

POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

INTRODUCTORY LEAFLET FOR PROSPECTIVE SHORT BREAK CARERS

WHAT ARE POSITIVE PARTNERSHIPS?

Disabled children and their families need families they can trust. Positive partnerships are a way of giving support to parents in the care of their children and to give the disabled child opportunities to broaden their experiences.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

It works on the basis of building a close and supportive partnership around a disabled child, their own family and between the carer and their family, and the Highland Council

DO WE NEED THIS IN HIGHLAND

Caring for any child is hard work and most parents look forward to a break now and again. This may take the form of a night out, a weekend away or more time with other family members.

Parents of a child with a disability may find it more difficult to get a break. They need to feel confident that their child's special needs are being met and that the child is benefiting from the time spent away from them.

WHO ARE THESE CHILDREN? "THE DOOR BELL NEVER RINGS"

Parents of children with disabilities can find that relatives, friends and neighbours will often offer to look after other children but are not confident enough to take responsibility for a child with disabilities. Other children are invited to come and play or stay the night, but children with disabilities do not always get these opportunities. Children with profound learning or physical disabilities are amongst the most affected, but so are children with autism and those suffering severely from epilepsy or other health problems.

A TYPICAL STORY

Melanie is 11. She lives with her mum and dad and two younger sisters. Melanie has a learning disability and has epilepsy, which is controlled by medication. She needs constant supervision as she is fascinated by knobs and buttons and has, once, turned the gas hob on in the kitchen.

She loves music and the television and she gets on well with younger children.

Melanie's mum and dad have no family support locally and can't remember the last time they went out as a couple. This is not their priority, though. They are becoming increasingly aware that Melanie's two sisters are not getting the attention they need, or the experiences they want, because Melanie needs such special care. They also realise that, apart from school and the Health Service, they are the only people Melanie has contact with.

DO CARERS NEED EXPERIENCE?

There is no such thing as a typical carer. Carers may come from any part of the Highland Council area and have a wide range of backgrounds and a variety of experiences. They may have a qualification and background in caring e.g. Social Work, Education, Nursing or Therapy. If they have experience of caring for children or young people with disabilities but no qualification, we will help with the relevant training. Just as important, we are looking for people who enjoy being with children and who have the patience and sensitivity to work with a child and their family

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Caring for other people's children, particularly disabled children can be a skilled and a professional task and deserves to be remunerated.
- People who have the skills and qualities required are a precious resource and may be able to provide care to more than one child.
- Flexible responses to the needs of families is regarded as one of the most important ways of supporting them.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

It is a part time professional task and you will be mostly working from home. You will be sharing your home and your family with up to four other children but not all at the same time!

Carers may also be sharing their community with the disabled children who come to them, as this is an important source of support to the whole family.

ARE THERE OTHER KINDS OF FAMILY BASED CARE IN HIGHLAND?

The Highland Council already has a number of respite care families who provide a very valued service to individual children and their families. You could well be one of them, thinking about building on your existing commitment.

There is still the need for these arrangements, which have often grown out of a friendship, or childminding or an existing partnership between families.

Here, anything from a few hours, perhaps once a week, to regular weekends and occasional holiday periods may be arranged.

CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR SHORT BREAK CARERS WHO BECOME POSITIVE PARTNERS

It is expected that carers will contract with the Council for a minimum of two years. They will be linked with up to four families or provide support for four children. Where appropriate they may take care for two of these children at any one time, for example siblings.

Direct care offered to each child by the carer will be for approximately 42 nights per annum, per child, usually in the carer's home.

They will receive a fee of £125 per week plus the allowances for the expenses incurred from caring for a child.

This caring partnership contributes to the happiness and wellbeing of the child as well as supporting the family. As carers get to know a child they will be able to bring an additional understanding to the development of the child.

BECOMING CARERS

Clearly, looking after other people's children is a great responsibility and we must ensure that all prospective carers are suitable to undertake this task. Having completed an application form, all applicants are thoroughly assessed by a Council Children's Resources Worker. The assessment process includes home visits, personal references, comments from the G.P, Police and Social Work checks and attendance at a series of preparation sessions. Sometimes it can be helpful for applicants to get involved in some related voluntary work prior to embarking on the assessment.

Following assessment, a report is prepared by the Children's Resources Worker, shared with the applicants and presented to the Fostering Panel. It is the Panel, which will decide whether or not applicants should be recommended for approval by the Council's Decision-maker, whose job it is, to make the final decision.

Government Regulations require this work to be carried out. The knowledge that Carers have been thoroughly assessed gives parents of children with disabilities the reassurance that their child will be properly cared for.

GETTING THE RIGHT FAMILIES TOGETHER (Matching)

It is important that the right families are put in touch with each other, that the skills and atmosphere offered suit the child and their needs. Time is taken to do this carefully.

Families who wish to build a positive partnership with short break carers, complete a "profile" of their child, which is passed to potential carers to read. Having read and discussed the "profile", the potential carers request that they would like to meet the family and find out a bit more about the child.

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER (Linking)

Once a match has been agreed, the carers begin the process of getting to know the child they will be caring for, and his or her family. This process usually begins with the carers visiting the child and his or her family, followed by the child's family visiting the carers. This process will continue until everyone, especially the child, is happy for the child to visit the carers alone. Visits build up gradually from a couple of hours until the child is settled and the potential carers feel confident enough to offer longer visits or an overnight stay.

This all takes time and it is important not to try to 'rush' the process. Experience shows that links are more likely to be long lasting if the linking process has gone at the right pace for all concerned, particularly the child.

It is important to point out that, should carers, parents or the child have any doubts about going ahead with the partnership, this will be discussed, and, if the doubts cannot be resolved, the decision not to go ahead will be respected.

It is vital that parents and carers feel they are choosing to make a partnership with each other.

Reviews of how the partnership is going are carried out on a regular basis, involving all concerned. It is especially important that we listen to the child's views and these will be sought wherever practicable.

THE ROLE OF CHILDRENS RESOURCES WORKER, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES AFFECTED BY DISABILITY.

In addition to recruiting prospective carers, running preparation sessions and carrying out assessments, the Childrens Resources worker will provide ongoing support to approved carers and keep in regular contact. They will also organise periodic training sessions, be available to offer advice, discuss concerns and help resolve problems.

LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

If you are interested in finding out more, then please don't hesitate to contact us by 'phone, letter or e-mail.