

Reading Families' Forum

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

COFFEE MORNING 23rd OCTOBER 2020 VIA ZOOM

Deb Hunter, new Mental Health Lead for Brighter Futures (and former Service Manager for Special Educational Needs and/or Disability) joined the coffee afternoon.

Nine parent carers attended with TuVida (formally Berkshire Carers Hub), Autism Berkshire and Fifi's Vision.

Deb's new role includes managing the Educational Psychology service, the Mental Health Support Teams in 16 schools in west Reading, the schools link project, the primary mental health workers, the Autism Advisor and the sensory and massage service that is provided via schools. Deb is also working to raise the profile of family support including to foster carers.

Deb is keen to hear families' views as part of the emotional and mental health review happening across Berkshire.

Our feedback:

The uncertainty around Covid and the lack of young people's usual supports and structure took its toll on our young people's mental health, especially those with autism. Some special schools were closed completely. (Deb encouraged families to let the SEN team know of concerns. This will be fed back to the regional commissioner if the school is not run by the Local Authority eg academies.) Some schools have been very helpful throughout the pandemic and one young person has just completed a full week at school, a huge achievement!

Families had to fight for services including to get their child into school, despite meeting the criteria eg risks to child or parent being a keyworker. This is how a lot of families felt even before the pandemic. Many parents contact Fifi's Vision distressed and needing support as they have to fight for everything their child needs.

Families caring for children a lot of the time (but the children's address is with the other parent) found that, while schools were good, there was no communication from CAMHS in the other area and little local support.

The impact on parents' mental health of constantly fighting for services and supporting their children's anxieties have left many parents struggling with their own mental health.

Autism Berkshire have a Wellbeing and Autism course running with 8 families online. They are going to hold the course again in January.

The impact on siblings of children who have been advised to shield has been great, including the anxiety of bringing home Covid from school. Young Carers does not seem to be operating in Reading.

www.readingfamiliesforum.co.uk

Registered Charity No. 1166585

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Some families have had difficulty accessing the specialist Children and Young People's Disability Team or getting enough short breaks to ensure that their children are not isolated and they have a break as a family. Deb will liaise with the social work team about the importance of mental health of children and families' short breaks.

One family tried to book on to the half-term multi sports in South Reading but was told it was full. There are still vacancies for Real Time, video and computing skills (unfortunately cancelled later that day due to low numbers).

Actions

1. Deb will visit Fifi's Vision to hear from families. Ramona will put them in touch.
2. Deb will contact Young Carers about how they can support siblings during the pandemic.
3. Jane Stanford Beale will let Deb know about the Wellbeing and Autism Course starting again in January.
4. Reading Families' Forum are part of the working group looking at Alternatives to Admission for children and young people with autism and/or learning disabilities and mental ill-health or dangerous/destructive behaviour. This is being led by the Clinical Commissioning Group in West Berkshire and will form a bid for a grant to set up a service. This will hopefully include support to prevent children becoming at risk of admission.

Supports available

TuVida are available during office hours to provide a listening ear as well as complete parent carer needs assessments 0118 945 4209 berkshire@tuvida.org

There are term time vacancies at Swings and Smiles youth club <https://www.swingsandsmiles.co.uk/our-sessions> for details.

Reading Mencap offer advice and support to families of children with learning difficulties to help them access support. 0118 9662518 office@readingmencap.org.uk

Swings and Smiles are offering online support to siblings <https://www.swingsandsmiles.co.uk/sibling-support> contact sibsupport@swingsandsmiles.co.uk

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