

MANAGING RISK WHEN REDUCING SPENDING ON SERVICES FOR DISABLED CHILDREN



KIDS has contracts with half the Local Authorities in England to provide services for disabled children, young people and their families. We thought that Directors of Children's Services and other senior colleagues may find a provider's perspective on reductions to services of value.

This briefing focuses on three areas – reducing the need for Out of Area residential placements, the strategic use of individual support and improved use of systems and technology. It ends with a note about the links between safeguarding and disabled children.

Reducing the need for Out of Area residential placements

The number of parents who have taken legal action to improve the education offered to children with special educational needs (SEN) is already soaring. The number of SEN tribunals has risen by 64 per cent in 12 years, and by 16 per cent since 2008. In 2008/9 3,100 tribunal cases were heard and this rose to 3,400 cases in 2009/10. In the current year it is expected that this will rise again to 3,600.¹

While reductions in services to disabled children and their families may have little to do with SEN provision, in reality these are the same children, and families will use whatever route they can to get what they believe their child needs.

There is a real risk that reducing services for families with disabled children will indirectly lead to even more tribunals.

Conversely research by nef consulting for Action for Children estimated that increasing short break services could lead to very significant savings. Across England it was estimated that: *“decreased cost of long-term residential care from reductions in the number of disabled children placed outside of the family home: £135 million”*.²

For families that are finding it very difficult to cope with their disabled child, arguing that their educational needs cannot be met in a local school and that their child requires specialist provision out of area has some attractions. However specialist residential educational provision is very expensive and it is not always in the best interests of the child to be separated from their family.

Conclusion

Reducing services for families with disabled children could lead to additional, substantial costs being incurred elsewhere if aggrieved parents turn to the tribunal system.

Solutions

The use of Mediation for disputes between parents and Local Authorities varies widely between different Local Authorities. KIDS runs an independent mediation service which is accredited by the Civil Mediation Council. Most London Local Authorities already use the KIDS service but KIDS would be pleased to provide this service more widely.

Many Local Authorities spend a very large proportion of their disabled children's budget on a very small number of disabled children. In many cases, particularly for children with multiple or unusual impairments this is entirely appropriate. For other children it may be that if local services were more developed and improved, their requirements could be met closer to home and at less cost. KIDS would be pleased to work with Local Authorities who wished to explore this further.

The Strategic use of Individual Support

Supporting disabled children in group settings where staff ratios can be set at, for example one staff member to four children, is on the face of it cheaper than supporting disabled children on a one to one basis out in the community.

Group settings are often more popular with parents who see them as a 'safe' place for their child and can also enable staff to be trained under the supervision of experienced and qualified practitioners. However group settings do not, on their own, promote inclusion and as the child grows older do little to prepare them for adult life in the community.

Conclusion

Some parents will not protest if one to one community support is replaced with cheaper group settings support. However the long term consequences may involve Local Authorities in greater cost later on, if disabled children are not brought up to manage in 'ordinary settings'.

Solutions

Increased use of the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act together with enhanced training for mainstream settings should enable more universal settings to accommodate disabled children in their services and activities. Sometimes one to one support will be required but can be phased out when it ceases to be necessary.

Similarly disabled young people often need one to one support when accessing public transport and public facilities. However in time some disabled young people can outgrow the need for this support and manage independently.

All one to one support contracts should have the greatest independence possible for the disabled young person as part of their outcomes.

KIDS would be pleased to work with Local Authorities in training mainstream settings in inclusion, working with parents who are anxious about inclusive settings, and in providing both group activities and one to one support for disabled children and young people.

Improved use of systems and technology

The Council for Disabled Children has calculated that there are more than 20 assessments which a disabled child may be subject to. This problem has been recognised by the Coalition Government who have said:

"We also need to look at assessment of disabled children and address the bureaucratic mess that families face to get their child assessed. Sarah Teather MP, 6 July 2010, launching a Green Paper in the autumn that will look at a wide range of special educational needs and disability issues".³

Conclusion

Clearly multiple assessments can be a significant waste of resources and in an age of improved technology should not be necessary.

