

April 2009

## Contact a Family Celebrates 30th Anniversary!

### 30 years of strengthening families with disabled children

30 years ago our work began from a small office in the London Borough of Wandsworth, when a few parents caring for a disabled child got together to share experiences and swap advice and soon realised the benefit of mutual support. Today, Contact a Family helps around 300,000 families with disabled children every year from across the whole of the UK.

And Contact a Family's work continues to be as vital now as it was 30 years ago.

The Anniversary year will be launched with the results of our online survey ***What Makes Your Family Stronger***. We've been asking parents and other family members caring for a disabled child about their biggest priorities to strengthen their family practically, socially and emotionally, and what they would wish for if more help and support were available.

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***The struggle for rights and justice for families with disabled children is not over - families with disabled children continue to be excluded and stigmatised and this is not acceptable***

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Other events throughout the year include *Our Family, Our Future* - an exhibition competition, asking families to represent their aspirations for their child in video, art or photo format; *Big Day Out* - encouraging and facilitating families to get out and about and enjoy some leisure time together; as well as the publication of reports on research into the everyday struggles that families with disabled children still face today.

Claire Pimm, Contact a Family's Director of Communications and Policy, said: "We know from our work with families with disabled children that they want to lead ordinary lives.

"Living without fear of debt and poverty, the opportunity to work, the chance to enjoy leisure activities as a family, getting an education to meet a child's needs and the importance of a good night's rest are essential to making any family stronger."



**30 years of  
strengthening  
families with  
disabled children**



# Supporters' Update

## Family Worker 'was really there for us'

Contact a Family's Family Support Service provides face to face support for families and can help with any of the wide range of issues that families face when caring for a disabled child.

All Family Workers are trained to help families through a particularly stressful or difficult period or when families are facing a crisis. Family workers offer one-to-one help and can offer support over the telephone, through home visits or at events in the local area.

Here, one mother who has benefited from the support of Contact a Family and their local Family Support Worker, explains the difference it has made to them:

*"Contact a Family was the first to help and understand me. Before that I felt very much in the dark and alone. My son Alfie has Down's Syndrome and I first telephoned the Contact a Family helpline to ask about claiming Disability Living Allowance for him. It was like a breath of fresh air talking to the adviser who immediately understood all of my issues.*

*I was put in touch with a local Contact a Family, Family Support Worker, who visited me in my home. I was overwhelmed by the Disability Living Allowance form, but the Family Support Worker spent three hours with me helping me to focus on the relevant points to ensure my claim was successful. She was so warm, kind, supportive, friendly and helpful. I didn't feel that she was trying to rush off, instead she stayed with me until I had completed the form and even had time to chat through other issues I was experiencing.*

*Thanks to the information she gave me, I found a childminder from a local service I didn't know existed. This gives me a break from Alfie and time to recharge my batteries.*

*Another concern I raised was the lack of nearby play facilities for Alfie to enjoy. Again, the Family Support Worker proved to be a fountain of knowledge and told me about a local play den suitable for children with additional needs.*

*I can't speak highly enough of the support I received from Contact a Family. I am still feeling the benefits, after just qualifying for Carer's Allowance following receipt of Alfie's Disability Living Allowance."*



**"I can't speak highly enough of the support I received."**

## Contact a Family Launches Into Cyberspace!

Contact a Family has increased its online support for families with disabled children by launching a range of support groups and networks on popular social networking websites MySpace, Facebook and Bebo.

Contact a Family is also one of the first UK charities to open an virtual advice centre on Second Life, a popular online virtual world. The office, open 24 hours a day, has a trained parent advisor available to answer queries every Wednesday from 10am - 4pm.

**“This website feels like heaven to me! I’ve felt alone for so long, but am now finding people who I can talk to who understand, thanks!” Contact a Family Facebook user**

These exciting new projects have proved an instant hit with parent and families who can access discussion forums, Contact a Family videos and podcasts, information on upcoming events, as well as being able to make new friends and chat online with other parents.



Contact a Family's virtual office in Second Life

## FUNdraising Round-up

Good luck to the 14-strong team of runners who are tackling this year's **2009 FLORA LONDON MARATHON** for Contact a Family.

Every year we're amazed with the fundraising efforts of our team who manage to beat the fundraising total of the previous year and leave us proclaiming it to be *“the best year ever!”* But 2009 looks set to surpass all others.

Collectively the team have already raised an unbelievable £46,000!! Thanks in no small part to runner and ex-Contact a Family Trustee, **ROBIN HINDLE FISHER**, who single-handedly has raised a whopping £39,500!!

