

Short Breaks Network 

BetterBreaks

The online journal for the Short Breaks sector



“Reaching out ...
to improve our practice”

May 2012

...working for disabled children...

“Reaching out ... to improve our practice”

Contents

Contents

Introduction	1
Six tips for supporting siblings through using Short Breaks <i>Monica McCaffrey</i>	2
Partnership Youth Projects in Enfield 2011: ‘Joint Service for Disabled Children’ and ‘Young People and the Youth Support Service’ <i>Shaun Barratt</i>	4
Communication and Interaction between workers and Young People with Severe Learning Disabilities <i>Martin Goodwin</i>	7
Autism and Play Taking a child centred approach <i>Wendy Usher</i>	11
The Short Breaks Journey 2: Evaluating motivation and personal development for short break carers <i>Pippa Boss</i>	13
Impact – enabling short breaks for disabled children	16
Focus on health: Case Study Short Breaks in East Sussex	17
Short Breaks Network Update Policy Training and Consultancy Inclusive Carers Network and Share	18
Call for Contributions and preview	19

Introduction

‘Communication’ is a broad topic and has many interpretations and associations. In this Better Breaks we look at how we as short break professionals can best communicate – with each other, with parents, with disabled children and with other young people to reach out and improve practice in short breaks

Siblings of disabled children are not always considered in short breaks provision. In the opening article, Monica McCaffrey the Chief Executive of Sibs and the sister of a disabled adult outlines six ‘top tips’ for supporting siblings. It follows up the presentations and discussions at the Short Breaks Network autumn conference and highlights the need to communicate with siblings of disabled children as a central component in the planning of short breaks.

Enfield Youth services embarked on three inspiring projects based in youth centres and involving disabled and non disabled young people. It’s a great example of communication and joint working at its best. A successful consultation process with young people and both youth and disability services led to engaging leading voluntary sector organisations in leading the projects in Journalism, Music and Carnival activities. The enthusiasm of the young people and all those involved in the projects is really brought to life in Shaun Barratt’s account.

The next two articles look specifically at means of communication with disabled children and how those working with them can learn from research and methodology to improve their interactions.

Martin Goodwin is a trainer for Short Breaks Network. His article focuses on methods of communication that workers used to facilitate interaction

with young people with Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD) aged 13-25 years old. It draws the conclusion that consideration of accessible communication and responsive interaction approaches are essential foundations to successful inclusion of young people with severe learning disabilities, supported by strong arrangements for multi-collaborative working.

Play is an important means of communication between children and between children and adults. Wendy Usher, an inclusion consultant and co-founder of ‘The Play Doctors’, sets out to destroy the myth that children with disabilities and particularly autism cannot indulge in play. She references a recent report on children’s play and highlights practice in Bedfordshire and South Wales; and follows up with suggestions of publications and resources to enhance our understanding of the possibilities of play with children on the autistic spectrum in short break settings, especially by taking a child centred approach.

Short Breaks Network on
Twitter: @ShortBreaksNet

In the last Better Breaks Lee Cox and the Inclusive Carers Network examined the routes they took in becoming a short break carer and the support they most need in this role. In this next stage of the ‘Short Breaks Journey’ we look at how carers remain motivated over many years and how we recognise their development in their role. More specifically, how Short Breaks Network supports carers and how we have evaluated the difference made since the commencement of ‘Aiming High’ and the introduction of the Children’s Workforce Development Councils standards for short break carers. We also take a look at evaluating training from a project receiving training courses from Short Breaks Network - a partnership

between Lambeth Council and ‘Whippersnappers’

Since October 2011, Impact, the delivery partner for Short Breaks, have been working with all 152 local authorities to support a sector led approach. In their regular feature for Better Breaks Impact report on their work with local authorities and the case studies of sector led practice they are collecting. To continue our features on short breaks from the health sector perspective we focus on a case study from East Sussex – a partnership between clinical services run by a health trust and the county council to deliver a range of short break opportunities to children with complex health care needs.

Although a small organisation, Short Breaks Network offer the short breaks workforce a diverse range of services and we let readers know about our current provision in the ‘Update’ section.

We conclude with a look ahead to the next issue of Better Breaks and an invitation to all readers to contribute. This is your journal and we want to maintain the depth and diversity of articles that Better Breaks is becoming known for. If you are unfamiliar with writing for journals we can offer editorial support, so don’t let that put you off. A few lines in response to current articles would be equally encouraged – or why not respond on Twitter?

We look forward to hearing from you!

Pippa Boss
Editorial Team



Six tips for supporting siblings through using Short Breaks

Monica McCaffrey, Chief Executive, Sibs

This article follows up the presentations and discussions at the Short Breaks Network conference last autumn. It highlights the need to include siblings in the planning and delivery of short breaks, with examples of best practice in Cornwall

1. Recognise that siblings need breaks too

Siblings of disabled children are first and foremost children; they want to be able to live ordinary lives and have positive relationships with their disabled brothers and sisters and with their parents. However, some of the challenges they face on a daily basis make this difficult. For example, they often experience restrictions on family and social activities and on their own behaviour at home, unfairness about their brother or sister getting more attention and resources than them, and having to do caring tasks or cope with environmental issues such as a persistent noise. Whilst it is recognised that their parents and disabled brothers and sisters need a break, it is rarely acknowledged that siblings need a break too.

'My sister's got an extra chromosome in her body which makes her life hell. We can't go on holiday very much because she can't go abroad because the journeys are too long and we can't have a pet because she will rip its tail. We can't go out for day trips because she just gets angry. I'm very limited having friends round because she just makes it very hard on Mum.' Sibling aged 13

2. Identify siblings' needs through Short Breaks assessments

There is a huge opportunity here for siblings' needs for breaks to be identified. Siblings' needs should be listed in the short breaks criteria, and siblings should be included in the assessment process. In your brochures and leaflets about the short breaks services you offer, refer specifically to siblings, rather than using the generic term family members. Talk to siblings and their parents about the benefits to the whole family of the sibling having a break. Signpost siblings and parents to any additional sources of sibling support.

