Lottery Fund grant. The role of this worker has been acknowledged at a national level, and the project was successful in the 2007 Scottish Social Services Council's Care Accolades awards in the category of most innovative and imaginative training programme.

Western Isles Assessment and Therapy Unit

The service provides a co-ordinated multi-disciplinary assessment and therapy support service for children with special needs and their families.

It offers support, advice and assistance to children, young people and families at its premises or at home. A range of services are tailored to fit individual needs, including structured therapy and play sessions, practical assistance, counselling support, informal support and information for carers and mutual support groups. The project may advocate or co-ordinate services for each individual. Regular multi-disciplinary and internal reviews are held to ensure continuity in terms of services and assessment of needs that are already identified.

Please contact Andrew Girvan, Action for Children Scotland's Director of Children's Services, Moira Luccock, Action for Children Scotland's Operational Director of Children's Services, or Frances Tran, Action for Children Scotland's Assistant Director, on **0141 550 9010**, if you require more information or if you would like to discuss any of the issues we have raised.

www.actionforchildren.org.uk

as long as it takes