

Childcare for Children & Young People with Disabilities

Research

for

NCMA Wales

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 It is estimated that 7% of children and young people in the UK are disabled¹. In Wales, this translates to 65,000 children and young people aged 0 to 25 years and 43,000 children under 16 years of age. 8,000 children in Wales are severely disabled.
- 1.2 Affordable, accessible childcare for disabled children is critical to enable their parents to access employment and training and help reduce child poverty.
- 1.3 An estimated 55% of families with a disabled child live in poverty². They face up to three times the costs of families with no disabled children, yet are more likely to be unemployed and be on low incomes³. Only 3% of mothers of disabled children work full-time and 13% part-time, compared to 27% and 39% of other mothers⁴. Enabling parents with disabled children to work or train is a critical step towards alleviating their situation.
- 1.4 Quality childcare is also critical to enable disabled children to fulfil their potential and meet their needs. Article 23 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that children who have any kind of disability should have special care and support, so that they can lead full and independent lives.

Research Aims and Objectives

- 1.5 This paper summarises research that gives a greater understanding of why disabled children take up a disproportionately small number of childcare places in Wales. Specifically it has aimed to answer the following questions:
 - What are the barriers to offering childcare to disabled children?
 - Would training encourage providers to accept disabled children?
 - How is information made available in each Local Authority area and how can improvements be made?
 - What are parents' main concerns regarding childcare for their children?

Methodology

- 1.6 In achieving the project aim and objectives a number of elements of research were undertaken across three sample areas of Wales: Newport, Merthyr Tydfil and Powys.

¹ Strategy Unit, Improving the life chances of disabled people (2005) Cabinet Office

² Mencap, Evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee Enquiry into Childcare for Working Parents (2003)

³ Dobson, B and Middleton, S, 1998, Paying to care: the costs of childhood disability

⁴ Child Poverty Review, HM Treasury (2004)

Research with Childcare Providers

- 1.7 25% of all registered childcare providers were contacted in each target area to assess their knowledge and awareness of disability issues; their ability to cater for children with additional needs; gaps in training; and some examination of policies and practices to assess whether there were structural issues that restricted access. In total, 97 providers were contacted. They were chosen with reference to type (as set out below) but also geographically to represent a spread of provision across all areas within each local authority. This was seen as being particularly important in Powys.

Figure 1: Sampling of Childcare Providers

	Childminder	Full Daycare	Out of School Care	Sessional Care	Total
Powys	103	25	26	64	218
<i>Sample</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>44</i>
Merthyr Tydfil	27	8	3	17	55
<i>Sample</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>11</i>
Newport	118	34	13	27	192
<i>Sample</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>39</i>

Research with Parents & Carers

- 1.8 One of the difficulties in consulting with parents of disabled children is that there is no one source of information about disabled children or group through which they are represented. To engage as many parents as possible, a range of strategies were adopted in this research.
- 1.9 Two focus groups were held in Merthyr Tydfil and in Newport with groups of parents of disabled children who were already meeting. In total, 26 parents were engaged through these groups.
- 1.10 A total of 71 parents of disabled children across the three target areas were interviewed by telephone. These were to parents that had already returned a short survey form in which they had identified themselves as parents of disabled children and consented to be contacted for an interview. The survey forms were sent out initially via special schools in the three areas and via Contact-a-Family, a charity working to support the families of disabled children across Wales.

Meta-Data

- 1.11 Data from a survey responded to by over 10,000 parents of children across 9 local authorities in Wales as part of the Childcare Sufficiency process has been used to support the information gained in the three sample areas. This data

was focused on the barriers to childcare use by all parents but identified parents of disabled children as a specific group.

Definitions

- 1.12 The questions of the definition of "person with a disability" and how persons with disabilities perceive themselves are complex. Our approach in this research has been to take the 'Disability' or 'Social' model of disability as our starting point.
- 1.13 This model regards disability as a normal aspect of life, not as a deviance and rejects the notion that disabled children are in some inherent way "defective". Most people will experience some form of disability, either permanent or temporary, over the course of their lives.
- 1.14 The disability model recognises social discrimination as the most significant problem experienced by disabled persons and as the cause of many of the problems that are regarded as intrinsic to the disability under the other models⁵. We will also use the term 'Disabled Children and Young People' to reflect this approach.

