

## Report from Parent/Carers Day April 10<sup>th</sup> 2008

The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Parent/Carers Day was held at the Cricket Club in Haverfordwest on April 10<sup>th</sup>. 37 people attended, 20 of whom were parents of children with special needs.

The day started with an introduction by David Halse, Head of Childcare Commissioning in Pembrokeshire County Council. He welcomed everyone to the meeting and reflected on the previous year, since the last Parent/Carers Day. He felt it had been a positive year in general and improvements had been noted in a recent inspection by external verifiers. David went on to give details of areas where there had been improvements as well as areas that needed further development.

The main improvements are as follows:-

1. Partnership working ie the way that agencies work together - an example of this is how NCH, Barnardos and PAVS have worked together to organise this Parent/Carer Day.
2. Short-break services ie both Barnardos and Holly House, which have had very good inspectorate reports. £150,000 has been invested in Holly House to ensure a 7 day a week service which has increased availability and flexibility.
3. Assessment and Social Worker activity - staffing has been increased to focus on children with complex needs. The aim has been to improve assessment skills and partnership working with families.
4. Reviews of children who have short breaks - the number and frequency has increased.

The main areas of development are:-

1. Reviews - a lot more work needs to be done to ensure that Social Services and Education are better integrated in the way they carry out reviews.
2. Transition - this is a very complex area and there is a long way to go to ensure a smooth transition from children to adults services. (Colin Cribb's replacement, Angela, from Hampshire will be starting in July.)
3. Direct Payments - people have been trying to encourage greater flexibility in response to needs by using direct payments. Services have increased but finances are a challenge.
4. Carers needs - a lot has been achieved by the Carers Assessment Team but work within the Social Work team needs improving.

David then thanked Sally Davies for all her work over the past 4-5 years.

The first main presentation was by Geraldine Murphy from PCC who spoke about the Single Children's Plan which is currently out for consultation.

This is a plan which will determine the shape of children's services in the future including services for children with disabilities. There was then a consultation exercise to find out what parents' views were on some of the areas of the plan.

If anyone is interested in looking at the full version of the plan it can be found on [www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/cypp](http://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/cypp)

This was followed by a short presentation by Judith Edwards, Project Manager at NCH who gave an update on the Children with Disabilities Action Plan. Judith spoke about some of the areas where improvements have been made. The 4 priority areas agreed on by parents and children with disabilities were early intervention, equipment, transition and leisure activities and the achievements made to date are:-

1. Early Intervention - the portage scheme has been strengthened and services for children with social and communication problems have been developed. There has been additional educational psychologists time agreed and this will be used to provide extra training for staff from social services, health and education.
2. Equipment - a new joint equipment store is being developed but there still need to be written protocols between the different agencies.
3. Transition - there have been additional transition keyworkers appointed. Protocols are being drawn up and progress has started to be made.
4. Leisure activities - there has been more access to mainstream activities as well as more special play/leisure opportunities for children with disabilities.

There was then a consultation exercise on the Single Children's Plan. The main findings were as follows:-

- 70% Parents felt that the plan only partly met the needs of children with disabilities
- Parents felt the main priorities of the plan should be 'Strengthened support for families', 'Consolidation of services with a focus on ASD', and 'Co-ordinated services - emotional health'.

- Parents thought there should be a mix of inclusive and specialist play
- Keyworkers were felt to be the best way of sharing information
- The most useful way of providing early years intervention was felt to be by 1:1 support at home
- Parents felt that specialist centres with expert staff are the best way to address health needs
- Specialist units attached to mainstream schools followed closely by local schools were thought to be the best way to provide education

The consultation exercise was followed by a presentation by Nicole van Schie, a parent of a son with Aspergers. She gave a very insightful talk about the difficulties of juggling work and caring for a child with disabilities.

This was followed by a talk by Cath Rendell from who spoke about a network of 6 childminders, who are all willing to take children with special needs. They are about to undertake additional training for this role. Referrals can be made via Flying Start and the full service is available to parents in the Communities First areas but information about the network can be given out to any parent.

A second consultation exercise was carried out around the issue of childcare services. Some of the questions were difficult to answer but the main findings were:-

- Over 30% parents had no childcare and over 36% mainly used informal/family support
- Most parents used childcare for a break as well as to increase their child's independence
- If additional support were provided most parents would prefer informal/family support including direct payments
- Over one third of parents did not know what services are available or did not think there was sufficient funding
- 43% did not know about direct payments
- 72% were not in paid employment but nearly 60% would like to be, the main reason they are not is due to a lack of general support closely followed by it not being financially viable
- Many parents felt that unemployment results in isolation and financial constraints

Maxine Clerk from Barnardos then gave a very interesting talk on the V-Linx project at Barnardos - a project that recruits young volunteers to befriend young people with disabilities. If you are interested in finding out more about this project please contact Maxine on 01646 687064.

At the end of the morning there was an opportunity to ask questions and one of the main concerns that was voiced was around the running of Pembrokeshire Activity Schemes this summer. This will be looked into and feedback given to parents via the NCH newsletter.

The evaluation of the day was generally very positive but there was some cynicism about putting all the talk into action, which was expressed by a number of parents.

Some suggestions for future events were:-

Speakeasy (sex education)

Healthy eating

Behaviour difficulties

Parent support groups

Groupwork with parents and professionals mixing

Longer time for speakers

Childrens services for ages 5-11 years

Realistic policy and promises

Keyworkers

Once the morning session was over everyone stopped for a very nice lunch followed by an opportunity to try out one of the many therapies on offer. Many thanks to all the therapists who volunteered to give their services.