

Contact a Family.

Future Corporate Strategy 2009-2014.

The start of the process.

Consultation with staff on vision, purpose and aims of Contact a Family.

At the staff conference which took place on the 8th November 2007, staff began to address the issue of Contact a Family's future strategy. Staff from across the UK attended.

It was agreed with trustees that we would put together the thoughts from the staff conference and present these for discussion to the trustee meeting on the 22nd November 2007.

At the conference staff were reminded of the present strategy and asked to reflect on how they might look in the future.

Current version of our vision, purpose and aims

*Our strategic **vision** for our beneficiaries*

Parents and families of disabled children in the UK are fully recognised, respected and appropriately supported.

*Our core organisational **purpose**:*

To support parents and families who care for a disabled child by:

- enabling them to have access to good quality advice and information, broad ranging appropriate support and contact with other families
- influencing changes in policy and practice in order to bring about substantial improvements for parents and families and their children

*The five **aims** are:*

1. By 2010, Contact a Family will be a leading provider of quality advice, information and support to families of disabled children across the UK;
2. By 2010, Contact a Family will have enabled parents' voices to be heard in shaping the policies and services that affect their lives at all levels;
3. By 2010 Contact a Family will have contributed to positive changes in legislation, policy and practice across the UK;
4. By 2010, Contact a Family will have long term financial security;
5. By 2010, Contact a Family will continue to have robust management and will have improved governance and infrastructure.

Staff comments on Contact a Family's current version.

These thoughts and ideas come directly from the Contact a Family staff conference.

Vision

There was general consensus amongst staff that they were keener on the EDCM vision of parents being able to live ordinary lives and having equality of opportunity. If this were translated to our vision it might read;

'Parents and families of disabled children in the UK are able to lead ordinary lives, have equality with other families and are respected and appropriately supported'.

Purpose

a) A number of points were made which suggested that our purpose should be linked more closely with our aims, especially around empowerment – for example:

To support parents and families who care for a disabled child by:

- *enabling them to have access to good quality advice and information, broad ranging appropriate support and contact with other families*
- *empowering parents to help us influence changes in policy and practice to bring about justice and greater equality for families*

b) a suggestion that we stress the need for independent advice i.e. 'enabling them to have access to good quality, independent advice and information etc'

Aims.

Most of the comments from staff related to our aims. A number of relevant points were raised;

- a) There was substantial support for including the concept of parent 'empowerment' as opposed to the current emphasis on 'enabling' and to use the word 'participation' rather than 'having their voices heard'. For example some suggestions that aim two should read *'Contact a Family will have empowered parents to participate in shaping the policies and services that affect their lives at all levels'*
- b) We should be 'the' leading provider of advice and information not 'a' leading provider
- c) A suggestion of a new aim around *'raising awareness of Contact a Family and of the needs of families with disabled children across the UK'*.
- d) A number of suggestions that aims 4 and 5 should be combined i.e. *'Contact a Family will have financial security, robust management, governance and infrastructure.'*

- e) A suggestion of a new aim around facilitation of other agencies i.e. *'Contact a Family will facilitate and enable other agencies and providers to deliver high quality service across specialist and mainstream provision'*. This is the kind of model used by our Children Centre team and many of our local and regional offices. Another suggestion involved stressing partnership working. If this were incorporated too this aim might read *'Contact a Family will work in partnership with other agencies and providers to facilitate and enable them to deliver high quality service across specialist and mainstream provision.'*

Other points which staff made which were not strictly relevant to the vision and aims but which trustees may find of interest were:

- a) we should raise the cut off point of our services to age 25 to facilitate the transition to adulthood.
- b) we should change the name Contact a Family to something which more adequately describes what we do (but no concrete suggestions as to what)
- c) we should change the strapline 'for families with disabled children' to 'for families with disabled children, children with additional needs and children affected by rare disorders'
- d) we should improve corporate fundraising
- e) we should improve the training we offer to staff
- f) we should put more emphasis on outcomes for families who use our services
- g) we should value the expertise of our staff more
- h) we need a brand re-launch
- i) we should improve internal and external communications
- j) we should improve and shore up infrastructure

Potential new version of our vision, purpose and aims based on staff comments.

Taking these comments into account a new version of the vision, purpose and aims, as suggested by the staff, might be:

Vision.

Parents and families of disabled children in the UK are able to lead ordinary lives, have equality with other families and are respected and appropriately supported.

Purpose.

To support parents and families who care for a disabled child by:

- enabling them to have access to good quality, independent advice and information, broad ranging appropriate support and contact with other families

- empowering parents to help us influence changes in policy and practice to bring about justice and greater equality for families

Aims

- 1) By 2014, Contact a Family will be the leading provider of quality advice, information and support to families of disabled children across the UK;
- 2) By 2014, Contact a Family will have empowered parents to participate in shaping the policies and services that affect their lives at all levels;
- 3) By 2014, Contact a Family will have contributed to positive changes in legislation, policy and practice across the UK;
- 4) By 2014, Contact a Family will have long term financial security and robust management, governance and infrastructure;
- 5) By 2014, Contact a Family will have raised awareness of its services and of the needs of families with disabled children across the UK;
- 6) By 2014, Contact a Family will have worked in partnership with other agencies and providers to facilitate and enable them to deliver high quality services to families with disabled children across specialist and mainstream provision.'

