

Nation's Conversations: “Mealtimes For All”

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FOREWORD



**Mark Hodge Marketing Director,
McCain [GB] Foods Limited**

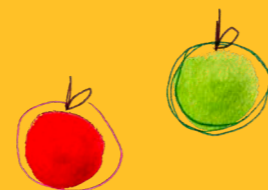
As a family run business, McCain understand the importance of family and the importance of time spent together. We also know that families come in all shapes and sizes and some face particularly challenging circumstances.

For the last two years, we have been a fly on the wall of family life through the McCain Nation's Conversations research series, surveying families across the UK to get to know what happens in kitchens, living rooms and anywhere else we eat together. It was especially interesting to observe the changes in family life when contrasting our

first year of research with the second; a year that saw families come to terms with the global coronavirus pandemic and the impact this had, and continues to have, on their lives.

This year, hand in hand with Family Fund, the UK's largest grant making charity dedicated to helping families raising disabled or seriously ill children and young people, we are continuing the series but with a special focus on how family life is experienced by families raising disabled or seriously ill children, surveying those who have been directly helped by Family Fund alongside families without disabled children across the UK.

For all families, no matter their circumstances, often the greatest joy comes from just being together. Whether it is around the dinner table, in front of the TV or on a family outing, parents revel in seeing their children enjoying themselves, taking comfort in the sound of laughter, feeling their love and getting to be themselves. Whether that be in the chaos of kitchen, the hub of most homes, or finding a moment to sit together as a family at mealtimes, joy can come from the simplest of pleasures.



For some, these moments are increasingly rare. As the research shows, even simple things like shared mealtimes and family outings are near impossible for many families raising disabled or seriously ill children, made no easier by the restrictions imposed due the coronavirus pandemic but the joy these parents and their children get from being together is just as special.

This research has been an important study in deepening our understanding of family life for those raising disabled or seriously ill

children, giving parents and their children a voice and a chance to tell their stories. It further underlines the important work done by Family Fund to achieve their goal of providing 150,000 grants and services a year to families raising disabled or seriously ill children.

We are determined that our donation of £1 million will help support some of those families who need it most, relieving some of their anxieties and making some space for more precious family moments.



FOREWORD



Family Fund

This important study shines a light on the complexity of family life when you are raising disabled or seriously ill children. In our work, we hear everyday from parents and carers who share their experiences with us. The challenging, complicated or difficult days alongside the good, uplifting and heartwarming days, and the moments in between.

As this report shows, time together as a family sharing moments can be much harder to experience when you are raising disabled or seriously ill children. For many parents and carers, juggling their children's needs, washing, feeding and often medicating their children, around the clock, relying on the support of other members of the family, and keeping the household running, can mean that there is little time, and bringing everyone together can seem an impossible task.

That is why Family Fund exists, to provide support to families living on lower incomes raising disabled and seriously ill children; to help and relieve some of the pressures that they face so they can find those moments together and be a family. It is also why we're delighted that with the support of McCain we will be able to drive further forward towards our goal of providing 150,000 grants and services a year to families in need of our help. The family unit is vitally

important, but too often family time can mean just getting by rather than enjoying the shared moments. Family Fund remains committed to ensuring that all families raising disabled or seriously ill children have the same choices, quality of life, opportunities and aspirations as other families.



Cheryl Ward, Chief Executive, Family Fund



Providing

150,000

grants and services to families with disabled or seriously ill children

SECTION 1:

The importance of mealtimes

Mealtimes are the cornerstone of family life. It is often the only time families get to be together and share stories, talk, and enjoy each other's company. Almost nine in 10 families raising disabled or seriously ill children (87%) reported that the pandemic has negatively impacted their mealtimes, while for families without disabled children this figure was much lower at 45%. It's not always possible for every family, but for those that get to enjoy it, family mealtimes are precious.



For families raising disabled or seriously ill children, they said that mealtimes are a chance to bring the family together, make sure everyone is eating, socialising and happy. The joy for these parents is often in simply seeing their children eat:

"It's the one time everyone is happy."

"Gives us time to wind down from our day and talk about what went on. It is important as my son struggles with eating so it is always nice and makes me proud when he eats his food or tries new things."

"It's nice to be able to talk about our days and have a good laugh together."

"I spend a lot of time making homemade dinners and I like to see my daughter enjoy them."

"The boys actually eat something and love chatting together. We play a game afterwards which is just the best."



"It's special because we can feel the warmth amongst us. Nice meal and the fact that everybody is happy and enjoying the meal as a family."





For the children, they get to enjoy their parent's cooking and have fun with other family members:

"Spending time with mummy."

"Mum is the best cook. She cooks lovely food and we all like it, sit together and talk. Or we watch a quiz which we all love."

