

February 2010

Public Policy briefing

disabled
Every Child Matters

The social and economic value of short breaks

Action for Children and the Every Disabled Child Matters campaign (EDCM) have commissioned nef consulting¹ to undertake research into the social and economic value of short break services.

As a leading provider of short break services, Action for Children knows how valuable these services are to disabled children and young people and their families. Likewise, short breaks are a key campaign priority for EDCM. This research provides a clear case for sustainable funding for the effective delivery of short breaks to disabled children and their families.

Over the past two years, the Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) programme has supported areas to transform their existing services for disabled children and young people, develop innovative short break opportunities and extend the reach to those most in need.

This research explores the social and economic value created by effective local delivery of short breaks – the largest component of the AHDC programme.²

Primarily, the research recognises that short breaks can provide families with a mechanism to cope with the pressures of caring for a disabled child. It also acknowledges that a significant number of families have in the past been unaware of or

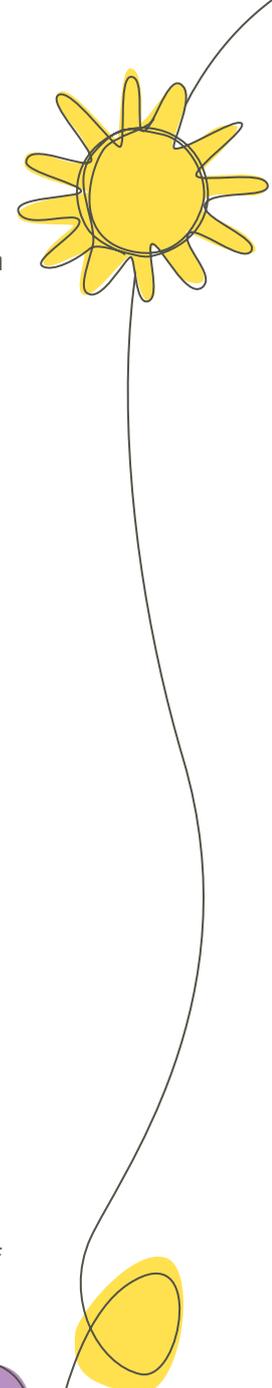
unable to access these services. By exploring the social and economic value created by short breaks, the research concludes that significant savings could be made to the State if short breaks were provided to all the families with disabled children who need them. It also concludes that failure to support these families in the long term would result in substantial additional costs to the State.

Action for Children works with the children and young people who most need support to achieve their full potential. As an independent charity, we campaign for changes that will end injustice, deprivation and inequality. Our campaigns aim to make a difference to all children, young people and families across the UK as well as those who we work with directly.

Every Disabled Child Matters (EDCM) is the campaign to get rights and justice for every disabled child. EDCM is a consortium campaign run by four of the leading organisations working with disabled children and their families: Contact a Family, the Council for Disabled Children, Mencap and the Special Educational Consortium. Between them, the campaign partners represent over 770,000 disabled children and young people in the UK.

¹Part of nef (new economics foundation).

²Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC): Better support for families, launched in May 2007, is the transformation programme for disabled children's services. AHDC is jointly delivered by the DCSF and the Department of Health. Local authorities in England have specific additional funding of £280 million during 2008–11 to improve the quality and quantity of short break services for families with disabled children.



Financial savings in England

Through independent analysis of data, nef consulting calculated that the State could make an estimated annual saving of **£174 million** if short breaks were effectively delivered to all those eligible to receive them.

This saving has been based on the following data:

- ▶ decreased cost of long-term residential care from reductions in the number of disabled children placed outside of the family home: **£135 million**
- ▶ decreased cost to health services from reduction in parents', families' and carers' stress: **£18 million**
- ▶ decreased cost to schools of educating siblings with behavioural and emotional difficulties: **£21 million**

These calculations have been based on the indirect impact on the family environment in terms of a reduction in stress for the parents, more time for other siblings and a reduction in family breakdown. It should be noted that the lack of a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of services, the social isolation of disabled children and their families, along with stress and potential family breakdown, can be calculated using additional indicators. Therefore, the figure given in this research should be interpreted as a minimum figure.

Conclusions

The AHDC programme is still in its early stages, with most local authorities only receiving the larger proportion of the funding to develop services in April 2010. However, it is clear that continued investment in short breaks could make significant savings to the State. To sustain and embed the real difference these services can deliver in practice will require sustained investment after the current spending period ends in 2011.

The social case for short breaks is well established. Action for Children and EDCM welcome the commitment that the three main political parties have made to continuing the work of the AHDC programme. This now needs to be backed up with commitments to sustain funding, to ensure this area of work is protected from the effect of cuts to public services.

We are concerned that if political parties do not confirm that they would protect short break funding for disabled children in the next spending period should they form the next government, uncertainty about future funding may force many local services to close during 2011. This will lead to even greater numbers of families with disabled children reaching breaking point due to lack of support and children missing out on the friendships and positive experiences their short break affords.

The AHDC transformation programme has offered new hope to many families who simply seek to live an ordinary life with their children. To raise the expectations of these families and to then let them down in 2011 would be disastrous. Achieving a step change in practice requires long-term investment acknowledging the importance of preventative services such as short breaks.

Recommendations

The Government should include sustained funding for the Aiming High for Disabled Children programme in its spending plans for 2011/12–2013/14.

The Government should develop a policy framework for improving services for disabled children and their families through the second phase of Aiming High for Disabled Children in 2011/12–2013/14.

For the full report, which includes the methodology of this work, please see:

www.actionforchildren.org.uk/valueofshortbreaks