



Short Breaks Review – Acorn House Dumfries and Galloway

Independent Review by
Action for Children July 2019
(Summary)

SHORT BREAKS REVIEW - ACORN HOUSE

Acorn House provides residential short breaks and support to children, young people (up to 18 years old) and the families of those with complex disabilities and/or profound health care needs and challenging behaviour. Managed by NHS Dumfries and Galloway in partnership with Dumfries and Galloway Council, this NHS facility is the only specialised provider of residential short breaks in the local authority. Delivered by healthcare staff through a nurse led model, the house currently accessed by 26 children, is equipped with 10 single occupancy bedrooms, an interactive sensory room and a large secure garden with a play area.

1. FOCUS

An independent consultation was requested to capture the views and voices of children, young people, and their parents/carers who currently or have previously accessed Acorn House short break services. Additionally, staff, key professionals, and families who are otherwise eligible to access this short breaks service were invited to participate.

The full report sets out the findings and responds to the brief requesting Action for Children:

- To determine whether the current residential short break service situated in Dumfries appropriately meets the needs of the population of children and young people with complex disabilities across Dumfries and Galloway.
- To assess whether other models of short break provision would be beneficial to the population of children and young people with complex disabilities.
- To assess whether other models of short break provision would provide best value in terms of service user experience and outcomes, and maximise the use of NHS Board and Dumfries and Galloway Council resources.

2. SUMMARY

The key messages from the consultation are:

- Acorn House short break service plays an essential role in maintaining the wellbeing of eligible families.
- An outcomes focused service with a clearer multiagency approach would better meet the individual needs of service users.
- Across Dumfries and Galloway there are a lack of suitable services available to meet the population of young people with complex disabilities needs.
- There is a need for service provision across Dumfries and Galloway beyond overnight short breaks, including evenings, weekends, holidays, group provision and alternative education placements.
- This residential short breaks service would benefit from the standards, guidelines and inspections brought through independent registration with the Care Inspectorate.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no doubt residential short breaks are fundamental to young people and families across Dumfries and Galloway. Short Breaks provide families with the necessary respite for children to continue to be cared for at home. Currently, Acorn House benefits a remarkably small group within the population of young people with complex disabilities across Dumfries and Galloway. To achieve greater impact, beyond the current 10% of eligible young people, a more flexible and outcomes led service is required.

The location of the service limits accessibility for families particularly in the west of Dumfries and Galloway. The commute is long, and for many unachievable. Not all young people and families consider overnight provision necessary or best suited to their needs. Offering a service with a 'menu of provision' including short breaks, residential, community outreach and holiday time provision would provide further choice and reach the wider population.

A number of constraints and limitations were highlighted through this consultation confirming that although Acorn House provides, for the most part, a safe environment meeting the physical care needs of young people with complex disabilities, the wider needs/outcomes of young people are not appropriately met through the service as it currently stands. Limitations included insufficient staffing levels preventing opportunity for young people to participate in activities/experiences which would help young people develop skills, confidence and build independence. The service is staffed by registered nurses and healthcare assistants, however, there is still a reliance on other NHS teams e.g. Community Nurses to carry out specific clinical procedures to meet medical health needs of young people. Particularly, the service lacks required skills and resources to meet the needs of young people with challenging behaviour.

Acorn House holds a positive working relationship with NHS teams in other departments which is viewed favourably by parents/carers and professionals. Both recognise a stronger working relationship with NHS professionals and wider key professionals would benefit young people further. For example, Acorn House staff working on a social care led model, alongside complex care health professionals, to gain a greater understanding of the medical needs of each young person. This would retain overall focus on each young person's wider needs/outcomes.

Key points recommended to appropriately meet the needs of the wider population of young people with complex disabilities include:

1. **Social care led model**, which would offer a more beneficial service to a broader number of young people with complex disabilities. Continuing a Health and Social Care Partnership, with health working closely with the social care team to support staff awareness/training and meet young people's needs while attending a clearly resourced service with timetabled activities/experiences. A Service Level Agreement should be in place specifying resource, provision and staffing required with potential stretch and flex to meet demand.
2. **An outcomes focused service** which places young people at the centre. Instilling GIRFEC principles and SHANARRI wellbeing indicators to fulfil all young people's individual needs and enabling them to achieve individual outcomes.

3. **Flexibility** offered through a 'menu of provision' creating choice for young people and families to access a service which best meets their needs. For example, offering short breaks, residential and community outreach provision. Enabling families more flexibility on timings and location e.g. weekend activity group in local communities, holiday club at Acorn House.
4. Creating a more **nurturing space**, reflective of a 'home from home'. Through use of the kitchen areas and adding personalised touches for each young person's stay. Providing areas for young people to have quiet time and be socially active, including greater use of the garden.
5. Strong **multiagency** input, with periodical reviews, to provide a more consistent needs/outcomes led service. Clearer multiagency working would benefit young people to achieve positive outcomes during their short break with consideration of social, educational and health needs.
6. Implementing an adequate **staffing structure** with skills, qualifications and experience which will achieve better value and meet the needs of the young people attending Acorn House. Ensuring staff undergo core training and additional training required to meet the needs of young people e.g. clinical procedures, behavioural management, autism awareness.
7. Clear **eligibility criteria** should be effectively communicated (along with any alterations) to all staff, relevant professionals and parents helping understand criteria for young people to access the service. This should coincide with a clear referral and admissions process.
8. Ensuring a high-quality service through standards and requirements of registration with an external **regulatory body** e.g. Care Inspectorate, Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC). With regular inspections driving and maintaining service performance.