

Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025-26 - Written information from Sparkle (A Children's Charity based in Gwent)

I am writing to you today on behalf of Sparkle, a registered children's charity based in Gwent, serving the population of disabled and developmentally delayed children aged 0-17 years, and their families living in the greater Gwent area (Newport, Torfaen, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent and Monmouthshire).

Sparkle currently supports 260 children attending fortnightly clubs, over 3,000 families and professionals receive regular information from our Family Liaison Service, while almost 2,500 parent-carers received 1:1 support from this unique support service last year alone. In addition, over 1,200 families accessed our tailored family activities for children with all range of disabilities, while more than 4,000 children and their families accessed screenings in our dedicated Medicinema, who could not otherwise attend a cinema. In addition, we provide lifesaving swimming lessons to these children, who at extremely high risk of drowning due to their disability, or the challenges their neuro-diversity, and other medical difficulties pose. Not only do we provide access to life experiences that other children take for granted, but our specialist support enables the children to thrive - in the words of a parent '*she has achieved a sense of belonging and improved self-esteem from accessing Sparkle clubs.*' (2024 Impact Report attached)

Providing these essential services to children with complex needs has been described as 'lifesaving' by our families, and our colleagues in Health and Social Care have come to rely on our vital services. In the words of a professional we work with "The Family Liaison Service is invaluable to families and professionals in providing an accessible service to all who need it. For professionals, it is hugely efficient to have a service where families can be directed to for accurate signposting and support."

However, the costs of providing our services have risen and continue to rise. Last year we had to make the extremely difficult decision to reduce staff through redundancy due to a significant drop in income from donations and grants following the pandemic. While we have received some support from the Local Authorities we serve, and we work closely with Aneurin Bevan Health Board, with the additional burden of NI and minimum wage increases in April this year, we may again have to look at cost savings through staff redundancy and service reductions i.e. loss of specialist play or Family Liaison Service support. We have already limited the services we can provide by cancelling our hugely popular 'outward bound' trips for young people, the majority of whom need 1:1 or 2:1 support to be able to access activities, which can provide a crucial opportunity to enhance their independence and their daily living skills. We have also reduced the frequency that children attend our specialist clubs, from weekly to fortnightly, to meet the rising demand for services.

A recent in depth analysis of disability trends that we conducted (report attached), has shown that despite the predicted fall in birth rate over the next 10 years, it is likely that the current trend for increasing numbers of children with disability will continue, such that in 10 years' time up to 17.5% of all children in Wales are likely to have a disability. We know that if our services are to be reduced further, the strain on families and the statutory services supporting them (Health and Social Care) will be immense, and it is likely that some of our

FIN(6)-05-25 PTN 8

families simply will not cope, resulting in these children with complex needs requiring full time residential care.

It currently costs Sparkle £750,000 per year to provide our services, and it is estimated that the increase in costs in line with NI and minimum wage increases will lead to this figure rising to £800,000. If we cannot provide our services, the statutory agencies will be required to provide this essential support. While we are doing all we can to raise the necessary sum, if we cannot, then our services will have to be reduced.

This financial year the charity received two unexpected donations amounting of £175,000, without which we would have been in further severe financial difficulty. This amount, combined with the additional 50K shortfall in core costs, leaves us with an overall projected shortfall of £225,000 for the coming 2025 /2026 financial year.

Any financial support that the committee can give Sparkle will help to ensure an essential service provision that this highly vulnerable group of CYP and their families are not only entitled to, but clearly deserve, need and value. Sparkle is happy to provide further information about its services and evidence of the need for financial support should the committee require it. Sparkle is also happy to appear before the committee should that be an essential part of the process.

Related reports:

[Sparkle Impact Report 24](#)

[Disability Prevalence report](#)