

# EQUITY CONFERENCE 2004: A Huge Success

The Equity Group

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## Recruiting now for ILN 2004-6

We're recruiting now for the ILN programme starting this Autumn — and we need your help. So far North Lanarkshire, Scottish Borders, East Renfrewshire and Dumfries & Galloway Councils have committed to take part. We're now working to recruit other local authority areas, as well as parents, teachers, social workers and health workers from these areas. If you live in one of these four areas and are interested in taking part, or know other parents or professionals who may be, please let us know. Even if you live elsewhere in the country but you feel your local authority should be part of the ILN, get in touch with any contacts or information. We'll be looking for another six local authority areas next year, so we need members all over Scotland to get involved!



Sheena McDonald, who chaired the conference, and Bart McGettrick, one of the inspirational speakers

More than 160 delegates from around the UK attended the Time for Inclusion Conference in March, making the Equity Group's fourth annual gathering its most successful to date. The one-day event, held in Dunfermline, was chaired by TV presenter Sheena McDonald and placed a strong emphasis on networking and sharing of knowledge and experience. Delegates included both individuals and representatives from a large number of diverse organisations. Many were already committed to finding out more about good inclusive education and many others were challenged throughout the day.

Delegates represented the widest possible range of interests including adults with disabilities, parents of young people with disabilities, education, health professionals, representatives from the voluntary sector, social work and students.

Top of the agenda was a presentation on the success of the Inclusive Learning Network given by Dorothy McDonald and

[cont'd. P2]

## Where she belongs

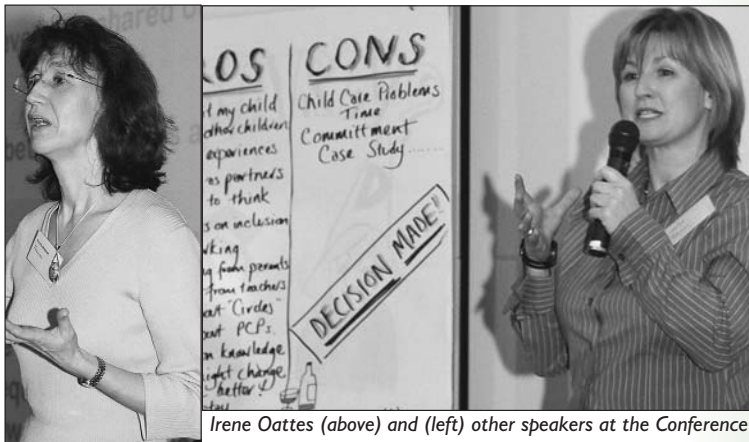
Debbie Ashurst, Partners graduate, drummer and inclusion fairy shares a little of Jenny's story (so far).

Two years ago Jenny left a special school. Her unsatisfactory, segregated experiences there made us determined to find a way to build an inclusive life for her and me, her mum and main carer. A visit to a Judith Snow workshop began an awareness of the inclusion movement and how others like us were making changes for people with disabilities.

A Circle of Support was established around Jenny, because we couldn't do this alone. With their knowledge and support and some Person Centred Planning tools, Jenny told us she'd like to try many things. A year out post school might be a good idea, to try life on and see what fits. Despite a severely limited budget, she did much, mostly ordinary things denied her in special land. Together, we learnt who we were. I knew so little about her. I'd lost so much of myself.

While we stripped away all the 'support' that blocked our progress, we needed money for Personal Assistant support, transport and our own front door from which to access life. We achieved these things and Direct Payments paid for staff, chosen by Jenny with her Circle's help, and definitely non-agency as this denied choice.

[cont'd. P4]



Irene Oattes (above) and (left) other speakers at the Conference

[Conference — cont'd from P1]

Heather Simmons of Equity with ILN participants, teacher Lesley Terris and parent Irene Oattes. The ILN also featured in an afternoon workshop session.

### Disability Law Developments

Next was international education and disability law expert, David Ruebain, whose presentation on development in law and practice on inclusive education was fascinating and at times challenging. David, who works with London solicitors Levenses, explored how the establishment and enforcement of individual rights influence changes in practice and thinking.