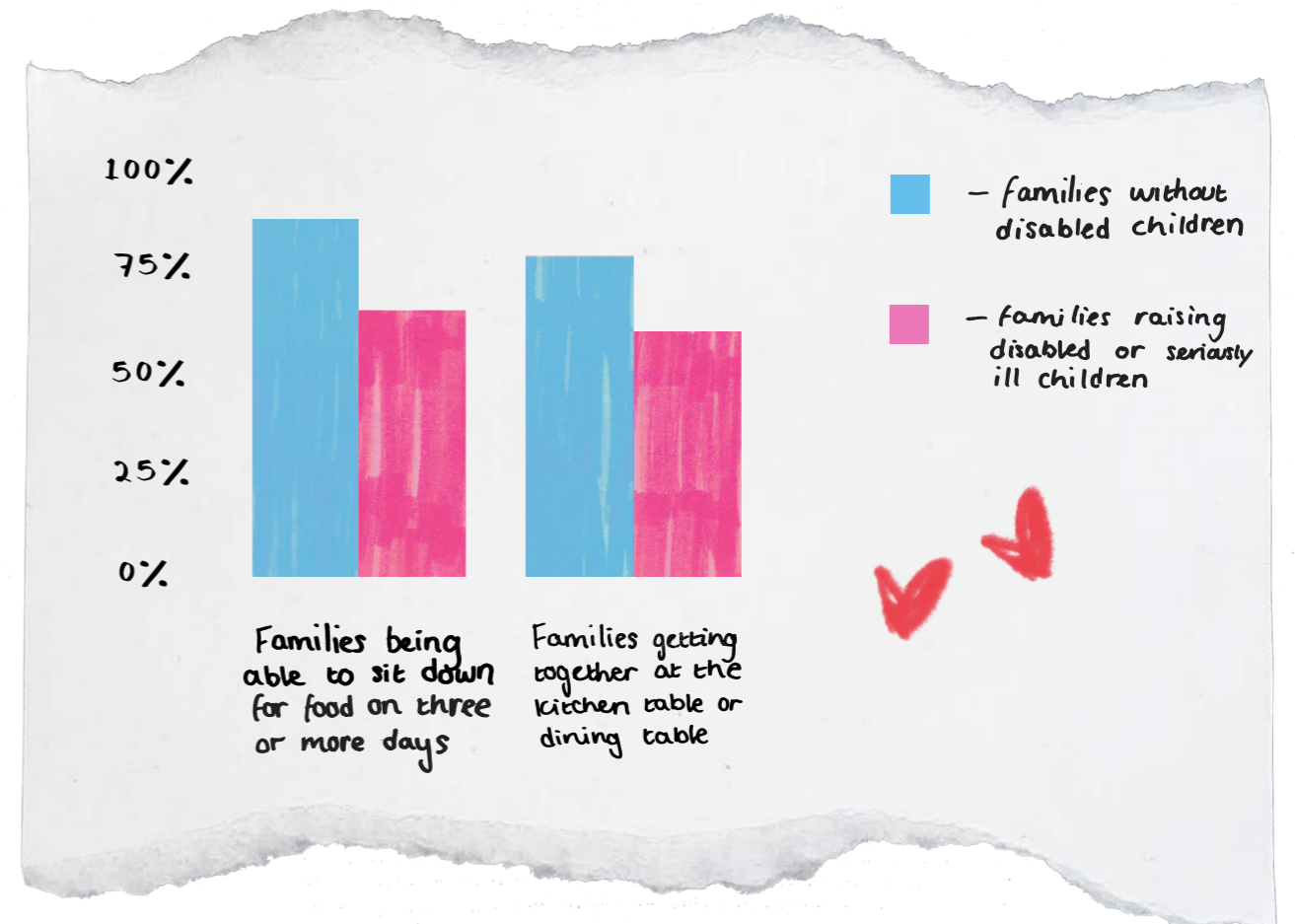
"Talking and being silly".

"We make silly superhero names for each other."

"My Dad makes really good food and we play games after eating."

Not all mealtimes are the same, and families across the country have differing experiences of eating together. While in a typical week 82% of families without disabled children sit down for a meal as a family on three or more days, families raising disabled or seriously ill children find it harder to get together, with just two in three (64%) sitting down for food on three or more days.

When they do get together, around three in five families raising disabled or seriously ill children (62%) typically eat together at the kitchen or dining table, whilst this increases to 75% for families without disabled children.



For many, just getting together can prove impossible. For families raising disabled or seriously ill children, by far the biggest barrier to coming together at mealtimes is the different needs of their children. Almost half of families raising disabled or seriously

ill children (48%) agreed this has stopped them coming together for mealtimes as they face specific challenges. In addition, they are more likely to find the experience stressful (23%).



“Sometimes he cannot have the over stimulation of eating in a group.”

“One of my autistic children has sensory difficulties and is very fussy so she won’t sit near anyone with anything on their plate that she finds hard to process.”

“If tea is not at the right time for when our daughter with Autism is ready it can cause a meltdown which will mean one parent is consoling her while the other has tea with our son. We try to take it in turns if this happens”.