⁵ Deborah Kaplan, World Institute on Disability

2. Childcare for Disabled Children & Young People

2.1 The past ten years has seen a significant expansion in both the supply and demand for childcare in Wales. Many parents now see childcare as an essential service that enables them to work or study. In recognising this, Government has accepted that it has a central role in ensuring that the childcare parents use is safe and provides the best possible development for their children. It is also committed to using resources strategically to ensure that childcare is of good quality, but also available locally at an affordable price. The Assembly Government has expressed a vision of childcare as part of a modern welfare state, available to all parents who need it⁶.

Giving children a 'Flying Start'

- 2.2 Research has demonstrated the benefits of high quality early education and care in aiding children's development, including their social, cognitive and language skills⁷. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education study has shown that the provision of high quality education and care can reduce the risk of developing special educational needs at a later stage from one in three to one in five⁸.
- 2.3 In Wales, the free part-time pre-school education is available to all children aged 3 and 4 years of age and the 'Flying Start' initiative provides further part-time care to children aged 2 years of age in the most deprived areas of Wales.
- 2.4 Disabled children & young people and their families can often feel isolated and opportunities to mix with other children are very important and integration of disabled children & young people is crucial to tackling prejudice and discrimination.

I would love my child to have a social life outside of his family. To mix with his own age group and to have friends. This integration now will help his socialisation and integration into society as an adult and help and support now will ease his transition.

Parent of a child with autism and a learning disability in Newport

Because although my child has special needs its good for children to mix with others of different abilities.

Parent of a non-verbal child with autism

Supporting parents

2.5 Enabling parents to work is a key part of the Assembly Government's strategy to tackle child poverty. In surveys of over 10,000 parents in Wales in 2008,

⁶ Welsh Assembly Government: The Childcare Strategy for Wales (2005)

⁷ Ed Melhuish; Child Benefits: The importance of investing in quality childcare, Daycare Trust (2004)

⁸ Kathy Sylva et al., The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education. Final Report (2004)

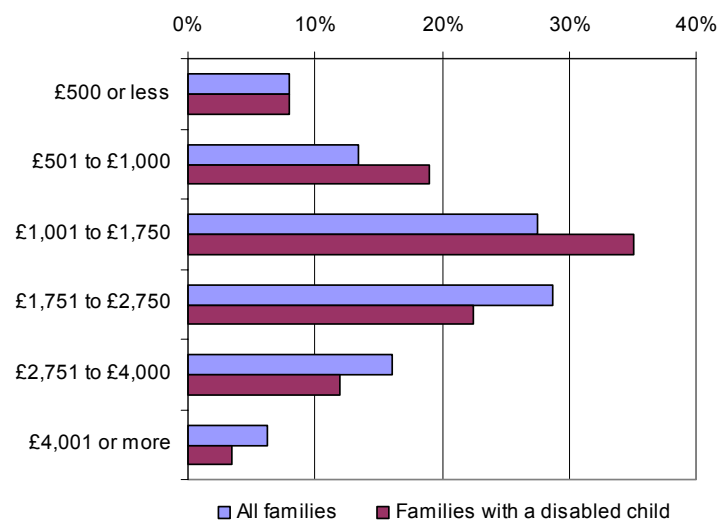
68% of parents identified as the primary carer were working. For the parents of disabled children & young people, only 43% of worked⁹.

- 2.6 Because families with disabled children & young people are less likely to work, it follows that their incomes are likely to be lower. In 2008, over half (51%) of all families with children aged 0 to 14 years had incomes of £1,751 per month or more. For families with disabled children, the proportion was just 38%.

I had to give up work to take care of my special needs child. I retrained as a childminder so I could get an income and be at home.

Parent with a 7 year old child with cerebral palsy

Figure 2: Monthly Family Incomes (2007)



- 2.7 Families with disabled children often face higher costs than other families, so paid employment can significantly boost their incomes and alleviate poverty. Parents also emphasise the emotional and psychological benefits of employment, including increased self-esteem, as well as the opportunity to have a respite from their caring responsibilities.

Childcare is a very needed service to enable parents to be able to work and give them a break and piece of mind.