He told the conference: "Inclusion is not about location, but about effective provision for all children, where local authorities, school and home take inclusion seriously. Thinking about disabled children's needs has helped all children to be treated more as individuals."

The extended lunchtime session was designed to ensure lots of networking, with small exhibitions and presentations from various organisations.

### Four Workshops & Best Practice

Those attending the conference chose to attend one of four workshops in the afternoon. Bryan Gregg of Shelter and Paul Gilroy of Ballikinrain

School led the session on including children with different needs.

The workshop on the Additional Support for Learning Bill was led by Robert Brown MSP, Convener of the Scottish Parliament's Education Committee along with Iain Nisbet from Govan Law Centre. There was strong debate on this subject and Robert Brown encouraged Equity's role in the development of the Code of Practice. He said ministers were keen to achieve much greater consistency across local authority areas.

Many delegates were keen to attend the workshop led by parent Gill Parker with headteacher Linda-Ann Reid on their experiences of working together to include Gill's son Ross. Many strategies for successful inclusion emerged from this workshop.

The fourth workshop featured the work of the ILN and was presented by parent Donna Allen and teacher Evelyn Craig who focussed on their action research work in the Scottish Borders, and Pat Clark, a teacher who has established an on-line support group in her area.

### Preparing for Next Year

To close the conference, the final inspirational speaker was Professor Bart McGettrick, Professor of Education at the University of Glasgow. Bart is a trustee of the Gordon Cook Foundation concerned with Values in Education and National Chairman of the Citizenship Values Educational Award Scheme.

There was a lot of positive feedback from delegates who attended the conference and work is already underway to prepare for next year's event.

Eileen Prior said: "The conference was a massive success for everyone involved. There was a great mix of delegates from all over Scotland, many coming into contact with Equity for the first time, and the discussion throughout the day was wide ranging. We very deliberately built in lots of networking time as well as widening the issue of inclusion beyond simply disability because the rights issues are the same for any child who is at risk of exclusion."

## Additional Support for Learning — update

Many of you will have been keeping a beady eye on the developments of the Additional Support for Learning Bill, but many have found the whole process confusing so we will attempt to unpick some of the main points for you and provide you with contacts to obtain full copies of all the documentation surrounding this legislation.

It's worth saying that many members took an active part in lobbying around the Bill, and it's been said on a number of occasions by MSPs and others that the views of Equity were important in shaping their thinking around the Bill. That

said, Equity's feeling is that the new Act misses an opportunity to push forward a universal, rights-based education system. However, we must work with that we now have.

The Record of Needs system is to be replaced now that the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act has been passed. The Act does not become law until autumn 2005 once a number of things have been put into place. Before becoming law the Tribunal system needs to be set up, mediation services put in place and the Code of Practice and Regulations must be written and consulted on.

The term Special Needs has been ditched in favour of Additional Support Needs which is designed to take in the needs of a wider range of difficulties. Children who meet this criteria of needing additional support could include bereaved children, bullied children, those with behavioural difficulties as well as those with traditionally identified barriers to learning (although one could argue — as we do — that it is not the child who has barriers, but the system).

### Record of Needs dumped

Instead of a Record of Needs, some children will have a Co-ordinated Support Plan which is a statutory planning document aimed at (that magic phrase) better joined up working between health, social work and education. Broadly speaking, only those children whose additional support requires the co-ordination of input from other agencies outside education will have a CSP.

The CSP is expected to focus on the potential of children than on their weaknesses, as the RON did. It is expected that more children will have a CSP than the two per cent who previously had a Record of Needs — existing RONs will be retained for the next four years — but some children who currently have a RON (those who do not have input from other agencies) will not be entitled to a CSP — an obvious area of concern for many parents.

The main differences from the RON system include:

- ◆ New duties on education authorities and others to provide support
- ◆ Mediation services for parents of children with additional support needs
- ◆ Dispute resolution arrangements
- ◆ New Code of Practice
- ◆ Changes to planning and preparation mechanisms for transition to post school life
- ◆ tribunals to hear appeals on aspects of CSPs

In drawing up CSPs, published literature says that parents' views will be taken into account and noted and that they can request specific types of assessment. Although previous legislation covered some of these points



Robert Brown MSP (left), Chair of the Parliament's Education Committee, speaking at the Time for Inclusion Conference, with Iain Nisbet of the Govan Law Centre

and failed to address others, it has to be said that many local authorities and individual schools had very fair and sensible ways of working whereas others seem to fail on so many levels, even those covered in law. Whether or not these changes will address that remains to be seen. A section on making advocacy services available has also been added to the Act, though disappointingly — and despite the work of Equity members and other campaigners — there is no obligation on local authorities to provide advocacy support.