'...time and breaks is probably the main thing at the moment that we need. That would be the best thing that we could have at the moment, just a break. I know it sounds awful wanting time away from your little brother but it is just something we have to do if we want to lead a life, kind of thing. Without, well you can't lead a life without stress, but without so much stress.' Sibling aged 15

3. Highlight the benefits to commissioners of breaks for siblings

Supporting siblings of disabled children is not a conflict of interest for Short Breaks providers. Providing a break for one member of the family often has a positive knock-on effect on the rest of the family. When siblings have a break the whole family benefits including the disabled child. Short breaks for siblings improve their wellbeing and self esteem. Sheffield sibling support group introduced a 'Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire' for a teenage group accessing short breaks which indicated improvement in each sibling's Mental Health Index. Barnardo's sibling support service in Hull recorded a 90% increase in siblings self-esteem and confidence. This type of early intervention is cheaper than delivering costly services such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) when siblings develop mental health problems. The hidden care that many siblings provide also enables parents to cope, when without this a disabled child may have to go into care.

'It really benefits me because it gives me time to get away and have a laugh with my mates. My sister's got PKU (Phenylketonuria) and it means she is not allowed any protein and it is really hard because we have all of that stuff in our house and she tries to have nearly all of it. I like coming here because I make new friends and I can have my own food like with all my friends.' Sibling aged 10

'We know that the support we have provided has prevented at least four young people from being excluded from school and many others have raised self esteem from the support they have received and given to others.'

Sandy Lawrence, Sibling Services, Cornwall

4. Be creative about what a short break is for a sibling

A short break for a sibling may involve being with other siblings, for example, attending a discussion based sibling group; taking part in an outdoor activity session with other siblings; participating in a one day workshop about autism. It could be having time with a parent when their disabled brother or sister has a short break. Or, it could be having support as a whole family to go swimming or to the park together.

Continued...

Six tips for supporting siblings through using Short Breaks *(continued)*

'The sibling service works very closely with our short breaks development manager and we produce a booklet prior to every school holiday which details activities for disabled children, activities just for siblings and short break activities which the whole family can attend. Over the Easter holidays 300 disabled children and siblings went to the 'FlowRider', a surfing experience, and the short breaks service has also developed a regular activity called 'Muddy Shorts' where disabled children and their siblings enjoy the wild outdoors, den building, fire pits and swings. Families continually tell us about the benefit of having both separate activities for siblings alongside the opportunity for the whole family to enjoy time together with the right support.' Sandy Lawrence, Sibling Services, Cornwall

5. Embed sibling support within Short Breaks provision

It is all too common for sibling breaks to be an add-on towards the end of the financial year when there is budget underspend. This short term approach to sibling breaks often means that the breaks are poorly planned and that fewer siblings access them due to the tight timescales. Sibling breaks need to be an integral part of the offer to families. They should be planned by providers with knowledge of best practice in sibling support and in consultation with local parents and siblings.

'The Aiming High for Disabled Children programme enabled short breaks and childcare to work together to provide a seamless service for disabled children and their families. This has continued in Cornwall under the umbrella of AIMING HIGHER and services for siblings are an integral part of our plans.' Sandy Lawrence, Sibling Services, Cornwall

6. Promote staff training on supporting siblings

Whether you are running a family break, a sibling group, or meeting with siblings regularly during assessments, there are many small interventions with siblings and their parents that can increase the value of the interaction. For example, knowing how to respond when a sibling says they are worried that their brother or sister will die, or being able to show a parent how to explain autism to a sibling. We recommend that staff and volunteers receive training on how to support siblings in one to one and group settings.

'Sibs helps professionals to work to a professional standard, based on what is successful, and importantly, relatively inexpensive.' Jan Stiff, Swings and Smiles



Sibs is the UK charity for siblings of disabled people. We provide direct information and support to siblings through our website and information line. Parents can access free phone support sessions on parenting siblings. We provide consultancy and training for service providers on supporting siblings, including how to run sibling groups. Short Breaks providers can buy in our workshops for siblings. For more information contact info@sibs.org.uk or call 01535 645453 or visit www.sibs.org.uk

Sibs thanks Sandy Lawrence, Accessible Childcare Project Manager, Cornwall County Council, for information about their Sibling Services. It started as a government funded accessible childcare pilot and is now funded from a range of sources including the Early Intervention Grant and the Parent Carer Grant which is managed by the Short Breaks manager.

Partnership Youth Projects in Enfield 2011:

‘Joint Service for Disabled Children’ and ‘Young People and the Youth Support Service’

Shaun Barratt, Enfield Youth Support Service.

The Enfield Youth Support Service has a long history of offering opportunities and supporting disabled young people to access their services. However, there was clearly a need to develop new strategies to encourage those disabled young people who had yet to attend any youth activities. To this end a series of consultations were carried out with Enfield’s disabled young people. We needed a clearer understanding of the young peoples’ perception of the youth services. We also focused on how the disability services and the youth services could collaborate in order to make accessing youth services more attractive.

The consultation was lead by the Young Peoples Consultation Group (YPCG), a group of young people from both specialist and non specialist schools, colleges and area youth forums. This was done through questionnaires, supported group work and face to face consultation.

They discovered that the young peoples’ concerns largely centred on perceptions of risk when accessing youth services. The young people felt that they were vulnerable to crime, gangs and violence and cited these as the major reason for their reticence for not attending more mainstream youth activities.

In response to this the YPCG held their own “Question time” event. They requested an opportunity to ask questions of decision makers within the borough who influenced the delivery of youth services and those responsible for keeping them safe whilst on the streets of Enfield.

We were pleased to welcome the Head of the Joint Service for Disabled Children, the Youth Participation Lead, the Deputy Head of the Youth Service and a Police Inspector to the event. The YPCG had clearly spent a lot of time and effort ensuring that their questions represented the views of all disabled young people in the borough. The panel were very impressed with the group :

‘The importance of having the opportunity to hear first hand from young people about their hopes, concerns, aspirations and needs is crucial when it comes to understanding and delivering good services. The Question Time format was excellent giving everyone a chance to be heard whilst remaining informal enough to be fun.’
Youth Support Service

‘.....force to be reckoned with - which is exactly what we want - the voice of young people loud and clear!’ Head of Joint Service for Disabled Children

The YPCG wrote about the event as follows:

‘We all really enjoyed having the opportunity to ask questions to senior staff about their plans for our services in the future and how to keep safe in Enfield and because senior staff came we felt we were really being listened to.

The boot was firmly on the other foot as we got to “grill” the police! Mick came across as very caring and clearly wanted to make us feel safer on the streets. We told him about our worries about knife crime, gangs and bullying and he listened and advised us on how we can keep safe and out of trouble. He told us about the safer neighbourhood and transport officers and how it is their job to help us feel safe on the streets of Enfield. We all feel he coped well “under interrogation” and he promised to come and see us again and talk to us in greater detail about these issues.