Consultation with trustees on vision, purpose and aims of Contact a Family.

The board of trustees were subsequently asked to give their views on this paper at the Trustee Board meeting on 22nd November.

Trustees divided into two groups to consider the vision purpose and aims.

There was some preference in one group for emphasising that families should have choice in whether they accept support and therefore there should be more emphasis on `offering' support. The vision might therefore read:

Families of disabled children are able to lead ordinary lives and are recognised, respected and offered appropriate support.

The other group wanted more emphasis on a rights based approach and to use the word normal rather than ordinary. This vision may read as:

Parents and families of disabled children in the UK are able to lead normal lives, have equality with other families and are respected and appropriately supported.

Subsequent discussions in CMT expressed some concern about the use of the word `normal' in the context of our work and it was felt that the word `ordinary' was a less controversial choice.

Combining these two approaches we might have a **vision** which looks like:-

Families of disabled children in the UK are able to lead ordinary lives, have equality with other families and are recognised, respected and offered appropriate support.

Trustees also want more emphasis on empowering families to achieve policy changes and on the role of families and volunteers. There was considerable support for turning the organisation on its head and making sure that parents lead change.

Trying to incorporate these points we might look at a **purpose** which is more like:-

1. Enabling families to secure their rights by offering them access to good quality independent advice, information and support
2. Enabling families to support one another by facilitating contact with others through linking, support groups and through local parent volunteer representatives
3. Empowering families to achieve changes in legislation, policy and practice to bring about greater equality

There was a view that five was too many aims and that these should be cut down. The aims should be more focussed on what we want for families rather than ourselves

This might lead to **aims** which look more like

- 1) By 2014, parents will have a greater understanding of their rights by having easy access to high quality independent advice, information and support;
- 2) By 2014, parents will have achieved greater equality by participating in shaping the legislation, policies and services that affect their lives;
- 3) By 2014, parents will easily be able to receive mutual support from others and will have opportunities to offer mutual support in return if they feel able to do so

There was also a lot of discussion about what our vision is of ourselves and it may be that we need a separate vision for families and the external world and an 'internal' vision for us as an organisation. This would enable us to have a separate vision about what we want for the charity – in terms of its management, governance and finances and the support and development it offers to its staff, without 'cluttering' the external vision with such matters. It enables the vision that we present to the world to be shorter and sharper whilst having a separate measure of how we are performing as an organisation.

Although we are not a membership organisation there seemed to be considerable support from trustees for building on the current membership. We will look at ways to develop the current membership to provide us with a stronger platform.

Perhaps an internal vision might be

Contact a Family is a well managed and well governed, financially stable organisation which is driven by parents, who participate in developing all aspects of our services.

We could then have internal aims about good governance and financial security as well as aims about, for example, valuing our staff as was raised at the staff conference without distracting from our main 'external' purpose.

This led on to a discussion of areas like the name of the charity, its strapline and the use of for example the word disabled. There was some support for the existing strapline 'families with disabled children', which was felt to be important but this was not popular with all. It was felt that some parents may not see a child with behavioural problems as 'disabled'. However, there was no overall consensus and undoubtedly this is an issue which will continue to provoke debate over the coming year.

Trustees were clear that they would also welcome a discussion on whether to raise the cut off point for services to age 25.

- Is this practical or does it risk spreading resources too thinly?
- It could attract more funding from different sources, but there would also have to be the infrastructure to support it.
- Families feel as if they are losing significant support when a child reaches the age of transition – 25 would seem to be a reasonable cut off point, but parents may always see a son or daughter as a child of the family and expect ongoing support beyond 25.
- To avoid overstressing resources, instead of extending our own services, we could look to develop other partners' services to help bridge the gap

Potential new version of our vision, purpose and aims based on trustee comments.

External Vision

Families of disabled children in the UK are able to lead ordinary lives, have equality with other families and are recognised, respected and offered appropriate support.

Purpose

1. Enabling families to secure their rights by offering them access to good quality independent advice, information and support
2. Enabling families to support one another by facilitating contact with others through one to one linking and through local and national support groups
3. Empowering families to achieve changes in legislation, policy and practice to bring about greater equality

Aims

- 1) By 2014, parents will have a greater understanding of their rights by having easy access to high quality independent advice, information and support;
- 2) By 2014, parents will easily be able to receive mutual support from others and will have opportunities to offer mutual support in return if they feel able to do so
- 3) By 2014, parents will have achieved greater equality by participating in shaping the legislation, policies and services that affect their lives;

Internal Vision

Contact a Family is a well managed and well governed, financially stable organisation which is driven by parents, who participate in developing all aspects of its services.

Internal Aims

- 1) By 2014, Contact a Family will have greater long term financial security
- 2) By 2014, Contact a Family will have developed its management and infrastructure to better support the work of its staff and volunteers
- 3) By 2014, Contact a Family will have governance arrangements which meet all the best practice requirements of the sector
- 4) By 2014, Contact a Family will be able to demonstrate the active involvement of parents in developing all aspects of its services

Where do we go from from here?

This paper has now been shared with Trustees who have asked us to seek the views of our stakeholders until May 2008. The final Strategy will be presented to the all day May 2008 Board meeting for approval.

Comments are welcome to any member of the corporate management team

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Corporate management team

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