### Tribunals

The tribunals are meant to be more user friendly and less intimidating for families. Those who would have been eligible for legal aid previously, will still be able to get it but only before and after tribunal hearings, not during them. The Scottish Parliament's Education Convener, Robert Brown, MSP, has stated that he does not see CSP as being so specific on issues of resources, so it is worth parents adding their comments on this to the Code of Practice.

Although the Act has been passed and there is no more room for consultation, you can still play an active part in developing the Code of Practice. The Executive commissioned Children in Scotland to hold seminars on what the Code of Practice should look like and how further consultation could take place. The Code will be put onto the Executive's website, which you can check or register for the SE's free weekly email system which lets you

know which consultations have just come out. To register for this leave your details at [www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/seconsult.aspx](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/consultations/seconsult.aspx)

We hope this has given you some idea of what the Act entails. If you would like a copy of the parents' guide to the Act contact Michael Courtney at the SE on 0131 224 4914. You can view a summary hand-out on the Act at the Executive website, which contains a table comparing the RON system to the new Act. You can find this on [www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/hasla.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/hasla.pdf). Also you can visit [www.rona.org.uk](http://www.rona.org.uk) to get updates on what is happening with the legislation. You can obtain a full copy of the Act from Her Majesty's bookshop on 0870 606 5566 or online at: [www.scotland-legislation.hmsso.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2004/20040004.htm](http://www.scotland-legislation.hmsso.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2004/20040004.htm)

## Snippets

### Learning and Teaching Scotland

Learning and Teaching Scotland is developing its website to become a resource on inclusion for authorities, parents and teachers and anyone else who wants to learn and share. Equity has been asked to provide information on the Group and the work it does with particular reference to the ILN. It is an exciting partnership that will hopefully develop over time. You can experience this resource at [www.ltscotland.org.uk/inclusiveeducation/](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/inclusiveeducation/)

## ILN News — ILN Pilot takes off

The 15-month ILN pilot programme has proved so successful that a further three years project funding has been provided by the Scottish Executive to extend the project into other areas of the country and include staff from health and other support services as well as parents and teachers.

The original programme, launched in January 2003, was meant for 12 people, but the idea captured the imagination of local authorities and so a total of 28 participants joined the network from Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway, East Renfrewshire, North Ayrshire, Scottish Borders and North Lanarkshire. Over a 15 month period, they took part in residential sessions with expert speakers from around the globe including Mary Schuh from the Institute on Disability in New Hampshire and Dora Bjarnason, Associate professor of Education at the University of Iceland.

One teacher who took part in the programme said: "The connections, personal development and authority-wide developments have been immense. I'd recommend the ILN for all."

The programme included lectures, group work, paired work and informal evening sessions. The action research enabled them to network as they worked with schools within their local authority areas, exchanging knowledge and strategies with teaching staff.

### Familiarity a key

Equity project manager Dorothy McDonald said: "The value of participants getting to know one another over a period of time should not be underestimated. The residential aspect of the course enabled in-depth discussions and reflexivity. Each participant now has a network of contacts across Scotland and locally that can be sustained over a long period of time."

The ILN also aims to create a lasting legacy by developing long term capacity in each area. Members had to work with individual pupils and pilot collaborative working practices. One of the other key aims is to empower parents and pupils to participate fully in their education. Children and families involved in the individual action research projects were finding solutions to any difficulties they encountered in education.

Parent Michelle Hall said: "As a parent working alongside teachers on the ILN it has helped me gain a wider knowledge and understanding of what inclusion should look like and how difficult it can be to gain. But also in lots of cases when you have a person with the correct attitude how easy you can gain successful inclusion."

"The teachers I worked alongside gave me the greatest inspiration to carry on even when emo-



*Dorothy McDonald, ILN project manager, spoke about the ILN at the 2004 Equity Group conference*

tions were running high on many occasions. It only strengthened the bond between parents and teachers as the barriers of frustration that had built up over many years were broken down as it became apparent to me as a parent that there are many teachers out there who do care."

