

Dear Ms Jenny Rathbone,  
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee.  
The Senedd,  
Pierhead Street,  
Cardiff.  
CF99 1SN

We are writing in relation to the January publication of 'Minding the Future, the childcare barrier facing working parents', following an inquiry by the Equality and Social Justice committee.

As a charity which provides many play facilities and clubs for disabled children across three centres in Gwent, Sparkle trustees particularly welcomed the report's focus on this area.

Dealing with the families of children with complex needs on a daily basis, we are only too aware of the lack of available, suitable childcare and the barriers this situation creates.

And while we could not step in to provide all of that childcare across Wales we could provide invaluable information to you and the committee members to help inform the decisions about what parents need, where the problems lie and how best solutions could be created.

As well as providing services out of Nevill Hall hospital and the children's centre in Caerphilly, Sparkle is also the charity partner of the Serennu Children's centre in Newport.

Serennu is unique in that it provides clinics and therapies for children and young people with complex needs from Newport and the wider Gwent areas. But, more than that, Sparkle uses the facilities at the centre to provide a wide range of after school clubs, play clubs, Saturday and holiday clubs, week in and week out. The after school and holiday provision is offered to between 150 to 200 children and young people with complex needs.

We deliver services in partnership with Aneurin Bevan Health Board, such as a continuing care club and a siblings support group. Further, we also work closely with social services, delivering Families First activities for Newport City Council. Our unique Family Liaison Service supports carers directly, with no referral needed and no waiting lists. This reduces a significant burden for the local health board and the social services departments of the five local authorities we serve. This Family Liaison Service offers support to more than 1,000 families a year who experience at first hand the difficulties in finding suitable childcare.

We also know that there is a significant level of unmet demand, illustrated by the growing waiting lists for access to our clubs and the distance some families travel just in order for their children to be able to take part.

Our whole ethos is about ensuring disabled children, or those with developmental difficulties, and their families, have the same access to opportunities as able bodied children. We work to make sure they are able to participate in valued childhood experiences, with access to the same range of opportunities, life experiences, activities and community services as any other child and their family.

We believe we have the expertise and experience necessary, built up over many years, to at the very least help be part of the solution to tackling the access problems your report identifies.

Apologies for this long e mail, which has just given you a taste of the work we do. We would welcome the opportunity to be able to meet you and/or other committee members at the Senedd to discuss the issues around childcare for disabled children and young people with complex needs.

In addition, we would invite you and/or other members of the committee to visit our purpose-built base Serennu, in Rogerstone, Newport, to show what can be achieved in terms of the provision of quality services and facilities for disabled children and their families.

We firmly believe Serennu is an example of best practice in this field which could be mirrored, or which could inspire others, across Wales and which would go at least part of the way to tackling the lack of childcare, after school clubs and wraparound care for disabled children, the shortage of which your inquiry so clearly highlighted.

We would also welcome the opportunity to be part of the consultation process in any future investigations into services which have a direct impact on equality issues for disabled children.

We urge you to visit [www.sparkleappeal.org](http://www.sparkleappeal.org) to get a flavour of what we do.

We have also attached our latest family feedback which highlights the many clubs and support we provide across Gwent.

We are currently carrying out a feasibility study into the possibility of creating another purpose built facility in north Gwent to ensure children in communities of Blaenau Gwent and surrounding area can access the same level of support as we currently provide in the south of the county.

Yours sincerely,

Sparkle chairwoman Dr Sabine Maguire  
Trustee, Nicole Garnon