

Enable Ireland Tallaght Children's Services Team

Presentation to NDA/NCSE seminar on
transitions to pre-school and school



Enable Ireland Tallaght

- Services for children aged birth to 18 years with a primary physical disability in South West Dublin
- 160 children and young people
- Average age at referral 12- 18 months
- Interdisciplinary Team
 - Occupational therapy
 - Physiotherapy
 - Speech & language therapy
 - Clinical psychology
 - Social work
 - Early educator
 - Community paediatrician
- Focus of service is on assisting each family to maximise their child's independence and participation



Stages in pathway to school

- Questions when new diagnosis/concerns arise and regularly in early years
- Early development and play skills group – parent & toddler
- Individual early education/play sessions
- Early education group
- Finding a pre-school – individual support for parents
- Preparation for pre-school – parents
- Assistance and support when child starts
- Continued support to pre-school
- Finding a school - individual support for parents
- Preparation for school – groups with children and with parents
- Support for introduction to school



John

- Cerebral palsy - tightness in legs impacting on ability to walk
 - uses wheelchair or walker
 - perceptual and processing difficulties
 - fine motor difficulties



John - Early education

- Attended parent and toddler group
- Attended Early Education group 2 days per week for 1 year
- Following discussion with family, decided on split placement for next year – mainstream pre-school x 3 days, Early Education group x 2 days
- Family chose a pre-school and a school



John - Pre-school

- First pre-school John attended had barriers to his participation despite support from team
- Change of pre-school
- Visits by Early Educator, Psychologist & Occupational Therapist to pre-school – disability awareness, curriculum, access
- Full-time mainstream pre-school for 2nd year, continued input by team



John - Transition to school

- o Meeting of family and team in January of year starting school
- o General meeting in Spring for parents of all children starting school next September
- o Assessments for applications for education resources, equipment, building adaptations
- o Steady communication between family, Enable team, SENO, Principal in months before and after starting school
- o School allocated a room for therapy for John
- o Now in 1st Class - included and participating in school



Stephen

Spinal Muscular Atrophy

- progressive condition
- PEG fed
- oxygen at night
- powered wheelchair
- above average cognitively
- excellent verbal skills



Stephen cont.

- Attended Early Education group x 2 days from age of 2.5 years
- Family chose a mainstream pre-school and secured a place
- Applied to HSE for funding for personal assistant in pre-school but funding refused
- Due to significant disability and medical needs involving major risk could not proceed with mainstream placement



Stephen cont.

- Still attending Early Education group - not now appropriate for his stage of development
- Appealing to HSE for funding for pre-school assistant for next September
- If this fails he may go straight into school next September (missing his ECCE year) and SNA will be applied for



Personal assistants in pre-school

1. Many children with a disability do not need additional personal assistance in pre-school
2. Some children need individual assistance but the pre-school is able to provide it from within their own resources and with ongoing disability team support
3. For a few children a full- or part-time pre-school assistant is essential. If not available:
 - Child attends preschool but participation and learning experiences limited (15 children in 5 years)
 - Child cannot attend pre-school due to medical needs and extent of dependence (4 children in 10 years)

NB. Recent increase in numbers of children with very complex needs due to extreme prematurity



Barriers to inclusion in mainstream pre-school and school

- Building – stairs, space for equipment and to move around, bathrooms/changing facilities, tables at height for wheelchair
- Attitudes – disability awareness, understanding of child's needs and strengths, expectations too low
- Social inclusion – opportunities to mix naturally with peers & develop friendships
- Family disadvantage –struggle to recognise child's needs & advocate for child
- Family stresses
- Health of child – hospital admissions & appointments



Addressing barriers

- Early identification of building and equipment needs and efficient processing of applications for funding
- Training for pre-school and school staff in disability awareness
- Observation and sensitive facilitation of child's opportunities for social interaction with peers
- Effective communication between pre-school/school and disability team about child's and family's needs