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**HEADLINE:** 'Looking after a child like Frankie is a 24/7 job. He needs one-on-one care';  
Former MP battles council over special needs funding

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**HIGHLIGHT:**

**FIGHTING ON:** Seven-year-old Frankie Wray with his parents Jimmy and Laura who are in a dispute with East Renfrewshire council about Frankie attending a summer play scheme. Picture: Colin Mearns

**BODY:**

HE was known as Big Jimmy, the one-time boxer, barrow boy and chimney sweep who graced the House of Commons with the same poise and grit he took to the ring.

For Jimmy Wray, a gruff son of Glasgow, traversing the long road from Gorbals to Westminster was an achievement in itself.

And yet, in spite of all the trials and tribulations he endured during his time as an elected representative of the public, it is MrWray's private life which now offers both the greatest pleasures and the gravest challenges.

The former Baillieston MP and his wife, Laura, have launched a protest against their local authority over the provision of summer playschemes for children with special needs.

Backed by a group of concerned parents, they are incensed that East Renfrewshire Council offers little in the way of facilities for youngsters like Frankie, their severely disabled seven-yearold son.

It is not the only battle that the pair have been forced to wage in recent years. Only 18 months ago, MrWray suffered a stroke which ravaged his senses.

The 70-year-old has made a remarkable recovery, but the months of rehabilitation proved an endless source of frustration. Even a ringing telephone, over which he once addressed the many concerns of his constituents, had to be left unanswered.

With his speech and memory stolen from him, MrWray said that the experience was akin to his "entire life being lost".

Compounded with illness to his wife's father and the demands of her career as an advocate in Edinburgh, to call it a testing time would be a gross understatement.

But throughout it all, nothing has impacted on Frankie. Although there has been no firm diagnosis of his illness, he displays many of the characteristics of Angelman syndrome.

Born premature, he spent his first weeks in intensive care, where he stopped breathing seven times. Such were the odds stacked against him, MrWray said, that one nurse thought he had died in her arms at one point.

Although his condition has markedly improved, he remains unable to speak or feed himself, has no awareness of danger, has difficulties with walking and motor skills, and is doubly incontinent.

In short, Frankie requires constant care, a duty which his parents are pragmatic enough to admit can prove grinding, especially in light of all that has happened.

While Frankie attends the Isobel Mair School in Clarkston - the region's only special educational needs establishment - and attends a weekend club, there is no summer playscheme. The council recently decided not to fund places for the area's young people at a centre run by the charity, Glasgow the Caring City, on the grounds that it is not registered with the Care Commission.

It is a stance at which the Wrays, and dozens of other families in the area, are aghast.

"Looking after a child like Frankie is a 24/7 job," said Mrs Wray, 55. "He needs one-on-one care as he's effectively a baby, but there's no way he can be cared for with the services there are at the moment.

"Parents of special needs children are disgusted at the council. They want their kids to learn as part of a secure, safe and small environment, not left sitting at the back of a mainstream classroom and being told to keep quiet.

"It's hard being the parent of a severely disabled child sometimes, but not everyone is prepared to admit it can wear you down. It's no wonder so many parents give up their jobs."

That though, seems a course of action Mrs Wray will not consider. To give in would be to admit defeat, and all the Wrays want is the odd afternoon's respite with which to catch up with housework.

Such simple requests are indicative of the slower pace of life they have come to crave.

Mr Wray officially retired in May from a career spent braving the bluster of party politics, and the family is now planning on relocating to a Stirlingshire farm where, among goats, ducks, and hens, Frankie can grow up in a happy and safe environment.

It is all his parents have ever asked for.