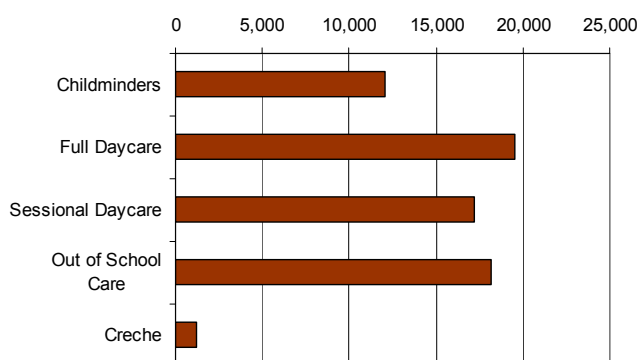
Parent of a 13 year old with learning and behavioural problems in Merthyr Tydfil

Availability of Childcare

- 2.8 Across Wales, there are around 70,000 childcare places that are registered to provide full daycare, sessional care and out of school childcare¹⁰. In relation to the number of children in Wales, this represents almost 13 childcare places available to every 100 children aged 0 to 14 years of age.

⁹ Melyn Consulting: Childcare Sufficiency Data (2008)

¹⁰ Melyn Consulting: Analysis of the Supply of Registered Childcare Places in Wales (2007)

Figure 3: Registered Childcare Places in Wales (2007)

- 2.9 Childcare in Wales is not evenly distributed with proportionately more available in the north than in the south; more in urban areas than in rural areas; and a strong link between the amount of childcare and deprivation (with less childcare in more deprived areas)¹¹.
- 2.10 Funding for local authorities to help childcare providers cater for disabled children & young people and support inclusive childcare is available in each area, but allocation of funding is determined by the priorities of the local Children & Young People's Plan. This results in different priorities being set across Wales and no common approach to support.

Paying for childcare

- 2.11 In theory, all childcare places should be available to disabled children & young people and mainstream funding to help with the cost of childcare through the tax credit system should help parents on low incomes pay for childcare. However, the additional cost often associated with providing for additional needs often makes childcare unaffordable to parents who are already at an economic disadvantage. Because of the cap on childcare funding through the Working Tax Credit (70% of costs up to a maximum of up to £175 for one child and £300 for two or more), extra costs to cater for a disabled child can be insufficient.
- 2.12 The Assembly Government has recognised the economic challenges facing the families of disabled children in accessing childcare. The Carers and Equal Opportunities Act (2004) requires authorities to take into account in the assessment the carer's wish to work. This includes the parents of disabled children & young people. While funding for implementing the Act is available to local authorities through the Carers Grant, there is little evidence that families have been able to access finance to support childcare through this route.

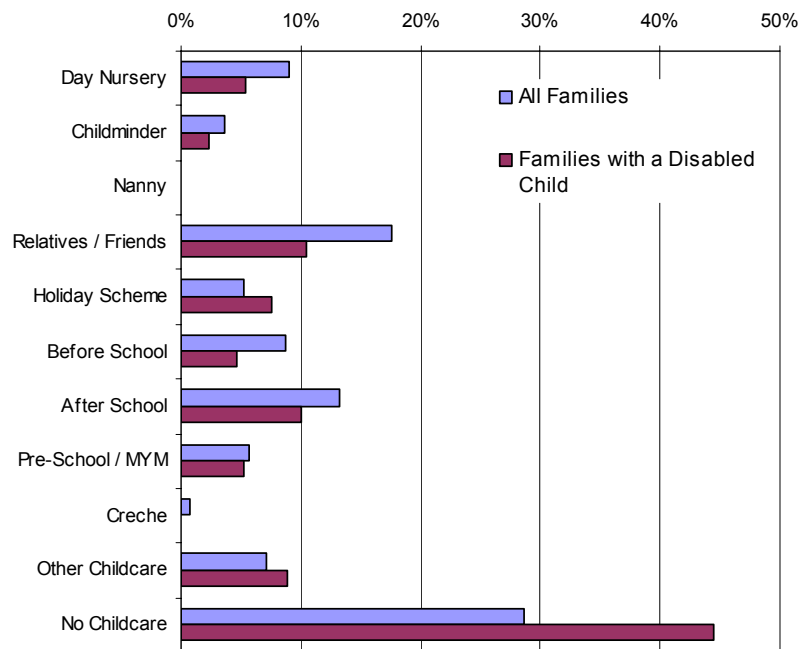
¹¹ Melyn Consulting: Childcare Sufficiency Data (2008)

Take-up of childcare places

2.13 Almost half of all parents in Wales with children aged 0 to 14 years use formal childcare on a regular basis¹². In addition, around of fifth of parents use informal care with children being looked after by friends or relatives. Amongst the general population, parents who are working predominantly use childcare.

