

News release
Sept 2007

Families of disabled children could be missing out on £millions

Around 476,000 families in the UK are not claiming the major benefit to help meet their disabled child's additional needs.

Despite being among the most vulnerable and often poorest families in society, 62% are NOT claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA) – a potential £109.50 each week.

Contact a Family, the only UK charity to work with families of children with any disability, has today launched a campaign to urge parent carers to claim what they are owed.

“It costs up to three times as much to raise a disabled child, so every penny counts,” said Jill Harrison, Contact a Family's Director of External Affairs.

“Families with disabled children often struggle to make ends meet, not realising that if their child needs additional care, or has mobility problems, there is a benefit to help.”

The number of people seeking help for personal debts has reached an all time high. For families with disabled children often struggling on below average incomes, financial worries are all the more distressing.

Many parents find out about their benefit entitlements by chance, or several years after their child is diagnosed with a disability or rare disorder. And then they struggle to fill out the lengthy application form.

As part of the campaign, Contact a Family has produced a guide to help parents claim DLA. The information booklet explains who is eligible for the benefit, gives step by step instructions to fill in the application form and advises on how to appeal against a decision.

Jill Harrison added: “Families providing care for a child with complex needs can receive over £100 each week, which can make a real difference.

“DLA is not means tested and does not affect claims for other benefits. In fact it can be a trigger for other important financial support such as extra tax credits and Carers Allowance.

”We would urge any parent whose child has additional needs to telephone our freephone helpline for confidential advice– 0808 808 3555.”

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For more information or to arrange an interview with a family case study, telephone Elaine Bennett on 0207 608 8741.

Notes to Editors

- Contact a Family is a national organisation that provides support, advice and information for families with disabled children. It runs a national freephone helpline, provides information on over 3,000 conditions and produces the Contact a Family Directory, visit the website at www.cafamily.org.uk
- Contact a Family's national freephone helpline is on 0808 808 3555, open 10 til 4 weekdays, and 5.30 to 7.30pm Monday evenings, and is staffed by fully qualified Parent Advisers who can answer queries on every aspect of raising a disabled child, from finding childcare, through benefits advice to transition to adulthood.
- In the UK there are 770,000 disabled children under the age of 16. That equates to one child in 20.
- In February 2007 the number of claims for DLA in the UK for children aged 15 and under was 294,300, according to the Disability and Carers Service.
- DLA has two components: the care component depends on the amount of care and attention a child needs, the mobility component depends on how much mobility the child has and is only available to children over three-years-old.
- According to the Cabinet Office Review 2004, 55% of families with disabled children live in, or near, poverty; while the Family Fund's recent research 'How do They Manage?' found that 73.3% of these families have incomes below the UK mean, and 21.8% have incomes below half the UK mean. In addition, recent Contact a Family research into debt found that 82% of families with disabled children had some sort of debt, while 15.7% reported debts of over £10,000 excluding mortgages – a significantly higher proportion than the population as a whole.
- Families with disabled children spend £27.61 on loan repayments a week, compared to the UK average of £3.10.
- Contact a Family is part of Every Disabled Child Matters (EDCM) coalition which campaigns to get rights and justice for disabled children.