



SIGNPOST

OSCR

Scottish Charity Regulator

www.oscr.org.uk

Registered Charity

SC032398

Introduction

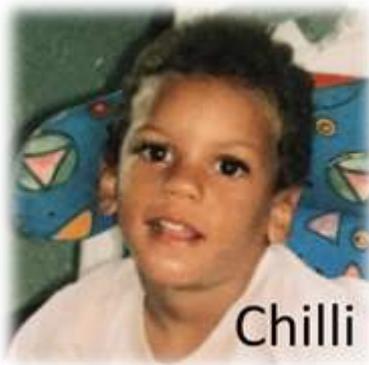
Angela Irvine, Chair of Signpost

Welcome to our latest annual report. It's hard to believe that Signpost is now 'sweet sixteen' and has been supporting the community of West Lothian for all these years. We hope you enjoy this report, where we look back at some of our accomplishments, and look forward to the future.

The past year has been another record-breaking year for our charity, with increasing demand for our services on one hand, and a difficult funding environment on the other. Despite the challenges, our staff and trustees work tirelessly to meet the needs of every family which include a young person with additional support needs. We remain committed to our aim of ensuring that they have the same choices and opportunities as everyone else – an 'ordinary life'.

Six teens

We offer support from birth to age 18. In later pages, you will meet some of the young people we have supported over the past 16 years as they have grown up with Signpost.



Signpost at a glance

S

Support – our one-to-one support gives families confidence that they can deal with the many challenges of childhood disability

I

Information – without this, no progress can be made. We know what questions families should ask, as well as giving answers

G

Getting through the Day with ASD – our training courses, on this and other topics, give families the tools they need to thrive

N

No diagnosis – Signpost fills the gap when children have additional support needs, but no formal diagnosis or statutory support

P

Partnerships – working with others means more can be done to benefit families than one small charity can do alone

O

Opportunity – we are small and agile and can respond quickly to needs expressed by families

S

Shared wisdom – peer support and a large community (400+ families) means a solution to a problem is never far away

T

Transition – we offer structured support as young people move from school to adult life, a very stressful time for families

Why is Signpost needed?

“always there when you need them, and they stay in touch with you – that’s really important”



“[what families need is] one source of information...on all the issues about which a parent may have concerns ... recommended by a range of health professionals, and handed to all parents who come into their contact with a problem of any type...in order to ensure that ...they know where to turn”.

“It should be made clear that even if a child does not have a definitive diagnosis...some provision must be made within the system for this group of parents, who currently struggle to gain the help they need.”

This study from 2010¹ found that 74% of families felt that they had received inadequate information from their local authority, and 62-64% said the same about their GP/hospital. **Other parents and charities were reported as the best sources of information.** These findings have hardly changed since a similar study in 2001.

More recently, in a 2017 study of young disabled people moving from childhood to adult life², a parent observed:

“Local information and guidance for parents could be improved – and someone to talk through what different services do... and help with planning or networking... it is not sufficient to be given a leaflet or a website. Ideally we need someone who could be alongside in crucial stages and knows our family”

Signpost is parent-led, and operates exactly as described above. We want all families to have, as one parent said:

“an ordinary life, where the disability doesn’t get in the way of what we want to do, with the same choices and chances as anybody else”

¹ ‘In the Dark’, Cerebra, 2010

² ‘Experiences of Transitions to Adult Years, Health and Social Care Alliance, 2017

What we do: Helpline / drop-in



Age <5 5-11 12+
25% 50% 25%

830 contacts in 2016-17

10% increase compared to 2015-16

pro-active, parent-led,
reliable, flexible and broad
ranging

a wee lifeline...

25% new contacts

75% returners seeking support with a new issue

Listening is the key to our success – often parents just need some

‘thinking space’ to find their own solutions with our support.

We give immediate support to meet individual needs, or signposting to other agencies in our network who can help.

