



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

CHAIR'S REPORT FOR THE AGM

SEPTEMBER 2018

INTRODUCTION

The Reading Families' Forum have been a charity since April 2016, building on our work to promote co-production (families of children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) and service providers developing services together) for the last 15 years.

We have a membership of over 190 parent carers.

MANAGEMENT

At the last AGM in November 2017 the following trustees were voted in:

- Lynsey McDonald – 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, Omera Waheed, and Ruth Pearce.

We have 1 employee, 1 vacancy and 1 paid contractor:

We are very lucky with our Parent Participation Co-ordinator, Fran Morgan, who organises all our events, minutes all our meetings and is a point of contact for families and service providers alike. She also arranges speakers for groups of parent carers at schools and children's centres. There are now 30 such groups, with 27 affiliated to the Forum.

Sadly, Samia Sharif has recently left us as our Youth Co-ordinator and we will look for a replacement this term. Special United will continue in the meantime with the support of Trustees.



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

REVIEW OF OUR WORK NOV 17 – SEPT 18

We have set up 4 Coffee Evenings attended by at least 12 parent carers each:

1. Helen Redding and Gill Dunlop attended in January to discuss school exclusions and agree the final wording of the guidance on school exclusions, now on the Local Offer.
2. Deb Hunter, Principle Educational Psychologist, attended to talk about the School Link service which supports children's mental and emotional well-being in schools. She also took feedback about extending the service, such as to the local special schools.
3. Maryam Makki and Gill Seagrove attended to talk about the Local Offer.
4. Helen Redding visited another coffee evening in June to hear what parent carers feel about short breaks.

An information day was held in March 2018 at Academy Sport. 64 families enjoyed numerous stalls, football, Owen's Animals, circus skills and face painting.

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 8 sessions to school groups since the last AGM.



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Co-Producing Improvements for children/young adults with SEND

The Forum sit on the 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 have also met with the new Lead for Education to ensure that gaps in services are sorted out and the new lead councillor for Education, Ashley Pearce.

We have been working with the SEND Service Manager to review how long children in need assessments and support and EHCP assessments are taking. Assessments are quicker but support is not happening as fast as we would like. We have a new interim SEND Service Manager who has agreed to continue this work, meeting us every 4 – 6 weeks.

The Forum are also part of the Short Breaks working groups, working towards improved, more equitable breaks for all you need them despite requested cuts in the short breaks budget.

We attend the SEND Joint Implementation Group with Health, Social Care and Education across the 3 LA areas: Wokingham, Reading and West Berkshire. We have had some success in getting improved ways of purchasing Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy equipment for children. We are currently working on better access to Occupational Therapy and Physio to children on EHCPs.

A big part of our work is ensuring that new managers are aware of families' views and that we build a good working relationship with them. Since the last AGM, we have had a Head of Education and, a new lead councillor for Education and a new lead for children's social care, a new interim SEND Service Manager and a new Director! As adult social care will start looking after young people aged 18 – 25 from 1st October, we are also working to re-establish relationships with adult social care. There is a new interim service manager, just appointed, whom we have invited to our next Forum meeting.

This is alongside liaising with councillors about the 25% reduction in the overall budget for the children's director over the next 3 years and the impact this will have on services for disabled children and adults. We have



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contacted the local MP and the leader of the council about this and are still trying to get a meeting with the latter.

In addition, the Forum have been contacting councillors and managers about the proposed reduction in free bus travel for disabled children and adults before 9:30, after 23:00, for escorts and Readibus.

Getting our young people's views heard

Samia set up 3 meetings of the Special United Youth Forum since the last AGM.

- Meeting in November with the Children's Commissioner to tell him what short breaks young people want.
- Meeting in May - our speaker on supported internships did not attend but the group discussed school exclusions and the draft preparation for adulthood leaflet.
- Meeting in July with the Children and Young People's Disability Team Manager to discuss support from Social Workers and more generally the things they would like to change about the support they receive.

All young people who attend are given a £10 voucher, plus free food!

PARENT CARER VIEWS ON SERVICES AND WHAT WE ARE DOING

Many parents tell us that they don't know what the Local Offer is, or don't know how to access it, and don't know what short breaks are.

We helped choose the design of new leaflets which have been sent out to schools and GP surgeries. Reading Borough Council are also trying to encourage schools and early years settings to show parents how to find out information.



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Parents are concerned about the number of fixed term and internal exclusions their children have. There have also been some issues about restraint

We have been tracking the number of exclusions with the SEND Service Manager and raising the issue at SEND strategy meetings. RBC have requested funding to set up a project to reduce exclusions and are redoing their policy on exclusions. We have taken up issues of restraint directly with senior managers.

OT and physio

As above, we are addressing the gaps in services at the SEND Jig meetings.

Parents have been concerned about the lack of planning for special school places, with many parents struggling to get their children into special school places, esp for secondary school

We have raised this issue with special school heads, the Education lead at RBC and the SEND Service Manager and the Lead Councillor for Education. 25 more places will be created at the Avenue School and we have asked RBC to plan for places for Sept 19 now!

Short breaks are a life line for many families. Young people tell us they want fun activities, and this is what parents want for them. Parents also want them to be flexible to families' need eg – if behaviour challenging, parents work in school holidays or parents are very unwell.

We are raising this in the short breaks review working group which is expected to last until the end of the year.

YOUNG PEOPLES' VIEWS ABOUT SERVICES AND WHAT WE ARE DOING

Preparing for Adulthood

Young people often don't have enough information about their options or how to achieve their goals. The Forum have been looking the information



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that is available with the Local Offer team and trying to make sense of it ourselves! We invited Reading College to one of the Special United events but, unfortunately, they were not able to attend. We will look at this again for a future session.

Listening to young people's views esp about transitions

Young people are mostly asked their views about their future from about 16. It is patchy before then. However, young people say that their views are often not listened to. This is borne out by the EHCP audit we were involved with in July, where young people's views were recorded but not influencing the outcomes and targets. The Forum are raising this at various meetings with education managers and schools.

School life

Young people have said that they often feel staff can't sort out situations when they are bullied or finding other's behaviour too noisy and disruptive. Some don't feel valued by staff, with targets looking at their behaviour rather than what they want to achieve. Again, we are raising this with education managers and meetings with schools.

FUTURE EVENTS

We are planning a conference on Complaints and SEND tribunals in October/November and our next Information Day March 19.



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GET INVOLVED

Are you passionate about improving services for children and young people with special needs? Do you want to attend meetings with managers responsible for services your child receives and give your views?

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
04/08/18