48%

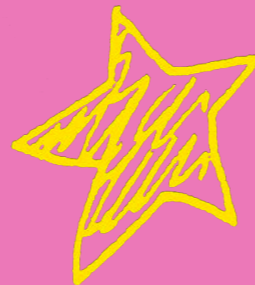


Agree that raising disabled or seriously ill children has stopped them coming together for mealtimes as they face specific challenges.

Top seven barriers for coming together at mealtimes during the last 12 months

Families without disabled children

1. We have different schedules so eat at different times (27%)
2. We have different food preferences / needs (21%)
3. We are too tired (10%)
4. Our children do not want to eat together (9%)
5. We lack time to plan for meals (9%)
6. We are busy caring for our children (7%)
7. We lack the space in our home to come together (7%)

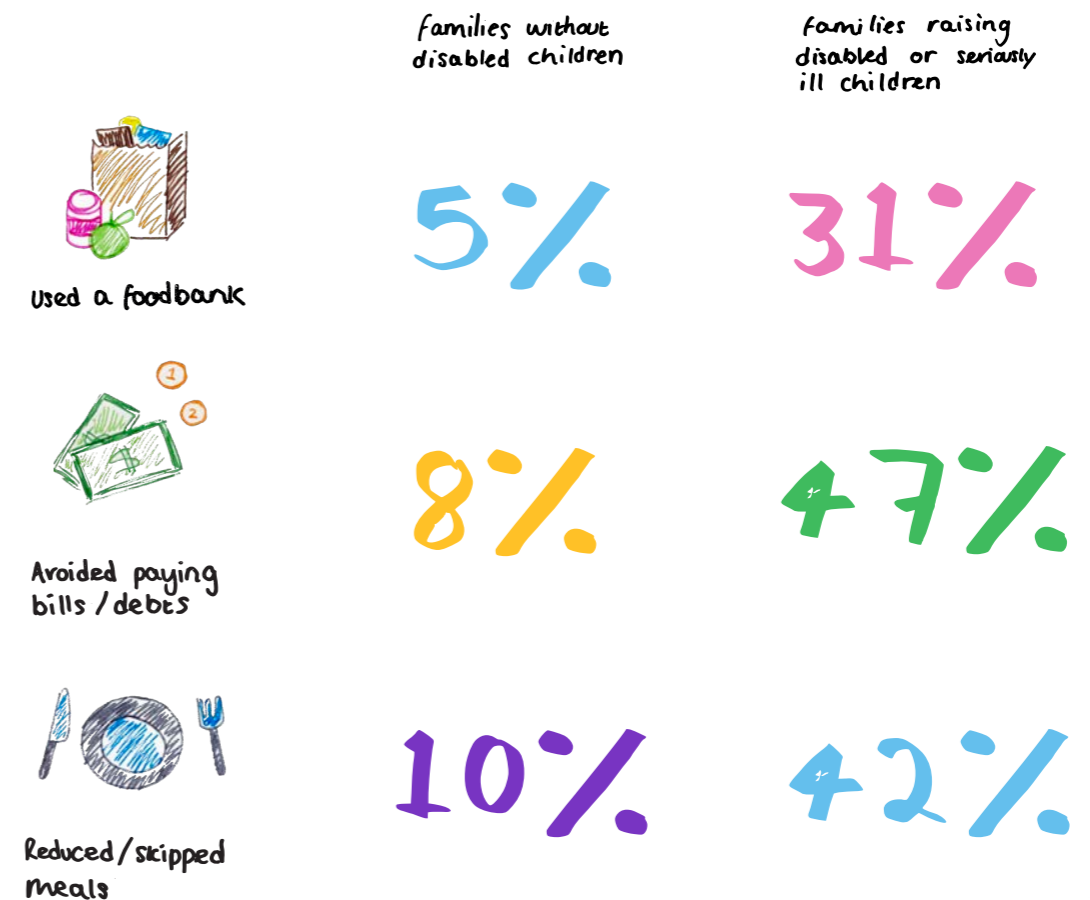


Families with disabled or seriously ill children

1. We have different food preferences / needs (48%)
2. We are busy caring for our children (26%)
3. We find it stressful (23%)
4. Our children do not want to eat together (22%)
5. We have different schedules so eat at different times (20%)
6. We lack the household items we need to sit together (16%)
7. We are too tired (15%)



Impact of the pandemic on mealtimes



The last year has been a difficult one for most, with the coronavirus pandemic taking its toll on all aspects of family life. Almost nine in 10 families raising disabled or seriously ill children (87%) reported the pandemic has negatively impacted their mealtimes, while for families without disabled children this figure was 45%. Across both sets of families surveyed,

increasing costs were raised as the largest negative impact of the pandemic on their mealtimes. A quarter of families without disabled children (24%) and two thirds of families raising disabled or seriously ill children (66%) saw the cost of their weekly shop increase, leaving many to have to make tough decisions in order to put food on the table.