You may also remember **JASON PASCOE** who we featured in the last Supporters' Update. Jason, Sergeant with the 6 Supply Regiment of the Royal Logistics Corps, ran 12km around Kandahar Airfield with six regimental colleagues for Contact a Family. Jason's brother Richard had microcephelia and died aged 24. Jason and his other brother, **JONATHAN**, are now taking on the gruelling marathon course in memory of Richard and aim to raise £5,000 again for Contact Family.

## Me and My Disabled Child - Competition Winners

Last year Contact a Family launched a competition - Me and My Disabled Child - asking parents to share their stories about the joys and challenges of caring for a disabled child.

We were overwhelmed by the number of responses to the competition and the excellent quality of entries we received which were a mix of home videos, written stories and images.



Winning photograph of Zak, taken by mum Vanessa Plant

Elaine Bennett, Media and PR Officer, said: “A huge thank you to all those families who entered the Me and My Disabled Child competition. The standard of entries was incredibly high and many will be used to raise awareness of life raising a disabled child.

“Families always tell us that the best source of information and support is from other parents caring for a disabled child, so we hope the entries will also act as a support to other parents.”

- The overall winner of the competition was Gareth Allen's film 'Fab Fin' which follows his bright and talented son Finley, who has Cerebral Palsy, in day to day life enjoying what he enjoys best: singing and playing.
- Winner of the written entries was Mike Walker, whose thoughtful and moving story about his daughter who is blind and has Cerebral Palsy was scored highly by the judging panel.
- Winner of the photograph entries was Vanessa Plant for her eye-catching and colourful picture of adopted son Zak, who has Cerebral Palsy and Epilepsy, having fun.

Some of the winning entries are featured in the latest edition of Connected, Contact a Family's magazine, on our website [www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk), and our YouTube and Facebook pages.

Prizes for the competition which included a Dell laptop computer for the overall winner were donated by Hobbs the Printers.



Images from the overall winner, film 'Fab Fin'

# Supporters' Update



Families in the North East, like the Crich family pictured above, again enjoyed free cinema screenings during the school holidays.

Thanks to employees from Siemens, families who came along to the Durham screenings enjoyed not only the film, but also a free raffle, drinks, sweets and a goody bag!

Have you been inspired by the Comic Relief Celebrities who climbed **Kilimanjaro** for charity? You can follow in their footsteps and trek to the summit of the world's highest free-standing mountain for Contact a Family.



If that's not for you then we have lots of other **overseas challenges** from cycling in Vietnam, trekking in the Sahara to rafting down the Zambezi river! *For more information contact 020 7608 8733*

## Help for Scottish Families Facing Fuel Poverty

Contact a Family has welcomed the Scottish government's commitment to include families with disabled children in measures to alleviate fuel poverty.

The Scottish government has announced that its fuel poverty programmes will be extended in April 2009 to include families on Income Support with disabled children under 16.

Ellenor Anwyl, Manager of Contact a Family Scotland said: "This demonstrates the Scottish government's recognition that disabled children and their families are particularly vulnerable to fuel poverty – something we are campaigning for across the UK.

"We have been campaigning for the introduction of a winter fuel allowance to support the poorest families with disabled children. We hope that this announcement will take us one step closer to our goal."

You can get future editions of **Supporters' Update** electronically. Not only will you be helping the environment but also saving us printing and mailing costs, meaning more of your donations go directly on providing services for disabled children and their families across the UK.

Sign up by emailing us your name and Supporter Reference number with 'supporters update' as the subject line to [fr.team@cafamily.org.uk](mailto:fr.team@cafamily.org.uk). We will then email you when the next edition is published, with a link to a PDF version of the newsletter to read online or download to read later.

## Improving Lives of Scotland's Disabled Children

*For Scotland's Disabled Children (FSDC)*, the campaign lobbying for rights and justice for disabled children in Scotland, has appointed a policy manager.

Kate Higgins will work to foster closer working between children, young people, parents, partner organisations within *FSDC*, the Scottish Government and Local Authorities to ensure that issues affecting disabled children and their families are reflected and acted upon throughout local and national policy.

Ellenor Anwyl, Chair of *FSDC* and Director of Contact a Family Scotland, said: "*FSDC* recognises there has been positive policy progress in Scotland in recent years but seeks to encourage politicians and policy-makers to make good the commitment to get it right for every child. Services for disabled children and their families have been under-funded for far too long."

Help us to celebrate our 30th Anniversary by running your socks off for Contact a Family!

**BUPA LONDON 10,000** - Monday 25th May

**ASICS British 10K London Run** - Sunday 12th July

**ADIDAS WOMEN'S 5K CHALLENGE** - Sunday 6th September in either London, Liverpool or Birmingham

To join the Contact a Family team  
call 020 7608 8733

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**Helpline** 0808 808 3555 Freephone for parents and families (10am-4pm, Mon-Fri & 5.30-7.30pm Mon only)

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