

# Radical approach for parents with learning disabilities developed

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Credit: Halfpoint

Researchers from the University of Bristol have contributed to the development of a radical new approach to supporting parents with learning disabilities.

Working with Impetus the Brighton and Hove charity helping vulnerable adults who are dealing with loneliness and isolation, they helped put

together a submission to Brighton and Hove City Council's Fairness Commission, recommending it set up a dedicated support service for parents with learning disabilities.

Beth Tarleton, from the Norah Fry Centre for Disability Studies at the University of Bristol, worked closely with Impetus on developing their message. She said: "Parents who have learning disabilities are far more likely to have their children removed than those who do not. But so often, if they were to get the support they need, they would be able to care for their children safely."

Jo Ivens, [chief executive](#) of Brighton & Hove Impetus, said; "Parents with learning disabilities are legally entitled to support so they can fulfil their parenting role and meet the 'good enough' standard of parenting. But in Brighton and Hove, the current system does not provide or enable this kind of support, which is why we have made these recommendations.

"While the safety of the child must always remain of paramount importance, the assessment system in Brighton & Hove is not adjusted to reflect parents' learning disabilities. This means that most parents are destined to fail generic parenting tests and this feeds into a default position where children are removed. This is extremely costly and can have a devastating impact on the mental health of the parents."

The report also makes an economic case for change, pointing out the costs of assessment and legal proceedings can be as high as £74,000 per parent with a [learning disability](#), per removal of a child.

Jo Ivens said: "These costs are often repeated, as many parents go on to have another child, so recurrent care proceedings are common. In Brighton and Hove, 26 per cent of Impetus's parenting advocacy clients alone have had a child removed in previous child proceedings.

"There are proven alternative ways of doing things, which have the dual benefit of being better for the parents who need support, and more cost-effective. For example, Medway Council's Valuing Parents Support Service provides support for parents with learning disabilities to meet the legal standard of 'good enough' parenting, which allows the family to remain together. It succeeds in around 87 per cent of cases."

Beth Tarleton and her team at the University of Bristol have evaluated the Medway approach. She said: "Under this approach, parents with learning disabilities are identified, and their parenting abilities assessed to highlight their strengths and weaknesses. A personalised parenting support plan is developed, to help enable them to meet the 'good enough' standard of parenting, and they are tested to ensure they can meet the needs of their child with this support in place."

The team assessed the cost of this service to be around £8,450 per family per year – a substantial saving when compared to the costs associated with care proceedings.

The Impetus submission recommends Brighton and Hove Council take several steps to improve the situation for parents with learning disabilities. It argues the council should:

- set up joint working between adult and children's social services, for referrals and support services for parents with learning disabilities
- establish a specialist support service for parents with learning disabilities along the lines of the Medway model
- make Shared Lives placements (where an adult who needs [support](#) and accommodation becomes a regular visitor to, or moves in with, a registered Shared Lives carer) available for parents with learning disabilities
- ensure staff are aware of how the Care Act 2014, Human Rights

Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010 apply to parents with a learning disability

- increase advocacy capacity for [parents](#) with learning [disabilities](#).

Provided by University of Bristol

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