### Steering Group assistance

The project was underpinned by a Steering Group consisting of senior representatives from each of the participating local education authorities, together with six Equity Group parent volunteer representatives living in each of the local authority areas.

Christine Vassie, North Lanarkshire Council's Steering Group member said: "We hoped when we signed up for the project that it would take us further down the road towards inclusive practice in the council and this certainly proved to be the case. At officer level there were opportunities to work closely with members of the Equity Group, as well as with colleagues from other councils. This enabled us to share our hopes and concerns and to explore new ways of making inclusion work."

## Keeping up the Momentum

Following the success of the ILN pilot, the programme has been developed and now receives project funding from the Unified Voluntary Fund for the next stage of the work.

However, ongoing support must be put in place to sustain the learning and networking of participants.

### Momentum Groups

Equity proposes to set up a number of regionally-based semi-autonomous Momentum groups comprising parents, teachers and other parties interested in inclusive education. These groups would be linked to the new ILN and supported by the Equity Group. Membership could include those involved in the pilot and forthcoming ILN as well as Equity members in each area.

The purpose of the local groups is to create a forum in which parents, teachers and others in a local area can meet on a regular basis to support one another, share good practice and explore practical ways of creatively solving problems. Groups will also draw on the vast resources of Equity members enabling them to keep involved locally whilst feeling part of a bigger national group.

Equity will support the setting up of groups by providing template aims and objectives, guidelines, training opportunities, support and mentoring for the local organiser.

Groups will undertake a number of activities including twilight training sessions in schools; presentations and keeping members informed of national Equity events. Members could also set up other local projects that support inclusive education in their area such as advocacy training courses and circles of support.

The next newsletter will carry an update. If you would like to be involved contact: Georgie Garrick, [georgiegarrick@hotmail.com](mailto:georgiegarrick@hotmail.com), or 01563 526450

*[Where she belongs, cont'd from P1]*

Jenny and I took back control of our lives and made the same kinds of choices as anyone else. A benchmark for Jenny's life is her non-disabled brother. She deserves, and had the right to expect access to, the same experiences — good and bad — as him. She didn't need all the endless meetings, assessments and herds of folk demanding her time and energy just because she has a label of learning disability.

Now, she is a selling artist, volunteer gallery assistant, employer, friend, teacher, student, performing musician, precious daughter, living her life in ordinary places, not special places. She has grown in spirit, in confidence, she chatters constantly about girly stuff (despite communication problems). She has a life worthy of discussion now.

It's tough maintaining an inclusive life, there is much pressure doing this in isolation, but it is the right thing for us. Segregation, in any form, will never be an option. It nearly destroyed us both. Other people know who Jenny is, not what her disability is, and she matters to them. She is valued, she is smart and she is developing her role in her community of choice. She is staying where she belongs.

## ISEC Conference 2005

Glasgow is gearing up for the ISEC 2005 conference already. The Inclusive and Supportive Education Congress is holding the 'Inclusion: Celebrating Diversity?' event next year and Equity is hoping to take part. Run by the Inclusive and Supportive Education Congress (ISEC), the conference is a forum for understanding the principals and practices of developing educational systems that include all students.

The prestigious event is boasting an impressive line-up of keynote speakers, which include Elliot Eisner (Stanford University), Mel Ainscow (Manchester University), Jeff Siagafoos (University of Texas), Windyz Ferreira (Paraiba University), Chen Yun Ying (National Institute of Educational Research, China) and Roy McConkey (University of Ulster).

Equity would hope to include three sessions on the Group's work with the ILN presented by teachers, parents, pupils and Equity members and staff. We should know by the next newsletter whether or not Equity will be taking part, but the conference itself will be worth attending. Running from 1st to 4th August next year, the delegate fee is £250 if you book before March 31st 2005 and £290 thereafter. The fees for parents are not going to be subsidised, so perhaps it's worth saving up now or nominating someone from your area to go and let your education authority know this is happening.

## Closing the gap

For many years parents have been voicing their concerns about formal and informal exclusions, which basically amount to discrimination. In recent months the Disability Rights Commission has taken this on board and is looking at filling this research gap.

