

Would you like support to care for your disabled child? (Oldham Family Link Scheme) Information for parents

This fact sheet can be made available in other languages or formats on request by contacting 0161 770 6666. For further information please see our detailed fact sheet **Information for all**.

What is the Oldham Family Link Scheme?

Oldham Family Link is a scheme that supports disabled children and their families by giving them the opportunity to have a break. It works by linking families with people who can regularly care for a disabled child in their own home overnight and maybe at weekends or occasionally for a full week.

Who benefits from the Oldham Family Link Scheme?

The scheme allows families to have a short break from one another and some time for themselves. If you have a child with a disability you may feel isolated because so much of your time is taken up caring for your child. Sometimes you might feel that you need a 'breather' - some time to yourself or to devote to other members of your family. The scheme is very flexible so you could choose to benefit from overnight stays or daytime visits, or perhaps a few hours after school or at weekends.

Your child will also benefit from the scheme. They will meet people who can give them a range of experiences such as trips to the local park, cinema, visiting friends and relatives or ordinary activities at home. They will be given the opportunity to mix with other people and enjoy relationships and experiences outside your immediate family.

Everyone benefits from Oldham Family Link. As well as benefiting the children and families, the carers also gain satisfaction from sharing in the care of a child and being able to help out the parents.

Although the additional needs of a disabled child may put families under considerable pressure, this does not mean that it is easy for some parents to share the care of their child. Indeed many parents may find it difficult to let their child go to another family. They may feel worried or guilty about asking us for support, or be anxious about the abilities of carers to manage their child's behaviour. As one parent commented:

“When I first heard about it I was a bit dubious – I was worried that they would not be able to manage him.”

The rigorous training and assessment process that family link carers undertake before they are linked with a child, may go some way to reassuring parents and children that family link carers are very committed and well prepared to care for their children.

How are family link carers selected?

Carers hear about the scheme through various routes e.g. from advertising, through word of mouth, or a recruitment campaign etc. Carers come from a variety of different backgrounds. For example, they may be a married couple or a lone parent.

Family link carers undergo an approval process under the same regulations as foster carers. As we are entrusting the care of a child to people outside the child's family, we make sure that we get to know prospective carers well. We carry out checks with the Criminal Records Bureau, and request medical and personal references etc.

Carers take part in preparation training, where carers are provided with information about what is involved in caring for a disabled child in their own homes. A competency-based assessment also takes place - this is a process where a social worker gathers information about the carers to ensure that the person has the essential qualities and skills required to care for a disabled child. If carers have children of their own, their views are also taken into account.

Once the assessment is complete the report and the carer's portfolio is presented to the Oldham Fostering Panel who meet monthly. They decide if the carer should become an approved family link carer. Once this decision has been made and the carer is approved a link with a family can be made.

How can my family join the scheme?

You have to be assessed as needing support, so if you think you and your family could benefit from Oldham Family Link the first step is to contact the Woodfield Centre on 0161 627 1749 and ask to speak to a duty social worker.

Our office opening hours are 8.40am to 5.00pm

You can also write, fax or email us.

Write to:
The Woodfield Centre,
Netherfield Close,
Werneth
Oldham OL8 4ET

Phone: 0161 627 1749

Fax: 0161 627 0388

If your family is assessed as being in need of extra support, the social worker will make a referral to the Woodfield Resources Panel where your family's support needs will be discussed. If family link has been identified as the most appropriate means of support then the family is referred to the Oldham Family Link Scheme. A link is then made with a carer who has the skills and availability to provide a service to your family. It may take a while to identify a suitable carer, as we try to ensure that the carer's family circumstances, home environment and experience are a good match for your child and the family, and that they can provide for the needs of your child.

How do I make a complaint?

If you are unhappy and want to complain you can contact the Complaints and Representations Officer. Call 0161 770 1129 or write to Freepost, Complaints and Representations Officer, Oldham Council, PO BOX 4, Civic Centre, Level 8, West Street, Oldham, OL1 1UL. Or you can email cypf.complaints@oldham.gov.uk