2.14 For families with a disabled child, the use of childcare is far lower with 45% of families with a disabled child not using any form of childcare compared with just 29% of all families in Wales. Across all types of childcare – with the exception of holiday care – use is lower. Even use of informal childcare provided by relatives or friends is lower amongst families with a disabled child.

Figure 4: Childcare use by parents in Wales (2008)¹³



2.15 Only a few parents interviewed for this research used formal childcare and very few used informal care. Even in areas such as Merthyr Tydfil where informal childcare is the first choice for most families, many parents of disabled children & young people said that they could not or would not ask relatives for support.

Information about childcare

2.16 Section 27 of the Childcare Act 2006 requires Local Authorities to ensure that parents of children and young people aged 0-19 have access to the full range of information they may need as parents. In most cases, this is achieved through the local Family Information Service (FIS), which at a minimum provides a telephone help-line during office hours. The Act also requires that

¹² Melyn Consulting: Childcare Sufficiency Data (2008)

¹³ Ibid

the information service must be accessible to all persons who may benefit from it, in particular, persons who might otherwise have difficulty in taking advantage of it. Information available from FIS services should include services for disabled children and their families, but in practice, the availability of comprehensive information is patchy. In 2008, only 7 out of 22 FIS services were able to provide information about services for disabled children and young people¹⁴. While this situation has improved as FIS's have worked towards the requirements of the Childcare Act, the experience of parents suggests that few access the service

¹⁴ Wrexham CRB: Survey to find out how prepared CIS are to meet the requirements of Section 27 of the Childcare Act (2008)

3. The views of parents

- 3.1 Consultation with parents of disabled children & young people highlighted a wide range of issues that they faced when considering or trying to access childcare.

Access to appropriate childcare services

- 3.2 Many parents with disabled children want to use childcare. Of the 97 parents who were interviewed, 74% said that they would like to use childcare if suitable childcare was available to them. However, over 90% of these parents also said that it was difficult to find childcare that was accessible and able to meet their child's needs.

My son has a health condition which requires regular hospital visits and he is frequently ill. Childcare that could accommodate his needs would be helpful.

Parent of a child with Down's syndrome and learning difficulties

There are facilities at Maes Ebbw School (fantastic outside play facilities, hydro pool, aromatherapy, etc.) but it is closed for 6 weeks during the summer holidays

Parent in Newport Focus Group

Physical disability appears to be catered for far more than mental disability and there is a definite discrimination between able children's provision and disabled children.

How does that happen with D.D.A.?

Parent of a child with Autistic spectrum disorder

- 3.3 Most of the parents interviewed had children of school age and therefore out of school care was the most common type of childcare that parents wanted to use.

We need holiday clubs, even just for a few hours at a time. It is no longer safe to allow children to play out on their own, especially when they have special needs.

Parent of a disabled child in Powys

I need after-school care occasionally, and holiday childcare for secondary-school age children with learning disabilities.

Parent of a 12 year old child with Downs syndrome in Powys

I would like to see after school clubs and holiday playschemes that are able to cater for disabled children and those with special needs.

Parent of a 9 year old disabled child in Merthyr Tydfil

- 3.4 Several parents who had used childcare said that although many childcare settings say that they are able to accommodate disabled children, they found that either places were limited or that they were unable to cater for their specific needs.

The only thing my child belongs to is a scout group. He cannot belong to anything else as he was having one to one in school and child care was difficult to find because of this.

Parent with a disabled child in Newport

I need 1:1 help for [my child] in her own home. I understand her needs best and need to be on hand for the care-giver to learn her needs and vulnerabilities before I would feel comfortable with her being cared for outside the home. For example, she communicates using Makaton, has no sense of danger and has a short-term memory deficit. So far, in 3 years I have not been able to find anyone who will or can use makaton with [my child] as not enough people are trained in it. I believe that people (childminders) are put off from helping in the home with a disabled child due to a lack of accurate information / education about what this would be like.

Parent with a child with Down's Syndrome

I was not made aware of after school clubs until my son was 11 years old. Then he could only go if they didn't have too many children in that day because of staffing levels. I always felt he wasn't wanted.

