

Short Break Carer Recruitment – to promote equality of access and choice for disabled children and young people

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Short breaks have been shown to increase access to community activities (1) (2) (3) (4) helping disabled children get out and about and do a range of activities, gain independence and make friends. Shared Care Network's UK Survey of short break services (2007) identified a lack of short break carers and difficulties in recruiting carers as one of the main barriers to promoting equality of access and choice in short breaks for disabled children and their families.(1)

Shared Care Network (SCN) is the UK's only organisation dedicated to promoting short breaks services. As part of the Aiming High for Disabled Children Transformation programme SCN has been chosen as the lead organisation to promote good practice in carer recruitment. The 'BIG Recruitment Challenge' project (April 2009-April 2011) aims to identify and share good practice in short break carer recruitment in England and to create new resources to support local carer recruitment.

Shared Care Network's presentation/ workshop will showcase some of the findings from research carried out with short break services throughout England via forums, questionnaires and through their participation in our annual awareness raising week Share the Care Week. It will also draw on research conducted with short break carers who have been recruited. It will include examples of successful recruitment such as 'word of mouth' recruitment; advertising; press, radio and new media campaigns.

The presentation will show the importance of targeting carers for children who are considered 'difficult to place'. Shared Care Network's last UK survey showed that the children who are most difficult to place are children with autism, challenging behaviour, male children, older children, children with physical impairments and children with complex health needs. The groups of children who are most likely to

wait longest for breaks are shown to be teenage boys with autism or challenging behaviour followed by any child of any age with complex healthcare needs or moving and handling needs. It will show how targeted recruitment can help meet the needs of those children who have been shown to wait longest for short breaks in order to ensure equality of access and choice for all disabled children. (1) (4)

The presentation will also highlight the importance of doing targeted campaigns to diversify the profile of carers coming forward in order to offer equality of access to short breaks across populations. It will highlight successful ways of recruiting carers who may be seen as being 'harder to reach' e.g. men, younger carers and carers from Black and ethnic backgrounds in order to meet the needs of the range of disabled children in the local community. (6) (7)

Sue Mennear is Shared Care Network's Head of Communications and manages The BIG Recruitment project. She has written a number of reports on recruitment and short breaks. She has worked for Shared Care Network for over 10 years; and in the field of communications, publicity and volunteer recruitment for 15 years.

As part of The BIG Recruitment Challenge SCN is creating online resources to support carer recruitment throughout England. These will include an online photo library to improve the quality of local services' recruitment materials and a new recruitment DVD to help services recruit carers for overnight short breaks, contract care, day-care and befriending services.

Shared Care Network will present our recruitment DVD and other online resources at the conference alongside the good practice we have identified in carer recruitment.

Sources and References

1. Carlin J, Cramer H, (2007) Creative Responses to Changing Needs – the Fourth National Survey, of Short Break Service for Disabled Children in the UK, Shared Care Network
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3. Mennear, S, (2008) "Breaking Down the Barriers – how short breaks are helping families of children with autism be more like other families" Shared Care Network
4. Prewett B, (2004) Short Term Break – Long Term Benefit, Joseph Rowntree Foundation
5. Mennear, S, (2003) Too Disabled for Care? – a report on short breaks for children with complex healthcare needs, Shared Care Network
- 6 Carlin J, (2008) A Job Worth Doing – A Guide to setting up and running a contract carer service, Shared Care Network
- 7 Simmons P, (2003), The Essential Guide to Carer Recruitment, Joseph Rowntree Foundation