Janet answered questions about the future of services in Enfield. She was very passionate! She was able to re-assure us that our play schemes would remain open! She stated that we are not as rich as we were before so we must spend any money in the future very wisely and it is up to us to tell her exactly what we want. Despite difficult times ahead she will support the group to keep what is most important to us like the befriending groups. We will certainly be keeping an eye on future developments!

We asked about things that worried us most when we think about coming to youth service activities. These are gangs, knife crime and safety. David talked very well about gangs and how we can keep away from joining them. The youth staff answered all our questions well and treated us with a lot of respect.’

Continued...

“We wanted to have exciting projects held in youth clubs that we could enjoy which may encourage us to attend them in the future”

Partnership Youth Projects in Enfield 2011:

‘Joint Service for Disabled Children’ and ‘Young People and the Youth Support Service’ (continued)

In response to these observations by the young people a number of initiatives were developed between the Joint Service and the Youth Support Service. The young people felt that having focussed projects with a theme that had wide appeal would be the best way for them to access youth services. Three projects were established linked to journalism, music and carnival.

Journalism

The journalism project was attended by both disabled and non disabled young people at a local youth centre and run by an organisation called Headliners – a charity which inspires and encourages the personal development of young people through journalism. Young people are trained to research and produce stories on issues important to them for publication and broadcast in all media outlets. They aim to give young disabled people a genuine voice by using accessible multi-media to express themselves on issues that concern them.

The project took place over six weeks and resulted in a film they titled ‘Have a Go Hero’. The aim was to highlight how those with disabilities are able to participate in statutory youth provisions. The non disabled young people attended disability awareness training and acted as ‘buddies’ to nine disabled young people working with them to produce the film together.

After two sessions building relationships with the youth centre the disabled young people soon forgot about their support workers and engaged in all the activities. They learnt how to use video equipment and considered different screen shoots and scenarios to film

The group as a whole gained more confidence as the film progressed and the non disabled group clearly had a

greater understanding of the needs of the disabled young people. Significantly the disabled young people engaged with peers they had never met before with no difficulties and showed significant increases in their confidence and self-esteem. The support workers for the young disabled people expressed how pleased they were that they had thrived outside their comfort zones.

“I love being a journalist and asking questions about what is important to me – next I want to interview Kate and William!”

As well as the achievement in producing the film, all eighteen young people involved in the project have picked up awards and accreditation and they were recently awarded certificates of achievement at a celebration event. Their film was shown on the evening and presented by counsellors and senior management. We were informed on the night by Headliners that the film has been submitted for a London Inspiration Film Award.

‘I enjoyed working with the different young people from the centre.’

‘Staff with different hairstyles and smiles! Thought that was great!!’

Music

A further seven young disabled people attended our second project with the young people at a youth club making music. The Red Rooms group who ran the project utilise creative methods and mediums to explore the world of music and make it accessible and enjoyable to all.

Seun, (now regularly seen serenading staff with guitar in hand), said he loved the music and singing and hitting the drums and staff report he talks daily about how much he enjoys going!

‘The project taught me so much about different ways to communicate with people of different abilities.’

‘I learnt that although we expressed it in different ways, we all had one thing in common, we all loved music!’

‘From that experience I would love to go and volunteer in the Inclusion Project.’
Young people from the youth club

‘Youth Support Service staff reported on numerous occasions that they had had a positive experience of working with disabled young people and at the same time they had gained a greater understanding of their diverse needs. 95% attendance illustrates that the young people enjoyed the projects and would look forward to future projects taking place. The young disabled people involved expressed that they hadn’t previously attended any youth centres and wouldn’t have done so without the support of a specific project and stated that projects were the way forward if they were going to continue to attend youth centres. There were no negative experiences expressed
Continued..

Partnership Youth Projects in Enfield 2011:

‘Joint Service for Disabled Children’ and ‘Young People and the Youth Support Service’ (continued)

by the young disabled people in respect of safety and support. Young people from the youth centres provided very positive feedback from working together. A great success!

Inclusion support worker

Carnival

For our third project the young people designed and entered a float at the Edmonton Cultural Festival & Carnival.

The arts and events development manager stated:

‘The project will be bold, colourful and vibrant. Each child will be a colour of the rainbow with their costume being an array of tones. This allows for lots of different materials to be used along with reflective materials’.

The young people commented:

‘Staff were very friendly and helpful; if we couldn’t find anything they would help us to find it’.

‘Nice to meet new people’.

The three projects were well received by the service providers:

‘This innovative approach to partnership working, joint planning and delivery has proved to be effective and forward thinking’

Deputy Head of the Youth Support Service

‘Enfield’s Youth Service has a passion and commitment for young disabled people to access all of our Youth services. In working in partnership with the joint service for disabled children we can create wonderful opportunities to bring young people of all backgrounds together whose only common purpose is to belong and have fun’

Youth Participation Lead Worker for Enfield

The success of the youth service adoption of a hands on pro-active approach to encourage and support the young people is illustrated by the fact that 16 young disabled people who previously accessed specialist provision are now accessing youth support service inclusion projects. A further 10 disabled young people accessed the projects in January 2012. A number of disabled young people from the inclusion project are now accessing mainstream youth provision unsupported. The young people’s consultation group demanded that the collaboration with the youth service didn’t end there, so our young disabled people accessed the activities provided by the youth service during the summer under The Futureversity program. 25 young people attended courses as diverse as DJing, jewellery making, multi sports, hair and make up, street art, trips out and much more.

‘Here In Enfield we are absolutely clear that disabled children and young people are ‘everybody’s business’! We consider ourselves very fortunate to be working with such inspirational young people, both disabled and non-disabled. It is a journey of discovery as all of us - young people, parents and professionals - make our vision a reality’.

-Head of the Joint Service for Disabled Children

Future collaborations between the two services are now underway with a dance project, music and journalism inclusive projects planned. Sharing skills sets will play a major role in the future, as a result shared training programmes between the two services have begun and are being implemented throughout 2012.

The real success is that young disabled people have gained new experiences which they hadn’t previously had the opportunity to access. They have universally given enthusiastic endorsement of the project ideas. The young people from the centres involved have without exception given positive feedback about their experiences. Most significantly young disabled people and their parents/carers are more confident about accessing generic youth centres/projects and importantly we are embedding the concept that ‘disabled young people are everybody’s business’!

