

Press Release 26th November 2014

Contact a Family report highlights the financial pressures on families raising disabled children.

A new campaign from Contact a Family is encouraging energy companies and the Government to make changes that will benefit families caring for disabled children.

The campaign has four main aims:

- That energy companies introduce a fixed monthly discount for households with a disabled child and to include disabled children in the Warm Home Discount scheme.
- An increase in the Carer's Allowance earnings limit in line with any future increase in the National Minimum Wage.
- The higher child disability element in Universal Credit to be widened to include children on the middle rate of Disability Living Allowance care component and those on the high rate for mobility.
- Increased help towards childcare costs for disabled children via tax credits, the tax-free scheme and Universal Credit.

Family Fund is supporting the Counting the Costs Campaign which was launched yesterday by Contact a Family based on the findings of their Counting the Costs 2014 report. The report identifies the additional costs associated with raising a disabled child and calls for energy companies and the Government to make changes that will benefit families caring for disabled children.

Over 3,500 families were surveyed across the UK and the findings showed a sharp rise over the last two years in the number of families with disabled children going without heating and food more than once a month. The families who completed the survey said that they were going without food (31%) and heating (33%) on a regular basis.

The survey also found that respondents were living without everyday essentials. A massive 84% said they were missing out on essential days out and leisure time as a family. Specialist equipment, therapy and hospital visits were also items that families felt they had to cut back on due to the cost of living.

Family Fund is keen to support Contact a Family by providing evidence from our own research on the additional costs associated with caring for a disabled child. Our consultation with families showed that almost **all families surveyed (96%) believed they faced additional costs** relating specifically to their child's disability. Families stated a huge range of items that could account for these extra costs. Around 50% of all feedback showed families were going without essential items such as clothing and bedding, as well as items to allow family leisure time such as outings and day trips. At least one in five families contacted stated that they were unable to afford things like childcare, play equipment, educational equipment and household items.

One family summed up succinctly the reasons why their families faced extra costs: “*My Child has bowel and bladder problems – this causes us lots of extra costs for new clothes, carpet cleaner and laundry detergents, not to mention the electric bills.*”

Many families highlighted the additional energy costs. One parent said: “*Energy costs have caused us to have less money and we have very little for food by the end of the month.*”

Family Fund Chief Executive Cheryl Ward said; *The Family Fund welcomes, and very much supports Contact a Family in its Counting the Costs campaign. Over the last few years the Family Fund has become increasingly concerned about the financial pressures that families raising disabled children are facing. We are seeing thousands of families every year approaching the Fund for support with the most essential of items. Things like clothing, bedding, hospital visiting costs and toys. We believe that these items are fundamental to a child’s wellbeing and that more should be done to secure these essentials for families raising disabled children.*

Contact a Family are encouraging people read the Counting the Costs 2014 report which can be found on their website www.cafamily.org.uk.

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Notes

1. The Family Fund is the country’s largest grant-giving charity and has over forty years of helping families with disabled children. It helps ease the additional pressures faced by low-income families raising a disabled child by giving them grants for a wide range of goods and services, including washing machines, dryers, fridges, clothing, bedding, sensory toys, computers, much-needed family breaks and more. Across the UK last year, the Fund supported 68,551 families with £33 million in grants.
2. Family Fund works hard to ensure that all funding received reaches as many families as possible across the UK. Last year, more than 94 pence in every £1 received went to a family in grants and services.
3. Family Fund grant applications can be downloaded from the Family Fund website www.familyfund.org.uk Families can contact Family Fund using the online contact form or by telephoning: 01904 621115. Join the conversation at www.facebook.com/familyfund and www.twitter.com/familyfund

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