Parent of a child with Down's Syndrome, partially sighted, hearing impairment, VSD

Lack of Information about services

- 3.5 Accessing information about the services and help available was extremely difficult, and many families relied on word of mouth from other parents in similar situations or their own investigations. They found this stressful and frustrating.

There is little or no information for childcare services for disabled children.

Parent interviewed in Powys

More information about childcare and the costs - in particular relating to deaf children.

Parent with a disabled child

You don't know what's out there if you don't have a Social Worker. I don't want a Social Worker but I want some of the services and information that come with having one.

Parent at Newport Focus Group

Information should be given to all parents with special needs children by social services and schools. I don't think that there's anything available, but I don't know how to find out.

Parent of a 9 year old disabled child in Powys

- 3.6 Only 6 out of the 74 parents interviewed across Newport, Merthyr Tydfil and Powys were aware of their local Family Information Service, and none of these had used it to find out about childcare. What was apparent is that families with disabled children are often engaged with a wide range of services eg. health, social services, education but there is no consistency in the provision of information available from these agencies. Parents said that they had been told about services by some professionals, but never in a clear and coherent manner.

Childcare costs

- 3.7 Paying for childcare was probably the most significant barrier for the parents of disabled children who wanted to work. Some parents accessed financial help with childcare costs through the mainstream channels eg. Working Tax Credit, but still found it difficult to afford childcare because of the higher fees that some providers were charging due to the additional resources required.

I have an autistic child and have tried using childminder but they always let me down. It takes my child a while to get used to someone and then they stop taking them. If a child is autistic and they need one-to-one, childminders don't want to know, or they need to be trained, so they ask for £10-12 per hour per carer.

Parent at Newport Focus Group

You should be able to pay relatives to look after your child the same as you would a CM – you can only access payment if they live away. His older siblings 16 & 18 know him intimately, I know they can look after him, they're the people I can trust and that's adequate for me at the moment.

Parent at Newport Focus Group

When my son lived with me I couldn't go back to work. Carers asked for £10 per hour and he has 2 carers, so that's £20 per hour.

Parent of an autistic child with severely challenging behaviour, ADHD, sensory problems.

- 3.8 The Inland Revenue's tax credit figures show that working families with disabled children are less likely to benefit from the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit than other families, with only 7.8% of families with one disabled child receiving the childcare element, compared with 14.6% of families with no disabled children¹⁵.
- 3.9 Many parents of disabled children require childcare for respite but face considerable cost barriers in accessing it. Some parents receive Family Aide respite from Social Services, but this is rarely on a regular basis. Others are able to pay for respite through self-directed payments, but again, this is insufficient to pay for regular childcare.
- 3.10 Free or low-cost holiday playschemes are the most commonly accessed form of childcare used by disabled children & young people, but these are irregular, insufficient to enable parents to work and some parents have concerns about the quality of care and supervision.

Confidence in services

- 3.11 Disabled children & young people are uniquely vulnerable and the parents of disabled children are acutely aware of the quality of care that their children need. Disabled children & young people often require specialist medical support or support from staff that have received training around a specific

¹⁵ Analysis of HMRC Child & Working Tax Credit Quarterly Statistics 2006

condition or behaviour. Parents are justifiably wary of using services in which they do not have full confidence.

There's not much training for staff for children with autism, challenging behaviour and sensory impairments in Wales.

Parent in Newport Focus Group

I did use an after school club for a while but my child couldn't settle. The staff at the club were not trained to work with autistic children.

Parent in Newport Focus Group

Although no childcare available when I requested it, I would have little confidence in anything on offer locally except staff who work at my child's school.

Parent of a child with ASD Traits, Global developmental delay, learning disabilities

- 3.12 In particular, parents often said that they would not feel confident in using settings where members of staff were not experienced in caring for disabled children & young people.

I would be interested in using a day nursery if there was one that accepted children with disabilities. There aren't any day nurseries with qualified and experienced staff for children with additional needs.

Parent of a 2 year old disabled child

Transport and logistics

- 3.13 Transport was found to be a barrier to childcare use for many parents of disabled children.

I would like my child to be able to enjoy after school clubs, but public transport is useless in our area, no buses at right times. We're also on benefit so can't afford cabs.

Parent of a child with ADHD, learning difficulties and mild epilepsy from Powys

Transport is a big problem, as we used to have free transport to come home from after-school club and to take them to and from the holiday club, but it was stopped.

