

# Enquire within

THE NEWSLETTER BULLETIN OF ENQUIRE, THE NATIONAL ADVICE SERVICE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN SCOTLAND

In this bulletin we examine ways support services can meet the needs of groups who have traditionally experienced barriers to accessing mainstream services. Articles are included on accessing childcare services, the activities of a locally based agency specialising in working with families from an ethnic minority background, and on the work of Enquire to ensure the service is accessible to children themselves.

## Grass not always greener in rural areas

By Julia Nelson, Development Officer for Children in Scotland's rural childcare development programme.

The idea of living in the country sounds idyllic, but when it comes to being able to access the services you need, living in a rural area can be difficult. Scattered communities pose a problem in that it is expensive to offer a service to a small number of families, particularly any specialised service.

Childcare is now high on the Government's agenda, with new money being devoted to increasing the number of places available for all 0-14 year olds 'in every neighbourhood' through the Scottish Childcare Strategy. The principal aim is to provide childcare that will help parents to take up work and training. However, good quality childcare which provides a safe, stimulating environment, is now widely recognised as contributing to children's social, physical and intellectual development as well as benefiting parents.

To guide this expansion of childcare, a Childcare Partnership has been established in each local authority area in Scotland. The members of Childcare Partnerships represent council departments, childcare providers, parents, the health sector, local enterprise company, training providers and employers. Their role is to conduct an audit that leads to a plan for childcare and early (pre-school) education and to advise on the priorities for funding in the area. It is recognised that many rural areas suffer from a low level of service for children and young people with special needs and some Childcare

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Internet: [www.childreninscotland.org.uk/enquire](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/enquire)  
Or write to: Enquire, Children in Scotland, Princes House, 5 Shandwick Place, Edinburgh EH2 4RG.



Partnerships have established working groups to look this issue.

Childcare is not a universal right, unlike pre-school education, and parents are expected to pay towards the cost of a place. To help low and middle income families where parents work 16+ hours a week, a new allowance is available in the form of the Childcare Tax Credit. A parent can apply for assistance with fees, up to a maximum



*continued on page 2*

## Publications

The parents' guide to special educational needs has now been published and is available free of charge on request. Factsheet No. 4 on Placing requests is also now available.

## Local events

From the beginning of next term, practical workshops are planned throughout Scotland. These will be based on exercises from the forthcoming Enquire training pack: Promoting effective decision-making in special educational needs, currently being prepared. These events will seek to develop useful skills for parent supporters including how to retrieve relevant information and develop negotiation and participation skills. A leaflet will shortly be available giving details of where and when the events will be held. Attendance will be on first come first served basis.

For further details send your name, address and a contact number to Julia Wilson at Children in Scotland. E-mail [jwilson@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:jwilson@childreninscotland.org.uk).

## Pilot projects

Enquire's pilot projects will now encompass a wider role of developing and promoting effective decision-making in special educational needs as well as offering mediation. Four local authorities have been identified to implement these schemes. These are Stirling, East Dunbartonshire, Glasgow City and South Ayrshire.

continued from page 1

of 70% of the total weekly cost, up to £100 for one child and £150 for two or more children. The tax credit is paid in the wage packet or directly by the Inland Revenue to self-employed people.

With the new national emphasis on developing childcare, a question often raised is 'when is a service childcare and when is it considered to be respite care'? For families, one service may fulfil both needs, but the definition may well affect how a place is allocated and who pays for it.\* There is no simple solution to this problem at present, but Childcare Partnerships will be trying to ensure that all children can access the childcare service they require.

Another issue to be tackled is that parents whose children have special needs may be unlikely to be out at work. This means they will not be eligible to have support towards the cost of childcare fees, although their child might benefit from taking part in play activities with other children who live nearby.

Some key areas to be addressed in rural Scotland are:

- Limited number of services and appropriate staff

There are still many rural communities that do not have an out-of-school service or a daycare centre for pre-school children. Childminders play an important role in providing places, but may not be available in all areas.

While most playgroups, nurseries and out-of-school clubs want to open their doors to all children, in reality it may be difficult to cater for a range of needs. This may be due to not being able to cover the cost of extra staff required and also lack of confidence, if the playworkers are not experienced at caring for children with specific needs. Training is a key issue here; both in terms of getting access to training and also paying for the course fees, transport and staff cover. The Scottish Executive has recently announced extra funding to go towards boosting the take-up of training courses.