Communication and Interaction between workers and Young People with Severe Learning Disabilities

**Martin Goodwin, Freelance
Trainer**

This article focuses on methods of communication that workers used to facilitate interaction with young people with Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD) aged 13-25 years old. It presents vignettes from observation to illustrate approaches and challenges to facilitating communication. Empirical data collected showed that the use of intensive interaction and provocations facilitated communication despite a lack of formalised communication methods. I conclude that consideration of communication and interaction approaches are essential foundations to successful inclusion of young people with severe learning disabilities.

Introduction

Many young people with SLD have significant difficulties in communicating verbally and expressing thoughts. They may additionally have difficulty to understand speech or may not use words at all, and a difficulty with comprehending other people due to associated memory, concentration and attention difficulties. Communication is often seen as resulting from the nature of the person's impairment, however Money and Thurman's¹ belief that communication depends on a means to communicate, a mode to communicate with and a reason to communicate firmly locates communication as a partnership between the child that fosters access, understanding and opportunities for interaction.



Total communication methods, which enable communication through symbols, sign language, objects of reference and other communication methods, are helpful and promote the young person's participation, understanding and independence. Hansen² (pg 5) describes Total Communication as:

'an approach to create successful and equal communication between human beings with different language perception and/or production'.

Continued...

**“I really
wanted to learn
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as it's important
to be alert
to their
communication”**

Communication and Interaction between workers and Young People with Severe Learning Disabilities *(continued)*

Importantly, total communication offers one or more ways of communicating and these can use high-tech (computer-assisted technology) or low-tech methods, which need to be tailored to the person's symbolic development, for example the use of an object, picture or symbol.

Professionals may find communicating with young people with SLD initially daunting and their apprehension may hinder the initiation of conversations and interaction. Studies by Ware³ illustrate that people with SLD often have fewer opportunities to communicate and interact with others, which in turn leads to loss of skills and denial of life-enriching opportunities. SLD can affect expression and social interaction.

Difficulties with expression can be due to cognitive difficulties with understanding social behaviours, causing the person to withdraw and appear aloof. This is in line with a diagnosis of autism, where there is a triad of impairments affecting social interaction, thought, imagination and behaviour, and language and communication⁴

Supporting communication and interaction

Parents informed us that the three young people used a variety of augmentative and alternative communication that include Picture Communication Systems, Makaton, Objects of Reference and Intensive Interaction yet workers' communication largely used verbal methods of communication, apart from one member of staff who used Makaton.

Visual-based communication methods support young people with SLD to respond and request, which research shows⁵ is important to facilitate initiation of communication and to avoid communication being led and dominated by communication part-

ners. Visual systems increase young people's control over interactions that normally render them passive⁶ Staff commented on difficulty in using a total communication approach and felt that training was needed in this area to improve their skills.

'I really want to learn Makaton as it is important to be alert to their communication'.

I observed that workers attempted to meet the communication needs of young people through speech that was adapted by using short words, simple vocabulary and grammar referred to as 'motherese'⁷ Workers used basic conversation in the context of activity so communication was concrete rather than abstract.⁸ They appropriately adjusted conversation, using one to three information carrying words⁹ narrative commenting, pause, and simple questioning¹⁰

The worker states 'you look happy – you're going roller skating – ye.....ah!'. 'C' puts his fingers in his mouth and made a 'eee' sound; the worker copies. A moment of intentional eye contact is held.

The vignette illustrates that a worker responded to non-verbal communication by treating the communication as intentional and responded though using contingent vocalisations to 'attract and sustain attention'¹⁰ by mirroring and joining vocalisations¹¹

'A' was tapping his hands with his fingers in a rhythm. The staff member copied the rhythm in burst-pause modality in between the times when 'A' stopped and also whilst he was tapping the rhythm. 'A' appeared to enjoy this.

Workers were flexible and responsive to individuals needs, allowing themselves to be led by the person and accepted short periods of engagement when the person was amenable.

Continued...



Communication and Interaction between workers and Young People with Severe Learning Disabilities *(continued)*

Workers additionally attempted to enable young people to experience interaction with each other and to encourage friendships with peers through promoting shared activity.

'A' was walking around outside and walked within the zone that the worker and 'G' were playing. The worker asks 'A' "Do you want to play too?" 'A' replied "yes" (using Makaton). Worker prompts turn-taking until a routine is established of throwing between worker, 'G' and 'A'

However, peer interaction was less frequent as young people often engaged in activities with workers. Young people had difficulty sustaining interaction and participation unless actively supported by workers.

Interactions were often short burst style, requiring workers to plan for a range of opportunities to engage young people and readiness to embrace interaction when the person is ready. Short burst interactions enable young people to have focused attention and give the worker opportunity to assess tolerance to activity, meaning that this style of delivery is person-centred as passivity is reduced through enabling the young person to have increased control. Frequently observed were gaps between interactions, referred to as 'pausing'¹² viewed positively as a means to enabling interaction at a pace and level of tolerance that suits young people with SLD and autism⁴

Supporting choices

Research has highlighted that workers have difficulty in enabling choice and decision making skills. Presenting choices is morally important for two key reasons:

*'It is the start of a continuum that leads ultimately to being able to initiate communication, though [some young people] may never achieve this level; and it is also an important part of treating young people in a respectful and inclusive way.'*¹³



During some interactions that attempted to facilitate choice and decision making there was high potential of acquiescence.

'A' worker asks 'G' "Do you want to paint?" 'G' said yes. 'G' was given the card and he was asked 'Do you want to use the green or blue paint?' and he replied 'Blue'. The worker said 'Do you want to use the green or red paint?' – 'G' replied 'Red paint'.

The above passage illustrates the tendency to repeat the last words due to difficulties with memory and processing meaning,¹⁴ thus choices need to be presented in ways that structurally support decision making.

Worker draws on some cards. 'G' looks closely and chose the word 'go outside' from 'paint' 'play with sand' or 'stay inside'.

Choice was additionally offered through concrete presentations of activities through a variety of stimuli, that encouraged shared interaction, choice and decision-making, autonomy and self-determination.

Provocations were used in a flexible, adaptable and open-way, with workers allowing free exploration, directly offering young people opportunities to interact with them through the use of play-props.

