



MANCHESTER'S  
SHORT BREAKS  
PROJECT

# Aiming High for Disabled Children

Issue 5 • April 2011

## Hello and welcome

**This is the final Aiming High for Disabled Children newsletter. We will still send you information about short breaks and how to access them.**

Aiming High for Disabled Children was a three-year initiative to transform services for children and young people with disabilities by providing short breaks, improving access to childcare and involving parents in decision-making. The initiative has now ended, but short breaks will continue to be provided as part of our disabled children's services. Manchester City Council will continue to involve parents in decision-making through the Parent Carer Forum (now known as Manchester Parent Carer Network).

**We've come a long way. In 2008/09 just over 400 children accessed a short break. We expect the total for this year to be nearer the 2,000 mark.**

## In this issue

### Help us to help you

Information about how we keep you up to date about services and how you can keep us up to date about your family's needs.

### The Spending Review

What the budget changes mean for disabled children's services.

### Short-break focus

A timely reminder of what short breaks can achieve. The final short-break focus looks at riding therapy from EST Manchester.

### Parent participation

An update from Manchester's parent carer forum, recently renamed Manchester Parent Carer Network.

# Disabled children's register: are your details up to date?

**The Children's Act 1989 requires that every local authority maintains a register of children and young people with disabilities in the area in order to help to plan services and give information to families. The database is voluntary and information is kept confidential. You can deregister at any time.**

Manchester's register is currently held by the Multi-Agency Partnership (MAP) team. You may know it as the MAP database. **We use the information you provide to keep you informed of services that may be of interest to you.**

We will be contacting you shortly to update the information we hold. **Please keep an eye out for this letter and give it your urgent attention so we can keep you informed about services that may be of interest to you.** Please also consider giving us your email address. Sending updates by email will help us to keep costs low and reduce our carbon footprint.

# The Family Information Service: help us to help you

The Family Information Service (FIS) offers free impartial information, advice and assistance for families with children up to the age of 19. This extends to age 25 if the young person is disabled or has a Special Educational Need (SEN).

Here are some reasons to call FIS:

- To book a short break or give us feedback about a short break you've taken
- To find out about childcare in your area
- If you need help or someone to talk to.

If you're having trouble finding a service that meets your needs, call FIS anyway. Even if FIS can't find a

solution straight away, it records any unmet needs and this information helps the Council to plan and commission future services.

## Contact us

You can ring FIS on **0800 083 7921** - calls are free from a land line. The Helpline is open Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm, excluding bank holidays. Or visit the online Family Service Directory at <http://manchester.fsd.org.uk>

# The Government's Spending Review: how it affects disabled children

We understand that a lot of Manchester people are worried about the Government's Spending Review and what it will mean for our public services.

## What is the Spending Review?

The Spending Review sets out the Government's plans for the next four years. Here are the announcements that might impact on services for disabled children and their families.

## Disabled Children's Services

The Spending Review announced:

- a 12 per cent reduction in the Department for Education's non-schools budget (this covers all children's services funded by the Government)
- a 28 per cent reduction in local council allocations over the next four years (this includes local funding of disabled children's services).

It was announced that money for local areas will no longer be ring-fenced from April 2011. This means that the Government will no longer tell local authorities how much to spend on disabled children's services.

## Extra funds for early intervention

The Spending Review also announced the introduction of an Early Intervention Grant worth £2billion by 2014/15. It has not yet been confirmed what exactly this money will go towards.

## Will this affect services for disabled children?

The Aiming High for Disabled Children programme was funded by a ring-fenced budget; this funding ended in March 2011 but the Government allocated £800million in April over four years for short breaks nationwide. Although this budget will not be ring-fenced and doesn't have to be spent on disabled children's services, Manchester is committed to providing services for disabled children and there will be an allocation from the Early Intervention grant and mainstream budget to ensure the continuation of short breaks.

## Welfare benefits

There are a number of changes to benefits that may affect you. If you need to know more about these, you can find details in the Every Disabled Child Matters (ECDM) factsheet on the Spending Review. See the additional information section below.

