

# DEVELOPING THE PARENT CARER FORUM

## WHAT ARE WE MAKING BETTER?

Swindon SEND Families Voice are the parent carer forum in Swindon. We want to reach as many families in Swindon that have children and young people with SEND as possible, to provide support, signposting and to encourage them to participate by sharing their feedback with the Local Authority and CCG to help improve services. We want to ensure the voices of parents and carers are listened to, that they feel heard, and their concerns are acted upon. In 1½ years we have grown from 340 to 1,400 followers on Facebook,

our online support group started in November 2018, currently has over 650 members, and our mailing list has increased from 77 to 330 people.

We aim to:

- Encourage working together, collaboration and co-production
- Build good relationships with the LA, CCG, local support groups, professionals and parents/carers
- Encourage better communication and transparency
- Host events that are useful
- Make life better for SEND families in Swindon

## WHAT ARE WE DOING?

We help parents and carers feel listened to by encouraging participation in surveys, requests for feedback and focus groups. Twenty-one parents recently contributed their priorities and ideas for the new Transition to Adulthood Strategy. We have a monthly support group called Branches which we host with local charity Hop, Skip and Jump. It is well attended (average of 19 attendees) and well represented by the Local Authority and CCG who regularly attend to help answer parent carer questions, and listen to their experiences. We regularly host workshops and events that our families will find useful, topics have included puberty, challenging behaviours and EHCPs. We use this as another opportunity to ask parents to participate in local consultations and surveys such as the SEND Annual Satisfaction Survey.

The LA is helping us to increase awareness of the forum by inviting us to speak at local conferences, attend networking meetings (eg, with SENCOs) and introducing us to key members of staff that can help spread the word about the forum to the families they work with. In September, we presented at the Children's Services Conference, where around 200 people attended, after which our Facebook followers increased by almost 58 people! We have also been invited to present at the SEND Summit, SENCO Network Meeting, SEND Forum and the Early Help Hub. We have managed to reach beyond the SEND Team within the LA by working with the Blue Badge team, who we collaborated with to share user feedback to improve the service following the new 'hidden disabilities' criteria that came into effect at the end of August 2019. On average we attend 18 meetings and events per month and by sharing an office with STEP for the last year it has meant joint working between us has improved greatly as representatives for parents, carers, children and young people. Due to a good reach on social media it is also possible for us to create 'flash surveys' where we can quickly obtain feedback from parents and carers such as whether there is a demand for a SEND Story time and Rhyme Session at Swindon Libraries which we put together recently.

We will know things are better when parents and carers tell us they are! We find that through building good relationships with the LA, CCG and other agencies we are able to respond better to parent issues. For example, a parent noticed there was an incorrect link to the 'Young Person's Contribution Form' for the EHCP Annual Review paperwork on the Local Offer website. We emailed the Local Offer Officer who was then able to update it to the correct link quickly, therefore correcting the mistake for future service users.

We will know things are better when we are regularly able to tell families 'You Said, We Did' to show their feedback was listened to and how it was acted upon to improve the issue. We are also trying to alleviate the 'them and us' that can sometimes be felt between families and the authorities, by encouraging people to remember it's people that make the services happen, and that we all do the jobs we do because we all want life to be better for children and young people with SEND.

We will know things are getting better as Swindon SEND Families Voice will continue to grow in numbers, showing we are reaching and supporting more families and they tell us that they notice a positive difference in their everyday lives.

## HOW DO WE KNOW THINGS ARE BETTER?

Here are some feedback we have received from parents and carers after receiving support from us:

- Thank you so much, mainly just for listening, and helping, it means a lot after all these years of being ignored!
- What would we do without you! Useful advice and Facebook group support.
- Thanks for all the help you have given and also for listening to me vent.
- You have supported me so much and I am grateful that I found you.
- The chance to speak to professionals about specific issues and in a relaxed environment is incredibly efficient, reassuring and helpful.

## WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES THIS MAKE?

