

Summary

Upholding the independence of disabled parents: Re-imagining children's services in co-production with disabled parents and professionals

About the DRILL Programme

DRILL (Disability Research on Independent Living and Learning) was an innovative 5 year, UK wide programme led by disabled people, for disabled people and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Launched in 2015, the programme was managed by a partnership of Disability Action Northern Ireland, Disability Rights UK, Disability Wales and Inclusion Scotland.

The aim of the programme was to build better evidence about approaches which enable disabled people to achieve independent living. The findings from the projects it funded can be used to inform future provision across a wide range of policy areas, and give a greater voice to disabled people in decisions which affect them.

This is one of a series of summaries of the project supported by DRILL. Final reports, toolkits and summaries of all the projects are available from the DRILL website at www.drilluk.org.uk.

Overview of the project

This project worked with disabled parents to develop solutions that aim to keep families together.

It challenges previous studies which have assumed a correlation between parental impairment and a negative impact on children's well-being.

Approach

The project used Participatory Action Research, which uses the voices of those most affected by the research.

This research with 6 disabled parents included focus groups, interviews, and service mapping.

Findings

Four of the six participating parents had spoken to health or adult services professionals to request support to help them fulfil their parenting responsibilities.

One parent requested equipment, via a health visitor, that made it easier for her to change her son's nappy and assist with other practicalities. Children's services said they were unable to do this. Subsequently, there was an increase in visits from local authority social workers.

The parents acknowledged that they would benefit from help, but they were fearful about having contact with children's services.

Parents' voices were not heard, and their own knowledge of their own impairments was not adequately understood or recognised.

There was poor communication and a lack of clarity about the social work processes disabled parents were subject to. This led to heightened anxiety about statutory service providers intervening in their lives.

Parental impairments were viewed as posing a risk to children and that their strengths and resilience were not the focus of attention. It was thought that one of the reasons for this was the predominance of the medical model of disability.

One parent was expected to demonstrate her ability to provide basic care for her daughter on an inaccessible hospital ward.

Parents talked of walking a 'tightrope' of having to demonstrate they deserved and were eligible for assistance but were not so needy that professionals deemed them to be a risk to their children.

Findings (continued)

Local authority adult services have a duty under the Care Act 2014 to provide support to disabled parents whose impairment has an impact on their ability to parent. They are failing this duty, signposting parents to children's social care services instead.

Austerity measures have meant thresholds for services and support are too high. This has had detrimental consequences for disabled parents and their children.

Recommendations

The project outlined many recommendations, some of which are listed here. All recommendations are included in the full report which is linked below.

- Establish a new dedicated specialist service which assesses and meets the needs of disabled parents and their families, consisting of 70% disabled staff
- The service should sit outside of current service structures and be embedded in the community to help overcome entrenched attitudes and models of working in adult and children's services
- There must be a process to include more opportunities for professionals to build relationships and rapport with disabled parents and their children. This will allow them to conduct a holistic family assessment
- Dispel the assumption that disabled parents are needy, dependent and have to be provided for by the state and/or their own children
- Local authorities must comply with their responsibilities under the Care Act 2014
- Routine collection of statistical data to establish the number of disabled parents in the UK and the nature and extent of service provision to support these families
- There must be acknowledgement from services that disabled parents and children are experts in their own lives
- There should be a move beyond individually orientated, reactive and crisis driven approaches to meeting needs
- Local services must promote family and community engagement.

Final report

[Upholding the independence of disabled parents: Re-imagining children's services in co-production with disabled parents and professionals](#)

Please click on report name to read the full report.

Project partners

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