- High cost of providing a service for a small number of children

However few children attend a regular childcare service, there must be a minimum of two registered staff on the premises. Where there are few children with a particular condition, it may also be difficult to provide a specialised service, so that often there is less choice for families in rural areas. While it is desirable to have plenty of staff time for children, the fees from a few children will not cover the cost of the two staff. This means that fund-raising has to be an on-going task for many small groups.

- Shortage of suitable, affordable transport

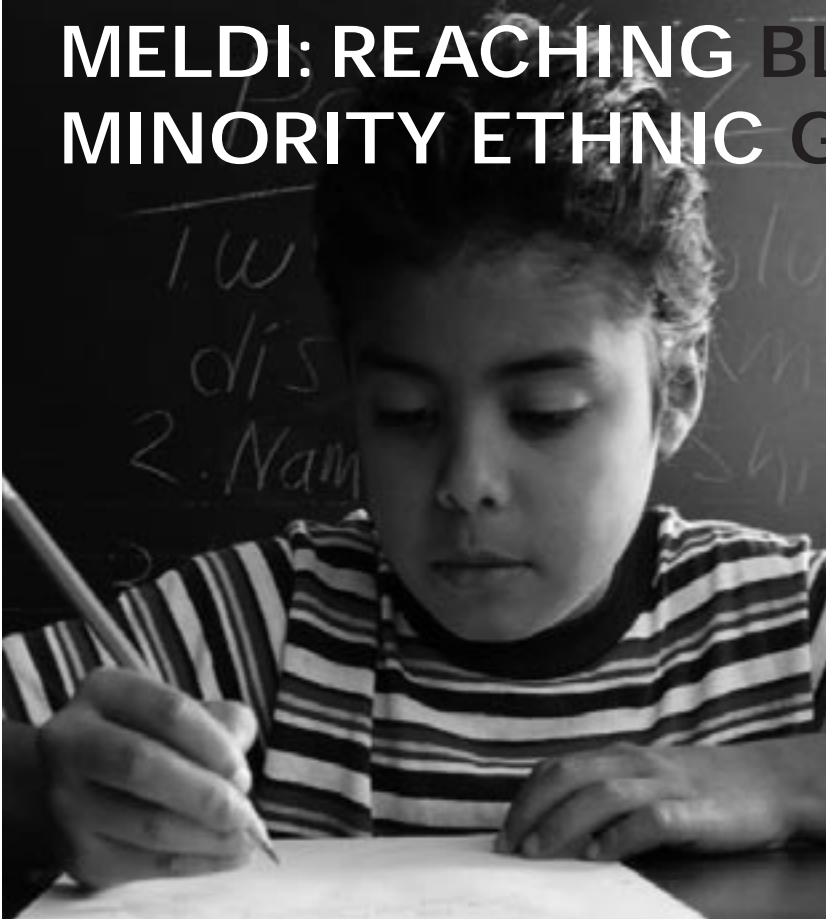
Ideally, children should be transported as little as possible and instead be able to attend a service near to their home. Where children do need to travel to access pre-school education and/or childcare, the costs of transport may be prohibitive to individual parents and the costs of running a minibus may be too expensive for a small childcare service to support. Drivers and escorts also need to have adequate training, especially if they are caring for children with a physical or learning disability. Initiatives in Scotland that overcome the transport problems include providing a 'multi-functional' service that caters for a wide age-range in one setting and car-sharing schemes. Another solution is to take services to children, by providing mobile play provision.

- Finding out about services

Access to information is improving, with each area now having a Childcare Information Service, available via telephone and in most cases, via the internet. A national helpline is also available, which can provide information on broad topics and can also direct you to the service in your area: Childcare Link (Scotland) 08000 960 296 or [www.childcarelink.gov.uk](http://www.childcarelink.gov.uk)

\*This issue will be explored in a short Children in Scotland briefing paper on services for children in rural Scotland with additional needs, due out Autumn 2000.

# MELDI: REACHING BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC GROUPS



Voluntary organisations across Britain are facing similar difficulties in making their services accessible to families from black and minority ethnic groups. As part of a recent study, 180 interviews were carried out with black disabled people (Double invisibility: exploring the needs of black disabled people in Warwickshire). The Warwickshire study highlighted a lack of service provision to those interviewed:

“The lived experience of black disabled people suggested strongly that ‘white’ statutory and voluntary organisations catering for disabled people did not understand the need for specific measures to meet the needs of black disabled people. Neither did many black and Asian organisations understand the needs of disabled people in their own communities.”

A separate study funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation concluded that, overall, families from minority ethnic groups caring for a severely disabled child were even more disadvantaged than white families in similar situations (On the edge: minority ethnic families caring for a severely disabled child, R Chamba et al, 1999, The Policy Press).

