

UNLOCKING DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE FOR FOSTER CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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Introduction

The chronic shortage of foster carers means that social workers and others involved in family proceedings are often struggling to find suitable places for children in care. This is especially difficult when children have disabilities or behavioural and development problems which are often associated with neglect and abuse. Fostering allowances are not generous, and whilst most carers do not foster purely for financial gain, it is a sad fact that bringing up a child who has additional difficulties is more expensive than bringing up one with no difficulties. This undoubtedly has a negative effect when trying to place children with additional needs.

Most professionals involved with childcare proceedings will be aware that there are increased allowances available for foster carers, paid by the local authority and which vary from one local authority to another. They come from local authority budgets and are susceptible to budgetary pressure to keep fostering allowances low. However, there are additional state benefits available for children who need extra help. These benefits do not come from local authority budgets as these are state benefits, the amounts being set nationally by central government. These benefits are payable regardless of whether any increased fostering allowances are also available.

Disability Living Allowance is a state benefit, payable when a child is aged 16 years or under and needs 'more looking after than children of a similar age', or they have difficulty getting around. Most people correctly assume that children with physical disabilities may have additional care and will probably have mobility needs, so will qualify for Disability Living Allowance. However, the term 'disabilities' encompasses a wide area and includes mental and developmental disabilities such as autism, ADHD, learning difficulties and depression. Many mental disabilities such as learning difficulties and developmental difficulties can arise from emotional and physical abuse, which is particularly prevalent amongst children in care. Often, children who have previously been in settings where there has been drug or alcohol misuse can be damaged and display behavioural difficulties due to the harm caused.

Foetal Alcohol Syndrome can cause developmental and behavioural difficulties that may last throughout the child's life. Children of drug users can display a wide variety of symptoms, which makes caring for them more difficult. Children who have

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