



*A voice for families of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities*

## **CHAIR'S REPORT 2017**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Reading Families' Forum has been a charity since April 2016, building on our work to supporting communication between families of children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) and service providers for the last 14 years.

We have a membership of over 160 parent carers.

### **MANAGEMENT**

At the last AGM the following trustees were voted in:

- Sara Nash – secretary
- Alice Carter – treasurer
- Pauline Hamilton & Alison Ries – trustees and our longest serving forum members
- Ramona Bridgman, Chair.

We also have 3 more parent carers on our steering group helping us co-produce services: Beryl Thompson, Lynsey MacDonald, and Ruth Pearse.

### **We have 2 employees:**

Fran Morgan, Parent Participation Co-ordinator, organises all our events, minutes all our meetings and is a point of contact for families and service providers alike.

Samia Sharif started as our Youth Co-ordinator in January this year, and has been busy setting up our youth forum.

Tara Robb, is self-employed. She runs our Facebook page and does all our book keeping.



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We are about to say goodbye to a self-employed worker, Jacqueline Daly, who has helped set up groups of parent carers at schools and children's centres. There are now 30 such groups, with 27 affiliated to the Forum.

### **REVIEW OF OUR WORK DEC 16 TO NOV 17**

**We have set up 4 Coffee Evenings** attended by at least 20 parent carers each:

1. Deb Hunter, Principle Educational Psychologist, explained about her service and heard concerns about accessibility of assessments.
2. Sue Briggs and Lesley Chamberlain gave a talk about getting help for children at school.
3. Mary-Jane Stroud, Autism Assessment Team, CAMHS gave a talk on the various referral pathways and about what to expect from them.
4. Lyn Oualah, Parenting Special Children gave a talk on understanding and managing behaviour.

**An information day was held in March 2017** at Academy Sport. 25 families enjoyed numerous stalls, football, circus skills and face painting.

**A training day run by SIBS in July 2017** was also well-received, with lots of useful advice for supporting the siblings of disabled children.

### **Support to parent carer groups**

Fran has arranged speakers to attend parent carer groups to assist them in lots of aspects of caring for a child with additional needs. We have paid for Parenting Special Children to provide 28 sessions to school groups in the last year.



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### **Getting better support for our children in schools**

The Forum sit on the new SEND strategy group and the 4 work strands that are part of that group: data and analysis, early intervention, building on local SEND provision and preparing for adulthood. We are also meeting with the children's director to ensure that gaps in services are sorted out.

We attend the SEND Joint Implementation Group with Health, Social Care and Education across the 3 LA areas: Wokingham, Reading and West Berkshire. We are currently working on improved ways of purchasing Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy equipment for children.

### **Getting our young people's views heard**

Samia has set up 2 meetings of the Youth Forum so far with free Sprinkles desserts at the first meeting and free pizza at the second. There is a £10 voucher for all young people who attend and help. The group has chosen a name: Special United and have:

- ✚ Contributed to what is on the Reading Local Offer
- ✚ Helped create an upcoming leaflet for young people on preparing for adulthood,
- ✚ Given their feedback on another area's Local Offer and
- ✚ Talked with the Independent Advice and Support Service (IASS) about what support they would like.

They are due to meet with Reading Borough Council to give their views about short breaks this week.

### **Better communication with the hospital**

We were part of the stakeholders group that met with the Royal Berks Hospital and helped get agreement for the hydrotherapy pool to remain open until a long-term replacement is found.

The 3 local forums arranged a successful meeting between parent carers and the Royal Berkshire Hospital and Berkshire Health Foundation Trust managers. We have agreed some actions that are needed, starting with better information for parent carers.



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### **Speedier support from social care?**

We have been working with the new SEND Service Manager regarding the Children and Young People's Disability Team. They have now completed all outstanding assessments of children 0 – 18 and have agreed a target of 90% of all new assessments being done in 45 working days. They will also report back on how many assessments of 18 – 25 year olds that are completed in that time and how quickly provision is arranged for all 0 – 25 year olds.

### **YOUR VIEWS ON SERVICES AND WHAT WE ARE DOING**

1. You have told us that it has been very difficult to get some schools to agree for an Educational Psychologist assessment, even when your child has been falling behind or had many fixed term exclusions. We have reported this to the children's director and understand some more Educational Psychologists are being appointed. Let us know what it is like getting assessments in the coming months.
2. You have told us it is sometimes difficult to get support for your child at school without an EHCP/statement, especially if your child hasn't been diagnosed with a condition or is on the waiting list for an assessment at CAMHS. The Clinical Commissioning teams are aware of this and are working with the council in setting up the school link project in 10 schools to see if this improves support and encourages referrals at the right time.
3. You have told us that you really value the support of the Independent Advice and Support Service IASS and that they have helped get the right support for your child in school.
4. CAMHS now allow families to refer themselves to the autism assessment and anxiety assessment pathways. We have met with the ADHD team as they do not allow family referrals and parents have told us that they have found it difficult to get schools to refer. The team are still not accepting parent referrals but will talk to parents on the phone if they are having problems getting a referral.
5. Our biggest request for speakers has been around managing children's behaviour and sleep and we will continue to fund speakers to groups at schools, children's centres and coffee evenings as much as we can. We



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also organise speakers on other topics such as getting support in school, benefits and the Local Offer.

6. You have told us that it takes a long time for Social Workers from the Children and Young People's Disability Team (CYPDT) to return your calls and emails and a long time for Social Workers to make an assessment and arrange agreed provision. We have agreed a "Reading Road to Success", a charter for families and CYPDT agreeing response times. We are also meeting with the new Service Manager for CYPDT to review how long assessments and provision are taking.
7. Some parents have told us that it has taken a long time (over a year in some cases) for your child's EHCP to be written up after a conversion from a statement. This is also being reviewed in our monthly meetings above.
8. Parent carers asked for our support as there was a review of the decision to extend the resource base at Blessed Hugh Farington School. We met with parents and liaised with the children's director and understand the contract for the new build has been finalised, with the 4 current year 7s starting in September 17.
9. A parent also asked for our support about the consultation to close Chiltern Edge School, just over the border in Oxon. Chiltern Edge has a Curriculum Development Centre which supports many children with additional needs in North Reading. We took part in the consultation. The closure has been delayed, subject to continued improvements at the school.
10. A big concern for many parent carers has been getting support agreed from CYPDT and the council in good time for transitions to further education and to secondary school. There is ongoing discussion between us and the council about this as well as the high number of permanent and fixed term exclusions for children with special needs.

## **FUTURE EVENTS**

We are planning a conference on Complaints and SEND tribunals in January and our next Information Day March.



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**GET INVOLVED**

Are you passionate about improving services for children and young people with special needs?

The Parent Carer Steering Group are a friendly group who support each other. No one is expected to do more than they can. Some parents go to meetings most weeks but some parents attend one or two a term fitting in with school runs and appointments. Everyone's contributions is valued.

Ramona Bridgman  
Chair, Reading Families' Forum  
03/11/17