Use of play-props allowed workers to further extend and develop opportunities to respond to interests through a process of observation, interpretation, reflection and planning. This approach is closely linked to a listening and responding model¹³ that builds on Rice's¹⁵ procedure of observing, supporting and extending schema clusters through a process of observing, documenting, interpretation, reflection and action planning to enable organic child-centred experiences.¹³ Importantly, reflective practice and on-going documentation enables understanding of young people's needs and preferences and enables responsive planning.

Continued...

Communication and Interaction between workers and Young People with Severe Learning Disabilities *(continued)*

Towards improved communication and interaction

This research has shown that there was little use of visual-based communication methods despite their use by young people. However, workers successfully adapted spoken communication by using 'motherese' techniques supported by intensive interaction to reciprocate shared enjoyment through interactions that were responsive, person-centred, meaningful and supportive of non-verbal communications.

Despite worthy encouragement of peer interactions, young people gravitated more to workers and thus development of friendships with peers was difficult.

Provocations helped to encourage choice, self determination, interest and internal exploration. Shared interactions were used as a tool to extend communication repertoires, especially through the use of observation and reflection that can aid planning and delivery.

The research illustrated the need for a systemic response to communication, through staff training and a robust policy framework on a service level and implementation of individualised guidelines on a personal level. This process is supported by strong arrangements for multi-collaborative working.

Accessible communication and responsive interaction are essential measures for the inclusion of young people and enabling empowering practice.

Martin Goodwin is an experienced practitioner who has more than 16 years experience in working with children and young people in a range of capacities including management and direct delivery.

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Martin runs regular training courses for Short Breaks Network

- Play & Leisure activities for disabled children
- My Life, My Choice
- Working with emerging sexuality

Autism and Play

Taking a child centred approach

Wendy Usher, Inclusion Consultant and Author

“My child doesn’t play, he is autistic!”

This was a recent comment made by a parent during a training session. She was referring to her son who has very specific areas of interest based on dinosaurs. She described her son as being isolated, happy to line up his plastic dinosaur figurines and not wanting to interact with other children. She found it difficult to see beyond his obsessive behaviour and did not know how to encourage him to play imaginatively.

She is not alone. Many parents lack the confidence to play creatively with their children, especially when their child may be a literal thinker with little interest in social interaction and social communication.

A recent report ‘The Ribena Plus Play Report’¹ published in April 2012 evidences that parents understand the value of play, but do not have time, are anxious about safety and lack the confidence to provide play opportunities for their children.

Within the research undertaken for this report 79% of parents agreed that play should be fun, rather than about achieving a goal and 97% of parents felt children should be playing outside.

Key findings within the report show:

- Play is vital part of physical, emotional and social development in children
- Theoretically parents know how best to play with their children, but they are not necessarily putting this theory into practice
- Pressures on parents and parental anxieties are shaping how their children play
- Children are not engaging sufficiently in the most beneficial forms of play

When looking at the triad of impairment in autism we recognise children have difficulty in three key areas: social interaction; social communication and lack of imagination.

Janet Moyles, an Early Years Consultant and author of *Excellence of Play*² says where play is sociable, ‘it ensures children learn how to collaborate and co-operate with others and use a range of language skills’; when it is active, it has benefits for children’s physical health; when play is creative or imaginative, as it is in drawing or dressing up, it ‘encourages creativity and innovative thinking’, whilst play which involves risks is important since ‘it is only through taking risks that children learn how to stay safe’.

It is essential that children on the autism spectrum have access to the ‘right kind of play’ which encourages their personal development to reach their full potential supporting their development in relation to the triad of impairment.

We need to think about play from the child’s perspective, taking a person centred approach.

Autism Bedfordshire³ is an independent charity providing information, advice, emotional and practical support to individuals with Autistic Spectrum Conditions, (A.S.C.) their parents/carers, families and associated professionals throughout Bedfordshire and Luton.

Back in 2000 they consulted directly with children on the autism spectrum and their families to find out what they thought of play. Children stated:

- We want to play with others but don’t know how to join in
- Play is what I do when I am on my own, I don’t always need other people
- I like it when I am with others who want to do the same things as me

Since then the organisation has continually consulted with their members. With the help of volunteers locally based groups were set up called ‘L.O.A.F – Loads of autistic fun. These are Saturday morning groups for the whole family. The group leaders work with members to determine what ‘play’ activities they would like to do. All kinds of play activities have been realised, including those to extend the thinking of the children attending.



Play has gone beyond ‘X box’ and ‘DVD’s’ encouraging children to participate in new and ‘fun’ activities. A number of these are themed around the children’s own interests including dinosaurs! Children and young people have benefited increasing their social understanding, social communication, raising self confidence and self esteem and learning to think more flexibly. Parents say that they are more confident at playing with their children, happy to relax in an atmosphere that does not judge. Children feel more confident and are more able to socialise. The group is so successful there are waiting lists for 3 of the 4 venues.

The group also provides a wonderful opportunity for local students and educational/social welfare staff to work as volunteers and gain valuable experience of working with and helping children with A.S.C.

Continued...

Autism and Play

Taking a child centred approach (continued)

A further example of good practice can be found in the Vale of Glamorgan⁴. A new project 'A Sense of Play' is run under the Early Support Programme funded by the Welsh Government.



It aims to improve the lives of children with additional needs and their families and is specifically aimed at pre-school age children.

A number of sensory packs have been developed to enable parents/carers to have ideas about appropriate play opportunities to meet the individual needs of their children. A trained professional will visit families in their homes for an hour a week for six weeks to deliver play sessions using the sensory packs. A Sense of Play booklet is available, packed with ideas for sensory play sessions. There is also a short film on their website that describes the project in more detail.

Training is also being offered to child-minders and playgroup settings. The sessions are an opportunity for professionals to learn more about Early Support and the Sense of Play project. This aims to give staff a wider understanding of play opportunities specifically for 0-4 year olds with special or additional needs.

'Hey, children on the autism spectrum play too!' by Wendy Usher⁵ has been written to support parents and people working with children on the autism spectrum understand how children on the spectrum may play differently. It helps adults consider how they are giving children choice and control in their play and how to interact and engage in play using the children's own special interests.

'Sensory Play Resource Book'⁶ has been written specifically for short break workers describing how sensory play is beneficial to all children and particularly those on the autism spectrum.

Both books are highly practical with lots of ideas and suggestions. One of the key messages is that *'It is participating in the activity that counts, not necessarily needing to achieve a goal'* This links directly back to the Ribena report¹ which states 79% of parents agree that play should be for fun rather than about achieving a goal. The challenge is how are we going to implement this for our children?

