



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

## **COFFEE EVENING 3<sup>rd</sup> APRIL 2019**

Deb Hunter, Principal Educational Psychologist and newly appointed Service Manager for Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) spoke with 18 parent and family carers to discuss support for our children's emotional and mental health and the new Mental Health Support Teams that are going to be set up in Reading and West Berkshire.

Any traumatic event can impact on a child's developing brain; support can help as the brain continues to develop. Reading is planning to become a Trauma Informed town. The aim is for everyone from shop-keepers, Police and teachers to respond in a calm, kind rather than authoritarian way. The Police have already had training.

Local employers such as Ernest and Young, Oracle and Microsoft say that young people are not ready to work. Young people with autism could be a massive asset but they need to be work ready. We need a different approach. For example if they are not attending school due to anxiety.

Trauma Informed practice has been used in at least 4 other Local Authorities such as Norfolk and Herts. When it is used in schools, exclusions and restraints decrease. Herts permanent exclusions disappeared and their fixed term exclusions reduced by 90%.

Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC) are training school heads and senior leaders to train their staff in this approach and look at their behaviour policies again. BFFC can't force schools to take part but 30 schools have already signed up. BFFC are also training Social Workers, voluntary agencies and the SEN team. The Early Years Special Educational Needs Coordinator, Aimee Trimmer, is sorting out a plan to train Early Years and Nursery settings.

### **SCHOOL LINKS PROJECT**

Most schools are signed up to this. Training in mental health, including depression and self-harm is free. The project charges for half and Educational Psychologist's (EP) time to conduct mental health surgeries

**[www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk](http://www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk)**

Registered Charity No. 1166585



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

every 6 weeks to discuss particular children. Parents have to give permission for their children to be named in these discussions or they are anonymous. The surgeries can recommend EP assessment, group therapy or individual therapy as examples of interventions.

#### EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Deb Hunter advised that it is ideal for schools to do at least 2 rounds of assess, plan, do and review and to have involved an EP before they apply for an EHC assessment. Parents can apply themselves although it is best to get an agreement with schools and other involved professionals wherever possible. Deb acknowledged that there will be exceptions for children with severe needs or children not attending school.

#### MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAMS

This is a trailblazer project in recognition of the work done in the Schools Link Mental Health project. The team in Reading will be led by 2 Senior Educational and Child Psychologists (Claire Thomas and Kayleigh Henry). There will be 4 newly qualified Education Mental Health Workers who are currently training in Reading University and on placement with BFFC Child & Educational Psychology Service. The MHST will also have a senior CAMHS worker, a Primary Mental Health Worker and an outreach/family support worker. The team will run for 3 years. If successful, the teams will be rolled out nationally.

The aim of these teams is to improve children and young people's access to mental health services, and in particular to increase the number and availability of early intervention for children and young people with emotional distress such as anxiety, depression, sadness. They will reduce waiting times for children and young people to get support and to give young people a choice of where they are seen. They could be seen at school, for example, or in the community at the No 5 counselling service.

16 schools in west Reading will take part in the pilot.

Reading children at West Berks schools will access the West Berks MHST and vice versa.

**[www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk](http://www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk)**

Registered Charity No. 1166585



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

**PARENTS RAISED THE FOLLOWING:**

1. One secondary school in West Reading has a history of being unhelpful in supporting young people.
2. Although the Avenue School has a psychotherapist, parents are often not aware of this or need something else.
3. It is vital to support children's emotional resilience and reduce their isolation. Young people need education and support to reduce the likelihood of them becoming anxious and/or depressed.
4. Parents would like support to recognise the early signs of anxiety and depression and to know how to support our children. Very often our children's anxiety and depression impacts on our own mental health.
5. We want our children to have less exclusions especially at critical points like exam times and work experience.
6. We also want school staff to be more knowledgeable about disability. At the moment, parents have to train staff.
7. It is really difficult to get an EP assessment for our children. Schools can't afford enough. It becomes a vicious school with children having to reach crisis before they get help. Family 1's child had reached crisis and was missing out on her education at school for months before an EP assessment was done. Things have settled since but the school have said that they might not be able to continue the support put in place. Family 2's child is in Year 5 and needs support. With the help of IASS, an EP appointment was made but then this was given to another child. The school have said that, unless the child was to do something like throwing a chair, they are not able to afford an EP assessment.
8. It is really difficult to get support for our children if they are struggling with anxiety. Families have contacted the school, their GP and been to hospital and got no help. Sometimes, all they will be told is that their child is on the waiting list for CAMHS and there is no support while they wait.
9. We want schools to recognise and take action to support a child if they child is having meltdowns straight after school or is becoming very anxious before school.

**[www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk](http://www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk)**

Registered Charity No. 1166585



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

10. Schools need to be trained in recognising and supporting girls with autism and symptoms of masking which often lead to meltdowns after school.

#### AGREED ACTIONS/SUPPORTS AVAILABLE

- Parents don't have to wait for the school to agree to refer a child to an EP if they have concerns around their emotional wellbeing e.g. if their child is anxious or depressed. Parents or schools can refer their child to the BFFC Single Point of Access to get help from a Primary Mental Health Worker. Tel: 0118 937 3641 or ring the EP service and ask the EP to raise with the school – same number. EPs have run anxiety groups in schools which have been very successful for children.
- There is a booklet "The Little Book of Sunshine" aimed at young people without a learning disability to support their emotional resilience, which can be downloaded at:

<https://www.berkshirewestccg.nhs.uk/patient-information/self-care/the-little-blue-book-of-sunshine/>

- Training for parents has been offered but not all parents were aware of it. Some parents have attended with primary age children:

Resilience

Wed 3<sup>rd</sup> July

There is a link for parents/carers to sign up to attend the remaining sessions above:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/5PL6GV5>

- Sign up to the DISC newsletter and emails to hear about more sessions next year [localoffer@reading.gov.uk](mailto:localoffer@reading.gov.uk)
- Fifi's Vision is run by a volunteer parent carer and holds weekly support sessions. Speakers are welcome to ensure parents know what help is available for their children. An EP is coming to a session soon.
- Ramona and Deb will develop a short information sheet for parents on where to get support for your child. This to go on Local Offer and

**[www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk](http://www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk)**

Registered Charity No. 1166585



*A voice for families of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities*  
to newly diagnosed children or children who have just gone on waiting list.

RB 07/04/19.

**[www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk](http://www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk)**

Registered Charity No. 1166585

Email: [fran.morgan.rff@gmail.com](mailto:fran.morgan.rff@gmail.com)



Tel: 07516 185380