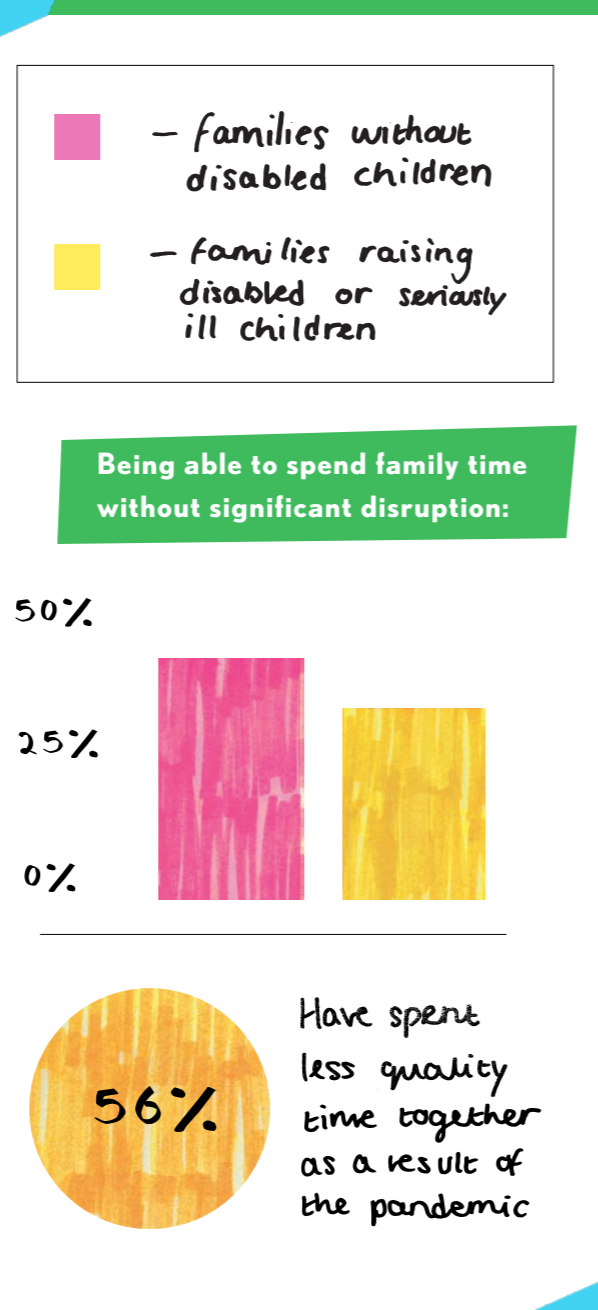
SECTION 2:

Quality time with family

As we have seen already in this report, the coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on the lives of families across the UK. There are those who have been able to enjoy family time despite the significant disruption, with 40% of families without disabled children (and 29% of families with a disabled or seriously ill child) saying it has meant they have been able to spend more quality time with their children. However, more than half of families raising disabled or seriously ill children (56%) have spent less quality time together as a result of the pandemic. In the past year, families reported spending an average of almost an hour and a half of quality time a day together, and around two in five families spent less than an hour of quality time with their children (39% of families without disabled children and 43% of families raising disabled or seriously ill children).

Quality family time can take many shapes and forms. For three quarters of families without disabled children (76%), sitting down together for a family meal is the most typical example of time well spent together, while watching TV together is the most typical way in which these families have quality time (79%). Days out (67%) and play and games (65%) are the other top ways in which families without disabled children enjoy each other's company. For families raising disabled or seriously ill children watching TV (68%), family meals (61%) and play and games (56%) are the top three activities.

The research shows that what really makes family time special for families is as simple as getting to spend the time together and watching their children be happy.



What do you enjoy the most about spending family time together?

"Watching my girls be happy and not missing anything they are learning to do."

"Seeing personalities develop and goals and futures discussed. Drawing closer together and showing love to each other."

"I love to make memories and see my children at their happiest even if it's difficult most of the time."

"Feeling united and having fun. It's so hard to find time to keep all the children happy and when you do it as a family it takes a burden off. It gives you that extra support in making that family time special. It also created memories to look back on. It shows the children how important it is to do things together."

"I adore my children. Just sitting together and laughing is important to me."

"Seeing my son communicate and engage more. Seeing him happy and having fun."

For many of the children, simply having the time to be with their parents makes family time valuable, as well as providing comfort and security.

"I like playing with my daddy, and I like giving mummy cuddles."

"When we get back to normal I'm looking forward to going shopping with mummy, having a girly day."

"I feel loved and I love the attention from my parents and siblings."

"Just being with mum makes it special."

"I love my family, I feel safe with them. They try and make us happy and we have fun when we are allowed out for days. I feel safe at home."