## Additional information

You can contact Every Disabled Child Matters by:

Email: [info@edcm.org.uk](mailto:info@edcm.org.uk)

Post: EDCM, 8 Wakley Street,

London EC1V 7QE

Or visit their website [www.edcm.org.uk](http://www.edcm.org.uk)

Information on the Council budgets will be published online when available. You can also look at accounts from previous years by visiting [www.manchester.gov.uk/finance](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/finance)

# The act of riding improves balance and helps to strengthen muscles and core stability

### What is The Elisabeth Svendsen Trust for Children and Donkeys (EST)?



For this issue's short-break focus we're heading over to The Elisabeth Svendsen Trust for Children and Donkeys in Abbey Hey.

The Elisabeth Svendsen Trust for Children and Donkeys (EST) is a UK charity providing unique donkey-riding therapy for children with special needs and disabilities, and therapeutic visits for adults in care homes and hospices.

The EST Manchester centre opened in Abbey Hey in 2004 to provide donkey-riding therapy for children in Manchester and the surrounding area. These magical creatures help unlock the minds of some of the most withdrawn children, providing opportunities for interaction and helping those with physical disabilities to develop their strength, balance and co-ordination.

Every week, approximately 150 children arrive at EST Manchester from their schools, hospices or homes to find colourful fully equipped play areas, outdoor play areas and gardens where they can relax while waiting for their donkey-therapy ride in the adjoining indoor arena.

The riding sessions are given under qualified supervision and vary greatly with the needs of the children who come to the centres. The needs range from learning or behavioural difficulties, autism, Down's syndrome, visual impairment, to those with severe physical disabilities such as cerebral palsy.

For some children it may be that a quiet ride of ten minutes is plenty, while others may spend some of their time grooming and stroking the donkeys. They are encouraged to be independent, and their confidence is raised by a lesson structured around correct riding principles, including taking turns to ride and following instructions.



Guiding the donkey to certain pictures, letters, numbers and symbols in the arena develops the children's riding skills, and they are encouraged to talk to the donkeys, to greet and thank them, to recognise them and to use their names.

The act of riding improves balance and helps to strengthen muscles and core stability. Through interaction both with people and donkeys, a child's vocabulary is stimulated and their self-esteem and confidence are boosted whatever their needs. The centres also offer rides in wheelchair-accessible donkey carts for children who are not able to ride on the donkeys.

EST Manchester also takes donkeys out to the local community to visit adults in nursing homes, residential homes and hospices. Donkeys are affectionate creatures and enjoy interacting with humans and are comfortable entering a lounge or

bedroom to meet residents in their chairs or beds. The donkeys enjoy being stroked, talked to and even sung to. Their visits evoke wonderful memories and often spark conversation among the residents, which continue long after the donkeys have left.

### **Debbie Coombes, Centre Manager, says:**

We've been involved with Aiming High since August 2010 and now put on special riding sessions during school holidays plus an Aiming High day on the first Sunday of the month.

Programmes such as Aiming High are brilliant for getting families out and about to enjoy sharing in a fun experience. The benefits of coming to a centre like ours as a whole family are immense. The social aspect of EST is very important to our attending parents. We encourage families to spend time in the

play area with their children and often see friendships forming. We want all members of the family to enjoy their day at EST and always encourage siblings to take part.

Donkeys are perfect to work with disabled children as they have a natural sympathy and really seem to understand the needs of their riders. Their quiet and kind temperaments help to build children's confidence in addition to the improvements in physical strength and balance the riding therapy sessions make. The children have a wide range of needs, from autism and ADHD, to physical disabilities and conditions such as Down's syndrome or cerebral palsy, or they may have emotional or behavioural difficulties. The sessions are tailored to meet each individual child's needs and make an enormous difference in their lives.

Here at EST, we allow children and their families to leave their disabilities at the door so they can focus on the riding, grooming and play activities along with making new friends.



