

Information for parent carer forums

Short breaks for disabled children and their families – England

The role of co-production in short breaks services

What do we mean by the term co-production?

Having parent carers at the heart of strategic decision-making helps to bring parents and services together to form a shared vision, and work together to bring about change.

Co-production happens when service providers recognise the benefits of working transparently, in true partnership with other practitioners and service users and they adopt this process from the start, involving all the key people equally when planning, developing, commissioning, procuring, implementing or reviewing a service.

When all the right people are around the table from the start, they are able to plan, make recommendations, take action(s) and develop materials, working together through to the end. When this works best, co-production shifts from an exercise in best practice to a process that local authorities can see working and truly believe in.

Following the recent special educational needs and disability reforms and the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014, parent carer forums all over England have been involved in co-producing local authority local offers, Education, Health and Care plans and service specifications. It is imperative that parent carer forums remain active partners in reviewing how the new system is working, and providing constructive challenges as active partners to local authorities and health services.

How does this relate to short breaks?

Local authorities have a legal duty to provide short breaks for children and young people aged 0–18. These must meet certain criteria, which help families to lead ordinary lives, minimise the effect of their child's disability and provide a break from caring. It is vital that they and Clinical Commissioning Groups work in co-production with parent carer forums and other partners in order to do a number of things.

Understand the needs of parent carers, children and young people in relation to short breaks

Local authorities must design short breaks that ensure that the range of services provided is sufficient to meet those needs, encompassing:

- day-time and/or overnight care in the homes of disabled children, or elsewhere
- educational or leisure activities for disabled children outside their homes
- services available to assist carers in the evenings, at weekends and during school holidays.

Measure the impact and effectiveness of short breaks

Short breaks services must assist parent carers to continue to care, or to do so more effectively, and enable parent carers to:

- undertake education, training or regular leisure activities
- meet the needs of other children in the family more effectively
- carry out day to day tasks which they must perform in order to run their household.

Produce a short breaks statement and local offer

Local authorities must work with their parent carer forum to develop their short breaks statement and local offer.

Need advice?

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 **0808 808 3555**

helpline@contact.org.uk

Open Monday to Friday, 9.30am–5pm

This is to ensure that they are based on the needs of families, are accessible, up to date, and include an outline of:

- the range of services provided
- any criteria by which eligibility for those services will be assessed
- how the range of services is designed to meet the needs of carers in their area.

Why use co-production when planning short breaks provision?

Forums might want to consult with their wider parent carer group to provide evidence to the local authority if short breaks provision in their area is not working or requires improvement. They may then approach the local authority to work in co-production to redesign the service.

The local authority might be planning such a re-design or a service review to overhaul their provision or make necessary budget cuts. If they were to practice co-production, they would:

- seek the opinion of the parent carer forum, as well as other stakeholders (practitioners, service managers, commissioners) on the process, right from the start
- work with the parent carer forum and other partners to design, plan and implement a consultation of young people, parents and other stakeholders' views
- meet with the forum and other stakeholders to discuss the key issues raised during consultation
- work together to plan and agree a constructive way forward, whether the current services need to be changed or new services need to be commissioned
- spell out the process for recommissioning services and reviewing their effectiveness, as well as
- ensuring that feedback is given on the outcomes of participation.

Some parent carer forums have challenged cuts to short breaks and have worked successfully in partnership with local authorities to redesign services to ensure that they are targeted in the right ways to meet need whilst also saving money, making the best use of the resources that are available. This is more likely to happen where local services have had a good experience of working with the parent carer forum, perhaps through previous consultation and participation work.

Making co-production work

For co-production to be successful it needs senior managers and strategic leads to understand how participation and partnership working works, and be committed to it. There also needs to be real commitment from all other stakeholders to making it work.

Working together with parent carers from the outset and giving them an equal voice may be challenging for services as they are held to account, made to look at issues from different perspectives and asked to work in different ways.

Working in co-production helps parent carers to better understand the constraints and limitations placed on services, particularly around the budgetary and legislative requirements for short breaks.

By working in co-production, partners are often able to find ways around problems or sticking points and to find realistic and workable solutions. It can be viewed as the difficult option as it can take time to get right. It may involve some initial time and effort, yet it saves time wasted in investing in the wrong short breaks provision. It ensures a better take up of the services that are developed, as they meet the needs of families better.

Resources to assist parent carer forums when working in co-production with statutory authorities in the development of short breaks services have been published by the Short Breaks Partnership, and are available on our website page on improving short breaks services at:

 www.contact.org.uk/pcp/shortbreaks

Further resources

To achieve your goals around the co-production of short breaks you may find the following resources helpful:

Contact webinars for parent carer forums

To help you engage more parents more effectively and help build your evidence base take a look at our parent participation resources page:

 www.contact.org.uk/resources

Parent Carer Forum Handbook

Provides a overview of resources to help your forum grow and thrive. You can order a hard copy version free or download it from the website at:

 www.contact.org.uk/setting-up-and-running-a-forum

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