

Contact a Family launches first SEN National Advice Service

Contact a Family has been awarded the Department for Education contract to establish a new country-wide service for families of children with special educational needs.

The Special Education Needs National Advice Service will offer comprehensive advice and information to parents in England who have a child with SEN, additional needs or disabilities, on any aspect of their child's education including:

- Early years
- School Action and School Action Plus
- Individual Education Plans (IEP's)
- Statutory Assessment/ Statements
- Annual Reviews
- Transition planning and education after 16
- Appeals

The service will also provide advice on general education issues affecting children with SEN such as transport to school; bullying; exclusion; medical needs in school and school attendance.

Anne Brook, Head of Advice and Information at Contact a Family, says: "We are delighted to be working with the Department for Education to establish this much needed service. All parents want their children to do well at school but some children need more support than others to achieve their potential because they have a disability, medical condition or other additional needs.

"The SEN National Advice Service will provide a unique one-stop-shop for parents and carers who will now be able to get one to one, in depth and personalised advice from fully trained and experienced SEN advisers about any concerns they may have regarding their child's education."

The service forms part of Contact a Family's integrated helpline and online service for families of disabled children. As well as a telephone helpline, the charity will also offer an online service for more general advice and guidance via email, the charity's website, facebook and Twitter to help families to engage with Contact a Family and with each other.

Brian Lamb, author of the Lamb Inquiry and Communications, Policy and Public Affairs consultant says: "I am delighted to see the launch of the SEN National Advice Service following the recommendations that were made in the Lamb inquiry."

Parents or carers caring for children with SEN or additional needs who would like advice and information about their child's education can call Contact a Family's helpline (0808 808 3555), visit the SEN National Advice Service online <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/families/SEN> or post a query on facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/contactafamily>) or twitter (<http://twitter.com/contactafamily>) or email helpline@cafamily.org.uk

- Contact a Family is the only UK charity that provides vital support and information for families of disabled children whatever their condition or disability. Last year we helped 340,000 families to access life-changing help. Call the helpline 0808 808 3555 or visit the website www.cafamily.org.uk

- In 2010/11 the impact of Contact a Family's work included:
 - Our family support services supported 9,000 families providing one-to-one support to families caring for a disabled child across the UK over the telephone, at drop-in sessions and through home visits or email. Support includes help with claiming benefits, accessing other sources of support, and negotiating with health, social services or education bodies. We also assist at key transition points, such as starting school or moving to adult services, providing information about local help, and a wide range of other issues.
 - Our helpline answered over 8,000 specific enquiries from families in crises or need.
 - We provided opportunities for 12,000 parents to come together at workshops and meetings for support and to learn new skills, eg wheelchair skills, dealing with difficult behaviour.
 - We linked up 179,000 parents with children with specific rare conditions.
 - We linked 10,000 families up with local services and resources.