

Making the links

Playful short breaks for disabled children

Mainstreaming inclusive play Good practice briefing No: 2



Introduction

This briefing has been compiled by KIDS, in partnership with Play England, in order to explore the links between the Aiming High for Disabled Children (2007) programme and the funding from the national Play Strategy (2008). It builds on an earlier KIDS briefing 'Aiming Higher for Inclusive Play' (2008), and accords with Play England's responsibility to support and challenge local authorities receiving funding under the Play Strategy. The briefing highlights the successful work undertaken by authorities who have linked their short breaks and play pathfinder funding and consequently increased opportunities for inclusive play.

The Play Strategy and Aiming High for Disabled Children

In December 2008, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published England's first national Play Strategy. This describes the government's commitment for every child to access free, safe, accessible and exciting play opportunities in the areas in which they live. This policy is supported by a commitment of £235 million to re-develop and create 3,500

play areas with the requirement of ensuring that these areas are accessible to disabled children. Thirty play pathfinder local authorities have been awarded approximately £2.5 million each to develop or improve 28 play sites, and to create one staffed adventure playground in their area. Every other top tier local authority in the country has been designated as a playbuilder and will receive approximately £1.1 million funding to develop or improve 22 play sites each.

The Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) programme allocates local authorities £269 million in revenue and £90 million in capital funding to develop short breaks provision and increase access to childcare and participation. In the past short breaks for disabled children (or respite care for their parents) have developed into a specialist service for disabled children. Whilst such facilities may remain important for some families needing the option of an extended break, the new investment from government also opens up the prospect of disabled children having the opportunity to take part in the types of activity many other children do.

An afternoon swimming, a couple of hours at a playground or simply hanging out with friends can all be considered as short breaks. Indeed, the dedicated funding streams provide a real opportunity to make play and leisure for disabled children and young people a priority, whilst providing their parents or carers with time to themselves.

A joint play and short breaks pathfinder group has been established. Supported by KIDS, Play England, SkillsActive and Together for Disabled Children, the aim of this group is to exchange information on the way that funding is used and to encourage the sharing of experiences. The following examples from the four joint pathfinder authorities highlight how short breaks and play funding are currently being linked together, and how the additional funding is being deployed. The four authorities have also demonstrated their commitment to disabled children, young people and their families by signing up to the Every Disabled Child Matters (EDCM) Inclusion Charter (www.edcm.org.uk).

London Borough of Enfield

Short breaks funding has enabled Enfield to recruit an Inclusion Development Manager to take a strategic lead across play and leisure services. This will ensure that inclusion is recognised as integral to developmental processes, rather than an optional extra.

Transport has been cited in several reports as a significant barrier faced by disabled children and young people in trying to access services. A combination of short breaks, Big Lottery Fund and Special Educational Needs (SEN) money has been used to provide alternative transport options for disabled children to improve equality of access.

Many disabled children and their families are used to accessing specialist or segregated services, so it is important to reassure parents and carers and build positive relationships. To this end, Enfield ran six inclusive taster sessions for disabled children to be included in mainstream holiday play provision. The sessions were very positive and it was clear from the evaluations that the children had enjoyed playing and having fun with their peers. It is anticipated that by using short breaks funding, at least 25 disabled children will be supported to use mainstream holiday play settings. Tackling any remaining concerns that parents have will remain a priority.

The presence of boundaries to play areas is an important design issue and many providers are now developing play areas without fences or barriers surrounding them. In Enfield decisions on whether to install fences in play areas have been made on an individual basis taking into account the opinions of the local community and user groups alongside guidance from DCSF. What has been learnt from this process is that in some instances a play area may need to be enclosed and secure in order to make it inclusive to children who need the security of physical boundaries, and whose appreciation of everyday risks and hazards may be limited.

Sunderland City Council

Sunderland has been allocated funding by AHDC to match the city's play pathfinder funding to enhance an adventure play facility at Silkworth Recreation Complex. An indoor sensory play area will be built alongside a newly developed indoor soft play area and extensive outdoor play space, providing additional play opportunities for disabled children.

Partner organisations and stakeholders from the public, voluntary and community sectors will be involved in developing the facility with a particular emphasis on consultation with children and young people. The voluntary sector organisation ETEC has been commissioned to work with disabled children and young people looking at what activities they want and what barriers need to be overcome. This information will be analysed and evaluated, and then fed back into the development of the adventure play facility and other play developments in the city.

Equality training and workforce development will also take place with existing staff to raise awareness and play pathfinder funding is being used to develop potential volunteering opportunities to support all children who will use the facility.

North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council

North Tyneside aims to ensure that all children have access to high-quality inclusive play opportunities. The authority's play pathfinder team and AHDC Programme Board are in regular communication and cooperate to ensure that a strategic approach is adopted which encompasses both the play and short breaks agendas.

In order to evaluate current play provision, the play development team have been engaging with a steering group of disabled children, young people and their families. The steering group's evaluations will feed into the location, design and development of the play pathfinder projects.



In addition, disabled children from all the special schools in North Tyneside have been given questionnaires about their social and leisure opportunities and the barriers they face. The children are being supported to participate fully in this process and the information gathered will then inform new play developments.

Events will also be held for children with specific impairments. The AHDC and play pathfinder teams, with the support of The National Deaf Children's Society, will host a joint event for deaf and hearing impaired children and their families to voice their opinions about the leisure services they access. This approach has been taken to ensure that all children have the opportunity to be heard, and it is hoped that in the future similar events will be held for children with other impairments.

In order to meet the requirements of disabled children and their families at a new adventure playground, short breaks capital and revenue funding will be used to ensure that the site is accessible and that staff are sufficiently trained to support all users of the facility.

