

Press release

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Families with disabled children struggle to afford food and heating

Families with disabled children are going without essentials such as food and heating. This is the norm, not a temporary crisis brought on by the economic slump.

These are the findings of *Counting the Costs 2010*, a survey and report from Contact a Family. The survey, a repeat of one carried out in 2008, asked over 1,100 UK parents caring for a disabled child about their current financial situation.

Key findings include:

- Almost a quarter are going without heating (23%). **Up** from 16% in 2008.
- One in seven (14%) are going without food. **Down** from 16% in 2008.
- More than half have borrowed money from family or friends (51%) to keep financially afloat or pay for essentials, such as food and heating. **Up** from 42% in 2008.
- More than 40% have applied for a charity grant. **Up** from 25% in 2008.
- Almost three quarters (73%) are going without days out and leisure time with the family. **Up** from 55% in 2008.

Srabani Sen, Chief Executive of Contact a Family, said: "Many families with disabled children are in financial dire straits. Everyone has been hit hard by the recession but families with disabled children were already having to cope with a harsh combination of extra living costs and the difficulty of holding down a job and caring. These financial pressures have been worsened by the economic slump and have left many at breaking point.

"In the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review we call on the Government to pay particular attention to ensuring that families with disabled children are genuinely protected."

Many of the parents who responded to *Counting the Costs 2010* don't work (60%) due to the difficulties of juggling employment and caring. Many parents wish to return to work, but find the lack of flexible working and the cost of childcare prohibitive, with 45% reporting they pay more for childcare for their disabled child.

Counting the Costs 2010 shows that financial difficulties have a negative impact on many aspects of life and increases families' social isolation. Almost three quarters are going without leisure and days out and 68% are going without holidays. Even basic activities, such as swimming or going to the local park that other families take for granted, are difficult and this is worsened by a lack of money.

Srabani Sen added: "Time and time again research shows that families with disabled children have an above-average risk of living in poverty. Steps must be taken to address this imbalance from the Government, from businesses and employers, from local authorities and the voluntary sector."

Ends

For further information and to request a copy of the report, telephone the press office on 020 7608 8741. There are spokespeople and family case studies available for interview.

Notes to Editors

- Contact a Family is the leading UK charity working with all families with disabled children. We provide advice and information on all aspects of raising a disabled child including detailed financial and benefits advice and bring families together so they can support each other. We also campaign for rights and justice for families with disabled children. Visit the website www.cafamily.org.uk
- *Counting the Costs 2010* is a survey and report about the finances of families with disabled children. The online survey hosted on Contact a Family's website was completed by 1,113 parents of disabled children between February and April 2010. It is a repeat of a survey carried out in 2008 with some additional questions asked.