Parent of a child with learning and behavioural problems

- 3.14 On one hand, children may need specialist transport to be able to access even local childcare settings. Alternatively, facilities that can cater for their needs may be situated some distance away requiring additional travel. Finally, many disabled children & young people attend special schools to which children are transported. Few special schools provide childcare through, for example, after school clubs, because transport is seen as a logistical barrier. The opportunity for disabled children & young people attending special schools to use after school clubs in their home community can be restricted by inflexible transport policies, and by the restrictive admissions policies that see many after school clubs based in schools only being accessible to their own pupils.

Care for older disabled children & young people

- 3.15 Often, children are able to become more independent as they grow older, but for some disabled children & young people, care requirements will continue or increase. Families find it increasingly difficult to find childcare that is appropriate to the developmental age of their child as they get older.

Day nurseries and childminders aren't appropriate for children over 10 years old.

Parent Interviewed in Merthyr Tydfil

Due to my sons age and disability I cannot get childcare

Parent of a 12 year old with ADHD and special needs

We need holiday facilities and clubs for older children with disabilities where staff are trained and can manage such problems and relate to children. I would encourage that these were open for all children as I know he would not attend clubs just for those children with special needs and he needs to mix with a full society ready for adulthood.

Parent of a child with behavioural problems, epilepsy, seizures and ADHD

Due to cost and provision of buildings and activities for young people aged 21 yrs and over who cannot integrate with people of a similar age there is not a lot on offer. There is a club for children from 5 years to 20 years during after school and summer holidays but not suitable for my son.

Parent of a young person with Autism, dispraxia

- 3.16 Current definitions of childcare and the ages to which childcare regulations apply do not help. Currently, childcare is only regulated when catering for children under 8 years of age. Even if older children access childcare, they may do so without the protection of regulations that ensure minimum standards of care. The Childcare Act (2006) talks about local authorities having a duty to ensure sufficient childcare for all children up to the age of 14 and to 16 years for disabled children & young people. Examination of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessments undertaken recently across Wales shows that there is very little provision for older children of all abilities. Parents of older children were clearly frustrated by this situation.

It is unfair that services for disabled children stop when they reach 18 years and further qualified services for these children doesn't carry on into adult services even though they are children in adult bodies.

Parent of a child with Global Ataxia, Severe Foetal alcohol syndrome, spina bifida, no communication

Inclusive services

- 3.17 Many local authorities in Wales have responded to the childcare needs of families with disabled children through providing or supporting inclusive playschemes. These are generally available during the summer holidays in some areas. While inclusive childcare services are meeting the needs of some

disabled children & young people, parents were concerned about the levels of support within such settings.

Inclusive playschemes will only work up to a point. The one-to-one carers are not supervising well enough though, which results in the child being picked on, photos taken, etc. so they don't want to go back (and I'm reluctant to leave my child there).

Parent in Newport Focus Group

One-to-one in inclusive provision not supervising well enough – better now, but could be an issue. Depends on whether the child wants to stick with an adult or not. If they do, it's ok, but if they don't it can be difficult.

Parent in Newport Focus Group

There is the problem of other children picking on my child (in inclusive playscheme). Do the staff know how to stop bullying? The staff don't say anything to me, I find out from my child when we get home. The staff at play schemes are so young. Do the staff realise that our children can't play the same games as other children their age?

Parent in Newport Focus Group

- 3.18 Parents were asked during interviews whether they would prefer to access inclusive or exclusive childcare services. The majority of parents consulted said that they would prefer inclusive services.

My son needs social skills and by mixing with all ranges of children his attitude improves.

Parent of a child with ADHD and Dispraxia

Would like opportunities for my child to mix with other children. Needs support and encouragement. Would be bullied by mainstream. Clubs / social groups of similarly disabled children would be wonderful.

Parent of a child with Autism

Good for disabled children to mix with disabled and "normal" children. Children with no special needs are a good role model for children with behavioural issues.

Parent of a child with Autism, language delay, social interaction problems

I feel that all children should learn to mix with one another, putting children with special needs into a different childcare service is like allowing other children to form prejudices against those children.

Parent of a child with ADHD, learning difficulties and mild epilepsy

- 3.19 On the other hand, a sizeable proportion said that they would prefer services that were just for disabled children & young people.

I think that to have a service for children with similar disabilities would be better so that the environment caters to their needs.

Parent of a child with Autistic spectrum disorder and general learning difficulties.

