

Children and young people with a disability and/or complex need in Northern Ireland – Access to Childcare

A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Studies have proven that barriers continue to exist for childcare service provision for children with a disability and/or complex needs living in Northern Ireland.

Four areas of unmet need in relation to childcare provision have been identified;

1. An inability to offer a level of specialist support that a child needs
2. Lack of flexibility to accommodate childcare requirements
3. Lack of specialist equipment for children with disabilities and/or complex needs
4. Parents lack confidence to leave their child with a childcare provider who they do not believe will be able to meet their child's needs.

As an initial step to addressing the barriers to existing childcare services (providers/minders) in Northern Ireland and improve the economic wellbeing of families of children and young people with disabilities, the DHSSPS, in collaboration with the Child Care Partnerships and the CYPSP Regional Subgroup, Children and young people with disabilities undertook two early steps to developing a more comprehensive strategy.

1. The DHSSPS awarded £95,600 in 2012/13 under the Small Grants Scheme to contribute towards the cost of specialist equipment or small adaptations to childcare provision in Northern Ireland. Ultimately it was anticipated that this would improve standards and accessibility for children with a disability/complex need to childcare provision in Northern Ireland with the anticipation that this would facilitate parents of children with a disability/complex needs to return to work, education and training.

The geographical spread of successful childcare providers who received the Small Grants Funding saw childcare providers across all the Childcare Partnership areas receiving the Disability Grant. Given the criteria the funding was directly targeted at children with disability in early years settings this was truly person centred in its application

2. The DHSSPS supported Children in Northern Ireland (CiNI) to deliver a Children's Disability training Programme through the months of May and June 2013 to child minders, day care staff, afterschool staff, parents and family members in Northern Ireland through the DHSSPS Childcare Fund. The aim of this programme was to increase the number of people equipped with the relevant skills and confidence to help care for a child with a disability. The Children's Disability Programme proved to be a significant learning opportunity. An evaluation of this training programme is currently underway.

The CYPSP Subgroup for children and young people with a disability, Childcare partnerships and DHSSPS are continuing to work to develop services in this area and a partnership working group has now been established to take this forward

The CYPSP Subgroup continue to build upon the training programme delivered by CiNI to promote awareness of disabilities and the rights of children and young people among parents, schools, youth clubs, children, young people, parents and local communities. The group believes that increasing awareness about issues faced by children and young people with disabilities in their own everyday settings will positively impact upon incidences of bullying and hate crime. Coupled with more education about their rights, children and young people will feel more empowered.

Read the CYPSP Regional Subgroup, children and young people with a disability action plan for 2011-2014 follow this link;

http://www.cypsp.org/publications/subgroups/cwd/cwd_action_plan_2011-214.pdf