

Charity Calls On Government To Help Severely Disabled Children

Contributed by The Editorial Team
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Disability charity MOVE Europe has unveiled its new Charter at the House of Lords, urging government to recognise the huge health and social benefits its unique mobility programme can deliver. The MOVE Programme has been shown to reduce the financial pressures on social care agencies and health services. Yet despite being available in this country for almost ten years now, only 1.5 per cent of the UK's 110,000 severely disabled children are able to access the scheme. Only two English local authorities are currently making MOVE available to all those that could benefit, and nine in Scotland.

Combining education and therapy, MOVE teaches children the core skills of sitting, standing and walking. Research has shown 72 per cent have increased their mobility within their first year on the scheme, which is delivered through schools and local authority agreements.

Specialist MOVE Trainers work with members of the child's everyday care team, including parents, teachers and health practitioners, teaching them how to deliver individually tailored programmes. This approach means costs associated with the scheme are minimal, and existing support staff are able to work more collaboratively.

As well as leading to greater independence and an improved quality of life, MOVE can offer considerable health benefits. Increased mobility helps children develop stronger bones and muscles while improving breathing and circulation. As just one of many senior physiotherapists using the Programme, Phyllis Tulloch has seen the results first-hand. "Since starting on the MOVE Programme we've had two children awaiting hip surgery taken off the waiting list";

Peter Holland, Chief Executive of MOVE Europe, said: "By getting children moving about, whether that's playing football with friends or just moving from a wheelchair to unsupported seating, MOVE can help to realign bodies, stretch out vital organs and improve muscle tone, all critical for future health. Ultimately, MOVE gives children the chance to realise their full potential and be, first and foremost, children."

Eight year old Oliver Baines has West Syndrome, and has been on the MOVE Programme for four years. Before starting MOVE Oliver spent all day either lying on the floor, or strapped into a chair, with no awareness of his own body and no muscle tone. He was incredibly passive, and spent most of his time asleep. Within just six months on the Programme, he became far more active, and today Oliver spends most of the day walking around using a gait trainer, without any adult help. His muscles have strengthened, and he can now take part in playground games with his friends. His mum Julie said: "I never thought I would see such a great improvement. He has certainly done himself, and us, incredibly proud";

MOVE's call on government comes during an extensive policy review of children and young people, which identifies services for disabled children as one of its three main priorities. The results of this review, launched in July 2006 by Economic Secretary to the Treasury Ed Balls and Schools Minister Andrew Adonis, will inform decisions in next year's Comprehensive Spending Review.

Government is also currently undertaking a policy review of independent living for disabled people, led by the Office for Disability Issues.