My son would cope better in that situation (a childcare service that was just for children with similar disabilities)

Parent of a child that is partially sighted and has cerebral palsy + learning difficulties

I would like to be able to use childcare that was for the same age as my children and the same disabilities

Parent of a child with learning and behavioural problems

- 3.20 A small number of parents said that both inclusive and exclusive provision were needed.

Both. I think it is good for [My child] to have some activities with neurotypical children and some for people with special needs

Parent of a child with severe learning difficulties

- 3.21 Although parents might like their children to attend inclusive childcare settings, practical experience and concerns meant that they expressed a preference for services where they first and foremost felt that their child would be safe.

Our experience is that many if not most children without disabilities are intolerant of those with disabilities.

Parent of a disabled child

My child would probably feel more settled with other similar children. Children who are "mainstream" tend to stare and laugh as they get older, they know my son is different.

Parent of a child with Autistic spectrum, severe speech/language difficulties, gross motor skills, behavioural, severe learning difficulties.

"Integration doesn't work, the facilities are not there Children with additional needs are vulnerable, I couldn't put my 14 yr old autistic son in with a group of other 14 yr olds. I think up to age 11yrs it is easier to integrate children with additional needs, but once they hit puberty it is much harder".

Parent of a 13 year old disabled child

Employment Issues

- 3.22 Inaccessible childcare is clearly a barrier for the parents of disabled children. Many of the parents interviewed expressed a desire to work for a range of reasons, but for some found that they could not do so because of their child's needs or because of the costs of care outweighed potential earnings.

When you can't get childcare enabling you to work, it's not just the loss of income that's a problem – it's the loss of independence.

Parent interviewed in Newport

I think Powys are failing disabled children across the board. I have persistently requested adequate childcare for my two children so I can return to work and was informed there was none available. Powys are discriminating against both the children and parents/carers who wish to work.

Parent of a child with ASD Traits, global developmental delay, learning disabilities

There is no provision available at the moment which would leave me satisfied that my child with special needs would be safe and get the attention they require. I choose not to work because there is no suitable provision available.

Parent of a child with Dyspraxia, ADHD, Epilepsy, Learning Difficulties

The current system discriminates against working parents with disabled kids and social services are useless.

Parent of a disabled child in Newport

- 3.23 Others were able to combine work and caring but found it stressful. Most of the working parents interviewed had experienced difficulties with their childcare arrangements at some point and the need for flexibility in employment arrangements meant some parents were unable to work or had to take jobs below their skill levels.

There's not enough of it available, I'm a single mum who works fulltime, frequently have to miss work as a result of childcare providers letting me down

Parent of a child who is partially sighted and has cerebral palsy + learning difficulties

I can get childcare. I have a good degree but I'm working as a classroom assistant as it's the only job I can get that fits in with my child's school hours.

Parent interviewed in Powys

4. Childcare providers

Disability Discrimination Act

- 4.1 The Disability Discrimination Act (2005) (DDA) should ensure that *all* services, without condition, should be available to disabled people. The DDA covers childcare providers who must make reasonable adjustments for disabled children & young people and they are not allowed to discriminate. They are allowed to charge extra if they need to employ extra staff or limit their provision to fewer children, but they are only allowed to charge for the *extra* costs incurred. Reasonable adjustment can mean that they change their practice to accommodate a disabled child's needs. It may not be reasonable to expect a childminder to make the degree of alterations to her home that you could expect a Local Authority to make to a school or a nursery.
- 4.2 Out of the 98 childcare providers across the three sample areas (Newport, Powys & Merthyr Tydfil) interviewed in 2009, 85% said that they were aware of their responsibilities under the DDA.

Childcare Places

- 4.3 Of those childcare settings interviewed, only 10 (10.2%) had a disabled child attending their setting and only 15% had a disabled child using their services in the past. Set against the total number of children currently using childcare services, disabled children & young people represented less than 1%.
- 4.4 Nearly a quarter of childcare providers had been approached by parents of disabled children in the past. While most had been able to provide a suitable service, 16% of providers had been unable to offer a place. In some cases, their premises were unsuitable (eg. no wheelchair access or lack of ramps). Some providers are clearly addressing this issue:

We didn't have correct equipment. We were waiting for the refurbishment to finish until we could make the correct arrangements for the child, by the time it was completed the child went somewhere else.