Colin McFarlane from the DRC said: "Education authorities and the DRC are going to be working together to look at how we can bring this work forward. There is a significant gap here and it is something which is being looked at on a UK-wide level also."

Colin added that the research was very much in its infancy and that current information being gathered in Scotland would be used as a base for a more comprehensive piece of work.

Equity chair Eileen Prior added that the biggest area of concern is informal exclusions and acknowledged this is the most difficult area to chart information.

She said: "Parents are often put in a very difficult position — they feel they have to go along with all sorts of informal exclusions to maintain a relationship with the school. It can become a cycle that is very difficult to break out of, getting progressively worse as energy goes into exclusion instead of creative strategies to avoid it. There is very little information in this area and none of it is up-to-date. We would fully support the DRC in any research into this area."

## Join Up & keep in touch!

Have you joined the Equity e-group yet? Or given us the OK to contact you by email? Now is the time help cut down the paper mountain. If you receive your news by email it will save Equity money and save you time and space. If you join the e-group you'll be able to offer and receive advice on issues around inclusion along with Equity members throughout Scotland. You can set it to a daily digest or just receive special announcements. Just email [erica@equityineducation.org](mailto:erica@equityineducation.org) and she'll do the rest.

## Vindicated

Marie Park lives in Dumbarton with Andrew and their two sons Noah, 6, and Joshua, 7

We came out of our first multi-disciplinary meeting for Noah in Primary One with a big smile on our faces. We had just been told that he was ahead in certain areas of language and on target for all others apart from one. He was doing the same in numbers as everyone else and he was happy and fitting in. Really what more could any other parent of a primary one want? As we were leaving the room, the head of network support came up beside us and said: "He was just ready for school wasn't he?"

Absolutely!

Flashback to last year when an educational psychologist who had only spent half an hour with our son suggested we start looking at segregated special schools and consider deferring for a year. When we asked her whose decision it was where and when Noah went to school, she evaded a direct answer, but we persisted until she grudgingly admitted that it was up to us, his parents, to make the final choice — "with input and advice from all the professional team".

I have never felt so vindicated and angry at the same time. That particular professional led me to doubt everything I knew to be true about my son. I believed in his potential — she believed in his label, which said he probably would-

n't be sitting in a primary one class with a band of female admirers (admittedly only five years old) and wee friends in his class who would protect him and play with him and a teacher who loves having him in her class. His label also says he shouldn't be recognising and reading a large vocabulary of words — but guess what — his teacher is teaching him and he is learning.

Even with the nightmare of sports day I had the support and advice of Equity members who suggested lots of ideas for including Noah. Eventually we and the school decided it would be good to have an older child push him in the races. The flat race was fantastic, but terrifying as Noah's wheelchair screeched to a halt in first place! As predicted he tried to eat his potato in the egg and spoon race, but performed brilliantly keeping a rubber ring on his head for the obstacle race. I was as proud of him as I was of the other wee sprinter in our family.

There are many things that Noah's label tells people around him, but it misses out a huge factor — potential. If we had believed Noah's label rather than his potential he would not be sitting in Knoxland Primary today, progressing in every area of his education. Yes he needs full time support to sit in that class, but who is going to tell me he's not worth it?

And to contradict another expect-



Noah, ready for P2

tation from his label, Noah allegedly does not initiate contact with others. But when we went out as a family last year on bonfire night to watch a display in our local park, Noah met more people he knew than we did. Everyone at school knows him and talks to him. It has been exactly the same during the summer holidays and all the primary sevens leaving the school were upset they were not going to see Noah again! Not only is his education making a difference to him — he is making a difference to the education of everyone in his school and I am very proud of him.

## Web guide: (not a new spider-man film)

We know that when you are busy, surfing the web can be tiring and time-consuming. We hope to highlight some useful internet resources in each newsletter and would be grateful if you could also let us know about any useful sites you've found.

The DRC has a very informative website covering all aspects of disability — log on to [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org).

There are links to only education information and from the menu at the top of the page, I found Publications and Reports to be the most useful section. Further down the page are details of the micro-sites that include DRC Scotland. Another fascinating micro-site is Citizenship and Disability for schools.

