



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

CHAIR'S REPORT FOR THE AGM

SEPTEMBER 2019

INTRODUCTION

The Reading Families' Forum have been a charity since April 2016, building on our work to promote co-production between families of children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) and service providers for the last 16 years. (Co-production means developing services together.)

We have a membership of nearly 200 parent carers.

MANAGEMENT

At the last AGM in September 2018 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 had 2 more parent carers on our steering group helping us co-produce services: Beryl Thompson and Omera Waheed.

We have 2 employees and 1 paid contractor:

Our Parent Participation Co-ordinator, Fran Morgan, organises all our events brilliantly, 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 were 27 such groups affiliated to the Forum; 5 groups still keep in touch and we have paid for speakers for them.

Lisa Harry is our new Youth Forum administrator and does a great job of organising events for Special United.



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

REVIEW OF OUR WORK OCT 18 – SEPT 19

We have held 5 Coffee Evenings attended by at least 15 parent carers each:

1. Sonia Aulak Interim Service Manager for SEND and Si Luker, interim Team Manager for the Children and Young People's Disability Team attended to discuss changes within the disability team. Jane Heath is now the permanent Team Manager and the team is now part of children's social care rather than education.
2. Mark Fowler, Interim Head of Education, and Sonia Aulak attended to discuss education for young people with SEND in February.
3. Deb Hunter, Principle Educational Psychologist and now the permanent SEND Service Manager, attended to talk about the new Mental Health Support Teams in April.
4. Aimee Trimmer, Early Years Advisory Teacher for Special Educational Needs & Disability, Under Fives Service at Brighter Futures for Children and Lynda Bolster, Family Support Worker at Dingley's Promise spoke about sensory needs
5. Maryam Makki and Gill Seagrove attended to talk about the Local Offer in July.

An information and fun day was held in March 2019 at Academy Sport. 55 families enjoyed numerous stalls, football, Owen's Animals, circus skills and face painting.

We have held 2 conferences – for parent carers and professionals one in October on SEN and one in July regarding social care.

We have also visited parent carers and young people at various groups to seek their views: Cranbury Post 16 College, Dingley's Promise drop-in twice and the hearing resource at Westwood Farm School.



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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 9 sessions to school groups since the last AGM.

Co-Producing Improvements for children/young adults with SEND

The Forum sit on the SEND strategy board and 4 of the 5 work strands that are part of the board's work: data and analysis, early intervention through to specialist provision, preparing for adulthood and short breaks. We also regularly review the Local Offer.

We sat on the interview panels for the new Team Manager and assistant Team Managers for SEN and were part of the stakeholder panel interviewing the permanent Head of Education, Kate Reynolds.

We have also met with the lead councillor for education, Ashley Pearce, and the lead councillor for children's social care, Liz Terry.

We attend the SEND Joint Implementation Group with Health, Social Care and Education across the 3 LA areas: Wokingham, Reading and West Berkshire.

The Forum have got involved in the East Reading Adventure Playground Assoc (ERAPA) changes (It had been thought that it would be closed but it will remain open while equipment is working but equipment won't be replaced.) We have had numerous meetings with RBC councillors and staff to ensure that playgrounds are as accessible as possible for children with a range of disabilities.

Getting our young people's views heard

The Special United Youth Forum has met 5 times since the last AGM.



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- In November with Brookfields School talking about supported internships and with Adult Social Care.
- In January with the Reading Community Football Trust and Reading Sport and Leisure
- In February with the Royal Berks Hospital and Healthwatch
- In April with Reading Voluntary Action
- In June with Deb Hunter regarding the Mental Health Support Teams and with Adult Social Care.

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

PARENT CARER VIEWS ON SERVICES AND WHAT WE ARE DOING

Some families have found it very difficult to get support from social care.

Carers' Assessments have been delayed for 6 months plus but there is now an agreement that Brighter Futures for Children will conduct assessments of parent carer needs if the child is under 18. Provided the parent is in agreement, the assessment will be combined with the child's assessment of need.

There have also been difficulties for some families in going through the Single Point of Access and getting their disabled child accepted for an assessment.

For others, there have been delays in getting the children in need assessment completed and getting the provision agreed at the end of the assessment.

The Forum and the Local Offer team are working with Brighter Futures to address all of the above.

Many parents have reported difficulty getting support for their young person in school and college

Many have found that school staff don't value their knowledge of their own child and that school support is not co-produced with parents.



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Some have found that it is difficult to get an Education, Health and Care needs assessment or an EHC Plan. Many have had to fight through to tribunal before getting an EHCP. There is a new SEN Team Manager and SEND Service Manager and we are working with them on this.

Delays in getting Occupational Therapy Equipment

Some children and young people have had to wait 6 months or more for vital equipment. This is an urgent issue which we have raised with the SEND Joint Implementation Group and it is one of their two top priorities to resolve.

YOUNG PEOPLES' VIEWS ABOUT SERVICES AND WHAT WE ARE DOING

Special United have said that they want:

- ✓ Accessible sports and leisure centres and parks – they like to do a variety of sports such as fencing, swimming, trampolining.
- ✓ Youth clubs with sessions for young people with additional needs so that they can relax with less noise, dimmer lights and no worries about being bullied.
- ✓ Promises of help at school to be kept to, staff who are supportive and quiet rooms to go to in school when they are stressed.
- ✓ More information about moving to adult social care and colleges, including videos on the Local Offer
- ✓ They also had lots of useful suggestions for the RBH about making the hospital more accessible.

FUTURE EVENTS

Provided the AGM agrees, these are our plans for the next 12 months:

- 🚩 A Transition Information Afternoon in November (transition to college, work and adult services)
- 🚩 Information and Fun Day (all ages) in March 20
- 🚩 5 Coffee Eves



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- ✚ 6 Special United Events
- ✚ A conference – topic to be agreed

GET INVOLVED

Are you passionate about improving services for children and young people with special needs? Then come and join the Forum. 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
03/09/19