The Minority Ethnic Learning Disability Initiative (MELDI) provides free advocacy, information and support services for individuals from black/minority ethnic communities who have a learning disability or special needs and their carers/families. It is funded by the City of Edinburgh Council, the National Lottery Charities Board and the Scottish Executive Education Department.

MELDI has been awarded two years funding under the Scottish Executive Special Educational Needs (SEN) Innovation Grant for a project entitled: Social inclusion of minority ethnic children with SEN. A key aim of the project is to produce ‘multi-media’ information packages for families eg. short videos on SEN. The videos will address issues specific to minority groups such as provision for children with English as an additional language. The videos will share experiences of families from black and minority groups by involving children, parents, schools and professionals in the video making process.

Many organisations consulted by MELDI expressed concern about lack of access for families from black and minority ethnic groups to their services and were enthusiastic about exchanging information and ideas on good practice. To draw upon the expertise of these organisations, MELDI would like to work in collaboration with relevant voluntary organisations to produce a directory of voluntary sector provision on SEN to be available in a number of different languages.

Discussions with voluntary organisations, as part of the MELDI project, revealed a range of positive initiatives including: monitoring of service use; routine translation of all published information; particular attention paid to the role of family support services; organising dedicated events; attention to the overall image of the organisation; and employment of staff from black and minority ethnic groups.

By working closely with the voluntary and statutory sector, MELDI hopes to ensure that the training package for families will be a sustainable resource. The training packages will be designed for use by parents in the home, or by small groups of parents and professionals. We have had an enthusiastic response from organisations wishing to use the training packages to support parents from black and minority ethnic groups with a child with special educational needs.

MELDI has recently appointed Metlha Brown to work with families of African/Caribbean origin in the Edinburgh area. Metlha is developing links with families and would welcome contact from families and professionals.

For more information about MELDI please contact Anne Hay, Administrator and Information Officer on 0131 623 2200.

## Improving access for children and young people

Enquire is available to children/young people with, or affected by, special educational needs and all those involved in their education. The involvement and participation of children and young people has been a key factor in shaping policy development for a number of years. The report on the consultation: Improving our schools (January 2000) recognised that:

“Children and young people want to be better informed and to be more involved in decisions concerning their education and their school. They want to be given more opportunities to be consulted on matters which affect them and to have their views taken into account when decisions are made.”

Children and young persons require access to information and advice at different stages and in different formats. Enquire can help young people be better informed through the provision of information and referral to appropriate local services.

Some of the factors that affect access to services for young people with special needs have been identified. These can include, for example: adult centred publicity materials, communication difficulties and motivational barriers. Using the phone may intimidate young people and difficulties might exist in accessing a telephone and articulating a query.



towards the end of the year that can meet the diverse needs and abilities of children and young persons with special educational needs. For example Enquire will be producing child friendly publicity materials, and a guide for young people with special educational needs in secondary school, and an accompanying video. The guide and video will provide information on special educational needs issues, including the Future Needs Assessment process, and options for post-school provision.

Increasingly, young people have access to the internet and e-mail at school and home. By contacting the Enquire through e-mail young people can access the service 24 hours a day, and it also eliminates the fear of having to speak to a 'professional' over the phone.

Other measures are planned to improve access and increase service uptake including:

- staff training on how to work directly with children/young people with special needs;
- consultations with young people;
- a programme of promotional visits to schools and youth clubs, involving individual consultations on specific matters.

For further information or feedback please contact Sally Baird, Development Officer, sbaird@childreninscotland.org.uk, 0131 222 2436.

### Technology 2000

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) are holding a Technology 2000 weekend at the University of Stirling from 2-3 September 2000. This will consist of a conference on the 2nd for professionals concentrating on current audiology provision in Scotland, but will also include a family day. A general open and family fun day is planned for the 3rd and an exhibition area will be available for others wishing to advertise their related services. Contact Veronica Rattray. E-mail: veronica@ndcs.org.uk

As with other users, confidentiality may be a concern to children and young people using the service. All queries to the service are confidential to the team (with the exception of disclosure of abuse). This is explained to all users when they are asked for their details for the Enquire database.

The service currently provides publications in certain alternative formats. To increase service uptake appropriately formatted materials will be published

## NATIONAL EVENT

Bookings are now being taken for Enquire's national event on 11 September called Supporting inclusion: good practice in meeting the individual needs of children in mainstream settings. It will be held at the Education and Conference Centre, Stirling Royal Infirmary. Leaflets on the event can be obtained by calling Moira Cameron on 0131 22 22 425 or e-mail Enquire.SENinfo@childreninscotland.org.uk.