Our lives, our choices

And this it what young people told us:

These are the things disabled children, and their brothers and sisters, felt were really important. You may agree or disagree. The things children said to us are written like this.

Disabled young people told the Audit Commission about their lives.

I want to go places where I'm safe and accepted

Get useful tips to help adults hear and understand your point of view.
Children and young people we spoke to wanted to go to places and try new things that were fun and exciting. They wanted to go to youth clubs, discos and leisure centres. They wanted to hang out with old friends as well as making new ones. But sometimes there were things about these places that stopped young people from going.

Young people said:

- The youth club near me’s got unsafe steps
- I can’t go on any of the rides
- Some kids cry because they get teased...
- I like going with the Princes Trust. We go down the beach and we did a concert. We danced to the music. And we had a party. And they take us down the park sometimes. And we painted masks and kites
Adults sometimes forgot that disabled young people wanted respect for their thoughts and feelings, just like everyone else. Some adults let them down by not doing what they said they would, or they forgot that disabled children and young people liked different things. They said adults should always try and understand about disabilities, but to remember that children wanted fun people to help them.

Young people said:

We had a right laugh. They treated me like one of them

People look at you. Treat us like normal people. Just treat us like themselves, even if I can’t move or walk or whatever

[Hospital waiting rooms should have] computers, games and videos to watch. Not babyish ones, like they’ve got

I like people who can tell stories...not when they sit there and drink tea...and knit
Young people told us that they knew how they felt and what they needed better than anyone else, but a lot of the time adults didn’t listen to what they had to say. Even if a young person took a long time to get their ideas across or had trouble speaking, adults should always listen to their opinion. When adults did listen it could really help and make things better. When adults did not listen it could cause a lot of problems.

Young people said:

- Teachers can’t spend enough time with disabled children. My brother’s report said he can’t read when he can
- Teenagers aren’t allowed in the small pool usually, and we have to keep explaining that we’ve got permission… but they don’t listen
- The new bathroom makes life really easy, I can just drive-through, like when I come home from school.
- I pushed myself around all day, crying my eyes out, and was so tired that I could no longer move my arms (when the electric wheelchair broke down)
YOUR lives, YOUR choices: Here’s how YOU can help people to listen

Here are some tips from disabled young people about helping adults to listen. They’ve tried them and they can really work!

Maybe you would find it useful to read them before you go somewhere that’s new or makes you feel a bit nervous, like meeting a new doctor. You might like to use all the ideas or just one or two. You could even take this with you as a reminder, in case you feel worried and forget.

Why not add ideas of your own, about what helps you when things get difficult?

Is it a bird?
Is it a plane?
No, it’s Super Communicator!
Here’s how you can help people to listen

TIP
Before going to a meeting like a doctor’s appointment, or visiting a new school, think of questions you want to ask. Get someone to write them down so you don’t forget.

TIP
Have a plan for helping people listen – when you meet someone new, try to make your communication really clear and ask people to say if they don’t understand you.

TIP
Say right away if people say anything you don’t understand.

TIP
If there’s something about a treatment or service you need to know, don’t be shy – ask about it.

TIP
Tell people when they do a good job and listen to you. It will show them they’re on the right track.

TIP
If you can, try to look eye to eye with the person you’re talking to.

TIP
If you aren’t happy with their ideas, come up with your own. Try saying ‘It would really help me if you do this...’

TIP
Even though you may feel frustrated, try not to lose your temper! If you keep calm and ask for things clearly, adults may find it easier to listen and understand your point of view.

TIP
But don’t be too easy going! If you feel that you aren’t being listened to, say so. Be polite but firm. Don’t just back down. They might be surprised, but it can help them to listen.
So now the Audit Commission knows what disabled young people think about their lives, what will happen next?

We’ve written all the things that young people have told us in a big book. We’re going to show it to people who can help make things better, like doctors, social workers, youth workers and their bosses.

Whenever we visit places that children go to, we will check that people are listening to what children and young people want. And we will keep reminding them.

We will talk to the government so they keep thinking about disabled children, so they know what kids told us, and so they can help places and people change.

And we have written your ideas down for mums and dads, so they can use them to help people and places listen to you and be more helpful.

How did we find out what people thought about places?

We asked lots of young people to talk to us. We went and listened in many different places:

- schools,
- youth clubs, and
- people’s homes.

Sometimes we just asked people what they thought of different places.

They told us, sometimes on their own and sometimes in groups.
What is the Audit Commission?

The Audit Commission is a group of people employed to go to places like local councils, hospitals, parks and libraries and find out what it’s like for the people who use them. We tell the government and people running these places about what we find so they can make them better for us all to use.

Why did we want to find out about disabled young people?

We wanted to find out what different places were like for disabled children, young people and their families. We wanted to know what was good and not so good, and how these places could be better and help make life easier for them. We thought disabled young people, their brothers and sisters and mums and dads might have some good ideas about what could be done to change places.

This summary was written by Holly Williams, from the Triangle Services disabled young people’s group, and the Audit Commission.

Other people found it easier to show us what they liked or didn't like, so we gave them cameras to take pictures of what they thought was important in their lives. Then we got together and talked about the photos. Others drew pictures to show us what they meant.