



"Welcome to Edition 3.

This issue is devoted to services for parents of children with special needs.

In addition to those services provided by the Council, support to parents is provided by voluntary organisations, the most significant being Signpost and Barnardos.

In this issue we will focus on Signpost, and in a subsequent issue, there will be an outline of what services are provided to parents by Barnardos.

- According to statistics 1 in 20 children are disabled = 770,000 children under age 16 in UK.
- **“There are more statistics about sheep, here in Scotland, than there are about children and adults with learning difficulties”** - quote from Sophie Dow, in a parliamentary speech in 2009.
- Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are more than nine times more likely to be expelled than their peers in England

Counting the costs 2010 – extract from Contact a family 2011

In 2010 Contact a Family followed up the groundbreaking 2008 Counting the costs study. They asked over 1,100 UK parents caring for a disabled child about their current financial situation.

Key findings were:

- Almost a quarter are going without heating (23%). - *Up from 16% in 2008.*
- One in seven (14%) are going without food. *Down from 16% in 2008.*

- More than half have borrowed money from family or friends (51%) to keep financially afloat or pay for essentials, such as food and heating. - *Up from 42% in 2008.*
- More than 40% have applied for a charity grant. - *Up from 25% in 2008.*
- Almost three quarters (73%) are going without days out and leisure time with the family. - *Up from 55% in 2008.*

What makes my family stronger: A report into what makes families with disabled children stronger - socially, emotionally and practically – extract from Contact a family published May 2009

Contact a Family surveyed 615 families with disabled children about their experiences of living in the UK, asking what makes you stronger practically, socially and emotionally.

Key findings of the 'What makes my family stronger' report are:

- Almost 70% of families with disabled children said that understanding and acceptance of disability from their community or society is poor or unsatisfactory.
- Over 60% of families said they don't feel listened to by professionals.
- Vital support services such as short breaks, a key worker and childcare are unavailable to almost half of families.
- Over 60% of families said they don't feel valued by society in their role as carers.
- Half of families with disabled children said the opportunity to enjoy play and leisure together is poor or unsatisfactory.



Signpost is a small, independent, user-led charity operating in West Lothian which supports families who have children with disabilities or other additional needs.

West Lothian has one of the youngest and fastest-growing populations in Scotland and there are an estimated 4000 young disabled people in the area.

Families of children who have additional needs face many challenges. Parents are thrust into a new role as carers and need help to equip themselves for their new role. Their children may find themselves treated differently and excluded from many opportunities which others take for granted. Often families have no idea who to turn to, or what questions to ask, - *"if you don't even know what question to ask, it's hard to get an answer"*.

We can direct families to services and resources they were previously unaware of and we work together with other agencies to provide a joint resource.

For example, Signpost, together with the Children and Young Peoples Team, the Child Disability Service and Education Psychology Department, have adapted and developed a parenting course "Getting Through the Day" for parents who have children on the autistic spectrum and this will be piloted in January 2012

What we offer:-

- A single point of contact for enquiries on any topic
- Help-line, email and a drop-in service for easy contact – no appointment required

- Website, facebook and bi-monthly newsletter
- Multi-media information library for use by parents, children, siblings and professionals
- Awareness raising presentations and information/social events
- Help families find funding for large items of equipment or holidays etc.
- Booklets such as "Financial Help Guide" "Leisure booklet" and "My brother or sister has additional support needs", "Holiday Booklet", "After diagnosis" and our "Are You Prepared for Change?" booklet aimed at identifying services and resources around transition

"I got information about other benefits I can claim which I never knew about"

- Advocacy support
- Training to support carers to meet their children's needs e.g. Transition Course

"The right people with the right attitude in the right place"

Our working relationships with other professionals within West Lothian help us act as a "bridge" between parents and carers to services and resources and explain the benefits from a parent's point of view. Professionals also use our service and we have recently been established as the main point of contact for The Scottish Childminding Service. We can deal with each enquiry individually either for the parent or potential childminder who needs information and confidence to care for a child with additional needs.

*"Signpost were the only people who took my concerns seriously ...
...my son was later diagnosed with autism"*

For more information please visit our website www.signpost-online.co.uk