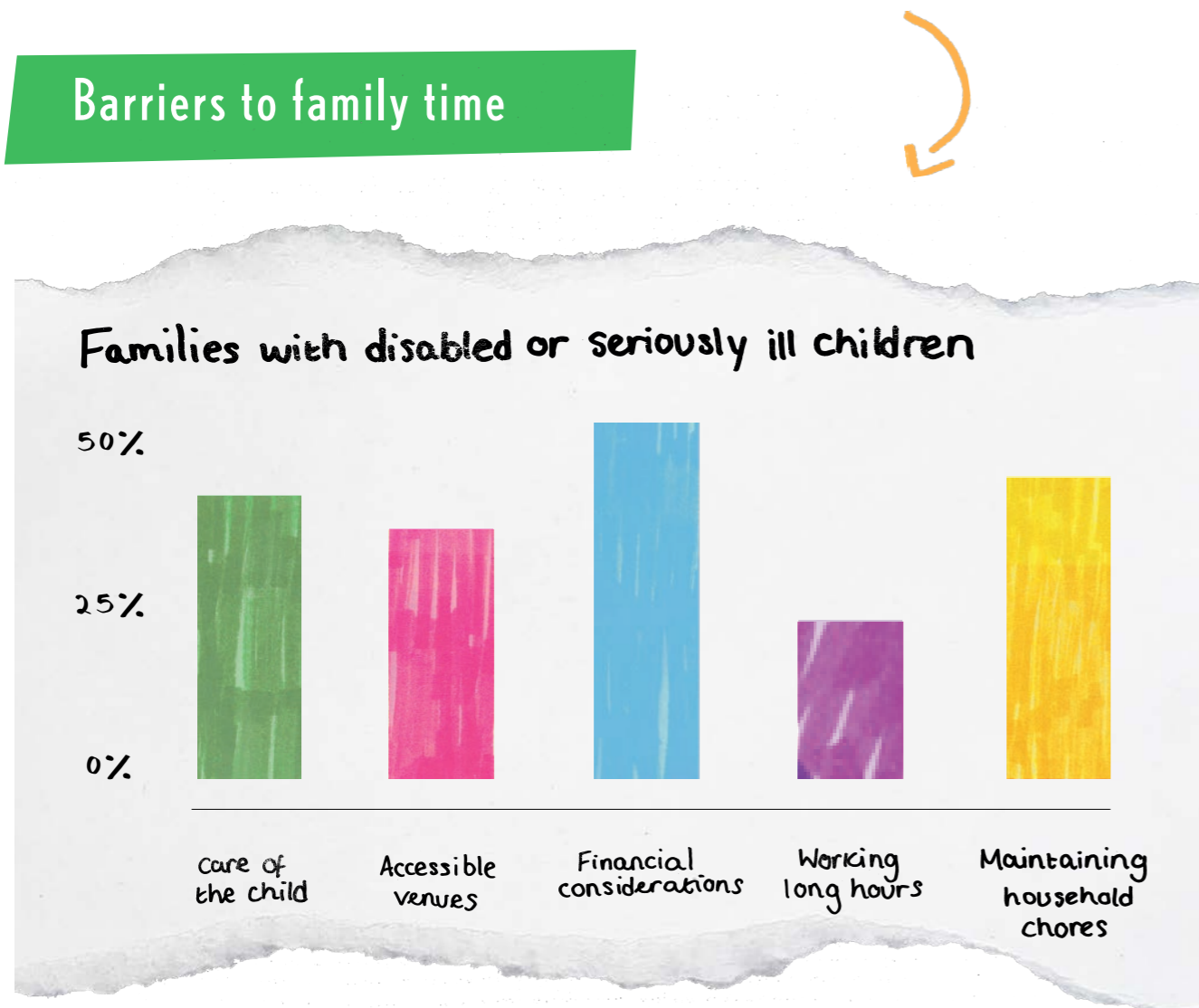
However, for families raising disabled or seriously ill children, they generally find these activities (eating together, playing games, watching TV) more difficult. Their specific circumstances mean that some of these options are not always open to them. Two in five families raising disabled and seriously ill children (42%) say the care their children need can act as a barrier to family time, as is the accessibility and appropriateness of many venues and activities for their children (37%). Financial considerations also impact what is available, with half of families raising disabled or seriously ill children (51%) saying they

don't have enough money to spend on days out. All of this means that families raising disabled or seriously ill children are less likely to spend time together having days out (48% compared to 67% of families without disabled children).

The juggling act of everyday life is also a barrier to family time, with one in five families raising disabled or seriously ill children (20%) saying they or their partner's long working hours prevent them from spending more time with their children, while 45% say they spend evenings and weekends keeping up with household chores.



Barriers to family time



“There are not very many places that we can visit as a family. Nothing indoors or enclosed - there must be a quick and easy exit at all times. Nothing that can be grabbed or thrown, not too many people. No possibility of going out to eat.”



"My disabled child takes up all of my time. Respite hours - 12 per week- are used to catch up on paying bills and household chores."

"It can be difficult to go out with other people being less accepting of our needs and sometimes it can be more expensive."

"We cannot all go out together as a family as my disabled children don't like noise and people. The lack of facilities with changing places for older children and for wheelchair access makes life a lot harder."

"When we go places people stare and tut which gives my son anxiety."

