



PRESS RELEASE, 21 OCTOBER 2004

### **Children with disabilities must have their voices heard**

Children in Scotland, the national agency for all those working for children and their families, is concerned that the views and feelings of disabled children and young people will be overlooked unless guidance accompanying the new, extended Disability Discrimination Act makes explicit reference to their involvement in decision-making.

A consultation on proposals to extend the Act to include the functions of public authorities, closes tomorrow (Thursday, October 21).

Although the proposals include a duty on public bodies to demonstrate how they have involved disabled people in developing action plans and producing disability equality schemes, it fails to mention children and young people.

Children in Scotland believes that unless this is done in the guidance accompanying the new duties set out in the Act, disabled children will be excluded from decision-making that has a direct impact on their lives.

Shelley Gray, policy officer at Children in Scotland, said: "Research suggests that disabled children are often left out in consultations, even where statutory duties require authorities to take children's wishes or feelings into account. It is therefore vital that the guidance accompanying the new duties set out in the Disability Discrimination Act makes it explicitly clear that children and young people should be involved.

"All children and young people have the right to have their views heard and taken into account in decisions that affect them. Involving them will also ensure that they are fully aware of their rights - as children and young people and as disabled people. People enforcing their rights is key to cultural change."

Children in Scotland has also suggested the guidance accompanying the Disability Discrimination Act should specify that public bodies should seek to involve adults and children *with a wide range of disabilities*. What is needed to promote equality for someone with a physical disability could be entirely different to what is required for someone with a learning disability.

## **Ends**

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## **Notes for editors**

1. The Disability Discrimination Act, a reserved matter, is being extended to the functions of public authorities and introduces a duty to promote equality for disabled people.
2. Children in Scotland is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and provisions are of the best possible quality and able to meet the needs of a diverse society.
3. Copies of the full consultation response are available to download from Children in Scotland's website. Visit [www.childreninscotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk) or contact Nicola Pay on 0131 222 2419. The response is based on discussions with members of Children in Scotland.
4. Shelley Gray is available to comment in more detail. Contact Nicola Pay on 0131 222 2419.