“

**I'VE SEEN BOTH BOYS  
GAIN SUCH A LOT  
FROM GOING TO EST  
MANCHESTER.**

”

## **Jake's story in mum's own words**

As a mum to two boys with special needs, it can be very difficult to find family-friendly places that can cope with us. My six-year-old son Jake has autism and his older brother James has significant speech and language delay, which means I need to be careful about introducing them to new environments. Jake's autism meant that he struggled with going to new places and James's problems with speech meant that he found it difficult to connect with others. For both boys, these difficulties knocked their confidence and made it even more challenging for them to relax and enjoy new experiences.

A couple of years ago, Jake started going to EST Manchester with his school for donkey-riding therapy sessions. I'd not heard of EST before but thought it was a fantastic idea. As donkeys are such gentle animals, I knew they would be great for the children. At first, my main expectation was for Jake's visits to give him some confidence around animals, as he is generally very wary and I hoped he'd be able to settle in. To be honest, I was surprised how he took to it virtually straight away, as I know how wary he is of animals and new situations.

After Jake had been going to EST with school for a while, we heard about the centre's Saturday Club, which welcomes the whole family to join in with the activities at the centre. James was excited to be able to join in with something that his brother did. There are very few places I can take the two of them; most places simply don't understand how to deal with children with special needs. At EST, I was thrilled to find that everyone is treated the same, everyone is accepted and you don't feel that everyone's looking at you. We know we can come to EST, enjoy a relaxed atmosphere and not be judged.

We all look forward to Saturday Club; James always asks 'Is it donkeys today?' and even though Jake has little speech, he always shows excitement when we tell him it's a donkey day. James says his favourite activity is leading Jake's donkey around the arena and, judging by the smile on his face, Jake would say his favourite is riding the donkeys.

Jake and James adore the riding sessions and love playing together afterwards; that is really what I enjoy the most about going to EST: seeing the boys enjoying themselves together alongside other children.

I've seen both boys gain such a lot from going to EST Manchester. They've both grown enormously in confidence, which inevitably leads to growth in other areas. For me, the main benefit of our visits is the feeling of acceptance. My family is slightly different from what some view as normal, but here at EST it doesn't matter - we are all able to share in the fun as a family.



Jake and James on donkeys

# What are the benefits of short breaks?

## A fun experience

First and foremost, short breaks should be fun! We want Manchester's disabled children to be included in the kinds of activities all kids love. We have worked with local organisations to offer safe ways to try exhilarating experiences. For example, skateboarding is one of the most popular after-school activities in Manchester, so we funded Saturday morning sessions at The Pumpcage Skatepark specially designed for children with disabilities.

ProjektsMcr's trained coaches and support workers teach children and young people how to skateboard. As you can see from the photographs, anyone can take part, and children can practise on very small ramps and build confidence slowly, learning at their own pace. Skateboarding is not about being perfect – it's about having fun.

To find out more about ProjektsMcr visit their website [www.projektsmcr.com](http://www.projektsmcr.com)



## Inspire confidence

As part of a short break, trying a new activity with trained workers in a safe environment can really boost a young person's confidence. Just as importantly, parents can find that their perceived barriers about what their child can accomplish are challenged.

In Issue 4, Sam's mum told us how her son's confidence grew following canoeing with the Water Adventure Centre (WAC):



"I kept thinking 'It's going to go wrong, it's going to be a disaster'. I was ashamed by the time I got home because during that session Sam achieved things and tried things I would have sworn he'd never be able to do. What a boost it was to his self-esteem."

Of course, some short breaks are more challenging than others. Registered charity Challenge 4 Change aim to help people overcome their barriers in order to progress. Their centre in Trafford Park features an aerial runway over 35 feet over the ground, a high ropes training course and a low-level obstacle course. Challenge 4 Change were awarded a grant from Aiming High for Disabled Children to run sessions for disabled groups over the February half-term break. One group leader told us:

"The aim of our club is to give young people challenging experiences, and they certainly got that. Our young people had a fantastic experience. If I had not seen it with my own eyes, I would not have believed it. The staff were brilliant with us and were so nice. We will definitely go back again."

