

Safe and happy childhoods for all

Briefing: Supporting disabled children

What's happening?

Around 1 in 10 children in the UK have a disability.* Children with disabilities and learning difficulties often miss out on opportunities that other children take for granted.

Lots can't take part in activities because venues are not accessible. Many still face discrimination, stigma and labelling which can impact on their mental health and self-esteem. And those who are neurodiverse are more vulnerable to being excluded from school, violence and abuse, and exploitation.

Caring for a child with a disability can make daily parenting duties more challenging. The basic day to day of getting them to eat breakfast, popping to the shops, and helping them get to sleep can seem like a mountains to climb even for the best parents.

Many families with disabled children are struggling. The cost of living disproportionately affects them as they, on average, face £581 a month in extra costs.**

Yet almost half of all carers provide 90 or more hours each week in care, so it's not surprising that only two in 10 carers are in full-time employment.*** This can make it hard for carers of disabled children to earn enough to stay out of poverty and makes these families extremely vulnerable during a cost of living crisis.

A child with a disability or learning difficulty deserves to have the same opportunities as any other child. It all starts with acceptance, inclusion and accessibility.



“ We need a society that champions inclusivity for neurodivergent individuals, with schools, workplaces and charities creating environments where every young person, including those with autism can thrive, along with infrastructure that promotes equal opportunities for all.”

Action for Children Young Ambassador

References:

*UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences - House of Commons Library (parliament.uk)

** [Life costs more for disabled children and their families](#) | Disability charity Scope UK

*** [The limits of work as a route out of poverty and hardship](#) | Action For Children

What services do we offer?

A disabled child should have the same opportunities as any other child. But caring for a disabled child or young person can be challenging.

Even the most experienced parents and carers need someone to turn to for help and advice. The tailored support we offer helps families cope – and gives disabled children a chance to thrive.

We provide:

Across the UK, we provide 65 services for disabled children, young people and their families:

Children's homes,

offering overnight, medium and long term residential care for disabled children and young people.

Short breaks,

for disabled children and young people in children's homes providing respite, independence and access to new opportunities.

Community support,

such as leisure, social, out of school and holiday activities for disabled children and young people, as well as in home care, drop in services, community social work and advice services.

Overnight support or day-care,

for disabled children in an approved foster carer's home.

“I like meeting my friends here. I enjoy the different things we do - one day we did bowling, then the meal out, craft night, or game activities or talent shows.”

Drew, who attends our Northants
Shorts Breaks Service

Who are Action for Children?

Action for Children protects and supports vulnerable children and young people by providing practical and emotional care and support, ensuring their voices are heard, and campaigning to bring lasting improvements to their lives.

With 426 services across the UK, in schools and online, we helped 765,905 children, young people and families in 2022/23 alone.

Service Spotlight:

Short Breaks

Our short breaks services offer young people and children with learning disabilities and complex health needs a range of opportunities to make friends, try new things and have some fun. They also provide families of a disabled child or young person with a break from their caring responsibilities.

Whether it's meeting new people, seeing the latest blockbuster or exploring their passions, short breaks offer young people with disabilities experiences that many children take for granted. One of our services has even created FestivAll – a fully accessible and inclusive music festival, so that everyone has the chance to dance to their favourite song!

Short breaks are also important for parents and carers. Parenting is hard work and if a young person has additional or complex needs, it can be uniquely stressful and challenging – sometimes contributing to family breakdown. While young people are enjoying their short break, parents and carers can rest, recharge and spend time with any other children.

Our short breaks services enable carers and families to feel better able to continue caring effectively for their disabled child. They provide support that helps the whole family to be happier and healthier.

Contact

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