



**Reading
Families'
Forum**

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

Reading Families' Forum CIO

Annual Report and Accounts

2020 / 2021

committees and working groups within the local authority, and work regularly with key service providers in the Local Authority, NHS and voluntary sector.

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 226 parent carers and 639 people follow us on Facebook which is over 90 more than last year! We reached a further 91 parent carers who are not members with our weekly emails during the year.

MANAGEMENT

At the last AGM in September 2020 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 have a number of parent carers who have provided invaluable support over the past year, including Ruth Pearse and Liang – I Yang.

We have 2 employees and 1 paid contractor:

Our Parent Participation Co-ordinator, Fran Morgan, organises our events brilliantly, minutes 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.

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

Tara Robb is an excellent self-employed administrator and does all our bookkeeping.

REVIEW OF OUR WORK OCT 2020 – SEPT 2021

We have held 7 online coffee sessions attended by about 5 parent carers per session:

- Deb Hunter, Mental Health Lead attended to discuss how best to improve mental health for Reading children.
- Karen O'Leary, RBH Practice Developer, attended to hear what children and young people need at the Royal Berks.
- KIDS Mediation came to discuss the new mediation service for Reading.
- Nikki Stevens, new SEND team manager, came to hear parent carers' views.
- Paul Gresty, Education Strategic Lead, heard parents' views on what new school SEND provision needed capital investment. Post 19 colleges for young people with complex needs are lacking in Reading as well as a resource for children with physical disabilities. The Forum are continuing to raise the need for both in Reading.
- Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust attended to discuss the neurodiversity service (autism and ADHD), which is now separate from CAMHS, and hear families' views.
- Parenting Special Children gave a talk on managing aggressive behaviour in our children.

The Forum have attended transition workshops as part of the new Berkshire West Autism and ADHD service. We also held a number of coffee mornings online for Brookfields School with West Berks Parent Carer Forum. We have decided not to continue with the latter but the school has agreed to promote our coffee mornings/evenings for all Reading parents.

We postponed our hoped-for Transition Information Day and Information and Fun Day due to Covid.

Together with Parenting Special Children, we held an online **Preparing for Adulthood Transition conference** on 1st July, attended by at least 48 people per session.

Co-Producing Improvements for children/young adults with SEND The Forum continue to sit on the SEND strategy group and the 6 work strands that are part of the board's work: communication strategy, early intervention through to specialist provision – which we co-chair – consistent approaches to emotional well-being, preparing for adulthood, short breaks and preparing for the CQC inspection. We also attend the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Carers' Steering Group.

We meet regularly with the Local Offer team to review the information and how it is presented and have met with the SEND team manager to look at improving their communication with parent carers.

The Forum was also part of meetings with both Reading MPs and the Royal Berks Hospital regarding the closure of the hospital hydrotherapy pool and have been in correspondence with the CCG about their decision to only fund hydrotherapy if there is an Individual Funding Request. We are still waiting for the hospital's response.

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

The Forum has had meetings with the lead councillor for culture, heritage and recreation and the council parks and leisure team regarding the accessibility of local playgrounds and have fed back to them regarding the accessibility of the 2 new swimming pools planned for Reading.

We have been involved in the set-up of the new Keyworker scheme for children and young people at risk of admission to a mental health bed or residential setting, and the Dynamic Support Register which has just started in Reading, West Berks and Wokingham.

We are part of the Autism Strategy Board and have fed back parent carer and young people's views about what needs improving for autistic children and young people in Reading for the long awaited Autism strategy.

We have been in regular contact with Berkshire West CCG, Reading Borough Council and Brighter Futures for Children to ensure that families' concerns about covid-19 have been heard, particularly around PPE for carers, respite provision during lockdowns and vaccinations. We have sent a weekly mailout with useful information to all our members and some non-members who have requested it, to try to keep people informed, and this has also been distributed by the council Disability Information Service to the several hundred people on their mailing list.

Getting our young people's views heard

The Special United Youth Forum has met online 8 times since the last AGM.

- In November, we had Elevate come to talk to young people about college and employment options
- In December, we met the new SEND team manager Nikki Stevens and young people gave their views on EHCPs
- In January, the Director of Children's Services and her colleagues heard young people's views about what it was like to have additional needs in Reading
- In April, a Senior Mental Health Practitioner from Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust talked to young people about maintaining their mental wellbeing
- In May, Deb Hunter and the Primary Mental Health Team Manager heard young people's views about the new Autism Growth Project

- In June, the Information, Advice and Support Team for SEND talked to young people about the service they offer and what young people would like to see
- Later in June, young people met with the Ofsted/CQC inspectors to give their views about support for children and young people with SEND in Reading
- In July, young people met with a video company to plan the training video we have been funded to produce for teachers and other professionals.

Young people who take part receive a £10 voucher.

