

Fosterline Wales Factsheet

Fostering a disabled child

Introduction

Disabled children are first and foremost, children. Fostering a disabled child is, in most ways, no different from fostering any other child. Disabled children have to contend with additional challenges and, as a consequence, caring for a disabled child may present additional practical or emotional challenges to their foster carers. *A note on language: The Welsh Government and Disability Wales support 'social model' language which uses 'disabled children' rather than 'children with disabilities'.*

Legal definitions and the social model of disability

The Equality Act 2010 describes disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a large and long-term adverse effect on someone's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. For children, this includes any physical or mental difference that has an adverse effect on their development. It includes children with mental health problems, developmental delays, physical or sensory impairments, or long-term illness.

From this definition, it would be easy to assume that someone's impairment is what disables them. However, the social model of disability is clear that people are disabled because society has expectations of what 'normal' means and, therefore, everything is organised around the needs of 'normal' people. This creates unnecessary barriers which dis-able children and adults by making everyday life and development more difficult or impossible. The Welsh Government formally adopted the social model of disability in 2002.

Why do disabled children need fostering?

Disabled children need fostering for the same reasons as any child in need of alternative care. Disabled children may be more vulnerable to abuse, particularly if they have limited communication skills.

Some disabled children may have a Care and Support Plan, which may include respite, to give the family a short break (see Code of Practice 6, 288 to 301) from each other – the child gets a chance for new experiences, while their parents and any siblings get a chance to focus on their own quality time and recharge their batteries. Often families with a disabled child have smaller social networks, and their child's needs may make it harder for informal arrangements to be made. In addition, many disabled children find it hard or impossible to take part in after school clubs, play schemes, sports clubs and other community activities and clubs, because the premises do not have full access for disability or the leaders are unaware of how to

include disabled children. This means their parents do not get the everyday breaks that other parents rely on.

Being a disabled child in foster care

All looked after children face potential barriers to achieving their potential. A disabled looked after child faces a double set of barriers. For them to succeed, their foster carer needs to use assertive communication and advocacy skills to speak up for them and make sure their legal rights are understood and enforced. [Part 3 of the Social Services and Well-Being Wales Act](#) explains how their care and support needs will be identified and met.

The role of the foster carer

You will be expected to work with a wide range of other professionals in health, education and leisure. The foster carer has a key role in contributing to the coordination of services and making sure that professionals have an overall picture of the child or young person's life.

Foster carers have a role in advocating for the child, challenging discrimination and supporting the child in developing skills and tools that will increase their resilience (see the factsheet 'Resilience').

You may need to make major or minor adaptations to your home or everyday life to support that child's development and wellbeing. If the child is with you long term, as a foster carer you can apply for a disabled facilities grant for adaptations to your home. If the child is with you short term, you should expect your local authority to provide or arrange any essential adaptations or specialist equipment.

Adapting everyday life means working closely with professionals to identify what environment will give the child the best opportunities to develop and thrive, and then working out how you can provide this without placing undue strain on your own lives.

Some disabled children up to the age of 16 may receive the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or aged 16+ the Personal Independence Payments from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), to meet additional costs of disability. Foster carers and social workers should discuss whether an application should be made. Foster carers should not receive a lower fostering allowance or be required to account for how any Personal Independence Payment or DLA is spent. However, foster carers should ensure all expenditure is recorded within their agency procedures, in order to be accountable for the monies received.

Special attention and sensitivity should be given to the needs of disabled children who experience multiple caregivers as part of their regular routine, and to their need for reasonable continuity of caregivers. Where a young person has other special needs, consideration **must** be given to continuity of specialist care by the NHS provision and school health services, which should be the same for looked after children as for any other child,

Disabled young people will face many of the same experiences and challenges as other care leavers in the transition to adulthood (see Code of Practice 6, 487 to 499).

The transition to social care adult provision, such as Shared Lives, may enable the foster carer to continue to be involved (see Code of Practice 6, 503 to 506).

Community

Foster carers should have local knowledge of resources available in the community which are accessible and accommodate disabled children

Education

Some children need additional support in order to achieve educationally. For most, this means additional support within their local mainstream school. For a few, this means going to a specialist school. Some children need additional support although they are not disabled children. They may simply need a different learning environment or additional support in order to learn.

The Welsh Government is transforming the system for supporting children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN) in Wales. New legislation and statutory guidance is only one aspect, albeit a fundamental one, of the wider package of reforms needed. The ALN Transformation Programme also focuses on skills development for the education workforce, to deliver effective support to learners with ALN in the classroom, as well as easier access to specialist support, information and advice. The ALN Transformation Programme, which will transform the separate systems for special educational needs (SEN) in schools and learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) in further education, to create a unified system for supporting learners from 0 to 25 with ALN.

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/additional-learning-special-educational-needs/transformation-programme/?lang=en>

Resources

Contact a Family is a good starting place for information, including any local support groups or services

<https://contact.org.uk/wales>

Easy Read guide to the legal rights of disabled people in Wales

<http://www.disabilitywales.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/Know-Your-Rights-Easy-Read-version.pdf>

Rights of children in Wales

<https://www.childcomwales.org.uk/uncrc-childrens-rights/>

Free e-learning course from The Fostering Network and Disability Matters

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/news/2015/free-online-learning-resource-foster-carers-children-and-young-people-disabilities>

Welsh Government. Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/deprivation/educational-attainment-of-looked-after-children/?lang=en>

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

<http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/people/children-and-youngpeople/rights/uncrc/?lang=en>

Disability Wales worked co-productively with partners, including Welsh Government, to develop the '*Transforming Social Services – Enabling Wales*' Toolkit

<http://www.disabilitywales.org/transforming-social-services-toolkit/>

SNAP Cymru <http://www.snapcymru.org/> provides information, advice and support for parents, children and young people who have, or may have, special educational needs or disabilities. We provide the following impartial, confidential and free services: Helpline advice and support, specialist casework, independent specialist advocacy and avoidance

The information and advice line 0345 120 37 30 Mon – Fri 9.30 am – 4.30 pm.

Cerebra - Working wonders for children with brain conditions www.cerebra.org.uk

Parent Support: Freepost Address Cerebra (Parent Support), FREEPOST

SWC3360, Carmarthen SA31 1ZY Email: info@cerebra.org.uk

Helpline (freephone): 0800 328 1159

How The Fostering Network can help

The Fostering Network offers advice, information and support. Our expertise and knowledge are always up to date and available through our vital member helplines, publications, training and consultancy.

Advice

Fosterline Wales

Call us on 0800 316 7664 from 9.30am - 12.30pm Monday to Friday. If you call outside this time please leave a message and someone will call you back as soon as possible.

You can email us or write to us at:

Fosterlinewales@fostering.net

The Fostering Network Wales

1 Caspian Point, Pierhead Street

Cardiff Bay CF10 4DQ

Support and resources

Our website is an essential source of information, while our online community brings together

thefosteringnetwork.org.uk

Training and consultancy

Wherever you are in your fostering career, as a foster carer, social worker or manager, The Fostering Network has a range of training designed to meet your development needs. For more information, contact our learning and development manager, Sarah Mobedji at [http://sarah.mobedji@fostering.net](mailto:sarah.mobedji@fostering.net).

About The Fostering Network

The Fostering Network is the UK's leading fostering charity, bringing together everyone who is involved in the lives of fostered children to make foster care the very best it can be.

Contact us

To find out more about our work in Wales, please contact:

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