This is a whole training programme online with worksheets, video clips, pictures etc. It is a fantastic resource for teachers in High School covering this section of the national curriculum. At the moment this has only been piloted in England, but there

should be a Scottish version on the website by late autumn.

Some people may be daunted by the thought of going on to the Govan Law Centre website, but it is extremely accessible and easy to follow. Although you can find out about many social justice issues, there is an education law unit section, which parents will find most useful.

Log on to [www.dev-glc.cqm.co.uk/sitemap.htm](http://www.dev-glc.cqm.co.uk/sitemap.htm) that will give you a site guide. Click on News Centre to find current education news and the Training section where you can find out about free training for parents. I found the most useful part the Information section that has a Leaflets online option. Click this and you can print off a whole range of very readable, useable leaflets covering issues like exclusion. These are mostly geared towards High School age children.

Marie Park

## Breaking down Barriers

Paula Craib lives in Aberdeen with Stuart and their son Matthew.

I became a member of Equity towards the end of my Partners in Policymaking course last year. I knew what we wanted for our son's education and now had the tools to try and achieve it. We'd finally managed to persuade the Educational Psychologist and the school to accept Matthew and that was the stage we were at come the Equity Conference in 2003.

There I heard real life stories of how inclusive education was working for others and I spent much of the day holding back the tears. I wanted that for Matthew but couldn't see it happening. However it was the talk by Jaynie Mitchell and her son's teacher Rae that made the biggest impact. I was stunned by Rae's dedication particularly spending her summer reading up about Autism to help Ross.

Up here it's unheard of to visit every child starting P1 and their family; my simple request for a meeting with Matthew's future teacher was turned down. Despite being overjoyed about getting Matthew accepted at mainstream school I was scared, very scared. I saw the wonderful relationship Jaynie and Rae had developed and realised this was the key to the future.

So on 19 August 2003 we took Matthew along to his first day of school. Again I attempted to arrange a meeting with his teacher to discuss his difficulties but again it was turned down. I tried to give her a copy of Matthew's "passport" but was told she wouldn't need it, that he would be fine. I was angry and upset...she didn't know Matthew and his quirks and needed to understand him.

We managed to muddle through the first few weeks and were upset further when his teacher pulled us up because Matthew had refused to get dressed after gym one afternoon. If she'd met with us then she'd have known the reason for this incident. At that same time we had Matthew assessed privately and finally had reasons behind his quirks and behaviours so I again requested a meeting explaining there was new information she needed to know. Voila! We finally got our wish.

We were all anxious at the beginning of the meeting but within minutes we relaxed and all realised the other wasn't the "enemy" after all! Matthew's teacher, Mrs Simpson, was genuinely interested in the latest information and even suggested strategies to help. We left the meeting with a new understanding of each other. Matthew's homework diary became a method of communication between home and school. We worked together to help each other help Matthew.

Matthew began Auditory Integration Therapy and it wasn't long before we started to see an improvement in his concentration levels and lis-



Mary Simpson and her pupil Matthew Craib — breaking down barriers together

tening ability. As these improved his schoolwork improved and Mrs Simpson began to show an interest in the therapy. The school allowed us to have his assessment appointments on the premises and his teacher came along to observe and find out more about it and the exercises to help Matthew's primitive reflex difficulties.

Word got out and we soon had various members of staff observing! The acting Head was so enthusiastic about it that she arranged a training session for the staff to learn how to do the exercises and learn of their benefit. There is now talk of timetabling in a daily exercise session for every class in the school which can only benefit all the children.

Building the relationship with Mrs Simpson was the best thing we could ever have done. She accompanied me to an information day one weekend, in her own time, to learn more about Autism and Sensory difficulties. She has even come round to the house to update us on his progress and to see how things are going at home.

After such a successful year, it is daunting having to start afresh with a new teacher but I am confident I can build as good a relationship with her as I did with Mrs Simpson. I have Jaynie & Rae's talk at the Equity conference to thank for making me believe what is possible.

### Snippets

#### Our AGM

Don't miss out on the chance to attend the Equity AGM. It will be held on 26 October at the Craighalbert Centre, Cumbernauld. You'll receive more info in the post but put the date in the diary now and, if you need help to get there, let us know and we'll try to organise a lift for you. As well as electing the Committee and voting on issues like the new constitution, you'll also have the chance to hear about the work of the team at Craighalbert and how they work to get children with motor impairments into mainstream education.

