



Improving wheelchair and transport services

Family Voice Southend: <http://www.familyvoice-southend.org.uk/index.htm>

When the parents forum, Family Voice Southend, contacted their Primary care Trust (PCT) to tell them about problems families were experiencing with the wheelchair service, the PCT asked to come and to meet parents to hear first hand for themselves. There was a limited choice of wheelchairs, which did not always meet the child or carers needs. There were such lengthy waiting times the child had often outgrown the new wheelchair before it arrived. Parents were getting little information regarding their options and how long they would have to wait for assessments and equipment.

Family Voice worked with parents and the PCT to develop a profile describing the wheelchair service they would like to see which the PCT used when inviting tenders to run the wheelchair service.

The service has now been outsourced to a specialist wheelchair provider and most families are extremely satisfied with the new service. Parents using the service are encouraged to contact Family Voice Southend if they have problems with the service. Family Voice Southend have a named contact in the PCT and on the few occasions parents have had problems a simple telephone call has been all that was needed to resolve the problem. This is much simpler and quicker and cheaper for the PCT than going through official complaints procedures, something parents are often very reluctant to do. It also provides a mechanism for the PCT to get regular feedback about how well the outsourced wheelchair service is being delivered.

The forum have since adopted a similar model working with the local authority around their school transport service. Parents had concerns about the newly outsourced service and the forum invited the commissioners from the LA to come and hear first hand from the parents. The parents concerns were related to access and safety. They did not think the escorts were adequately trained, the children had difficult getting on and off the converted buses and there were some problems with seat belts.

When parents tried raising this with the contractor they were not helpful or willing to listen.

The local authority was unaware these problems were occurring and all of these teething problems have now been resolved. The parent's forum are encouraged to feedback to the LA if any further problems occur. If there was a problem that could not be resolved by a phone call then another meeting would be arranged at the Forum.