Six teens – Owen

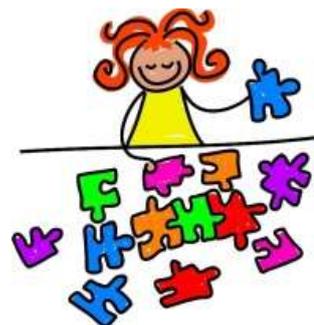
My son Owen began to develop vocal and motor ‘tics’ at the age of 7, and the journey to his diagnosis of Tourette’s Syndrome (and other conditions) five years later was a very difficult and emotive time for Owen and the family. We turned to Signpost for advice and without their support we would have had no idea what to do.

Owen found primary school very challenging, and was in and out of school, but has now found himself in the right place at secondary and is thriving. The support he receives is fantastic and we are so proud of the confident teenager he has become. Here he is with his bearded dragon, ‘Steve’.



What we do: Autism Support

'Getting Through the Day with Autism' 10-week parent training based on needs expressed by families (2 or 3 courses per year/16-20 parents)



'Cozmic Club' & 'Motiv8' administrative support for 2 parent-led social clubs for around 16 teenagers with ASD in mainstream school

Autism Access – a unique pathway from initial diagnosis to essential support (in partnership with NHS Lothian) for around 40 families each year



Dads' information evenings for working parents, and any male carers (up to 20 per year)

Social stories training supporting children's understanding of behaviour and social situations



Six teens – Chilli

We have been using Signpost since it started - my son and Signpost were babies together! They have provided me with a wealth of information about local activities, charity funding and basically just supporting me when I've been feeling lost. We have had funding for a swing, a specialist seating system and most recently an eye gaze device for school! We have also enjoyed a few evenings at the zoo thanks to Signpost!

Now that Chilli is 16, Signpost has helped me with information on transitioning to adult services- a new journey for us which they are making a little less daunting!



What we do: Growing carers' skills

Advocacy – In 2016-17, 42 carers were supported to advocate for their child, and 6 young people were supported to express their views on decisions which affected them



Transition into adult life – innovative support for parents to share their concerns, consider options and facilitate their child's choices (1 course for up to 20 parents each year, run in partnership with Carers of West Lothian)

Parent Carer Alliance – in 2016-17 we piloted the first-ever Scottish parent-led forum for co-production of services, which has already had some success in influencing local council services for disabled children in West Lothian.

Peer support – connecting families with others in the community to share their experiences and knowledge



Six teens – John

Signpost has always been a part of our family's life – always there for a friendly chat if needed. Their support is amazing; they help you think things through, like when we were trying to choose the right school to meet John's needs after he didn't have the easiest time in primary school. John is now doing well at college.

Because I work near Signpost I see how they make everyone welcome and are very resourceful at finding answers no matter what the question.



What we do: Ages and stages

We support families from birth to age 18, building relationships and trust, so that they bring us their problems before they become a crisis. This early intervention often prevents the need for more intensive support from statutory services.



We operate in the gap between friendship/kin support and statutory services, offering low-key, personalised support based on the family's assessment of their needs, while using our experience to suggest further useful supports they may not be aware of. Our support often encourages families to access services with whom they were reluctant to engage (e.g. social work). Families often return to us over the years as their children grow and their needs change.

Six teens – Ceira

“Signpost has supported us to recognise what we know already and what we still need, and to voice our emotions and worries in difficult situations. They helped in so many ways – in the early days they gave us books so my daughter could understand how autism affected her. Later it was about making sure her little sister got support – Signpost suggested a siblings club, and now she knows she’s not alone, and gets so many opportunities that I couldn’t provide (my health isn’t good). Both of them have clubs, which has really boosted their confidence.

I joined a carers group, and that has helped me to speak up better. Recently we attended the transition course, which led to us getting social work involved (we’d never have known to ask them otherwise) – and it also led to Ceira getting a place at college, another thing we didn’t think was possible. Signpost supports the whole family – we’ve loved borrowing the free family pass to Dynamic Earth, which lets the kids enjoy time with the extended family, a treat we couldn’t afford otherwise.