Solutions

The Government is making the National electronic Common Assessment Framework available to Local Authorities free of charge (and this programme continues under the Coalition Government).

If national eCAF is used as the assessment for disabled children and subsequent assessments are rationalised, this should introduce considerable savings into the system. Providers of services such as Barnardos and KIDS are also early adopters of national eCAF and can access the system enabling (with consent) the rapid flow of information to those who need it.

Benefits identified by KIDS staff in using an electronic CAF system include:

- eCAFs are always legible and information is not missing
- Time saved by sending these electronically – no envelope stuffing or addressing or postage costs
- Electronic confirmation that the person has received the eCAF
- Time saved not relying on postage system; information can be shared immediately
- General word processing advantages e.g. cutting and pasting from other sources
- Improving the quality of assessments by providing consistency of approach
- A cost effective way of improving integrated working
- Ensuring that the needs of the child are dealt with by the most appropriate professionals preventing escalation
- Providing extensive management information

The national eCAF team can be contacted at: sanjeev.kumsar@education.gsi.gov.uk

There are further savings available through the use of technology in the organisation and delivery of services to disabled children and young people. KIDS has developed Direct Short Breaks which enables families to book a short break on line and allows Local Authorities real time access to what every family is receiving.

KIDS has brought together a number of providers working in the arena of technology and service provision, and below is a list of those who would be interested in exploring ways to improve efficiency with Local Authorities.

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www.activities-unlimited.co.uk	linda.smith@suffolk.gov.uk & norman.mellor@csduk.com
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Safeguarding and disabled children

Every year since 2006 there has been at least one tragic case of disabled children and/or their parents who have died, involving suicide and/or the parent taking the life of the disabled child.

- **On 26 April 2006**, Alison Davies aged 41 jumped from the Humber Bridge with her son Ryan, aged 12. Both died. Ryan had autism.
- **On 24 October 2007**, Fiona Pilkington aged 38 set her car alight with herself and her daughter Francesca aged 18 in it. Both died. Francesca had learning difficulties, was doubly incontinent and could not be left on her own.
- **On 26 November 2008**, Joanne Hill aged 32 drowned her daughter Naomi aged 4 in the bath. Naomi had cerebral palsy.
- **On 31 May 2009**, Neil & Kazumi Puttick jumped to their deaths at Beachy Head carrying the body of their child Sam aged 5 in a rucksack. Sam who was paralysed had died two days earlier.

With regard to specific safeguarding procedures and serious case reviews, a 2009 government study found that “*There is a widespread lack of local and national data on disabled children who are subject to safeguarding children procedures*”.⁴

However the same government paper cites research by Brandon et al (2009) which found that of a sample of 189 Serious Case reviews, 14 children (8%) were disabled.

Conclusion

Reducing services for disabled children is a decision that has potentially serious safeguarding consequences. In particular, support for parents who would not otherwise come to the attention of Children’s Social Services is important as parents can ‘break’ under the strain of caring for a disabled child if there is insufficient support available.

Solution

The Coalition Government within days of taking office committed itself to funding additional respite breaks. “*An example of our approach of cutting with care is that we will take some savings from ending Child Trust Fund payments to provide a better way of helping disabled children. I can therefore announce that our figures for savings include provision for over £20m each year, starting next year, to be spent providing additional respite breaks for severely disabled children. This would allow for upwards of 8,000 week long breaks which will, I am sure, be welcomed by many parents who have the huge responsibility of caring for a disabled child.*”

David Laws MP – 25 May 2010⁵

We all need to work together to ensure that this promise reaches the families that need it most.

References

1. TES 30th July 2010
2. The social and economic value of short breaks – Action for Children (2010)
3. www.education.gov.uk/news/speeches/st-edcm
4. Safeguarding disabled children - Practice guidance: DCSF (2009)
5. www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/press_06_10.htm, under the heading Protecting key front-line services and those on lower incomes.

About KIDS

KIDS – working with disabled children and young people

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.

www.kids.org.uk

If you would like to follow any of this up with KIDS, please contact in the first instance either a KIDS member of staff known to you or, KIDS Chief Executive: kevin.williams@kids.org.uk