You can get more information about Challenge 4 Change from their website [www.challenge4change.org](http://www.challenge4change.org) or call 0300 123 0401.

## New skills

Short breaks are not about school, but they can provide an opportunity to pick up new life skills.

For example, Venture Arts recently ran ‘art soup’ workshops, which combined art with healthy eating. Children turned food into art and exhibited their work at the Nexus Art Café and shared a free healthy lunch.



Sometimes, disabled children and young people have a particular passion that short breaks can help them develop. In Issue 3 we heard all about Justin, a 13-year-old boy with autism and a passion for drawing. His mum signed him up for a short break with Venture Arts and one of their teachers spotted his potential and asked if he would like to do an animation course. The course was funded by Aiming High and Justin produced an animated short called ‘Stack is in Jail’ (available on youtube.com). As his mum said:

“It was amazing to see Justin so proud and to see how much he enjoyed everyone’s positive reactions to the clip. He was literally jumping for joy.

“I sometimes worry that if I hadn’t taken Justin to the art class, this part of his life wouldn’t exist. He wouldn’t have this skill, this sense of achievement, this sense of pride. **I think Aiming High has given him the keys to unlocking something that will be a big part of his future life.**”

## Breathing space

Short breaks can give a parent carer more time to spend with the rest of the family. Like Lisa, who uses the Time specialist play sessions in her own home. She wrote to Time to tell them how the service has helped her and her family.

“I would just like to say a massive thank you. The two people you have sent for Rio’s care are fantastic. Rio took to them immediately, which is a hard thing for him to do.

“Since Rio came out of school, family life has been so hard and time has been non-existent, but now we all have time for each other. Rio’s ASD is hard, as when he triggers he is very high functioning, but just that little time away means Rio can play at ease with people who relate to him.

“I could not believe this service existed; it is fantastic. I had to give up my career to take care of Rio, so now that we all have time for each other it’s great and has brought us all closer. We are taking my daughter out for lunch on Sunday, and we have not been able to do such a simple thing because Rio does not like restaurants.

“Both workers are polite and friendly, and we were at ease with them straight away. To be given these breaks is fantastic and you have probably pulled a family from the brink of not really knowing what else to do or where it was going. You’ve given a teenager her mum and dad back, and a little boy patient parents, as those hours pull us together again after bad days. To do basic things like shopping for food as a couple and relaxing to enjoy lunch, or taking our daughter for a haircut is just fantastic. You have rebuilt a family.”

“  
**YOU’VE GIVEN A  
TEENAGER HER MUM  
AND DAD BACK, AND A  
LITTLE BOY PATIENT  
PARENTS... YOU HAVE  
REBUILT A FAMILY.**  
”