Pieces of work that we have been involved with since the last AGM

- The equipment policy for children in mainstream early years, schools and colleges was completed. This makes it clear which body is responsible for providing equipment at home, school and in the community for all disabled children across the west of Berkshire.
- Information about parent carer needs assessment is clearer on the Brighter Futures' website and we understand that there are fewer delays in Brighter Futures picking up work from the carers' hub TuVida.
- The new guide to using a Direct Payment to employ a PA for your child is complete and awaiting publication.
- The SEND guide to transitions to primary schools for families and professionals was finished.
- We helped the Children and Young Peoples Disability Team update their referral criteria – you no longer need a diagnosis, and it applies to autistic children as well as to children with other conditions.
- We completed a survey of young people about the support they want when diagnosed with autism and/or put on the waiting list for an autism assessment.
- We helped Brighter Futures set up short breaks for the October and December school holidays, which are now regular activities. The Forum are still pushing for more short breaks, including for those with more complex needs. We are expecting the short breaks to improve from October half-term with year-long grants for providers.

JOINT OFSTED/CQC SEND INSPECTION

This took place in June 2021. While the inspection was positive overall, it made it clear that there is real frustration with families having to fight for services for their child and feeling left without support.

The inspectors also highlighted

- the lack of provision for young people aged 18+ and how stressed parent carers were
- the need to get better at identifying children with additional needs before they start nursery or preschool
- the need to reduce the waits for Autism and ADHD assessments
- the need to make health pathways easier to understand.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Become a member if you are not already; the more members we have the more clout we have with local services. All parents or other family carers of children and Young People up to age 25 living in the Reading Borough Council area are eligible to join and membership is free. Members elect our trustees and choose the chair, secretary and treasurer.
- Become part of the steering group. We will support you to become involved in the meetings above. Service managers like to hear from different parent carers rather than just the same old faces!!
- Become a Trustee and be part of planning our work. We are a friendly, supportive team and make sure we all only do what we are able to do at the time. As our children get older, we are looking for parent carers of younger children as well as more experienced parents.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Reserves policy

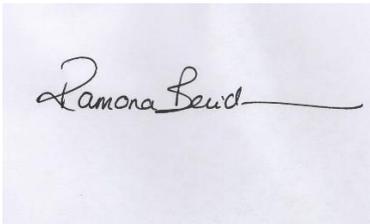
Reading Families' Forum has very little unrestricted income because its work is funded by short term grants from the charity Contact and other organisations. These grants cannot be held as reserves. We have now built up a small reserve and would like to increase this to cover 3 months' expenditure to allow work to continue while awaiting grant funding.

Accounts and Treasurer's Report

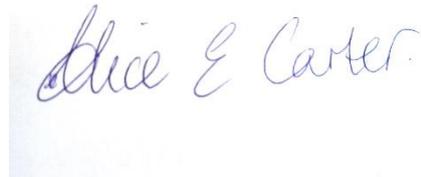
The accounts for the financial year 2020 / 2021 are attached to this report.

Reading Families Forum receives an annual grant from Contact to facilitate parent carer participation in the Reading Borough Council area, and supplements this income by applying for grants from other bodies for specific projects. Our 2020-21 programme of events was severely impacted by the global pandemic meaning that we had to move all our events online. We therefore did not spend the whole of our Contact grant funding, but were able to use some of the underspend to cover ongoing costs of the Youth Forum, Special United, to extend the original funding from RBC while awaiting renewal of this grant. We carried forward £136 from the Contact 2019-20 grant which has been transferred to unrestricted funds, but the underspend on the Contact 2020-21 grant of £3319 cannot be carried forward and will be deducted from our 2021-22 Contact grant.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees:



Ramona Bridgman, Chair
17/9/2021



Alice Carter, Treasurer
17/9/2021

Receipts and Payments Accounts 2020-21

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted fund (BFfC 2019)	Restricted fund (Contact)	Total 2020-21	Total 2019-20
Receipts	£	£	£	£	£
Contact grant	0	0	13,415	13,415	15,000
Total receipts	0	0	13,415	13,415	15,000
Payments					
Public Events	(100)	0	240	140	7,193
Steering group / parent carer costs	156	0	127	283	1,357
Staffing and administration costs	0	0	7,436	7,436	4,151
Resources (including website)	0	0	0	0	1,478
School Groups Project	0	0	0	0	1,158
Youth Forum	0	1,570	3,000	4,570	5,121
Total payments	56	1,570	10,804	12,430	20,456
Surplus (Deficit)	(56)	(1,570)	2,611	985	(5,456)
Net movement in funds	(56)	(1,570)	2,611	985	(5,456)
Brought forward at 1/4/2020	2,852	2,600	844	6,295	11,751
Transfer between funds	136	0	(136)	0	0
Carried forward at 31/3/2021	2,932	1,029	3,319	7,280	6,295

Statement of Assets and Liabilities
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	Unrestricted funds	Restricted fund (RBC 2019)	Restricted fund (Contact)	Total 2020-21	Total 2019-20
Cash at bank and in hand	2,932	1,029	3,319	7,280	6,295
Assets retained for charity's use	0	0	0	0	0
Liabilities	0	0	0	0	0
Total assets less liabilities	2,932	1,029	3,319	7,280	6,295