What we do: Money, money, money

Research shows the cost of raising a disabled child is between 2 & 3 times more than a typical child, and often one parent must give up work because of their caring responsibilities.

We help families to receive £1000s per year by matching them to sympathetic funders who will pay for essentials such as washing machines, respite breaks or special equipment, which is not always provided free of charge, as many suppose. Other agencies also refer families to us for this help.



Rosie (left) will enjoy her independence now that she has a self-propelled wheelchair.

We also buy passes to local attractions, and lend them out for free, so that families can have some stress-free time together without worrying about cost, or their child having a 'melt-down'. Families enjoyed more than 200 day trips last year using our passes.

Six teens - CJ

My daughter CJ has loved animals from a very young age. Visits to the Zoo could be hit or miss due to her autism – some days she would want to stay all day, but on others the noise and crowds were too much for her, and we'd have to leave early – very expensive for a single parent.

Borrowing the free pass has been amazing – as we were no longer under pressure to make the most of any visits, my daughter became so comfortable that she now volunteers once a week, assisting the zoo keepers. She now hopes to do a degree in conservation/ zoology. It is amazing what a pass can lead to...it has changed my daughter's life.



Innovation ➡ *action*



Having contact with so many families helps us to understand emerging issues, and we can often respond more swiftly than larger organisations. We often find that although information exists, no-one has brought it together in a usable form before.

We work in partnership wherever possible, recognising that our contribution might act as a ‘catalyst for change’, or that a project beyond our means as a small charity can often go ahead if several agencies collaborate.

New this year:

Scotland’s first [parent carer engagement forum](#) developed parent skills in service co-production, with original research which influenced local council holiday activity schemes.

[New Lego club](#) funded by West Lothian Council’s ‘people’s vote’ (participatory budgeting) will support isolated children

Partnership with ‘Jumpstation’ to provide [adapted trampolining](#) - *“don’t call it additional needs, call it the sane parent session!”*

Examples from our 16 year history:

[‘Are you prepared for change?’ \(2005-present\)](#) award-winning transition planning for parents and [‘The Big Plan’ \(2007\)](#) person-centred planning for teens *“helped us see our son differently”*

[Cozmic Club & ‘Motiv8’ \(2007- present\)](#)– social clubs for teens with autism from mainstream schools - *“meeting others like me gave me the confidence to achieve more in other areas”*

[Autism access service \(2011- present\)](#) – a defined pathway from diagnosis to ongoing support, in partnership with NHS Lothian *“I learned more in the last hour than in past 6 months”*

[‘Financial help for families’ \(2013 – present\)](#)- information from diverse sources about help families may be entitled to, from council tax reductions, to energy-saving tariffs, to support for disabled students, as well as benefits such as DLA.

[Dad’s autism information sessions \(2013-present\)](#) – support for male carers to understand their children - *“apprehensive about coming but felt the benefit... good to hear from another dad”*

Evaluation and impact

We regularly evaluate our impact using surveys & training feedback and have recently made more explicit links between what we do and the outcomes detailed in the Scottish Government's 'Getting it Right for Every Child' and Carer Information strategies.



Our evidence shows that as a result of contact with Signpost, most families have multiple positive outcomes – for example, they are able to take action or make plans, they feel more in control or less stressed, they can access a new service/club/group they did not know about before, or their child has improved quality of life.

Six teens – Beth

Beth was diagnosed with right hemiplegia cerebral palsy at about 4 months old after we noticed she wasn't keeping up with her twin sister Ellen. She also has a learning disability and epilepsy caused by a stroke before birth. It can be very daunting when you first get your diagnosis and wonder what the future holds. We were directed to Signpost by Louise at the child development clinic and from then Signpost have helped us along our journey of ups and downs.