Wendy Usher

Inclusion Consultant and Author

Wendy can be contacted through The Play Doctors

www.theplaydoctors.co.uk Or by phone: 01234 757768

References and Further information

1 The Ribena Plus Play Report www.ribena.co.uk/download/Ribena_Plus_Play_Report.pdf

2 Janet Moyles (Ed.), *The Excellence of Play*, 2nd ed. Maidenhead: Open University Press; 2005

3 Autism Bedfordshire
www.autismbedfordshire.net/childrens-services/loads-of-autistic-fun-loaf

4 Sense of Play Project
Play Sessions Booklet
<http://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/idoc.ashx?docid=a6acfa5f-ff16-4cff-af51-b32f48259ba6&version=-1>

A short film describing the Sense of Play Project
www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/living/social_care/children_and_young_people/child-care_-_fis/parents_zone/children_with_additional_needs/early_support/sense_of_play_project.aspx

5 Usher, W *Hey children on the autism spectrum play too* The Play Doctors; 2010

6 Usher, W *Sensory Play Resource Book - making a short break a positive experience* KIDS; 2010

Both books available in our Inclusive Carers Network library
www.shortbreaksnetwork.org.uk/title/Books_DVDs_and_Reviews

Better Breaks welcomes recommendations of other publications, reports and resources to support the short breaks workforce in communication and play. Short Breaks Network run regular training courses on Play and Leisure activities for disabled children on Short Breaks

The Short Breaks Journey 2: *Evaluating motivation and personal development for short break carers*

Pippa Boss, Short Breaks Network

In the last Better Breaks Lee Cox and the Inclusive Carers Network examined the routes they took in becoming a short break carer and the support they most need in this role¹. The question I now wish to pose is how carers remain motivated over many years and how we recognise their development in their role. More specifically, how Short Breaks Network supports carers to remain motivated and how we have evaluated the difference made since the commencement of 'Aiming High' and the introduction of the Children's Workforce Development Councils standards for short break carers. Standard six is called 'Develop yourself' and focuses on how to maximise support and training to develop knowledge and skills.

How do short break carers see their role?

In Committed to Caring², Beth Prewett asked a number of short break carers this and the response was varied - volunteers, semi-professional and professional, irrespective of the level of remuneration. Carers with more access to training, support and involvement with their service and those with a previous background in the disability field were more likely to regard themselves as professional. The word 'professional', for some, does not convey the love, enjoyment and altruistic motivations linked to providing short breaks, while for others the word conveys the skills and expertise required to provide short breaks and is a label that affords respect and recognition. All the carers questioned recognised their own skills and commitment and felt that the reasons why they became short break carers in the first place was a desire to use these skills to benefit disabled children and their families.

The Inclusive Carers Network

The Inclusive Carers Network was established in 2008 in response to requests from carers for ongoing support – see Lee Cox's article in Short Breaks Update³. A fairly bleak picture had emerged – carers felt isolated and unsupported in their role; at the same time there was a crisis in the recruitment of carers and services reported long waiting lists and frequent placement breakdowns because of inadequate support.

The network now provides: training courses; a dedicated interactive website; a quarterly magazine, 'Share'; resources including films and DVDs about being a short break carer; discounted rate to Short Breaks Networks conferences; a free toy and book lending library; regional meetings and other forms of peer support.

Reports and Surveys reviewed in previous Better Breaks indicate a transformation in support for the short breaks workforce since 'Aiming High' that has made a real difference to the lives of carers and disabled children and their families

We recently conducted our own evaluation of the Inclusive Carers Network.⁴

Surveys were sent to short break carers and short break providers offering a range of services from overnight care to inclusive play and personal assistance through direct payments. 160 short break carers and 74 short break services responded.

The surveys clearly indicate the role the network has played in the transformation of support for short break carers.

88% of carers said that being part of the network had increased their confidence in looking after disabled children.

'It gives you reassurance that you are achieving the best care and support for children you have - through training and being in sync with legislation so they are safe and you are recognised as professionals. The confidence you get from knowing the network will help you to tackle behaviour problems, source activities or equipment, back you up and support you is invaluable to becoming a better carer, hence making the children's experience so much fuller and exciting.'

Continued...



The Short Breaks Journey 2:

Evaluating motivation and personal development for short break carers (continued)

91% reported an increase in their knowledge and skills in looking after disabled children

'Training is vital and having the ability to ask experienced carers in the network for advice is invaluable'

84% of carers said they felt less isolated as a short breaks carer since being part of the network.

'It's been a lifeline at times'

Being part of the network has led to many carers feeling secure in their role and able to see a future in short break caring. 81% of carers said it is more likely that they will continue looking after disabled children in the future. This is vital for the future of short breaks as not only recruitment but also retention of carers has been a problem for services in the past.

'There is the potential with short break caring to feel a little isolated or less involved. The Carers Network obviates this feeling'

'I have now received information and training in autism and feel that I will be able to give respite to parents until retirement. Having a son with Aspergers, I am now more enabled to help myself and other parents.'

The support carers gain from the network is very clear from the responses to the survey and we can see definite benefits to disabled children and their families.

When asked how the network can improve its level of support, responses included more training courses and forums – particularly available locally and flexibly and to include parents; more information given to families on transitions from children to adult services and how carers can help with transition; more information on tax, welfare and resources.

'Carry on. You are providing a comprehensive and invaluable service which has scoped the needs and wants of carers'



Short Breaks Network Training

As well as setting up this support network, Short Breaks Network has developed an extensive training programme supporting local authorities in meeting the Children's Workforce Development Standards and supporting the 'new look' short break workforce emerging through 'Aiming High'

The programme has been designed through working closely with local authorities and other training providers and building productive relationships with our trainers and consultants. In this way courses are tailored to meet the needs of short break services and learning outcomes developed. The average score for meeting learning outcomes for training courses designed for short break carers in 2011 was 4.5 out of 5

'It's the only training available that really relates to the needs of short break services'

'Highly rated and valued training with 100% positive feedback from course participants'

Workforce development case study: 'Lets get inclusive'

'Lets get inclusive'⁵ was a project aimed at improving the access of children and young people with disabilities to universal short break and childcare services. It was a partnership between 'Whippersnappers' and Short Breaks Network, commissioned by Lambeth Council. A series of training courses and activities were provided by both organisations for the short breaks and childcare workforce across Lambeth. Integral to evaluation of the projects success was an 'Inclusion Audit and Learning Log' (IALL) - a self assessment tool for the different settings to enable evaluation before and after the project.