## Equity takes inclusion message to Health Service

In autumn 2003 Equity was commissioned to design and deliver training to NHS staff on their role in ensuring children are included effectively. Equity members interested in becoming trainers were recruited to both train as trainers, and work on the development of the training course. Here's Marie Park's story:

THE phrase 'baptism of fire' hardly seems adequate to express the rollercoaster ride we felt as participants of the training for trainers programme. I can only describe it as a journey from terror to triumph as we prepared to deliver a programme on working with schools to NHS staff across Scotland. As Dorothy McDonald's enthusiasm for our gifts and talents bubbled over, each participant shrunk further down in their seat. At that point we had no idea we could be transformed into competent trainers and little did we realise we actually did know what we were talking about!

Masterminded by Dot, Jo Cochrane and Eileen Prior, the pro-

gramme enabled us to design and deliver a one-day workshop on working with schools to NHS staff. I think our confidence was boosted by our own involvement in the programme and we began to realise just how much we had to contribute. The mix of personalities and experiences meant that we all found our niche and were able to work effectively as a team.

The course was aimed at any health professionals working with children such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, school nurses, paediatricians, health co-ordinators and any other relevant professionals. Because many of us were working with these people on a personal level, it was agreed that we would not train in our own area to maintain a professional distance and avoid any emotional conflict.

The programme emerged to be very challenging for all participants including the power of labels, basic principles of inclusive education and legislation. Participants were also

given the chance to look at what health, education and parents uniquely bring to a child's education and to acknowledge the value of each person's contribution.

The workshop was very much rooted in real-life examples and participants valued the chance to look at a recent case study where inclusion was not working. This stimulated many exciting ideas on how health professionals could play a more positive role in including children in mainstream schools.

Feedback from the participants was very positive (well, we did give them chocolate), but there was a resounding echo to involve education staff in a joint training programme along similar lines.

As for us trainers — we would rate the experience as invaluable. This kind of workshop is what can truly make a difference in the lives of our children. We may have started off in terror, but we emerged elated and confident that the word is being spread.

## Equity Group update

The past year has brought many changes for Equity and has opened up new opportunities as well as causing a change in direction in some areas.

Director Laura Bowden was unfortunately on sick leave during most of the second half of 2003 and early 2004, so many of Equity's recent achievements have taken place without a director in place. Laura has now moved on to another position and we wish her all the best.

Because our core funding was not continued by the Scottish Executive, the Paisley office has had to close and the organisation now has a temporary base in Peebles, with a freelance administrator supporting the chair, Eileen Prior, and training co-ordinator Dorothy McDonald. We've applied for continued funding of £5,000 per year from Lloyds TSB Foundation, which funded us in 2003-4.

Membership has now reached more than 400 and Equity's work over the past year has included a number of projects. The Inclusive Learning Network, funded by the Scottish Executive, has been hailed as a great success and project funding has been secured to continue for the next three years. There are also plans to set up local Momentum Groups to maintain and continue the work of this project on a local basis.

Training has been prominent this year with a very successful programme involving NHS staff working with

schools. A number of trainers were trained to deliver an innovative one-day workshop to support NHS staff to ensure they play their part in effective inclusion. Equity has also been involved in various conferences and in-service opportunities as well as taking the lead in promoting a universal education system during the consultation stages of the Additional Support for Learning Bill.

Developments are continuing in the plans to change the status of Equity to a Company Limited by Guarantee, which was agreed at the last AGM. Achieving funding for the ILN means that Equity is effectively trading as a business and changing the status will protect Committee members financially and legally. This will also make things easier for the Group to gain funding for more activity as grant-giving bodies are increasingly looking for organisations to have a formal company structure with audited accounts and records.

It has also been agreed to allow postal votes for members for special and annual general meetings to ensure members' views are as fully represented as possible. The Group realises there are many challenges faced by members who want to be more involved but cannot actually attend meetings.

If you're interested in getting involved with the Committee, then nominate yourself when the paperwork comes round for the AGM — don't be shy!