

Briefing paper

Managing caring and employment

Why is employment so important?

Like everyone else, parents of disabled children need paid employment for financial reasons. Caring for a disabled child also involves significant extra expenditure over a much longer period of time. Going out to work reduces the isolation commonly experienced by parents with disabled children. In common with other mothers returning to work, mothers of disabled children report increased self-esteem and an identity outside their caring/parenting role.

What are the problems?

Although some parents of disabled children actively make the choice to stay at home to care for their child, for the vast majority of parents this is not a choice, but a situation forced upon them. Parents highlight the following barriers:

- demands of caring leaves them with limited time or too exhausted to work
- the volume and inflexibility of daytime appointments and meetings
- earning enough to cover costs, including loss of benefits
- lack of opportunity for part-time or term-time employment and availability of training courses
- inflexible employers or managers who have negative attitudes to caring responsibilities
- lack of information, support and guidance on returning to work and their rights in relation to work
- inadequate and/or affordable alternative care services such as childcare
- unreliable transport services and help in emergencies
- a lack of awareness and access to carers assessments that consider their right to work, study and leisure opportunities.

Sometimes parents with disabled children are made to feel like they are 'expected' to stay at home and care for their child by professionals. This further restricts their right to a life beyond their caring responsibilities.

How can children's centres/family information services help?

- by having clinics available in the local community to ease the burden of travelling to appointments
- have information available on training and schemes aimed at helping parents getting back to work, including volunteering opportunities
- ensure parents know that going back to work is likely to affect their benefits and help them get a 'Better off welfare benefits calculation'
- let parents know about their rights whilst at work and what options are available if parents are thinking about leaving work
- inform parents about their right to a carers' assessment and direct payments
- ensure that parents know about the different types of childcare available and the experience staff have of working with disabled children
- provide targeted information to families from black and minority ethnic communities, as they face additional barriers to work and finding out about alternative care services
- find out how your local jobcentre plus supports parents with disabled children.

Contact a Family can provide:

- factsheets on 'Working', 'Finding and paying for childcare' and 'Getting direct payments for your disabled child'.
- details on how to request and what to expect from a carers assessment
- advice to parents wanting to return to work including their employment rights

Managing caring and employment: sources of support

Contacts	What Can Be Offered
Contact a Family Helpline Tel: 0808 808 3555 Online medical directory www.cafamily.org.uk/home.html	Advice on any aspect of caring for a disabled child. Families can speak to benefits advisors to check they are claiming all they are entitled to. Back-to-work calculations can also be provided. A telephone interpreter service is available. <i>Criteria – free to families caring for disabled children aged 0-19 years of age, living in the UK</i>
Carers UK http://www.carersuk.org/Home ACE National Toolkit http://www.acetoolkit.com/	Provides a range of factsheets, research and guide on combining work and caring. Resources for local authorities to help them develop services that enable carers to remain in or return to work.
Learn Direct www.learndirect.co.uk	For information about distance learning courses
Working Families Helpline Tel: 0800 013 0313 www.workingfamilies.org.uk	Free legal advice, covering employment rights, negotiating with your employer and in-work benefits. <i>Criteria – free to families on a low income, lone parents or if you or your child has a disability, living in the UK</i>
Jobcentre Plus Tel 0845 6060 234 www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk	Provides help and advice on jobs and training for people who can work and financial help for those who cannot.

Hints and Tips:

- find out if your local area has a Carers' Centre or Carers' Project which offers advice and guidance for carers wishing to return to work or training - the first stage may be support in gaining the confidence to take new steps
- find out from your local Learning and Skills Council if local colleges or adult education centres give concessions to carers.
- find out from your Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) about local volunteering opportunities.

This is one of a series of briefing papers to help children's centres and family information services begin to support families of disabled children on specific issues. You can browse all of these at <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/childcentres.html>

To find out more about how the children's centre team at Contact can help please contact:

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