

SUBMISSION FROM DEREK BEHAN

1. We are the parents of a 13 year old daughter, Grace, who was diagnosed with autism 10 years ago. Following her diagnosis (which I have since found out we were extremely fortunate to attain at such an early stage) there seemed very little in the way of structured available information from the NHS or from our local authority relating to either the condition or any support available.
2. Grace's introduction to school was a very traumatic time as her needs were little understood, both by ourselves as isolated, poorly informed parents and by the school staff and local authority.
3. With the introduction of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (and with the help of some dedicated professionals) we were able to engage with the schools in a better defined way. This has resulted in significant progress for Grace within the educational setting and she has become a much happier child. I have no doubt that without the responsibility imposed upon the authority and the appropriate agencies by the 2004 Act, Grace could not have achieved what she has. That said, she has a few years of her education remaining and we will continue to review her progress referencing the 2004 Act and code of conduct as a guide.
4. Our concerns are now about Grace's future. Recent enquiries with the authority have revealed that it is unlikely that any of the existing local authority housing provision will be suitable for Grace's future needs. In terms of employment, despite Grace's obvious abilities, the lack of understanding about her condition, combined with her vulnerability, give us genuine concerns. Also, with only 13% of UK autistic adults being in employment it seems the concerns are not unfounded.
5. Our hope as Grace's parents is that, should we not be around, we can trust that there will be sufficient co-ordinated support around for her to contribute and to live as independent and secure a life as she should be entitled to.
6. By creating the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, the Scottish Parliament took the lead and showed that Scotland is a modern, forward-thinking and responsible nation. Our situation is evidence, were it required, that this has changed lives much for the better. In the case of the Autism (Scotland) Bill, the Parliament has an opportunity to further enhance its reputation by bringing Scotland into line with the rest of the UK and creating a more secure future for some of the population's most vulnerable people. As for Grace, she needs this to happen....

Derek Behan
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