

Article for Manchester Carers Forum newsletter – April 2011

Would you like to write about being a carer?

In March 2011 a group of parents met to write about their personal experiences of caring for a disabled child. Some of this work will be published on the Manchester Carers Forum website.

While each parent's experiences remained uniquely personal - there was much in common. The group cared for children with a range of disabilities, some more obvious (for example, wheelchair-users or Down syndrome) and some 'hidden' (for example, on the autism spectrum).

Through the combined talk and writing, sensitive feelings and emotions emerged; the shock of the initial realisation, the effect of disability on family life, grief and conflicting senses of duty and failure. Highly positive views were also expressed. One mother explained that her son's Annual Review had been much better and her parental input was now a valued part of the school support team, helping to ensure maximum progress and achievement for her child. For some parents the sessions stirred powerful emotions, but also offered valuable opportunities to share experiences and to be reminded that carers are not alone.

Could writing at home about your personal challenges (either for yourself or for the website) help you cope better? If so, the following points may help. Think whether you are writing about:

- Your child and his progress – babyhood, nursery age, at school or as an adult
- Yourself – how you feel as a parent carer, how or when you found out about the disability and dealt with that knowledge, the joys and challenges of everyday living, or how you juggle family life around your disabled child's needs
- Educational aspirations:
 - What do you expect for your child - happiness, friendship, achievement?
 - Are your expectations matched by your child's teachers (high but realistic)?
 - Is home and school communication effective for you? What could improve it?
 - Is your child's statement properly addressed by the school?
 - Is effective teaching enabling your child to make good progress?
 - What would you seek to improve and what is needed to make it happen?

Having thought about the content of your writing, if you would like others to read it what do you want them to know? Perhaps you want to raise awareness for readers who are not carers, reassure other carers that they are not alone or simply share your particular experiences?

A few pointers to give your writing impact:

- Describe briefly what the disability is so that readers can relate your examples to it and understand that particular condition better
- Show rather than tell - examples of your caring experiences give readers insight
- Balance positive with negative experiences – show both joys and challenges
- Write from the heart – as a novel evokes emotion through fictional characters, your writing describes real life characters (yourself and your child)
- Don't be afraid to convey life as it is
- Give your piece a beginning (perhaps describing the disability), a longer middle (possibly using some of the ideas listed) and a clear ending. What thoughts do you want to resonate in your readers' minds?
- Remember that you know more about **your child as an individual** than anyone else.

You may find that your writing develops naturally as anecdotal description or as a poem. What matters is that it represents your unique style and conveys your personal message.