Support for children on unsupervised play sites has not been neglected either. Play rangers are receiving disability equality and inclusive play training to support disabled children who access such sites and give them a genuine choice of attending supervised or unsupervised play provision.

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Partnership working is important in Dudley. The wide involvement of the voluntary, community sector and statutory sector partners (including the Primary Care Trust and the police) has been instrumental in putting inclusion at the heart of the development of the Dudley play strategy.

The process has included the participation of, and consultation with, disabled and non-disabled children, their parents, carers, professionals and volunteers who support their play opportunities and outcomes. This has informed the development of all the pathfinder play areas and ensures that the requirements of disabled children are heavily featured in the play strategy. Strong anti-bullying strategies have been developed as part of the play pathfinder 'Safe to Play' policy in partnership with 4Children and DCSF. A new children's play service is also being established working with third sector providers KIDS and me2Mencap, together with local volunteers from Rollercoaster's, KIDS Orchard and the Phoenix Centre. This service will have a strong emphasis on ensuring all children are included in play provision. In doing so, this will extend Dudley's play provision for disabled children.

In addition, new activities and play facilities have been provided in public parks and local schools which include some specialised

equipment for disabled children. In order to support children to use these, a group of young disabled people have been taken on as volunteer play rangers. These young people will also support children in the new adventure playground in Dudley.

Key themes and recommendations for joining play and short breaks funding

Partnership and communication

Joining up funding streams requires effective communication and collaboration. Partners need to have an awareness of each other's vision, outcomes, policies and practice. It is important to grasp how people from different teams will work together, distinguish individual roles and responsibilities and put in place some SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant resources, timed) objectives to work towards. Partnership working with parents or carers and disabled children is also key. The examples above demonstrate the importance of consulting with disabled children and their families in the planning, design and delivery of services that will meet their requirements. Without eliciting these views, services will not be fully accessible to disabled children or their families.

Transport and toilets

Enabling disabled children to get to and from play settings or short breaks services is a necessity, an essential part of provision. If disabled children are unable to visit public services or travel with their parent or carer by independent means, services will remain inaccessible. And once they are there, all children need to be able to access appropriate toilet and changing facilities (www.changing-places.org).



Training

Extensive research demonstrates that negative attitudes are the biggest barrier to inclusion. Thus, if we are to develop environments that are genuinely welcoming for disabled children, we need to develop people who genuinely welcome them. A 'can-do' approach alongside adopting respectful attitudes is best engendered through equality training. In some circumstances, specific training which relates to a child's individual support requirements may also be necessary. KIDS provides training on inclusive play and can also advise on how to access other equality and diversity training courses.

Appropriate assistance

Many disabled children are able to access services independently, but some children will require additional support. By talking to the individual child and their parents, it will become clear what support is required (if any).

Occasionally a full time personal assistant is needed, more often it will be an extra pair of hands.

In both instances it is important that this worker understands the importance of play and the Playwork Principles (www.skillsactive.com/playwork/principles) to ensure the child is able to engage in self directed, freely chosen play.

Adaptations and equipment

Under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), services are required to make reasonable adjustments to allow disabled people to access their service. Thus, all play and short breaks services must make the necessary adjustments to include disabled children. For children who require specialist equipment this may already exist in the child's home and it may be possible to use it. Otherwise, equipment pools or toy libraries (www.natll.org.uk) may be able to provide some items. Having diverse, challenging and fun activities available for all children is imperative for developing high-quality inclusive play opportunities.



KIDS - the disabled children and young people's charity

KIDS is a national charity working towards a vision in which all disabled children and young people realise their aspirations, and their right to an inclusive community which supports them and their families. KIDS provides a wide range of services in seven English regions, and promotes inclusive play and leisure nationally across the children and young people's sectors through workforce development and support. Through its Playwork Inclusion Project - PIP (funded by the DCSF), KIDS provides training and seminars on inclusive play and a wide range of publications and briefings.

This briefing was compiled by KIDS in partnership with Play England. It forms part of Play England's contract with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to support and challenge local authorities receiving funding under the National Play Strategy. KIDS is working with Play England to provide advice and guidance to play pathfinders and playbuilders on promoting accessible design and inclusive play and is running a telephone advice line open Monday to Friday from 10.30am-12noon and 2.00pm to 3.30pm. Please call 020 7359 3073 or email pip@kids.org.uk

KIDS publications - The PIP Guidelines Series

- **Inclusion by Design - a guide to creating accessible play and childcare environments**
(Clare Goodridge 2008, Ed. Philip Douch)
- **Pick & Mix - a selection of inclusive games and activities**
(Di Murray, 3rd Edition 2008)
- **It doesn't just happen - inclusive management for inclusive play and childcare** (Philip Douch, 2nd Edition 2006)

PIP Publications and a range of good practice briefings can be ordered or downloaded from:

www.kids.org.uk/publications

Other resources


KIDS DVD: Kids just gotta have fun!
(2008) Featuring KIDS Hayward inclusive Adventure Playground.

National Inclusive Play (NIP) Network e-bulletin: A FREE bi-monthly e-bulletin containing news and events on inclusive play. Send your email to: pip@kids.org.uk to subscribe.


Useful websites

- **Play England:** www.playengland.org.uk
- **SkillsActive:** www.skillsactive.com
- **The Play Strategy:** www.dcsf.gov.uk/play
- **Aiming High for Disabled Children:** www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/ahdc
- **Together for Disabled Children:** www.togetherfdc.org
- **Every Disabled Child Matters:** www.edcm.org.uk

If you would like a copy of this briefing in large print or an alternative format, please contact the PIP Team.



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