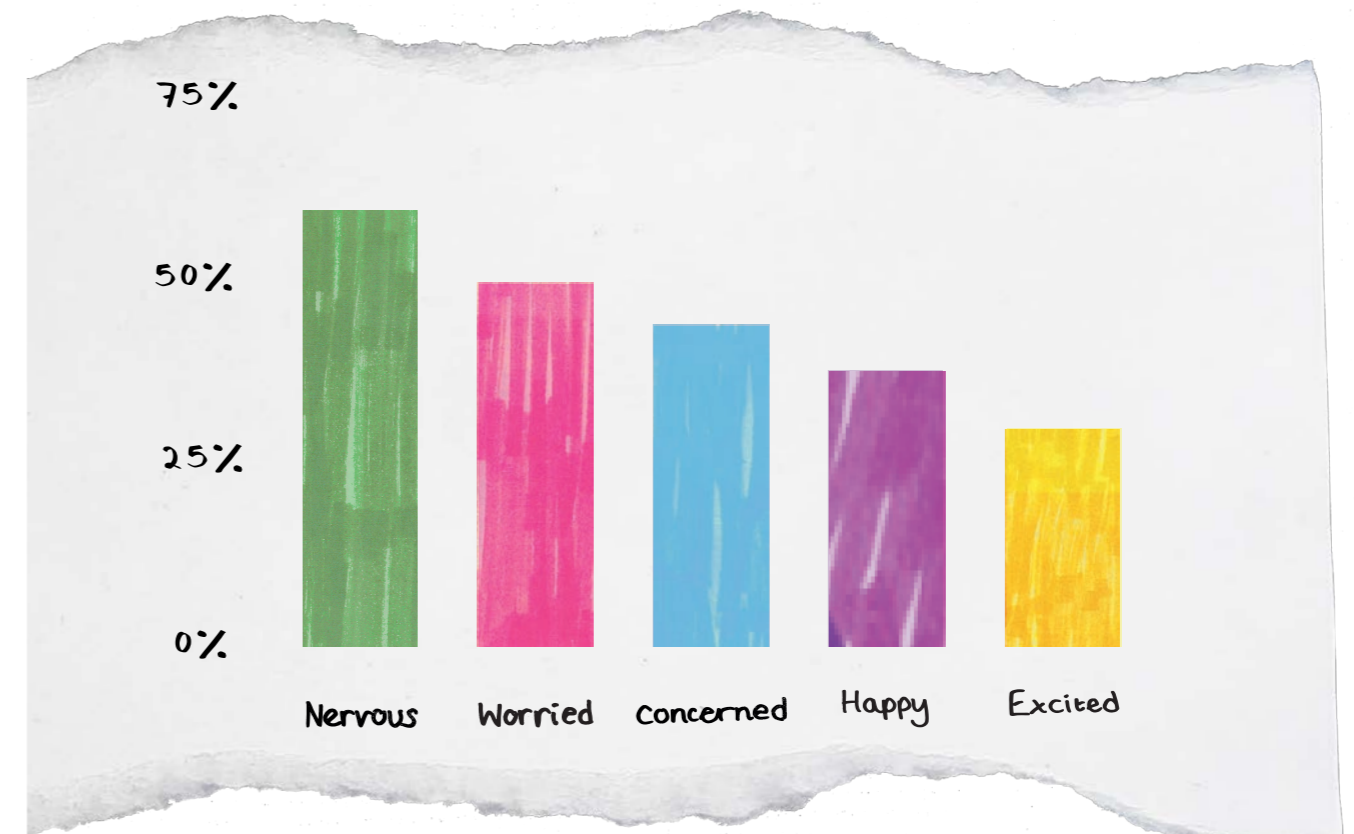


Beyond quality time, the pandemic has also impacted families more directly. Two in five parents without disabled children say the pandemic has negatively impacted their health and wellbeing (40%) and that of their children (41%). For families raising disabled and seriously ill children this impact has been much more significant, with three quarters saying it has negatively impacted them (73%) and their disabled or seriously ill children (76%).



While going "back to normal" after the pandemic brings hope to many, this research reveals that it will take significant adjustment for life to "return to normal" and that comes with its own anxieties and stresses. While happiness and hope are two of the top three emotions families without disabled children feel when considering the end of lockdown, those raising disabled or seriously ill children say they are nervous (58%), worried (49%) and concerned (44%) about restrictions being lifted. Although around two in five families raising disabled or seriously ill children (38%) say they are happy and 28% are excited.

