

Disability

Previously services were only available if the needs of the child fitted neatly into a service provided whereas now I feel that some authorities are taking a far more creative and individualised approach to what they can provide.

Mother of child with disabilities

Introduction

This final summary brings together the main findings from three C4EO literature reviews, which include examples of validated local practice and contributions from service managers, children, young people, parents and carers to support you in the development of services for disabled children, young people and their families.

C4EO's aim is to support senior managers in local authorities and their partner agencies, including health, to improve the lives of children and young people in their communities by providing the best possible evidence on what really works.

C4EO's work focused on three specific areas in relation to disabled children¹: increasing the quality and range of early years' interventions, improving access to positive and inclusive activities, and developing differentiated services to meet diverse needs. Key findings from all reviews were:

- Families of young disabled children who have a consistent key worker will usually experience better relationships with services, quicker access to benefits and reduced stress. A father said², 'Having a key worker and multi-agency meetings would make all the difference rather than having to deal with so many different agencies and repeating oneself.'
- Disabled children and young people want more choice in the activities available to them, and these opportunities can improve outcomes for their physical and psychological wellbeing. A mother said², 'I think we need more children's centres with more organised activities for disabled children. I would also like to see my local authority host more holiday schemes.' (Newman, 2010)
- Poverty and disadvantage consistently compound the difficulties faced by families, especially those from some black and minority ethnic groups. A mother said² 'If some authorities spent more time on ensuring that all families, whatever their background, had the help and support necessary to claim their full entitlements then some of the problems of poverty would at least be eased'.



Using the evidence to improve practice

Working in strategic partnership with other agencies and with families

- When developing your overall strategy for disabled children and their families, agree a working definition of inclusion, because inclusion can be interpreted in different ways and take place at different levels. This can lead to models of service delivery which are not genuinely and actively inclusive.

Involving children, young people, and families

- Parents know more about their children than anyone else so always ensure that you involve them as key partners in understanding what will help them and their child most.
- Provide opportunities for disabled children and young people to participate in both mainstream and separate activities. Decisions about the most appropriate setting should be informed by what disabled children and families feel is best for them. One young person said,² 'They asked me what it felt like to be carried like a princess. Little did they know that it actually made me feel excluded and lose my dignity'.
- Consult with disabled children and young people on access to, the quality of, and the extent of inclusivity of activities. This will improve take-up and satisfaction levels.
- Agree how you will provide different services to meet the needs of the range of disabled children and their families, and how you will integrate early years' services into your overall strategic development.

- Use the national minimum standards (DCSF, 2007) that families can expect, to develop an information strategy, which includes everybody in your partnership. As one service provider said³, 'Provision of information to all groups is a priority, as is utilising and harnessing the support of the voluntary sector which may be more robustly linked to minority groups'.
- Ensure your strategy includes a policy on zero tolerance of bullying, and includes disabled children and young people.

Service structure

- Early intervention helps to improve the emotional health and wellbeing of parents, and to promote better family relationships. A mother said³, 'Support needs to come much earlier as it is often only received once a family reaches crisis point'.
- Ensure that early years' services consider the needs of the whole family and are delivered in homely, non-clinical surroundings, through a seamless and integrated inter-agency process.
- Develop services that are well planned and structured, and continue for long enough and intensely enough for families to gain the benefits.

Allocating resources

- Implement programmes that result in positive outcomes, and exercise caution about large-scale investment in new interventions unless there is clear evidence of improved outcomes.
- Provide high-quality pre-school education for disabled children in order to reduce the numbers with an SEN diagnosis in primary school.

Delivering services

- Train all staff in inclusive approaches.
- Introduce comprehensive key worker services, for example, to provide quicker access to financial benefits and reduce parental stress.
- Ensure that services are based on whole family assessments and services respond flexibly. Whilst specialist services may be required, mainstream services should also be able to offer a differentiated approach where needed.
- Sensitivity to cultural needs is required: offer appropriate cultural choices to all disabled children and their families.
- Consider the use of electronic communication to deliver information and materials to families.
- Deliver services that include the needs of mothers, fathers and carers as well as children.

Auditing and monitoring service delivery

- Monitor take-up and access to services by disabled children and teenagers in services such as pre-school activities, and leisure, sport, arts and cultural services.
- Gather data on the needs of disabled asylum seeking children as more evidence is required about their needs.
- Encourage service providers to evaluate their range of activities for inclusiveness and accessibility.
- Consider making the findings from the 'access to service audits' publicly available (in electronic and/or paper format).



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Local practice that has made a difference

Practice examples have been submitted to C4EO and assessed against a range of criteria to determine the extent to which evidence can improve outcomes. Validated practice has strong outcome evidence of impact on population groups, whereas promising practice has mainly qualitative outcome and output evidence. Here we summarise two validated and one promising practice examples:

Ealing Services for Children with Additional Needs (ESCAN) is a key worker service for children with complex needs. The family key worker coordinates services, appointments, examines the family's needs and makes Family Service Plans, helps families with early support materials and monitors their outcomes. All the services are co-located and there is an information sharing agreement between services. A local website provides information on activities and support groups. As a result of this method of operating only a small number of children have needed additional interventions by the social care team and none have been re-referred. (Validated)

NHS Eastern and Coastal Kent, East Kent Hospitals University Foundation Trust and Kent County Council have implemented a multi-agency intervention programme to promote young children's speech, language and communication needs. The I-CAN programme is based on a joint approach, and involves parents as co-educators in the delivery of a programme in nursery, a children's centre or at home. Ninety-two percent of children taking part in the programme have been able to attend primary school, only 1 in 12 required a statement of SEN and high levels of satisfaction were recorded in feedback from parents. (Validated)

Mencap in partnership with Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council introduced the *me2* Kite mark award for inclusive children's settings. In order to achieve the Kite mark play and leisure settings have to demonstrate their inclusiveness. The *me2* project involves young people assessing and evaluating services instead of relying on adult experts. To date 22 settings have received the award in Dudley and another 30 are working towards the award. (Promising)

Further details on these examples and more validated and promising local practice examples, can be found on the C4EO website.



Footnotes

1. Disability is defined in legislation (Disability Discrimination Act 1995) as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
2. The quotations are drawn from group discussions with C4EO's Parents and Carers Panel, debates with local service providers, and documents which highlight the views of children and young people.

References

Beresford, B. (2010) *Improving the wellbeing of disabled children and young people through improving access to positive and inclusive activities*, London: C4EO.

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), (2007). *Aiming high for disabled children*, London: DCSF.

Newman, T., et al (2010) *Improving the wellbeing of disabled children (up to age 8) and their families through increasing the quality and range of early years interventions*. London: C4EO.

Newman, T. (2010) *Ensuring all disabled children and young people and their families receive services which are sufficiently differentiated to meet their diverse needs*, London: C4EO.

Stay involved with C4EO

- Access the range of support and national and local data on the C4EO website and compare your data with that of other areas.
- Encourage managers to consider applying to be C4EO sector specialists.
- Use C4EO Tailored Support scheme. Discuss with your colleagues and directors of children's services whether you could use the free support from C4EO's accredited and trained experts to develop your service for disabled children.
- Suggest that your organisation submits local practice examples which can be validated and placed on the C4EO website.

Final summary and recommendations

This summary is a concise overview of C4EO's work in this theme for directors of children's services. Please visit www.c4eo.org.uk to download full, in-depth versions of the knowledge reviews as well as copies of this summary and other materials.