# Short-break eligibility

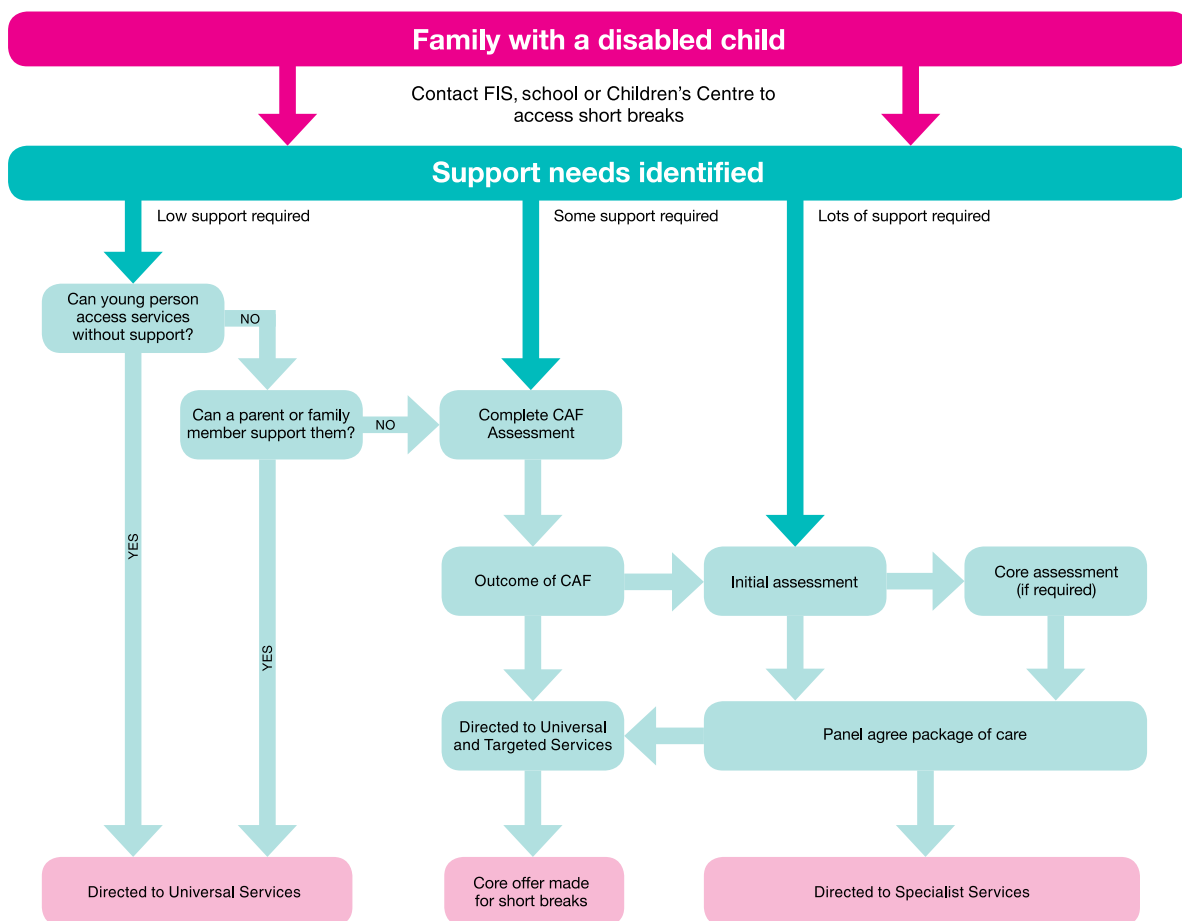
The Government's guidance regarding Aiming High recognises that some parents of a disabled child, in particular parents of those with a severe disability, will require short breaks on a regular basis in order to continue their caring role.

We are working to make the assessment process more robust by using clear eligibility criteria to ensure that short-break allocations are fair and transparent.

Manchester's eligibility criteria have now been drafted following consultation with parents and carers to ensure that they are clear and easy to understand. The eligibility criteria are currently being piloted by social workers and key workers to ensure that they meet the needs of families and to make sure that workers can fully understand how to use them.

Below is a flow diagram showing you how the eligibility criteria will work and how you'll be able to access short breaks from September 2011. While we are finalising the criteria you can continue to access short breaks by calling the Family Information Service on **0800 083 7921**.

Local authorities must also prepare a short breaks service statement by 1 October 2011 so that families know what services are available, the eligibility criteria for these services, and how the range of services is designed to meet the needs of families with disabled children in their area. We will be preparing the draft statement over the next few months and consulting with parents, carers and children and young people.



# Parent participation

Although the Aiming High for Disabled Children project ended on 31 March the forum will continue to develop. It will provide all parents and carers of children with disabilities in Manchester an opportunity to have their say on how services are delivered and to be involved in decision-making. Manchester Carers Forum and Manchester Parent Partnership will work together to support this

development and ensure that parents' views are heard. If you have not already registered to be part of the forum, contact Kerrie at Manchester Carers Forum to receive latest updates and information and have the opportunity to attend meetings and take part in consultations. You can call her on **0161 819 2226** or email [kerrie@manchestercarersforum.org.uk](mailto:kerrie@manchestercarersforum.org.uk)

# Update from Manchester Parent Carers forum



**Manchester Parent Carers forum has a new name, a new Facebook page and a new website on the way.**

The forum members have voted to be known as **Manchester Parent Carer Network**.