Playgroup in Powys

- 4.5 73% of childcare providers said that their premises were currently accessible to wheelchair users. Of those that were not, over a third were planning alterations that would improve access.
- 4.6 More commonly, childcare providers were unable to provide a place because of a lack of staff to provide one-to-one care or a lack of experience in caring amongst staff.

He was a diabetic child with a sever illness but we didn't have any staff available to care for him.

Day Nursery in Newport

- 4.7 While 80% of childcare providers said that if they had an enquiry from a parent with a disabled child that needed extra resources (equipment or staff) they would be able to cater for their needs, only 70% said that they could provide a on-to-one carer for a disabled child that needed this level of care from within their own resources. Childminders said that they would find this most difficult as they would be unable to cater for other children – or their own in some cases – without a considerable drop in income. Some childminders said that they would be able to provide on-to-one care but would need to charge twice or three-times their usual rate.
- 4.8 Being able to recruit experienced staff to work as on-to-one carers was identified as a problem by some providers who even when funded to provide additional support could not deliver due to a lack of manpower.
- 4.9 In all three of the authorities studied, there was some funding available to support one-to-one care of disabled children & young people although not all childcare providers were aware of this, and only a minority had accessed this support.

Training

- 4.10 70% of childcare providers said that they or their staff had received some training in working with disabled children & young people. This was most commonly training that had been given as part of a vocational course (eg. NVQ Childcare Learning & Development). A few providers said that their staff had received specific training such as Makaton, to support working with disabled children & young people. Across the three authorities, the level of training seemed to be inconsistent. All of the childcare providers in Merthyr Tydfil had received fairly recent training around disability. In Newport three-quarters had received training while in Powys the figure was 60%.
- 4.11 When asked whether there was anything – such as training or information – that providers feel would make them or their staff better informed, or more able to cater for children with disabilities, only a small number identified additional training. Most felt that there was adequate training available, or that because they were not currently caring for any disabled children & young people they did not need any.

Yes there's been enough training. Newport council are very helpful and can cover cost for one-to-one care.

Out of School Club, Newport

Haven't really looked into it as I've never catered for a child with disabilities

Childminder in Powys

- 4.12 Some said that they would like more training while others said that should a disabled child wish to use their service they felt confident that they could access appropriate training.

More advanced training would be good on children with disabilities, and for it to be updated in a certain time frame

Playgroup in Powys

No-training is always there if it's needed

Day Nursery in Powys

- 4.13 A larger number said that they would like better information about working with disabled children & young people, and particularly about grants or support that is available.

We would like to see more grants to fund more things for children with disabilities.

Playgroup in Powys

Yes, we're always wanting to know more as I'm sure there are new acts and policies coming out all the time

Day Nursery, Newport

The training in Merthyr is good but it would be a good idea to provide leaflets to our local childminding services about how they can provide for disabled children as we get lots of requests from the parents of disabled children for childcare that we can't do.

Out of School Club, Merthyr Tydfil

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 Quality early education and childcare lays a strong foundation for children's development and provides parents with important opportunities for employment and family support.
- 5.2 There have been a range of childcare initiatives in Wales in recent years, but to date very few have addressed explicitly the needs of disabled children and their families, who through no fault of their own disproportionately experience inequality and poverty.
- 5.3 Many families find that flexible and appropriate childcare is simply not available. In many rural areas this is compounded by a lack of any childcare provision at all.
- 5.4 Mainstream financial support for childcare costs is only available to working parents while the families of disabled children often need respite care or childcare that allows disabled children and young people to mix with their peers to aid development.
- 5.5 Many families cannot afford childcare – which for disabled children often costs more – and so cannot work, and this problem often worsens as children get older and fewer services are available.
- 5.6 Childcare providers can struggle to provide places for disabled children because of the premium that they have to charge to cover additional costs.
- 5.7 Despite most parents wanting to use childcare, information to support parents of disabled children is patchy and relies on parents taking a pro-active approach that is often unrealistic given their many other responsibilities and caring duties.
- 5.8 Parents of disabled children are justifiably concerned that any specific needs are met and that the quality of childcare on offer is appropriate. This can be a significant barrier to use of childcare with a mismatch between what parents expect of childcare providers and what childcare providers perceive is required of them.
- 5.9 While most parents with a disabled child would like to work, because very few use childcare or have experience of using childcare, their horizons are often restricted and their aspirations limited.