



Growing Up in Rural Scotland

Key Issue Discussion I - Additional Support Needs

Children in Scotland's Growing Up in Rural Scotland (GURS) programme supports those involved in planning, overseeing and providing children's services (especially for the early years) across rural Scotland. GURS offers opportunities to identify solutions, exchange information and promote good practice in improving the lives of young rural children. One of the activities that will be conducted this year is information sharing. Through conversations with Childcare Partnerships, the GURS co-ordinator has found that issues affect different rural areas to varying extents. In response, the GURS co-ordinator will utilise site visits with Childcare Partnerships to expand on a key issue of their choice. This information will be appropriately compiled and shared among Childcare Partnerships.

Key Issue - Additional Support Needs

Discussion with members of the Highland Childcare and Family Resource Team, Tuesday August 15th, 2007

What are the issues and challenges in supporting providers to enable children with additional support needs to access main stream provision?

Funding the additional support required for children with additional support needs can be very expensive and can strain already overstretched budgets. An example was given where the amount of money required to fund the additional support required for one child to access main stream provision was £7,000 which represented 25% of the operating budget for Skye and Lochalsh. Concerns were raised about the financial capability to resource additional support if there had been other children requiring this level of support.

It is often difficult to manage parents' expectations of service provision for their children. Recent legislation (Additional Support for Learning Act) has provided various entitlements for families with children with additional support needs. However identifying who is to fund these entitlements is not straightforward. These difficulties were heightened recently when a local family identified that they needed 42 hours of childcare per week which amounted to £1,000 per month over and above the provided childcare. The Highland Children's Forum wrote to Peter Peacock seeking advice on where these additional funds should be sourced as there were not sufficient funds within the local authority to assist this

family. The Scottish Executive responded that funding should be provided at a local authority level. The matter was eventually resolved through the 'Working with families' fund in the short term. It is currently an issue that the family are pursuing again through the legal system as they believe the L.A should provide the additional sum required, although childcare is not a statutory responsibility.

Some parents do form a reliance on services and when that service is changed, it can be hard for them to adjust. For example if a child has had one to one support in a playgroup but not in the nursery class because the need is not assessed to be there then parents can feel that services have been withdrawn from them.

What are the issues and challenges in enabling parents of children with additional support needs to access main stream provision?

The tax and benefit systems for parents are extremely complex. When guidance is sought from the tax office often conflicting information is provided by different members of staff. It would appear that interpreting the complexities of tax and benefit information is also a challenge for the 'experts'.

Money issues are challenges for many parents. Having a child with additional support needs can have many financial demands on the family. It is difficult or often impossible for parents, particularly those on a low income, to access sufficient funds to satisfactorily meet their child's needs.

Finding flexible employment with understanding employers is very difficult for parents with children with complex needs. One member of the group only knew of two cases where parents are successfully managing the demands of their employment and the needs of their children. The group felt that only the large employers in the area would be able to offer the flexibility needed for parents with children with complex needs to attend appointments with consultants, therapists etc

Some parents feel that their children don't fit into main stream provision and they would rather have the comfort of specialist provision where their child is not 'different' from other children.

Moving to the country from the city parents often feel that their children will be safer and have more freedom but difficulties develop when expectations of services do not match those previously experienced in the city. Problems arise in centres where there is a mix of private and



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referred government funded places (for identified children referred by Social Work). There is a reluctance by the 'paying' parents for their children to attend the centre.

There are insufficient accessible holiday activities (particularly activity based) for children with additional support needs.

How can these issues and challenges be overcome for both parents and providers? Are there developments underway to address these challenges and issues? What needs to be in place?

Highland Council provides funds to the Care and Alliance (CALA) which was used previously to fund one to one support for children with additional support needs. Now applications are reviewed to determine the most appropriate form of support for the child and are geared towards the child. For example the best use of funding could be for additional equipment in order to make a particular centre accessible.

Where there are several children with additional support needs attending a centre, assessments are being made to establish the best use of resources at a group level. This would enable appropriately skilled workers and resources to be put in place. Psychological services have a key role to play in this assessment process.

It was felt that some providers could benefit from training to increase their confidence in working with children with additional support needs.

Parents definitely benefit from continuity of staff. This can enable their trust and confidence to blossom and can provide a familiar and safe environment.

Please provide examples of successful models where children with additional support needs have accessed mainstream provision. Why do you think they were successful? Please include

comments on why they were successful for the children, the parents and the providers. Building on these successful models, what future developments do you envisage?

The 3 o'clock club which operates out of a demountable unit in the grounds of Dingwall Primary school provides services and support to six children with additional support needs. Its success is attributed to two main factors – the leadership of the manager and continuity and consistency of staff. The manager has been in post for several years and has created a pleasant place to be for both children and staff. Strong leadership and the planning of exciting and innovative provision for the children have enabled staff to develop first rate skills. Over the years, the manager and staff have built up very positive relationships with parents. Because of these positive relationships parents have great confidence in the club. The 3 o'clock club is supported by the Ross and Cromarty Childcare Partnership. The group also commented that where clubs have assisted parents through periods of transition for their children, this has been of great benefit.

On a national level, are there policies/strategies that need to be addressed?

There needs to be clearer and more straightforward policies in place. Where there are stated entitlements for children with additional support needs, the appropriate funds should be in place to support these entitlements. Regulations should be there to help and not hinder the integration of children with additional support needs. The new Childcare Strategy should include policies and strategies that provide an equitable service for children with additional support needs with either working or non-working parents. There should be an understanding that the distinctions between childcare and respite blur.