

SHORT BREAKS STATEMENT FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

September 2011

Introduction

The Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to provide breaks from caring for carers of disabled children to support them to continue to care for their children at home and to allow them to do so more effectively. The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 give more detail on how local authorities must fulfil their duty to provide breaks from caring, including a requirement to produce a Short Breaks Statement outlining the range of short break services available, who they can be accessed by and how.

Short breaks give disabled children and young people the opportunity to participate in enjoyable leisure activities while also giving their parents/carers a break from their caring role. Short breaks can take place after school, at the weekend and in the holidays, and includes overnight breaks.

In Sunderland, a short break is part of a continuum of services which support disabled children aged 0-18 and their families to live ordinary lives.

Writing the Short Breaks Statement

The person responsible for preparing this Statement is Steve Fletcher, Acting Manager, Looked After and Disabled Children.

This Short Breaks Statement has been written in consultation with disabled children in Sunderland, their parents and a wide range of colleagues across the Council and from partner agencies. This has included schools, health trusts, early years practitioners, the Youth Service, independent short breaks providers, Sunderland Carers Centre and Play and Leisure services.

It has been approved by Sunderland Children's Trust and Sunderland City Council.

Publication and review

The Short Breaks Statement is published on the Sunderland City Council website. It will be reviewed annually in October in consultation with partners.

Needs assessment

Through the Aiming High for Disabled Children programme which ran in Sunderland between 2008 and 2011, work was undertaken to identify disabled children and to find out about the types of short breaks they and their families wanted. Research suggests that 7% of children will be disabled, with 1% being severely disabled. Aiming High for Disabled Children identified approximately 600 severely disabled children aged 0-18 who may require the additional support of short break services, which is about 1% of the child population in Sunderland. Over the three year Aiming High programme, 515 disabled children in Sunderland benefitted from targeted or specialist short break services.

Through consultation, disabled children told us they wanted to be able to spend time with their friends doing the things all children and young people like to do. Many families told us that short breaks at the weekend and during the holidays were more important than breaks after school, but as disabled children became teenagers, having short break activities after school became important as well. Some families told us that having enough short breaks during the day meant that they did not need occasional overnight breaks. Other families told us that regular, planned overnight breaks were a lifeline to them. All families wanted choice and flexibility in the short breaks services they received. Some families did not want anyone else looking after their children, but wanted support to be able to enjoy leisure activities as a whole family.

Short breaks available in Sunderland

Most disabled children will be able to access the same leisure activities provided by universal services as their non-disabled peers, without the need for an assessment. Service providers have a responsibility under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to the way their services are provided in order to be inclusive to disabled children. Our Families Information Service has good quality information about universal leisure services and they can be contacted at <http://www.familiesinfoservice.com/>

For disabled children who require additional support to access leisure activities, and for those whose family need more breaks from caring to support them in continuing to care for their disabled child at home, a range of short break services may be available following an assessment. Information on requesting an assessment will be available shortly.

An assessment with the disabled child and their family will help to establish how much support they need, including the need for short breaks. The assessment will take into consideration the nature and severity of the child's disability, the support needed by the family to enable them to continue caring for their disabled child, and other factors that might be having an impact on the family's ability to care for the disabled child. It will look at the carers' needs and the wishes of the disabled child. Once an assessment is completed, a decision will be made as to whether additional support is required. If so, a tailored package of services, which may include short breaks, will be provided to support them in their caring role.

A Common Assessment Framework (CAF) may identify the need for targeted short breaks. Targeted short break services include:

- Youth clubs
- Holiday activities and play schemes
- Weekend activities

If further support is required, a National Assessment Framework Initial or Core Assessment undertaken within the Children's Disability Service may identify the need for specialist short breaks. Specialist short break services include

- Leisure Link workers who will support a disabled child or young person to access leisure activities at home and/or in the community
- Overnight short breaks, which can be in a residential centre, family or activity centre
- Direct payments, which provide families with funding to arrange their own short break services; support is available to help in managing the direct payment

We aim to provide reliable, regular, planned short breaks so that families can plan around the frequency and duration of breaks. Short breaks are part of a strategy of prevention, to enable families to get help at an early stage, so as to avoid them reaching breaking point through the demanding nature of their caring role. However, all families experience crises from time to time and additional short breaks may be available to help them through a difficult period.

We work closely with colleagues in Health to ensure disabled children with complex health needs have access to short break services. Health professionals in Sunderland have a good track record of supporting short breaks service providers by providing training, nursing support and advice on specialist equipment and this will continue.

Transport

We know that some families do not have access to a car and therefore struggle to take their disabled child to short break activities, and only some families receive the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance to help with transport costs. Due to this, we understand that some families would like transport to and from short breaks services to be provided by the Council. However, group transport is difficult for us to organise and sometimes results in children spending longer than an hour on a minibus. It is also expensive and takes resources away from the amount of short breaks that can be provided. In Sunderland we have prioritised the short breaks and so will only provide transport in very exceptional circumstances. Some short break providers may offer transport to and from their service, but may charge families to use it.

Transition to adulthood

As disabled young people approach adulthood, the professionals and services that support them and their families change from children's services to adults' services providers. To help maintain friendship groups at this time and to recognise that some young people do not leave school until they are 19, specialist inclusion youth clubs remain open to disabled young people until they are 19. Young people can then be supported to make the transition to a club for 19 to 25 year olds.

Moving on from other short break services will be managed through the processes described in Sunderland's Transition into Adulthood Protocol and Pathway

<http://www.sundc.org.uk/documents/TransitionPathwayandProtocol-FinalversionFeb11.pdf>

Through this process, information and assessments will be shared, and future short breaks for the young person when they turn 18 will be identified in advance.

As young disabled people approach adulthood, their short break services will help them to grow in confidence and competence, and increase their independence.

Participation

The voice of disabled children and young people and their families is at the heart of planning and delivery of short break services. We are committed to consulting disabled children and young people and their families on service developments. We require all short break service providers to involve their service users and their families in planning, review and evaluation of the service they receive.

Information

Information about what short break services are available and how to access them will be made available to families in a range of formats including through the Families Information Service, on the www.sundc.org.uk website and through the Real Issues bulletin distributed by Sunderland Carers Centre.