



## Summary

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### **Mutual benefits: The potential of disabled people as foster carers**

#### **About the DRILL Programme**

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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](http://www.drilluk.org.uk).

#### **Overview of the project**

This project explored the barriers that prevent the inclusion of disabled people from being part of the foster care workforce and the ways to overcome these.

## Approach

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The project began with an online training needs and perceptions survey, distributed to staff at four fostering agencies. This was designed to allow for a bespoke training programme to be produced. Eighty-one responses were received.

A short survey for existing foster carers was also produced.

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with foster carers and those interested in becoming foster carers. Respondents were a mixture of volunteers from the four sites, and disabled people who came forward having heard about the project.

Training at four agencies was also carried out, followed by the distribution of 'disability friendly' guidance material.

## Findings

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There is an estimated shortage of 8100 foster carers in the UK.

The main concern identified by staff at fostering agencies was the level of severity or complexity of a particular impairment, and how this may hinder fostering-related task performance. This raised concerns about safeguarding.

There were reservations that foster children would automatically become the carer of the disabled adult.

Determination and resilience were highlighted as traits which could benefit children, many of whom may have low self-esteem.

A shortfall in knowledge of concepts relating to disability was noted. The majority of respondents did not know what co-production was and had limited knowledge of the operation of the social model of disability.

One disabled foster carer was turned down by several agencies before being accepted by a local authority, where she has used her life experiences to help several children. This includes a young girl who was due to be cared for in a special residential establishment.

Mobility and accessibility were noted as potential problems for disabled foster carers.

## Findings (continued)

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Another disabled foster carer described a good experience with her local authority. They responded positively to her requests to change her criteria and accommodate her changing needs.

After training, staff felt that their understanding of disability had improved and were more aware of the different types of impairment.

It was also recognised by staff (following training days) that disabled people can be a good role model for foster children in a variety of ways, such as adopting a proactive approach to dealing with adversity.

## Recommendations

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

- Fostering agencies must meet the Equality Act 2010 requirement to avoid direct and indirect discrimination in recruitment, selection and support services
- Disabled people should be welcomed as foster carers, and recruitment and selection systems should be tailored to accommodate necessary access requirements
- Training for all foster agency staff in disability equality and awareness, delivered by disabled people, should be a core requirement
- Current disabled foster carers should be championed by their agencies as role models to encourage other disabled applicants
- Local commissioning authorities should only approve fostering agencies which demonstrate their commitment to the inclusion of disabled foster carers
- Department of Work and Pensions' guidance should specify fostering as falling within its Access to Work provisions and provide guidance for advisors and assessors
- Government should fund a recruitment campaign targeting potential disabled foster carers to help reduce the shortfall in foster placements and provide better choices for children and young people in need of care.

## Final report

[Mutual benefits: The potential of disabled people as foster carers](#)

Please click on report name to read the full report.

## Project partners

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**University of  
Worcester**



**Shaping Our Lives  
National User Network**



**Foster Care  
Co-operative**

