

# Family Services in Akureyri (Fjölskyldusvið)

General information - Social Services - Services for the Disabled, Child Protection

## General information

Family Services is a part of the social affairs division of the town of Akureyri. Services within the department are divided into two categories, each with its own administrator. These categories are: **social services, child protection.** Specialists from various disciplines such as social workers, psychologists, and developmental therapists work together within the department and special emphasis is placed on teamwork and cooperation with other institutions.

- Who is entitled to these services?

The right to receive services is based on laws which require municipal authorities to provide certain services and also on an evaluation of individual need. The department's staff examines each application, evaluates the need for services, in cooperation with the applicant, and finds a way to deal with the problem at hand. There is total confidentiality between the staff and those individuals seeking help from the department. The best way to get these services is to call or come into the department's offices and make an appointment with a counselor. The services are free of charge.

- The service area

All of the counseling services and services for the disabled are available to the residents in the following districts: Akureyri, Eyjafjarðasveit, Grýtubakkahreppur, Hörgársveit and Svalbarðsstrandarhreppur.

## **Social Services**

- General

The role of Social Services within the Family Services Department is to offer counseling to individuals and families and to give direct financial assistance.

- Social counseling

The aim of social counseling is twofold. Firstly, it is to provide information regarding social rights and secondly, to support people with social or personal problems. Social counseling consists of, among other things, giving advice about financial matters, housing, child rearing, and divorce, including custody and visitation rights, adoptions etc.

- Financial assistance

Financial assistance is based on the laws about social services in local municipalities. According to these laws each individual is required to support him or herself, his or her spouse, and children under the age of 18. The laws also state that local governments should help their residents by providing services and assistance that are likely to correct a problem or prevent people from getting into a position where they are unable to support themselves and their dependents. There are various reasons why people may need financial assistance such as low salary, unemployment, or illness. The Social Affairs Council of Akureyri has set rules about financial assistance for the staff at Family Services to follow. Counselors accept applications for financial assistance which must be accompanied by various other financial documents such as a tax return, tax statement, salary statement, and a rental contract. Information is also required regarding family members, employment, housing, income, debts, and property. Financial assistance is taxable.

## Services for disabled people

- General

Disabled people and their families can get counseling and information about services and diagnosis and have their need for assistance evaluated by Family Services. The department can also provide support families for disabled children. The department handles job-hunting for the disabled, and runs day centers, sheltered workshops, and job training centers.

- Counseling and diagnosis

Besides offering social counseling to disabled individuals and their families, the department provides specialized counseling for example, in the form of interviews and counseling for people who work with the disabled in the community. People can get information from the department about their right to services. Evaluation of the need for services is conducted in cooperation with the appropriate parties in each case. Coordination between the school, home, leisure activities and work is necessary to make the most of the services. There is cooperation among diagnostic and treatment institutions both in Akureyri and Reykjavik.

The diagnosis of disabled children and adults is done partly by the department but also in cooperation with other institutions, such as the district hospital in Akureyri (Fjórðungssjúkrahúsið), the State Diagnostic and Counselling Center (Greiningarstöð ríkisins), the National Hearing and Speech Institute of Iceland (Heyrnar og talmeinstöð Íslands), Kristnes, Reykjalundur (a rehabilitation center), the Icelandic Low Vision Clinic (Sjónstöð Íslands) and the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the National Hospital (Barna og unglíngageðdeild).

- Various services

A **toy library** is available at the department with facilities for training disabled children. The toy library helps parents choose toys which can help their children and lends toys to parents as well as to support families and preschools.

According to the laws of social welfare, Family Services is required to conduct an assessment of the needs of disabled children for care. Parents are informed about their right to **caregiver benefits** and are assisted in filling out an application. Then a staff member evaluates the pressure they are under, the need for care, and suggestions are sent to the State Social Security Institute (Tryggingastofnun) accordingly.

Disabled children and their families have the option of getting the services of a **support family**. Parents present their wishes to the staff at the department, who then evaluate the need and decide on the arrangement in cooperation with the parents. The **Organization of Disabled in Iceland** (Öryrkjabandalag Íslands) owns apartments in Akureyri and rents them to disabled people. The staff at Family Services accepts applications for apartments and is responsible for renting them out in cooperation with the Organization of Disabled in Iceland.

- Plastiðjan Bjarg / Iðjulundur

Plastiðjan Bjarg / Iðjulundur is a job training and rehabilitation center as well as a sheltered workshop for the disabled. Job training is aimed at giving people skills to work in the open market, doing work assessments, helping people find jobs, and assisting them at work, as needed. Work in a sheltered workshop for the disabled can be permanent and is primarily for those who have been unable to find or keep a job in the open market.

- Rehabilitation center

The Rehabilitation center provides services for adults who are severely disabled, in the form of training, rehabilitation, work, self-care, and leisure activities. The goal is to reduce the effects of the disability and increase work skills and participation in daily life.

## **Child protection services**

- General

The aim of **child protection** is to insure decent conditions for children while they are growing up, by supporting the parenting role of the family and by using means at their disposal to protect individual children when necessary. According to Icelandic law children are considered to be minors until the age of 18. Staff members from the department inspect the living conditions of children if there is some suspicion that those conditions are unacceptable and use various approaches to improve things, such as counseling, case managers, personal advisors, support families, foster care placement, institutional placement, and financial aid.

- The importance of cooperation

Cases of individual children and their families are brought to the attention of the department by various means. Sometimes people seek assistance on their own. Sometimes a member of the public or someone who deals with the children reports their suspicion that the child is being neglected or abused in some way. The person notifying the child protection service may remain anonymous if he or she chooses. In every instance the staff of the child protection service evaluates each case to see if there is a need for supportive measures. Emphasis is placed on working for change in cooperation with the parents. There is also cooperation with various institutions, such as the Child Protection Agency (Barnaverndarstofu) regarding

diagnosis, treatment, and possible placement of children in foster homes. There is cooperation with the Children's House (Barnahús) when there is a need to investigate suspicion of sexual abuse of children and subsequent treatment. There is also cooperation with the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the National hospital (Barna og unglिंगageðdeild Landspítalans).

A **case manager** assists parents in the upbringing and care of their children in the best way.

A **personal advisor** counsels and instructs children to strengthen them socially, morally, and emotionally, regarding work, education, and recreation.

A **support family** takes care of a child, or a child and parent, for a few days a month to reduce the stress of the child or the child's family and to guide and support parents in their parenting role.

- Further information

Further information can be obtained at the Family Services office, Glerárgata 26, 3rd. floor, tel: 460-1420. There you can also get other brochures about Social Services in Akureyri. You can find information about the department's services at the information booth in the entrance to the town hall in Akureyri, Geislagata 9, and on the town's web-site, [www.akureyri.is](http://www.akureyri.is)

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