Facebook members can now access our information page by searching for 'Manchester Parent Carer Network' and clicking the 'like' icon. You will then see updates from the forum on your own news timeline. It's also a really useful way for the forum to keep in touch with you, and that's going to be really important now that the Aiming High for Disabled Children project has been completed.

The website was launched in April and is going to be a really exciting addition for the group. We have a group that meets on Wednesday mornings and gathers information needed for the construction of the website. We are also starting a writing group where parents will be able to write their stories about their 'journey' of being a parent of a disabled child.

Manchester Parent Carer Network held its first conference on 31 March 2011. Sue Harris from Partners in Policymaking, who is a parent carer herself, was a guest speaker along with William Case, who is a fantastic self-advocate.

Gary Neild also provided an insight into personalisation, which was useful to many parent carers.

Throughout both the daytime and evening sessions there were opportunities to take part in workshops around independent living personalisation, self-directed support, transition and person-centred thinking.

“  
**I FOUND THE EVENT REALLY OPENED MY EYES TO WHAT I SHOULD BE EXPECTING FOR MY SON.**  
”

“  
**IT HELPED ME THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX. I WANT MORE FOR MY CHILDREN BECAUSE THEY DESERVE BETTER.**  
”

“  
**MORE PARENTS SHOULD HAVE COME - IT WAS BRILLIANT.**  
”

Carers found the event thoroughly enjoyable and informative, as can be seen here from some of the comments fed back to us.

## Future meetings

Dates for the next meetings in May are below.

Manchester Parent Carer Network will be arranging a dedicated focus group regarding the Green Paper – 'Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability' in order to collect views and submit our responses to the Government. The Green Paper is all about Special Educational Needs and will affect all children who have a disability, so it is important parent carers have a chance to express their opinions as it will impact on their child's life directly.

Meetings are friendly and welcoming. Lunch is provided, and there is a chance to socialise, relax and meet new people.

- **South Manchester meeting**  
Monday 16 May, 10.30am–1pm  
Wythenshawe Forum,  
Wythenshawe, Manchester M22 5RX
- **North Manchester meeting**  
Wednesday 18 May, 10.30am–1pm  
North City Library, Rochdale Road,  
Manchester M9 4AF
- **Central Manchester meeting**  
Friday 20 May, 10.30am–1pm  
Manchester Carers Forum,  
London Scottish House,  
24 Mount Street, Manchester M2 3NN



## Contact us

**Kerrie Wilson**  
Manchester's Parent Participation Officer  
Tel: 0161 819 2226  
Email: [kerrie@manchestercarersforum.org.uk](mailto:kerrie@manchestercarersforum.org.uk)  
Manchester Carers Forum website:  
[www.manchestercarersforum.org.uk](http://www.manchestercarersforum.org.uk)  
Visit the forum blog: <http://manchesterparentcarers.blogspot.com>  
Join the Facebook group:  
**Manchester Parent Carer Network**

# **Thank you for supporting Aiming High for Disabled Children in Manchester**

The project team would like to thank Manchester's parent carers and disabled children – you have helped to shape the future direction of services in Manchester and we hope you'll keep telling us your views so we can keep improving services.

## **Contact us**

### **Short breaks**

Contact the Family Information Service

Tel: 0800 083 7921

Email: [fisinfo@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:fisinfo@manchester.gov.uk)

Website: <http://manchester.fsd.org.uk/>

### **Parent Carer Network**

For support and information contact Kerrie Wilson

Tel: 0161 819 2226

Email: [kerrie@manchestercarersforum.org.uk](mailto:kerrie@manchestercarersforum.org.uk)

Facebook: Search 'Manchester Parent Carer Network'