The staff are great and always make you feel welcome and the fact that some of them have personal experience of parenting children with disabilities makes you feel that they really understand the issues. They have helped me find lots of social activities, given us the opportunity to attend Edinburgh Zoo dream nights. We also found the Transition meetings very useful, with lots of speakers and advice.

Beth is now moving on to the Supported programme at West Lothian College. I wish Signpost all the best and here's to the next 16 years!



16 quotes about Signpost[★]



“if you don’t even know what question to ask, it’s hard to get the right answer, but Signpost guides you”

“user-friendly and have a deep understanding of the needs of families – I feel confident when I refer families to Signpost”

“Signpost staff are the right people in the right place with the right attitude”

“allowed us to identify positive things in our life as well as areas for improvement”

“Signpost were the only people who took my concerns seriously...my son was later diagnosed with autism”

“Helped us prepare to tell my son about his autism – which turned out to be a positive experience fortunately!”

“got me in touch with other families – it was such a relief. Now I am providing support to another mother and can now pass on my experiences and knowledge”

“hands on, and they get things moving”

“[without Signpost’s support] I think my son would have dropped out of school with no alternative in place”

“to know that I am not alone makes me believe in myself and not doubt myself”

“helped us to feel that we are moving forward as a family”

“A friendly face and encouraging talk helps a lot. No query is too big or small. They really do point you in the right direction!!”

“Newsletter helps me feel included every time I read it”

“I felt encouraged to persevere in getting a service for my daughter, previously I didn’t know how to access the appropriate service and felt shunted around”

“incredibly informative... [info] given in a sensitive manner”

“[without Signpost’s support] we would not be coping with our family or school network”

★ from our evaluations

Funding and Governance

Signpost is a registered Scottish charity whose trustees are parents or professionals, living or working in West Lothian, with personal experience of the challenges facing disabled children.



Our trustees meet monthly to receive reports and decide strategy. Outcomes for the year are set during our annual development day, and reviewed regularly. Regular training is undertaken by staff and trustees, and new trustees receive a structured introduction to the organisation.

Full accounts can be obtained by contacting Signpost on 01506 431133, or emailing enquiries@signpost-online.co.uk.

We are grateful for the support of our key funders this year:

- ✓ Big Lottery Fund
- ✓ West Lothian Council/Community & Health Care Partnership
- ✓ West Lothian Development Trust
- ✓ Baily Thomas Charitable Fund

Summary Income/Expenditure 2016-17

	2016-17	2015-16
Income	£123,796	£54,388
Donations & legacies	£..10,432	£ 7,341
Charitable grants	£113,317	£46,934
Other/trading	£ 0	£ 0
Bank interest	£ 47	£ 113
Expenditure	£ 80,788	£79,771
Charitable activities	£ 80,788	£79,771
Total funds carried forward:	£100,137*	£57,129

* of which £45,789 are restricted funds, plus designated funds of £19,000 to mitigate the risk of having to meet legal obligations if the charity has to be wound up in the future.

Make good things happen...

The work of Signpost relies on many generous individuals and funders who give us their money, time and energy, and we are very grateful to them all.

If you believe that young people with additional support needs deserve to have the same choices and opportunities as their friends, please support our work.

Make a donation today:

JustGiving™

search for 'Signpost'

JustTextGiving™
by  **vodafone**

text SIGN01 £2/£3/£5
to 70070

Or contact **01506 431133** to set up a regular donation by standing order or Fastpay.

Other ways to support us:

- ✓ Volunteer your skills
- ✓ Hold a fundraising event
- ✓ Challenge yourself – run a marathon, give up chocolate for a month, or jump out of an aeroplane!
- ✓ Become a trustee
- ✓ Become an ambassador – tell everyone about us and ask for their support



Be part of something amazing – support us today!

Signpost
Beatlie Campus
Craigshill
Livingston
EH54 5EJ

Telephone:
Tel: 01506 431 123

Website:
www.signpost-online.co.uk

Email:
enquiries@signpost-online.co.uk

Facebook:
Signpost-West-Lothian

