

Aiming High for Disabled Children: Every Child Matters. Update

Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC), launched in May 2007, is the transformation program for disabled children's services.

Short breaks

Families with disabled children told the government that their number one priority is regular and reliable short breaks from caring. Responding to this, a large part of the funding for Aiming High for Disabled Children will be spent on short breaks.

Over the last few months information from parents, users and professionals has been gathered and collated to identify gaps in provision of short breaks and unmet needs. Over 1000 questionnaires have been distributed across Croydon to a representative sample of families, resulting in approximately 220 responses. I have met with a number of parents groups, individual parents and a larger number of parents at an event hosted by the Carers Information Service in January. Responses consistently identify gaps in services at key times of the day, weekends and school holidays. Gaps in services for certain groups have been highlighted. Families with children with complex needs and behaviours which challenge, struggle to find appropriate support, as do other groups of disabled youngsters. Support for disabled teenagers is limited. Gaps in information about services, transport and geographical location has also been highlighted as issues. There have been many other useful comments and suggestions about what needs improving; these have been noted.

In Dec 08 a meeting was held with current and potential short break providers to prepare the way for expanding current services and developing new ones. The commissioning process for agencies to tender for funds to develop short breaks in Croydon has commenced. In this first round, pilot projects and a range of short breaks will be commissioned which will begin to provide increased capacity during the year. We also have some capital funds to provide equipment, training and possibly small adaptations for current providers of short breaks including universal settings such as after out of school clubs. Please let me know of any organisations you know of who might benefit from this investment which would enhance current provision and widen access.

We also aim to improve parental and user participation to develop more responsive services. This will be delivered by working closely with Parents in Partnership and involving parents in decisions made about service commissioning and delivery.

May I thank you for your time and responses which have helped informed the decisions about where Croydon Council needs to concentrate its efforts over the next two years. There will be further opportunities to give us your views about how services can better meet the needs of disabled children and young people at an event later in the year and in a Fun Day we plan to hold with the Carers Information Service in Feb half term holiday next year.

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