

We are nearly two years into our programme to transform short break services for children and young people with disabilities. In this edition of our newsletter we look at how we are moving towards meeting the government's 'Full Service Offer' for short break services. We look at how the expanded and new services are making life better for families and what we are learning as we do this.

## What is the 'Full Service Offer'?

The government set out a vision for short break services that we are working to meet for March 2010. It is called the 'Full Service Offer'. It says that a short breaks service should:

- Be based on an assessment of a child's need, taking into account the views of that child or young person and their family.
- Offer a significantly larger number of breaks than were offered before the programme began.
- Have fair and transparent eligibility criteria so that short breaks can be used by families at any time, not just in times of crisis or breakdown.
- Offer a wide range of reliable local short break provision, tailored to families needs.
- Be a positive experience for children and young people, encouraging new friendships and experiences.
- Be culturally appropriate, meeting the cultural, linguistic and religious needs of children and their families.
- Be available on a planned and regular basis, when families need the services, such as evenings or school holidays
- Be age appropriate for each child and suitable for the disability of each child, ensuring that no groups are disadvantaged in accessing short breaks.

## Confidence building

**Fifteen year old Grant has discovered a talent and gained a lot of confidence after accessing services through the West Norfolk Deaf Association.**

"My son is 15 years old and is profoundly deaf. He has been deaf since birth. He is a very shy boy and because of his communication problems he does not mix well with other children. He has very low confidence and has been quite socially isolated," says Grant's mum, Lesley.

"This year the local Deaf Centre was able to put on some activities and I managed to talk Grant into going along. Everyone was so nice. Grant felt the same as all the other children and wasn't 'the deaf boy'."

Grant explains what his new hobby means to him. "I went to deaf club and they took me boxing twice. The man at the boxing club was really nice and told me I was really good at it. Because I had already been there, I felt safe. I have joined the boxing club now. I am starting to feel better and I talk more."



## Promoting friendships

**Terri Nelson, manager of the Hamlet Centre, explains how friendships are helped to flourish on their short break schemes.**

There are two girls in particular who come to mind, one from Bungay and one from Norwich. They really hit it off here and became firm friends. It's difficult for them to see each other away from here, so we make sure that we book them on the same days as each other wherever possible. Both have found friendships difficult and are over the moon to have met each other.

Another development we've seen is young people and their families meeting through our services and then using mobile phones and social networking to keep in touch. It's as important for parents to come together and have a chance to share information and chat as it is for children and young people. We see parents gathered outside just talking so we make sure we give them the opportunity to meet here if they want.

Photo: The Hamlet Centre



Photo: Marshfields, King's Lynn

## Siblings join in

**Kim Holmes of The Clare School explains how a flexible approach to services made a difference this summer.**

This year we were joined by siblings of some of our service users for the first time. This wasn't on a large scale and wasn't planned as such, but a few brothers and sisters of the young people coming here simply asked if they could come along too. As long as we had enough staff to cover it, we agreed.

We would really like to be able to actively offer this as a service in the future as it worked really well – brothers and sisters spent time together and parents got more of a break too. It obviously comes down to funding and staff, but if we have the opportunity to be more inclusive in our services, we'd certainly like to do that.

## Learning and developing

**Darran Lovell tells how Norwich City Football Club's Football in the Community Matchday scheme has developed due to feedback from families.**

We've run four sessions of our Matchday scheme so far with six more to go this season. The numbers of children and young people attending has steadily grown – possibly due to the first team doing a little better in the league!

Already we've made a number of changes to what's on offer to make it as inclusive as possible. We'd planned to use the upper tier of our 'Ability Counts' gallery at the Carrow Road football ground, but after the first session we found out that one of the young

## Making communication easier

**Amanda Jacques of the Priory Children's Centre explains how funding has helped introduce new resources for children with English as a second language or with other communication difficulties.**

We've been working with early years settings in the Great Yarmouth area to introduce visual timetables and using communication aids such as picture exchange cards (PEC signs). The system uses symbols to represent key activities such as circle time, snack time, and other regular activities. The setting then uses them to show children what happens when. Individual workers carry key rings with all the symbols on which they can use if they feel a child does not understand what's being said, and there are also large scale versions of the same signs that can be used when addressing groups.

