

## A “brokerage” service to provide short breaks

United Kingdom (Suffolk) - Scope and Suffolk County Council

### SUMMARY OF PROJECT

Activities Unlimited (AU) has collaborated with Scope to create this unique service delivering short-break activities for disabled children and young people (DCYP) aged 0 to 25 in Suffolk, UK. Built on the ‘pick and choose’ model of a travel agency, it is aimed at tackling barriers faced by parents/career people who are seeking activities for their disabled children that are safe, fun, and appropriate, while simultaneously giving parents and other caregivers regular breaks from their caring roles.

“The team at Activities Unlimited works incredibly hard to support families who have children with additional needs and to ensure that the young people have access to a whole host of fantastic opportunities and activities to enhance their social and life skills.”

—Cheryl Sharland, Head of Inclusive Services, Suffolk County Council

### FACTS AND FIGURES

- Family outcomes based on user evaluations: “We are able to go out as a family more often” (49%); “Family outings and events are now more enjoyable” (46%); “There are more places/events for the family to go out together” (39%).
- Parent outcomes: “It allows us more quality time with our children” (60%); “We feel better able to cope” (45%); “We have more time to ourselves and for having a social life” (27%).

### PROBLEMS TARGETED

Parents of DCYP require regular short breaks to enable them to continue to provide their children with the care they need, but it has proven difficult for families to find and arrange suitable activities for their disabled children during such times. Traditional ‘respite’ models lacked choice: The focus was primarily on caring for the child, and was available only to those with the highest needs. Further, long waiting lists did not always consider the best outcomes of the child.

### SOLUTION & METHODOLOGY

The AU model provides leisure activities for the DCYP and short breaks for their parents/caregivers based on need, taking into account the voice of children, young people, and their families, and using fair, understandable, and transparent eligibility criteria so services are not just restricted to those in

crisis situations. Families complete an online self-assessment via the AU website. This identifies the level of offer they receive, which could be an individual budget that can be used to purchase activities, equipment, or 1-to-1 support. Registered families are able to access a range of suitable activities overseen by the brokerage (Scope), which is responsible for matching the needs and aspirations of disabled young people by developing the market and creating a wide range of short-break leisure and recreation opportunities. Providers of short-break leisure and recreation opportunities wishing to register as AU providers and to promote their services must do so through the brokerage, which has developed a robust quality-control mechanism. The brokerage service gathers feedback from users about the types of activities they would like, and the brokerage proactively approaches specialist and mainstream providers to see how the local market could respond to meet these needs.

### **OUTLOOK & TRANSFERABILITY**

AU offers a model that is responsive to a personalised agenda and is easy both to scale-up and replicate. Grant funding, alongside government support and a set of quality standards, is also available on a time-limited basis for providers who want to develop or improve their offer to disabled children and young people. Scope has adopted the AU model to establish two similar projects in Leeds and Blackpool.

Photo: Yes

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