How families raising disabled or seriously ill children feel when considering the end of lockdown:



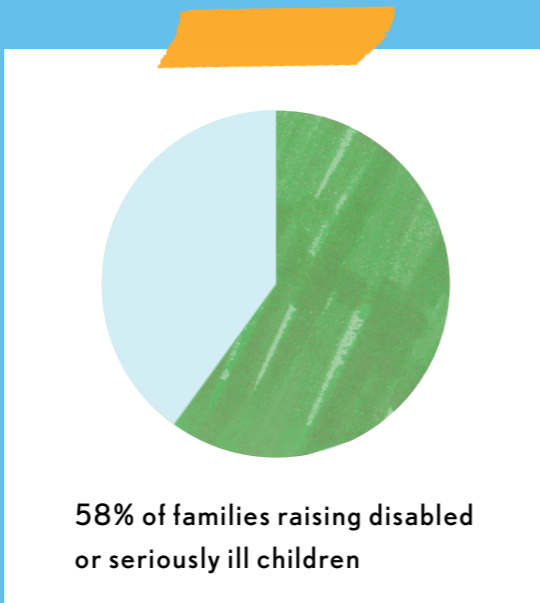
SECTION 3: Community matters

Communities play an important role in providing support networks. While the first national lockdown in March 2020 was often characterised as one in which neighbours came together, rallied around and looked out for each other, a year of social distancing and limits on social interactions has been difficult for many and support systems have been impacted. It has been particularly challenging for the families raising disabled or seriously ill children, 58% of whom say that lockdown has limited the support they get from people in their neighbourhood (compared to 31% of families without disabled children).



The research also shows that the pandemic has had a negative impact on community spirit for some across the country. While just under one in five (18%) parents without disabled children say their sense of belonging has increased during the pandemic, 39% of families raising disabled or seriously ill children say their sense of belonging has decreased. The research suggests that isolation might be setting in, particularly for those with more difficult circumstances. While around one in 10 parents without disabled children say they often feel lonely (10%) or isolated (12%), around four times as many parents raising disabled or seriously ill children say the same (39% and 46% respectively). Families raising disabled or seriously ill children fear things have become even worse for their children, with 58% saying they are now more lonely or isolated as a result of the pandemic.

Feeling lonely or isolated as a result of the pandemic.



Connections in the neighbourhood can provide a lifeline, respite and a comfort to those who need it most. 43% of families with disabled or seriously ill children say the friendships and associations they have with people in their neighbourhood means a lot to them, similarly around two in five (41%) say they have someone to call on if they need company.

However, families raising disabled or seriously ill children appear to have lower connections and support in their community. The research shows that families without disabled children are more likely to have someone they can count on if they're in need of help (58% compared to 47% of families with disabled or seriously ill children) while families raising disabled or seriously ill

children are less likely to think of themselves as similar to others in their neighbourhoods (30% compared to 46% of families without disabled children).

For many families raising disabled or seriously ill children, how they feel when they are out among the community adds to the feeling of isolation. Half feel anxiety and a lack of confidence (48%) and a similar number (42%) say the attitudes of others towards them prevents them from greater community involvement. This is made more difficult by their caring responsibilities (54%). These barriers are significantly lower for families without disabled children, for whom being too busy is the top reason (26%).



Top five reasons for not engaging more in your neighbourhood when you want to

Families without disabled children

1. Too busy/not enough time (26%)
2. Anxiety/lack of confidence (20%)
3. Attitudes of other people (16%)
4. No one to go with (10%)
5. Nowhere to go in the area (10%)



Families with disabled or seriously ill children

1. Caring responsibilities (54%)
2. Anxiety/lack of confidence (48%)
3. Attitudes of other people (42%)
4. A health condition, illness or impairment, or disability (29%)
5. Too busy/not enough time (25%)



“We can’t take her with us. We used to go to church as a family, this hasn’t been possible for years. The same is true of most events/places locally - they’re simply not suited.”