The system is being introduced in early years settings and is proving particularly useful if children move to another setting or take part in a holiday playscheme at the Children's Centre. A number of parents have also asked for their own copies of the cards to be used at home.

## Cancellations cause concern

**With many new services being developed, we're learning all the time about how to make the best use of resources and plan the right services. Mel Julier, manager of Nelson Lodge, tells how this year they saw unexpected high levels of cancellations and the impact that had on services.**

There are a number of cancellations during most school holidays, but this summer appeared to be a more significant number than in previous years as cancelled visits totalled 65. This would be equivalent to closing or being empty for more than ten days during the holiday.

Obviously, wherever possible the empty beds were offered to other families but it isn't always as simple to replace one young person with another. There are lots of factors to take into consideration such as the compatibility of the group of young people, the amount of notice required as families often have alternative plans, transport arrangements for parents or carers who work and the impact of offering extra dates that are outside of the agreed care package.

Notice of cancellations given by families has been variable, from several weeks in the case of holidays to one hour or even no notification in some cases. Reasons recorded for cancelled visits included sickness of the young person or another family member, family outings or events, double booking with other organisations, young people preferring to spend time at home and working parents being unable to organise the transport for the young person.

If visits do have to be cancelled, the more notice a family can give, the better the chance we have of finding a family who are able to use the space offered. Short breaks really are too valuable a resource to be wasted.



Photo: About with Friends, Cromer



# Reaching more families

**This year, Helen\* from Norwich and her teenage son have accessed short break services for the first time. We speak to her about her experiences.**

## **Was there a reason that you hadn't used short breaks before?**

I had no idea we were entitled to them so I hadn't even thought about it. My son has Global Developmental Delay and has a statement at school but he's not registered as disabled.

## **How did you find out what was available?**

We had a letter through school from Family Voice (Norfolk) inviting parents to an open meeting. I went along to that and found out about what was available.

## **What services do you now use?**

We have a carer from Crossroads for an hour and a half once a week, plus very occasional evenings. She plays with my son, takes him to the playing field on a nice day, she's taken him to the library or plays at home. It gives me a chance to have some time with my older son helping him with his homework, or even just catching up with the ironing.

## **Was the process of finding out about and applying for short breaks easy?**

I was really anxious about it but it was surprisingly easy. A manager from Crossroads came to visit us at home to find out more about my son and discuss what would help our family most. We didn't have to justify why we should have services, it was assumed that we should have them and were actually offered more help than we chose to take up.

## **How was it when you first started getting services?**

It was a slow process. My son was quite clingy at first and our carer had to build his trust while we all made an adjustment. The process was good though and we could take it at our own pace. On the very rare occasions when our regular carer can't come we really miss the support she brings.

\*not her real name

# What are short breaks?

- Short breaks come in all shapes and sizes and give disabled children and their families a break from caring responsibilities.
- They can be a break for the child away from the family or can involve supporting families to take a short break together, away from the routine of daily life.
- They could last a few hours, a day, evening, overnight or for a weekend. They could take place in or away from the home

# Transforming short break services in Norfolk

In May 2007, HM Treasury published a report called *Aiming high for disabled children: better support for families*, based on the Government's review of services for disabled children. One of the recommended actions was to recognise the critical importance and significant benefits of short breaks to disabled children and their families. A total of £370 million is being invested across the country and 21 Pathfinder areas are leading the way to find innovative and effective ways to improve short break services. For further details or to read the full report, visit [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/ahdc](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/socialcare/ahdc)



Short Breaks at Chapel Road School, Attleborough

## Thanks

Thank you to the providers and families who gave us permission to take some photography to show short breaks at their best. We now have some beautiful pictures which will help bring our literature about short breaks to life.

# contact us

Call the Short Breaks Pathfinder team on 01603 714185 or email [shortbreaks.pathfinder@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:shortbreaks.pathfinder@norfolk.gov.uk)