

Fosterline Wales Factsheet

Fostering a disabled child

All looked after children can face barriers to achieving their potential. A disabled looked after child faces multiple barriers. For them to succeed, their foster carer needs to use a range of skills and communication methods advocate on their behalf and make sure their legal rights are understood and enforced.

This factsheet explains legal definitions and the social mobility of disability; why disabled children and young people need fostering; the role of the foster carer and how to best engage with the child or young person's additional needs.

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. Please note: The Welsh Government (formally adopted the model in 2002) 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 makes the important difference between 'impairment' and 'disability' owing to social barriers. as everything is organised in our communities around the needs of 'normal' people. This creates unnecessary barriers which dis-able children and adults by making everyday life and development much more challenging.

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 ([Social Services and Well-Being Wales Act 2014](#), Code of Practice 6, 290 to 294, see below) – the child has opportunities 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 have limited access to 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 limited resources 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 child faces multiple barriers. For them to succeed, their foster carer needs to use a range of assertive communication and advocacy skills to speak up for them and make sure their legal rights are understood and enforced. Code of Practice 3, see below, 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 all services and making sure that other professionals have an overall picture of the child or young person's life and the progress in meeting their current needs. Foster carers will have local knowledge of community resources which are accessible and accommodate disabled children.

Adapting everyday life means working closely with other professionals to identify which services and environments will give the child the best opportunities to develop and thrive, and then working out how you can make things happen, which also fits in with your own family arrangements.

NHS

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 healthcare by the NHS provision and school health services, which should be the same for looked after children as for any other child,

Transition

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, 400 to 415). The transition to social care adult provision, such as Shared Lives, <https://sharedlivesplus.org.uk/> may enable the foster carer to continue to be involved (see Code of Practice 6, 505 to 508).

Education

Some children need additional support in order to achieve educationally. For most, this means additional support within their local mainstream school, which may provide a different learning environment or additional support in order to learn. For a

few, this means going to a specialist school. Some children need additional support although they are not disabled children.

The Welsh Government (see below) is transforming the system for supporting children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN) in Wales with single legislation creating a unified system of the support given to children and young people aged 0 to 25 years who have ALN and are receiving education and/or training. A wider package of reforms needed. includes skills development for the education workforce, as well as easier access to specialist support, information and advice

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

In contributing to all these activities, foster carers have a key role in advocating for the child, ensure their rights are recognised, their voice is central to all reviews and planning, challenging discrimination and supporting the child in developing skills and tools that will increase their resilience (see the factsheet 'Resilience').

Additional financial support

(See below, The Fostering Network Signpost 'Benefits')

- **Carer's Allowance** is for people who spend at least 35 hours a week providing regular care or support
- **Free School Meals.** Need to clarify the Local Authority policy.
- **Disabled Facilities Grant.** 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 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.
- **Disability Living Allowance-DLA**
Some disabled children up to the age of 16 may receive the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or aged 16+ the Personal Independence Payments (PIP) from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), to meet additional costs of disability. Foster carers and social workers need to confirm in the Care and Support Plan ~~should discuss~~ whether an application should be made. Most foster carers will be the recognised 'appointee' and should not receive a lower fostering allowance or be required to account for how any PIP 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.

Resources

Equality Act 2010: Information and guidance on the Equality Act 2010, including age discrimination and public sector Equality Duty
gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance

The Social Model of Disability disabilitywales.org/rights/social-model/

Social Services and Wellbeing Act 2014, Welsh Government:

- Code of Practice 6, Children Looked After
gweddill.gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/180328pt6en.pdf
- Code of Practice 3 Assessing the Needs of Individuals
gweddill.gov.wales/docs/dhss/publications/151218part3en.pdf

The Fostering Network 'Benefits'
fosteringresources.co.uk/?pid=321

Additional Learning Needs, Welsh Government
gov.wales/additional-learning-needs

Contact a Family is a good starting place for information, including any local support groups or services
contact.org.uk/wales

Know your Rights, Use your Rights, Live your Rights!
disabilitywales.org/rights/

Children's Commissioner for Wales: Children's Rights
childcomwales.org.uk/uncrc-childrens-rights/

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
childreninwales.org.uk/policy/un-convention/

Children's Legal Centre Wales
childrenslegalcentre.wales/

A Foster Carer's Guide to Education in Wales. The Fostering Network
thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/looking-after-fostered-child/education

Welsh Government. Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales, 2016
gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/strategy-raising-the-ambitions-and-educational-attainment-of-children-who-are-looked-after-in-wales.pdf

ExChange: Care & Education-online community of practice info hub
exchangewales.org/careandeducation

SNAP Cymru provides information, advice and support for parents, children and young people who have, or may have, special educational needs or disabilities. Helpline 0808 801 0608 and enquiries@snapcymru.org
snapcymru.org/

Cerebra – Our **Vision** is that every family that includes a child with a brain condition will have the chance to discover a better life together.
Guide for Parents:

cerebra.org.uk/help-and-information/guides-for-parents/
Helpline: 0800 328 1159 and info@cerebra.org.uk
cerebra.org.uk/

Welsh Government: Supporting learners with healthcare needs
gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/supporting-learners-with-healthcare-needs.pdf

Welsh Government: A Young Persons Guide to Transition, 2010
gweddill.gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/100305transitionguideen.pdf

Welsh Government: Autistic Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan 2016-2020
gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/refreshed-autistic-spectrum-disorder-strategic-action-plan.pdf

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 at:

fosterlinewales@fostering.net

Support and resources

Our website is an essential source of information, while our online community brings together foster carers for peer support and advice. You can login to share your experience and get advice from other foster carers. Our online community is a safe and secure area to discuss foster care matters.

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 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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