



PRESS RELEASE
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National project to help parents exercise new rights pilots in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray

Children in Scotland, the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland, is seeking volunteers with a passion for promoting parents' and children's rights to help take forward a new pilot project in the region.

The new Advocacy (Additional Support for Learning) project, launched this month, will help parents of children in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray who need extra help at school to speak up for their own and their child's rights under new Scottish Education law.

The Additional Support for Learning Act, a major new piece of legislation that will reform Scottish education law when it commences on 14 November 2005, recognises the important role that parents can have in improving children's achievement at school and strengthens their legal rights to be involved in making decisions in this area. For more information on the Act see '*notes for editors*'.

Linda Paterson, advocacy co-ordinator for the project, said: "Parents have unique knowledge and experience of their child that most professionals will not have. Making sure they are fully involved in making important decisions, like whether or not their child has additional support needs and what kind of support they require is therefore vital.

"The Additional Support for Learning Act strengthens parents rights to be involved in making these decisions, but actually exercising those rights might seem daunting for some parents.

"An advocate can provide them with information on what options are open to them, provide support and encouragement for them to speak up for themselves, accompany them at meetings, reviews and when resolving disagreements, and speak up on their behalf if they feel unable or uncomfortable in doing this themselves. Advocates also

aim to encourage and empower their clients, enabling them to be more confident in speaking up for their own or their child's rights in the future.”

The project is seeking volunteers to be advocates for parents and their children. Training will be offered to successful applicants in advocacy skills and knowledge of the new Additional Support for Learning Act. Continuing training, supervision and support will be offered to volunteers on an ongoing basis, plus the chance to meet up with other volunteers to discuss practice issues.

Volunteers would need to be able to commit a minimum of four hours per week, perhaps slightly more initially while undergoing induction training.

The pilot project is managed by Children in Scotland and funded for a year by the Scottish Executive. If it is successful, it could be extended throughout Scotland.

For more information, or to request a volunteer pack please contact Linda Paterson, Advocacy Co-ordinator, 32 Upperkirkgate, Aberdeen AB10 1BA. Tel: 01224 622515.

Notes for editors

- **The (Education) Additional Support for Learning Act 2004** will replace the law relating to special educational needs on 14 November 2005.

At this point, references in law to ‘special educational needs’ will cease. The new concept of ‘additional support needs’ will apply to any child or young person who, for whatever reason, requires additional support, long term or short term, in order to learn and to work to their full potential.

Children who already have special educational needs will automatically have ‘additional support needs’ and have new rights to access extra support. However, because it introduces a system in which a much wider range of children are eligible for additional support, children who have not been considered to have special educational needs in the past could now be eligible for additional support under the new law.

A child might need extra help with their education because they have social or emotional difficulties, behavioural difficulties, are experiencing problems at home, are being bullied, are particularly gifted, have a sensory impairment, communication problem or a physical disability.

It is not possible to list all the reasons because it will always depend entirely on each individual child. Any number of different circumstances can impact on different children's ability to learn. As a result, support might need to come from health, social work or certain voluntary organisations, as well as from within education.

- **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.