

## **SHORT BREAKS STATEMENT FOR DISABLED CHILDREN**

### **Introduction**

The Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authorities to provide breaks from caring for carers of disabled children to support them to continue to care for their children at home and to allow them to do so more effectively. The Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011 give more detail on how local authorities must fulfil their duty to provide breaks from caring, including a requirement to produce a Short Breaks Statement outlining the range of short break services available, who they can be accessed by and how.

Short breaks give disabled children and young people the opportunity to participate in enjoyable leisure activities while also giving their parents/carers a break from their caring role. Short breaks can take place after school, at the weekend and in the holidays, and include overnight breaks.

In Sunderland, a short break is part of a continuum of services which support disabled children aged 0-18 and their families to live ordinary lives.

### **Writing the Short Breaks Statement**

The person responsible for preparing this Statement is Steve Fletcher, Acting Manager, Looked After and Disabled Children.

The (draft) Short Breaks Statement has been written in consultation with disabled children in Sunderland, their parents, schools, Early Years practitioners, the Youth Service, short breaks providers, Sunderland Carers Centre, professionals from Health, Education and Social Care and colleagues in Play and Leisure services. Wider consultation will take place during the summer of 2011. A final draft will be presented to Children's Services Leadership Team and Sunderland Children's Trust for approval.

### **Publication and review**

The Short Breaks Statement will be published on the Sunderland City Council website in October 2011. It will be reviewed annually in consultation with partners.

### **Needs assessment**

Through the Aiming High for Disabled Children programme which ran in Sunderland between 2008 and 2011, work was undertaken to identify disabled children and to find out about the types of short breaks they and their families wanted. Disabled children told us they wanted to be able to spend time with their friends doing the things all children and young people like to do. Many families told us that short breaks at the weekend and during the holidays were more important than breaks after school, but as disabled children

became teenagers, having short break activities after school became important as well. Some families told us that having enough short breaks during the day meant that they did not need occasional overnight breaks. Other families told us that regular, planned overnight breaks were a lifeline to them. All families wanted choice and flexibility in the short breaks services they received. Some families did not want anyone else looking after their children, but wanted support to be able to enjoy leisure activities as a whole family.

### **Short breaks available in Sunderland**

Most disabled children will be able to access the same leisure activities as their non-disabled peers provided by universal services. Service providers have a responsibility under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to the way their services are provided in order to be inclusive to disabled children. We will work with our Families Information Service to ensure that families have access to good quality information about universal services and how accessible they are.

For disabled children who require additional support to access leisure activities, and for those whose family need more breaks from caring to support them in continuing to care for their disabled child at home, a range of short break services are provided. These include:

- Leisure Link workers who will support a disabled child or young person to access leisure activities at home and/or in the community
- Youth clubs
- Holiday activities and play schemes
- Weekend activities
- Overnight short breaks

Alternatively, following an assessment, a family may decide to have a Direct Payment and use the funding allocated to them to arrange their own short break services. Families will be supported to understand how a Direct Payment may benefit them. Direct Payments will be offered as part of a number of choices as to how their needs could be met. Families will not be forced to have a Direct Payment, but will receive support in managing one if they chose this option.

An assessment with the disabled child and their family will help to establish how much support they need, including the need for short breaks. The assessment will take into consideration the nature and severity of the child's disability, the support needed by the family to enable them to continue caring for their disabled child, and other factors that might be having an impact of the family's ability to care for the disabled child. Once an assessment is completed, each family will be provided with a tailored package of services, which may include short breaks, to support them in their caring role.

We aim to provide reliable, regular, planned short breaks so that families can plan around the frequency and duration of breaks. Short breaks are part of a strategy of prevention, to avoid families reaching breaking point through the demanding nature of their caring role. However, all families experience crises from time to time and may require additional short breaks to help them through a difficult period.

We will work closely with colleagues in Health to ensure disabled children with complex health needs have access to short break services. Health professionals in Sunderland have a good track record of supporting short breaks service providers by providing training, nursing support and advice on specialist equipment and this will continue.

### **Transport**

We know that some families do not have access to a car and therefore struggle to take their disabled child to short break activities, and only some families receive the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance to help with transport costs. Providing transport can be time consuming – with children sometimes spending longer than an hour on a bus – and is expensive, so in Sunderland we will only provide transport where an assessment of a family's needs has identified this as a priority. Our aim is to provide transport fairly, but not unnecessarily. Some short break providers may offer transport to and from their service, but may charge families to use it.

### **Transition to adulthood**

As disabled young people approach adulthood, the professionals and services that support them and their families change from children's services to adults' services providers. To help maintain friendship groups at this time and to recognise that some young people do not leave school until they are 19, specialist inclusion youth clubs remain open to disabled young people until they are 19. Young people can then be supported to make the transition to a club for 19 to 25 year olds.

Moving on from other short break services will be managed through the processes described in Sunderland's Transition into Adulthood Protocol and Pathway. Through this process, information and assessments will be shared, and future short breaks for the young person when they turn 18 will be identified in advance.

As young disabled people approach adulthood, their short break services will help them to grow in confidence and competence, and increase their independence.

### **Participation**

The voice of disabled children and young people and their families is at the heart of planning and delivery of short break services. Young people and their families are able to shape the development of services through consultation and through involvement in the commissioning process. All commissioned short break services are contractually bound to involve their service users and their families in planning, review and evaluation of the service they receive.

### **Information**

Information about what short break services are available and how to access them will be made available to families in a range of formats including through the Families Information Service, on the [www.sundc.org.uk](http://www.sundc.org.uk) website and through the Real Issues bulletin distributed by Sunderland Carers Centre.