There were five outcomes for the project, including

Continued...

The Short Breaks Journey 2:

Evaluating motivation and personal development for short break carers (continued)

'Increased confidence to offer services to disabled children and young people and in working in partnership with families.'

100% of settings returning IALL logs reported increased confidence in working with children with disabilities, measured on a 'confidence scale'

Staff attending from a Children Centre have expressed feeling more confident in their ability to provide opportunities, particularly around communication, since attending the Communication Skills training course.

Nursery staff attended the Safe and Healthy Course and said they are more confident when planning trips and in how to include the children and their family in activities. Staff also feel more open to approach parents and seek their views regarding the child's disabilities.

A childminder wrote that since she had Communication Skills training she had become more relaxed and confident with children with disabilities. She said when she started to look after a 2 year old child with speech delay the child's communication was just screaming. Now the child is 3 years old and during the Let's Get Inclusive training the childminder has used body language, picture communication and referred the child in her care to speech and language therapists at local Children's Centres. With all the work and support from the childminder the child is talking now rather than screaming.

'This training [Building partnerships] was eye opening [...] It has helped us make changes to the way we work with families'

All of the Short Breaks Networks training courses were well received, with 100% of evaluations rating them good or very good. 'Building Partnerships' was considered particularly useful and many participants appreciated having parents with children with disabilities delivering it.



Summary

From the evaluations we can deduce that the training Short Breaks Network offers is highly rated as a service that meets very specific training needs and is of excellent quality. The impact of this training on carers has resulted in increased confidence, skills and knowledge and has led to some carers considering caring for children with more complex needs.

Evaluation of the Inclusive Carers Network indicate that the services provided by Short Breaks Network are highly regarded by both carers and workers, the majority of the suggestions for any improvement were to carry on and do more of the same. As a key service offered by Short Breaks Network there is scope for expansion in the training we offer. New types of short break provision are increasing e.g. via direct payments, and carers providing these breaks will need support and training.

Many of the challenges services perceive they will face in the next few years in supporting their workforce are around reduced funding. The added value that Short Breaks Network offers by sharing information and resources will be more important than ever. Services are keen for Short Breaks Network to continue its lobbying, awareness raising, research, policy and practice advice and its hugely successful Inclusive Carers Network and training service and to continue to support short breaks services and carers around the UK.

Some things don't change: Overwhelmingly, the response to the question 'What motivates you most in your short breaks role?' is the benefit to families, the sense of helping and the pleasure derived from the children and young people they work with.

References:

- 1 Cox, L. Short break carers routes to work, *Better Breaks* February 2012: 13-14
- 2 Prewett, B. *Committed to Caring* Shared Care Network; 2000
- 3 Cox, L. Including short break carers. *Short Breaks Update* July 2011: 12-13, Also Fountain, R. Towards a common framework of essential skills 6-7
- 4 Pemberton, V. Evaluation of the *Short Break Carer Network* Short Breaks Network; 2012
- 5 Whippersnappers 'Let's get Inclusive' Lambeth Council 2011

Impact – enabling short breaks for disabled children

Impact, the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) delivery partner for Short Breaks, has been working with all 152 local authorities to support a sector led approach. Impact's aim is to offer support, advice and examples of next and best practice to help local authorities deliver their legal obligations to provide short breaks for disabled children, facilitate sector and parent led developments in how short breaks are provided and to help short breaks providers, particularly voluntary and community organisations, develop their capacity.

In recent months Impact has been working with local authorities to identify local good practice which can be shared with other authorities. These case studies fall into a number of broad categories:

1. **Short Break Activities** - highlighting new and exciting types of breaks such as wheelchair dancing workshops or tree climbing experiences
2. **Short Break Duty and Statements** - looking at accessible ways of communicating Statement policy and local offers to children and young people or parents and carers and involving them in the consultation process
3. **Widening Participation and Empowerment** - work being undertaken on extending reach and bringing short breaks to 'hard to reach' groups including BME communities
4. **Workforce Development** - still to be developed further, this category focuses on training: for example, making more universal services staff aware of the requirements of disabled children
5. **Capital Funding** - looking at the rewards of developing major projects such as an outdoor activity centre, but also at how even small budgets can make a big difference if well targeted: funding, for example, specialist surfing equipment for disabled youngsters
6. **Partnership working** - highlighting how some authorities have developed hugely positive partnerships with local charities, voluntary groups and local providers.

The Impact website, www.impactsb.co.uk (hosted by Short Breaks Network and currently under-going a facelift), highlights these emerging, innovative and sustainable practice stories and we are working with local authorities to identify and share new ways of approaching short breaks on an ongoing basis. The website contains other useful resources relating to good short breaks practice and also details the thematic

workshops which Impact are making available to local authorities on a number of current themes: Personalisation, Short Breaks Duty Statements and Short Breaks within the context of the Health Reforms.

The Impact team is led by Jane Harrison and local authorities are supported by a team of Strategic Advisers and Regional Co-ordinators whose contact details are on the website.



enabling short breaks for disabled children



Focus on health: Case Study

Short Breaks in East Sussex

Groups of children with physical disabilities and complex needs are being offered short breaks through play scheme days, outings and short breaks within the home by Chailey Heritage Clinical Services, run by Sussex Community NHS Trust. It is renowned for the care of children and young adults with complex disabilities.

The scheme, run in partnership with East Sussex County Council, is for children living in East Sussex who have a range of physical or complex health needs such as communication difficulties, physical difficulties, epilepsy or children who are gastrostomy or nasogastric fed or oxygen dependent.

On our play scheme days children have the opportunity to take part in art and craft activities, cooking and meeting other children to have some fun. With a wonderful location in the East Sussex Weald and views over the countryside, children are also able to use the outside space.

Angie Godden, specialist community nursing team leader for Sussex Community NHS Trust, said of the scheme:

'Through these short breaks we can provide a safe and interactive environment for children. We offer a variety of activities that are tailored to the individual needs of the child, allowing the children to interact with others and giving the parents a short break. We have had great fun providing this service and wonderful feedback from the children and their parents. We are looking forward to continuing this work with East Sussex County Council until 2014. It is such a success and we hope that this will continue.'

