

## SWINDON SEND FAMILIES VOICE BRANCHES SUPPORT GROUP

What are we making better?

The Local Area SEND Inspection in 2018 showed that Co-production was weak. Many parents and carers contributing to the inspection were negative about their dealings in the local area. As a parent carer forum we wanted to address this by bringing parents, carers and professionals together in a positive way and to also improve relationships, create

greater understanding of each other, and encourage parents and carers to participate; so they feel listened to, and can see how their feedback creates positive change. Branches Support Group is strengthening the SEND community: Allowing parents to meet others and have an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback. We often find that parents and carers feel isolated and it helps to meet others that have shared experiences. The group gives attendees a focus, through guest speakers and topics each month. It also helps them find their identity again. Being a parent is one of the hardest jobs and without the right support and advice it seems impossible to get through each day.

What are we doing?

Branches Support Group provides an opportunity to make parents aware of services available which they may not be aware of, increasing their knowledge. The group also provides us with the opportunity to reach out to more SEND families, increasing the size of our forum and encouraging participation as well as strengthening their support through one to one chats with our team and peer to peer from others attending.

We launched Branches in May 2019 and host a group each month (alternating between day and evening meetings to reach as many parents and carers as possible). On average we have about 25 parents attending. We provide a friendly and relaxed environment for them to meet and make friends. We find many parents are struggling and just want to be heard; this is their safe haven. Examples of guest speakers have been Sendiass, Exclusions Manager and an Educational Psychologist.

Branches is a support group for all SEND parents and carers and we are able to provide support to them in a professional and friendly way. We can see the parents opening up and seek advice for their family. Parents want to talk and unload themselves. The professionals attending provide helpful answers to questions and signpost if necessary. Providing more knowledge to parents and carers helps to build their confidence when they need to meet other professionals, such as in meetings at school.

Some feedback we have received includes: Relaxed atmosphere; No subject was taboo; We could talk openly; Very interesting; Good subject matter; Great to listen to other parents; Great opportunity to access specialist advice.

What difference is this making?

What will we do next?

Due to the current Covid-19 situation Branches is on hold until the government guidance changes. We will then continue the group. We have tried to run the group virtually as an

alternative to meetings face-to-face, but very low attendance levels indicated that parents were not keen to meet for the Branches group in this virtual format. However, running formal workshops virtually have proved more popular.

We will continue to work in Co-production with the LA, CCG and other local services to ensure our guest speakers are both helpful to parents and carers and also a good opportunity to share their feedback and show how it shapes services.

### BRANCHES SUPPORT GROUP EVERYONE WELCOME

Tel: 07486 873405  
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BRANCHES is a new support group open to all parents and carers of children and young people with any Special Educational Need or Disability, aged 0-25 years

#### WHEN?

3rd December 2019  
10am - midday

#### WHERE?

Saltway Centre  
Multi Purpose Room,  
Pearl Rd, Middlezease  
SN5 5TD

Children are welcome

Working Together  
Strengthening Support  
Reaching Out

**GUEST SPEAKER**  
Lucy Walshe  
Educational  
Psychologist



BRANCHES is a free support group, however voluntary donations for refreshments are welcomed