

Hubs resources – Reaching out to families with disabled children

What's the issue?

Families with disabled children might not use your hub /childcare setting because:

- they may not think the service is aimed at them and therefore don't think their needs will be understood or met
- some parents may not trust mainstream services because of bad experiences in the past
- parents may not want to speak to someone who is not familiar with their child's disability particularly if the condition is rare.
- both parent and child are nervous about going into a new situation, where they don't know anyone, and they don't know about the disability (e.g. speech & language difficulties which impacts on being able to express yourself, following instructions, interacting with peers).

For many families simply getting out of the house is a major challenge, often because parents are too busy or tired from their caring responsibilities, some need transport to access even very local facilities. Others maybe worried about the attitude of other parents and children using childcare particularly if the child has challenging or different behaviour.

Why you might struggle to attract families with disabled children usually because they:

- do not have the links with the specialist organisations and services that families use
- aren't in contact with professionals that families are in contact with
- don't offer the type of services/activities families can access
- are unsure where local families live or understand the impact of disability and caring

Ideas for attracting families to your hub

Organise information days – try inviting different services from across your local area, for example, the Family Information Service, Speech and Language therapists and the At Home Care Service. This is a great way for parents to engage with a variety of services (and also for professionals to get to know one another). Make it fun by offering face painting and goody bags for the children. Provide lunch and pamper sessions so parents can relax and socialise too.

Themed workshops on topics that parents need help with e.g. sleeping, challenging behaviour. These could be advertised through local support groups or via your local authority disability register such as often send newsletters out to local families.

Offer advice/drop in session – for example, family support workers and volunteer parent representatives from Contact a Family are based at various children's centres across England. They offer practical and emotional support such as help with benefits. They help parents feel welcome and introduce families to other services offered at the centre.

Invite a parent support groups to use your centre to host their meetings and **involve** parents in planning the type of services you offer.

Linking up with child development centres, special schools, parent partnerships, and specialist agencies/professionals (e.g. therapists, wheelchair services, incontinence) etc.

This will help to raise your profile and spread your message about what you offer. Families tell us they feel more confident about using a children's centre if a professional they are familiar with introduces them to their local children's centre such as portage.

Your **outreach workers** will have a key role in identifying local families especially those ones not already access services. When trying to reach out to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) families with disabled children making links with community groups can be a good method.