Diane Dean whose twin daughters Katie and Sophie took part in the activities last week said:

'Words cannot express how fantastic the service is that we have been offered at Chailey Heritage. The staff have been out of this world. It has enabled me to have a few hours break and given my husband and myself time together. I do not know what we would do without this fantastic service.'

If you would like to know more about the scheme contact Angie Godden, Specialist Community Team Leader on 01825 724715 or via email to angie.godden@nhs.net

“Ensuring Short Breaks for all....meeting the needs of all disabled children”

Short Breaks Network spring conference took place on May 3rd. It was attended by delegates from across the sector and feedback has been extremely positive – evaluation forms indicating a predominance of ‘excellent’ and ‘very good’ responses in all categories including meeting the learning objectives of the conference:

- An understanding of current innovative and sustainable practice in short breaks**
- Solution focused approaches to practice**
- Knowledge and skill sharing around short breaks**
- Training to deliver better support for children on short breaks**

The ‘solution focussed practice’ section of the day was a series of four presentations from short breaks providers and practitioners demonstrating how they have developed innovative services and practice to reach and include all disabled children and young people. The content of this ‘case study’ session in our last two conferences has strong links with Better Breaks – several of the presentations follow on from Better Breaks articles or precede them, giving opportunities to maximise the sharing of new ideas and practice.

Follow the conference as it happened on Twitter [#shortbreaksconf](https://twitter.com/shortbreaksconf)

Short Breaks Network Update

Policy

Susan Kelly, National Policy Officer at Short Breaks Network is available to help you with queries and clarification around policy issues and sharing good practice. This is how the process works.

1) Send in your question to 'questions@shortbreaksnetwork.org.uk'

2) We acknowledge your request then decide on the best way of dealing with it. Some questions are straightforward and answered by direct email response whilst some require more discussion or may need to be sent out to the Policy Group or wider network for advice before responding.

Wider findings from the questions process will now be disseminated in a number of different ways. Every quarter we will analyse the numbers and types of questions and responses and report on that through Better Breaks, Share and the website

We have also started work on two new briefing series:

'Short Breaks in Practice' are practice papers on topics which have been of wider interest in the 'questions' process. The first of these has been produced and is on the topic of 'Carer Toilet Breaks whilst on Community Activities'. This will shortly be available on our website www.shortbreaksnetwork.org.uk

'Short Breaks Policy Focus' will be the second series of briefings and will hone in on specific policy issues which our members are commonly raising. The first of these will be out soon and focuses on the issue of bedroom sharing in family based overnight Short Breaks.

Short Breaks Policy Group

Short Breaks Network are proud to have an active group of experienced practitioners who form our 'e-policy group'. The policy group operates primarily by email and we are grateful for the time and expertise members offer to the wider network. We are currently expanding our membership of the policy group to better represent the whole short breaks sector. If you are a health, play, residential, 'sitting service' or community based activities practitioner who may be interested in being involved please contact susan.kelly@shortbreaksnetwork.org.uk for a discussion. We will introduce members of the Policy group in the next edition of Better Breaks.

Training, Development and Consultancy

Short Breaks Network is the only provider in the UK focusing solely on training and development around short breaks for disabled children.

All our courses are designed with the needs of short break practitioners and carers at the core. Our trainers include experienced short break service managers and practitioners as well as short break carers.

We offer cost-effective in-house training that brings courses to you. Course content can be tailored as required to ensure we fully meet the needs of your organisation and staff.

Alongside our comprehensive programme, our consultancy service offers further tailor made support for local authorities and short break service providers

For more information contact Steve Haines: steven.haines@shortbreaksnetwork.org.uk



Share magazine for Inclusive Carers network

Share is the quarterly magazine for all those who work directly with disabled children during short breaks. With contributions from specialists, trainers and short breaks workers, Share features topical discussions, information, top tips, news and views and is read widely by inclusive & specialist play-workers, family based carers, befrienders, sitters and residential support workers.

Share links with IncNet, SBN's on-line interactive community at www.shortbreaksnetwork.ning.com

Each Carers' Network member receives 2 copies by post - one to keep and one to pass on to an interested friend or leave in a public place like the library or doctors' waiting room. Practitioners often request extra copies of Share for use in carer and play worker recruitment and training.

If you'd like to write for Share or receive a complimentary copy, please contact lee.cox@shortbreaksnetwork.org.uk or call 0117 9415361

Call for Contributions and Previews

- *Would you like to share your ideas with the short breaks workforce?*
- *Have you examples of exciting practice you would like to write about?*
- *Do you have testimonials and feedback from families about your service?*
- *How about engaging photographs of children on short breaks?*
- *Have you research or post graduate study to contribute?*
- *Does your organisation offer a service that enhances the lives of disabled children and their families as part of an inclusive society?*
- *How does your short breaks service think 'outside the box'?*
- *Have you formed successful partnerships with other services?*

Article brief:

800 – 2000 words or 2 – 4 sides of A4 at font size 12, to include photographs and other visuals where possible. Vancouver Style referencing

Editorial support and advice given if required.

Each issue has a theme and we welcome articles to supplement this.

Additionally we have regular features:

- *Focus on Health*
- *Short Break carers journey: Support for short break carers.*
- *Current Research*
- *Response to previous articles*

Upcoming Issues

Summer 2012

Becoming an adult: The role of short breaks in transition and the move to independent living

Bridging the gap between children and adult services

Sutton Transition Coordination

Person centred planning and transition weekends for young people with ASD

Jigsaw 4 u

Creating outreach services to develop independent living

Bakers Way, Bridgend

Leisure Link: Tailor made support to access universal activities.

Wirral Short breaks

The Short Breaks Journey 3: Transition

The role of short break carers in supporting the different needs of young people into adulthood.

The next phase of parent carer forums

Parent 2 Parent and FACE

Autumn 2012

Developing practice for the new climate

We particularly need contributions on this topic

The 'Support and Aspiration' strategy for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the economic austerity measures have changed the climate in which short breaks practice is developing.

This issue seeks to highlight how short break providers, practitioners and researchers have responded to these changes – by adapting current practice or creating new models.

The Short Breaks Journey 4: Endings

Managing a placement ending: move to adult services; bereavement; placement breakdown

Winter 2013/13

The personalisation agenda and working to an outcomes focus

Better Breaks is published quarterly by Short Breaks Network

Short Breaks Network is a Limited Co. Registered in England and Wales No: 5083359. Registered Charity no: 1104216
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Short Breaks Network

