

Family Network

A support service for children and young people with severe learning disabilities



Information for people who would like to help



This leaflet can be made available in other languages, on audio tape, CD, large print or other formats on request. Contact us at Wigan Council, Department of Adult Services, Public Relations Unit, Town Hall, Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1YN. Phone: 01942 827173. Email: ssdcru@wigan.gov.uk

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Photographs by www.JohnBirdsall.co.uk

www.wigan.gov.uk

Children and Young People's Services

Family Network Service

Family Network is a support service for disabled children and their families.

What are family based short term breaks?

Family-based short term breaks link disabled children of all ages with families and individuals who can provide them with short term care on a regular basis. All the children who use the service have a severe learning disability, though they may also have additional needs, for example a physical disability, complex health care needs or a sensory impairment.

Carers provide a vital support service to families of disabled children. Usually the child comes to stay at the short break carer's home and takes part in everyday activities with them, such as shopping, going to the park, watching television and playing games.

The amount of time the disabled child spends with their carer family varies – a typical commitment would be one weekend each month, but whatever time you have to offer, do contact

Family Network. We also need carers who can offer regular tea time visits, day care and people willing to be sitters in the child's home. If you have more time to offer, you may be interested in our full-time scheme.

Who are short break carers?

These are ordinary people like you. They come from all ages and backgrounds, they may be working, retired, unemployed or students. They may be couples or single, have children or not. Some have experience of working with disabled children and some do not.

What they have in common is to enjoy the company of children and young people, and be able to give some time on a regular basis to look after a disabled child and give their family a break from caring. They are provided with training, support and an allowance.

Children are very carefully matched to carer families, and as a carer you would not be expected to support a child you did not feel you could care for with confidence.

What do short break carers do?

As mentioned earlier, short break carers get disabled children involved in everyday activities. The child may go with you to

the park, go shopping, watch a DVD or help with cooking. Many disabled children do not get to do many of the things non-disabled children take for granted. Short breaks provide a means of extending their social lives and widening their experience and gaining independence, as well as having fun.

More about the children...

The children are from ordinary families like yours. They will have a severe learning disability, but all are looking forward to the opportunity that being part of Family Network will bring.

Some of the children also have a physical disability, sensory impairment or other health concern. The children and young people are of school age and may attend a special school. This sometimes makes it difficult for them to meet up with their friends socially, as they may well live some distance from school.

What do the children and young people say?

Some of the comments we have received include:

- *"I like going to stay with my carers. Sometimes we go shopping, and I play with Tom on the computer and we watch DVDs." (Paul, aged 11).*
- *"It's much better than staying in. I do lots of things when I am there! I play with the cat and I play in the garden." (Bharat, age 6).*
- *"It's a break – a mini break for me from my family and a mini-break for my family from me!" (Angela, age 15).*

Who benefits from short breaks?

Everyone benefits.

- **Disabled children** get to do many things which non-disabled children take for granted, in an environment reassuringly like home. They get to broaden their social lives and make new friends, enjoy new experiences and gain independence.
- **Their families** get a chance to take a rest from caring full-time and recharge their batteries, pursue interests (difficult to do when looking after their disabled child full-time), or spend some quality time with their other children, partner or friends.

- **Short break carers** themselves broaden their own horizons, have fun with the child they are caring for – all the while knowing that what they are doing gives another family a break and that the child enjoys the visits too.

What do parents of disabled children say?

Some of the comments we have received include:

- *"It's a different environment and people. As his contact with others is limited, it is good for him to meet others and he really enjoys going."*
- *"It gives us a bit of time on our own. Gives our daughter time away from us too – it is good for both the family and the disabled child."*
- *"I would say that at first we felt a bit guilty at sending Eddie to her. It was as though we were palming him off onto someone else, but now I can say it is really worthwhile and we're all better for it."*

How do I become a short break carer?

The first step is to either phone, email, or return the tear-off slip on the next page to receive the initial application form. We would then arrange to visit you and give you further information about what's involved, including details about the Criminal Records Bureau disclosure form you will need to complete.

If your application is successful, you will receive training and support to help you care for a disabled child successfully. An allowance is paid to make sure you are not out of pocket.

If you need any further information, speak to one of the Family Network social workers on 01942 481180, or email ssdfamnet@wigan.gov.uk



Give a little time, make a **big** difference!

Family Network Service



Please send me more information about Family Network and how I/we might help a disabled child and their family.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Please return this form to: Family Network Service,
Wigan Council, Children and Young People's Services,
Claire House, Lower Ince Health Centre, Phoenix Way,
Ince, Wigan, WN3 4NW.