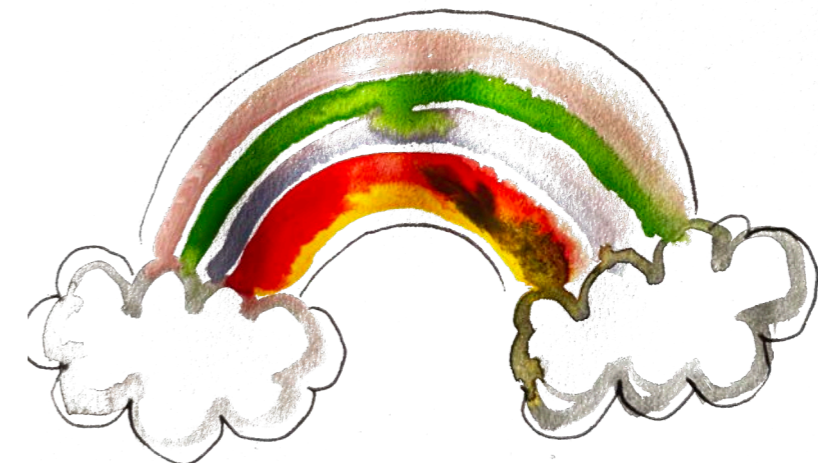
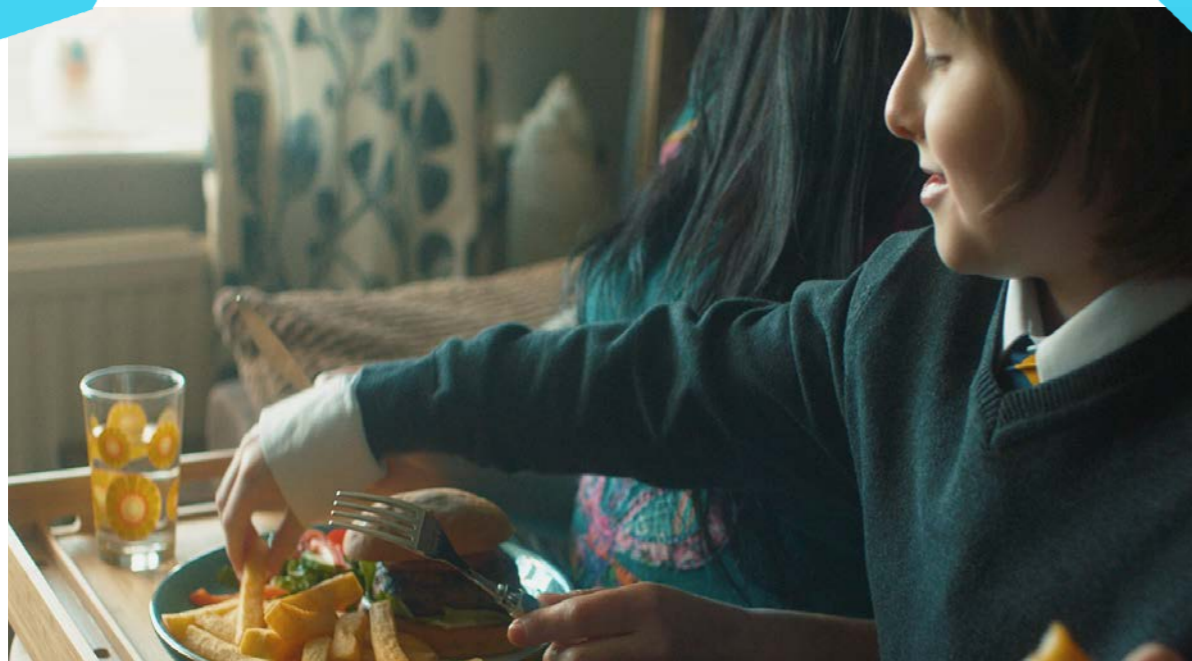
"People don't understand our lives."

"Lack of understanding of my children's disabilities. No disability friendly parks as we live in a rural area. No buses or safe spaces."

"We are the only ones with disabled children in this area so people don't know how to act towards us i.e. feel like they don't know what to say or do."



"People tend to stay away when they find out we have two autistic children."



CONCLUSION

Moments that matter

Working on this special edition of McCain Nation's Conversations with our charity partner Family Fund has given a whole new perspective on how families experience life in the home and within the wider community. It opens up a new dialogue and theme of conversation that we have not previously had access to and highlights the experiences of families with disabled or seriously ill children who are supported by Family Fund.

What comes across in the research is the role that community can play in helping families raising disabled and seriously ill children being more seen and supported. Together with those precious family moments that were cited as integral to helping to nurture family bonds such as mealtimes together, community is an important extension.

Through our £1 million donation to Family Fund we hope to raise awareness of the great work Family Fund do and inspire people across the UK to spread the word about

Family Fund. Not only reaching those who may be eligible for their help but to support Family Fund so it can continue to make a difference through services and grants, so all families are able to enjoy mealtimes and family time together. It's those little moments that matter.

For further information on the Family Fund and McCain partnership and ways to donate, please visit www.mccainfamilyfund.co.uk



£1 million donated by 2023 to Family Fund Trust (reg charity no. 1053866 & SC.040810).

Survey via OnePoll and Family Fund. The sample consisted of 1,000 families raising disabled or seriously ill children who have been helped by Family Fund, and 1,000 families without disabled children.



McCain has pledged £1 million that will help Family Fund to take a further step to achieving their goal to provide 150,000 grants and services per year to families with disabled or seriously ill children by 2023. McCain makes Britain's favourite chips and takes pride in the quality and care that goes

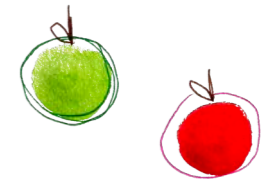


Family Fund is the UK's largest grant-making charity for low income families raising disabled or seriously ill children. For 48 years Family Fund has been supporting families so that they can have the same opportunities as others. It does this by providing grants for essential items such as kitchen appliances, clothing, bedding, furniture, family breaks, computers and tablets, sensory toys and more. It also provides services to help families access

The report design is inspired by our new pack, coloured by Charlie Conway aged 10. Charlie's family were among those helped by Family Fund.



into every mouthful. At our heart is the food we make and the people around us, from our network of hundreds of potato growers to families enjoying our food at home. For the full range of products with nutritional information please go to www.mccain.co.uk/mccain-products



more of the information they need to improve their quality of life, such as signposting to statutory and charitable financial support that may be available, and information to support the day-to-day care needs of their children. Grant applications and further information on who Family Fund helps can be found at www.familyfund.org.uk or by calling 01904 550055.



