



## **Growing up with Disability**

*Stirling PLUS*

### **Paul Dumbleton – Chief Officer, Stirling Plus**

I'm sure everyone's aware that there are a lot more constraints than we're reading in the papers about the constraints on children just getting out and playing, but children with disabilities face so many obstacles to that and a lot of those are not physical obstacles, they're to do with their vulnerabilities and their need for a bit more support or a bit more supervision than the average child of their age.

Plus is a voluntary organisation based here in Stirling, it's was formed about 20 years ago now, nearly 20 years ago by a group of families who were very concerned that their children with disabilities were not able to get involved in ordinary local play activities, particularly at that time. They were concerned about the summer holidays and the fact that their children were stuck at home when others were being able to get involved in getting out and about and doing things with friends.

The parents managed to get a fair bit of support from the local authority to borrow a school and borrow a van and that sort of thing and it was such a success that they decided they wanted to carry on and, and do more than that. And since then, it's grown into a number of different projects. Sadly a lot of children with disabilities don't have close friends and that's really the reason that Plus exists.

In schools we work by having a circles of support inclusion officer and her job is to go in and help children within the class, support the children with disabilities within that class. There's a lot of talking about what the young person might need in terms of extra support. The ways that children might actually get involved in doing that and particularly in the kind of social support being visible sort of support that just having someone to play with in the playground.

It's a strange area to be working in, cos we're really working in, in the area of people's social lives and social lives are private matters, but because they need support, children and in fact, other you know people with disabilities generally, their social lives become almost the objects of public policy.

Interviewer

... you going to school with?

**Girl**

We're both going to school with ...

**Interviewer**

What's it called?

**Girl**

Wallshay

**Interviewer**

What's it like?

**Girl**

Big. Big. Quite scary because ... you go from like the oldest in the primary school to the youngest of the high school.

**Interviewer**

How do you feel about that feeling?

**Girl**

Scared and nervous.

**Man**

The other projects have been particularly aimed at seeing if we can overcome some of the barriers to them forming friendships.

The youth inclusion projects work with the organisations and ensure that they have the information they need, the support they need, the help they need. Occasionally they do need an extra pair of hands and we can provide staff support, but usually, within their own resources if they work at it, they actually can provide the additional support that children with disabilities need.

**Woman**

When we did our promise. Was that a happy time or was that a sad time?

What do you think?

Was that what they meant to say, was it?

(Interspersed with reply from profoundly speak impaired person)

No? You're right, that was a really happy time wasn't it? What a nice smile.

**Woman**

... best times wasn't it, it was a fantastic time, I'm so proud that day.

**Woman**

Where's the camping one? Point to it. Show us it. Right can you find it?

**Girl**

This was my one and only the croc badge.

**Woman**

I don't know what this was before

**Woman**

Oh that's the one you did at camp, yes you did that, that's a scientist's one.

**Girl**

Scientist.

**Woman**

Yeh ...

**Girl**

... and that was from croc, a croc, the croc badge. I tried to ride on ???, she said a loud no sound.

Woman

Ah ha.

**Man**

We still do the work that was started those years ago offering play opportunities to young people and so really what we're giving children is a chance to be away from their families and families to have a break from, from caring for their children. And although families do love to spend time together, family members also like to spend time apart.

**Woman**

Angus has Ashberger's Syndrome and some loss of hearing. Angus, do you like coming to play park?

**Angus**

It's just great fun, there's lots to do and there's nothing, there's nothing boring here.

**Woman**

He enjoys like building and construction so he probably enjoy the junk modelling through there.

**Angus**

Yes, what do you like working (can't hear over b/ground noise)...??

**Man**

I like working at Plus cos I know that I'm making a difference when I work here.

**Angus**

Yeh?

**Woman**

Do you go to dad's work?

So what's your favourite room to go into then? Would you like to play on the street? Would you like to play out on the street with all your friends?

Whereabouts

That one? Ahhh, which one?

Like to go to Gran's house?

**Man**

I think children who need support to get involved in, in social activities are always going to be quite disadvantaged cos it means there's always going to be an adult around. And when there's an adult around, interactions between children are always going to be different to when there isn't an adult around.

You're intruding into a bit of life that for most people is private and so you need to do that in the most sensitive way, the way that respects people's dignity, the best way you can.

**Woman**

Can you see them all? Can you see all the animals? There's a badger and a fox and an owl.

Two strange animals appear in the moonlight but before she has time to answer ... they're all sitting up for the dog.

Right, turn the page. Good boy. She loves the night but has rarely been beyond the garden gates.

Are you going to turn the page again? Right. You got it? Right, right, going to turn it? Well done.

**Man**

What Plus has done to achieve for the children using the service is an ordinary social life and that's, that's belonging and a sense of belonging, really belonging not, not just being tacked onto a school to their local clubs and societies and so on.

I think children with disabilities actually end up under much more surveillance than, than other children and actually I think any of us, if we do a bit of reflection, it's those, those spaces between adult supervision is where lots of, lots of really good growing up goes on. And children with disabilities really miss those sorts of spaces.